LINGUISTIC SEXISM AND GENDER STEREOTYPES IN THE WRITING OF SELECTED MALAY MALE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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**ABSTRACT**

Despite all efforts made to identify, address and remedy gender inequality, sexism in modern-day society is still prevalent, particularly those against women. This study aims to investigate the occurrences of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes against women in essays written by Malay male university students. Linguistic sexism was analysed using Umera-Okeke’s (2012) and Amare’s (2006) framework while Brannon (2004) was used for the analysis of gender stereotypes. Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) critical discourse analysis framework was used to approach the study. The findings from the study indicate that linguistic sexism is evident, particularly in terms of students’ semantic choices. Gender stereotyping in the form of psychological traits and activities associated with women were also noted. The findings show that Malay males display the normative gender role stereotypes of a woman as polite, modest, understanding, supportive and adept at homemaking. However, the study also indicates that women were beginning to be viewed in a new light as intelligent and educated with professional careers of their own. This study falls back on Malay culture to explain sexism and gender stereotyping of women by Malay males.

Keywords: essay writing, gender stereotypes, language and gender, linguistic sexism, Malay culture, Malaysian university students

**INTRODUCTION**

There is a lot more to language than merely as a tool for communication and information transfer. According to Catalán and Maria (2005, as cited in Umera-Okeke, 2012) people use language to construct their views of society, organize knowledge and new information that is acquired as well as incorporate the norms and social patterns of their community into their daily lives. The aforementioned norms and social patterns unfortunately imply that through the use of language itself, some social groups are at risk of being marginalised, subjugated and trivialised by the society, often without its members realising it.

When it comes to the mistreatment that these social groups are subjected to, one of the most obvious examples of such phenomenon can be observed in gender inequality.
Sexism is typically defined as anything that places one sex at a higher ladder of the society than the other. Sexism is a recurring issue in various societies around the world, regardless of the fact that these societies are of Western or Eastern origins. Religious and cultural values, combined with perceived biological distinctions that render one gender superior than the other are often cited as the reasons why this phenomenon persists. This issue is further aggravated by people’s assumption that sexism is merely a thing of the past (Swim & Cohen, 1997, as cited in Smith & Craig-Henderson, 2010; Umera-Okeke, 2012).

Sexism does not only materialise through people’s actions and behaviours. The language that is widely used in everyday discourse carries different instances of sexism, and the English language is a prime example of such language. Several forms of linguistic sexism have appeared in a number of instances in the English language, and feminists have been striving to address these traces of linguistic sexism for decades (Amare, 2006). Irrespective of the forms, language components and the levels in which linguistic sexism surfaces, attempts to address and remedy gender stereotypes in language should be taken seriously to bring about changes in the society to one that affords both genders an equal playing field. This study is therefore intended to investigate if linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes are evident in Malaysian university students’ written language.

**RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Since Lakoff’s work was published in 1975, a number of research studies have been done on language and gender, and these studies have delved into this pertinent issue in various instances such as in the use of nouns (Cralley & Ruscher, 2005), texts (Schmader, Whitehead & Wysocki, 2007; Dako, 2013), visual images (Mohamad Subakir Mohd Yasin, Bahiyah Abdul Hamid, Zarina Othman, Kesumawati Abu Bakar, Fuzirah Hashim & Azmah Mohti, 2012), indexing system (Amare, 2006), mock job interviews (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011) and nature of a particular language (Githinji, 2008). Linguistic sexism is observed at the levels of semantics, morphology, and syntax, and in the use of honorific and non-parallel terms (Umera-Okeke, 2012). In addition, it also appears in several forms such as ‘firstness’ (men and women, he or she, Mr. and Mrs. Smith), the use of generic man and he, sexist labels and suffixes, stereotypes and omission, in which these forms are commonly discussed in guidelines and books (Amare, 2006). However, much exploration still needs to be done in the area of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes.

