

Sexism in Language



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Sexism in Language

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This paper is dedicated to my parents who have always supported me and to my grandmother without whose blessings I wouldn't have been able to be where I am today.

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Abstract

This thesis aims at upholding the various forms of sexism that exist within languages. Over the years sexism has been weaved into the language system so subtly that people end up submitting to the sexist views without even realizing it. Many a time have people laughed at jokes that are sexist and used proverbs such as "A woman has the shape of an angel, the heart of a snake, and the brains of an ass." Considering a nurse to be only female and an astronaut to be male is something quite common. Even in discourse females interrupt less in conversations and often fail to gain the floor in a mixed sex conversation. Thus this thesis aims at upholding only the obvious that people usually fail to see. It tries to show the different levels at which sexism exists in the language system (Word, phrases and discourse)

1.0 Introduction

Women have come a long way from the days of being inferior and powerless. We have seen many women's movements take place in the past years which have helped change our views and their position in society. However, in the midst of all this change one thing remains quite constant: sexism in language. Languages slowly came into being a long time ago, so long that the origins of language are lost to the mists of time. Thus the question lies whether languages force us to unconsciously think along the lines of the old days. Are women discriminated in the domains of language?

"It is men who have made the world which women must inhabit, and if women are to begin to make their own world, it is necessary that they understand some of the ways in which such creation is accomplished. That means exploring the relationship of language and reality."
(Spender, 138)

Language is a system of symbols that we use to communicate with each other. It is a vehicle of ideas and reality that we have accepted and followed without much questioning. However these ideas have been shaped by the reality constructed by the dominant male group. Historically it is the men who have formed the structures, categories and the meanings. "Women have largely been excluded from the work of producing forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and realized" says Dorothy Smith, a Canadian sociologist who has had immense impacts on sociology and many other disciplines including women's studies. (Spender, 143) Women have been deprived of the means to participate in creating forms of thought relevant to express their own experience or to define and raise

social consciousness about their situation and concerns. They were excluded from the process of reforming language/ active language planning. In history, there have been several instances of man arguing not only for his superiority but that this superiority be reflected in the structure of language. Thomas Wilson, an English diplomat and judge, and a courtier at the court of Elizabeth I in 1553 insisted that the natural place of man was before woman and that it should be reflected in the structure of language. Thomas Wilson's audience was all male. They appreciated the logic and accepted it. (Spender, 147)

According to Joshua Poole, a scholarly grammarian, the male gender was the worthier gender and should thus take "pride of place". None of his male colleagues disputed it. (Spender, 147) In *Eighty Eight Grammatical Rules* by John Kirby, 1746, Rule Number Twenty One stated that the male gender was more comprehensive than the female gender. Mr. Kirby believed that it was legitimate to encode this personal belief in the structure of language for all to comply with. This rule Number Twenty One was handed down to a world of male grammarians who did not resent the centrality of men. (Spender, 148)

Based on Rule Number Twenty One many nineteenth century grammarians resented the use of the term *they* as a reference instead of *he* when the sex of the person is unknown. For example "Whoever wants to swim has to take their swimsuits along with them." Thus these male grammarians secured the 1850 Act of Parliament which legally stated that the masculine includes the feminine (thus enabling "he" to be written instead of "he or she"), unless expressly indicated otherwise. (Spender, 150) Thus, it can be said that

language is used to dominate or patronize. An in-depth analysis of language will clearly reveal these attitudes

1.1 Rationale of the Study

Sexism in Language is considered an important factor in various fields such as Sociolinguistics, feminism etc. Although a lot of empirical studies have been carried out in this field, most of the work has concentrated on English rather than other languages. In Bangladesh, research in this field is rare. One of the very works on this topic is a chapter in Rajib Humayun's book "Shomaj Bhasha Biggyan" However this chapter deals with sexism at the lexical level and not phrase and discourse. This thesis has tried and combined sexism at all three levels so that this might help people to become aware of the extent of sexism prevalent in languages and also provide scope for further research. The thesis has also attempted to draw examples from different languages (mostly English and Bangla) instead of limiting itself to English.

1.2 Limitations of the study

In contrast to the data that was available for English, the resources for Bangla were very limited. Thus the examples provided in English are far greater in number than those in Bangla. Time was also a constraint. The research was carried out within a specific period. It is also a small scale research. Thus the sample size for the different surveys conducted was also small. Hence it is difficult to generalize findings based on such a small scale study. A large scale research could have offered a clearer view of sexism in language and how people perceive it.

1.3 Methodology

This thesis was conducted in two methods. The first method is a Literature review. It is a body of text that aims to review the critical points of current knowledge on the topic of Sexism in Language. The books that I have reviewed are 'Man made Language' by Dale Spender, Feminist Stylistics by Sara Mills, American Proverbs about Women by Lois Kerschen, You Just Don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation by Deborah Tannen, Sociolinguistics by Roland Wardhaugh, and Methods of Rhetorical Criticism Edited by Bernard L. Brock, Robert L. Scott and James W. Chesebro.

The second method is an empirical analysis. Surveys were conducted on the topic of Alignment of male and female terms and Occupational Lexis.

Questionnaires were used to conduct the survey. Ten subjects were chosen randomly. All of the subjects are bilingual where their first language is Bangla and the second/ foreign language is English. The results have been presented in bar graphs.

2.0 Literature Review

Sexism terminologically can be defined as a set of attitudes and behaviors towards people that judge or belittle them on the basis of their gender. Sexism comes in many different forms, including blatant, covert, and subtle sexism (Benokraitis & Feagin, 1999). Blatant sexism is defined as obviously unequal and unfair treatment of women relative to men, whereas covert sexism is defined as unequal and unfair treatment of women that is recognized but purposefully hidden from view. In comparison to these two forms, subtle sexism represents unequal and unfair treatment of women that is not recognized by many people because it is perceived to be normative, and therefore does not appear unusual. (Swin)

Sexist language is an example of subtle sexism in that it consists of speech that reinforces and perpetuates gender stereotypes and status differences between women and men (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Crawford, 2001; Gay, 1997; Maass & Arcuri, 1996; McConnell & Fazio, 1996). (Swin)

According to David Spencer the edifice of male supremacy has been assembled in every aspect of language from its structure to its function of use. It is the male that has constructed language with little or no contribution from women. (Spender, 147)

A semantic rule which can be seen functional in the language is that of the male-as-norm. David Spencer says that while this rule operates people are required to classify the world on the premise that the standard or normal

human being is a male one and when there is but one standard, then those who are not of it are allocated to a category of deviation. Hence the status of the female is derived from that of the male. (Spender, 147)

Male pronouns serve as general terms that include both the male and female. The *brotherhood* of man includes women, but *sisterhood* does not include men. When Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence that "all men are created equal" and "governments are instituted among men deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed," he was not using *men* as a general term to include women. His use of the word *men* was precise at the time that women could not vote. (Kaufman, 10)

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, male pronouns were not used to refer to both males and females. The pronoun *they* was used to refer to people of either sex even if the referent was a singular noun, as shown by Lord Chesterfield's statement in 1759: "If a person us born of a gloomy temper...they cannot help it. By the eighteenth century, grammarians (males) created the rule designating the male pronouns as the general term, and it wasn't until the nineteenth century that the rule was applied widely, after the act of Parliament in Britain in 1850 sanctioned its use. (Spender, 150)

Language is not a transparent carrier of meanings, but it is a medium which imposes its own constraints on the meaning which is constructed. Language is seen very much as a social phenomenon. Critical linguists such as Hodge and Kress have shown that meaning does not simply reside in a text but is the

result of the process of negotiations and a set of relations between the social system within which the text is produced and consumed, the writer and the reader. They go on to show that this process of using language to define oneself can have effects on the language system as a whole and ultimately on the way that society is structured. (Mills, 9)

Language can reflect sexism in society. Language itself may not be sexist, but it can connote sexist attitudes. Words of a language are not intrinsically good¹ or bad but reflect individual or societal values. Hence the words people use to refer to certain individuals or groups reflect their individual nonlinguistic attitudes and may also reflect the culture and views of society. One speaker may use a word with positive connotations while another speaker may select a different word with negative connotations to refer to the same person. For example, the same individual may be referred to as a terrorist by one group and as a freedom fighter by another.

Another example of sexist views expressed through language is proverbs.

Lois Kerschen points out that proverbs in America have originated as a part of folklore¹. He adds that one of the functions of folklore is that of a propaganda, as folklore is the perpetuation of tradition. The stories, proverbs, and other forms are a legacy of the customs, beliefs, and practices of one generation to the next. If one wants to explore the historical image of women in oral tradition, proverbs are an ideal subject since while being brief; they are

¹ Folklore is an oral tradition and is the customs, beliefs and practices of a people and therefore an expression of its culture

perhaps the best indicators of attitudes and beliefs of any of the forms of folklore. (Kerschen, 2)

Noted folklore author Alan Dundes has provided the material for the following paraphrased list of American folklore characteristics concerning male-female images:

1. Boys are discussed first and discussed in terms strength and largeness
2. Girls are associated with sweet foodstuff, smallness, and a plaything nature.
3. Domestic servitude, as in homemaking and housekeeping is defined for women.
4. Women are passive.
5. Women are expected to marry. The penalty for not doing so is to be the butt of cruel sayings and games about old maids.
6. The female path is that of love, marriage, and childbearing, not in careers like doctors, lawyer, Indian chief.
7. The female path does not include running amuck in Cupid's garden.
Sex is a male prerogative maintained rigidly by a double standard.
Women are victims of a man's right to sex. Boys sow wild oats while "nice girls blush."
8. Women are told what they should do, which is act like women, and what they should not do, which is act like men; thus the negative reactions to "tomboys" and "whistling girls."

