

Sexist Language Among University Students In Malaysia

Bahasa Seksis Dalam Kalangan Pelajar Universiti di Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Traditionally, stereotype of sexism can be referred to as the beliefs people hold about members of the categories man or woman. Sexist language, on the other hand, is defined as any language that is supposed to include all people, but excludes gender. The present study, therefore, looks into some linguistic features that indicate sexism among men and women. The study aims to identify 1) the common features of sexist language recognised by university students in Malaysia, and 2) the level of awareness towards sexist language among university students in Malaysia. 70 university students were selected as sample, and data were collected using two methods: survey and semi structured interview. Both descriptive and thematic analyses were used to analysed the data. The findings indicate that majority of the participants perceive words that narrowly define women and men as normal words, without thinking much about sexist language. The participants however, were aware of the existence of sexist language but chose to accept it as part of the cultural values and norms of the society.

Key words: *sexist language, common features, awareness, norms, cultural values*

ABSTRAK

Secara tradisinya, stereotaip seksisme boleh dirujuk sebagai kepercayaan orang ramai tentang kategori lelaki atau wanita. Bahasa seksis, sebaliknya, ditakrifkan sebagai mana-mana bahasa yang sepatutnya merangkumi semua orang, tetapi tidak termasuk jantina. Oleh itu, kajian ini melihat beberapa ciri linguistik yang menunjukkan seksisme di kalangan lelaki dan wanita. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenal pasti 1) ciri umum bahasa seksis yang diiktiraf oleh pelajar universiti di Malaysia, dan 2) tahap kesedaran terhadap bahasa seksis dalam kalangan pelajar universiti di Malaysia. 70 pelajar universiti telah dipilih sebagai sampel, dan data dikumpul menggunakan dua kaedah: tinjauan dan temu bual separa berstruktur. Kedua-dua analisis deskriptif dan tematik digunakan untuk menganalisis data. Penemuan menunjukkan bahawa majoriti peserta menganggap perkataan yang secara sempit mendefinisikan wanita dan lelaki sebagai perkataan biasa, tanpa memikirkan banyak tentang bahasa seksis. Para peserta bagaimanapun, menyedari kewujudan bahasa seksis tetapi memilih untuk menerimanya sebagai sebahagian daripada nilai budaya dan norma masyarakat.

Kata kunci: *bahasa seksis, ciri umum, kesadaran, norma, nilai budaya*

1. Introduction

Over time, language in terms of verbal communication is undeniably has the power in which sexism and gender discrimination are performed and reproduced into sexism in language. Therefore, this chapter will represent about the research background of the study, problem statement, and objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and also the limitations of the study which is focused on sexism in language among university students of English Language Studies in Malaysia

Traditionally, stereotype of sexism can be referred to as “the beliefs people hold about members of the categories man or woman” (Archer & Lloyd, 2002). A number of research made regarding this topic has portrayed that most men assert dominance in their conversation, whilst it is the opposite for women. This is due to the fact that both of them behave in accordance with their sex class traits (Tannen,2001). In men’s point of view, they are seen as an epitome of masculinity. Masculinity can be defined as a society in which men are supposed to be assertive, tough, and focused on material success. Meanwhile, women are looked at as the personification of femininity. This can be proved by their upbringing since childhood where girls are taught to be feminine, while boys in the opposite which is being masculine.

In this study, sexism among men and women in terms of language will be in focus since this stereotype has long been in practice and most people are not aware of this act of being sexist as it is considered the norm due to the same perceptions applied by everyone. To further explain the differences between males and females, a research by Bonvillain(2008) also mentions that men and women are assigned different social roles, values and communicative behavior, which makes gender vary among generations, societies, and even settings. Apart from that, leadership traits can be seen as one of the common features in which men are supposed to have and women are still considered as under-represented in positions of a higher level than men(Powell, 1999) despite it is now a modern day. That is why men are always perceived as the important person compared to women as men are the head of the family who keep their family safe and become the provider. Subsequently, it leads to a situation of sexism in language where men have more access to voice out their thoughts and opinions women are looked as the ones following men’s lead instead of fighting for their rights in speech. It has been demonstrated in past studies that men are generally seen as more agentic and more competent than women, whereas women are seen as more expressive and more communal than men (Diekman&Eagly, 2000). Thus, the norm of the society leads to differences in men and women’s language use since early socialization.

