THE REALITY OF LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

Language possesses a very significant role in the formation of reality inside the mind of its users. Three elements comprising of society, language, and thoughts are interrelated in constructing the reality of language in society. Society produces thoughts; thoughts create society, and language mediates the process of formulation of reciprocal relation between thoughts and society. Sexism in language use in society prevails in favours of men culture that is directly responsible for the way people see their world, as an important means of reinforcing sexist assumptions. As life flows to its natural course, this linguistic habit is challenged in its being rational and logical by linguistic feminists, of which both female and male.

Keywords: sexism in language, linguistic feminists

INTRODUCTION

When people discuss the reality of language, they try to comprehend how language exists and functions in reality for people to communicate their concepts and ideas. In referring to Saussure's statement (1916) that language is the social facts, some linguists and laymen believe that language is the product of social framework and mirror through which one can see and learn a particular society (Coulmas 2003: 563), that this idea means that concept owned and formulated by people are represented in their language.

Language users tend to use different words to describe the roles of man and woman. This discriminatory system continues to exist when it is underpinned by powerful ideologies in believing that men's role is dominant or patriarchal in meaning, whereas women's role is complementary (Acker 1989:15). Since the mid 1970's research on language and sex have concentrated on the role language plays in the location and maintenance of women in a disadvantageous position in society (Coates 1986:42). And as the reflection of people's concern in sexist language, people start thinking of reformulating the meanings of some words because of the changing roles of men and women.

This paper wants to see how concept of reality influences the use of language and how language determines concepts of reality in people's minds.

LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

Concepts and thoughts are expressed through language, so language is a complex system that reflects what meanings are attached to attitudes, behaviours, and ways of life (Hinkel 1994: 4). In supports to the idea, Kramsch mentions that language reveals cultural reality as language refers to mass experiences related to attitudes and ways of life (Kramsch 1998:4). Those statements explain that concepts and ideas precede words or language.

In contrast to the idea, language creates social reality, as people create meaning through language orally and in written forms. Language is inseparable from culture, it relates to how people see the world (Eastman, 1975) (Kramsch, 1998). Relationship between language, thoughts, and reality can be explained through the idea that

language determines the limit of our world which constructs our reality (Spender 1980: 139). In view of this, the *Determinist* view of language is believed to be one of ideas in linguistic traditions. Anthropologists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf famous for Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis or Whorfianism stated that linguistic differences determine differences in people's world view. Or the way people see the world is constructed by the language they use. The language system is the shaper of ideas. Language guides people's mental activities (Carroll 1956: 212). Those statements explain that words or language precedes concepts or ideas.

The latter hypothesis is difficult to sustain. Words or language does not precede concepts. In fact, language system is shaped by the functions it serves. Language reinforces and reflects cultural and ideological practices which it describes. Concepts and ideas of the world come first, and then recorded through language. In other words, concepts and ideas are lexicalized in language and the system of language expands or contracts relative to the concepts it needs to express. The following is the discussion on how concepts precede language. There are three ways how the reality of language is formed. *First*, through the understanding of the physical and social realities, which are emerging. The naming of objects or events is often influenced by particular conditions and preferences. People would name a particular body organ *genital* rather than the one less decent and impolite. People use the word *homicide* rather than *murder*; or *mutilation* rather than *cut the dead into fractions.* Another instance is that people of the marginal groups such as *PDIP* or *PDI Struggle Party* and *Gepeng* (*Gelandangan Pengemis*) name themselves as such to create sympathy. The naming of objects or events is important as it is assumed that the more the

name is mentioned the better understanding people have on something (Kress and Hodge 1979:5).

