

Linguistic Sexism On The Portrayal Of Female And Male Celebrities In News Coverage

¹ Sherina Brenda Sopyani, ² Ni Made Suwari Antari, ³ I Komang Sumaryana Putra

¹⁻³ Udayana University

Faculty of Humanities, English Departement

Korespondensi : sherinabrenda13@gmail.com

Abstract : *News articles always play a vital role, it has a broad impact and is gradually becoming a part of daily life. Celebrity lifestyle also draws attention and quite eager to be read, and this paper aims to investigate the expression of linguistic sexism against female celebrities in the various news media. Adopting a feminist stylistic within word level and discourse level, this paper attempt to analyze 22 written news. The selected features at the word level include transitivity which requires naming categories and material actor versus material goal. While the discourse level include modality and passivization. It reveals that linguistic sexism is present in celebrity news coverage, with several subtle forms of sexism.*

Keywords: *celebrities, digital news, feminist stylistic, love affair, sexism*

INTRODUCTION

Sexism is an ideology circling around women and men's basic natures and the roles they should perform in society. As a result, gender stereotypes that based on sexist beliefs about women and men can make one gender appear superior to the other. This hierarchical thinking might be aggressive and intentional, or it can simply present itself as an unconscious bias. Sexism can have impact on everyone, but women are having tremendous chance for being the affected one. Sexism also has been an important topic for research object for linguist, either sociologist. Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis stated that language not solely comes before influence of culture and society but also impacts people's insight of reality and the whole world (Sapir, 1986). Thus, news is one of the pragmatic uses of linguistic, it shares the same feature: reshape and shaped by society. In this day and age, news media always play a vital role and provide authoritative information for people, including feminist researcher who observes news and media as personal interest.

This research is studying sexism from news media perspective, to detect gender control distribution between females and males celebrities, in certain American and British news site according to feminist linguistic stylistics by Sara Mills.

The previous studies of language and gender usually focus into two main aspects: to study from perspective of semantics, syntax, morphology, etc., and from perspective of pragmatics, discourses, speech style, etc. In 2018, Johanna Kristensen wrote an article at Karlstads University about study on linguistic sexism in Buzzfeed News. Kristensen used feminist stylistics by Mills to examine 159 articles. The tools used at the lexical level analysis are: generic pronouns and nouns, the affix -man identifying and naming practices for females

and males. At the discourse level, the tools include how the relationship terms between females and males are described, age-related and appearance. Thus, found that linguistic sexism is expressed at certain levels in BuzzFeed News. However, the limitation on distinct generalisations is still too few. This research was inspired by Kristensen's study to provide a further in the area of feminist linguistic on news analysis.

Therefore, this research takes a central focus of the research is the title and content of each news sample, that talks about celebrities. Specifically in their love affair, since celebrities serve as large influencer towards particular life of people. The research question that will have to be answered to fulfil this aim and scope are the following:

1. How is gender bias reflected on American and British news coverage about celebrities?
2. Do American and British news coverage tend to biased female than male celebrities?

The feminist stylistics essentially is a study of language, in any form of text with focus on gender and the way it represented. Therefore, this research only applied analysis aspects of word level and discourse level by Mills.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The concept of stylistic is part of literary study which deeply focus on the analysis of various elements of style, the way texts were analyzed. To conduct research precisely, many linguists apply this stylistic analysing. Without exception, a feminist stylistics. This study of language focus on gender and how it represented within the text. Mills (1995) construct a framework for feministic analysis within a text. In that state, Mills also point out an aspect which considered, play major role that will help researchers in analysing gender within the linguistic scope. She categorized three matters that are concerned with the analysis: word level, clausal level and discourse level.

Analysis at the word level focused on the individual lexical items within a text. Such as generic use of pronouns, naming and titles are essentially studied at word level. Henceforth, discourse level focused on the context of any text. Analysing in this level means considering aspects at the word level and the clausal level and relate them to a bigger concept of society. The discourse level in this research will analyze how male and female celebrities were describe in their relationship, the form of adress, also their depicted appearance.

DATA AND METHODS

The data that used to conduct the research were based on non-human data source. In this case, various American and British news site, namely: Daily Mail, E! Online, BuzzFeed

News, New York Post, The Sun, Cosmopolitan, The Teal Mango and Koimoi. All of the source of news are found in digital version from the official site, with total of 22 news. The news are all written about American and British celebrities regarding their love affairs. The chosen sites widely known as news portal that talk about celebrities love affairs exclusively, and suitable to be used as a data source for this research. This research is not focused in only one site but many sites, with the intention to detect sexism or gender discrimination among celebrities, that happens in the media surface of America and United Kingdom.

