Linguistic Turn and Gendering Language in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary

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Abstract

Language constructs how humans perceive things. Since language is a human construction, it tends to be biased as it is mainly men's construction. Using gender perspectives, this paper attempts to discuss the imbalance in gender representations found in the examples given in an English learner's dictionary, that is, the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 3rd Edition*. A learner's dictionary is chosen because it is where one can find and learn the meaning of words. The results show that linguistically speaking, English is still a highly patriarchal and gendering language where men are portrayed better than women. Women tend to be subjugated under men's domination. Sexism and patriarchy still overshadow the meanings of words characterizing men and women. This means that men are still considered to be dominating women, despite the fact that the feminist movement has been going more than thirty years. Consequently, English language teachers should balance the gender bias by providing addtional materials that are gender neutral.

Keywords: gender, linguistic turn, dictionary, lexicography, English language

1. Introduction

Language signifies its speakers. Social and cultural constructions of the speakers are also done via language. One of the most important contributing variables that is socially and culturally constructed is gender, which has always been embedded within language. This paper aims at revealing the gender perspectives in a learner's dictionary that uses the English language, which is an international language spoken and learned by billions of people. A similar research project, but on a bilingual learner's dictionary, was made by Ishikawa (2013) which looks at gender stereotypes in *Basic Japanese-English Dictionary, Second Edition, 2004*. Ishikawa's findings confirm that the most popular bilingual Japanese-English dictionary still portrays stereotyped gender images in which men enjoy higher status than women: men occupy the public sphere linking their status as high where women are limited to domestic sphere being submissive to their husbands (Ishikawa, 2013, p. 226).

In the English language, gender differences can be noticed in the use of pronouns, i.e. he and she. In addition, it is commonly said that men and women tend to speak differently. Lakoff's influential study *Language and Woman's Place* (1973) claimed that women's language is weak and unassertive compared to men's language. Jones (1990 in Coates, 2004, p. 103) suggests that when women are talking to each other, it is usually considered as not serious matters or just gossiping; however, when men are talking to each other, it is a 'real talk' and commonly perceived as serious matters. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003, p. 3) state that "expressions referring to women commonly undergo semantic derogation and sexualization". Eckert and McConnell-Ginet provide *mistress* and *master* for the examples. *Mistress* for a woman is not merely a feminine form of *master* for a man. *Mistress* semantically connotes a sexualized female while *master* semantically refers to positivity and power. Therefore, words and expressions in the English language are not only a linguistic fact, but also a social construction: the product of social and cultural practices in which one sees and perceives reality. The binary opposition between men and women and the language they use not only signifies different genders, but also shows the hierarchy: men are superior and women are inferior.

Language is the way we see, perceive, respond to, and even criticize anything. This is what is known as *linguistic turn*, a term introduced by an American philosopher Richard Rorty (1967, pp. 6-9). Rorty's concept of *linguistic turn* is then used not only in philosophy, but also in the fields of language and culture. *Linguistic turn* can also be regarded as an extension of Friedrich Nietzsche's idea that language is analogized with "the infinite

interpretability of all things" (Behler, 1991, p. 89). Language is the interpreter of all things. Language is meaning making. Since meaning is unlimited, so does meaning making. In this notion, language becomes the "ground of being" or "the foundation from which our experience and knowledge of the world are generated" (Tyson, 2006, p. 255). It is through language that our understanding of the world is perceived and it is through language too, that our conceptual framework of how we see the world is built. In the words of Rorty (quoted in Allen, 2007), it is only language that provides human's cognitive access to objects. Accordingly, in this perspective, only through language, knowledge is produced and delivered. Knowledge is then very much a linguistic phenomenon, "that knowledge comes in a statement or speech act; that the unit of knowledge is linguistic, logical, a *logos*" (Allen, 2007, p. 11).Accordingly, language becomes the very core of knowledge as through language, knowledge is conveyed and disseminated, and knowledge produces discourse: specific ways of the world is produced. That being said, language has turned into power. *The linguistic turn* proves to be more than just language, but more about power, especially the power to dominate.