1.1 Statement of Problem

Sexism is not only based on how an individual looks like, the difference in their skin color, the actions that were made, but, it also affects in the way we speak. Therefore, the core problem that this study intends to investigate is the common features of sexist language. This work arises from having observed the shortcomings from university students’ level of awareness regarding the aforesaid problem. As such, sexist language is hard to be recognized by many as it is casually used by majority of people all around the world. Often, we hear people saying “I prefer to work with men than women”, in conjunction with the word ‘feminine’ and ‘girly’ are used as insults (Sophia M., 2008). Meanwhile, ‘man up’ or ‘take it like a man’ are embraced. Discrimination towards women in terms of language should be

highlighted and discussed in this study as women deserve to live outside of the orbit in which it focuses on men's shadows. To add in, a study by National Education Union and UK Feminista, 2017 has also mentioned that the voices of girls around the country who are being subjected to sexual harassment and sexism must be heard. The existence, effort and the success of a woman should be attributed to themselves only and not be defined by male influence.

With all things considered, these issues need to be addressed as sexist language is seen as detrimental to university students. It is also hoped to educate them to not normalizing such behaviour where it can give a huge effect on oneself. Therefore, such a consideration may prevent or reduce internalized oppression and justification of discrimination among these students (Jimin P., 2019). This can be proved by a study made at Iqra University where language discrimination most likely affects student's performance in ways like fear of negative evaluation, restricts communication with others, isolation, low self-esteem and discriminatory jokes by fellow students (Sarooj J.,2020). Regardless, it is reasonable to address the issues of sexist language towards UKM students to help build a better society that is free from sexist language.

That being said, if the above-mentioned problem is not addressed by fellow researchers, it could cause a huge discrimination on the society that is mainly focusing on women whereby men will dominate the language itself than women. Women will not have the right to speak or even to contemplate on the actions made. To illustrate it in our local context, recent news by The Star that writes about a 17-year-old student namely Ain Husniza, who revealed a teacher's jokes about rape, are being exposed for their behaviour online and how the netizens who are mainly among men, posted lewd comments about her. Though the teen demanded apologies from them, they showed no signs of regrets but to post even more lewd comments as her voice was not heard at all. As such, it can clearly be seen how low the position of a female that the society tend to regard it as a joke stemming from the stereotypes imposed on them since long time ago.

To surmise, the reason why this significant study is needed is to ensure that university students are aware of the existence of sexist language which then aspired to devoid the use of the above-mentioned language itself from the Constitution. This statement is supported by recent news where Orla O'Conner, a director of the National Women's Council of Ireland(NWCI) who has mentioned a call to remove "sexist and outdated" language from the Constitution. The call was successfully agreed and welcomed regarding the issuing of a series of recommendations on gender equality by the Citizens' Assembly on the 24th of April 2021. Therefore, with the help of this work, it is hoped to create awareness to the UKM students on the common features of sexist language and open their minds to other possibilities for their voices to be heard.

2. Literature Review

2.1 *The Origin of Sexism*

According to a study on social role theory, sexism originates in the gender-typical social roles (MenegattiRubini, 2017). Men are more likely to take part in tasks that require strength, speed and able to be away from home for a long period of time. As for women, they are required to stay put at home and responsible in tasks at home such as child-rearing, cooking and cleaning the house. Subsequently, this leads to the fact that men are seen and expected to be independent, active, agentic and namely, while women are perceived as someone who is kind, pure, communal and benevolent. Therefore, it can be seen that gender stereotype exists due to characteristics and activities that are imposed in individuals according to their

respective gender-typical occupations and roles in the family. Additionally, Wood & Eagly (2002) have mentioned in their study that women are reflected as communal and they are expected to possess feminine gender role but not the agentic ones. Subsequently, the expectations toward men and women lead to normative pressure since childhood which then associates with gender-typical work as well as family roles. That being said, consistency of the behavior between both genders (e.g. agentic behavior for men and communal behavior for women) contribute to gender discrimination.

