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Covert Sexism in Mandarin Chinese

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Covert Sexism in Mandarin Chinese

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Introduction

Western linguists have been studying various aspects of sexism in the English language for several decades. Following on the heels of influential works by Robin Lakoff (1975), and Miller & Swift (1977), and others, a host of researchers began to identify and catalog types of sexism manifested in features of language such as vocabulary, grammar, discourse, and even intonation. (For a good historical overview of sexism in English, see Baron, 1986. Other recent research includes Stanley, 1977a, 1977b; Spender, 1980; Graddol & Swann, 1989; Eakins & Eakins, 1978; Francine & Anshen, 1983; Hill, 1986; Sorrels, 1983, and others.) Recently scholars have turned their attention to sexism in Mandarin Chinese as well, finding strikingly similar sexist phenomena in linguistic aspects such as Chinese characters, vocabulary, idioms, and proverbs. (See Shih, 1984; Wang, 1986; Wu, 1991; Liu, 1991; Jung-Palandri, 1991; Chen, 1995; Moser & Chen, 1995, just to name a few.) The most notable treatment of sexism in Chinese is that of Farris (1988), whose work has greatly influenced this article.

Like other cultures, China has a long history of sexist social conventions, and the Chinese language is pervaded with evidence of these. Research in this area has usually sought to identify and catalog aspects of Chinese that embody these sexist cultural traditions, such as sexist idioms, demeaning words for *wife*, derogatory terms of address for women, or the large number of characters containing the female radical (女) with negative connotations. Such elements tend to be rather easily identifiable and have been some of the earliest aspects to be targeted for linguistic reform. (The Chinese Communist Party, for example, in their attempts to elevate the status of women and eradicate vestiges of feudalism, has from time to time officially discouraged use of perjorative terms of address for women and wives.) Notable contributions have already been made in such research, but there are certain kinds of sexism in the Chinese language that are more subtly embedded in the grammar in such a way that they often escape conscious attention. This article attempts to shed light on some of these phenomena, since it is often in these hidden patterns of linguistic usage that sexist assumptions and notions are most powerfully present.

Overt vs. covert linguistic categories

In order to highlight and study these implicit sexist usages, it will be useful to borrow Whorf's (1956) distinction between *overt* and *covert* linguistic categories. Overt categories (Whorf also uses the term *phenotypes*) are categories explicitly marked in the language; covert categories (also called *cryptotypes*) are meanings not coded explicitly in grammar or lexicon, but rather emergent only in syntax and various usage patterns in the language. Farris (1988) was perhaps the first to raise the topic of covert sexist categories in Chinese, noting ways in which the language implicitly relegates women to a kind of "negative semantic space." This notion is a constant theme throughout various aspects of

sexist language in both Chinese and English, and we will deal with it in some detail below.

Examples of overt categories in English are plural forms (which are explicitly marked with either *-s*, *-es*, or a vowel change), and past tense verbs, which are marked in various ways according to verb type. An example of a covert category is the class of intransitive verbs (such as *go, gleam, sleep, arrive, appear,* etc.). These verbs are on the surface indistinguishable from transitive verbs like *cook*, *kill*, *find*, or *see*, until it is noted that they are not interchangeable in sentence structures like "It was V'ed" ("It was cooked", "It was killed", "It was seen", etc., where the intransitive class fails: *"It was gleamed", *"It was slept", *"It was appeared" etc.). In other words, the difference is not evident from surface level aspects or grammatical markings of the verbs themselves; it is only through contextual patterns of usage that the two categories emerge (the transitive category taking objects, the intransitive category not). Another example of a cryptotype is the set of transitive verbs that in some way involve covering, enclosing, or surface attachment, to which the prefix *-un* may be attached to denote its opposite. Thus we have a class of items like *uncover, uncoil, undress, unfasten, unlock, untangle, untie, unfold*, but not *unthink, unmake, unjump, unmelt, unthrow*, etc.

As we shall see below, there are many linguistic categories governing male and female terms and meanings which show sexist patterns that are not necessarily psychologically evident to speakers, but nevertheless have a powerful reinforcing effect, in that they fit so seamlessly into the prevailing worldview that they pass unnoticed as "common sense". Linguistically, such structures come to be considered as merely "correct" or "standard". A particular word or idiom perceived as sexist can be rather easily isolated and gradually weeded out of the language, but sexism more subtly encoded in patterns of usage is not as easily noticed, much less consciously avoided. Not all of the subjects examined below constitute covert categories *per se*, but all are examples of a kind of sexist bias embedded in the very warp and woof of the language, and which lie at the boundaries of sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and cognitive psychology.

