

Original Research Article

The Causes and Solutions of Sexism in the English Language

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Abstract: As we all know, English has become the language used by the largest number of people in all languages and is the representative of western civilization. Language is not only a social phenomenon, but also reflects the degree of social development. Therefore, understanding language is a crucial step for us to explore culture and civilization. However, no matter how developed the language is, it has its drawbacks and is not so impeccable. Sex discrimination has always been a phenomenon in English language. According to Longman English Dictionary, the interpretation of gender discrimination is: discrimination based on sex, especially the prejudice of men against women. This article will first elaborate on the etymology, word formation and usage of gender discrimination in English language. Secondly, this article will explain this phenomenon from the historical, social and cultural perspectives. Finally, in view of the gender discrimination phenomenon discussed in this article, this article will explain the development of the future trend and the solutions.

Keywords: Sexism; English Language; The Causes and Solutions

1. Sexism in the English language

In western countries, the society is male dominated and male centered. As a vulnerable gender group in society, women have been discriminated against for a long time. This phenomenon can be inevitably reflected in the English language. For example, when people hear or see the two words “virgin” and “prostitute”, they will first think that these two words refer to a woman who has never had sexual experience, and a woman who makes money by providing sexual experience. They rarely think that these two words can also be used to refer to a man who has never had any sexual experience, and a man who makes money by providing sexual experience. Otto Jespersen, a Danish linguist, points out in his book the development and structure of English language that English is the most masculine language in people's minds. Language is like an X-ray that can provide invisible, visual ideas. In the 18th century, the Welsh linguist Rowland Jones studied the language of men and women, and claimed that the study of the Old Testament was the key to the mystery of language. He concluded that women are not as good as men and that inequality in all languages is just and reasonable. Chinese scholars Yang Yonglin and Bai Jiehong have also made a detailed study of sexism in English language and introduced some feasible strategies to eliminate sexism, but they only think about language strategies tested and explored.

1.1 Etymology

In Oxford high level English Chinese Dictionary (2004 Edition), sexism is defined as unfair treatment (especially for women) due to gender and different attitudes due to gender differences. According to the new Weber English encyclopedia Dictionary (1997), sexism is defined as: (1) attitude or behavior based on the inherent thinking mode of traditional social role division; (2) discrimination or prejudice based on one's gender, especially for women. From the above concepts, we can see that gender discrimination is a social phenomenon that regards men as the main body of social norms and despises and insults women. When it is applied to language, it refers to the phenomenon of taking men as the main body of social norms and women as accessories or exceptions.

1.2 Word-formation

Many other words are also made up of root words with masculine meaning, such as “-man-”. In English, there are many “men” words: Chairman, businessman and so on. Chairman, agent and principal “chairman” is a typical example of discrimination. According to the Oxford high level English Chinese dictionary, “chairman” refers to the person in charge of the overall situation in a meeting or company. Similarly, “businessman” refers to all Shagreen, not only men who do business, but also many women. Therefore, these words combined with “man” do not differentiate between men and women. In addition, there is no morpheme “man” in some English words indicating positions. Initially, these words were neutral, but the qualitative thinking of patriarchal society made these positions more male oriented. Therefore, in English people can't help but think of men's words, such as doctor,

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pilot and so on. Because the traditional idea is that men have a stronger body, even a smarter brain; when describing women doctors, they often add women's gender words in front of them, such as woman doctor. In addition, there are also some words in English that describe occupation. People will think that they often refer to women, such as secretary. Obviously, these positions often don't need more sophisticated skills, so people think that they are designed for women. They think that positions like nurses and secretaries are not suitable for smart and strong men. This traditional idea is also a response to gender discrimination.

1.3 Semantics

The asymmetry of semantic markers refers to the difference in meaning between unmarked and marked terms. In a pair of words which constitute the opposite of male and female, the words that express male often have the color of commendation, while the words that express female often have the color of derogation. For example, bachelor refers to the single man who does not want to marry but lives happily, while spinster refers to the spinster who is old and aged and cannot marry out due to various reasons, with obvious derogatory color; professional refers to the professional in higher social status such as doctor and lawyer when it is used for men, and prostitute when it is used for women; "Governor" refers to the ruler of a country, while "governance" refers to a governess who is employed by a lower position of people; callboy refers to a waiter who greets actors in a theater, and "Call Girl" refers to a girl who is called for. Through these examples, we can see the gender discrimination reflected by the asymmetry of semantic markers in English.

1.4 Usage

1.4.1 Intimacy title

In the west, male superiors can call their female subordinates by some intimate nicknames, such as darling. On the contrary, female subordinates can't use these nicknames to call their superiors, and female superiors can't call their male employees as well. However, strange men or non-intimate men can use nicknames to call women, which shows that in British and American society, women have lower social status than men and are less respected than men.

1.4.2 Name

In the west, women usually use their father's surname before marriage and their husband's surname after marriage. For example, the man after marriage is still man, while the woman after marriage has changed from miss to Wife. There are many feminists and professional women. Hillary Rodham, the wife of Bill Clinton, the then president of the United States, was also supporting that married women should not only mark their husband's surname, but also their husband's surname, rather than their father's. Although she was a feminist herself, she changed her name according to her husband and her political needs. However, no matter how you change it, you can't go beyond the following choices: either your father's surname or your husband's surname.