A study by Fiske (2001) has mentioned that there are two forms of sexism prejudice which are expressively hostile and subjectively benevolent. Expressively hostile can be described to as the negative perceptions toward women according to the traditional gender roles in order to justify male power as well as women are portrayed as sexual objects in men's consideration. As for benevolent sexism, it is a rather fine-drawn form of preconception towards women where they are seen as fragile, kind, pure and in need of men's protection. Subsequently, these forms of sexism prejudice lead to the portrayal of men dominance as well as women's supporting role (Eagly, 1987).

2.2 *Sexism in the Structure of Language*

Gender discrimination or known as sexism is not a rather new phenomenon that has recently been discussed with regards to language. Therefore, can languages be sexist? Based on feminists' research which are Spender (1998) and Frank (1989), they point out that the stereotype beliefs about both males and females and how they are related to each other are solely on the world of masculine's point of view. Additionally, in terms of linguistics, how reality is represented is rather androcentric. A study by Stahlberg et al. (2007) has also mentioned that sexism and gender discrimination are embedded in the grammatical structure of most languages and therefore are perceived to be normative. It does make sense to note that bias representation exists in language. Sexism in language can be defined as men being portrayed as the dominant and women as the accessory or an extra part that is attached to the language itself. To view this in terms of linguistics, men are to be the elements to describe or representing the non-gendered subjects, meanwhile, it is the opposite for women. To illustrate, men are generally specified as the representative of humans, women on the other hand, are rather specifically being categorized as feminists.

According to a research in abroad context by Oriane Sarrasin (2012), she conducted a study among 446 students in the United Kingdom and in two (French and German-speaking) regions of Switzerland. As a result, her hypothesis that gender-neutral language relates to negative attitudes in all forms of sexism is confirmed to be true. However, it is the opposite in French-speaking part of Switzerland where the results shown that there are more positive attitudes than negative attitude due to the use of gender-neutral language was introduced only recently. That being said, it can be concluded that people's reaction towards gender-fair language is also affected by their level of awareness towards sexism in language.

A more recent study by Weatherall (2015) has explained that sexism in the structure of language can be clearly seen by the use of masculine generic or male terms to refer to people generally such as *mankind*. Meaning to say that there are more positive connotations of masculine form of words than women where "women are interpreted as passive object positions" (Fiske, 2001). Another study by Weatherall, (2002) also mentioned that sexism in the structure of language is widely known in the entrenchment of gender stereotypes that often value women negatively using sexual connotations (e.g. *madam*, *mistress*). As for masculine form of words, positive connotations are imposed (e.g. *bachelor*, *lord*).

A study has mentioned that sexism in language is considered as “multifaceted phenomenon, taking different forms in different representational practices, which have their own particular histories and characteristics”(Cameron, 1998), not just what is claimed that language is a world based on male’s perspectives. To add in, Cameron views sexist by showing the level of certainty in linguistic subsystems to represent both males and females such as gender masculine pronouns and feminine suffixes. That being said, it is proved that the words that we choose in our language do matter(Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Therefore, to answer whether language is sexist or not, Spender(1998) and Frank(1989) have concluded in their studies that our languages are proved to be sexist.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

According to Creswell (2018), three main methods in research design are qualitative, quantitative and mixed method approach. This study employed a mixed method design which is the combination of qualitative and quantitative approach of collecting and analyzing data (Creswell &Tashakkori, 2007) in order to investigate the ELS university students’ common features of sexism in language and their awareness upon encountering sexist language remark.

