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Gender and Language

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Abstract. We examine gender differences in language use in light of the biological and social construction theories of gender. The biological theory defines gender in terms of biological sex resulting in polarized and static language differences based on sex. The social constructionist theory of gender assumes gender differences in language use depend on the context in which the interaction occurs. Gender is contextually defined and fluid, predicting that males and females use a variety of linguistic strategies. We use a qualitative linguistic approach to investigate gender differences in language within a context of marital conflict. Differences appeared in the use of self references but not in the use of social words and positive and negative emotion words. The results of this study failed to support the sociological theory and provide preliminary evidence for the biological theory.

Keywords. gender, social construction, biological.

I.   Introduction.

Gender Issue has been a concern for many activists and researchers till present.

The studies have been done in many kinds of fields such as in domestic affairs, work places, political cases and even in language use. In the language use in particular, the gender issues are aroused due to the belief that there are differences in terms of men and women in expressing their language when they interact in their social life. Women and men speak differently where women' way of talk are considered to be more inferior like being powerless and unimportant. A lot of debates and research have been done after this issue was published. The following discussion will try to present about gender and language use. The first discussion will be about the overview of gender and language in order to see the definition of gender and its difference from sex, the history of gender and language use. The next one will be the discussion of some theories that were proposed related to the

topic. Furthermore, pragmatics and its relation to the gender and language use is also part of discussion because through pragmatics, the

language use in any social context can be analyzed. To be more specific, categories of gender in language will be discussed to see what actually items that are focused on for this issue. Then, the next concern will be about gender and the use of language varieties and gender stereotype in language. Finally, the discussion will be about gender in language education.

The term "gender" is sometimes misunderstood by some certain people by

considering it is the same as "sex". In fact, they have different definitions, "Sex is

designation based on biology, whereas gender is socially and psychologically constructed by the process of interactions in the family, social and education settings." In other words, "gender is not something we have, but something we do, something we perform.

Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex." It means that sex is something that is brought with when a person is born.

Gender is referred variously across areas of social science. In a specific social

setting, the culture legalizes values, expectations, meanings and patterns of behavior and communication of its society. Concerning gender for example, it can be seen a lot of structures that are formed. Based on what emerge on television, magazines or personal experiences, it shows the representations of gender issues. Women are assumed in home making, care giving and subservient roles. Conversely, men are represented as leader and breadwinner. Furthermore, in many cultures women take the name of their husbands after getting married, sons have more freedom to play outside the house and daughters have to be more at home and take care of younger siblings.

Additionally, it shows that at some certain schools or academies the gendered based positioned are offered for the student recruitment so that they will be able to fulfill requirement of future work positi on. Due to daily practices, such gender issues are considered normal or even are not realized as the forms of gender identities.

Categories of Gender in language

It is important to know some terminologies that are used to represent men and

women directly in a language. There are four terms as stated in Hellinger and Bubmann.

a. Grammatical gender

In linguistics, the category of grammatical gender is a crucial issue. In some

languages, they consist of three gender classes like feminine, masculine or neauter.

Grammatical gender is a basic part of a noun that determines which kind of agreement such as article, adjective, verb, numeral or preposition that can follow the noun. In English language for example, although it is common to refer to the pronoun of an animal

as "it", the pronoun can be changed to be "he or she" as in person's pronoun when the

sex of the animal is known. The following sentences will show how the subject pronoun of an animal can be different:

I saw a cat on the street. It ran so fast. (unknown cat)

I brushed my beautiful cat "Meow". She was very happy. (house pet and very wellknown)

b. Lexical Gender

In linguistics, "gender" is usually used as property of extra-linguistic of femaleness

or maleness. It can be seen in English personal noun of mother, sister, son and boy.

Lexically, the meaning of mother and sister represents femaleness while son and boy relate to maleness. In other words, such nouns can be referred to "gender specific" (female specific or male specific). However, there are many words that can be classified as "gender-indefinite" or "gender-neutral" which does not specify to sex of referent, For example: citizen, patient or individually. In all languages, lexical gender becomes crucial base in deciding the form of terminologies, address terms and a number of personal pronouns. In Bahasa for instance, "bibi and ibu" are used to address aunt and mother respectively, it is similar to "paman and bapak", the former means uncle and the latter means father.

c. Referential gender

Referential gender can be understood as the linguistic expressions that are used to

non-linguistic reality. It means a word can be changed its basic function grammatically and lexically to be feminine, masculine or neuter when idiomatic expressions are used. For example, in German language mädchen "girl" is neutral grammatically, possesses a lexical-semantic specification of femaleness and commonly used to refer to female. In contrast, when it is used as an idiomatic expression like

in "Mädchen für alles" or "girl for everything" or "maid of all work", it might be expressed for male as well. Although metaphorically mädchen is neautral, it seems that the transmission of gendered message happens where derogatory connotations appear.

d. Social gender

Social gender can be understood as the social separation between masculine and

feminine roles and character traits. It means that personal nouns are formed specifically socially when there is no any difference between feminine or masculine words if it is viewed grammatically or lexically. For example, in English, there are a lot of many higher-status occupational terms like lawyer, surgeon or scientist which are usually referred to male-specific pronoun he. In contrast, Female-specific pronoun she will be used to refer to low-status occupational titles such as secretary, nurse or schoolteacher.

Conclusion

Based on what has been explained above, it can be derived some points from

this writing. Firstly, gender concern can be found in the use of many languages across the globe. Secondly, the gender based language which seem express the differences in language of men and women can be found not only in common expressions, but also in famous proverbs and fictions. Thirdly, in many cases, women languages are considered to be sentence and approval seekers and does not have logical speech order. Fourthly, the separation between masculine and feminine roles in language may be affected by the more inferior than men's language because it consists of disfluency, unfinished different social status and power distance between men and women where men is often considered to have higher position than women. Those conclusions were derived based on the language and gender studies that have been done in many fields and in many countries.

Talking about Indonesian context in general and Acehnese context in

particular, it seems that there is still lack of research that has been conducted related the issue of gender and language. Thus, it is very crucial for the next researchers to find out

the gender expressions that maybe used in those languages as well.

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