There is a scarcity of studies on linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in the local Malaysian context. A search of the found a study by Bahiyah Hamid, Mohd Subakir Mohd Yasin, Kesumawati Abu Bakar, Yuen Chee Keong and Azhar Jalaluddin (2008) who found gender bias and linguistic sexism in selected Malaysian primary and secondary school English language textbooks. Males were projected as successful, powerful and occupying higher positions in society while females were portrayed as playing supporting roles to males for instance as mothers, wives and nurturers in the social domain and nurses in the professional domain. The study found that the language used in Malaysian English textbooks foreground and reinforce men as the standard and portray women as second-place to men. Mohamad Subakir et al. (2012) investigated how visual images in English language school textbooks reflect gender biasness and stereotyping especially of women and they too found an imbalance that favoured men who were represented in public spaces while women were portrayed in the private sphere as wives, mothers and nurturers. Images of women were
generally absent in the workplace and in unconventional professions although in reality Malaysian women are in the professional workforce in large numbers.

Findings were made by Lee (2015) who studied gender representation in Japanese EFL textbooks and found gender disparities in the form of male firstness, female invisibility and stereotypical images still prevalent in the textbooks examined. Lee (2014) investigated linguistic discrimination in teachers’ language amongst Chinese EFL teachers and found that gender-biased language is still widely used; their choice of generic pronouns co-varied with factors such as meaning, word structure and gender stereotypes associated with particular occupations. While it is true that sexism in language can be observed in various media such as language textbooks and teachers’ language use, writing is another area that reflects the thoughts of people about emotional, cultural and societal values. The thoughts that are mirrored in writing can be picked up and studied to find out the extent to which linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes are rooted within the unconscious minds of the writers. Therefore, this study attempts to look into this specific issue in order to gain a better understanding of how sexism and gender stereotypes materialise in students’ written work in the Malaysian context. In so doing, the study adds to existing literature on gender bias and linguistic sexism in Malaysia.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The specific research questions of this study are:
1. What gender stereotypes of women are evident in the written essays of Malaysian male university students?
2. How do these gender stereotypes reflect the Malay culture?

RELATED LITERATURE

Linguistic Sexism

Sexist language can be generally defined as language that consciously or subconsciously leaves a particular gender at a disadvantage. Atkinson (1993) defines linguistic sexism as involving a wide range of linguistic practices that silence and depreciate women, including how women are labelled and referred to in interaction and communication.

Theoretical perspectives of language and gender

There are four schools of thought on studies in language and gender: deficit, dominance, difference and social constructionist. The deficit theory (Lakoff, 1973, 1975) sees women’s language as intrinsically inferior to men’s: women’s language is weak, lacking, deviant and deficient to men’s language. The dominance theory (West & Zimmerman, 1983) sees men as physically and socially more powerful and dominant than women resulting in different speech styles between them. The difference approach (Tannen, 1990; Holmes, 1995; Coates, 1996) reclaimed women’s place as different but equal to men. Differences in speech styles are as a result of men and women being socialised or brought up differently; boys are encouraged to speak up and be dominant while girls are expected to be obedient and cooperative. The social constructionist approach (Cameron, 1997; Baxter, 2003; Holmes, 2007) views gender as identity. Men and women use language differently because they are constructing their own identity. As a result, language use is socially and culturally
determined. Men and women all over the world do not speak in the same way because people come from different cultural, religious, regional, ethnic and sexual orientation backgrounds and they may change the way they speak according to the context or situation they are in (Holmes, 2007).

Saci (2014) notes that the chronological order of the four schools of thought above does not mean that the recent ones invalidate the earlier ones. The theories, in fact, complement one another “because each one of them tackles the problem from a different angle enabling us to have a better broader understanding” (Saci, 2014, p.8) of the issues in language and gender. The paper therefore takes on a complementary view of the theories in language and gender in its approach to the study of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes of a group of Malaysian male university students.

**Forms of linguistic sexism**
Linguistic sexism takes many forms such as sexism in semantics, syntax, morphology etc and these are visible in various instances across the wide usage of everyday discourse. Sexism in semantics as noted by Amare (2006) and Umera-Okeke (2012) is discussed below as this was the linguistic practice that largely emerged in the data of the present study.