Bryman(2012) mentioned that the combination of both qualitative and quantitative methods has become common in recent years. This is because mixed method design can be seen as more reliable in providing and obtaining detailed and precise data according to the research objectives as well as answering research questions stated in Chapter 1. That being said, based on the four types of mixed method research designs which are triangulation, embedded, explanatory and exploratory (Teddlie and Tashakkori 2008), explanatory model is employed in this study. Due to the nature of the study explanatory model is seen as the most appropriate model to be used in this study which first starts with quantitative data collection followed by qualitative data collection. Subsequently, both quantitative and qualitative data can provide a better understanding and explanation of the results of this study.

3.2 Population and Sampling

In this study, the target population was full-time English Language Studies (ELS) university students in Malaysia. A list of students from year 1 until year 3 was obtained from the office of Pusat Pengajian Bahasa dan Linguistik (PPBL) after receiving permission from all of the mentioned years of study(year 1 to year 3) students as well as the head of the course itself. That being said, the sample for this research is simple random sampling as the participants were compressed to ELS students and in this study, 70 of them will be chosen to conduct the survey as it is easier and more convenient to collect the data. Since this study used mixed method approach, there is a significant difference in the number of the participants. In quantitative method, a set of structured questionnaires was used to collect the data distributed among 70 ELS students. Among the 70 students mentioned, 4 of them (2 males and 2 females) were chosen to be interviewed in order to collect the qualitative data to provide further explanation and understanding from the quantitative data.

3.3 Data Collection Procedures

In quantitative approach, a set of structure questionnaires consisting three sections(Section A, Section B and Section C) was created through Google Form and then distributed accordingly to collect the data from all the participants(70 ELS university students). The reason why

questionnaire is used in quantitative method is because it is regarded as one of the most useful and convenient for the students to access and use. Additionally, Bryman(2004) has mentioned that by using Likert-scale, the items must be in a form of statements and not questions. Therefore, a five-point Likert-scale were used in all three sections(Section A, B and C). In Section A, the answer options varied from ‘Strongly Agree’ to ‘Strongly Disagree’ to the statements, “Not all sexist” to “Definitely sexist” in Section B and “Very unwilling” to “Very willing” in Section C. These three sections also included ‘Undecided’ column allocated in case the respondents not able to decide the answer.

As for qualitative method, interviews were conducted in order to obtain a better explanation, understanding as well as reasoning on the findings extracted from the quantitative data. The interviews were conducted among four of the participants(2 males and 2 females) from the first data(quantitative) . The interview questions were chosen from the first data and it was a rather informal conversation to view their thoughts and opinions on the common features of sexism in language as well as their level of awareness upon encountering sexist language remark. The findings of both quantitative and qualitative data are to correlate and measure whether the answers are found to be different among each other or not.

The findings in the questionnaire were chosen based on the highest percentage of the answer or whether the results show similar percentage between agreement and disagreement. Furthermore, interviews were also conducted to further explain and provide reasoning on the findings from the questionnaire related to the research questions and research objectives and it also provides a better opportunity in understanding the participants’ point of views as to why they chose certain answers in the questionnaire.

In terms of timing, sequential timing is chosen in this study where quantitative data(questionnaire) were first purveyed and analyzed, after that, interviews were conducted to support certain results in the responses in the questionnaire.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedures

To analyze quantitative data, descriptive statistics were used in order to determine frequency distributions, means and standard deviations. However, the data collected by the respondents must first be input into Statistical Package for Social Science(SPSS) to achieve the aforementioned statement. The implementation of descriptive analysis is seen as a vital tool to determine the respondents’ answers in regards to the common features of sexist language as well as their level of awareness of sexist language. Therefore, descriptive analysis is proven to be reliable and relevant to inscribe the research questions of this study.

