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Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University of Malang  
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Proceeding of the 1<sup>st</sup> ELITE Conference  
Vol. I: On Linguistics and Literature

**THE MULTIFACETED DIMENSIONS**  
OF LINGUISTICS, LITERATURE,  
AND LANGUAGE TEACHING

Editors:  
Miftahul Huda  
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# GENDER TYPICAL ASSESSMENT AS REFLECTED IN ENGLISH NOUN INVENTORY

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## A. Introduction

*Gender* bias studies are important in relation to issues of justice and equality. Based on Sapir-Whorf's theory of language relativity (Sapir, 1929), the writers are interested to examine the English lexicon as a reflection of the gender bias culture of its native speakers. The study is focused on finding gender bias patterns in English noun inventory in terms of the gender typical assessment.

The data are gained using documentation technique by exploring monolingual dictionaries and Corpus. The writers use the keyword *gender* with *male* and *female* elements as the semantic components required in the lexical data collected. They are considered as potentially gender-biased lexical items. Data reduction and classification are conducted by considering the existence of *bias* (unfairness in treatment) for both genders. In the analysis, the data are seen in their special association given by the language users to each gender, which may ultimately be lexicalized. In other words, the data are interpreted based on their associative meaning.

This associative meaning, along with conceptual and thematic meanings, belongs to Leech's classification of meaning. Leech (1979: 10-27) mentions that associative meaning can be either connotative meaning (meanings based on the value arising from the speaker's experience with what is referred to by the word, including the physical or psychological image of the thing, a typical stuff, and so on), stylistic meaning (meaning that arises of the social context of the word use), affective meaning (meaning arising from a feeling or attitude of the speaker or the hearer of the word), reflective meaning (meaning arising from the various shades of meaning possessed by a word), or collocative meaning (the meaning arising from the words that often collocate with it). This theory is significant to examine different gender typical assessments based on the associative meanings the words have.

In addition, the theory of one type of lexical relations, i.e. antonymy, is significant since the data mostly form this type of relation. Many words containing meaning component of gender distinction will form binary antonyms. It is a relation of two lexical items when the positive of the one means the negative of the other (Saeed, 1997: 66). Cruse (1986: 199) names this type of antonyms *complementaries*. The binary antonyms/complementaries that only differ in gender component are evidence to prove different treatments a language may have to both genders.

## **B. Discussion**

There are three things worth noting in relation to these associative meanings. The first is that the pairs of antonymy that have similar conceptual/denotative meaning may have different associative meanings. An example is *bachelor – spinster*, *first lady - first gentleman*, and *master - mistress*. Secondly, there is the use of lexical elements with different association in the formation process of compounding or antonymous terms with a similar conceptual meaning, or in the naming of a particular gender quality. Such antonymous pairs are seen in *bachelor party - hen night*, and *best man - bridesmaid*. The naming of certain gender qualities that is biased can be seen in terms of the formation of many elements that use animal or inanimate object as shown in the term *hen night*, *bird*, *old bird*, *fishwife*, *trophy wife*, *tart*, *dog*, etc. The third includes the difference in the realm of judgment and the expectations which are very gender typical.

### **1. Different Connotation of Elements of Antonymous Pairs**

In the antonymous pair *bachelor-spinster*, the conceptual meaning is a man or woman who is not married or still has not got married. In the similar single status of both entities, the two differ in their associative meanings. A *bachelor* is considered as the having his own decision not to get married so it has a positive connotation, while being *spinster* is the result of having no choice to get married it has negative connotation. This is certainly due to the common association of marriage experience that indicates that men are the ones that choose and propose their partner actively, while women are selected and proposed (passive role).

This difference in connotation is apparent in the list of collocation of both words in COCA (accessed on Nov 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012). In 100 most common collocations of the word *spinster*, it is found that 51 words have negative value with the frequency of the occurrence is 92. Those words have negative connotation in terms of age (e.g. *old*,



*elderly, aging, aged, middle-aged, on-the-shelf, etc.*), feeling (e.g. *lonely, repressed, pathetic, lovelorn, hopeless, frustrated, etc.*), and quality (e.g. *dowdy, childless, masculine, poor, silly, sassy, strange, over sophisticated, odd, neurotic, moth-eaten, moralistic, mannish, mad, long-toothed, live-in, landless, isolated, etc.*). There are 23 words with positive connotations in terms of quality (e.g. *independent, wealthy, efficient, feminine, natural, miraculous, lovely, light-hearted, intelligent, etc.*), but it only has the frequency of occurrence 27. The rest of the words are considered to have neutral meaning because different people may consider the value differently in different situations. The examples are the words *only, white, single, other, obvious, etc.*

On the other hand, the word *bachelor* is collocated with more positive words. It has the collocation with 21 positive words (e.g. *eligible, fine, young, professional, social, good, hottest, etc.*) in 268. It collocates with 17 words with negative connotation (e.g. *old, confirmed, mechanical, criminal, gay, poor, etc.*) with the frequency of occurrence 163.

