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## Attitude of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language Students in Gender-Fair Language

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### ABSTRACT

*Awareness of gender-fair language means being mindful of using inclusive and respectful language for all genders, while avoiding terms that reinforce stereotypes or discriminate against specific genders. This study sought to investigate the attitude of the Bachelor of English Language students on gender-fair language. Results revealed that most BAEL students acknowledged that making changes was difficult, but the majority believed it was important to make an effort to stop using sexist language. Although some argued that the term was gender-neutral and merely referred to the position, it was crucial to consider the social context in which language operates. Other BAEL students also believed that the change in dynamics of English language is unacceptable because it was deeply embedded in the culture. It was clear that as these students expressed themselves more positively using gender-fair language, their awareness and attitudes toward gender equality thrived. With this, implementation of education and awareness programs that address the impact of sexist language on individuals and society is recommended.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Gender-fair language, BAEL students, stereotypes*

### INTRODUCTION

Gender fair language awareness refers to being mindful of using language that is inclusive and respectful of all genders, and avoiding language that reinforces gender stereotypes or discriminates against certain genders. This includes using gender-neutral terms whenever possible and avoiding the use of generic masculine pronouns to refer to both men and women.

According to Sczesny et al. (2016), Gender-Fair Language (GFL) tries to lessen discrimination and gender stereotypes. Neutralization and feminization are the two main approaches that have been used to treat men and women equally in languages. For instance, gender-unmarked forms like police officer can be used to neutralize the usage of male-masculine forms (policeman), while feminine forms (i.e., the applicant, he or she rather than the applicant, he) are used to highlight the presence of female referents. GFL contributes to the decrease of gender stereotyping and discrimination by integrating studies on language structures, language policies, and individual language behavior.

Gender-fair language reduces unnecessary gender-related anxiety in their writing so that, reader can concentrate on the actions of individuals rather than their sexual orientation. For instance, the practice of using he and man as generic terms poses a common problem. Rather than presenting a general picture of reality, he and man used generically can mislead your audience. According to

Martyna (1978), it has shown that the average reader's tendency is to imagine a male when reading he or man, even if the rest of the passage is gender-neutral. Therefore, they cannot be sure that the reader will see the woman on the job if they refer to every technician as he, or that the reader will see the woman in the history of man. On the other hand, replacing every he with he or she attracts even more attention to gender and defeats their purpose.

According to Ansara and Hegarty (2017), since language and society are mutually reflective, it is critical for communicators to acknowledge and accommodate changes in word meaning and acceptance. The growing awareness of the fact that some words' apparent meanings have changed due to the shifting roles of men and women in the society contributes to their concern over the usage of sexist language. Given the evolution of language and the diversity of people today, viewpoints and character, as well as the requirement to take into language awareness. Growing concerns about the necessity to demonstrate sensitivity to language. In order to attain gender equality, there are initiatives that present terminology that is gender-neutral. Fair language for women is on the usage of syntactic and lexical constructions that do not prioritize, minimize or draw attention to a specific gender. People view language as a crucial instrument for identifying gender, such as whether anything is being viewed as either masculine or feminine where the majority of frequently imposes a duality.

Subsequently, forms of language have an impact not only in job advertisements and other recruiting materials, it has also a significant impact on both the hiring managers and the individuals who apply for the post. A German hiring simulation study found that when the position was advertised in the masculine (Geschäftsführer, CEO, masc.), decision makers preferred male applicants over female applicants for high-status leadership positions (but not middle-management positions). When word pairs were used (such as CEO, fem./CEO, masc., Geschäftsführerin/Geschäftsführer), nonetheless, ladies and men were appraised as similarly appropriate for the gig (Horvath & Sczesny, 2015).