However, from the analysis mentioned below, there were a number of information which require further explanation through interviews, that is why qualitative method is also used in this study. Subsequently, the interview is based on the chosen questions on the structured questionnaire. The data collected from the respondents were analyzed using thematic analysis by writing the interview transcripts. The interview transcripts were then be examined closely on the respondents’ rational on determining their answers as well as identifying if there were any similarities and differences to correlate with the findings based on the questionnaire.

4. Data Analysis And Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The values of Skewness and Kurtosis tests were used and interpreted in conducting the normality of the sample. Therefore, values that fall within the range of -2 to +2 for the

Skewness test, and -3 to +3 for the Kurtosis test are considered within the normal range (Sekaran, 2003).

That being said, it is proven that the normality of the sample is appropriate to be used in this study. The details of the findings of the normality tests are shown in **Table 1.2**.

Table 1.2 Statistical normality tests for scale data from the sample $N = 70$.

Descriptives				
		Statistic	Std. Error	
19 to 24 years old	Mean	21.86	.150	
	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	Lower Bound	21.56	
		Upper Bound	22.16	
	5% Trimmed Mean	21.95		
	Median	22.00		
	Variance	1.573		
	Std. Deviation	1.254		
	Minimum	19		
	Maximum	23		
	Range	4		
	Interquartile Range	2		
	Skewness	-.629	.287	
	Kurtosis	-.523	.566	
	Male and female	Mean	1.5714	.05958
95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Lower Bound	1.4526	
		Upper Bound	1.6903	
5% Trimmed Mean		1.5794		
Median		2.0000		
Variance		.248		
Std. Deviation		.49844		
Minimum		1.00		
Maximum		2.00		
Range		1.00		
Interquartile Range		1.00		
Skewness		-.295	.287	
Kurtosis		-1.970	.566	

Based on **Table 1.2**, the overall results show that the distribution of the sample is normal. Consequently, this sample is proven its reliability and accepted to be regarded as normal distribution through the random sampling from the population. Accordingly, to indicate that the sample is the representative of the population, the residual between the observed value and the predicted value must be relatively small to be fitted into the model.

4.2 Descriptive Analysis

The means of a total number of 20 items based on 5-point likert scale method in Section A, B and C which were tested to the respondents according to the respective variable are presented in **Table 1.3**, **Table 1.4** and **Table 1.5**. All items have mean score 1.8 and above. This is an indication that the majority of the respondents did not agree or chose 'undecided' option with the items' statements based on each variable and this provides crucial antecedents on the respondents' level of awareness on sexist language.

Summary of the means of items according variable ($N = 70$) in Section A, B, and C.

Table 1.3 Section A: To measure respondents' knowledge in sexist language.

Item	Descriptive Statistics							
	N Statistic	Mean		Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
SA1	70	2.5429	.13450	1.12528	.613	.287	-.055	.566
SA2	70	2.5000	.14208	1.18872	.426	.287	-.947	.566
SA3	70	2.8714	.14803	1.23853	.345	.287	-.883	.566
SA4	70	3.2000	.14898	1.24644	-.300	.287	-.965	.566
SA5	70	2.1714	.11860	.99231	.835	.287	.525	.566
SA6	70	2.5429	.13450	1.12528	.424	.287	-.734	.566
SA7	70	2.3286	.10714	.89639	.536	.287	.202	.566
SA8	70	1.9857	.10274	.85961	.732	.287	.129	.566
SA9	70	2.5571	.10697	.89501	.260	.287	-.192	.566
SA10	70	2.9143	.13611	1.13881	.051	.287	-.956	.566
SA11	70	2.0714	.10636	.88990	.747	.287	.678	.566
Valid N (listwise)	70							

Table 1.4 Section B: To measure respondents' awareness in identifying sexist language.