The fact shows that the word *bachelor* has more positive associative meaning than the word *spinster*. In addition, the word *bachelor* is also much more frequently used than the word *spinster* considering that the word *bachelor* also has a general meaning of 'scholar.' It will also indirectly affect the associative meanings that are reflective (effect of other shades of meaning). Therefore, this word is also often used as a neutral term.

The same case happens to the elements of an antonymous pair *master* and *mistress*. In this case, the feminine form (*mistress*) also has more negative associative meanings. It is evident in its collocation as well as its reflective shades of meaning. The word *master* has collocated with more positive adjectives, while *mistress* with more negative ones.

The word *mistress* collocates with 14 negative words in 110 occurrences, but it only collocates with 6 positive words in 17 occurrences. The negative words include *harsh, alleged, jealous, coy, naked, illegitimate, unnamed, seductive, black-faced, unsolved, etc.*. They mostly cover morality assessment. The positive ones include *beloved, dapper, faithful, tidy, angel-like, and street-smart*. The rest of the words which are neutral mostly cover their physical description like *pregnant, amber, blond, sexy, brown-eyed, etc.* and words denoting their identity like *Parisian, Marie-Therese, Brit-Asian, Leningrad-trained, etc* (COCA, accessed on Nov 5<sup>th</sup>, 2012).

The table above shows the great difference of the collocation posed in the word *mistress*. Even though it also has positive collocation, it has much more negative connotative collocations in much more frequent occurrence. This seems to also relate to the nuances of meaning of the word *mistress* (FD):

1. A woman who has a continuing sexual relationship with a usually married man who is not her husband and from whom she generally receives material support.
2. A woman in a position of authority, control, or ownership, as the head of a household
3.
  - a. A woman who owns or keeps an animal
  - b. A woman who owns a slave
4. A woman with ultimate control over something
5.
  - a. A nation or country that has supremacy over others: Great Britain, once the mistress of the seas.
  - b. Something personified as female that directs or reigns
6. A woman who has mastered a skill or branch of learning
7. (Mistress used formerly as) a courtesy title when speaking to or of a woman.
8. (Chiefly British) A woman schoolteacher

The list of meanings of the word *mistress* above shows that it has one negative meaning nuance (no. 1). This will also reflectively give a negative association with the word.

In contrast, based on COCA (accessed on Nov 15<sup>th</sup>, 2012), the word *master* is not only rich with more neutral collocations but also contains more positive collocations (19 words in 295 occurrences) than negative ones (7 words in 42 occurrences). Examples of the neutral words are *doctoral*, *unpublished*, *Dutch*, *Tibetan*, *enigmatic*, *ebonized*, *long-faced*, *120 square foot*, etc. The positive ones include *grand*, *certified*, *luxurious*, *undisputed*, *court-appointed*, *benevolent*, *understated*, etc. The negative ones include *petty*, *cunning*, *dueling*, *macabre*, *sharp-tongued*, *plumpish*, and *ex-slaved*. This is indirectly related to the nuances of meanings of the noun as stated in FD:

1. the man in authority, such as the head of a household, the employer of servants, or the owner of slaves or animals
2. a person with exceptional skill at a certain thing
3. (Fine Arts & Visual Arts / Art Terms) (often capital) a great artist, esp an anonymous but influential artist

4.   **a.** a person who has complete control of a situation  
       **b.** an abstract thing regarded as having power or influence
5. a workman or craftsman fully qualified to practise his trade and to train others in it
6. an original copy, stencil, tape, etc., from which duplicates are made
7. (General Sporting Terms) a player of a game, esp chess or bridge, who has won a specified number of tournament games
8. (Business / Professions) (Social Science / Education) the principal of some colleges
9. a highly regarded teacher or leader whose religion or philosophy is accepted by followers
10. (Social Science / Education) a graduate holding a master's degree
11. (Transport / Nautical Terms) the chief executive officer aboard a merchant ship
12. a person presiding over a function, organization, or institution
13. (Business / Professions) (Social Science / Education) Chiefly Brit a male teacher
14. (Business / Professions) (Law) an officer of the Supreme Court of Judicature subordinate to a judge
15. (General Sporting Terms) the superior person or side in a contest
16. (Engineering / Mechanical Engineering) a machine or device that operates to control a similar one
17. (Government, Politics & Diplomacy) (often capital) the heir apparent of a Scottish viscount or baron

From the list of the meanings, it can be seen that the word *master* has only positive reflective meanings.

