



Teaching Gender-Sensitive Language And Gender-Biased Terminology

Khamdamova Sevarakhon Oybek Qizi

Teacher Of The Department Of "Teaching Languages", Faculty Of Management In Production, Fergana Polytechnic Institute, Fergana City, Republic Of Uzbekistan

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ABSTRACT

This article will define gender sensitive language and illustrate its importance in communication, especially business writing. In addition, this article examines the reasons for gender sensitive language and gives some examples to gender biased terminology.

KEYWORDS

Gender, Gender Sensitive Language, Gender Neutral Terms, Gender Biased Terminology.

INTRODUCTION

Gender became an object of scientific research only in the second half of the twentieth century, but even before the advent of targeted gender studies, the existence of differences in the speech behavior of men and women was not in doubt [3], since gender obviously affects the communicative behavior of participants in communication, regardless of their role in a particular speech act. In addition, speech gender stereotypes, some of which are enshrined in the language (for example, in proverbs and sayings: A woman came from the city, brought news from three boxes; Women

know how to keep secrets together), play an important role in our perception of other people [11]. With the developing views on gender issues scientists also paid attention to the creating gender sensitive language which avoids gender discrimination and using gender neutral terms in their speech. Language not only reflects the way writers think; it also shapes the thinking of listeners or readers and influences their behaviour. Word choices often carry unconscious assumptions about gender roles [1]. The use of terms only referring to males is not accepted anymore, as excluding

women is considered an offence. Language should therefore be used with a high degree of precision [2]. Avoiding discrimination between genders starts with language, as the systematic use of gender-biased terminology influences attitudes and expectations and could, in the mind of the reader, relegate women to the background or help extending the survival of a stereotyped view of masculine and feminine roles. The United Nations directives in that regard invite United Nations staff to avoid to the extent possible the use of language which refers explicitly or implicitly to only one sex, and to ensure (according to each language’s characteristics) the use of non-sexist/gender-sensitive/neutral language [5]. These article present the following: - Sex and gender: definition and difference between the two terms; - United Nations official instructions with regard to the use of gender-sensitive language; - Alternatives and solutions to gender-biased language in English - Resources for further reference; - A detailed list of gender-biased language examples and gender-sensitive alternatives.

SEX AND GENDER

Sex: biological and physiological characteristics that define men and women. Sex characteristics do not vary between societies (for example menstruation, reproductive capacity and breast feeding are

women’s characteristics, while men generally have more massive bones).

Gender: socially constructed attributes, roles, behaviours and activities that a given society considers appropriate for men and women. Gender roles are the activities ascribed to men and women on the basis of perceived societal differences. Gender roles vary greatly between societies: division of labour in families, communities and the marketplace; access to education, health care, job opportunities, financial resources and decision-making roles; and other issues.

Alternatives and solutions to gender-biased language

When meaning both sexes, we should use a term that includes both. Writers, speakers, teachers, public figures, media persons should examine their language to reduce choices that exclude or stereotype others. Each language has its own characteristics; solutions to gender-biased terms and expressions vary between languages. The following guidelines are mainly for the English language.

With regard to the English language, it is almost always possible to find alternative terms and sentence structures to avoid gender-biased or stereotyping language.

Table 1 .The use of pronouns

Nº	Examples	Proposed alternatives
1	The client should receive his invoice in two weeks.	The client should receive his or her invoice in two weeks (alternately reverse order: her or his).
		The client should receive the (or an) invoice in two weeks.
		The invoice will be sent to the client in two weeks.
2	Each participant must present his ID badge at the door.	All participants must present their ID badges at the door.

		Each participant must present his/her ID badge at the door.
3	A good judge relies, to some degree, on his common sense.	A good judge relies, to some degree, on common sense.
		A good judge relies, to some degree, on his or her common sense.
4	The teacher is usually appointed on the basis of his training.	Teachers are usually appointed on the basis of their training.
		A teacher is usually appointed on the basis of her or his training.

Table 2.Exclusionary terms

Nº	Examples	Proposed alternatives
1	Man Person;	individual; human being
2	Mankind	Humanity; human beings; people; men and women
3	Chairman	Chairperson; chair; president (in certain cases)
4	Spokesman	Spokesperson; representative; (when talking about a specific person: Mr. John is the spokesman of the President; Ms. Jeanette Walker is the spokeswoman of the President)

Stereotyping roles and attributes

Do not represent certain jobs as only appropriate or held by women or men.

possessing stereotypic gendered attributes.

Examples to be avoided:

Examples to be avoided:

- Professors are men and elementary teachers are women;
 - Politicians are men and women are wives;
 - Housework is the duty of women and an option or out of question for men;
 - Scientists are men and secretaries are women;
 - Doctors are men and nurses are women.
- Do not represent women and men as

- Men are independent; women are dependent;
- Men are admired for their accomplishments, women for their physical attributes;
- Men are active; women are passive;
- Men are ambitious; women are modest;
- Men are leaders; women are followers [6].

Table 3.

Nº	Examples	Proposed alternatives
1	John and Mary both have full-time jobs; he helps her with the housework.	John and Mary both have full-time jobs; they share the housework.
2	Transport will be provided for delegates and their wives.	Transport will be provided for delegates and their spouses or persons accompanying them.
3	A nurse knows that every day she will touch a life or a life will touch hers.	A nurse knows that every day she/he will touch a life or a life will touch hers/his (or use the plural).
4	Maria is a career woman.	Maria is a professional. Maria is an engineer (do we say John is a career man?)

Table 4. Personal titles

Nº	Examples	Proposed alternatives
1	Miss, Mrs.	Ms. (unless the woman herself prefers the courtesy title Mrs. or Miss). A woman’s marital status is very often irrelevant to the matter in hand.
2	Mr. and Mrs. John Smith	Mr. and Mrs. Smith; or Jane and John Smith; or Mrs. Jane and Mr. John Smith
3	Mrs. Michael Austen	Ms. Patricia Austen

CONCLUSION

Business writing is a tool which enables business authorities stay in touch with employees, customers and with people in general. Consideration of gender sensitivity in writing, using of non-discriminatory, inclusive forms makes employees and customers feel important and respected. That is not only a source of business prosperity and prot but it is also a way to build solid bridge between society and business as they are interdependent. Gender sensitivity in business English writing can boost devotion, dedication and feeling of equality, loyalty and respect in community. These are main features which

enables business to build strong foundation of success and further development. Business writing is a tool which enables business authorities stay in touch with employees, customers and with people in general. Consideration of gender sensitivity in writing, using of non-discriminatory, inclusive forms makes employees and customers feel important and respected. That is not only a source of business prosperity and prot but it is also a way to build solid bridge between society and business as they are interdependent. Gender sensitivity in business English writing can boost devotion, dedication and feeling of equality, loyalty and respect in

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