LANGUAGE AND IDEOLOGY IN THE MEDIA: TREATMENT OF GENDER IN NEWS REPORTS

Maziana Osman
Academy of Language Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA Pahang
Shazul Ezry
Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication, Universiti Putra Malaysia

ABSTRACT

Language encodes ideas and meanings and in doing so, brings along with it a particular world-view of the text producer. The present study attempts to investigate how media portray men and women, through the analysis of language use. Samples of news reports were collected from three media forms within a duration of one week. The findings showed that there was differential treatment as to how men and women were portrayed in the media.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the most important and the most powerful of all the systems of signs (Chandler 2001). It performs the crucial role in the construction of media texts in that it encodes ideas, meanings and messages. Linguistic structure of a text can effectively encode a particular world-view, the ideology of the text producer (Simpson 1993). Mass media, which act as the channel in which messages are conveyed, are a powerful factor in shaping people's beliefs and attitudes (Fairclough 1995) towards others and the world surrounding them.

In the early forties and fifties, gender roles were clearly defined. Men were regarded as superior and women inferior. However, the trend has now changed. Women have gained higher and respected status in the society. The present study attempts to investigate how media represent men and women, through the analysis of language use.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language and ideology

Simpson (1993) claims that critical analysis on language use will manifest different world views, predominantly with respect to phenomena such as power and status, which are embedded implicitly in the style of texts. Hodge and Kress (1993) states that the grammar of a language is its theory of reality and that ideology dictates the way we construe the knowledge around us.

Haynes (1989) reports that the linguistic choices are the reflection of the ideological options. By looking at the options and examining which are chosen and which are excluded out of the options, (paradigmatic structure), the ideological dimension of a text can be made explicit. Simpson (1993) argues that texts are never regarded as neutral, value-free chunks of language but, rather, they are viewed as embodiments of a host of institutional and political discursive practices.

Treatment of gender in mass media

Much research has been conducted on the issue of gender treatment in the different the mass media. The interest on studying gender issues started as early as in the 1960s with the advent of the feminist movement.

In advertisements, differences in gender portrayal were found in the types of products which were advertised by males and females. Men were most frequently associated with non-domestic products and women with domestic ones. Women's roles were typically defined in relation to other people; as housewives or mothers, whereas by comparison men were rarely shown as husband or fathers (O'Donnel and O'Donnel 1978; Dominick and Rausch 1972 as cited by Furnham and Farragher 2000).

Differential treatment was also evident in the type of conversation men and women were indulged in. Men's conversation in advertisements was focused on the theme of authority and the concepts of money and control, whereas women's conversation was focused on more nurturing themes of feelings and security (Knupfer 1998). On the working roles of men and women, males were portrayed mainly in the working roles and females mainly in non-working roles. Men were given the high-level business and professional roles whereas women were cast more frequently in entertainment or sports roles (Chi 1999).

Gender bias was also prevalent in textbooks. Macaulay and Brice (1997) examined example sentences in ten syntax textbooks and discovered that male-gendered subjects and agents outnumbered female. They also reported that women were often described not on their own terms but in relationship to others and that men appeared more often than women in sentences describing intelligence.

The same pattern of gender discrimination was also found in news reports. Research showed that women received less coverage than men and were under – represented as news subjects (Koivula 1999; Duncan Messner and Williams 1991; Fountaine and McGregor 1999). Furthermore, women were described with language that included cases of infantilism such as "girl" and "young lady" whereas men with one that acknowledged their adult status (Koivula 1999). Moreover, women were frequently referred to using their first names and men using their last names (Koivula 1999; Duncan 1992).

From the literature cited above, it can be summarized that media represented men and women in strikingly different ways. Men were depicted as being superior while women inferior. Although some studies have reported a decrease in the stereotyped portrayal (Furnham, Babitzkow and Uguccioni 2000), gender bias in media still exists despite the changing trend in reality.