9. Males are procreatively independent. The female procreative role is usurped by Santa, the stork, the Easter bunny, and others, thus limiting female activity. (Kerschen, 2)

Cora Kaplan (1976) has pointed out that even though advantages would accrue to men in a patriarchal society if women were not permitted to use the reformed constructions of language at all, there would also be disadvantages, and the compromise- constructed by males – has been to allow women to express themselves, but only in male terms. In this way, women remain 'outsiders', borrowers of the language. This analysis is shared by many feminists, among them Sheila Rowbotham (1973) who has said that this borrowing restricts women 'by affirming their own dependence upon the words of the powerful', and male property rights to the language are reinforced rather than weakened by women's use of language. (Spender, 12)

There is a current feminist criticism which justly maintains that consciousness-raising does not remove males from the influential positions in society nor does it provide women with equitable wages. (Spender, 6) Too much emphasis in scrutinizing the language and discovering the sexism embedded in it gives rise to extreme political correctness. A deeper variant of these arguments involves the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the suggestion that our language shapes our thought processes and that in order to eliminate sexism we would do well to eliminate "sexist" forms from our language. Some people dismiss the effectiveness of such a suggestion, viewing 'non-sexist language'

as irrelevant window-dressing which merely hides sexist attitudes rather than changing them. (Spender, 6)

People may use sexist language for a variety of reasons. They may do so because it is traditional, it is ingrained in current written and spoken language and can be difficult to change, they lack knowledge about what constitutes sexist language, they do not believe that such language is sexist, or they are attempting to protect established social hierarchies. (Swin)

Sexist language is learned at an early age and can be considered a linguistic habit. Along with learning sexist language people, at an early age, learn how they should sound like when they talk. Any differences in verbal skills may be explained in great part through differences in upbringing. (Swin)

According to Deborah Tannen, some of the differences in way the male and female communicate can be explained by looking at how children are socialized in their early years. She explains that boys and girls at an early age, tend to socialize with people of the same sex and each group has a different approach to certain things. Girls tend to form more closely knit relationships by talking about intimate things that they would not be able to share with any one else. They look for comfort and support from each other in these relationships that are meant to be kept for a lifetime. On the other hand, Tannen points out that boys' relationships with one another are different. Boys tend to show off their ego much more than girls and try to stand out in the group that they belong to. (Tannen, 18)

Girls are rewarded very early for behaving politely and putting the needs of others before their own, but are told off more than little boys for rough behavior. Little boys, on the other hand, are praised for being 'active' and 'spirited.' Linda Thomas and Shan Wareing assert that these gendered socialization patterns are not neutral : they still prepare women for being less socially powerful than men. (Tannen, 18)

Ronald Wardhaugh points out that in cross-sex conversation men interrupt more, challenge , dispute, and ignore more, try to control what topics are discussed, and are inclined to make categorical statements. Such behaviors are not characteristic of women in conversations that involve both men and women. (Wardhaugh, 317) In other words, in their interactional patterns in conversation, men and women seem often to exhibit the power relationship that exists in society, with men dominant and women subservient.

"Men have more power and may be more assertive; women tend to be kept 'in their place' but aspire quite often to a different and 'better' place. Women therefore appear to be more conscious of uses of language which they associate with their 'betters' in society, that is, those they regard as being socially superior. (Wardhaugh, 321)

Trudgill explains (pp. 182-3) that women may be more status-conscious because they are less secure and have less well developed social networks than men. Their social position is usually inferior to men and they are usually

subordinate to them. Men are also judged by what they do, whereas women are rated on how they appear, and an important part of that appearance is their speech. Women have a much greater need to use language to signal their social status than do men. Another important factor in their differential usage is that working-class speech has connotations of 'masculinity' and women often want to dissociate themselves from it for that reason, preferring speech types which are regarded as more refined. (Wardhaugh, 206)

Trudgill (1972), in one of his studies in Norwich, England, found that the distribution of the variants of the (ng) variable showed that there were very marked differences between the usage of working-class males and working-class females: males favored the [n] variant i.e., pronunciations such as *singin'* rather than *singing*) much more than did females. He found similar results with other variables, with women showing much stronger preferences for standard forms than men.

Cheshire's (1978) finding in Reading, England, shows that lower-class boys use more nonstandard syntax than lower-class girls.

Studies focused on sex differences have already come under attack by a number of scholars. Criticism centers on the labeling process whereby women's language and communication behaviors are found to be deviant or deficient. (Spitzack and Carter, 413) As Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae, and Nancy Henley suggest, gender scholars are now beginning to realize that early reliance on the findings of influential male linguists such as Jespersen is

problematic because, in the very questions asked about sex differences, female deficiency is already presumed:

Do women have a more limited vocabulary than men do, or do they use more- or different- adjectives and adverbs? Are women more apt to leave their sentences unfinished? Do they enunciate more properly? Do they use lots of “superficial” words? Are their sentences longer or shorter, than men’s? Do they use more questioning, or uncertain notation?

Arguably, not all of these questions suggest female inferiority, but in each case, male speech is the standard against which female or “other” speech is judged. The female difference is viewed as a handicap when compared to a standard that finds deviation in all that is non-standard male usage. In Robin Lakoff’s work, women are found to lack authority and seriousness in speaking, hence reducing their effectiveness. Here women’s speech is ineffective because it is laden with weak expletives, trivializing particles, intensifiers and polite forms, tag questions, and hedges; in short, Lackoff finds women’s language behavior to be tentative, uncertain, and indecisive. (Spitzack and Carter, 413) Dale Spender criticizes Lakoff’s work by noting that the observations made, like those in Jespersen’s work, are grounded in an implicit acceptance of masculine speech as the norm:

Lackoff accepts that men’s language is superior and she assumes that this is a feature of their linguistic performance and not of their sex... She takes male language as the norm and measures women against it, and the outcome of this procedure is to classify any difference on the

part of women as “deviation.” Given these practices, it is unlikely that Lakoff could have arrived at positive findings for women, for any differences revealed, whether a product of language or of sex, would be predisposed to interpretation as yet more evidence of female deficiency (Spender, 8)

As Lakoff's work exemplifies, if women's speech is thought to be deficient, it will appear deficient since she presumes that women speak differently, not that women and men speak differently. (Spitzack and Carter, 414)

A very widely debated issue in gender and discourse is gendered discourse as a constraint. This conception of 'gendered discourse as a constraint' accounts for the stubborn reality that if women and men do not speak in ways associated with their sex, they are likely to be perceived as speaking and behaving like the other sex- and hence are negatively evaluated. This is demonstrated at length by Tannen (1994) for women and men in positions of authority in the workplace. Tannen found pervasive evidence for what Lakoff had earlier identified as a double bind: women who conformed to expectations of femininity were seen as lacking in competence or confidence, but women who conformed to expectations of people in authority were seen as lacking in femininity- as too aggressive. (Tannen, 18)

Bergvall (1996) similarly demonstrates that, in a number of small group discussions at a technological university, a female student displays linguistic behaviors in some ways associated with stereotypically “masculine” speech (“assertively”) and in other ways considered feminine (“cooperative, affiliative,

instrumental"). However her "assertive and active engagement" was negatively assessed by her peers in the class, "both orally and through written evaluations." Bergvall concludes that, when this woman "fails to enact the traditional supportive feminine role, she is negatively sanctioned and is silenced by the gender-normative activities of the class" (1996: 186

3.0Analysing Sexism at Various Linguistic Levels

Sexism exists at various Linguistic levels. The levels that this paper will concentrate on are morphological level, phrasal level, semantic level and the level of discourse. Under the morphological level is inflection which concentrates on how a feminine word in a pair is formed by adding an affix to the masculine base word. Then comes the generic terms where it is shown how male terms are used neutrally. Under alignment of male and female terms it is shown how the male term always comes before the female term. Occupational Lexis delves in the denotation linked with given occupations. Sexism and naming looks at how women are addressed through names and titles.

The next level that this paper concentrates on is the phrasal level. Under this topic different types of metaphors, similes and proverbs will be analyzed.

Sexism at the semantic level looks at how many pairs of terms differentiated by sex alone have over time gained different connotations.

Sexism at the level of discourse focuses on how men and women speech vary and for what possible reasons.

3.1 Sexism at the morphological/lexical level

3.1.1 Inflection/affixation

A close look at the internal structure of words will reveal that many pairs of words with masculine and feminine forms reflect a view of women as the deviant or subordinate group. In nearly all such pairs, the masculine word is considered the base, with some kind of a feminine word or affix being added.

In English there are about 200 or more such pairs, a few examples being heir - heiress, hero - heroine, steward - stewardess, usher - usherette, lion - lioness, prince - princess, actor - actress. Certainly, it is not difficult to see how the attachment of the feminine suffixes '-ess' and '-ette' to *prince* and *usher* respectively to form feminine words indicates the significance of the female only as an addition to the male. The male form is the unmarked form, and therefore, it is argued, implicitly the main form.