The data was collected through document and record on the internet was collected through varying steps, firstly reading comprehension and observing towards the content of news, afterwards identifying the selected data that qualifies with topic and followed by data recording.

All of the data then will be analyzed firstly using quantitative method to find out the word level of sexist words in the news. Hence, the word level by Mills can be achieved through other theories as well, in this case Halliday (1994: 107) analytical framework namely: classification, transitivity, transformation and modality. In this research will only covers the transitivity, modality and transformation. More further, the data will be examined to find out the role of agent or actor and the object or goal. The actor or agent is the one who performs the action, and the object or goal who receives or is affected by the action. In other words, the agent is determined through its relationship between action and expression of the verb, while the object is determined primarily through the word order. The transitivity analysis will be based on the figures below:

Figure 1. Naming Categories

Naming categories
First name
Surname
First name + surname

Figure 2. Material actor (agent) versus material goal (object)

Material actor vs material goal
Material actor
Material goal

Secondly, the data will also analyzed using qualitative method to meet the inquiries of discourse level of sexism or gender discrimination, through ideology of feminism. For instance, in the data, will be examined to find out which gender is the most getting sexist wording towards their appearance. To meet the inquiries, theory from Halliday analytical tools also able to be combined, namely modality and transformation. Modality, as exchange in English, is the crucial key in carrying out the interpersonal function of the clauses (Thompson 2004: 41). Noticeably, in English naming and addressing can express

the meaning of mood. While transformation divided into two: passivization and normalization. Passivization occur when a an affected participant with noun denoting, followed by putting a non-actor to be places in the subject position in a sentence. This discourse level will focus on pragmatics and speech styles within the written news of the data.

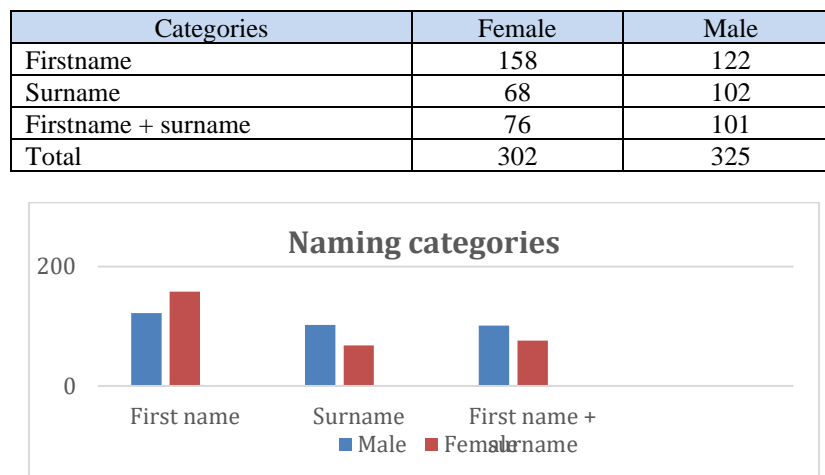
RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results gathered from the data material are presented and analyzed in this section of the research. The section is divided into two main parts where the results and analyses from the research main text are presented in section. The first section will focus on word level and the rest focus on discourse level respectively.

1. Word Level

Naming is used to observe linguistic sexism in ascertain celebrities role and position regarding their gender (male and female) in their love affairs, reflecting and having impact on people's perception towards the news. However, after the analysis process with certain methods as mentioned before, comparing with the male celebrities who seems have the same power and influence, female celebrities somewhat tend to have more lexical terms which make their roles and positions vaguer and weaker.

Figure 1. Naming Categories



As shown in Figure 1, the number of female celebrities that were mentioned by name was considerably lower than the number of males mentioned by name, with 312 for female celebrities, and 325 for male celebrities respectively. It is somewhat surprising that female celebrities that called by their first name in written news was noted higher than male celebrities. The general pattern of naming celebrities in American and British news is that the first time a person is named, both their first name and surname is used. As illustrated in Example (1) and (2).