THE STUDY

It has been accepted that language is a powerful tool of communication. This study attempts to demonstrate that language not only carries with it explicit messages but also underlying and implicit meanings. More importantly, as the societal and political power of women has increased, it is considered timely to analyze whether the representation of women in the media has similarly improved. Finally, in response to the notion that media have powerful effect on people's mind, especially the younger generation, it is necessary that media promote positive and realistic images of men and women. This study attempts to evaluate whether local mass media have fulfilled this expectation. This study will benefit those in the fields of mass media communication and discourse analysis as well as the public, who are the consumers of the mass media. Finally, this study will contribute to the literature of critical linguistic and gender issues.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to examine whether there are quantitative and qualitative differences in the portrayal of men and women in news reports. Consequently, the study hopes to answer the ultimate question of whether there is gender discrimination in the portrayal of men and women in news reports.

Methodology

Theoretical Framework

Critical Linguistic

Critical linguistic seeks to interpret, rather than simply describes the linguistic structure of texts. This type of discourse analysis posits that there is a strong relationship between ideological processes and linguistic processes (Fairclough 1995). Central in the critical linguistic approach is the model of transitivity founded by Halliday (1985) (as cited by Simpson 1993). The transitivity model provides one means of investigating how a reader or listener's perception of the meaning of a text is pushed in a particular direction and how the linguistic structure of a text effectively encodes a particular world-view (Simpson 1993). It is concerned with the transmission of ideas, and is therefore, part of the

ideational function of language. According to the model of transitivity, speakers record their experience in clauses that have three components, namely the process (expressed by the verb phrase in a clause), the participants (realized by noun phrases) and the circumstances (expressed by adverbial and prepositional phrases). The processes can be further classified into action (material), speech (verbalization), states of mind (mental) or states of being (relational) (Simpson 1993).

Definition of Terms

The following key terms are defined in relation to their use in this study:

a)   Ideology
Ideology is the discursive process whereby meaning is produced that affects relations of power (Goldberg 1999). Belsey, drawing on Althusser, (as cited by Moynagh 2002) notes that ideology is not an added extra which one adopts or consciously practices but that it is the very way in which individuals view the world. It is a collection of shared assumptions within a society about how the world is seen and life experienced.

b)   Discrimination
Discrimination refers to the difference in the treatment of two or more parties. In the context of the present study, it concerns with the differential treatment given to men and women.

c)   Sexist Language
Sexist language holds the opinion that favours men over women (Moore 2002). This is realized, among others, in the use of generic word *man*, for example, in *mankind, manpower* and *manhood* and in the use of *man* in occupational terms such as *chairman, fireman, policeman and mailman*. Sexism also exists in the use of pronouns *he, his* and *him* to refer to nouns like *the student, the author, the judge* and so forth because it defies the idea of a female student, author or judge (Jacobson 1995).

Sampling

Samples of news reports were collected from three media forms:

a)   Newspapers
News reports appearing in the local and sports sections of the *New Straits Times (NST)* and *The Star* were collected for a week. Out of these, news reports from four editions of each newspaper were chosen randomly, from which headlines and news content were examined.

b)   Television
News broadcast on a national broadcasting television, *TV2*, was videotaped for a one-week period. News in the local and sports sections were selected for analysis.

c)   Radio
News broadcast on a national radio station, *Radio 4*, was recorded for a period of a week. Recording was carried out once a day. News reports in the local and sports news were selected for analysis.

Data Analysis

Quantitative and qualitative methods were employed in analyzing the treatment of gender in news reports. A checklist of categories, adapted from previous literature on gender bias and from Halliday's transitivity analysis, was formed. The analysis of texts in the present study focused only on the material process due to its relevance with the problem being investigated.

The quantitative analysis involved analysing texts based on the following categories:

a)   Men and women-referenced headlines
Here, headlines in local news reports were examined. Opening texts were examined in the absence of headlines, as in the case of television and radio news broadcast. The rationale for examining headlines and opening texts is that they form the gist of the content and are the first to catch audience's attention.