The masculine form is the one from which compounds are made, e.g., from king - queen comes kingdom but not queendom, from sportsman - sports lady comes sportsmanship but not sportsladyship.

In Bangla there is a wide of range of suffixes that are added to the male form to signal "female."

<i>Suffix</i>	<i>Pairs of masculine and feminine words</i>
আ	মূৰখ-মূৰখা, ব্ৰিদ্ধ-ব্ৰিদ্ধা, পাপিস্তহ-পাপিস্তহা
ঈ	ছাত্ৰ-ছাত্ৰী, কুমাৰ-কুমাৰিনী, শিষ্য-শিষ্যী, নৱতক-নৱতকী, নদ-নদী
আনী	থাকুত-থাকুৱানী, ছাকৰ-ছাকৰানী, মেথৰ-মেথৰানী
ইনী	নাগ-নাগিনী, বাঘ-বাঘিনী, অভাগ-অভাগিনী, শল্লাশ-শল্লাশিন
নী	কামাৰ-কামাৰিনী, জেলে-জেলেণী, হস্তি-হস্তিনী
ন	নাতি-নাতিন, থাকুৰ-থাকুৱন
আইন	বেয়াই-বেয়াইন, হুজুৰ-হুজুৱাইন
ত-ত্ৰি	দাতা-দাত্ৰি, ধাতা-ধাত্ৰি, অভিনেতা-অভিনেত্ৰি

3.1.2 Generic terms

Generic structures provide further evidence to show the sexism encoded in the language. Words like "generic" *he* and *man* can be said to render women invisible. It promotes male imagery in everyday life at the expense of female imagery so that it seems reasonable to assume the world is male until proven otherwise. Even when a context is clearly specified as gender-neutral (e.g. describing a student in a co-educational institution), male terms used "neutrally" induce people to think of males.

Words such as chairman, salesman, and mankind are just a few examples. It is amazing to see how even sociolinguists were insensitive to its use until recently.

Here is an example produced by William Labov, an American linguist, widely regarded as the founder of the discipline of variationist sociolinguistics:

We must somehow become witness to the everyday speech which the informant will use as soon as the door is closed behind us: the style in which *he* argues with *his* wife, scolds *his* children, or passes the time of day with *his* friends. (Labov, 99, quoted in Graddol and Swann, 109)

The sexist terms can very easily be avoided, as follows.

We must somehow become witness to the everyday speech which the informant will use as soon as the door is closed behind us: the style in

which *the person* argues with *their spouse*, scolds *their* or *his/her* children, or passes the time of day with *their* friends.

Here is a list of sexist terms and how they may be avoided

<i>To be avoided</i>	<i>To be preferred</i>
Mankind	Humanity, human beings, human race, people, humankind, humans
Man's achievements	Human achievements, our achievements
The best man for the job	The best person (or candidate) for the job
Man-made	artificial, manufactured, constructed
Manpower	Workers, workforce, staff, labor, human resources
Man	People, humankind, men and women, women and men, individuals, human beings, person, the individual
Man the desk	Staff the desk, be at the desk
Chairman	Chairperson, chair
Headmaster	Headteacher, head
Policeman, fireman	Police officer, fire fighter

Even in religion we see the use of the male pronoun to refer to God. *I love god and he loves me*. However, in Bangla, gender neutral pronouns like *সে*, and *তিনি*, exist, as do words like *মানুষ*, an inclusive term unlike the English man or mankind.

However Bangla is not void of the so called generic terms. Words like ছেলেধরা, ছেলেবেলা, ছেলেখেলা, ছেলেমানুশি, and প্রথম পুরুষ, দ্বিতীয় পুরুষ and তৃতীয় পুরুষ exist.

3.1.3 Alignment of male and female terms

The belief that males come first in the natural order can be seen in the alignment of male and female terms. This can be seen both in English and Bangla, where the male term comes before the female term. Mr. and Mrs., boys and girls, brother and sister, father and mother husband and wife are just a few of the many examples in English.

The only time, however, the female comes before the male is in situations regarding marriage and sex, e.g. bride and groom, prostitute and male prostitute. Another example is ladies and gentlemen.

Examples in Bangla are ছাত্র-ছাত্রি, ছেলে-মেয়ে, দাদা-দাদি, ভাই-বন, রাজা-রানি, শামি-স্ত্রি, নাতি-নান্নি etc.

--- See Appendix A for EXPERIMENT ---

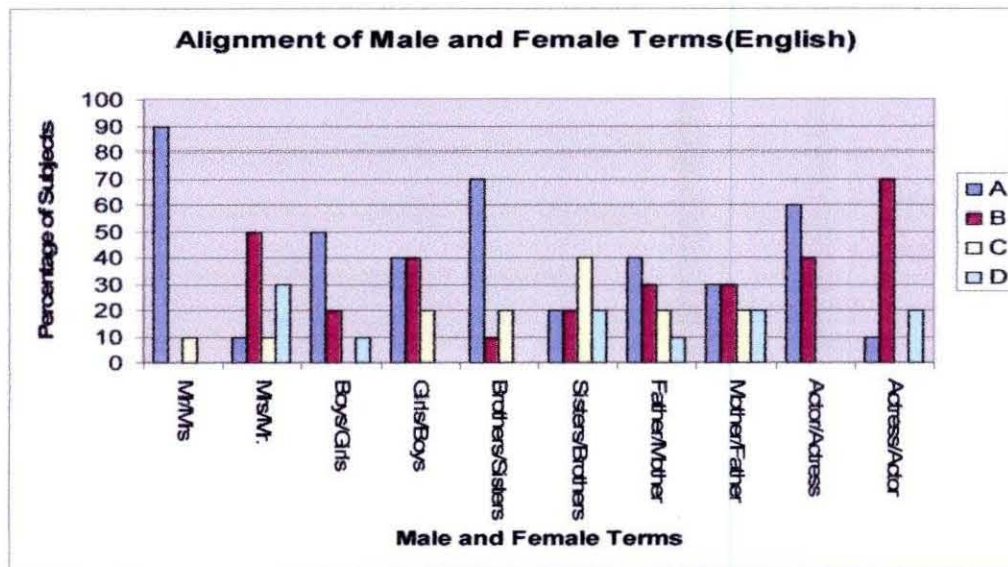
A survey was conducted to check the concept of alignment of male and female terms in people. The subjects were given a set of grammatically correct Bangla and English sentences in which the order of the male and female terms was altered. Then they were asked to rate the sentences with
A= The sentence is absolutely fine B= Something is strange C= Not sure or
D= The sentence is definitely wrong

Hypothesis: The male term is always placed before the female and is the natural way of doing so.

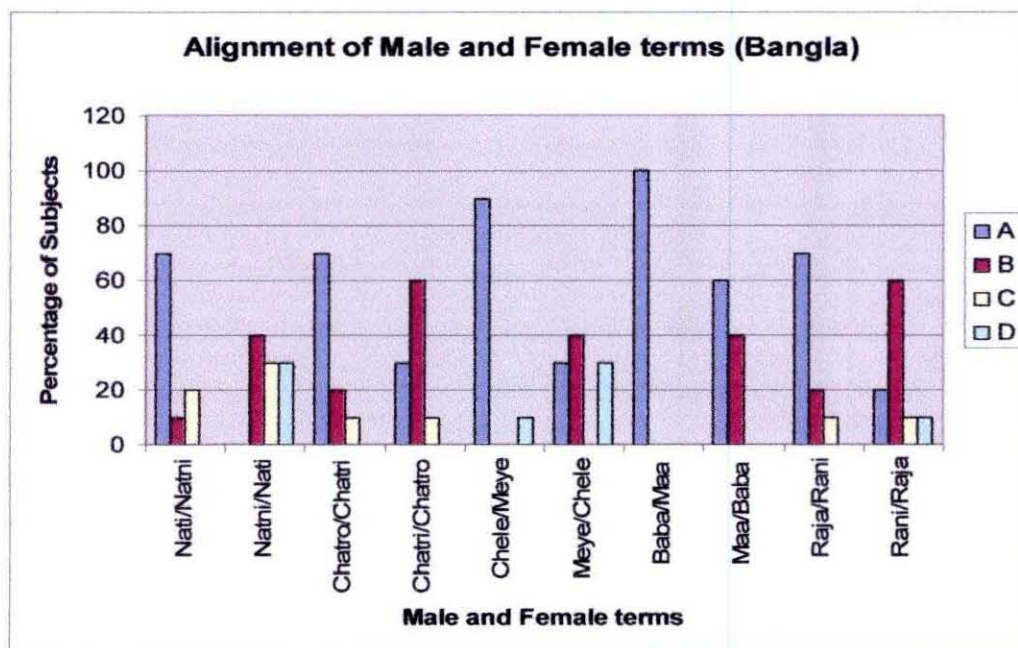
Number of subjects: Ten (Bilingual)

Method used: Questionnaire

Method used: Questionnaire



From this bar chart it can be said that every time the usual order of male before female was reversed the percentage of A fell drastically and that of B,C and D increased. For example in Sisters/ Brothers the percentage of A dropped by 50 percent and that of C and D increased by 20 percent each.



মহিলা - বাক

The same can be said for Bangla male and female terms. For ☐☐-☐☐☐☐

not only did the percentage of A drop from a 100 percent to 60 percent, 40 percent of the people rated it with a B.

