

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Since English is an international language, any problems which are directly or indirectly connected become a great matter. One of the problems is the sexist language, which has become the subject of debate since long time ago. Some, especially women, argue that the language discriminate them, therefore, they try many efforts to change the language with the neutral (non-sexist) one. It is not an easy fight, since some other think that this problem is too overstated and they keep using the language.

Actually, as Holmes (2000) said, the term sexist language refers to the language, which stereotypes of both men and women. She added that, principally, the research in this matter concerned with the way language expresses both negative and positive of both men and women, but practically, the research has concentrated on the ways in which language conveys negative attitude to women. This is because there are many forms in English characterizing it as a sexist language that mostly discriminate women, they are:

- English has no truly generic pronoun forms. People often used *he*, *his*, or *him* to refer to indefinite subject or object. Some argue that this is affected by the history of English language itself, where the authors of modern English grammar are male, and they wrote for male readers, since at that time few women were literate. Moreover, in 1890, an Act of Parliament decreed that “he” should be used for both sexes in all Parliamentary language (Stanley in Bolinger, 1980).

- There are some metaphors in English language, which describe women more of derogatory images compared to those used to describe men. And most of these metaphors have more negative value to women than metaphors which describe men. (Holmes, 2000)
- In English, many words reflect women as a deviant, abnormal or subordinate group. The words like *actress* which refer to women, is a word derived from 'actor' by adding suffix -ess. (Holmes, 2000).
- The word *man* is often used as a generic word, especially if it is connected with the occupational words. For example the words like *chairman, fireman, etc.* is still often used although there is a recommendation to change it with *chairperson, fire fighter, etc.*

These characteristics have made most definition about sexist language point to the language which discriminates women in some ways. Swim et al. (2004) stated:

Sexist language is an example of subtle sexism, unequal and unfair treatment of women that is not recognized by many people because it is perceived to be normative, in that it consists of speech that reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes and status differences between women and men.

In accordance with them, Umaine University Staff explained that sexist language is a language which discriminates, ignores, limits, or trivializes women and girls. They also added that sexist language excludes women's values, perspective, and experiences.

Of course, those who perceive sexism in language is a great matter had made some efforts to limit or even erase sexism in English language. In 1970, feminist proposed the use of neutral gender language in any aspect, then they continued their

struggle by proposing revision on the writing of bible in a matter of the using *He* as a pronoun of God. They continue their struggle by doing a campaign internationally with their articles.

Those efforts have given quite satisfying result, at least in some aspects. In 1977, the United States Department of Labor revised about 3.000 of it is approximately 30.000 titles for occupations (see Bolinger, 1980). In 1980, neutral gender language (non-sexist) has been accepted in many schools in America as a normative. In our country, there is a tendency of avoiding sexist language, especially in writing articles on the newspaper. Wardough (1998:312) gave a comment to this condition:

There is now a greater awareness in some part of the community that subtle, and sometimes not subtle, distinctions are made in the vocabulary choice that used to describe men and women.....there is a frequent insistence that neutral words be used as much as possible.

Furthermore, many editors suggest the writer to avoid sexist language, even for some, an article or a book which consists sexist language will not be published. Woodrow (2004) in the article entitled *Theory of Essay: Writing Guide*, said that writer should use non-sexist, and avoid the using of generic "he", since many readers find sexist language is offensive. Today, gender-neutral language has gained support from professional and academic groups such as the American Psychological Association and the Associated Press, and from most major textbook publishers. Some newspapers in America, the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal for example, avoid sexist language. Many psychology journals, law journals, and literature journals do not print articles or papers that use gender-inclusive (sexist) language.

But those efforts are not enough, since there are still many who do not know these issues, and even some do not want to accept the proposal. Zohrab (2001), for

example, stated that sexist language issue has become a tool for Feminist to get attention from the community and to get a better-higher position in them. Graglia (1996) gave a comment to what Peter had stated, she said that this is caused by their unawareness of the power relationship of the language they use with the concepts that they produce. This is not the only reason why some people still use sexist language in their speech or in their writing, Swim et al (2004). stated:

People may use sexist language for a variety of reason; they may do so because it is traditional; it is ingrained in current written and spoken language and can be difficult to change; people lack of knowledge about what constitutes sexist language; people do not believe that such language is sexist, or people are attempting to protect their social hierarchies.

This means that someone's perception on sexist language will be different from others, even for women. Although it is feminists which represent women, who campaign the avoidance of sexist language, in fact many women who perceive sexist language do not discriminate them. We can see the example on this song lyric which is written and sung by Joan Osborne, a famous female singer, entitled *One of Us*.