Analyzing was in the form of categorizing the utterance as being either men-referenced or women-referenced. This was achieved by identifying the use of masculine or feminine nouns or noun phrases in the headlines or the opening texts. Thus, the headline *Ismail recounts tragic landslide episode* was categorized as men-referenced due to the use of a masculine noun *Ismail*. Similarly, the headline *Shahrizat softens stands after coming under fire* was categorized as women-referenced because of the use of a feminine noun *Shahrizat*. On the other hand, the headline *Perlis set to be a major producer of teak waling sticks* was placed under the neutral category because of the absence of either masculine or feminine nouns or noun phrases in the utterance. Frequency count was adopted in this analysis.

b)   Description of men and women in relationship to others
In this category, every sentence in the news reports in the local section of all three media was examined. The analysis involved establishing frequency count for each utterance that described men or women in relationship to someone else. This included description of men and women as being someone's husband/wife, father/mother, brother/sister or boyfriend/girlfriend.

c)   Use of first and last name of men and women in international sports news
This category focused on headlines and opening texts which appeared in the international sports section. The rationale for choosing international over local sport news was culture-based. The local culture posits that people, men and women, are addressed in the same manner - using their first name. The analysis involved establishing frequency count for each occurrence of using first or last name to refer to sportsmen and sportswomen.

The qualitative analysis included the following categories:

a)   Participant roles and lexical choice
This category involved the use of transitivity analysis. As mentioned in the previous paragraphs, the present study focused on studying headlines employing the material process because of its relevance with the problem being investigated. Material processes have two inherent participant roles associated with them, namely, Actor and Goal. This category focuses on identifying what types of participants do men and women predominantly function as; as Actors or as Goals.

Thus, each headline was analyzed and broken down into three elements: Actor (a compulsory element which represents the doer of the action), Material Process (the verb phrase that shows the process of doing) and Goal (an optional element which represents the person or entity affected by the process). A table describing the headlines with regard to which word or phrases belong to the three elements above was prepared for easy reference. 27 headlines using material process in its active construction were selected for analysis.

b)   Use of sexist language
Headlines and their contents were examined to investigate the use of sexist language. Sexist utterances were copied and analyzed.

FINDINGS

a)   Men and women-referenced headlines

Table 1: Men and women-referenced headlines

Media Forms	Men and Women-referenced Headlines			Total
	Neutral	Men	Women	
Newspapers: NST	80	23	4	4
The Star	15	12	2	29
Total	95	35	6	136
TV2	20	13	0	33
Radio 4	5	4	1	10
Total	120	52	7	179
Percentage	**67**	**29.1**	**3.9**	**100**

Table 1 shows that out of 179 headlines and opening texts examined, 120 were neutral. 80 headlines the *News Straits Times* and 15 in *The Star* were neutral. 52 were men-referenced whereas only 7 were women-referenced. Examples of neutral utterances included:

1.   *Tabung Haji has assured the safety of Malaysian while performing hajj in Saudi next year.* (TV2)

2.   *EPF's assistance for disability and funeral expenses has been increased.* (Radio 4)

3.   *Yayasan Terengganu clears air.* (The New Straits Times)

The above texts were categorized as being neutral because neither masculine nor feminine nouns or noun phrases were used in the utterances.

29.1% of the headlines were men-referenced from which 13 were from *TV2* and four from *Radio 4*. The remaining 35 men-referenced headlines were from newspapers with the *New Straits Times* contributing about two-third of them. Examples of men-referenced headlines were :

1.   *Nik Aziz* **to meet Kelantan-born people on Raya second day.** (The News Straits Times)

2.   *Ismail recounts tragic landslide episode.* (The Star)

3.   *Dr. Mahathir urged Muslims to send their children to national schools to acquire religious education.* (Radio 4)

4.   *The Sultan of Selangor,* **Sultan Sharifuddin Idris Shah** *today conferred rewards and medals to 60 people on the occasion of his 57th birthday today.* (TV2)

The above texts were categorized as men-referenced due to the use of masculine nouns *Nik Aziz, Ismail, Dr. Mahathir* and a masculine noun phrase *The Sultan of Selangor*.

A mere seven headlines were categorized as women-referenced. Out of these, four and two came from the *New Straits Times* and *The Star* respectively, whereas one from *Radio 4*. *TV2* did not use any women-referenced headlines at all.