This shows that people do consider the natural order of alignment of male and female terms to be male before female.

3.1.4 Occupational Lexis

There are many nouns that denote workers in a given occupation. People assume someone's gender because of its association with that word. In some cases they may seem gender-neutral like teacher and social-worker, but others like doctor, nurse, and astronaut may have gender neutral denotation but no gender neutral connotation. This will be reflected in forms such as ☐☐☐☐☐ ☐☐☐☐☐☐☐ and male nurse.

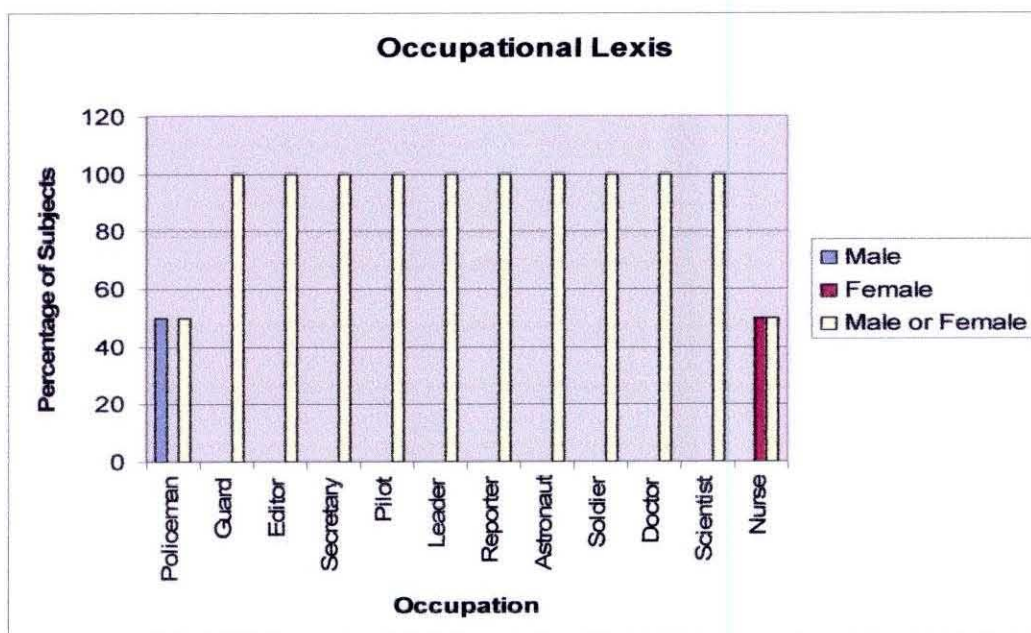
— See Appendix B for EXPERIMENT —

A survey was conducted to check whether people are aware that certain terms like nurse, astronaut, policeman, ^{কবি, কবিরাজ} ☐☐☐, ☐☐☐☐☐☐ etc are for both male and female i.e. have gender neutral denotation.

Hypothesis: People are aware of the gender neutral denotations.

Number of Subjects: Ten (Bilingual)

Method: Questionnaire



From the bar graph it can be said that except for nurse and policeman, people are aware that words like guard, pilot, secretary etc are used to refer to both male and female.

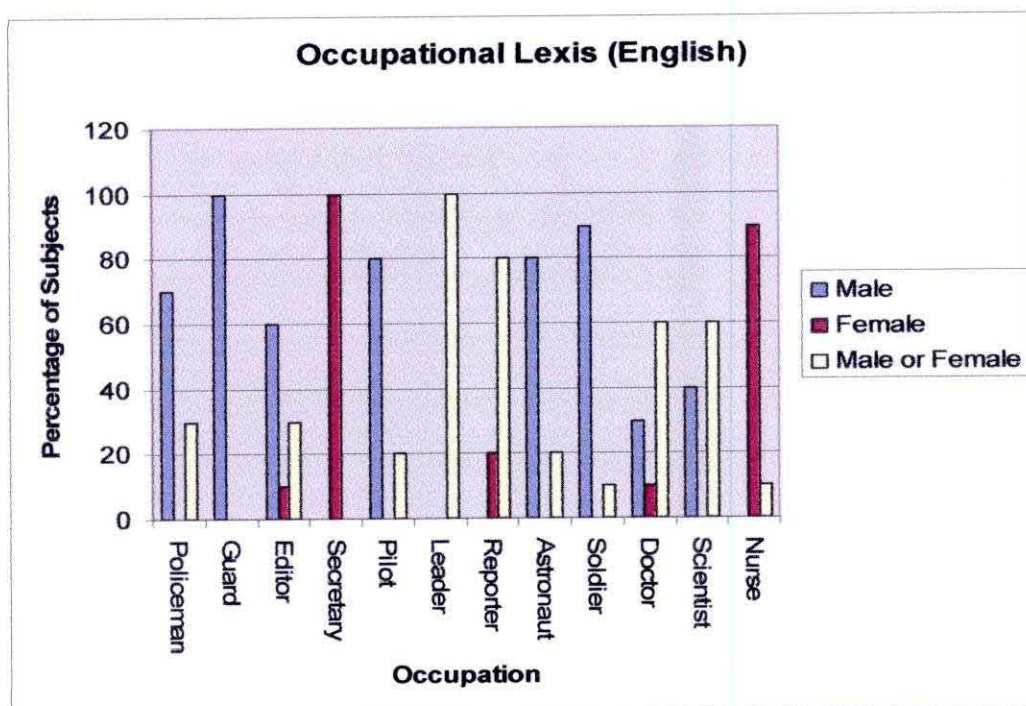
Another survey was conducted following the previous one where the connotations of such words were tested. An interview was carried out where the bilingual subjects were asked to point out the gender of the image they visualize upon hearing the specific words: Policeman, guard, secretary, pilot, leader, reporter, astronaut, soldier, doctor, scientist, nurse, কবি, কবিরাজ, ডাক্তার, শিক্ষক, মুক্তিযোদ্ধা.

Hypothesis: Despite being aware of the gender neutral denotation of certain words, people apply the gender biased connotations.

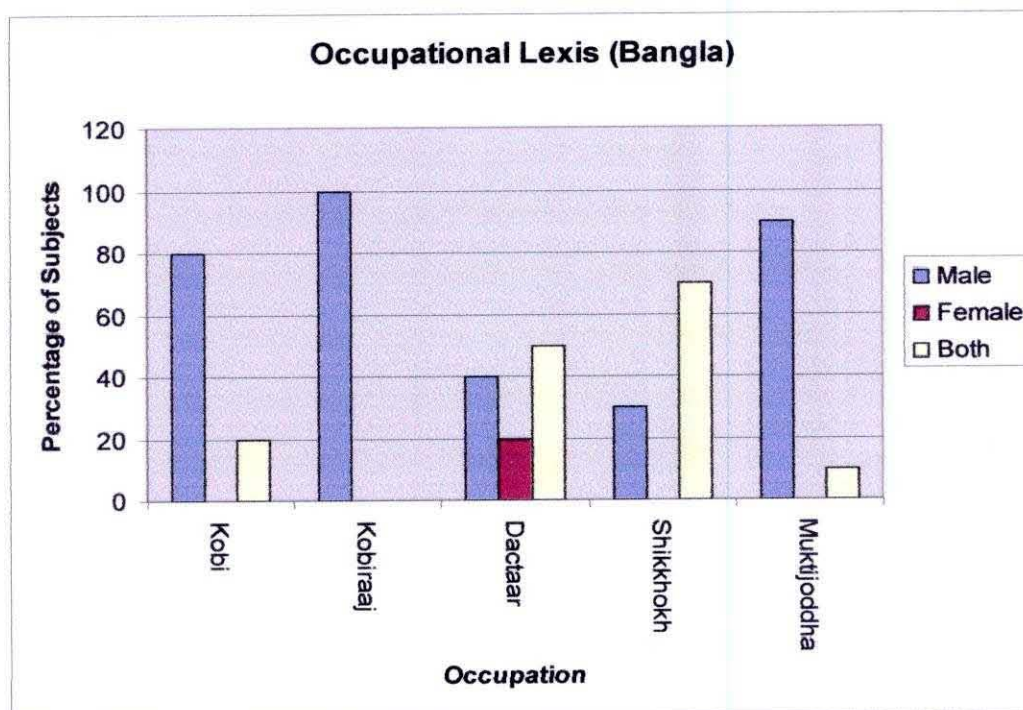
Number of Subjects: Ten (Bilingual)

Method: Questionnaire

When asked to visualize, the perception of people changed radically. Previously people had agreed that the words mentioned above are used to refer to both men and women but this time the scenario was quite different. Occupations like secretary and nurse were dominantly female whereas guards, pilots, astronauts, policemen, soldiers were mostly male. There were a few exceptions such as doctor, scientist, reporter and leader.



In case of Bangla the results were almost similar



Gender neutral terms like কবি, কবিরাজ, ডাক্তার, শিক্ষক, মুক্তিযুদ্ধা were predominantly visualized as male.

3.1.5 Sexism and Naming

Married women resent being identified only under their husband's names. Etiquette books used to teach that if a woman had Mrs. in front of her name, then the husband's name should follow because Mrs. is an abbreviated form of Mistress and a woman couldn't be a mistress of herself. However this isn't very logical because Miss is also an abbreviation of Mistress. Feminists hoped to simplify matters by introducing Ms. as an alternative to both Mrs. and Miss.