Another pair which has similar conceptual meanings but different associative meanings is the words *first lady* and *first gentleman*. The word *first lady* has a more positive connotation than the word *first gentleman*. Being a female companion of a man who heads an institution is considered a source of pride, while being a man whose companion heads an institution is unfairly regarded as negative because he is under the shadow of his wife. The collocation simply can not be proved in the corpus due to the non-existence of the data, but several nuances of meaning and the recognition of the

word *first lady* in the dictionary shows gender bias. The word *first lady* in the FD has two definitions, each of which is associated with other words.

1. the leading woman in an art or profession  
[achiever](#), [succeeder](#), [winner](#), [success](#) - a person with a record of successes; "his son would never be the achiever that his father was"; "only winners need apply"; "if you want to be a success you have to dress like a success"
2. the wife of a chief executive  
[married woman](#), [wife](#) - a married woman; a man's partner in marriage

In the first meaning nuance, the word refers to a woman successful in her field. The second nuance of meaning, which is contrasted with the word *first gentleman*, sees more her role as the wife of a 'successful' man, which becomes the number one. The term *first gentleman* is not unanimously recognized in leading monolingual English dictionaries like CALD, MW, and OLD. This may be caused by several things. First, because in the history, the case of a woman in power is still not considered feasible to be recorded lexically so having the term for her partner is not deemed necessary. Second, there also seems to be reluctance on the part of the man to admit himself in this position or the fear of offending the male peer in the position to be called using this term. It can be seen in the explanation of this word in the FD: *In situations where the head of state is a woman, the First Gentleman term is sometimes used to mirror the term First Lady. The title is usually chosen by the leader's husband.* The mention of the choice of a husband for this term shows that people still consider the feelings of the man in this position. They will call him so when he prefers it.

## **2. Different Association of the Word Element in Compounds and Term Formation**

Besides the antonymous pairs having members with different connotations, the pattern of gender bias in the gender typical assessment also appears in the form of differences in the associative meaning of the elements used in the formation of both compounds and terms. In compounding, the data sample is an antonymous pair of *hen night* - *bachelor party*, and *best man* - *bridesmaid*. As for the formation of terms that do not form antonymous pairs, there are terms like *bird*, *dog*, *bitch*, *Fishwife*, *trophy wife*, *tart*, and *sexpot*.

In the antonymous pair with the conceptual meaning 'party held for prospective newlyweds,' the difference in the association of elements used to form the words appears. To mean 'party held for the grooms' the term is *bachelor party*, and 'party for the bride' is *hen night*. On the form for the masculine gender, the element used refers to a male single adult, i.e. *bachelor*. However, in the case of the feminine form, the word *hen* is used as if to refer to the bride and friends.

In the antonymous pair with the conceptual meaning 'the same-sex friend of a bride or groom who helps during the wedding,' the same thing happens. The form used for the feminine has lower association than that for the masculine. The masculine form is formed from the word *best* and *man*, while the feminine one is formed from *brides* and *maid*. The word *best* is a superlative form of the word *good* which clearly indicates a positive association. It is combined with the word *man*, which indicates the sex of the entity. Moreover, it has positive associations of 'being adult, independent, and responsible'. On the other hand, the word *brides* is used to indicate the 'possessive' relationship, and is combined with the word *maid* which may mean a *girl* (neutral to refer to the sex and status of the entity) or a *female servant* (having low meaning association).

The formation of both antonymous pairs above clearly shows inequality in the association of the elements used in the formation process of the compounds even though they have a similar conceptual meaning.

In the formation of the terms which assess a particular gender, the same phenomenon also arises when the feminine gender assessment is termed using the names of animals and inanimate objects. Those containing animal elements to assess a particular gender both positively and negatively are shown in *sex kitten* 'a young woman who is sexually attractive,' *bird* 'a young woman,' *dog* 'a woman who is not attractive,' *bitch* 'a fierce and unpleasant woman,' *fishwife* 'a woman who talks aloud and unpleasantly' and a few others. Actually, this case also occurs in the formation of the term to give typically masculine gender assessment, but only four words are recorded in CALD: *cock of the walk* 'a man who is too confident and considers himself the best,' *love rat* 'a man who has an affair with a woman who is not his own wife or girlfriend,' *dog* (which is also used to mean 'a man that is not fun and not to be trusted'), and *wolf* (which also means 'a man who always tries to have sex with every woman he meets').