Gender asymmetry of dyads

Lakoff & Johnson (1980) and other linguists have noted that oppositional and collocational dyads in English (and perhaps most languages) seem to adhere to a pattern in which the first component of the pair can be characterized as semantically "plus" and the second component "minus". The pattern can take various forms: positive-negative, primary-secondary, prior-subsequent, cause-effect, and so on. Some examples are: *good and bad*, *active and passive*, *more or less*, *up and down*, *joys and sorrows*, *light and dark*, *front and back*, *large and small*, *tall and short*, *love and hate*, *right and wrong*, *Heaven and Hell*; and so on.[1] This pattern is found in Chinese as well: *hǎo huài* 好坏 ("good-bad"), *shì fēi* 是非 ("right-wrong"), *shì fǒu* 是否 ("is-not; whether or not"), *duì cuò* 对错 ("correct-incorrect"), *shàng xià* 上下 ("up-down"), *qián hòu* 前后 ("front-back"), *dà xiǎo* 大小 ("big-small; size"), *duō shǎo* 多少 ("many-few"), *lǎo shào* 老少 ("old-young"), *gāo dī* 高低 ("high-low"), *cháng duǎn* 长短 ("long-short"), *kuān zhǎi*

[1] There are occasional exceptions to this plus-minus ordering, of course, such as *black and white*, "The Agony and the Ecstasy", etc., but these are often for reasons of euphony or special dramatic effect. Some dyads allow for more flexibility than others.

宽窄 ("wide-narrow"), *yuǎn jìn* 远近 ("far-near; distance"), *ài hèn* 爱恨 ("love-hate"), *róng rǔ* 荣辱 ("glory-shame"), *xǐ āi* 喜哀 ("happiness-sorrow"), etc. This ordering pattern of collocational and oppositional pairs in fact is observed in most languages, which suggests it is not merely a matter of convention, but very likely reflects basic aspects of human cognition. Note that the first member of such pairs very often functions as a *generic*, or primary category term. For example, the word *tall* in the dyad *tall-short* functions as the generic term in assessments of height. That is, when one says "How tall is Jane?", there is no assumption that Jane is tall; the question is merely a neutral one concerning her height. But if one says "How short is Jane?", the assumption is that Jane is short. And so with questions such as "How old is Jane?", "How fast is her car?", "How heavy is her suitcase?" etc., where in each case the primary member of the pair is used to signal neutral quantification.

Such usage patterns are exactly isomorphic to the Chinese case. *Lǎo Zhāng yǒu duō gāo?* 老张有多高？ ("How tall is Lao Zhang?") is merely an inquiry as to Lao Zhang's height, whereas *Lǎo Zhāng yǒu duō ǎi?* 老张有多矮？ ("How short is Lao Zhang?") assumes Lao Zhang to be short. And so with other quantitative generics: *duō yuǎn?* 多远？ ("how far?"), *duō cháng?* 多长？ ("how long?"), etc. Compounds expressing abstract gradable qualities use the primary component of the dyad for their expression: *chángdù* 长度 ("length"), *kuāndù* 宽度 ("width"), *gāodù* 高度 ("height"), and so on. Another example of this positive-negative ordering pattern, one that is so obvious and pervasive as to perhaps be not worth mentioning, is one of the standard question patterns in Chinese, V 不 V?, as seen in tag questions such as *Hǎo bu hǎo?* 好不好？ ("Good, not-good?"), *Duì bu duì?* 对不对？ ("Correct, not-correct?"), *Shì bu shì?* 是不是？ ("Is, not-is?"), and so on. It is seems natural for human categorical logic to place the positive first, and the negated, modified, or special case second.[2]

Given the longstanding sexist traditions in Western and Chinese culture, it is not surprising that such asymmetries are also evident in dyads involving gender pairs. Some examples in English are: *man and woman*, *he and she*, *boys and girls*, *brothers and sisters*, *husband and wife*, *sons and daughters*, *male and female*, *guys and dolls*, *Mr. and Mrs.*, etc. Names of couples or pairs with male and female members also tend to follow this order: Jack and Jill, Romeo and Juliet, Hansel and Gretel, Anthony and Cleopatra, Samson and Delilah, Sonny and Cher, Roy Rogers and Dale Evans, Ike and Tina Turner, Burns and Allen, and so on.[3] Through the nearly invariant male-female ordering, it can be seen that the male role overall is seen as primary, as normative, as in some sense *defining* the adjunct female role.