When one wants to find the meanings of a certain word, one usually searches for that word in a dictionary. In explaining the meanings of a word, a dictionary does not only use definitions, but also examples. According to Atkins and Rundell (2008, p. 452), example sentences are a vital component of a dictionary which function to support and illustrate every linguistic fact recorded in the dictionary. However, the question that may arise when reading the examples is that whether the possible meanings found are neutral. Earlier we discussed that *linguistic turn* has made language to be more than just language: it is a device to exercise power for language is power, especially the power to dominate. With the notion of *linguistic turn* in mind, we attempt to discuss the examples found in the entries of an English learner's dictionary in order to show imbalance gender representations. An English learner's dictionary is chosen because it is a type of dictionary that is most commonly used by billions of people who learn English. A discussion on the chosen learner's dictionary is given in the fourth section of this paper.

2. Linguistic Turn, Sentence and Meaning

One consequence of *linguistic turn* is that language is not only about the things an individual learns, but also as part of what is learned. Within this understanding, even the philosophers themselves function not as philosophers or people giving rise to its true meaning, but philosophers themselves are participants involved in the phenomenon of language. In this sense, language becomes very important, language is central in the process of constructing social reality. Language is productive, performative and creative —it is language that makes things happen and shapes reality (Austin, 1962). This concept is closely related to famous Sapir-Whorf hypothesis which suggests that "language determines thought and that linguistic categories limit and determine cognitive categories" (Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis, accessed 2013).

The concept of *linguistic turn* was followed by many Western thinkers who work within both domains of modernism and post-modernism such as Judith Butler, Luce Irigaray, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Jürgen Habermas and others, including Michel Foucault who views the role of language in knowledge. *Linguistic turn* not only elevates the position of the language (and the sciences that are associated with language, such as linguistics and literature) that was once always considered marginal compared to other sciences, especially life sciences. With *linguistic turn*, language becomes a primary determinant because the way we look at things determined by our language. *Linguistic turn* considers that language constructs reality. In view of the traditional Western philosophy, language is just a label to name things without any awareness of the political consequences of such labelling. Ferdinand de Saussure changes such notion and according to him, "a linguistic sign is not a link between a thing and a name but a concept and a sound pattern" (Saussure, 1983, pp. 66-67). Linguistic sign which refers to any cultural text either in the form of words, sounds, objects, artefacts, and the behaviour does not show the relationship between the object and its name, but the concept and pronunciation. In Saussure's view, we will not be able to know a seat as a chair without knowing concept of a seat that exists in our brain. When we look at a picture for example, a concept of the image will emerge in our brain. However, the concept will not form an image or visual. Instead, the concept will be an influx of narrative and narrative is the core language. The dominance of language exists everywhere: around us, in every aspect of life; from economics to politics, social, cultural and even in every knowledge. Through the discourse of *linguistic turn*, language guides us through our search of ontological concept or cultural phenomenon.

The most important impact of *linguistic turn* is the importance of language or discourse in the societal construct. In humanities, the social processes and structures are no longer seen as a determinant that forms a society or a particular culture: they are cultural products resulted from communication that takes place through language prevailing in the community. No one is free from language. Language entraps us, even history cannot be separated from language. Because of *linguistic turn* too, something that used to be natural now is considered as

cultural, such as the natural man is no longer considered to be aggressive; as well as the natural woman, she is no longer considered to be naturally submissive. It is language that forms feminine and masculine traits of women and men. *Linguistic turn* teaches us that the sensory perceptions that we receive from the outside is not natural, it is through language that we can understand and interpret the meaning of those perceptions, and that perceptions may indeed vary. When a perception is spoken and narrated then it automatically constructs knowledge. These perceptions that then form knowledge and knowledge truth. Whorfian hypothesis goes further saying:

"We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face; on the contrary, the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds - and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds. We cut nature up, organize it into concepts, and ascribe significances as we do, largely because we are parties to an agreement to organize it in this way - an agreement that holds throughout our speech community and is codified in the patterns of our language. The agreement is, of course, an implicit and unstated one, *but its terms are absolutely obligatory*; we cannot talk at all except by subscribing to the organization and classification of data which the agreement decrees (Whorf, 1940, pp. 213-214, his emphasis, quoted in Chandler, accessed 9 August 2014)."