Examples of women-referenced headlines included :

1.   *Shahrizat softens stands after coming under fire.* (The New Straits Times)

2.   *Tan hopes to get a chance to explain action.* (The Star)

3. *Women and Family Development Minister <u>Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil</u> today urges Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO) headquarters to inform their respective branches on government allocations.* (Radio 4)

The above headlines were categorized as women-referenced due to the use of feminine nouns *Shahrizat, Tan* (referring to Tan Cheng Liang, a state assembly representative) and *Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil.*

The results showed that news headlines were generally neutral. However, men- referenced headlines outnumbered women-referenced headlines with a ratio of 7:1.

b.   Description of men and women in relationship to others

Table 2: Description of men and women in relationship to others

Media Forms	Description of men and women in relationship to others	
	Men	**Women**
Newspapers:		
NST	0	7
The Star	0	0
Total	0	7
TV2	0	2
Radio 4	0	2
Total	**0**	**11**
Percentage	**0**	**100**

Table 2 indicates that there was no instance where men were identified in terms of their relationship to someone else. On the other hand, women were described in relationship to others, for example, as someone's wife or mother, eleven times; seven in the *New Straits Times* and twice each in *TV2* and *Radio 4*. Most of these were gathered from news coverage on functions attended by ministers. There were no similar data gathered from *The Star* because during the period of analysis, the newspaper did not have coverage on functions attended by ministers, as did the other newspaper.

Examples referring to women in terms of their relationship to others included :

1. *Datin Seri Hendon Mahmud, the wife of Deputy Prime Minister, was also present.* (TV 2)

2. *Also present at the event was his(Dr Mahathir's) wife Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah Mohd Ali.* (The New Straits Times)

3. *Present was Bakti honorary secretary Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor, who is also Najib's wife.* (The New Straits Times)

In the above texts, *Datin Seri Hendon Mahmud, Datuk Seri Dr Siti Hasmah and Datin Seri Rosmah Mansor* were not described as their own persons, but as **wives** of others.

c. **Use of first and last name of men and women**

Table 3 : Use of first and last name of men and women

Media Forms	Use of First and Last Name				Total
	Men		Women		
	First	Last	First	Last	
Newspapers:					
NST	1	14	4	0	19
The Star	1	12	0	1	14
Total	2	26	4	1	33
TV2	2	3	0	0	5
Radio 4	0	0	0	0	0
Total	4	29	4	1	38
Percentage	10.5	76.3	10.5	2.7	100

In Table 3, 26 out of 28 headlines in the *New Straits Times* and *The Star* referred to men using their last name whereas three out of five headlines in *TV2* used the last name of men. In contrast, one out of five newspaper headlines referred to women using their last name whereas *TV2* international sports news reported no use of either first or last name of women. *Radio 4* reported no use of either first or last name of both sexes because in most cases, the full name of athletes or third person pronouns were used to refer to athletes.

Examples on this included :

Male Athletes:

1.   *Wood seeks fifth Grand Slam of golf title.* *(Tiger Woods)

2.   *Grieving Daly to play in Australia GP.* *(John Daly)

3.   *Craig's hat- trick steers Scotland to beat Fiji.* *(Andy Craig)

4.   *Enrique wraps season with 13th win.* *(Luis Enrique)

Female Athletes:

1.   *Natalie cracks 100, butterfly world record.* *(Natalie Coughlin)

2.   *Annika wraps season with 13th win.* *(Annika Sorenstam)

3.   *Sorenstam Hungry for more titles.* *(Annika Sorenstam)

(*Athlete's Full Name)

In total, 29 headlines used the last name of men and four used their first name. One the other hand, only one headlines used the last name of women and four used their first name. It is evident, therefore, that the use of first name was higher for women than for men.