The association of particular opinion to gender type as man or woman causes different treatments towards man and woman. Society sees that men are strong, whereas women are weak (Poynton 1989:13). The idea is supported by the result of a research towards babies. In a research of several nine-month old babies, when they are at peace, courageous, and happy, the researchers regard them male babies. Researchers believe that those dimensions of behaviour belong to male. On the other hand, when babies react to stimulus nervously and frightfully, researchers believe the babies to be female ones. This fact might explain the causes of why society differentiates man from woman in terms of behavioural dimensions (Condry and Condry in Poynton 1989:13). The association of characteristics attached to man and woman becomes the prevailing reality in a society as long as society believes it. The term 'gender' as applied to grammar is originated in the linguistic scholarship of ancient Greece. The word is derived from a word meaning *class* or *kind* which refers to the division of Greek nouns into three different classes: masculine, feminine, and neutral. The term is not used to describe the biological sexual characteristics by which we identify females and males but to include the social roles, attitudes, and values which society considers as appropriate for one sex or the other. The association of woman with feminist characteristics as weak, submissive, obedient, amusing, and emotional, and the association of man with masculine characteristics as strong, creative, rational, and leadership is called gender ideology which is partial in nature and based on untruthful conditions (Kress and Hodge, 1979). *Second,* through spontaneous, direct, and routine

ways of using language. In conducting a communication, both parties work together to create a natural communication (Berger and Luckmann, 1966). Natural communication may create possibilities to build social situations required for interpersonal relation and process of socialization. Casual conversation refers to routine of a taken-for-granted world to organize social situation as a foundation for socialization. This is asserted by Halliday who says that a speaker has selected which linguistic forms to be used to interpret meaning. This in turn creates the structure of reality. Besides, both communicators have realized forms and meanings of language in the level of phones, lexical and discourse in ordinary conversation as part of the process of taking on particular social roles as ways of enacting social processes that are functional (Halliday in Poynton 1989:14). When it comes to using discourse, communicators are able to implement various genres to serve their communication goals. Those genres are recount, exposition, narrative, argument, and many others and the combination of them. In teaching, for example, a teacher may implement narrative or descriptive genres to explain objects, persons, and events. A student could apply genres of recount and argument to answer questions and do the assignment. *Third*, the existence of specific grammatical categories as language characteristics. A society may have a complete term for a particular concept. The way of regarding gender and race because of biological factor is a reality in society providing that the differences are natural, common, and inevitable. The feminists regard the issue the mechanism of justifying power of male gender over the other gender that is female (Wearing, 1984). Further, this opposition of characteristics requires that one gender is more admitted and recognized than the other. Western Capitalistic

society supports this tendency, stating that it is true that men's characteristics as logical, competent, active, and resourceful are the basic characters to conquer nature and human beings. As a result, people belonging to society in which society cherishes gender ideology will trust this false ideology.

The following is how words or language precedes concepts. Cameron states that people's linguistic habits often perpetuate ideas about things which are no longer embodied in law, but which continue to have covert significance in the culture. And people's attitudes and assumptions cause the deep-rootedness of sexism (Cameron 1985: 16). The relation among language, thoughts, and reality explains linguistic practices to reinforce and naturalize sexist divisions in society in the following ways: (1) Sexism in language is inherent in the system of language. This system is intrinsically biased. Communicators actively construct the inequality existed between men and women. (2) Sexism is encoded into language and used either consciously or unconsciously.

WESTERN SOCIETY'S GENDER IDEOLOGY AND ITS IMPLICATION.

Western society is organized in terms of patriarchal order. This is a behavioural system in which men simply have power over women. Patriarchal is endemic to all types of social interactions and organizations (Simpson 1993: 161). The term 'Androcentrism' appears to describe a male centered world view, wherein male activities are evaluated positively and female activities negatively. Usages of language attributed to men are regarded more favourably than those attributed to women (Coates, 1986: 15). For example, in the eighteenth century, when language change was taking place in the forms of new language constructions, women

were blamed for this happening. By the turn of the twentieth century when linguistic change was inevitable and started to attract scholars to study, men were not to blame, on the contrary, recognized as chief language innovators. This explains that Androcentric rule states that men's linguistic behaviour fits the view of what is admirable or desirable, while women are blamed for being reprehensible.