In some European countries women are known by their father's name rather than that of their husband- for example Anna Karenina in Russia or Sveinbjorg Sigurdardittir in Iceland. Is it a better convention than taking up the husband's name or merely a different kind of sexism?

Currently many women are changing their names and instead of taking the name of either their father or their husband they are coining new, autonomous names for themselves; for example, Cheris Kramer has become Cheris Kramarae, Julia Stanley has become Julia Penelope- there are almost countless examples of this change. A common practice has become That of taking the first name of a close female friend or relative – such as mother- as the new family name (for example, Elizabeth Saarah, Janet Robyn)

In Bangla, girls are given names without any last names. They are names such as Fatema Akhter, Ummeh Kulsum etc.

3.2 Sexism at the phrasal level

3.2.1 Metaphors and Similes

Women are passive and Men are active. The metaphors available to describe women include an astonishing high number of derogatory images compared to those available for men.

Animal Imagery

In the English language, males *roar*, *growl*, or *bellow* whereas females *squeal*, *shriek* or *purr*. Animal metaphors also illustrate the different expectations for males and females. Men are referred to as studs, bucks, and wolves while women are referred to with such metaphors as kitten, bunny, beaver, bird, chick, and lamb. Some animal metaphors that are used predominantly with men have negative connotations based on the size and/or strength of the animals, e.g., beast, bullheaded, jackass, rat, loan shark, and vulture. Negative metaphors used with women are based on smaller animals, e.g., social butterfly, mousy, catty, and vixen. The feminine terms connote action, but not the same kind of large scale action as with the masculine terms. Other terms that show how we view old women more negatively than young women are: old nag vs. filly, old crow or old bat vs. bird, and being catty vs. being kittenish. There are no matching metaphors for men.

The chicken metaphor tells the whole story of a woman's life. In her youth she is a chick. Then she marries and begins feathering her nest. Soon she begins feeling cooped up, so she goes to hen parties where she cackles with her friends. Then she has her brood, begins to henpeck her husband, and finally turns into an old biddy.

Unlike English I didn't find too many animal imageries discriminating against women in Bangla, and a significant number of the imageries are neutral referring to both men and women such as শিয়াল (cunning), গাধা-গাধি (where both the terms are disapproving in terms of intelligence), কুত্তা (a slang).

The only form of sexism is revealed through certain metaphors where women are specifically associated with small animals lacking strength, such as small birds. Men are associated with animals with strength such as বাঘ (courageous).

Food Metaphors

Another example of passive and active is in relation to the differences in food metaphors. Food, of course, is a passive substance just waiting to be eaten. Thus, names like peach, cookie, a dish, sugar, or sweetie-pie were often used as nicknames for woman. In Bangla saccharine terms such as মিশটি are used for females.

Miscellaneous/ Other Metaphors

Bangla is a language where a lot of emphasis is placed on the facial features of a woman. This can be seen encoded in the Bangla language through similes. There are several similes comparing the facial features of a woman to non-human things. For example: আপেলের মত গাল, বাশির মত নাক, মুলার মত দাত, হরিনের মত চোখ. A lot of emphasis is also put on a woman's voice, e.g. মধুর মত. This exposes reality and thought. When a man is asked to describe his ideal woman, he describes her with such similes. There is little to no reference to her intelligence. Such similes do not exist for men.

3.2.2 Marriage and Language

The grammar used in talking or writing about weddings shows the expectation of men playing the active role. Men wed women while women become brides of men. In the traditional ceremony, the official asks, "Who gives the bride away?" and the father answers, "I do." Some fathers answer, "Her mother and I do," but that doesn't solve the problem inherent in the question. The idea that a bride is something to be handed over from one man to another bothers people because it goes back to the days when a man's servants, his children, and his wife were all considered to be his property. They were known by his name because they belonged to him, and he was responsible for their actions and their debts.

In Bengali there exists a similar situation. When talking about the wedding to be held of a man we say "মানিক বিয়ে করেছে" and in the case of a woman we say "তার বিয়ে হয়েছে" When a man is going to get married he says "বিয়ে করব" and a woman says "বিয়ে বশব" The man plays the active role.

3.2.3 PROVERBS

Human beings all around the world, despite being different from each other, have a lot in common. Some observations written down on Sumerian clay tablets about 4,000 years ago have ideas in common with later Greek or Latin, Sanskrit or Chinese reflections, or with African or Asian or South American ideas orally transmitted even today-in spite of local cultural differences, and the historical changes which of course, also exist.

Apart from the formal records of culture that compose the heritage of people, folklore reveals the common life of the human mind. Folklore or “voice of the folk” is an oral tradition in sounds, stories, myths, legends, riddles, rhymes, jokes, games, sayings, proverbs but it is also dances, crafts etc. It is the beliefs, customs and practices of people and thus an expression of its culture. Until recent times, the study of folklore has prominently excluded women. Perhaps this is due to male folklorists who carry chauvinistic viewpoint or the more pervasive bias of a male-dominated world; women have been rendered invisible in the picture of civilization’s progress. Exploring male chauvinism in most folklore is a usually a long process however this becomes easy with the study of proverbs. The nature of proverbs is such that, while they are brief, they are perhaps the best indicators of attitudes and beliefs of any of the other forms. Therefore if one wants to explore the historical image of women in oral tradition, proverbs are an ideal subject.

There is generally a matter of rhyme and meter to consider and a binary structure. Usually proverbs contain humor, but that humor, particularly for

women is satirical, bitter and even macabre. Proverbs about women tend to reflect the old habit of setting 'us' against 'them', not in terms of culture but in terms of sexual embodiment.

Since proverbs are a good indicator of attitudes and beliefs, they are used by modern psychologists as part of their diagnostic testing material. Proverbs have been used to test for personality traits, attitude, schizophrenia, depression, cerebral disease, abstracting function and cognition.

Proverbs are used by people on an everyday basis. They are expressions that can handle any situation with ease. When someone needs to make a comparison or prove a point, they will find themselves using proverbs time and time again. Folklore is accepted without thought, just as any other propaganda. Proverbs slip into our subconscious and program our thinking without us knowing the source. There are so many matters of faith or status quo that one accepts without questioning and simply accepting that that is just the way it is. After all, how many times can one hear "Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned" before one believes that women truly are vicious and vindictive?

According to anthropologists and sociologists, proverbs can be seen as a tool of the patriarchy established at the beginning of humanity when the caveman's physical prowess, essential to the survival as a hunter and protector, caused him to think that he was superior to the cavewoman. Through the centuries this male dominance has been coded into law from the

Bible to the Napoleonic Code. As a part of the process, the proverb has been used to translate this biased law into lay terms. (Kerschen, 5)

There are proverbs about women referring to and defining the ideal shape and significance of almost every part of her body ranging from the head to the foot.

Women and candle, twist their necks if you want them at their best. (Spanish) (Schipper, 39)

Beauty you have got, my daughter, and intelligence I will buy for you (Ladino, Morocco) (Schipper, 40)

A woman has the shape of an angel, the heart of a snake, and the brains of an ass. (German) (Schipper, 40)

A house's beauty is in (the use of) water and a broom; a girl's, in her eyes and eyebrows. (Persian) (Schipper, 43)

If it is the beauty of her lips, it is beauty of her sex. (Bisa) (Schipper, 46)

The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world. (English) (Schipper, 46)

The handsome finger gets the ring (Swahili) (Schipper, 52)

A hairy man's rich, a hairy wife's a bitch' (English) (Schipper, 56)

A timid heart will not see a white breast. (Kurdish) (Schipper, 59)

Love for a girl lies below the navel. (Rwanda) (Schipper, 60)

A woman is like the merino sheep- she is judged by her backside. (Sotho, Lesotho/ South Africa) (Schipper, 63)

Look for someone who has short feet, because one who has long feet is your fellow-male. (Malawi) (Schipper, 66)

There's not a pretty girl without fault, nor an ugly one without charm. (1963; Mexican) (Kerschen, 50)

A woman's hair is her crowning glory. (1948; New York) (Kerschen, 50)

There are many proverbs that define the characteristics of a woman. Proverbs provide a long list of characteristics for women: They are slow, gentle, bashful, never satisfied, vivacious, affectionate, curious, pale, mysterious, stubborn etc.