Human sensory perception means nothing without language. Linguistic system is central in transferring and interpreting sensory perception received. The transaction taking place is a process involving translation of thought into words to make it comprehensible for us: in this way linguistic system is at work, creating meaning from thought to narration. "A sentence," says Foucault, "cannot be non-significant; it refers to something, by virtue of the fact it is a statement" (1972, p. 90). By this, Foucault means that there is no sentence or word without meaning, and meaning lies not only on what is said but also on the discursive formations in which such sentence lies such as who is speaking what on what occasion. Foucault further explains that in looking for meaning, discursive facts will always involve questions such as "according to what rules has a particular statement been made, and consequently according to what rules that could other similar statements be made" (1972, p. 27). A sentence is not a merely made up of a series of words, rather, according to Foucault, it is a coded message that must be deciphered in order to understand its meaning. A sentence is a definite way to refer a visible reality, Foucault further remarks. In doing so, one may understand that reality is constructed through words or series of sentences: the very notion of knowledge is carried by language.

In Foucault's *Archeology of Knowledge*, for bearing its meaning, a sentence does not stand only on grammatical level. A sentence is discursive in a sense that it has numerous possibilities of meanings that lie beyond its literal meaning on the grammatical level. The discursive practice of a sentence means that the meaning of a sentence will be determined by "a body of anonymous, historical rules, always determined in the time and space that have defined a given period, and for a given social, economic, geographical, or linguistic area, the conditions of operation of the enunciative function" (Foucault, 1972, p. 117). A sentence is a statement therefore it is governed by a set of rules that places its meaning in its time and place. A sentence is a statement that inevitably is historical, and so is a word. Foucault even explains further that even two exact words cannot be exactly identical. The following discussion will prove what Foucault means by this.

3. Towards Gender Perspectives on Language and Discourse

As discussed earlier we know that language is a construction by human. Human construction is not natural and often hierarchical and bias, depending on who is speaking on what position. Language is a construct so is gender. Both are social and cultural programming and not natural construction. Researches on how language affects gender and vice versa have much been done. The second wave feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s in America and United Kingdom had targeted how English was highly gendered reflecting women's position as the *second sex*, a term that Simone de Beauvoir used to describe women in relation to men. As the second sex, women function as men's *other* thus the process of *othering* (marginalization) takes place upon women with men as the centre (de Beauvoir 1953). Robin Lakoff's *Language and the Woman's Place* (1973) and Dale Spender's *Man Made Language* (1980) present some examples showing that language (i.e. English) is highly sexist: privileging men over women. The claim that language is sexist reaches its peak within the second wave of feminist movement as marked by Ruth Morgan, "The very semantics of the language reflects [women's] condition. We do not even have our own names, but bear that of the father until we exchange it for that of a husband" (Morgan 1977). Take the following as examples:

1)   He is professional. (positive sexual connotation)

She is professional. (negative sexual connotation)

2)   He is the master of …. (positive)

She is the mistress of …. (negative, particularly in such a contecxt as 'She is the director's mistress)

3) John hopes to meet an eligible spinster. (negative, now bachelorette is used to avoid sexism in meaning)

Mary hopes to meet an eligible bachelor. (positive)

At a glance, examples above show that men are generally described "better" than women. Two exact words are not identical in meaning: meaning lies on what associations that a word is connected to. Further explanation of how two exact words 'approving' and 'disapproving' for men and women are not identical will be discussed later.