d. Participant roles and lexical choice

Table 4: Participant roles and material processes

Actor	Material Process	Goal
1. Sultan	shows	concern (over the drowning of boys).
2. Fisherman	lands	2.4m-long marlin.
3. PM	visits	handicraft exhibition.
4. Dr M	will launch	Umno's SMS service (on Friday).
5. Brother	burns (to death in fire).	
6. Fishermen	seek	RM1.6m for losses from sand dredging.
7. CM	pays tribute	to personnel on duty during Raya.
8. Border policemen	get	helmets (to ward off catapult attacks).
9. Nik Aziz	to meet	Kelantan-born people (on Raya second day).
10. Kong Choy	welcomes	Lim's move.
11. Man	died (in KL hospital).	
12. Ismail	recounts	Tragic landslide episode.
13. The Malaysia's court	will decide	The fate of Italian businessman.
14. The Sultan of Selangor (today)	conferred	rewards and medals (to 60people).
15. Penang MCA chairman	should stop	making negative comments (on Gerakan President).
16. Deputy Prime Minister	has just arrived (in Kuching).	
17. Dr Mahathir	assures	the peaceful and orderly transfer of power.
18. Datuk Halim Hamid (today)	took over (as the Perlis CPO).	
19. Umno Youth	has called on	the government (to review Malaysia's approach).
20. The Yang Dipertuan Agong	granted	an audience (to the outgoing Nepalese ambassador to Malaysia).
21. Datuk Seri Abdullah Ahmad Badawi	urged	Muslims (to emulate the passion for knowledge)
22. Dr Mahathir	urged	Muslims (to send their children to national schools).
23. Datuk Seri Shahrizat Abdul Jalil	urges	NGO headquarters (to inform their respective branches).
24. PRM young women	join	Keadilan's Wanita wing.
25. Shahrizat	soften	stands (after coming under fire).
26. Mother and daughter	die (in crash)	
27. Baby Nurul	to spend	Hari Raya (in hospital).

(Words/Phrases in brackets are Circumstances).

In Table 4, each headline is broken down into these three components: Actor, Material Process and Goal. As clearly seen in the table, the headlines employ active construction, thereby making the Actor the first element in the clause. This consequently places emphasis on the doers (agents) of the processes, resulting in the Actor getting the focal prominence. Table 4 shows the preference of the text producer(s) to represent men more as Actors than as Goals (headlines nos. 1-22). Men are the actors in almost all of the headlines except for headline no. 13 in which men is the Goal. This foregrounding of men more as Actors carries two implications, first; that men are considered as important subjects and second; that men are superior in the sense that they are active and bring things into being (compare this to Goal – the passive entity affected by the process).

The table also shows that women predominantly function as Actors. However, the number of utterances is very much fewer than that of men.

Lexical choice associated with men (headlines nos. 1 – 22): Analysis on the types of material processes revealed that the majority were *intention* processes (where the actors performed the acts voluntarily) and two – *burns* and *died* in headlines nos. 5 and 11) - were *supervention* processes (where the acts just happened). The use of intention processes suggested that men were in control of the situation.

It is interesting to analyze the use of material process *took over* in the headline *Datuk Halim today took over as the Perlis CPO* (no. 18). Representing the process as *"took over"* is paradigmatic since the same act can be referred to as *became,* thus, *Datuk Halim today became the Perlic CPO.* The process *took over* signifies strength and authority and, therefore, portrayed men as those who are in charge and in power. The same effect would not have been achieved if *became*, which connotes passiveness, were to be used. In transitivity analysis, *became* would be categorized under relational processes in which the participants are not affecting the other in any way.

Similar pattern was found in the headline *Sultan shows concern over drowning of boys* (no. 1). Material process *shows* (concern) was selected over relational process *is* (concerned) as in *Sultan is concerned over drowning of boys.* Material process was chosen since it connoted activeness and authority.

Other material processes which signify power and authority include *assure, call on, grant, urge, launch, decide, visit, confer* and *land.*

Lexical choice associated with women (headlines nos. 23 – 27): Due to the nature of the news headlines, that there were more men-referenced than women-reference headlines (as shown in the previous paragraphs), the data gathered was not sufficient enough to form a strong argument. However, a quick look at the samples provided, particularly the verbs *join* and *soften*, would reveal a tendency to associate women with that of weakness. The verb *join* signifies dependence over others whereas *softens* suggests fragility.

e.   Use of Sexist Language

The analysis revealed the presence of sexist language in the media. Although the use was not widespread, it indicated the insensitivity of local media producers towards the female population. The examples included:

1.   *Firemen and their families are worried over the worsening soil erosion behind their home* (New Straits Times).

2.   *Border policemen get helmets to ward off catapult attacks.* (New Straits Times).

3.   *A housewife and her daughter were killed when their motorcycle crashed into a tree* (New Straits Times).