Consequently, the goal of gender fair language is to lessen gender prejudice and stereotyping. The two main approaches are to treat men fairly and to make language gender-neutral and women in an equal manner. These kinds of equitable gender language according to Sczesny's (2015) citation of the literature relate to neutralization and feminization. Gender Equality suggests using forms that are appropriate for a given gender and is more frequently utilized in grammatically gendered languages. It is essential to comprehend gender-neutral language in order to communicate effectively in work environments. In Bukidnon State University, Bachelor of Arts in English Language students engage with stakeholders, clients, and coworkers from a variety of backgrounds as they prepare for their future employment. They can communicate politely and inclusively, avoiding inadvertent biases or discriminatory words, if they are aware of gender-neutral terminology. The importance of this expertise is rising in organizations that place a high priority on inclusion and diversity. In order to assess gender concern and analyze the gender fair language awareness of Bachelor of Arts in English Language students, it is important to understand the significance of gender awareness and fair language usage in academic settings. This involves examining the impact of language on gender perceptions, understanding the concept of gender fair language, and evaluating the attitudes and behaviors of BAEL students towards gender-fair language. Raising public sensitivity, understanding, and knowledge about gender (in)equality is the goal of gender awareness campaigns. Raising awareness is a process that encourages communication, deepens understanding between people, and builds the abilities and talents needed

to bring about societal change. Concerning this, it is right to assess the attitude of the BAEL students in gender-fair language.

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study aimed to answer the following question:

1. What is the attitude of the BAEL students on gender-fair language?

### FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study was anchored on gender fair language theory by Formanowicz, Moser, and Sczesny (2012). Gender fair language (GFL) is language used with the intention of reducing gender bias in one's mental representation, or mental understanding of an idea. Gender fair language includes gender-neutral and gender-inclusive language.

Formanowicz et al. (2016) studied the use of the gender-unfair language, especially while referring to those of masculine generics, which have restricted the visibility of women as well as the cognitive availability of female exemplars. This might have been disadvantageous for women. For example, in personnel selection (Stahlberg et al., 2007). This can be corrected by enhancing women's visibility by the use of novel feminine forms (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). However, even this may have negative consequences. Therefore, it should, for example, be prevented in women's professional self-reference (Horvath et al., 2016). As a result, women avoid using the gender fair language such as avoiding the feminine job titles in grammatical gender languages just as to defend themselves from accusations of incompetence and lower status. This also help to keep gender stereotyping and social discrimination at bay. The main aim of gender-fair language (GFL) is to reduce gender stereotyping and gender discrimination.

There are two approaches that can be used to make gender-fair improvements in both written and spoken language, ensuring that women and men are treated equally. Neutralization and feminization are the two ways in which we can reduce gender discrimination and stereotyping. When male-masculine forms like (policeman) are replaced with gender-unmarked forms like (police officer), neutralization occurs, while feminization occurs when feminine forms are used to make female referents visible (i.e., instead if salesman the term sales women is used). The most fundamental asymmetry is in the usage of the masculine generics.

### METHODOLOGY

In order to properly investigate the research problems and achieve the study's goals, this study used a quantitative research design specifically cross-sectional research design. To guarantee that the results were reusable, an accurate representation selected from the group of interest was given a structured questionnaire using random sampling procedures.

#### Research Design

In gathering the numerical data for this study, the researcher used a quantitative study specifically a cross-sectional research design. This study employed a survey design as it was suitable for assessing the degree of familiarity of the attitude of the BAEL students in terms of belief in sexist

language. The researcher adopted the research instrument entitled Attitude towards Sexist and Non-Sexist language developed by Parks and Robertson (2004) cited in Talosa (2018).

### **Research Locale**

This study was conducted in one of the state universities in Bukidnon. This institution started as a two-year secondary school named Bukidnon Provincial High School in 1924. In 1928, it offered a four-year secondary normal curriculum and was renamed Bukidnon Normal School (BNS). The academy was formerly known as Bukidnon State College and became a university in 2007. Bukidnon State University is one of the institutions in the province that aims to produce excellent and competitive professionals among its students. The university has seven colleges and offers 29 programs. One of the colleges in the university is the College of Arts and Sciences and one of the programs in the college is the Bachelor of Arts in English Language, which is the center of development in the university. The Bachelor of Arts in English Language (BAEL) is a four-year degree program that teaches students about the structure, development, theories, and applications of language, as well as how to write and speak in English successfully. Hence, BAEL students are the respondents of this study since they are susceptible to proving the applicable data.

