Sexism in Language
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Outline

I. Introduction and definition
II. Sexist language from two typical aspects
   □ sexism in words
   □ sexism in proverbs
III. Non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes
IV. Conclusion
Define: Sexist language is language that expresses bias in favor of one sex and treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner.

- men 😊 ↔ women 😞
- existence of sexist language is due to sexism in society
- stronger sex ↔ weaker sex
- language simply reflects this social fact
- problem: language is inherited
  → number of attempts to influence and change languages and linguistic behavior
Sexism in words

- Men = norm for the human species
  → male = human
  ⇒ this makes women invisible

- women’s linguistic status is often dependent on and derives from that of men
- dependent and subordinate position
- prevents the portrayal of women and men as different but equal human beings
Sexism in words II.

Common forms of sexism:
① using 'man' and 'he/him/his' as generics
② -man, -ette, -ess, -trix in occupational nouns and job titles
③ asymmetrical naming practices
④ stereotyped images of women and men
⑤ descriptions of women which trivialise them and their status
Sexism in words - examples

English does not possess a third person singular pronoun which is gender-neutral: *he, his, him*: refer to both men and women (confusing, inaccurate, makes women invisible)

E.g.

i: All men are mortal, Julia is a man, therefore Julia is mortal.

ii: Like other animals, man nourishes his baby with milk.

iii: We want to hire the best men we can get for the job.
Sexism in words – examples 2.
Male-oriented words that contain the element ‘-man’ while they apply to both sexes.
Sexism in words – examples 3.
The feminine gender can only be obtained by adding a certain bound morpheme to some particular nouns.
Sexism in words – examples 4.
The name of some professions (of common gender) can be applied to both sexes. However, people associate them only with male. We have to add ‘woman’ before those names if we want to refer to female of those professions.
Sexism in words – examples 5.

The classic ‘master – mistress’ pair tendency, where the female words tends to have less favourable meaning. (Male meaning is ‘good’, female meaning is ‘bad’.)

1) Master = host vs. mistress = lover
2) Governor = person appointed to govern a province or state vs. governess = nurse maid
3) Professional (qualified vs. prostitute)
4) Tramp (homeless vs. prostitute)
5) Shrew (‘bad – tempered woman’ vs. ’a shrewd businessman’) 
6) The (wo)man in the street.
Sexism in words – examples 6.

♠ lower social status of women: Mr vs. Miss/Mrs

♠ a man and his wife, man and wife, John’s window

♠ ’wife of’, ’mother of’, ’daughter of’ vs. ’father of’, ’husband of’
Sexism in proverbs

Sexism is reflected perfectly in proverbs because proverbs are condensation of one language. Prejudice towards women can be felt in these proverbs.

1) A women has even cheated.
2) Women have got long hair and short sense.
3) A woman’s tongue cracks bones.
4) Who he follows his wife’s whores.

These proverbs are common not only in English, but in many other languages.
Non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes

1. Titles and some naming practices

- Asymmetrical = inequality
- Mr, Mrs, Miss vs Ms
- Other titles
- Salutations in correspondence
Non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes

2. Alternatives for 'man'

(1) avoiding the use of male-specific words in the generic sense
(2) avoiding the use of man in idioms and phrases ('the best man for the job', 'the man on the land', 'the man in the street')
(3) occupational nouns and jobs titles
-ending in 'man', obscure the presence of women in such professions

→ Replace the '-man' part
- Use the existing gender-neutral term
- Use the '-person' alternative
- Use the explicit name of both sexes

Referring to a woman by means of the '-person' compound is discriminatory.
Non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes

Alternatives for he/him/his

✓ recast the sentence in the plural
✓ leave out the pronoun
✓ repeat the noun
✓ use 'he or she', 'she or he' or in writing 's/he'
✓ recast the sentence and use another pronoun, for example, 'you', or 'we'
✓ recast the sentence to avoid pronouns
✓ use they (it's not a problem that it is considered ungrammatical – If a student wants to get a test, they should come to my office.)
Non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes 3.

Occupational nouns and job titles which refer exclusively to women should also be avoided. (-ette, -ess and -trix suffixes)
Where the reference to a person's sex is irrelevant 'woman doctor', 'woman reporter' 'female astronaut' and expressions like these should be avoided.
Non-discriminatory portrayal of the sexes

Stereotyped images describing women and men

- parallel manner
- *dear* (ie), *darl', darling*, *sweetie*, *love* (endearments)
- similar characters (*forceful* vs. *pushy*)
- work should not be depicted as unimportant or worthless (*working mother*, *working wife*)
- belittling and insulting expressions (*weaker sex*, *old wives tales*, *the fair sex*)

→ women are naturally less competent than men
Conclusion and Opinion

Sexism in language is a social problem, and in order to eliminate it, we should above all eliminate the concept of prejudice in human beings thoughts.
THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!