**Sexism in Semantics**
There are several words in English that carry different connotations when they are used to describe men and women. More often than not, these words can have negative, derogatory and sexual connotations when they are used to illustrate women. For example, the word *professional* can be used to describe men as being members of respected professions or being very skilful at the things that they do. However, when the same word is used to describe women, it potentially carries a different interpretation of these women as being either prostitutes or promiscuous. The same can also be said of other seemingly ‘harmless’ words in English vocabulary. A *tramp* can either mean a person who is jobless, homeless and wanders from one place to another or a sexually immoral woman. Next, the description of a man being *loose* means that he is simply a casual person, whereas the same word when used to describe a woman implies that she is sexually ‘active’. Other examples can also be found in pairs of words for males and females such as *master* and *mistress*, *governor* and *governess*, and *bachelor* and *spinster* in which these sets of words tend to have positive-masculine and negative-feminine nuances.

In addition, sexism can also be observed in personification of inanimate objects. For example, the sun is seen as male while the moon, which receives light from the sun is seen as female. This distinction is made as objects that are strong or superior are often personified as masculine and objects that are weak, passive and receptive are typically feminine. Apart from personification, animal imagery also tends to trivialise women, which explains why a man is a *tiger* or a *bull* while a woman is characteristically referred to as a *chick* or a *cougar*.

**Gender Stereotypes**
In defining gender stereotypes, a clear distinction between sex and gender needs to be established to avoid any confusion. Brugeilles and Cromer (2009, p.27) define sex as the “biological differences between males and females” which relate to “the observable difference between their genitals and to their physiological functions in procreation”. On the other hand, gender refers to the culture and social division between men and women in which
terms such as masculinity and femininity are used to differentiate one sex from the other. Specifically, gender deals with the qualities, tastes, aptitudes, roles and responsibilities associated with men and women in a society (Brugeilles & Cromer, 2009). In comparison, sex is based on the distinction between the biologically different male and female while gender is based on the distinction between the socially different man and woman.

The distinction between sex and gender as provided above is crucial in order to gain a better understanding of what gender stereotypes entail. According to Brannon (2004) a gender stereotype refers to beliefs about psychological traits and characteristics of men or women which also include specific activities that are fitting for each gender. As opposed to gender roles, which are dictated by behaviours, gender stereotypes revolve around the beliefs and attitudes about masculinity and femininity. Therefore, as gender is governed by the concepts of masculinity and femininity, it is inevitable that characteristics of both genders become generalised and expectations are imposed by society upon men and women in terms of how they are to conduct themselves in society. Failure to adhere to these expectations can potentially result in an individual being subjected to prejudice and discrimination. Two of the most common examples of gender stereotypes imposed on men and women are that men are sole breadwinners of their families while women are homemakers who are expected to take care of household-related matters.

Stereotypes evoke certain feelings and beliefs towards the groups that are being stereotyped. Several studies then ensued to capture the contents of gender stereotypes by explaining them according to the aforementioned feelings and beliefs associated with each stereotype. This eventually led to research by Eckes (2002) and Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, and Xu, (2002, as cited in Brannon, 2004) who suggest that the combination of competence and warmth is a comprehensive measurement tool to examine stereotypes further. These two dimensions, which form the stereotype content model, indicate that lower-status groups in society such as ethnic minority groups, older people, disabled people and women are perceived as less competent but kind and warm, leading these groups of people to be rated positively (Eckes, 2002 & Fiske et al. 2002, as cited in Brannon, 2004). On the other hand, those who are of the high-status groups are respected for their competence but not adjudged to be kind and warm. These values between low competence-high warmth and high competence-low warmth are chartered in Figure 1, along with feelings and examples associated with each combination. In addition, combinations such as high competence-high warmth and low competence-low warmth are also included to gain a better understanding of the different values across the continuum of competence and warmth.
Gender and Malay Culture

The Malay gender system is strongly influenced by the history of religions, customs and cultures (Rahimah & Shaipul, 2014). The Malay culture and belief system is governed by two main elements which are the Islamic faith and Malay norms. The former is explicitly outlined in Article 160 of the Constitution of Malaysia which defines Malay as, among others, a person who professes the religion of Islam, speaks the Malay language and adheres to the Malay norms and customs. This definition cements the role of Islam and its teachings in dictating the whole of cultural and social norms among Malays in Malaysia (Effendy, 2006, as cited in Rumaya Juhari, Siti Nor Yaacob, & Mansor Abu Talib, 2013). Specifically, the Malays in Malaysia are followers of the sunni tradition who live their lives according to the teachings of the Holy Quran and the traditions of Prophet Muhammad and abide by syariah law.