### **Research Participants**

The participants listed for the purpose of this study was composed of 124 students, spanning across different academic years within the Bachelor of Arts in English Language program at Bukidnon State University. The student composition of the respondent pool outlined a diverse representation, with 33 students from the first year, 14 students from second year, 41 students from third year, and 36 students from fourth year.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

In gathering the data, the researcher started by preparing necessary materials detailing the research objectives, proposed methods, ethics considerations, and timeline. After the approval of the conduct of the study, questionnaires were distributed to the participants and systematically collected data. This approach ensured a comprehensive and rigorous process from approval to thesis completion. The data collected for this research was through a survey questionnaire. The survey was composed of twelve (12) question with regards to the attitude of Bachelor of Arts in English Language students in Gender-Fair Language. In the questionnaire, a Likert scale was used to determine if the respondent agreed to the given statements.

### **Research Instrument**

The research questionnaire used in this study was adopted from the study of Talosa (2018) entitled Filipino ESL Students Androgyny Trait, Awareness and Attitude in Gender Fair. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed and organized quantitatively. The content of the research instrument contained questions regarding the attitude of the BAEL students in terms of belief in sexist language.

### **ETHICAL STATEMENT**

In the pursuit of academic excellence and the advancement of knowledge, the researcher solemnly asserts the ethical foundation upon which this thesis is constructed. The commitment to research integrity is unwavering, and pledge to uphold the highest standards of ethical conduct throughout

the entirety of this scholarly endeavor. This commitment encompasses a multifaceted approach, beginning with the acknowledgment of the paramount importance of research transparency, dedicated to providing a clear and comprehensive account of the research process, including the design, methodology, and data analysis procedures, ensuring that the intricacies of this study are open to scrutiny and evaluation. Respect for the dignity, rights, and privacy of all participants is a fundamental principle guiding in this research. In securing informed consent, the researcher has strived to empower participants with a full understanding of the research's purpose, potential implications, and their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Recognizing the potential impact of this work, I have taken proactive measures to minimize harm, demonstrating a deep concern for the well-being of participants, the environment, and any entities affected by the research. Moreover, emphasize the importance of confidentiality, assuring that all collected data are treated with the utmost discretion, anonymized, and securely stored. This research aligns with and adheres to the ethical guidelines and any deviations are transparently disclosed and justified. committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse research environment, where each participant is treated with respect, regardless of their background or beliefs. By affixing the name of the researcher to this ethical statement, researcher affirm his/her dedication to conducting research with integrity, ensuring that the pursuit of knowledge is guided by ethical principles and contributes positively to the academic community and beyond.

## DATA ANALYSIS

In analyzing the data, the survey questionnaire was the basis for determining the awareness level of the Bachelor of Arts in English Language students at Gender Fair Language. The following was used in the analysis of the data.

Legend:

Mean Level	Verbal Description
4.51- 5.00	Strongly Agree
3.51 – 4.50	Agree
2.51 – 3.50	Undecided
1.51 – 2.50	Disagree
1.00 – 1.50	Strongly Disagree

*Source: Talosa, A. D. (2018). Filipino ESL Students Androgyny Trait, Awareness and Attitude in Gender-fair Language. Asian Journal of Science and Technology, 9(10), 8865-8874.*

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion about the attitude of BAEL students in Gender-fair Language. The discussion was based on the objectives of the study.

Table 1. Sexist Language with Positive Response.