It is generally true, that men have constructed supremacy of social position to oppress and exclude women by a straightforward act of linguistic appropriation (Spender, 1980: 19). It has been the dominant group, in this case males who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism as its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest. The chain reasoning to connect this type of linguistic domination and the existence of the patriarchal order is shown as follows.

(1) Men made language
(2) Language controls reality
(3) Men control reality
(4) Men control women

Many everyday words reflect *trapped* expressions because their meanings have been fixed by men. For example, the word *frigidity* has become codified in dictionaries as failing to become sexually aroused. However, this negative evaluation is not carried over into the male equivalent *impotence* which Spender argues is defined as not failure but an inability to become aroused. Thus, this can be concluded that women *fail* where men through no fault of their own are simply *unable.* Spender sees it as asymmetric and calls for reinvention and rejuvenation of the English language. In this way, sexism in language can be tackled head on (Spender, 1980: 20). This strictly determinist approach to sexism in language is problematic to tackle, just like Paul Simpson's statement that tries to remove sexual bias from society by altering the lexicon is like trying to cure a patient of measles by painting over their spots (Simpson, 1993: 167). This pessimistic point of view proves that sexist language has been used for as long as people live. Accordingly, it is impossible to be reformulated into a more gender-free in nature.

Gender discrimination as the effect of western society's gender ideology is prevalent in almost all countries in the world. Its practices can be recorded through various media orally, visually and in written forms. In identifying subjects, separate terms are sometimes used for the same job title. One term is supposed to indicate greater ability or skills. The term that is supposed to indicate greater ability of skills is often referred to males while the lesser terms are used for women. Fasold (1999:111) provides the example as follows: *Each bicyclist must dismount and walk his bicycle across the intersection,* where it is not known and it does not matter whether any particular bicyclist is female or male.

Language in a newspaper can influence people's way of using language. People tend to use words that often appear in newspaper for the reason of practicality, efficiency, and fame. Newspaper is to lead and give examples of using accepted language (Cameron, 1985:101). The effect of newspaper on the change and development of language is clear that journalism could not have arisen without a manifested need for it and a growing appreciation for the language. Lindstrom (1956:51) shows the practice of stereotype in using a word or diction. The term *turncoat* was the only word by which it was journalistically permissible to refer to American soldiers who had *gone Communist* and in which they must state publicly about their disconnection to American citizenship.

The research on the use of biased words in the *Jakarta Post* issued in October 2001 shows

that there were eleven words of that kind in the form of pronoun. From those eleven pronouns, ten pronouns show man's pronouns and just one pronoun shows woman's pronoun. The two examples are as follows: 'We did not ask for *his* name.'; '*The chairman* of the Indonesian Muslim *Brotherhood'.* In addition, there are forty four words of noun which show man's nouns and only four nouns of woman's nouns. The two examples are: 'In Pakistan *tribesmen* waving Taliban flags.' ; 'The *spokesman* insisted that the Taliban remained united'. Those male-gender language use clearly explains the newspaper's support to man's domination (Anggraini, 2002: 29).

As with the concept of man's language in advertisement, Cameron states that the extract of advertizing *booster showers* appeared in an edition of the magazine *Exchange Contract* shows the subject position is constructed as that of a married male, and that the magazine targets are potential house buyers, as one who has financial means and responsibility for decision making. Women as a group occupy, by contrast, only an oblique relationship to the text and moreover only a sexual relationship to men (Simpson, 1993:175).