Examples also abound in Chinese, where the male-female ordering is, if anything, more invariant. The following are just a few examples of male-female dyads in Chinese: *nánnǚ* 男女 ("man-woman"), *fūqī* 夫妻 ("husband-wife"), *fūfù* 夫妇 ("husband-wife"),

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[2] There are, of course, occasional exceptions to the pattern in Chinese, such as *hēi bái* 黑白 ("black white"), which incidently is paralleled in the English collocation pair *black and white*, but these are merely exceptions that prove the rule.

[3] The only exception I can think of is "Bonnie and Clyde", in which the order may be for reasons of euphony, or perhaps due to the sheer novelty of a female bank robber.

fù mǔ 父母 ("father-mother")[4], *bàba māma* 爸爸妈妈 ("father-mother"), *xiōngdì jiěmèi* 兄弟姐妹 ("brothers-sisters"), *érnǚ* 儿女 or *zǐnǚ* 子女 (both meaning "sons-daughters"), *qiánkūn* 乾坤 ("male-female", "heaven-earth"), *lóngfèng* 龙凤 ("dragon-phoenix" [symbolizing male and female, respectively]), etc.[5] Of course, there are occasional exceptions to this convention in Chinese, such as *yīn yáng* 阴阳 ("female principle, male principle") but such exceptions (which sometimes equally reflect a sexist basis, as well)[6] are rare. Not surprisingly, famous couples in Chinese history and literature are also conventionally listed in male-female order. Examples are: Liang Shanbo 梁山伯 and Zhu Yingtai 祝英台, Jia Baoyu 贾宝玉 and Lin Daiyu 林黛玉, Xu Xian 许仙 and Bai Suzhen 白素贞, etc.

The important thing to note is that it is very difficult to make the case that this virtually invariant asymmetrical pattern is in any way a "natural" ordering (as might be the case with the other dyads above). There is simply no compelling *logical* reason why the female should occupy the secondary or negative semantic slot in the dyad; it is instead a deeply ingrained linguistic convention reflecting deep-seated underlying cultural assumptions. Given that women have been conceptually viewed by most societies as less important, less typical, or even "deviant", it then becomes "natural" for native speakers to accord them second place in such dyads, on the cognitive model of pairs like *up-down*, *good-bad*, etc.[7] This state of affairs goes unnoticed because it is in keeping with a kind of unspoken "common sense" that is absorbed and accepted (by both males and females) very early on in childhood during the process of language acquisition. Presumably, in a hypothetical non-sexist world such gendered dyads would merely be randomly in either order, or, if there were conventional orderings, they would exhibit no preference for male over female. English, like all languages, has a large set of collocational pairs with relatively fixed orders; we speak of *knives and forks*, *dogs and cats* (except when it rains), *pens and pencils*, *meat and potatoes*, *tables and chairs*, *fruits and vegetables*, and so on, but it is obviously difficult to maintain that these orderings reflect anything but arbitrary convention.

The male-female ordering convention extends to various stock phrases and idioms involving both genders, as evidenced in examples such as *láng cái nǚ mào* 郎才女貌

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[4] Farris (1989) points out that while "mother and father" is an acceptable compound in English, *mǔ fù* 母父 ("mother-father") in Chinese is not only non-standard, it sounds utterly wrong to Chinese ears.

[5] Even the Chinese word-processing software I am using to produce this very article is designed in accordance with this covention. When I enter the *pinyin* string *tā*, the first three Chinese characters that appear in the selection window are 他, 它 and 她 ("he, it, she"), in that order. The order the characters is determined by frequency of actual usage, of course, and it is significant that the female pronoun is of even lower frequency than the inanimate pronoun *tā* 它 ("it")!

[6] This is true in English, as well. For example, the standard pair "Ladies and Gentlemen" reverses the male-female pattern, presumably for chivalrous reasons ("Ladies first!").

[7] There are, incidently, fixed compounds in which both gendered and neutral orderings can be seen side-by-side: *nánnǚ lǎoshào* 男女老少 ("male-female old-young", i.e. "everybody"), *xiōngdì jiěmèi* 兄弟姐妹 ("older brother-younger brother, older sister-younger sister"), etc. Just as the old-young hierarchy is implicitly recognized, so the parallel male-female hierarchy is reinforced.