Statements	Weighted Mean
If the original meaning of the word 'he' was 'person', we should continue to use 'he' to refer to both males and females today.	4.16
When people use the term 'man and wife' the expression is not sexist if the users don't mean it to be.	4.03
The English language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture.	3.90
The elimination of sexist language is an important goal.	3.20
Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate sexist language.	3.20
Women who think that being called a 'chairman' is sexist are misinterpreting the word 'chairman'.	3.12
We should not change the way the English language has traditionally been written and spoken.	3.04

The statement, *If the original meaning of the word 'he' was 'person', we should continue to use 'he' to refer to both males and females today* has a weighted mean of 4.16 which means that the student agreed the contention that if the original meaning of the word 'he' was 'person,' then its continued use to refer to both males and females today is warranted finds resonance with a significant segment of students. A prevailing perspective among these students was rooted in the argument that historical linguistic norms should not be hastily discarded, as they bear the imprints of the era in which they originated. Advocates for maintaining the traditional usage argue that language, by nature, evolves slowly, and altering established conventions may lead to confusion or a dilution of historical context. Moreover, Kuhn (2014) concurred with this viewpoint that language, being a reflection of societal values, should be understood within the context of its historical evolution. Also, the adaptation of language to contemporary norms is an ongoing process and should be approached with a measured consideration of the cultural and linguistic heritage embedded in the words being used. For students maintaining the use of 'he' as a gender-neutral term aligned with a nuanced appreciation for the historical intricacies of language and its capacity to encapsulate societal shifts over time (Peterson, 2012).

Further, the statement, *When people use the term 'man and wife' the expression is not sexist if the users don't mean it to be* has a weighted mean of 4.03 which means that participants agreed and they understood the language and its meaning. Language was often seen in today's culture as a dynamic, constantly developing concept that was influenced by social development and cultural conventions. BAEL students believed that although the phrase "man and wife" has historical roots

in traditional marriage duties, it was no longer as sexist when used in casual conversation if the speaker has no intention of maintaining gender inequality. They viewed language to be flexible and interpretive, and before categorizing some terms as simply sexist, one must take into account the context and meaning behind their use. Furthermore, several students believed that language changes over time and that the social attitudes of a given society can influence the meaning of a given sentence. In addition, some BAEL students agreed that language evolved over time and the meaning of some sentences may change based on social attitudes and values. Therefore, they agreed that while the term "male and female" may have originated in a patriarchal context, its current use among individuals who do not intend to reinforce gender bias should not automatically be considered sexist. Tannen (2016) emphasized that the value of purpose and context in language interpretation by agreeing that the word "man and wife" is not sexist if the users do not intend for it to be.

In the claim, *The English language will never be changed because it is too deeply ingrained in the culture*, it gauged a result of 3.90 which means that BAEL students believed that the English language remained unchanged because it was deeply embedded in the culture. First off, the significance of English in worldwide work, diplomatic activity, and technology had been established by its wide adoption as a standard language, making significant adjustments difficult. Students often emphasized the historical value of English, which had developed over centuries, absorbing elements from many languages and civilizations to produce a sophisticated vocabulary and expressions. The depth of linguistic background created an air of seriousness and support, which made BAEL students claimed that the language was too deeply established to change much. Furthermore, the idea that English should remain in its existing form was strengthened by the emphasis placed on standard grammar and vocabulary in the school curriculum (Crystal, 2010). English language did not change much since it was so ingrained in culture while languages can change over time. English's lexicon and fundamental structure were probably going to stay the same. Crystal (2011) highlighted that the essential elements of the English language were ingrained in a multitude of societal contexts, making significant changes improbable.

Another is, *The elimination of sexist language is an important goal* with a mean of 3.20. This indicated that BAEL students agreed with this statement and was not surprising. Discrimination and gender stereotypes were reinforced by sexist language, which could be harmful to both individuals and society at large. Eliminating sexist language also encouraged diversity and a feeling of connection among all academic community members. Additionally, it made students ready for a job where inclusive communication was becoming more and more important. Furthermore, students were actively contributing to the larger push for fairness and gender equality by realizing how important it was to eradicate sexist language. Cameron (2015) emphasized that getting rid of sexist language was important for making sure men and women

Additionally, in the statement, *Although change is difficult, we still should try to eliminate sexist language*, it casted a result of 3.20. Most BAEL students agreed that making changes was hard but most thought that it was important to try and stop using sexist language. They believed that even though change can be difficult, it was still necessary to create a fair and equal society. Using sexist language could cause harmful ideas and would add to a culture of treating people unfairly. Also, students realized how powerful language could be in shaping how people think and act in society. Getting rid of sexist language was not just about changing words but it was about making a big move toward a culture that respects and values everyone, no matter their gender, and building a

sense of togetherness and equality among different groups of people. Hooks (2009) argued that language had the power to change our perceptions, which may lead to create a culture free from sexist and inclusive language.