The gender system of the traditional Malay culture reflects a binary opposition of roles and responsibilities of men and women in the Malay community (Phelps & Austin, 1975, as cited in Rahimah & Shaiful, 2014). Rahimah and Shaiful (2014) analyse the gender perspective in Malay proverbs and they note that in the Malay culture, although men and women are viewed as mutually complementary and need each other, men hold a dominant position over women. For instance women are dependent on men for leadership and decision-making. Wazir Jahan Karim (1992) also argues that Malay policies lead men to be empowered, especially in decision making in both, domestic or public spaces, endorsing men as more rational in making judgements than women. Men work in public spaces and traditionally engage in heavy work while women are out of the public eye and are in domestic spaces (Wazir Jahan Karim, 1992). In the context of domestic spaces, women are seen as determinants in upholding the self-esteem and dignity of the family and household and in maintaining the love of their husbands and preserving the harmony and well-being of family and society (Ruzy Suliza Hashim, 2006; Rahimah & Shaiful, 2014). Women who are active in public spaces are discredited as less sweet, aggressive and shameless. Lim (2003)
also comments that emotions of male-chauvinism prevail in the Malay culture and that this sentiment discriminates stereotyping against women for instance in male and female attitudes towards sex and romance. Similar findings were made by Jerome (2013) who analysed Malay songs and found gender stereotypes in the songs that reinforce men’s and women’s roles in romantic relationships. Women were lyrically depicted as being emotionally dependent on men and vulnerable in romantic relationships despite the evidence of female emotional strength in the songs. In short, in the Malay worldview, although women are viewed as complementary to men, they are subordinate to men, with supportive roles and responsibilities to perform particularly in the domain of family and household.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design
This research is qualitative in nature and it adopts Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) critical discourse analysis (CDA) approach as the analytical framework. Thirty essays gathered from thirty male students from a Malaysian university were used as data for this study. The sampling was deemed sufficient to establish the linguistic patterns of interest since the study is discourse-analytic in nature for which “smaller selections of material, written or oral, which is handled ‘manually’ by the researcher” is a feature of the inquiry (Angermuller, 2015, p.512). The students were Malays from various diploma programmes ranging from Business Studies to Office Management and Administrative Science and Policy Studies. The selection of these students was based on convenient random sampling technique in which the students were taught the English language by the researcher (first author) in the previous semesters. In addition, since the focus of this study was on linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes, variables such as academic background and language proficiency were not taken into consideration.

Data Collection
The writing task required the students to write an essay of between 150 and 200 words entitled *The Perfect Woman*. The purpose of this essay was to gather the students’ thoughts and perspectives on the criteria and characteristics of a perfect woman. The students were first briefed about the task that they would be asked to do before being given the assurance that their language proficiency and use of formal structures in their essays would not be assessed. Furthermore, since the task was conducted in a language laboratory fully equipped with computers, the students were given the choice to either write the essays or type them out on a computer. The task lasted for an hour.

Data Analysis
The collected data was analysed using Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) framework for CDA. This three-part model consists of three dimensions of discourse which are namely; a) the object of analysis (the texts), b) the processes by which the object is produced (written, spoken, designed) and received (read/listened to/ viewed) by human subjects, and c) the socio-historical conditions that govern these processes. In turn, three different kinds of analysis were employed for these three dimensions of discourse, which include; a) text analysis (description), b) processing analysis (interpretation), and c) social analysis (explanation).
Text analysis was conducted to identify occurrences of linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in the data. The study focused on sexism in semantics as this was the aspect of linguistic sexism that emerged in the data. Meaning relations between words (Fairclough, 1989) and lexical repetition (Halliday, 1994) served as analytical devices to locate the way in which the respondents’ experience of the social world with regard to the idea of a perfect woman was represented. Meaning relations between words that were investigated include “synonymy” (sameness of meaning), “antonymy” (oppositeness of meaning), and “hyponymy” (inclusion of meaning) to locate ideological themes (Fairclough 1989, p.116). Fairclough (1989, p.115) notes that ideological themes, which are usually implied rather than stated explicitly, can be explored in discourse through “wording” which involves analysis of vocabulary. In addition to meaning relations, gender stereotypes were also determined based on lexical repetition (Halliday, 1994). According to Halliday (1994) lexical repetition may be used as a device for studying ideological implications in discourse. Other than its textual function for coherence, lexical repetition can have a didactic and emotional effect on readers. It is employed by writers to emphasize a certain attitude, value, belief or fact. In the context of the present study, lexical repetition can be a useful device to reveal the embedded ideological themes in the students’ essays.

