

Linguistics Sexism in Chinese and English Language

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Abstract: Linguistic sexism is sexism that takes place through language. This may involve the use of pronouns for only one of the sexes and language that are unfair to the sexes. Chinese and English, as two separate system, somehow shares common traits in gender discrimination. In compliance with lexicology, syntax, cultural and social factors, sexism in both language is discussed to make a comparison from linguistics' perspective.

Keywords: Linguistics Sexism; Lexicology; Syntax; Culture

Introduction

As a carrier of culture, language can reflect people's social concepts and social customs, carrying a large amount of social and cultural information. China has been deeply influenced by Confucianism since ancient times, and men have long dominated, while women are thought to be subordinate to men and dependent on them in thought and status.

The term "linguistic sexism" emerged when social perceptions and customs were reflected in language. As the name implies, "linguistic sexism" is a cultural manifestation of "sexism" in language, which includes differences in speech, intonation, vocabulary, grammar, and conversation. With the development of sociolinguistics and the rise of feminism in the United States, linguistic sexism has become one of the focuses in socio-linguistic study. The publication of *Language and Woman's Place* written by Robin Lakoff in 1975 was a major breakthrough for the study of language and gender in the field of linguistics. She believed "women experience linguistic discrimination in two ways: in the way they are taught to use language, and in the way general language use treats them."

What is more, linguistic differences include phonological, intonational, lexical, grammatical, and conversational. This is despite the fact that the two languages belong to different language families and have different vocabulary and syntactic rules. Although the English and Chinese languages belong to different language families and have very different lexical and syntactic rules, the two languages coincide in their use of sexism. In this essay, the latter way will be mainly discussed from lexicology, syntax, culture and society's perspective between Chinese and English.

1. Linguistics sexism in Chinese

1.1 Chinese idioms

A phenomenon usually occurs in Chinese words involving descriptions of males and females: the order of masculine words appears before feminine words, e.g., father and mother, sons and daughters, etc. This phenomenon is a habit of language development in the long run. Idioms, as a kind of Chinese vocabulary, also have this phenomenon.

Gender discrimination is not only discrimination by men against women, but also manifests itself as discrimination by women against men. According to the statistics of the Chinese Idiom Dictionary, there are 29 idioms that imply derogatory meanings to men or women: 15 of them. The number of idioms that are obviously derogatory to women is 4, and the number of idioms that are implicitly derogatory to men is 10. (Qu Yi & Yu Lili, 2019.)

1.2 Chinese proverbs

As crystallization of human wisdom, proverbs are simple and concise words passed down among the people, which reflects the cultural environment and way of thinking of a country and nation. Huang Shengnan (2020) noted that as a

special form of expression in language, proverbs vividly reflect the social culture of different countries in different periods and people's ideology.

e.g. Too much learning does not become a woman

1.3 Ancient china's culture and society

As a communication tool, language reflects certain social culture and social phenomenon. The time when users use language, the social environment in which they live, the development of contemporary society, and changes in social institutions affect language. After the clan era, the relationship between men and women became imbalanced for the following reasons.

As Sun Rujian(2010) explained, women have more responsibilities in the family than men and are less powerful than men in the fight. Both in the era of force and in the era of financial power, most women were in a protected position, losing their independence and being dependent on men. In fact, if there is a hierarchy in the social organization, where some people are subordinated to others, then an unfair system emerges, and with it the phenomenon of linguistic sexism.

2. Gender discrimination in English

2.1 Lexicology

2.1.1 Word formation

In linguistics (particularly morphology and lexicology), word formation refers to the ways in which new words are formed on the basis of other words or morphemes, which is also known as derivational morphology.

From the above word structure, we can learn that male is the master of history, the main body of the society. The English vocabulary tends to show male's superiority. The expression of gender difference between a pair of words is different, male mark word usually has no mark items, its distribution range is wide, but the female marked word often has marked item, its distribution range is limited. Although human society is composed by men and women, people commonly use the word "man or mankind "when they express the meaning of "person or human". The word "man" is frequently used in English, its distribution range is wide, not only for a man also for a female. There is torus helping you to know it well.

e.g. mankind=man + kind;

history=his story; fireman=fire+man; policeman=policeman+man

2.1.2 Word markedness

From the above analyses, we can know English itself has no difference of gender. Because of the historical reasons, people are used to believing that prestige person are always males. Many professionals such as doctor, professor, engineer, lawyer, pilot, judge, surgeon can be used to indicate both males and females. But when indicating female's position, professional, etc., these words are created by adding a bound morpheme or by combining them with a word referring to female. Because these satisfactory jobs are traditionally viewed as ones qualified only by males. In many cases, women are just the appendant to men.

e.g. pilot-woman pilot; actor-actress; lawyer-lady lawyer

2.2 English proverbs

e.g. He who laughs last laughs best.