Moreover, the claim, *Women who think that being called a 'chairman' is sexist are misinterpreting the word 'chairman'* has a result of 3.12. Due to its historical association with men in positions of power, the title "chairman" was intrinsically gender-specific. Although there were others who contend that the term was gender-neutral and only indicated the position, it was important to recognize the social context in which language functions. Since language both reflected and upheld social norms, it was essential to use gender-neutral terminology to advance equality and inclusivity. Hence, it ignored the larger effects of gendered language in maintaining established power dynamics when women's objections about the term "chairman" being exclusive were disregarded. Will (2011) argued that terms like "chairman" were not inherently sexist and that those who find them offensive were misinterpreting their meaning. Language should not be manipulated to conform to political correctness and that such efforts undermine the true goals of feminism.

Finally, the declaration, *We should not change the way the English language has traditionally been written and spoken* gained a weighted mean of 3.04. This stems from the idea that the language has developed into what it is today over time and that altering its grammar and fundamental structure could cause problems, compromises verbal and written language purity and communication. Conventional spelling, grammar, and punctuation offer a coherent structure for comprehension and expression, facilitating precise and coherent communication of ideas. Furthermore, adhering to accepted linguistic norms promotes correctness and consistency in both written and oral communication, which promotes successful cross-cultural communication. Also, modifying one's writing or speech patterns in English might lead to misconceptions and confusion, particularly for individuals who are unfamiliar with the new conventions. With this, it is important to respect and preserve the traditional norms of the English language to ensure clear and effective communication. Truss (2016) supported the idea to maintain the traditional way of writing and speaking the English language, emphasizing the importance of grammar and punctuation in effective communication.

**Table 2. Sexist Language with a Fail-to-Agree Response.**

Statements	Weighted Mean
Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid sexist language.	2.27
Sexist language is related to sexist treatment of people in society.	2.21
When teachers talk about the history of the Philippines, they should change expressions, such as "our forefathers," to expressions that include women.	2.17



Opinions on a language's sensitivity may differ greatly. It is important to recognize that language preferences are very personal and that what one person finds attractive may not always be agreed upon by another. Thus, there will always be people who cannot agree on which language is the sexiest, despite the fact that others may fight strongly about the attraction of particular languages.

In the statement, *Most publication guidelines require newspaper writers to avoid using ethnic and racial slurs. So, these guidelines should also require writers to avoid sexist language* garnered a weighted mean of 2.27. The disagreement of BAEL students of this principles means that the topic of using inclusive language in publication guidelines has stirred up a lot of debate. While guidelines usually tell newspaper writers not to use ethnic or racial slurs, some people think these rules should also say not to use sexist language. Those who supported this idea say that just like using slurs based on race or ethnicity can cause harm and discrimination, using sexist language can also contribute to unfair treatment based on gender. It's not just about the words; it's about how people are treated because of their gender. Pinker's view on this matter is representative of a larger discussion concerning political correctness, freedom of speech, and how language shapes social perceptions. While some contend that banning sexist language is necessary to advance gender equality and foster an inclusive atmosphere, others feel that such laws violate free speech rights and obstruct candid conversation.

Further, in the statement, *Sexist language is related to sexist treatment of people in society*, it gained 2.21 mean result which means that students disagree that the topic guidelines should make sure writers avoid sexist language to show a commitment to being inclusive and respectful. However, not everyone agrees with this. Some students think rules about language limit their freedom to express themselves. They see it as a form of censorship that goes against their right to speak freely. Some students also resist the idea of changing traditional views, thinking efforts to promote inclusive language are unnecessary or go against their values. Some might not even realize how sexist language is connected to bigger issues like gender inequality.