Language is sexist and gendered. The ways men and women speaks reflect not only gender gap between the two sexes but also produces social orders in which men's social position is higher than women's. In response to the sexism in language and gendering language, Lakoff explains

"Our use of language embodies attitudes as well as referential meanings. 'Woman's language' has as foundation the attitude that women are marginal to the serious concerns of life, which are pre-empted by men. The marginality and powerlessness of women is reflected in both the ways women are expected to speak, and the ways in which women are spoken of. In appropriate women's speech, strong expression of feeling is avoided, expression of uncertainty is favoured, and means of expression in regard to subject-matter deemed 'trivial' to the 'real' world are elaborated. Speech about women implies an object, whose sexual nature requires euphemism, and whose social roles are derivative and dependent in relation to men. The personal identity of women thus is linguistically submerged; the language works against treatment of women, as serious persons with individual views (Lakoff, 1973, p. 45)."

Language then implies gendered positioning: a positioning that makes "women disempowered by being constrained to use 'powerless' language, ways of speaking that simply are not very effective in getting others to think or do what the speakers wants them to (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2007)". Even more than forty years after Lakoff's first publication of her seminal article "Language and woman's place", through language women are still believed to be powerless and minor compared to men, and this renders them to be ranked second in social order and excludes them from powerful positions and authority. Language, in this case, becomes a medium of oppression used by men to force women in their place without giving them a room of their own.

As suggested earlier by Foucault that a sentence is a statement carrying a discursive formations, a sentence, a word is never neutral. Its discursive meaning is also gendered. It depends on co(n)text(s) where it appears (Walsh 2001). Any linguistic item is deemed ideological. It is therefore biased and any linguistic unit about women is discursively produced not only by its linguistic meaning but also social and cultural meaning: "*any* linguistic item or structure has the potential to become ideologically charged, depending on the way it is coloured by the surrounding cotext and/or by the context of production and consumption in which it occurs (Walsh, 2001, p. 33, her emphasis)".

A word is ideological in its very nature. Using discursive formation in mind, a word is never neutral: it is highly biased and gendered, depending on associations that word is connected to. A word may become evidence that marks the dominance and control of one sex or one gender over another. In so doing, meaning of any linguistic unit such as a word then is located between linguistic and extralinguistic phenomena (Walsh 2001). This is exactly the very reason why it is vital to examine language using a feminist discourse as any linguistic unit such as a word is inevitably hegemonic to some degree, carrying in its meaning a social and cultural discourse of how women are positioned in relation to men. A feminist approach to discourse is assessing how language portrays and represents women and how such portrayals and representations still convey gender inequality. Since patriarchy is still the norm of our everyday society, many words associated with women still assume the patriarchal power that supports gender domination.

4. Gender Inequality in the Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 3rd Edition

There are several English learner's dictionaries available, including those published by the units of the oldest universities in England, i.e. Cambridge University and Oxford University. The data for this study are obtained from the *Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary, 3rd Edition* (CALD3). The main reasons for choosing CALD3 over the *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, 8th edition (OALD8) CD-ROM is the functionality of the search menu and the number of examples provided. CALD3 provides an advanced search menu that enables us to search for the words 'man' and 'woman' in the category of examples (see Figure 1, picture on the left side). In OALD8, there is no specific category for searching for examples. Furthermore, in CALD3 we can find a binary opposition for the usage of the words (see Figure 1, picture on the right side), i.e. 'approving' and 'disapproving'. This means that we can use CALD3 to look for examples that use the words 'man' and 'woman'