	Descriptive Statistics							
	N Statistic	Mean		Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis	
		Statistic	Std. Error		Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
SB1	70	1.9286	.13998	1.17117	1.201	.287	.470	.566
SB2	70	2.7571	.15014	1.25612	.206	.287	-.971	.566
SB3	70	2.8571	.16188	1.35439	.015	.287	-1.303	.566
SB4	70	2.4714	.15857	1.32667	.370	.287	-1.143	.566
Valid N (listwise)	70							

Table 1.5 Section C : Identifying respondents' reaction upon sexist remarks.

Item	Descriptive Statistics							
	N Statistic	Mean Statistic	Std. Deviation Statistic	Skewness		Kurtosis		
				Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error	
SC1	70	2.5571	1.19947	.250	.287	-.868	.566	
SC2	70	2.4857	1.35927	.548	.287	-.928	.566	
SC3	70	1.8143	1.12021	1.334	.287	1.045	.566	
SC4	70	2.5143	1.32690	.466	.287	-.952	.566	
SC5	70	3.9714	1.26229	-1.280	.287	.712	.566	
Valid N (listwise)	70							

In **Table 1.3**, the highest mean value for the variable of respondents' knowledge in sexist language is SA4 with the value of 3.2 and the lowest mean is SA8 with a value of 1.98. The Kurtosis values for SA1 to SA11 are all between the range of -2 and 2. This is an indication that these variables are normal.

In construct of respondents' awareness in identifying sexist knowledge in **Table 1.4**, it indicates that the highest value is SB3 which has a mean value of 2.8 while the lowest is SB1 which has a mean value of 1.92. In this part, the Kurtosis values for SB1 to SB2 are ranged between -2 and 2, which indicates that the items are normally distributed.

As for **Table 1.5**, the variable of identifying the respondents' reaction upon sexist remarks has the highest mean value of 3.9 for the item SC5 and the lowest mean value of 1.81 for the item SC3. As for the Kurtosis values, item SC1, SC2, SC3, SC4 and SC5 are placed between -2 and 2. This shows that the kurtosis values for this variable is within the normal distribution range.

All that being said, it is seen that the Kurtosis values for the three sections (Section A, Section B and Section C) are within the range of normal distribution (-2 and 2).

4.3 Reliability Analysis

Cronbach's alpha coefficient analysis is used to test the reliability of scales instrument used in this paper. This is to measure whether the scale is free of random error or otherwise as well as indicating that there is no presence of bias to ensure the consistency of measurement across time and items in the instruments. The Cronbach's alpha value for each variable are presented in **Table 1.6**, **Table 1.7** and **Table 1.8**.

Table 1.6 Section A: To measure respondents' knowledge in sexist language.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.970	.973	11

Table 1.7 Section B: To measure respondents' awareness in identifying sexist language.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.976	.976	4

Table 1.8 Section C : Identifying respondents' reaction upon sexist remarks.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.653	.586	5

According to research studies by Nunnali (1978) and DeVellis (2003), to prove high reliability of the scales of variable, it must reach a minimum level of 0.70 and above. **Table 1.6 and Table 1.7** show that the high reliability of all the variables except for **Table 1.8** with

a value of 0.65. However, in certain cases, the value of 0.6 is considered acceptable mentioned by other past studies (Ursachi, G., et. al, 2015).

To surmise, it is seen that the variables are tested and proven reliable as it supports the appropriateness of the scales of variable and the concept used in this study. Hence, the results of the instruments are suited to be used to analyze the data properly.

4.4 *Analysis and findings on interview*

4.4.1 *Demographics of the Interviewees*

Out of 4 respondents, 2 were women while the other 2 were men. In this interview, approaching women were easier as they are willing to attend the interview in short notice to be compared to men respondents. However, in terms of responding actively to the questions given during the interview, both men and women were able to respond actively on their thoughts and opinion regarding the sexist language issue.

Table 2.1 Category of Informants

Gender	Number	Age
Male	2	20-24
Female	2	20-24

Table 2.1 covers the categories of interviewees according to their gender and age. Commonly at the indicated age range, many of individuals are more open to discussion regarding gender bias in language. To add in, the four of the interviewees are of ELS UKM students. Hence, that includes the reason why the researcher chose the particular age range in this paper.