There are two kinds of women: those who take what you are and those who take what you have. (New Jersey, North California) (Kerschen, 35)

A woman is the greatest contradiction of all (Illinois) (Kerschen, 35)

A woman's tears are a fountain of craft. (English; Pacific Northwest) (Kerschen, 34)

Woman is woe to man. (Kerschen, 33)

Maids want nothing but husbands, and then they want everything. (Kerschen, 33)

An opinion formed by a woman is inflexible; the fact is not half so stubborn. (Kerschen, 39)

Every woman is wrong until she cries, and then she is right instantly. (Kerschen, 34)

There are many other proverbs about women under different categories. One such category is 'Widows.' As many marriages were made for economic reasons, spouses were often eagerly interested in holding on to what

contributed to the marriage (and preferably, also, to possess what the spouse had brought in.) As a consequence, premeditated murder (by husbands as well as by wives) for reasons of economic profit and inheritance seems to have occurred in Europe. Stories about such murders may have contributed to superstitious beliefs and stereotypical ideas about widows in other parts of the world. When a husband dies, his surviving wife is made suspect in proverbs from five continents:

Never marry a widow unless her [first] husband was hanged. (English, UK/USA) (Schipper, 120)

A woman who buries a husband does not mind burying another one. (French) (Schipper, 120)

The man who marries a widow should expect to suffer a few deaths in the family. (Spanish, Mexico) (Schipper, 120)

Every time a woman who was born in the watersnake year opens her mouth, a husband is swallowed. [Husbands of women born in the year of the water snake were believed to die prematurely]. (Tibetan) (Schipper, 120)

Avoid the woman who has it within her fate to destroy eight lives. [When she marries her husband will die.] (Chinese) (Schipper, 120)

You flirted with the widow, but do you know what killed her husband? [Warning not to marry a widow too quickly.] (Bassar, Togo) (Schipper, 120)

A widow is associated with the power of death, simply because death has visited her house and seized her husband. In proverbs no such observations about widowers exist, in spite of well-known cruel stories such as that of

Bluebeard, and hardly any concerning a widow's cheerfulness after the death of a husband. (Schipper, 120)

Another very common category among proverbs is mothers-in-Law versus Daughters-in-Law. As much as mothers are adorned and praised, mothers-in-law are detested in proverbs, and they do not like their daughters-in-law either. The situation is usually presented from the perspective of either the mother-in-law or the daughter-in-law. Everywhere, mothers-in-law are at the proverbial centre of negative in-law qualifications.

Who counts on his mother-in-law's soup, will go to sleep without dinner.

(Creole, Dominican Republic) (Schipper, 141)

Never rely on the glory of a morning or on the smiles of your mother-in-law.

(Japanese) (Schipper, 141)

The friendship of a mother-in-law is like dry weather in the wet season.

(Papiamentu) (Schipper, 141)

Friendship between mother-in-law and daughters-in-law only goes as deep as the teeth [of the smile]. (Portuguese, Brazil) (Schipper, 141)

The tail of a pike is always black; nowhere in the world will you find a good mother-in-law. (Bengali, Bangladesh) (Schipper, 141)

In proverbs, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law quarrel at the slightest provocation. Living together 'is like introducing a pestilence in the house' as a Thai proverb puts it.

In proverbs, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law quarrel at the slightest provocation. Living together 'is like introducing a pestilence in the house' as a Thai proverb puts it.

The daughter-in-law has taken the oath to love her mother-in-law on the day when charcoal turns white. (Arabic, Morocco) (Schipper, 142)

When will there be peace between daughter-in-law and mother-in-law? When a donkey climbs a ladder. (Hebrew) (Schipper, 142)

Where a hundred soldiers fit, a mother-in-law with her daughter-in-law doesn't. (Estonian) (Schipper, 142)

Women are most severely denounced in these proverbs; for instance, *ঝি জাব্দা*

শিলে, বউ জাব্দা কিলে / *jhi jabda shile, bau jabda kile* (teach your maid-servant

a lesson by giving her a tough tool to use and teach your daughter-in-law with your fist, meaning maid-servants should be given hard tasks and a daughter-

in-law a beating), *শাশুরি মালা শকালে, খেয়ে দেয়ে সময় থাকে তো কানব আমি*

বিকলে / *shashudi mala sakale, kheyeye deye samay thake to kandba ami bikale*

(my mother-in-law died in the morning and I'll try to weep over her if I have

time at the day's end, meaning indifference on the part of a wife to her

mother-in-law), *ননদিনি রায়বাঘিনি, দান্দিয়ে আছে কাল- শাপিনি* / *nanadini*

raybaghini, dandiye achhe kal-sapini (my husband's sister is like a tigress,

standing like a venomous snake, referring to the rivalry between the wife and

the husband's sister), *শশুরবারি মধুর হারি, তিন দিন পর ঝাতার বারি*

/shashurbadi madhur hadi, tin din par jhantar badi (a father-in-law's house is

most hospitable, but only for three days, meaning fish and visitors smell in

three days), দুই সতিনের ঘর, খোদাই রক্ষা কর। *dui satiner ghar, khoday raksa kar* (Only God can save the family of a man with co-wives), etc. (Banglapedia)

3.2.4 Humor and Jokes

The area of humor is complex, because it is not possible to locate sexism at the level of the individual words used. Most of the time sexism is expressed through the use of wit and playfulness. The sexist nature of sentiments expressed in the poem can be disguised through the use of wit and playfulness. Because the sexism may be disguised under the cover of humor, the reader may unwittingly participate in the perpetuation of the sexism embedded in the text when s/he laughs at the wit. Below is an example of a poem by John Donne.

"Hope not for mind in women ; at their best,
Sweetness and wit they are, but mummy, possess'd."

from *Loves Alchemy* (Mills, 105)

Here Donne is saying that there is no point in expecting to find intelligence in women. The best you can hope for is "Sweetness and wit" but once you've 'had them', they are merely dead shells.

If thou be'st born to strange sights,
Things invisible to see,
Ride ten thousand days and nights,
Till age snow white hairs on thee,
Thou, when thou return'st, wilt tell me,
All strange wonders that befell thee,
And swear,
No where

Lives a woman true and fair.

If thou find'st one, let me know,
 Such a pilgrimage were sweet;
 Yet do not, I would not go,
 Though at next door we might meet,
 Though she were true, when you met her,
 And last, till you write your letter,
 Yet she
 Will be
 False, ere I come, to two, or three.

from *Song (Go and catch a falling star)* (Mills, 105)

These lines suggest that there is no such thing as an attractive faithful woman. Faithful women are only faithful if they are ugly because then men won't want them. He then changes by saying that even if you could find an attractive faithful woman, by the time you have told someone, she will have been unfaithful with two or three men.

In the text by Ben Jonson, sexist statements are justified by critics because of the stylishness and cleverness of the poem.

Follow a shadow, it still flies you;
 Seem to fly it, it will pursue :
 So court a mistress, she denies you;

Let her alone, she will court you.

Say, are not women truly, then,

Styled but the shadows of us men?

At morn, at even, shades are longest;

At noon, they are or short, or none;

So men at weakest, they are strongest,

But grant us perfect, they're not known,

Say, are not women truly, then,

Styled but the shadows of us men? (Mills, 106)

Women are presented only in relation to men, either chasing them or fleeing them. A metaphorical link has been made between women and shadows.

Women do not have any violation of their own, but like shadows are 'tied' to men. The poem also shows that women gain stature only through the caring for men who are very young or very old; when men are at their prime (at noon) women are seen to be non-existent.

Jokes, like poems, also seem to function as a way of affirming sexist views within society without allowing for a challenge to be made to them.

A joke from a rag-mag circulated by students of Imperial College, London in 1990 states:

Frank comes out of a sex-change operation. A friend asks him: 'Was it painful, changing into a woman?' Frank replies: 'The only disturbing part was having a hole drilled into my head and half of my brain being scooped out.' (Mills, 108)

The jokes in this rag-mag seem to work by setting up an out-group; in this case it is women and their sexuality/stupidity.

Other examples are:

Why do women get married in white?

So they match the kitchen appliances!

Why don't women need driver's licenses?

There is no road between the bedroom and the kitchen.

Why haven't any women ever gone to the moon?

It doesn't need cleaning yet

Why do women live longer than men?

Because God adds them the time that they wasted on parking.

Why do women have smaller feet than men? So they stand closer to the kitchen sink.

The number of jokes where women are the object of the humor are in majority.

Freudians explain such jokes as a healthy mechanism for the release of repressed hostilities, a convenient catharsis beneficial to the joker.

Surprisingly (since they are therapists), they fail to consider the negative

psychological impacts on victims of such jokes. A study conducted by LaFrance and Woodzicka (1998) revealed that women are negatively affected by sexist jokes and that sexist humor creates a hostile work environment for them. Sexist jokes place women in the difficult position of having to choose whether to laugh in order to not offend colleagues and superiors, or to not laugh and be seen as humorless and uncollegial. (Kaufman, 10)

Humor is often associated with power; it is especially positive in dispelling fear. Reagan, the 40th president of the United States, gained access to a power he could not have achieved in any other way through his joke telling. It allowed him to take control from interrogators armed with far more information than he. Ronald Reagan's success is, indeed, one of the best illustrations of the power humor gives to those who know how to use it. Regan validated his position as a leader by this use of humor.

Because an established patriarchal culture recognizes that humor is empowering, it has sought to deny women, children, and other "inferior" groups the capacity for humor. It is often said that women do not have a sense of humor. Mainstream humor has created a rich palette of negative stereotypes as devices for maintaining and increasing a sense of inadequacy in an oppressed group. For men, sexist jokes against women help to maintain the gender domination prevalent in all domains of men's lives. There are many mother-in-law jokes (by contrast, there are no father-in-law jokes). Mother-in-law jokes cause women to bond with men against other women (the mother-in-law) and finally against themselves; for in patriarchal normative

society, every woman will become a mother-in-law- nagging, unattractive, unpleasant at best, and nasty at her usual worst. (Kaufman, 10)

Adam and Eve were the happiest and the luckiest couple in the world, because neither of them had a mother-in-law

Hello. Your mother-in-law fell into my pool with crocodiles. The crocodiles are yours, so you save them.

A pharmacist tells a customer: In order to buy arsenic you should need a legal prescription. A picture of your mother-in-law just isn't enough.