under the entries that are labelled 'approving' and 'disapproving'. These results in a good number of examples to be analysed. When we use the headwords of the entries we obtain from CALD3 to search for the examples in OALD8, we found that OALD8 only provides very few examples, i.e. only two examples in reference to 'approving' for 'man' and 'men', and also only two examples in reference to 'approving' for 'woman' and 'women.'
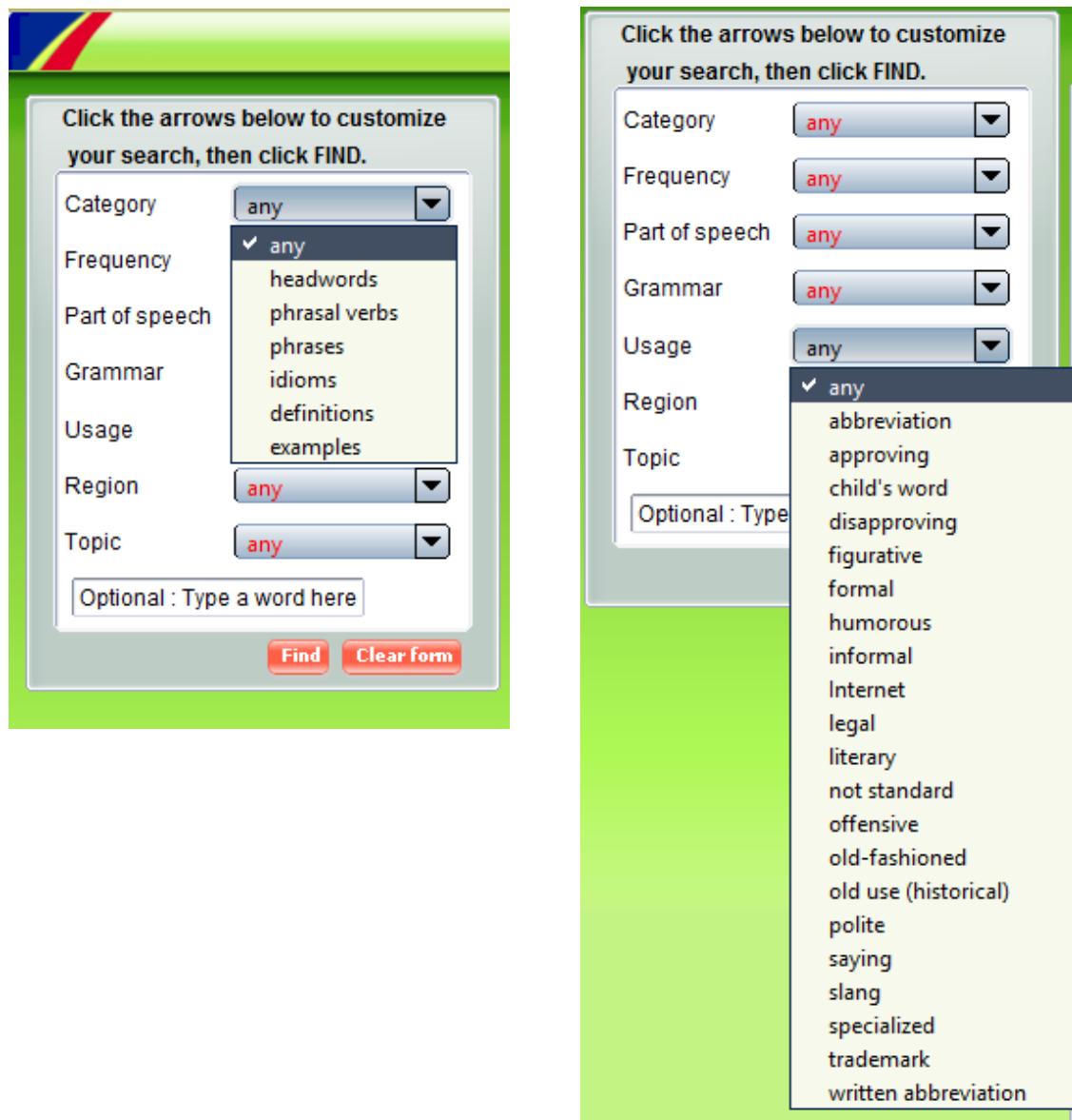

Figure 1. The screenshot of CALD3

In the Advanced Search of CALD3, we found 226 examples labelled 'approving' and 1,674 examples labelled 'disapproving'. From those examples, we searched for the words 'man' and 'woman', as well as, 'men' and 'women'. From that search, we found 11 examples with reference to 'approving' for 'man' and 'men', 5 examples with reference to 'approving' for 'woman' and 'women', 29 examples with reference to 'disapproving' for 'man' and 'men', and 19 examples with reference to 'disapproving' for 'woman' and 'women'. An extract of those examples is presented in Table 1 (the headwords are put in bold).