Accordingly, throughout the interview, the researcher discovered that the data gathered is saturated. Consequently, the researcher sees a rather similar patterns in the responses of the interviewees. Therefore, there is no need for further collection of new data as it won't necessarily give out new discoveries about this issue. This is because it is best to simply collect the data until theoretical saturation is reached (Ritchie, J. & Lewis, J., 2003). To put it in simpler words, even if there are more data provided, it does not necessarily lead to further information.

4.4.2 *Themes*

In this section, the data from the interviews were coded and highlighted in terms of the phrases or sentences. Those sentences or phrases were then "coded" into shorthand labels to describe the context in order to extract the themes that fit in the research objectives and research questions in this study.

Consequently, there are two definite themes that were found in this interview: 1) common features of sexist language and 2) awareness in the existence of sexist language.

Common features of Sexist Language

In lines with this interview, common features of sexist language were perfectly described based on the participants' answers. Most of them have encountered the situations in which

gender roles were mentioned and what they were told and expected to do. In the interview with a male respondent, he stated:

There's this one activity in the kitchen. I was told to not being able to perform an art foam on the freshly hot coffee. Because being a man usually having a rough and reckless hand.

Another interview with a female respondent, she stated:

I remember a lecturer telling me something like: you don't have a boyfriend yet so you can still focus on your career and be successful before you get married.

This shows that there are many underlying gender assumptions in that statement where men are not supposed to involve themselves in women's work in the kitchen. Meanwhile, women are not supposed to have a partner until they finished their studies so they could focus on it instead of performing duties to their partner.

Awareness of ELS University Students in Malaysia towards Sexist Language

To describe the awareness of the participants on sexist language, it is seen that all of them do realize on the existence of sexist language. They were able to express their thoughts and opinions and some of them describe it briefly and some even went to an extra length to explain the meaning of sexist language.

A briefly stated meaning of sexist language by a male participant:

A language that identifies gender

An in-depth explanation on the meaning of sexist language by a female participant:

I believe sexism definitely exists and can take all shapes and forms. One of which is language and as a language student, it is all the more evident how language is used to perpetuate certain ideologies so yes, I think sexist language does exist and more awareness should be given so that we can stop perpetuating these negative ideologies.

The above-stated meaning of gender bias in language expressed by the participants show that they are aware of the existence of sexist language and understood it clearly.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this study, it is impossible to make general assumptions based solely on the data from the questionnaire and interview. Both of the data must be connected to each other so a further reliable result to answer the research objectives: 1) common features of sexist language and 2) the level of awareness of sexist language can be achieved.

Throughout the study, it concludes that majority of the respondents were born and raised with the same thoughts of how gender roles are perceived and imposed in males and females respectively and this is proved by a study by Bonvillain(2008) which mentions that men and women are assigned different social roles, values and communicative behavior, which makes gender vary among generations, societies, and even settings.

To add in, the way words are interpreted to narrowly define or demean women in the context of work-documented sexism in language (e.g.MANkind, HE to refer both males and females) -considered normal. Many participants are aware of the existence of sexist language, yet, since the language itself is too deeply ingrained in the culture, they do not even realise that they themselves exhibit sexist language especially towards women. (e.gMen are expected to do heavy jobs, women belongs in the kitchen)

However, there is a limitation that may have influenced the results to this study. In order to avoid violation of the guidelines of the International Review Board, this study is restricted to strong or deeply offensive language that could imply to emotional charge to the participants. Hence, the participants may be subjected to perceive the inventory to be too mild to oppose in terms of an indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group known as microaggression such as “whore” or “bitch”. This is because those words are likely harmful to women even though they are labelled as sexist, yet, they are not used in this study. Further direction of the research regarding sexist language topic should consider refining and providing creative ways to include stronger language in the study so there may be significant changes in the result caused by divisions in ideologies from the participants.

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