

## SEXISM IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

This paper through examples exhibits the phenomenon of sexism in the English language, its reasons and suggests possible alternatives on how to avoid sexism in language and sound non-sexist. Also some examples of sexist structures in Russian and Kyrgyz are being analyzed.

**Key words:** phenomenon of sexism, non-sexist words, feminism.

Эта статья на примерах демонстрирует феномен сексизма в английском языке, его причины и предлагает возможные варианты, как избежать дискриминации по полу в языке. Также анализируются некоторые примеры сексистских структур в русском и кыргызском языках.

**Ключевые слова:** феномен сексизма, несексистские слова, феминизм.

Gender issues in linguistics are of prioritized trends. A part of feminist linguistics is sexism. Sexism is the belief that one sex (usually male) is superior to the other sex and should dominate in most important areas of political, economic, and social life. As women have always been considered a weaker sex, sexism is discriminating against women based on their sex. It is discriminating by the means of language. Sexism portraits women as less significant than men.

Sexism is inherent in the language. It exists as reflection of the very existence of two sexes – male and female. It is a natural linguistic phenomenon that we address women in a different way. Men are valued more in all cultures. Sexism is seen universally in all languages making those languages more or less sexist.

The appearance of non-sexist words and structures in the English language was caused by the feminists in the 1960s when the feminists declared English to be a sexist language. Non-sexist words start to appear and they were considered neologisms at that period and still new non-sexist words continue to appear in English as a result of changes concerning women's status in society.

Feminists pointed that there were more male forms of words than female (because of the word *man* as a second component in many professions). From the 1970s onward, gender specific words are regarded as discrimination. So the words with the second component *man* changed. For example, instead of *cameraman camera operator* is used more frequently, *fireman – firefighter, policeman – police officer, chairman – chairperson, postman*

– *postal worker, Congressman – member of Congress, etc.*

Some English professions are basically of common gender, namely, they can be applied to both sexes. However, people habitually associate them only with male as if maleness is the norm, and that women are ‘special marginal cases’. So we have to put *woman* before those names when we refer to female in those professions.

For example,

MALE	FEMALE
<i>Doctor</i>	<i>lady doctor</i>
<i>Lawyer</i>	<i>lady lawyer</i>
<i>Professor</i>	<i>woman professor</i>

Now let us have a look at Russian examples. Does the word *генеральша* mean a woman general (*женщина-генерал*) or a general’s wife (*жена генерала*)? It more seems to mean the second – a general’s wife. Here comes a question – why not to name a woman who works as a general like in English - a woman general? Another question is – could a woman work as a general? Not quite often. Naturally some professions need man essence, so the words denoting them are gender marked and the word *генерал* is one of them.

Russian female words have informal versions of the professions that are socially male marked. *Директриса, деканша* for example. Stylistically such women words are substandard vocabulary and sound condescending. Appropriate words for women in these professions are *директор* and *декан*.

Now let us look at the common word *housewife*. The work of housewife should not be depicted as if homemaking and the person performing it, is not important - as in the phrase ‘*even a housewife can ...*’. Parenting and homemaking roles should be accorded with dignity. Men as well as women clean the house, buy the groceries and care for children, yet it is common to see statements such as: ‘*Housewives are now paying more for groceries*’ or ‘*The school sent a note home to mothers*’. Such attitudes assume men do not have an important role in the home and that it is a woman’s ONLY role. Traditionally, the job of homemaker is done by women and the job of provider is done by men, but both men and women can be providers and homemakers. An alternative term suggested to ‘*housewife*’ is ‘*homemaker*’. A *homemaker* is a person whose main job is to take care of his or her own family home and children. That sounds non-sexist.

Sexist language also includes the depiction of women in the position of passive object rather than active object. For example, terms used for marriage and parenting can suggest men have higher status, and imply ownership as in ‘his wife and children.’

Compare with Russian, *жениться* *на* *ком-то* about a man and *выйти* *замуж* *за* *кого-то* about a woman (a married woman stands behind the man – *замужем* – *замужчиной*). Kyrgyz attributes for being married are *үйлөнүү* as a male word and *турмушка чыгуу* as a female. These representations of women trivialize their lives and place personal judgment on them. Marriage is a positive marker of social status. In English men and women get married to somebody regardless their sex. In case they are married, they use *married* for either sex whereas in Russian *замужем* is used for a married woman and *женат* is used for a married man. A Kyrgyz married man uses the attributive adjective *үйлөнгөн, үй бүлөлүү*, a married woman is described as *үйбүлөсүбар*. In Kyrgyz the phrase of being married for a woman is valued and equal to having a family.

*Miss* and *Mrs* are indicators of both marital status and sex while *Mr* indicates sex only. The feminine equivalent of *Mr* is *Ms*. As a general rule, woman whose marital status is not known or who does not like it to be referred to where it is not relevant, should be called *Ms*, the equivalent of *Mr* for men.

Russian and Kyrgyz seem to be more sexist languages than English is. Sexist language creates an image of a society where women have lower social and economic status than men.

Nevertheless, there has been made progress in eliminating sexism in the English language. English is much less sexist language than many others.

Here are the examples of how to avoid sexist language and sound neutral. Avoid using word that call attention to the gender of the person doing the job. Do not assume that *farmers, writers, painters*, or anyone in a responsible position is necessarily always male.

BIASED	POSSIBLE	ALTERNATIVE
Academics have <b>wives</b>	Academics have	
and <b>children</b> to support.	<b>families</b> to support.	

INSTEAD OF	SAY
Authoress	Author
Actress	Actor

Woman doctor/lawyer      Doctor/lawyer

Male nurse      Nurse

Male teacher      Teacher

Be careful with the generic use of 'he'. Avoid the pronoun 'he' when both sexes meant.

SEXIST      NON-SEXIST

Does everybody      Does everybody

know what **he** wants      know what **they** want

**The man**      **The person** we want for the job

**Men**      **People, humanity**

Change structures to the plural form.

**Each student** must complete **his** assessments by Friday.      **Students** must complete **their** assessments by Friday.

Use the passive form.

**He** must return it by the due date.      **It** must **be returned** by the due date.

So language itself is not sexist. Society is. Sexism is a political issue today. The level of

society consciousness determines the patterns and templates and defines stereotypes to denote men and women oops! or should I say women and men? Language changes constantly in response to social needs. Society is making efforts to let women express themselves in the language. These efforts are called fight against sexism in language. Freedom in the language for women is the necessary condition to use other basic human rights.

As for language instructors it is particularly important that the university provides a model for students to use the language in a sensitive and appropriate way. Educators' mission is to raise awareness of non-discriminatory forms of language and to foster use of them in both speech and writing in the university. Non-sexist English in this regard is a resource we could turn to in order to bring about the change we want in our life

## References

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