There are also many jokes about women and money: shopping jokes and jokes about women spending a lot of money, handing over the paycheck to the wife jokes, alimony jokes, and jokes about women as gold diggers all represent this form of humor.

A Man will pay \$2 for a \$1 item he needs

A Woman will pay \$1 for a \$2 item that she doesn't need.

A Woman worries about the future until she gets a husband

A man never worries about the future until he gets a wife.

A successful man is one who makes more money than his wife can spend

A successful woman is one who can find such a man .

3.3 Sexism at the semantic level

3.3.1 Connotations

According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the structure of a particular language influences the habitual thought of its speakers. Different language patterns yield different patterns of thought. It is language which constructs our reality.

Each of us has to *learn to see*. The growth of every human being is a slow process of learning “the rule of seeing,” without which we could not in any ordinary sense see the world around us. There is no reality of familiar shapes, colours and sounds to which we merely open our eyes. The information that we receive through our senses from the material world around us has to be interpreted according to certain human rules, before what we ordinarily call “reality” forms. (Williams, 33)

When there is a sexist language and sexist theories culturally available, the observation of reality is also likely to be sexist. It is by this means that sexism can be perpetuated and reinforced as new objects and events, new data, have sexist interpretations projected upon them. It is because of this many pairs of terms differentiated by sex alone have over time gained different connotations.

Male	Female
Master	Mistress
Governor	Governess

Courtier	Courtesan
Sir	Madam
Host	Hostess
Bachelor	Spinster
Priest	Priestess
Patron	Matron

In all of these terms the female-specific term is used to refer to someone of lower status and frequently having an overlaid sexual connotation. "Patron" and "matron" have such different levels of prestige that women try to borrow the more positive masculine connotations with the word patroness, literally "female father." Such a peculiar term came about because of the high prestige attached to patron in such phrases as a patron of the arts or a patron saint. "Matron" is more apt to be used in talking about a woman in charge of a jail or a public restroom. (Mills, 84)

The male term "courtier" has retained its meaning of someone attached to court, but the female equivalent now has a meaning of sexual servant or prostitute. The terms "master" and "sir" still have retained their associations of power and prestige, but their female terms have acquired sexual and non-prestigious meaning. "Bachelor" (as compared to "spinster" or "old maid") has such positive connotations that women try to adopt them by using the term bachelor-girl or bachelorette. Priest-Priestess are equivalent terms without the same connotations. "Priest" refers to someone who has power and status within the established church, whereas "priestess" refers to someone who

organizes religious ceremonies in a cult outside the Christian faith. It has fairly negative connotations for most people. (Mills, 84)

A call boy is the person who calls actors when it is time to go on stage and a call girl is a prostitute. If a man has a client he is a businessman and if a woman has a client she is a prostitute. If a man is a pro he is competent but if a woman is pro it would be interpreted to mean she is promiscuous. Wizard and witch contrast almost as much. The masculine wizard implies skill and wisdom combined with magic, while the feminine witch implies evil intentions combined with magic.

When, for example, such ordinary words as woman or girl acquire the additional meaning of "mistress" or "prostitute", as they once did, an attitude towards women held by some members of society becomes part of the experience of all that society's members. Language is at once the expression of a culture and a part of it. Just as changes in language may be understood by an examination of the social and historical context in which it is used, so may social attitudes be illuminated by a study of language change. (Mills, 12)

3.4: Discrimination at the level of discourse

There is no doubt that men and women are very different from one another. They have different voice characteristics, females are not as strong as males and tend to weigh less than them. Females mature faster than the males and from a very early age females tend to be less aggressive than males. Apart from such differences the male and female also vary in their speech.

...women and men talk differently. Research in Britain, America and New Zealand reveals similar gender-based patterns of discourse. Women appear cooperative, facilitative participants, demonstrating in a variety of ways their concern for their conversational partners, while men tend to dominate the talking time, interrupt more often than women, and focus on the content of the interaction and the task in hand, at the expense of attention to their addressees... (Holmes, 1986)

There is substantial body of evidence that suggests that men and women, and girls and boys interact, to some extent, in different ways. According to the above quotation from the New Zealand linguist, Janet Holmes, suggests, such differences would be thought of as a disadvantage to female speakers in cross-sex interaction.

Empirical studies of gender and talk have documented several specific features of conversational style that are said to differentiate between female and male speakers. Examples of these are:

- Amount of talk: male speakers have been found to talk more than females, particularly in formal or public contexts.
- Interruptions: male speakers interrupt female speakers more than vice versa.
- Conversational support: female speakers more frequently use features that provide support and encouragement for other speakers, for example 'minimal responses' such as mmh and yeah.
- Tentativeness: there are claims that female speakers use features that make their speech appear tentative and uncertain, such as 'hedges' that weaken the force of an utterance ('I think maybe...', 'sort of', 'you know') and certain types of 'tag questions' (questions tagged on to statements, such as ('It's so hot, isn't it?')).
- Compliments: a wider range of compliments may be addressed to women than to men, and women also tend to pay more compliments.

(Swann, 230)

These empirical findings suggest that men and women talk in different ways. Not all men and women speak in the same way and the way people talk differ according to different contexts. Such findings however have given rise to debates that concern whether female and male styles are better interpreted in terms of cultural differences between the sexes, or in terms of the relative power of female and male speakers.

Feminist author and Professor Robin Lakoff claims that females' use of "woman talk" in society denies women the opportunity to express themselves

as effective, strong thinkers and speakers. The speaking style of women has certain features that deny them the access to power. Their language features collectively indicate uncertainty and hesitancy. (Swann, 230)

Don Zimmerman and Candace West (1975) in their early study of interruption found that more interruptions occur in mixed-sex conversations than in single-sex conversations and that almost all the interruptions in mixed-sex conversations were perpetrated by men. Zimmerman and West state that an interruption is a speaker's right to complete their turn. In interruption women, men are denying women their equal status as conversational patterns. It is a means of making the women seem invisible. (Swann, 231)

Analysis of conversations by Pamela Fishman (1983) reveals that women give more conversational support than men. These are verbal and non-verbal feedback that listeners give to speakers. Listeners can give feedback by saying things like 'mmm,' 'uhuh,' 'yeah' and by nodding, smiling, frowning and other body gestures and postures. The studies suggest that women's sense of when it is appropriate to give conversational support is more 'finely tuned' than men's, so that the speaker really feels they are being listened to. Topics raised by men therefore have a greater chance of success of being elaborated upon and pursued than those raised by women. Fishman saw women's conversational supportiveness as an 'expected' characteristic of being female: women are expected to keep the conversation going. (Swann, 231)

Another expected role of women is to be polite. Robin Lakoff had argued that part of women's social role was that of 'arbiter of morality, judge of manners' (Lakoff, 52), and this encouraged them to be linguistically polite. A recent study of (English) language use in New Zealand, carried out by Janet Holmes argues that '[w]omen's utterances show evidence of concern for feelings of the people they are talking to more often and more explicitly than men's do' (Swann, 235)

Lackoff has also claimed that women may answer a question with a statement that employs the rising intonation pattern usually associated with a question rather than the falling intonation pattern associated with making a firm statement. According to Lakoff, women do this because they are less sure of themselves and their opinions in comparison to men. For the same reason, she says, women add tag questions to statements, e.g., "That's the right button, isn't it?" This use of tag question is a clear way of demonstrating women's hesitance to express themselves with force. Women avoid committing to an idea so they can prevent conflict and seek reassurance from both men and women. For example a woman would be more likely to say "They caught the robber yesterday, didn't they?" than a man. A man would be more likely to say "They caught the robber yesterday." (Lackoff, 221-33)

However tag questions have been controversial in language and gender research. Empirical support for Robin Lakoff's claims has not been consistent. Some early studies (e.g. Baumann 1979; Dubois and Crouch 1975) found, contrary to expectations, that tag questions occurred as often in male as in

female speech. Janet Holmes identified four distinct functions of tag questions:

- Epistemic modal tags, which are used to express uncertainty about information being conveyed.
- Challenging tags, which are confrontational; they may boost the force of an utterance or pressure someone into replying.
- Facilitative tags, which invite the addressee to contribute to the conversation.
- Softening tags, which reduce the force of potentially negative utterances.

Holmes argues that facilitative and softening tags have a politeness function whereas epistemic modal tags and challenging tags do not express politeness. Holmes found that men used more epistemic modal tags; women, on the other hand, used more facilitative tags. This would suggest that women are more positively polite than men. (Holmes, 306)

An explanation offered for the variation of the way women and men speak is 'dominance' theory, which takes the difference in power between men and women as the main cause of discoursal variation. It is statistically the case that men tend to have more power than women, physically, financially and in the workplace hierarchies. Research which supports this explanation includes Fishman (1980), and DeFrancisco (1991). The strength of this explanation is particularly clear in some situations, such as business meeting, where women

often report that they have difficulty in gaining the floor (i.e. the right to speak.), that they are more often interrupted, and that their points are not taken as seriously as men's are.