Sexist use of language signifies that men are superior to women. The use of *men* in occupational terms *fireman* and *policeman* in texts 1 and 2 above was considered sexist since the persons holding the job could be either male or female. Possible gender-neutral alternatives to the terms are *firefighters* and *police officers.* The term *homemaker* should be used as an alternative to *housewife* which was considered degrading to the women's image.

DISCUSSION

The discussion was carried out based on the results presented in the previous section. The quantitative analysis provided strong and valid evidence that there was differential treatment in the portrayal of men and women in news reports.

The first evidence was from the analysis on whether a particular headline is men-referenced or women-referenced. This headline analysis is relevant to this study on gender treatment as headlines of news reports formulate the overall theme of texts (Fairclough 1995). Consequently, the use of masculine nouns in a headline would indicate the "masculine" theme of the text (i.e. the news content would be about males) and the use of feminine nouns would signal the "feminine" theme of the text (i.e. the news content would be about females). Hence, from the results, it was obvious that there was gender discrimination in news reporting. Men's stories made up 29 percent of all stories whereas women news accounted for 3.9 percent of the total; about seven times higher than that of women. News about men far outnumbered news about women. This was consistent with the finding of previous research that

women were under represented in news reports (Koivula 1999; Duncan, Messner and Williams 1991; Fountaine and McGregor 1999).

The second proof that there was gender discrimination in the representation of men and women in news reports was gathered from the analysis on description of men and women in terms of their relationship to others. It was found that women were described as someone's wife more often than men were described as someone's husband. In fact, the finding showed that men were **never** referred to as someone's husband. This subtly conveys the message that women are inferior to men, that women's existence depends on the existence of men

This differential portrayal of men and women was summarized by a researcher in these words: "women have relationships and men have jobs" (as cited by Macaulay and Brice 1997). Similar finding was also reported in another study by Macaulay and Brice (1997) whereby females were identified as someone's wife five times more often than males were identified as someone's husband.

The final quantitative evidence in the bias portrayal of men and women was evident in the use of first and last name to refer to male and female athletes. The results showed that the use of first name was higher for women than for men. 29 headlines used the last name of men and four used their first name, whereas one the other hand, only one headlines used the last name of women and four used their first name. This finding was supported by another study conducted by Koivula (1999) who reported that women athletes were referred to by their first names about four times as often as the men, who were referred to by their last names almost twice as often as women.

The use of first name and last name to refer to people is of particular relevance to this study. Linguists have established that members of dominant social group are addressed to by their last names, whereas others by first names (Duncan 1992). Therefore, the practice of describing male athletes using their last name suggests their power and dominance whereas addressing women with their first name implies inferiority. Duncan (1992) described the practice as infantilism, i.e. associating women with small children, while giving adult status to male athletes. In sum, the use of last name for male athletes indicates a linguistic construction and legitimization of men's superiority.

The results of the qualitative analysis also provided evidence on the disparity in the treatment of gender in news reports. Using the transitivity analysis, it was found that men predominantly functioned as Actors. This foregrounding of men more as Actors implies two things. First, men are considered as important subjects and second; men are considered as superior since an Actor affects others and brings things into being, in contrast to a Goal which is the passive entity affected by the process. The results also indicated that women predominantly functioned as Actors but the number of occurrences was very much fewer than that of men.

Analysis on the material process expressed by the verb phrase in men-referenced headlines indicated careful choice of lexical items as evident in the use of *took over* instead of *became*, and *shows concern* instead of *is concerned*. In addition to that, verb phrases such as *assure, grant, launch and decide* that express the material processes were paradigmatically chosen to associate power and authority with men.

Similar lexical analysis on women-referenced headlines, on the other hand, showed the inclination to associate women with that of weakness. The verb *join* for example, signifies dependence over others whereas *softens* suggests fragility. This finding is consistent with another study by Duncan (1992) who reported that words that communicated strength were used more often to describe male players than female players.

There was also evidence on the use of sexist language in the news reports. Since sexist language suggests superiority of men over women, local media texts producers should be sensitive enough to avoid sexist usage of language.

It is apparent from the discussion of the findings above that there is an underlying and implicit agenda attached with the media texts. The critical linguistic analysis has made explicit the hidden agenda, in parallel with its function to interpret, rather than simply describe the structures of texts. The agenda of the text producer(s) is to subtly promote the view that holds the superiority of men over women. This form of ideology has existed in the mass media for the past 30 years, as proven by previous literature.