Personal pronouns are pronouns that are said to refer, with equal likelihood, to women and men. But the English language ignores women by allowing masculine terms to be used specifically to refer to males and commonly to refer to human beings in general. The generic pronoun "he" is perhaps the most well-known example of the gender-specific of sexist language, and is frequently referred to be "he/man" language. The most significant manifestation of the sexism is in the use of generic masculine pronouns "he" and its variants "his", "him" and "himself" in such sentences

e.g. Frailty, the name is women. (Shakespeare Hamlet)

In his well-known work Hamlet, Shakespeare wrote "Fragile, your name is woman." What this quote indicates can be richer than just its literal meaning. The word Name also had two opposite meanings in Shakespeare's time: one referred to something nominal or superficial, while the other referred to substance, essence, meaning beyond appearances. This undoubtedly comes from the "Nominalism vs. Realism" debate, depending on the context and the philosophical position of the user. The latter usage is favored in Hamlet, where, for example, the last line of the most famous soliloquy, "lose the name of action," means not "lose the name of action," but "lose the meaning of action." Losing the meaning of action. Therefore, a better translation here would be "Vulnerability, you are female by nature!"

The discussion of the nature of vulnerability has a very complex historical background. In the Christian tradition, the essence of vulnerability is the human flesh, a defect brought about by original sin. ChenXin (2018) pointed out that when the spirit desires God, the flesh drags its feet, which is called infirmitas. This is not an accidental weakness, but an essential weakness that arises from original sin rooted in human nature. Judged by the famous saying by the literature giant Shakespeare, it is quite easy to find out that the bias over gender has been long existing in western ideology.

2.3 Western culture and society

2.3.1 Religious factor

Following the previous part, it has come to the religion-related topic. In the Bible (The Books of The Old Testament): "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and he slept; then he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, 'This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken.

According to the Bible, man came to the world first while woman made from one of man's ribs was created just as a help meet for him. And she was not created until all other animals failed to meet the satisfaction of the man. From the order of the birth, it is obvious to see the different importance of man and woman. And man and woman are not equal at all because woman is only a part of man, which itself is the discrimination against women. It is said that the first sin is also committed by the woman. She was seduced by the snake into eating the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and having the man eat, too. At last, the woman was punished to bring forth children in pain and was ruled over by the man. From above, the superiority of men and inferiority of women is clearly seen.

2.3.2 Social factor

Feminists all claim that we live in a patriarchal society: a society of men, ruled by men and for men. Patriarchy depicts men as the perfect norm against which women are measured and found lacking. Both the Western and Eastern societies use sex, to one degree or another, in allocating tasks, activities, rights, and responsibilities. Liu Xiaotian(2001) also indicates that as for the job done by men and women, there is a long-stereotyped notion of what they can do. In history, there has been a division of labor--a division in which women's place was restrained at home for housework and child-care while men worked outside being the breadwinner. At last, men had dominance over women, and women had to be dependent on men. This was the turning point for women.

From then on, in paternal society, slavery society and capitalist society, women had been on the bottom of society. In long and endless course of history, gender discrimination against women has been accumulated. It is due to different labor division that leads to different social status. This has been clear in ancient and modern society. Later, in addition to domestic work, women began to enter the paid work place. However, even though half of women are employed outside the home, the belief persists that woman is mainly, and primarily, in the roles of wife and mother.

Due to women's relative physical weakness and lower educational background, they do primarily the low-status, low-paying jobs. Although men also have family roles, they are defined primarily by their economic or occupational position. Thus the in the gender discrimination society has been in existence, the embodiment of which is necessarily the sexism of

language(Xin Chen, 2018). Due to some social and cultural factors, people treat women as inferior to men. They educate men to be manly, decisive, and brave while women are required to be polite, conservative, obedient, and gentle.

Also women have to constrain their emotion and give up their own need to meet the satisfaction of men as they are in subordinate status in the society. As time passed by, when speaking women pay more attention to the elegance and standard of language than men. They use more pleasant and polite words in the hope that they can receive other's approval. And they are taught to speak softly, to avoid contradicting others, to be obedient in communication, and to be aware of giving cues of strong confidence. They mold themselves to be inferior in their potential sub consciousness.

Therefore, women try their best to strengthen their social status through their speech than men do. The lower women's position is, the more polite they are in the face of others. And the standard language they use can show their submission and politeness. This also suggests that women are in a lower position in the society.

3. Conclusion

History has determined the unequal status of men and women both in family and the society, which greatly influenced the way of life and ideology of future generations. The phenomenon of sexism is manifested in the form of language, but in fact reflects the historical and cultural context of the time.

In order to truly achieve equality between men and women and eliminate gender discrimination, we must start from ourselves, eradicate the deep-rooted backward thinking that men are superior to women, and take various measures to improve the status of women in society.

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