Next, processing analysis which deals with the processes by which the object (i.e. the text) is produced and received by human subjects was done. For this type of analysis, the stereotype content model (Brannon, 2004) was used to chart the gender stereotypes towards women that were found in the texts (see Figure 1). The gender stereotypes from the findings of the text analysis were placed on the chart to identify the most commonly recurring stereotypes about women in the data and were interpreted according to the dimensions of competence and warmth.

Lastly, social analysis was conducted by explaining the reasons behind the depiction of these gender stereotypes in the data. This explanation was done based on the Malay culture and beliefs which form the value system of the students in this study.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

**Text Analysis**

**Meaning Relations**

The data showed that an ideal woman is viewed as being mentally stable, logical and not emotional. However a woman is generally seen as otherwise: she is described as emotional, argumentative, irrational and illogical. For instance in Example 1, she is described as “turn(s) coo coo”, “trust their emotions instead of their brains”, “(being) topsy turvy hormonal wrecks”, “(display) exaggerated arguments”, “(are) argumentative”, and “(want to) win war”. These words and expressions are hyponyms of the superordinate - emotional, argumentative, irrational and illogical. The words display negative, derogatory connotations of women. The preference is for mentally stable women who are described as logical and thoughtful.

**Example 1**

In my opinion, being a perfect woman is being mentally stable. No matter how hot or attractive you are, but your head must be in a logical condition. Once you turned coo-coo, things will become ‘poo-poo’.

Lots of women tend to trust more on their emotions instead of their brains. Being emotional is acceptable for once or twice but if it takes everyday of
their lives (and making it into a daily routine) it would be a huge pain in the butt, not just to their spouse but to everyone around them. Emotionally unstable and topsy-turvy hormonal wrecks is generally a major root in every woman and exaggerated arguments tend to lead to another. You’re still wondering why the actual problem still can’t be solved and now they’re arguing of something way different than your actual point. Even worse, when women are not thinking logically and just cracked out anything argumentative that can ensure they will definitely win war.

A woman who can control herself, there may be only 10% of the global women population that have this ability, 95% may slap your brains out and the 5% have the poison sting that will turn your life upside down. In conclusion, the most perfect woman is because they are logical, professional, tolerable, independent, thoughtful and trustworthy.

In Example 2, a woman is described as needing education and knowledge although not necessarily needing specialist knowledge. Antonyms are used when she is described as not needing “a certification to scale (her) knowledge”; instead she would be better if she knew more “general knowledge”. Although education and knowledge are valued, it appears that she need not be too knowledgeable.

Example 2
Education and knowledge is very important, however, it doesn't mean that a certification to scale their knowledge, but how much they know about general knowledge is more important.

In Example 3, a woman is described as needing to be “cool”, “can accept man the way they are”, and “...must understand...men...” This view conveys the meaning that she has to be tolerant, understanding and acceptable of men’s idiosyncrasies such as watching sports on television even if this activity irks her.

Example 3
Woman has to be cool so that they can accept man the way they are. Some of the biggest fights couple have are over watching sports. The woman must understand that men need to watch sports because it cannot be separated from them. She must accept that no matter what.

In Example 4, sexism is apparent in the use of the word “tidy”. A non-ideal woman has “papers and files all over the place”, is “disorganised and untidy” although she may “wear smart” clothes and “spray [herself] with perfume every single day”. Sexism is also evident in the use of the word “high heels” to refer to shoes and how a woman’s car cluttered with shoes can make it difficult for passengers to sit in.

Example 4
Ideal woman are tidy. If they wear tidy clothes, and they smell good and keep their cars, houses and workplace clean. Non ideal women’s car is filled with high heels all over the place, making it difficult for passengers to sit and rest their feet. Non ideal women’s workplace is filled with papers and files all over the place. These show how disorganised and untidy they are, even though they wear smart and spray themselves with perfume every single day.