The phrase *your wife* constructs a subject position to be occupied by a married man, one who, moreover, needs *a little excitement.* The specific target of a notional bread winning head of the family shows the husband's connection to the plumber who fixes the shower. The advertisement as arranged in a columnar format against a background of squares resembling bathroom tiles is read as follows:

GIVE
YOUR
WIFE
A HARD
TIME

IN THE
BATHROOM
Turn on a little excitement. Choose your shower pressure. The Stuart monsoon booster makes it easy. Show this advertisement to your plumber. He will know just what you are after. The advertising language shows sexism that the subject being focussed is a married man. The question arises whether or not sexism language can be denaturalized. People need to replace determinism with a more functional view of language. It may be that the angle of telling adopted in a text represents the world in a sexist way. Linguistic analysis can unpack the angle of telling and the representation which it produces, thereby, denaturalizing these types of discourse. One attacks the discourses primarily by becoming aware of them and by developing rival discourses or ways of representing that people will eventually incorporate their own method of dealing with reality (Simpson, 1993:167).

The use of biased words or gender discriminatory words might be naturalized through six possible ways, as follows: *First,* using double plural pronouns to refer to someone, for example: *he/she; s/he; him/her. Second,* using plural pronouns, without changing the sentence meaning, for example: *they/them. Third,* using words such as: *human, person, humankind. humanity, human being, human race, people. Fourth,* using more inclusive words, for example: *chairperson, worker, adult sized. Fifth,* using neutral words, such as *assistant, officer, student. Sixth,* using similar words which are applicable for both sexes, for example: *artist, singer, student* (Anggraini, 2002:30).

THE REALITY OF LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF INDONESIAN MOSLEM FAMILY
In Indonesia where most people are Moslem, there is a well-known wise saying that is

supposed to reflect a family while at the same time to guide them: A happy family is a family which lives on the aspects of *sakinah*, *mawadah*, and *warahmah*.

In reality, however, the above terms if associated with the concept of happy family, have not been preserved fully. The language that is used to reveal and express reality does not fulfill the task. In reality, the terms do not show their true meanings. The question is: 'How can that be?' And the answer is: 'Because of the patriarchal type of Indonesian society'.

The society regards men to be the leaders or masters of the family. Accordingly, men could do things they feel like doing, despite the wife's agreement. *Sakinah* family means family that is harmonious, peaceful, and loving. This peaceful atmosphere exists in the expense of the wife's suffering. Wives work hard to meet the aspect of *sakinah* themselves as expected by the society. They create harmonious, peaceful, and loving family probably without the husband's involvement. The wives are the ones responsible for the *sakinah* family.

An ideal wife is a woman who is *sholihah,* the one who never disobeys her husband, who is patient, and submissive to her husband. The noble behaviours are conducted and performed for the sake of being *sholihah.* In spite of her husband's ignorance, a wife must be *sholihah,* amuses as well as entertains her husband and makes him happy and contented, that her husband assures her of going to Heaven. This implies that a wife's happiness is a gift of a husband.

The aspects of *mawadah* and *warahmah* mean mutual understanding, respect and appreciations between husband and wife. This brings the sense that a wife is not supposed to suffer, oppressed, and exploited. A wife who tolerates a husband's immoral conducts will not

help him, on the contrary, will put him down graded towards hell. It is a must that husband and wife need one another, that without the other, he or she is not complete.

The terms *sakinah, mawadah, warahmah* as language reality do not reflect the true meaning of the concept. Wives are offered happiness in Heaven for their wise conducts, being denied their fundamental rights granted by God the Almighty as individuals to obtain worldly satisfaction and happiness (Siti Nuriyah A. Wahid: 2008).

In relation to language that precedes concept, it is for the terms above, that *sakinah, mawadah, waramah* are noble values that should guide Indonesian Moslem families to live their life. Patriarchal society might get in the way of fulfilling the expected harmonious, peaceful, and loving families.

CONCLUSION
The *Determinist* linguists influenced by Whorfianism propose that language system creates the limits of people's understanding and perception of reality. Thus, sexist language creates a sexist world. In an attempt to counter the unequal and biased words, the alternative model relying more on words function is proposed. A functional model is the way of using a language which is conditioned by the functions it serves.

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