For those containing elements of inanimate objects, the examples are *trophy wife* 'a young attractive woman who is a couple of an older but rich and successful man, and becomes a social symbol of the man,' *tart* 'a prostitute or woman who uses flashy makeup and clothes and seems to want to draw the attention of the opposite sex,' and *sexpot* 'a very sexually attractive woman or a woman highly interested in sex.' In the three words, the element *trophy* 'things used as a symbol of success,' *tart* 'a kind of cake,' and *pot* 'a kind of container, or a toilet' are used. This also happens in some other cases. For the masculine gender, this phenomenon only appears in *beefcake* 'a muscular man,' *medallion man* 'a man trying to look younger,' *sugar daddy* 'a rich man who spends his money for giving young women gifts so they would go out with him,' and *egghead* 'a man or person who is intelligent but boring as he is only interested in learning and thinking.' In the latter case the word can also be used to modify a woman.

Apart from the fact that the use of names of animals and inanimate objects in the lexicalization of nouns of gender-specific assessment happens for both genders, the number of feminine cases occurs far more than those of the masculine ones. This can be interpreted as a lack of equal treatment or bias occurring in this language. Even some cases demonstrate the use of a feminine element to assess a man negatively as seen in the words *old woman* 'a man who worries about little trivial things,' and *drama queen* 'someone who is too upset and angry over small mistakes.' The two terms containing the word *woman* and *queen* that originally refer to a female, however, in this case they are used to modify men with negative qualities, although the *drama queen* can also be used to refer to a woman.

### 3. Domain and Expectation in Typical Gender Assessment

The data included in gender-specific assessment whether they are considered positive or negative also clearly indicate the differences in the domains and expectations to assess both genders. From all 50 words of the negative assessment for masculine gender, forty nine of them are about the character/ mental attitudes, which means only 1 is about the physical condition. The ten words of positive assessment consist of six assessing the character and four assessing the physical condition. This is somewhat different from the feminine gender assessment. Of the 58 words of negative assessment, there are 20 data about physical assessment (four of which also assess character). Of the

14 data of positive assessment data, ten of them are physical. The difference in the tendency of the domain of assessment can be seen in the following table.

<i>Masculine</i>				<i>Feminine</i>			
<b>Mental</b>		<b>Physical</b>		<b>Mental</b>		<b>Physical</b>	
+	-	+	-	+	-	+	-
<b>6</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>21</b>

### **Table of Domains of Gender Typical Assessment**

From the above table, it is apparent that there is a tendency to be negative assessment in both genders, with a larger percentage for the assessment of character. However, what looks strikingly different is the physical assessment is addressed mostly to the feminine gender while the mental/character assessment to the masculine gender.

In addition to the difference in the domain of assessment, what is also worthy to note is the difference in expectations for such assessments. If it is checked, what is considered a positive quality for men is not necessarily considered to be positive for the feminine gender, and vice versa. This happens in not only the physical domain but also the mental or character domain. The data show that men are expected to be powerful, able to protect, and win, while women considered positive if they are soft, appreciative, and beautiful.

This different expectation gives rise to data that are considered funny when a woman who is clever and powerful is then judged negatively (*bluestocking* 'a clever woman who loves to learn so she is uninteresting,' *amazon* 'a tall and strong woman,' *dominatrix* 'a woman dominating in sex') while men with similar qualities are assessed positively (*alpha male* 'strong and successful man in charge on the other,' *beefcake* 'strong and muscular men'). Men are also considered negative if they are weak and defeated by women (*cuckold* 'a man whose wife has an affair with someone else behind him,' *cissy* / *sissy* 'a weak and cowardly man who is regarded as female'), and women are considered positive when they are soft, shy, and respectful (as seen in the concept *demure* 'shy and polite', and *curtsey* kneeling as an action of respect done by women and children').

Apart from the general trend of being physically and mentally assessed as positive and negative, apparently English lexicon also indicates a difference in expectations or standards of judgment which is clearly gender bias. The expectation is actually clear in

negative assessment received by transgender people because they look and behave as expected to happen in the opposite sex (biological physically).

### **C. Conclusion**

After the analysis of the data, the writers come to several conclusions. With regard to gender-specific assessment, the study demonstrates that the word formation and the original meaning of the elements used in the terms also suggests that women are positioned as objects / things many of which have been compared to animals/ inanimate objects. It of course also creates an impression of feminine gender associative value in this culture as an object to be owned. In addition, the gender typical assessment for both positive and negative value has a different realm or domain and expectations, which implies a different effort from both genders. In this case, the masculine gender is rarely assessed physically, while the feminine gender is quite often assessed physically. Masculine gender is also expected to be strong, protective, responsible and 'winning.' On the other hand, the feminine gender is expected to be gentle, polite and respectful (not showing superiority), and what is quite important is to look beautiful and attractive.

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