Likewise in Example 5, the term “modest” entails a woman not “(having) physical contact with men, say(ing) vulgar words, brag(ging) and post(ing) whatever and wherever (she) eats, whatever (she is) wearing, and whoever (she networks with)”. Such activities when performed by men however may not be described as “conceit” or seen as immodest. The term modest takes on different meanings when used with men and women. The word “nursing” also displays sexism as the word “nurse” is often associated with women.

Example 5
Ideal women are modest when it comes to physical appearance and social interaction. Why do they like to have physical contacts with men and say vulgar words? Why do they need to brag and post whatever and wherever they eat, whatever they are wearing, and whoever they are nursing in every social networking site? They do not show modesty, they show conceit.

Other words such as “voluptuous with curves in all the right places”, “lovely”, “beautiful”, “have a beauty inside and outside”, “gorgeous”, “pretty”, “body shape”, “attractive”, “asset”, “wear size 2 and look like Emma Watson” are also deemed as sexist as they assume feminine connotations for women which are not commonly used to describe men. Words such as “body shape”, “asset” and “voluptuous” are patronizing towards women’s physical appearances. For instance, describing a perfect woman as possessing a good body shape and being voluptuous implies that her physical appearance is more important than her personality. The word “asset”, in particular, is sexually charged. While describing a man as possessing a valuable asset refers to his wealth, telling a woman that she possesses valuable assets might refer to her shapely figure or her intimate parts.

In sum, the analysis of meaning relations shows that the traits of a perfect woman from the respondents’ perspective is that she must be physically beautiful, modest in speech and dressing, mentally stable, logical, tolerant, understanding, acceptable of men’s temperaments, tidy, organised, knowledgeable, and she should not be argumentative and emotional.

Lexical repetition
Lexical repetition of vocabulary items in the essays were grouped as stereotypes in terms of two categories: a) psychological traits associated with women, and b) specific activities that women are associated with. The traits of a perfect woman that were discovered from the analysis of meaning relations were incorporated into the analysis that involved lexical repetition in order to establish a broader view of the gender stereotypes of the respondents of the study.

Stereotypes in terms of psychological traits
From the essays gathered, a number of recurring psychological traits that the students deem to characterise a perfect woman were found. These traits, along with the frequencies of these traits across the data are listed in Table 1.

Table 1. Psychological traits associated with women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Psychological traits associated with women</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Polite, Well-mannered, Modest</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding, Obedient, Loyal, Supportive</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confident</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intelligent, Logical, Educated</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious, God-fearing</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 outlines five of the recurring psychological traits that the students deemed to be fitting of an ideal woman. One of the most sought after characteristic of a woman is politeness. This trait includes good mannerism, modesty and other qualities like upholding her dignity and knowing how to carry her own self in public. Another popular trait desired of an ideal woman is she has to be understanding, obedient, loyal and supportive. Being confident is also a common trait of a perfect woman across the data. Next, a perfect woman is someone who is intelligent or well-educated. Lastly, being religious and God-fearing is also part of the make-up of the perfect woman.

Stereotypes in Terms of Activities Associated with Women

Based on the data, an ideal woman is associated with two main categories of activities. These categories are namely homemaking and having own career, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Activities associated with women

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activities associated with women</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Homemaking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cooking</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of family</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking care of household</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having own career</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear from Table 2 that according to the respondents, a perfect woman is someone who is married and has children, along with being a career woman. In the category of homemaking, women are expected to be excellent cooks. They are also expected to be adept at taking care of their husbands and children. Similarly, they are also in charge of household-related matters such as tidying the house, washing the clothes and washing the dishes. Apart from homemaking, a woman’s success in her career is also seen as part of being a perfect woman.

Processing analysis
The second type of analysis in Fairclough’s (1989, 1995) model, i.e. processing analysis, was carried out to examine the processes that underlie the gender stereotypes found in the data.