Another is, *When teachers talk about the history of the Philippines, they should change expressions, such as "our forefathers," to expressions that include women.* The statement casted 2.17 mean reflecting some disagreement about adopting inclusive language guidelines. Shifting the focus to a broader context, open conversations were recognized as crucial for providing comprehensive education. It was essential for students to understand why these guidelines existed and how they contributed to a fair and respectful society. By using examples and stories that illustrated the harm caused by sexist language, educators could help students empathize and gain a deeper understanding. Discussions about the power of language in shaping thoughts and attitudes also heightened students' awareness of the necessity of inclusive language in publications.

However, some writers opposed the idea of including women in narratives about Philippine history. They argued that doing so might alter the original understanding of historical events and maintained that there was no need to change the language used to discuss history. These writers believed it was important to interpret history as it was understood at the time, rather than through the lens of contemporary perspectives.

**Table 3. Sexist Language with Undecided Response.**

Statements	Weighted Mean
Teachers who require students to use nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students.	3.47
Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity.	2.65

Since individual opinions are heavily influenced by personal preferences, the idea of the sexiest language is subjective. The fact is that people's opinions on how alluring a language can be vary widely, so what one person finds engaging may not be so to another. In the end, there is still discussion over which language is the sexiest, which allows for a variety of viewpoints and individual preferences.

Certainly, in the statement, *Teachers who require students to use nonsexist language are unfairly forcing their political views upon their students* gauged a result of 3.47 weighted. This means that most student were undecided about the idea that teachers making students use nonsexist language were like pushing their political views on them, a topic that many students could not agree on. Some students thought that being made to use nonsexist language took away their right to speak freely and made them follow certain beliefs they might not have agreed with. They believed that using language should have been their own choice and not something forced on them. On the other side, many students understood that using inclusive language, which did not support gender stereotypes, was important. They saw it as a way to create a respectful and inclusive environment for everyone, not just about politics. They might have also thought it helped challenge what society considered normal and made things fairer. Students' thoughts depended on their own beliefs, values, and how they saw language affecting society.

Moreover, the idea that, *Worrying about sexist language is a trivial activity* casted a weighted mean of 2.65. This was a controversial topic among students, leading to different perspectives and indecision. Some students argued that concerns about sexist language were really trivial because they believed that language should not have been a concern and that individuals should have focused on more pressing matters. On the other hand, many students were not sure about this statement because they knew the important influence of language in the formation of the attitudes and perceptions of society. They understood that sexist language could perpetuate harmful stereotypes and promote a culture of inequality. Additionally, these students emphasized the importance of creating an inclusive and respectful environment through conscious language use. Some students also felt insecure because they understood that sexist language was only one part of a broader effort to combat gender discrimination and promote equality. They recognized that while addressing systemic issues was important, language played a crucial role in reflecting and reinforcing social norms.

## CONCLUSION

The Bachelor of Arts in English Language students exhibited a notably heightened awareness and more positive attitudes toward gender equality. These implications were drawn from the findings

which suggest a noteworthy relationship between linguistic expression and gender equality awareness among these students.

The research findings exposed a positive relationship between the use of gender-fair language and the level of awareness demonstrated by BAEL students. It was evident that as these students express themselves more positively in gender-fair language, their awareness and attitudes toward gender equality flourished. This connection between linguistic choices and attitudes implied that an individual's knowledge about gender equality was intricately linked to their internalized beliefs and attitudes. The language utilized by BAEL students appeared to serve as a reflective mirror of their evolving awareness and progressive attitudes regarding gender equality. As they embrace and employ gender-neutral language, these students not only convey a commitment to inclusive communication but also signal a deeper understanding and acceptance of equality between men and women.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

With the findings drawn from this investigation, it is recommended that to implement education and awareness programs that focus on the impact of sexist language on individuals and society and encourage the use of inclusive language in academic and social settings which include promoting the use of gender-neutral pronouns, raising awareness about the impact of language on gender equality, and providing guidelines for respectful communication.

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