1.4.3 Reference terms

When it comes to men and women, they are not equal, but men first and women second. In the long-term language habits, the word order of men and women mostly follows the principle of men first and women second. There are some words without male mark in form. People are used to treat them as male words.

2. Reasons of the sexism in the English language

2.1 Historical Factors

As Shakespeare of the Renaissance said, "a person's socio-economic status determines his right to speak." Therefore, in the English language countries, there has been a long-term male dominated language phenomenon, in which the male is the dominator and the initiator of power, while the female is the acceptor and the dominator. For example, in the United States, representatives, senators and presidential election qualifications and women It doesn't matter, and so far, there's no female president.

In conclusion, the author believes that the root of sexism lies in history. With the changes of the times, sexism is becoming more and more serious. At the same time, words or slang expressions containing sexism came into being.

2.2 Social factors

At the beginning, men's muscles were more developed than women's, and they played the role of hunting. Women were weak and wanted to have children, and were responsible for the family and children. Although the roles are different, the values are the same, but with the development of social productivity, men occupy the dominant position, and women's position gradually declines. Because women can have children, they have become the precious property of their husbands, and various social norms restricting women have gradually formed. Women's status is low and subject to the concept of men. Although women's status has improved later, people's discrimination against women has been deeply rooted through the mass media. Because of the influence of society, women also feel that they are inferior to men and it is normal for them to be treated unfairly. In English, language discrimination against women has become common. Language is a mirror of society, which changes with the change of society. Comments in the Book Language and the status of women: women are deprived of the right because they do not have the ability to control the right. Sexism in language is the manifestation of social and historical division of labor.

2.3 Cultural factors

Discrimination and prejudice against women, as views and attitudes deviating from objective facts, are also part of cultural ideology. Cultural ideology refers to concepts and attitudes closely related to cultural values. The spread of cultural ideology will counteract the discrimination and prejudice against women. Myth is a form of culture. The image of women in myth can also help us understand sexism in language. In many myths around the world, men are often regarded as the model of species, while women

are male variants. Even though women are sometimes praised as the God of wealth, the mother of the earth and so on, they still cannot escape the charge of the source of all evils.

In the process of socialization, social prejudice is obtained through the words and deeds of social groups, parents, relatives and friends, partners and the mass media (radio, film, television, newspapers). People's discrimination and prejudice against women are also obtained directly from the contact of parents, relatives and friends or groups, or through the mass media. In English, under the influence of traditional ideas, the language discrimination against women has become a vicious circle. For example, in western countries, when women are asked "what does your husband do?" at a party, no one will venture to ask a man "what does your wife do?". It is a very common social and cultural phenomenon that women are placed in subordinate status in the West. Female psychology also accepted the fact of subordination.

3. To development tendency and ways to avoid sexist language

Traditional linguistics regards language as a tool of communication, but this tool does not serve the whole people equally. It shows different cultural psychology and social consciousness to men and women. Language is more a cultural phenomenon, embodies cultural value, is the aggregation of culture, and is a special culture of its own system.

The phenomenon of sexism in different cultures is not only a symbol expression, but also a cultural stereotype, a social mentality and a reflection of cognitive model in the language system. It is not only a linguistic problem, but also needs to be combined with the study of language and culture. The study of linguistic philosophy and cognitive science explores the relationship between language and thinking and reveals the subculture phenomenon in language use, which has rich cultural connotation and profound significance.

At present, the characteristics of the era of global economic integration and world political multipolarity are in the same line with the cultural linguistic concepts of culture diversity and language diversity, while emphasizing the holistic view! The theory of chaos with nonlinearity and unpredictability provides a brand-new and effective methodology for cultural linguistics. The above attempts make the possibility of chaos in the study of cultural linguistics come true. Therefore, we can see that chaos has a broad application prospect in the study of language and culture.

4. Conclusion

To sum up, women need to make unremitting efforts to achieve their true liberation. The reflection of language on society is a long process, and new discrimination is constantly reflected in language. The elimination of sexism in language, the elimination of sexism in society and the real elimination of sexism in language depend on the realization of gender equality in social reality. Language, as a tool of communication, carries human thoughts. Without the development of language, human thoughts cannot develop forward. To change the concept of sexism, first, women need to wake up and actively participate in their own efforts to get good results. We should get out of the misunderstanding of sexism, realize the neutrality of language and improve language awareness. We should not only rely on women's own efforts, but also unite women all over the world, get men's support and cooperation, strengthen communication and consultation with men, and women can get complete liberation through language.

The phenomenon of sexism in language is universal and complex, which exists in all levels of languages. After decades of development, language and gender research has made great progress, showing a diversified and dynamic development trend. The study of sexism has greatly enriched the study of linguistics. It needs to be pointed out that there should be a proper evaluation of the scope of language sexism, not to go to extremes, not to think that sexism must exist in all languages, or in all areas of a specific language, and sexism has certain limitations.

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