Table 1. Approving and Disapproving Man and Woman

	Man	Woman
Approving	• Julie's fiancé is a nice **clean-cut** young man • No one doubted that the president was a man of the highest **integrity**. • He was a man of **principle** versus • She doesn't have any **principle**. • John Herschel was an **urbane**, kindly and generous man. • He looks like a nice, **wholesome**, young man.	• She's a **down-to-earth** sort of woman with no pretensions. • She's a woman of exceptional **perspicacity**
Disapproving	• a **bumptious** young man • a **cocksure** young man • You know what an **old woman** Dave is — he nearly had a fit because he got a few specks of mud on his shoes! • A **grasping** greedy man • Robert is a **self-centred**, ambitious, bigoted man. • He's an **officious** little man.	• a **fast** woman • a **flighty** young woman • That woman is a real **trollop**. Every time I see her she's with a different man.

The data in Table 1 show that men are generally depicted better than women. Consider the words for 'approving' man: 'urbane', and 'approving' woman: 'down-to-earth'. The use of 'urbane' for man and 'down-to-earth' for woman signifies gender use in the language. The word 'urbane' shows similarity with the word 'urban', whereas 'down-to-earth' is definitely a strong reminder of earth. These words suggest binary opposition between urbane versus earth: urban versus rural, culture versus nature. In the light of eco-feminist critique, culture that signifies progress will definitely need nature/earth to sacrifice in the name of progress. Patriarchal oppression against women and nature is caused by the view that the nature represents women: something feminine, helpless and deserves to be dominated. The politics of *othering* is based on the very masculine thought that nature equals female. In terms of linguistics, women are always naturally feminized (Warren, 2000).

Words for 'approving man' such as 'clean-cut', 'integrity', 'principle', 'sharp', 'unimpeachable', 'urbane', 'wholesome' and 'wise' indicate strong characterization of masculine traits that are heavily related to emotional maturity while words such as 'down-to-earth', 'perspicacity' and 'spontaneous' are more related to just emotional quality, not necessarily maturity. Emotional maturity requires strong emotional quality, not just quality. There is a difference in terms of degree between quality and maturity. The words for 'approving' man and woman indicate immanent hierarchy where men overpower women. Those words also indicate the emotional maturity of a leader and since men are always socially and culturally believed to the leader of women, such words are no wonder.

The norms in which men and women are associated as explained above undeniably mark gender hierarchy, creating different identities for men and women. For a man, to have emotional maturity is necessary as it shows concomitant ideologies of male autonomy and power. While for a woman, it is enough for her to have just emotional quality that can never supersede a man's maturity. The examples also show that it is approved for women to be spontaneous, but men must be wise. Another immediate binary opposition from the examples will be the word principle: "He is a man of principle, while she doesn't have any principle." Perhaps the lexicographers of this dictionary are unconsciously aware of the gender bias while writing these examples.

Examples of 'disapproving' labels for men and women even show a very strong gender hierarchy. The words for men such as 'cocksure', 'ego', 'fussy' in the sentences exemplified have no correlation to moral and sexual connotation while for 'disapproving' women such as 'fast', 'flighty', 'loose' heavily suggest otherwise. 'Disapproving' category for men refers to character traits while for women more about ethics on sexual morality. For a woman, it is her sexual desire that must be regulated by the words signifying a bad woman while for a man it is only his characters: an indication of being a bad man. Sexual passivity is highly suggested for women via

these words in order to control women and maintain men's domination. Friedan says that "the highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their femininity … accepting their [women's] own nature, which can find fulfilment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love" (Freidan, 1963, p. 37). Women, who are not sexually passive, such as 'flash' women, 'flighty' women or 'loose' women, are bad. Another example that clearly points out gender imbalance is the word 'old woman'. It is as if only women are capable of being and becoming trivial.

