



UNIVERSITI
TEKNOLOGI
MARA

The **Epitome** */I'pitəmi/*

Academy of Language Studies, UiTM Kedah Branch

Unleash the epitome of creative writers

Volume 1, Issue 1

2023

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The views, opinions and technical recommendations expressed by the contributors are entirely their own and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editors, the Faculty or the University.

eISSN 3009 - 0075

Published by:

UiTM Kedah Branch,
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SYNOPSIS

The Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah branch is proud to present the first issue of its e-magazine, The Epitome, as our focus to highlight our commitment to contribute to the areas of creative writing.

THE EPITOME aims to provide a platform for writers, educators, academicians, poet, and researchers to share their ideas, findings, knowledge, and experience, particularly on various creative writing genres - personal essays, poetry, short stories, songs, movie scripts, plays, and innovative projects in four different languages (English, Bahasa Melayu, Mandarin, and Arabic).

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

It is with great pleasure and immense pride that we, the Academy of Language Studies at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) Kedah branch, extend our warmest welcome to all writers and readers to honor all 127 artistic masterpieces. This is indeed a tremendous achievement to commemorate our debut.

We are privileged to offer the platform for the writers to show their talents in creative writing in this magazine, which serves as a testament to our commitment to the area of personal essays, poetry, short stories, songs, movie scripts, plays, and innovative projects. Their invaluable contributions and unwavering commitment to academic excellence have played a vital role in shaping this magazine.

Thank you.

Best regards,

Editorial Board



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WHY WE SHOULD LEARN THE MALAY LANGUAGE

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I have been teaching the Italian language at one of the public universities in Malaysia for the past twenty years, and now I am able to speak the Malay language (Bahasa Malaysia) with those around me.

During my online webinars, I always recommend that people from all over the world should learn the Malay language, even if it did not reach an international level like English. The reason is that this language has been considered the least sexist language. In fact, according to Focus D&R (an international digital magazine that deals with science, nature, technology, culture, medicine, history, and ecology), Danish is the most sexist language, followed by German, Norwegian, Dutch, Romanian, English, Hebrew, and Swedish. Mandarin ranks ninth, followed by Persian, Portuguese, and Hindi. Italian ranks thirteenth, just before Finnish, French, Korean, Spanish, Indonesian, Arabic, Japanese, and Croatian. At the bottom of the rankings are Turkish, Filipino, Polish, and, finally, Malay which, out of the 25 languages examined, was the least sexist.

Issues about linguistic sexism have been discussed by linguists and academics. Learning Malay helped me to recognize sexism, even in small forms, in my mother tongue. A language that emphasizes male and female gender manifests the unequal power relations between men and women which have existed historically. The sexist language, in a way, is compounding the discrimination against women. It also prevents the full advancement of women in society.

Unfortunately, sexism is widespread and prevalent in all sectors and all societies and reinforced by gender stereotypes affecting mostly girls and women, much fewer men and boys. Sexism constitutes a barrier to the empowerment of women and girls, who are disproportionately affected by sexist behavior, it is linked to violence against women and girls, whereby acts of “everyday” sexism are part of a

continuum of violence creating a climate of intimidation, fear, discrimination, exclusion, and insecurity which limits opportunities and freedom. Despite the existence of standards at international, national, and regional levels guaranteeing the principle of gender equality, a gap still persists between standards and practice, between de jure and de facto gender equality.

We must be aware that the words we speak shape our thinking in subtle, subconscious ways and influence our actions. That’s why some cultures and religions emphasize the use of positive words in order not to create a negative character of the speaker and listener. Here we see that language structures subtly influence and dictate culture.

It is accepted that each language has its own structure and grammar rules. But some languages do not mark gender distinctions systematically. Some use pronouns to distinguish between male and female, and some go even further, extending the gender distinction to inanimate nouns through a system of grammatical gender. For example, in Italian, the word “house” is feminine, while book is masculine.

Non-gendered language is important as it frames the understanding of equality; it shapes our views of women’s roles and directly impacts their participation in all aspects of society. Non-gendered language can also empower, advance and promote equality between women and men. On the other hand, gendered language can contribute to the marginalization of women in the labor market, impede educational attainment, reinforce traditional gender roles, and support harmful traditional practices.

Language is a reflection of the attitudes and norms within a society. It also shapes our worldview and, over time, people’s attitudes as to what is “normal” and acceptable. If a language uses unequal distinctions between

females and males, it is accepted that men are more favorable than women. For example, some Italian words, in the masculine form, have a positive meaning. But, in the feminine, it is negative: “Un uomo disponibile” (masculine) means a kind and thoughtful man, but the feminine “una donna disponibile”, means whore. Hence, this word that carries the meaning “whore”, seems to be a norm to the users. It also looks like that feminine gender nouns (compared to the masculine ones) are dirty and repulsive.

The way language is used not only reflects social structures and biases but may also reinforce preconceptions and inequalities related to gendered roles in everyday life and in the work environment. While women play an active role in all parts of society, language that ignores or minimizes their contributions is still often used. Gender-inclusive language is about writing and speaking in a way that does not discriminate or marginalize on the basis of gender and does not promote or perpetuate gender stereotypes. The Malay language is the less gendered language. For instance, the same word “dia” is used to refer to a male or female; while English has two different gendered personal pronouns (he and she) to name them.

For this reason, I would like to congratulate the Malaysians from the bottom of my heart and tell them: “Chapeau”, for creating and using such a beautiful and non-sexist language.



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eISSN 3009-0075

9 773009 007004