In terms of the placement of gender stereotypes with regard to psychological traits in the stereotype content model (Brannon, 2004), the traits that describe perfection in terms of the behaviours women are expected to display are determined to be less competent but warm (low competence-high warmth). Therefore, this evaluation applies to characteristics such as being polite, well-mannered and modest, understanding, obedient, loyal, and supportive, and religious or God-fearing. On the other hand, the remaining two labels, which are being confident and intelligent, and being educated are characteristics of successful women belonging to respected professions, which ultimately mean that they are evaluated to be competent but less warm (high competence-low warmth). Consequently, these five traits would appear in the stereotype content model as illustrated by Figure 2.

![Figure 2. Stereotype content model for psychological traits associated with women](image)

The two categories of activities associated with women that were extracted from the data were Homemaking and Having Own Career. Based on Brannon’s (2004) stereotype content model, the role of women as homemakers is evaluated as incompetent but warm and caring (low competence-high warmth) across the two dimensions of ‘competence’ and ‘warmth’. On the other hand, the assessment for career women is judged as competent but less kind and caring (high competence-low warmth). The positioning of these two types of activities associated with women in the model is illustrated in Figure 3.
The analysis shows that the respondents of the study exhibit gender stereotypes of women that largely reflect women as being of high warmth and low competence. In the context of education and career, however, women are viewed as having high competence but low warmth.

**Social analysis**

In order to gain a better understanding of the gender stereotypes from the respondents’ perspective, a social analysis needs to be conducted by explaining these stereotypes according to the Malay culture and beliefs that the students identify themselves with.

As noted by Rahimah and Shaiful (2014), the Malay gender system is strongly influenced by the Islamic religion. Hegemonic and singular interpretation of Islam and of female morality and piety as stipulated in the Holy Quran and Prophet Muhammad’s traditions ensure that the Malay society has an unwavering stance on the traits that its women are expected to display. This explains the psychological traits that were found in the data which postulate that an ideal woman is someone who is polite, well-mannered, modest, understanding, obedient, loyal, supportive and ultimately religious. The aforementioned traits are highly valued and institutionalised by the society as they epitomise feminine perfection from the religious point of view.

Next, the study showed that a perfect woman is also defined by her adeptness in homemaking, which is gauged by her status as a wife and mother to her husband and children respectively. Similarly, this quality has its roots in the Islamic faith as marriage is the only acknowledged legal form of procreation (Ruzy Suliza Hashim, 2006; Rumaya Juhari, Siti Nor Yaacob & Mansor Abu Talib, 2013). Moreover, following the tradition of Prophet Muhammad that marriage completes one’s Islamic faith, Muslims generally place marriage as an utmost priority in their lives. Therefore, it is through marriage that Malay women can...
put themselves in the position of living together legally with men and producing off-springs. Once women subscribe to the institution of marriage, their worth as a wife and as a mother will be judged mainly based on matters related to domestic management such as cooking, and taking care of the family and the household. These are precisely the values that were found to be valued in the image of a perfect woman.

However, the emergence of traits such as confidence and intelligence and the need for women to have their own careers show that in today’s modern world the role of Malay women is expanding into the professional domain and is not strictly confined to being mere homemakers. Global changes, particularly in the areas of economy and education mean that women are being increasingly recognised as having control over their academic achievements and their involvement as workforce professionals. As the Malay society contends with the fact that men should not be the only breadwinners in their families, modern Malay women are expected to be well-educated and capable of securing jobs to improve the overall living status of their families. This is echoed by Md Azalanshah and Runnel (2013, p.4) who state that “the measure of a modern woman’s advancement lies in literacy and education, decreased birth-rate, shared parenting/caring responsibilities, discretionary income, job opportunities, women in government and the professions, a flourishing presence in creative fields and freedom of choice”.

CONCLUSION
The findings gathered from this study support the previous literature (Bahiyah Hamid et al, 2008; Muhammad Subakir et al, 2012; Jerome 2013) that linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes still occur in modern-day Malaysia. As in these previous research studies, the present study also shows that Malay males in Malaysia today still uphold normative gender role expectations and stereotypes of a woman as subordinate with qualities of being polite, modest, well-mannered, understanding and supportive of men and being able to perform homemaking duties. Women are viewed as having to have high warmth and low competence. However, there appears to be an emerging view among Malay men of women also possessing intelligence and education as well as having professional careers of their own.

REFERENCES