For both men and women, power and influence are also associated with education, social class, regional origin, and so on. A study of norms and norm-breaking in Malagasy (Keenan, 1974) suggests that gender differences in language may be social in origin rather than linguistic. Among the Malagasy, men do not put others into situations in which they may lose face. They use language subtly, try to maintain good communication in their relationships, and avoid confrontations. They are discreet, they prefer indirectness as an expression of respect, and they are considered to be able speechmakers: men's 'requests are typically delayed and inexplicit, accusations imprecise and criticisms subtle' (Wardaugh, 320). Women do not operate with the same set of rules. They openly and directly express anger towards others. They also criticize and confront, and men use them to do this. They can be direct and straightforward, and because they can do so, they perform tasks, such as interacting with strangers, buying and selling when these requiring negotiating a price, and reprimanding children, which men prefer not to perform. In this society thus men are indirect and women and children are direct. The most interesting fact is that it is indirectness of speech which is prized in Malagasy and regarded as 'traditional' and it is men who employ it. On the other hand, 'direct speech ... is associated with a loss of tradition, with contemporary mores' and it is found among women and children (Wardaugh, 321). Women are definitely inferior to men in this society

too. Thus it can be seen once more how speech of the two sexes reflects their relationship within the total society.

Men and women also differ in terms of their consciousness of the uses of language that is considered as being socially superior. Women tend to use more of the standard forms in their speech. Men are more apt to say "*Fill 'er up*" than women are; men use more obscene language than women do in public. But the major differences between the sexes are in the important attitudes towards language. (Labov, 245) In Fisher's 1958 study of the use of *-ing* and *-in'* in a New England village it was found that both boys and girls use both variants. But among the girls, ten out of twelve used more *-ing* than *-in'*, while among the boys, only five out of twelve did. In general, women are more sensitive to overt social correction and use more prestige forms than men. But this difference is not independent of social class. It is moderately true for the highest status group in a speech community, but the effect is far more striking in the *second highest* status group. Here the difference may appear in an extreme form. Among lower class women who live at home, on welfare or without regular occupation, less awareness of sociolinguistic norms and less response to them is observed.

STATUS GROUP	I	II	III	IV
Men	5.0	19.3	23.1	25.0
Women	4.8	9.2	27.2	23.7

Men and women are practically the same for the highest status group. In the lower groups III and IV there are small differences with no clear direction. But in the second highest group there is a great difference between men and women: women use less than half as much pronominal apposition than men. Women are motivated to conform to, and cooperate with, those who are socially more powerful whereas men are more inclined to seek solidarity with peers. Women, therefore, consciously look 'up,' whereas men do not, preferring instead, though they may not be conscious of it, the solidarity they find in the 'masculinity' and 'toughness' of peers and even of those they regard as being 'below' them in society. (Labov, 245)

So why might these differences exist? Rise of different languages or different dialects are usually associated with geographical or social distance. However the situation of men and women's speech is different. Despite growing up in the same families, going to school together, working together and socializing together; men and women's speech vary.

One explanation offered for these variations is 'dominance' theory, which takes the difference in power between women and men as the main cause of discursal variation. It is statistically the case that men tend to have more power than women, physically, financially and in workplace hierarchies. The ways people talk may be a reflection of the material differences between the sexes, and may also reinforce those differences, making them seem 'normal', part of the 'natural order of things'.

Research which supports this explanation includes Fishman (1980), and DeFrancisco (1991). The strength of this explanation is particularly clear in some situations, such as business meetings, where women often report that they have difficulty in gaining the floor (i.e the right to speak), that they are more often interrupted, and that their points are not taken as seriously as men's are.

Two of the problems with dominance theory are that first, it may appear to cast all women as 'powerless victims', and second, it casts men as undermining, excluding and demeaning women. 'Difference theory' is a response to these difficulties. It suggests that women and men develop different styles of talking because, in fact, they are segregated at important stages of their lives. Deborah Tannen's work (1990, 1991) is often taken as an illustration of difference theory. (Thomas and Wareing, 71)

According to 'difference' theory, playing in single sex groups as children, and having same sex friendships in adult life, leads men and women to have separate 'sub-cultures' each of which have their own 'sub-cultural norms', that is, rules for behavior and in particular, speech. Within their own sub-cultural groups, women's and men's conversational norms work perfectly well for what they want to accomplish. Women, the theory explains, desire from their relationships collaboration, equality, intimacy, understanding, support and approval. Men, on the other hand, allegedly place a greater premium on status and independence, and are less concerned about overt disagreement and inequality in their relationships. The problem arises when women and

men try to communicate with one another: their different styles can lead to misunderstandings. (Thomas and Wareing, 72)

Some people link these characteristics to biological factors: that men's different hormonal balance means they are more aggressive than women. Others link it to socialization: that girls are rewarded for behaving politely and boys for being 'active' and 'spirited'. (Thomas and Wareing, 72)

There is a weakness of both the models described above. There is a tendency to regard 'women' as being more or less the same: talking in the same way and having the same expectation from relationships. In fact differences of age, nationality, religion, class, sexual orientation, regional and cultural background mean that two women may have different ideas of what it means to be a 'woman', and different expectations of their friendships and sexual relationships. Equally, men are not a homogenous group with shared values, but have diverse ways of thinking about their identity.

Conclusion

In my study of language I was rather astonished to see the extent of sexism involved and how history as well as people in today's time is playing a role in establishing it.

From my research I have not found as many examples of sexism in Bangla as in English. One of the reasons could be that Bangla has not been studied extensively in this respect. For example there are certain spheres in the English language such as beauty/ appearance and language which is absent in Bangla. In such language forms women are judged by their appearance for example blonde, babe etc which have negative connotations in terms of intelligence.

Despite the sexism present in different linguistic levels people have been making efforts to use inclusive language, to say he or she or they when speaking about individuals whose names they do not know. Leading publishers have developed guidelines to help writers use language that is fair to both sexes, and most newspapers and magazines list women by their own names instead of only by their husbands' names. Educated and thoughtful people no longer begin their business letters with "Dear Sir" or "Gentlemen," but instead use a memo form to begin with such salutations as "Dear Colleagues," "Dear Reader," or "Dear Committee Members." It's nice to see that chairman is giving way to chair or head, mailman to mail carrier, clergyman to clergy etc

In order to change sexist language it is not enough to reform the language-use of individuals whom you meet; the change has to be at an institutional level, at the level what Cameron calls the 'gatekeepers of language'.

Feminists have thus attempted to influence institutions to adopt policies concerning sexism, often as part of an overall equal opportunities policy. Many institutions, such as educational establishments, publishing houses and organizations like the British Sociological Association, have developed gender-free or anti-sexist language policies, which advocate that care be taken to avoid sexist usage in documents. However, whilst changes have happened in the type of language which is used to describe women or the relative merits of either sex within these institutions, it is clear that such policies are not being adhered to in many documents and interactions. It is very difficult to attempt to formulate a policy which is sufficiently flexible and yet sufficiently limited in order to define sexist language and it is also very difficult to impose a policy on language-use.

The best thing about people being interested in and discussing sexist language is that as they make conscious decisions about what pronouns they will use, what jokes they will tell or laugh at, how they will write their names, or how they will begin their letters, they are forced to think about the underlying issue of sexism. This is good because as a problem that begins in people's assumptions and expectations, it's a problem that will be solved only when a great many people have given it a great deal of thought.

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Appendix A (Questionnaire)

Set A:

Rate the questions by A= The sentence is absolutely fine B= Something is strange C= Not sure or D= The sentence is definitely wrong

- 1.) Mrs. and Mr. Rahman are having dinner.
- 2.) The boys and girls are playing in the field.
- 3.) মেয়ে ছেলেরা বাগানে ফুল কুরাচ্ছে।
- 4.) এই বিদ্যালয়ের ছাত্র ছাত্রী রা বেশ মেধাবী।
- 5.) My father and mother are going to Spain on a holiday.
- 6.) আমার নাতি নান্নিরা বর হয়ে জাচ্ছে।

Set B:

Rate the questions by A= The sentence is absolutely fine B= Something is strange C= Not sure or D= The sentence is definitely wrong

- 1.) Mr. and Mrs. Rahman are having dinner.
- 2.) The girls and boys are playing in the field.
- 3.) ছেলে মেয়েরা বাগানে ফুল কুরাচ্ছে।
- 4.) এই বিদ্যালয়ের ছাত্রী ছাত্ররা বেশ মেধাবী।
- 5.) My mother and father are going to Spain on a holiday
- 6.) আমার নাতি নান্নিরা বর হয়ে জাচ্ছে।

Set C:

Rate the questions by A= The sentence is absolutely fine B= Something is strange C= Not sure or D= The sentence is definitely wrong

- 1.) আমার বন ও ভাইরা কুমিল্লা বেরাতে গিয়েছে।
- 2.) My sisters and brothers live abroad.
- 3.) আমার মা বাবা পারকে বাইরে গিয়েছে।
- 4.) The actresses and actors were all present at the party
- 5.) এখানে নেপাল এর রাজা রানি বাস করে।
- 6.) The goddesses and gods have come down from heaven.

Set D:

Rate the questions by A= The sentence is absolutely fine B= Something is strange C= Not sure or D= The sentence is definitely wrong

- 1.) আমার ভাই ও বনেরা কুমিল্লা বেরাতে গিয়েছে।
- 2.) My brothers and sisters live abroad.
- 3.) আমার বাবা মা বাইরে বেরাতে গিয়েছে।
- 4.) The actors and actresses were all present at the party
- 5.) এখানে নেপাল এর রানি রাজা বাস করে।
- 6.) The gods and goddesses have come down from heaven.