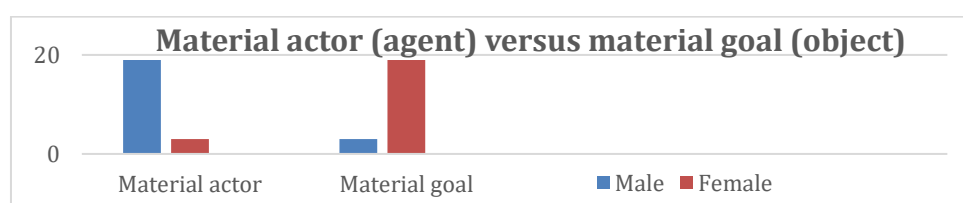
- (1) *Kim Kardashian* tried to make amends with her family for how her ex-husband *Kanye West* had 'treated' them over the years [...] *Kanye* had 'always' treated her family poorly.
- (2) *Max Bowden* was spotted leaving co-star *Shona McGarty's* home in the early hours of Wednesday morning

If a person name is mentioned more than once, then the second pattern after it, the news media naming only include the person's first name, which displayed in Example (1). With this pattern in mind, it can be gathered from the numbers in Figure 1 that there weren't just male celebrities being named more than once, but they were also written in their surname and first name with surname. Giving an evidence if female celebrities were often to be called by their first name. Using a first name to refer to a woman while used a surname for a man indicates a form of gender discrimination for the woman in comparison to the man. Stav Atir and Melissa (2018) in their article stated that when surname is often identified with man and less with woman may undermine the female prominence. Hence the enormous implication is: if a woman isn't well-known and doesn't identified by her full name – then she isn't as important or deserving an acknowledgement

Then, this is an obtained result for figure 2, shows the initial analysis of identifying each word as "actor" or "goal" within the written news. For a total 22 of written news that has been thorough the word level analysis contained an explicitly stated human object (19 for female and 3 for male).

Figure 2. Material actor (agent) versus material goal (object)

Categories	Female	Male
Material actor (agent)	3	19
Total	22	



As shown in Figure 2, the two genders exhibit somewhat different tendencies respectively to transitivity of their depiction in the written news: female celebrities more frequently is in the goal position, while male celebrities more often is actor. Given the fact that male celebrities have been often depicted to be a clear example of rather positioning women is inferior than them.

Yet a distinct result obtains for the fact that male celebrities also positioned as an object or humiliated by their ex-wife or girlfriend: from three case of the dataset that has been analyzed. This result is somewhat unexpected. Example (3) displayed one of the cases.

(3) Miley Cyrus says her marriage to Liam Hemsworth was a 'f*cking disaster'

Mills stated that transitivity analysis is more open to be a competent interpretation, as it's proposing a model of feminist analysis intended to solve some problems in genuine meanings to sets of language items (Mills 1995:149).

2. Discourse Level

In this section, after the collected data were analyzed in word level using transitivity analysis, now will be analyzed in discourse level using modality and passivization. In order to identify differences between male and female languages, in the scope ideology of feminism. Obviously, this section will focus with the pragmatics value and the speech style that was carried in the written news.

Modality can reveal the interpersonal relationship among the participant and address imbalance between male and female. As illustrated in Example (4) and (5).

- (4) Ex-England footballer Andy Carroll spent the night with not one, but two *blonde women*
- (5) Zayn Malik appears on plus size dating app WooPlus in bid to find *'fuller woman'*

Both examples shows that the news media employed degrading forms of address when describe male celebrities with other females. When describing females, they associated it with their appearance and gender identity, "blonde women" and "fuller women" respectively, rather than expressing it with more general forms of address. Another linguistic sexism can be seen in another evidence, as displayed in Example (7).

- (6) It comes after the former One Direction singer split with *slim supermodel* Gigi Hadid.
- (7) Elizabeth Olsen puts her *fabulous body* on display in bikini with husband Robbie Arnett

What is evident from Example (6) and (7) is both portraying female celebrities with their husband or ex-boyfriend, but the female depiction is more and the one that associated with their appearance. Highlighting shape and size of one gender than other(s) is considered as sexist. Another form of sexism that grows widely and rooted in our humankind is the way a woman with roles they should play and behave in society. Some of certain roles that force women in their lives are should able to washing, cooking, cleaning, dressing, shopping, bearing children and looking after. All of these forces are fundamental contribute for woman's oppression until now. While celebrity lifestyle might spared them from that oppression, but the most striking result to emerge from the data is that such oppression still exist in celebrity's life. As displayed in Example (8) into (11)

- (8) Cardi B once rapped "I don't cook, I don't clean", Offset took to Instagram to show off Cardi's kitchen skills while clowning the overcooked wings.
- (9) Max vowed to his *baby mama* Roisin Buckle that he was not romantically with anyone else

- (10) Tristan Thompson has conceded that his 'hook up' with alleged *baby mama* Maralee Nichols [...]