Words associated with 'disapproving' women can be understood as ways to feminize women. Women's sexually must be controlled and regulated therefore feminine figure is identified as being NOT a flash, flighty or loose woman. In 'disapproving' category, women are much associated with sexual metaphor compared to men. Another example confirms this: 'that woman is a real trollop' (the meaning based on this example is a woman who has had a lot of sexual relationships without any emotional involvement). Disapproving identities of women are sexually charged while disapproving identities of men are only morally charged. This is very common as Haste (1994) contends that "the sexual metaphor is central to maintaining sex-gender system that support male dominance (quoted in Eckert & McConnelly-Ginet, 2007, p. 215). The demarcations between moral for men and sex for women in this 'disapproving' category are ultimately invented to such an extent that discursive meanings and associations for those words are both infinitely metaphorical and metaphor is an essential medium in which reality is constructed: making sense and forming social reality (Pondy, 1983 quoted in Wilson, 1992). With such metaphors, reality is constructed in where women are ultimately demonized in terms of sexual connotations while men are only demoralized in terms of personal character.

A closer look at the examples in the dictionary leads to meaningful gender imbalance and hierarchal binary opposition (see Table 2).

Table 2. Hierarchy of meaning between man and woman

	Man	Woman
'Approving'	Morally correct man	Good characters of woman
'Disapproving'	Bad characters of man	Morally bad woman

The data in table 2 show that men must be morally correct while women should only have good characters: the notion of morally correct women seems to be non-existent. A woman can only be morally bad and the worst man is he who has bad characters, not bad morals: a morally bad man does not exist. The binary opposition discussed above reinforces sexism in patriarchy: a belief that a woman's biological sex determines her subordination.

Other interesting associations on 'disapproving' category between man and woman lie on the notion of self, as shown in Table 3.

Table 3. 'Disapproving' category for man and woman

	'Disapproving'
Man	**self-centred**
	Robert is a self-centred, ambitious and bigoted man.
	self-importance
	He's a modest-mild mannered, without a trace of self-importance.
Woman	No example of self-related association

The examples in Table 3 propose gender superiority and constitute recognition of male authority. Men are associated with self but self is non-existent for women. One must agree that above examples manifest ideologies of the so called a self-made man: a construct most men believe in patriarchal society. In American culture, 'self-made man' is a cultural ideal when a man achieves success because of his own work without any help from others, much like the notion of American dream 'from rags to riches'. While for a woman, there is no such thing as a 'self-made' woman as such idea is alien for women. Man is *self* while woman is *other*: men are present with self while women are absent (no self) and such connotations overtone ideological underpinning of male

autonomy and individualism. Within the dichotomy between *self*(men) and *other* (women), "women are defined as 'other' or they are ignored, rendered invisible and silent, if they not fit the patriarchal scheme" (Madsen, 2000, p. 18). Women's absence in relation to self is certainly men's language that well places women outside the spectrums of power, knowledge and personal autonomy.

5. Conclusion

This study has shown that what Lakoff claimed more than more than 30 years ago amidst the hey-day of second wave feminist movement in the 1960s to 1970s has not changed much. Language, particularly the English language is mostly constructed by men. Sexism in the English language and gendering words that create gender stereotypes is still prevalent in many areas. The examples taken from a popular English learner's dictionary confirm the existence of stereotypes, where one gender supersedes the other: male subordinates female. English learners who often consult English learner's dictionaries for examples on how a word is used, may not realize that they use sentences which show gender inequality. This may perpetuate the gender inequality in the process of English language teching and learning. Consequently, in order to provide more gender equality, English language teachers should have gender awareness and provide additional teaching materials that are gender neutral.

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