The results of the present study revealed distinct contrast in how men and women were portrayed in news reports. Women received less news coverage than men did and were usually referred to as someone's wife, thus, denying their existence as their own person. Men were the dominant members of the society and women were not, as indicated by the use of men's last name and women's first name. Foregrounding men more as Actors in clauses implied their focal prominence and superiority. In addition to that, paradigmatic lexical choice also reflected an underlying message favouring a particular sex over the other.

It is argued that mass media should provide accurate and balanced portrayal of men and women considering the fact that women nowadays have gained higher and respected status in the society and have become somewhat equal to their male counterparts. The advocates of this opinion believe that it is the role of the media to fairly represent the reality. However, it should be noted that in providing images, interpretations and explanations of events occurring in the world, the mass media do not simply and neutrally provide information about that world but actively encourage us to see and understand it in particular ways and in certain terms. Rather than faithfully 'mirroring' the external world and its 'reality', it is argued that the media have constructed and interpreted the nature of that world according to certain values, ideological frameworks and cultural principles (O'Sullivan, Dutton & Rayner 1998). Therefore, asking the mass media to fairly portray the reality would be like asking them to do what they are not capable of doing. Media do not represent reality, instead, they **construct** reality.

The way men and women are portrayed in the mass media depends a lot on ideological framework adopted by the media text producer(s) in particular, and the media institutions in general. It is true that the role of women in the modern society has changed and improved, but looking at the current phenomenon, the ideology of the text producer has not moved in the same direction.

Comparison across the media forms

In general, newspapers, television and radio displayed similar pattern in representing men and women in news reports. For example, in the analysis of men and women-referenced headlines, all three media forms used more men-referenced than women-referenced headlines. Similarly, in describing men and women in terms of their relationship to someone else, all three media forms identified women as someone's wife more often than men as someone's husband.

The difference among them was in the number of texts examined. Newspaper provided more data compared to the other two media forms. This was considered natural since newspapers have the luxury of ample space. Television and radio, on the other hand, have to deal with time constraint.

Effects of gender bias on media consumers

It has been acknowledged that mass media have powerful effects in shaping people's beliefs and behaviours (Littlejohn 1999). Previous research has indicated that sex stereotyping and gender bias have adverse effects on media consumers, especially young children. Experts agreed that stereotyping produced negative effects on members of the stereotyped group, leading to a sense of judgement. This evaluative dimension of stereotype can be internalized, leading to lowered self-expectations (Macaulay and Brice 1997).

Research also indicated that sexist writing could affect the readers' perceptions about career attractiveness. Briere and Lanktree (1983) as cited by Macaulay and Brice (1997) found that students exposed to a sexist version of the reading rated a career in psychology as significantly less attractive for women than did students exposed to a non-sexist version. A number of studies also suggested that gender stereotyping and gender bias could oversimplify reality and restrict life options. It can be concluded that gender bias has a negative emotional and professional impact on media consumers. Therefore, it is time that mass media institutions change the way they construe the world, with regard to the portrayal of men and women.

Sesi Poster

CONCLUSION

Analyzing gender discrimination through the use of language is fascinating and intellectually empowering. It reveals whose realities are privileged and whose are suppressed. As discussed, language has been used by the mass media as a powerful tool in the reinforcement of gender distinctions. It enacts stereotypes and inequalities as well as reflects, reinforces and reconstructs traditional gender boundaries and gender inequalities.

The present study has confirmed the finding of previous literature that there is gender discrimination in the mass media, particularly in the news reports. This is disheartening given the fact that the women and men's roles in the society have changed markedly in the past 30 years. To ask the media to improve their portrayal of women in order to accommodate the changing role of women in society is like asking for the almost impossible. The "changing" process is not as simple as it sounds – it involves the whole system of the society itself.

Gender bias in mass media has negative impacts on people's beliefs and perceptions. The best approach to minimize the effects of gender bias on consumers of mass media is through education. The public, especially the younger generation, should be taught how to "read" the mass media. They should be made aware that the representations made by the media are not always accurate, and that what they see or hear in the mass media is not always the reality.

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