The females in Example (8) is clear evidence of how expectation towards woman to have a great skills in cooking. This is one of signs of sex differences in attitude, while “people of both sexes eat; people of both sexes cook.” (Williams 2014: 61). Then in reproduction, women are valued only in terms of their ability to reproduce in other words bear children. As illustrated by the females in Example (9) and (10), to elaborate from Merriam Webster, a ‘baby mama’ is a slang term for a mother or more who gave birth to children with a man, and typically not his wife or current partner. In most cases these ‘baby mama’ is only left with child support, and the man who fathered the kids nor the unborn babies will not live together, to raise and take care of their children.

Then the analysis of transformation, with passivization theory has been applied in the data that were collected, in instance of Example (11) and (12)

- (11) Attorneys for Nichols claim that Thompson [...] and 'insisting that she get an abortion and threatening
(12) Blac Chyna's attorney accused the Kardashians' lawyer [...] the nude photos that Rob Kardashian leaked

The sentence in written news described the crime with a passive form and in this way blurred the relationship between the “actor” and the “goal” role: in Example (11) is Thompson & Example (12) is Rob Kardashian, with their victims. In this case, it would definitely made readers to misinterpret, consider that they probably don't have a direct connection with the females involved.

CONCLUSION

Despite that celebrity lifestyle is always a huge dream for peoples, that doesn't deny the fact that they were experiencing sexism in their life and this paper is one of research in feminist stylistic to unveil it. Thus, for the investigation this paper has discussed and reveal major finding, to answer whether linguistic sexism could be found in the celebrity news coverage, from certain American and British news media. To recall that the collected data from the source are all written about celebrities love affair and to be analyzed applying framework tools: word level and discourse level by Sara Mills and to be analysed specifically using transitivity, modality and passivization by Halliday. This present study provides the result that linguistic sexism is exist in celebrity news coverage, through the word level and discourse level. It can be seen that female celebrities are more discriminated by the depiction of their love affair news, which is enabling the sexism itself. Many forms of linguistic sexism in celebrity

news coverage exist: (1) by referring female with their first name and male with their surname, (2) positioning female as an object, (3) portraying female appearance and gender roles, and (4) using ambiguities to blurred the relationship between the role of “actor” and the “goal”. This linguistic sexism will lead into unconscious bias since news is providing information widely to the people.

Hence, it should be pointed out that, there are some limitations in this present research which require future exploration, especially by sociolinguist that shares same personal interest in feminist stylistic in linguistic analysis. Firstly, the research data are all taken from the various American and British news media. The written news are mainly concerned with celebrities love affairs, thus it will be necessary for future study to research investigation into other region newspaper and subject research beside celebrities. For more objective results, more statistical analysis is needed, as well as more solid data from empirical studies such as interviews and questionnaires to assess public perceptions of sexism in the news.

REFERENCES

- Atir, S., & Ferguson, M. J. (2018). How gender determines the way we speak about professionals. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 115(28), 7278–7283. <https://doi.org/10.1073/pnas.1805284115>
- Chen, Z. (2016). Critical discourse analysis of sexism in English language. In *Proceedings of 2016 2nd International Conference on Humanities and Social Science Research (ICHSSR 2016)* (pp. 79-83). Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ichssr-16.2016.79>
- Dai, H., & Xu, X. (2014). Sexism in news: A comparative study on the portrayal of female and male politicians in *The New York Times*. *Open Journal of Modern Linguistics*, 4(5), 709–719. <https://doi.org/10.4236/ojml.2014.45061>
- Hammarqvist Kristensen, J. (2019). Linguistic sexism in a digitally native news outlet: A study on linguistic sexism at lexical and discourse levels in BuzzFeed News. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 93, 8–16. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2013.08.420>
- Jotform. (n.d.). Data collection methods. Retrieved May 27, 2022, from <https://www.jotform.com/data-collection-methods/>
- Linda, B. G. (2018). When last comes first: The gender bias of names. Retrieved from <https://news.cornell.edu/stories/2018/07/when-last-comes-first-gender-bias-names>
- Rao, P., & Taboada, M. (2021). Gender bias in the news: A scalable topic modeling and visualization framework. *Frontiers in Artificial Intelligence*, 4. <https://doi.org/10.3389/frai.2021.66473>
- Sainz-de-Baranda, C., Adá-Lameiras, A., & Blanco-Ruiz, M. (2020). Gender differences in sports news coverage on Twitter. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(14), 5199. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17145199>
- Williams, S. J. (2014). A feminist guide to cooking. *Contexts*, 13(3), 59–61. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1536504214545763>