*"If God had a name, what would you call and would you call to **His** face. "*

The word "his" on that lyric, shows that Joan did not put any attention to the sexism problem although she is a woman. And if we look closer to our community, in this case the female students of English Department of UPI, in writing their acknowledgement on their paper, many still use the word "he" as a pronoun of God. This means that there is a tendency of different perception on sexist language in our community.

From these conditions, the writer feels curios about student's perception and response especially female, concerning to the sexist language issue.

1.2 Statements of the Problem

In this study, the problems to be investigated cover:

1. How do the students react to the sexist language issue?
2. What are female students' perceptions on sexist language?

1.3 The Aims of the Study

This study is aimed:

1. to know their response to the sexist language case;
2. to identify female students' perception on sexist language.

1.4 The Significance of the Study

The result of this study is expected:

1. to provide information about sexist language, especially in English language;
2. to give a brief description of female English students' perception on sexist language;
3. to discover female English Students' response to sexist language issue;
4. to be a consideration for teachers and students in choosing the language they use in their daily life;
5. to be a basic foundation in arranging sexist language principles in English

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1.5 The Scope of the Study

This study is limited only to identify female English students' perception on sexist language and to identify their response to sexist language issue.

1.6 Research Method

The method used in this study is descriptive method. Soepartono (1995) stated that one objective of the descriptive research is to describe more specifically the characteristics of individuals, groups, or situations.

In this study, the writer tries to describe female students' perception on sexist language, and to know their reaction to the sexist language issue.

1.7 The Subject of the Study

This study is conducted in English department of UPI, involving twenty female students. The writer decided to choose only female students since most of critics about sexist language come from feminist that represent women; moreover, sexist language is considered more offensive to women.

1.8 Data Collection

To collect the data, the writer use three instruments; closed ended questionnaire, open-ended questionnaire, and interview. The close-ended questionnaire is mainly aimed to a description about female students' perception on sexist language. While the open-ended questionnaire and interview are aimed to reveal the response from female English students to sexist language issue.

1.9 Data Analysis

To analyze the data collected from the close-ended questionnaire, the writer takes the following steps:

1. Finding out the percentage of each response per item
2. Calculating the frequency (fo) of the respondents who answer an item of each question.
3. Calculating the percentage of each total frequency of respondents' answer to item by using this formula:

$$\text{Percentage (\%)} = \frac{\text{Total Respondents who answer an item (fo)}}{\text{Total Respondents}} \times 100$$

4. Making a table that consists of some columns of statements, frequency, and the percentage.
5. Calculating the total frequency and the average percentage
6. Classifying the average percentage into the form of interval as follows:

00,00%	= none
00,01% - 24,99%	= a few of
25,00% - 44,99%	= nearly half of
50,00%	= half of
50,01% - 74,99%	= best part of
75,00% - 99,99%	= nearly all of

100,00 % = all of

(Suryadi, 1987 in Sanjaya, 2005)

7. Making the report.

While to analyze the data taken from the open-ended questionnaire and the interview, the writer use qualitative analysis, which will be presented accurately and briefly.

1.10 Clarification of Terms

Below are some terms clarified in order to avoid unnecessary misunderstanding:

1. perception : the way we see, assume, and understand something which is mainly influenced by our experience, and purpose.
2. response : an act as the result of incoming stimulus.
3. sexist language : a language which discriminates someone based on gender, in which contains words or phrases which stereotypes someone, especially woman.
4. sexist language principles : principles which were proposed by the feminist containing some rules, suggestions and guidance concerning to sexist language avoidance.

1.11 Organization of the Paper

There will be five chapters in this paper:

Chapter I Introduction

This chapter discuss about the background of the study, statements of problem, the aims of the study, the significance of the study, the scope of the study, research method, the subject of the study, data collection, data analysis, clarification of terms, and organization of the paper.

Chapter II : Theoretical Foundation

In this chapter, the writer put a detail description about perception, the definition, the sequence of events in perception, things which influence perception, elements which build perception, and some principles about perception. The writer also describe about sexist language, the history of sexist language existence in English, some characteristic in English which made it perceived as sexist, and some comments from the experts.

Chapter III : Methodology

This chapter will discuss about the method used in this research, the subject of this research, data collection, and data analysis. This chapter also explains about some consideration why the writer chooses descriptive method in this study, and why he only takes female students as the subject of the study.

Chapter IV : Findings and Discussions

In this chapter, the writer presents the findings from this research. The findings are separated based on how the data collected and the research questions. The writer also analyzes and discusses the findings using quantitative and qualitative analysis.

Chapter V : Conclusions and Suggestions

In this chapter, the writer points out some important findings from this research and put some suggestions for students, teachers, writers, media, and English Department of UPI related to sexist language issue.