("The man is talented, the woman beautiful"), *fū chàng fù suí* 夫唱妇随 ("The husband sings, the wife accompanies") etc. Indeed there was even an entire genre of pre-modern fiction called *cáizi jiārén xiǎoshuō* 才子佳人小说, novels about "talented young men beautiful women" that again reinforces this gender ordering.

Thus the entire set of female members of such pairs constitutes a kind of *covert category* of dispreferred, de-emphasized, or marginalized items. As we shall see, this state of affairs manifests itself again and again in the usage patterns of Chinese grammar.

Asymmetric gender defaults of *rén* 人 ("person")

A problem noted in almost all the literature on sexist language in English is the use of *-man* as a suffix in words such as *businessman*, *congressman*, *chairman*, *mailman*, etc., as well as the use of *man* as a generic for "humankind" or "person", as in "Man is a tool-using animal", "manned spacecraft", "one-man show", "manpower" etc.[8] Some Western scholars familiar with Chinese have observed that the problem of such masculine defaults so common in the English lexicon historically do not arise in Chinese due to the use of the gender-neutral word *rén* 人 ("person") in compounds. For example, a gender-marked English word like *businessman* becomes *shāngrén* 商人 ("business-person"); *Englishman* becomes *Yīngguó rén* 英国人 ("English-person"), etc. And a sentence such as "Man is a tool-using animal" becomes *Rén shì yòng gōngjù de yì zhǒng dòngwu* 人是用工具的一种动物 ("Humans are tool-using animals."). The assumption is that *rén* 人, having no gender marking, is roughly equivalent in all cases to the English word "person" or "human". But as we shall see, in many cases the word actually carries a strong implicit masculine marking that is only evident when observed in a range of contexts.

In sentences such as the following, *rén* 人 does indeed seem to have no specific gender association:

Zhè fángzi zhù sānge rén.
这房子住三个人。
("This room sleeps three persons [*rén* 人].")

Děng yìhuir zài dǎ. Gōngyòng diànhuà yǒu yíge rén zhèng zài yòng.
等一 会儿再打，公用电话有一个人正在用。
("Make the call later. There's a person [*rén* 人] using the pay phone right now.")

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[8] The usual response to the claim that such usages are sexist has been that the word *man* has lost its literal semantic sense in these cases, and does not psychologically carry any masculine imagery. There is some research that tends to confirm that man carries a halo of male associations even in such generic cases. Two sociologists at Drake University, Joseph Schneider and Sally Hacker (1973), asked 300 college students to select from magazines and newspapers a variety of photographs to illustrate the different chapters of a sociology textbook. Half of the students were assigned chapter headings like "Social Man", "Industrial Man", and "Political Man". The other half were given headings like "Society", "People in Industry", and "Political Behavior". The not-too-surprising result was that those given the headings containing the word "man" overwhelmingly chose photographs of *men* engaged in the activities in question, whereas the students who had been given the sex-neutral headings chose more photographs which included women.

In such contexts where the unnamed person or persons in question are not intended to become fully-fledged actors in any discourse, the word seems truly gender neutral. However, in a large number of linguistic contexts where the listener is required to create a mental "node" for a person who is to have an important role in a discourse, the use of *rén* is somewhat different. An example of such contexts is the beginning of anecdotes, stories, or jokes. At the outset of a joke, for example, the narrator or writer typically introduces the main character or characters in a short expository sentence:

Yǒu yíge rén, hén yǒu qián...
有一个人，很有钱...
("There was a person [*rén*] who had a lot of money...")

At first sight, the use of *rén* in here seems to be the same as in the above two sentences; in principle, the person could denote either a male or a female. But sentences do not exist in a vacuum. In the context of tendencies and regularities of Chinese discourse (subconsciously perceived), such sentences carry a strong male default, for the simple reason that when the character in question is female, her sex is most often *specified* at the outset of the discourse by some gender-specific descriptive term: "*Yǒu yíge lǎo tàitai...*" 有一个 老太太... ("There was an old woman..."), "*Yǒu yíge gūniang...*" 有一个姑娘... ("There was a young girl..."), "*Yǒu yíge měinǚ...*" 有一个美女 ("There was a beautiful woman..."), etc. The *covert* male default of the word *rén* is not evident until one actually examines how it functions in contrast to other overtly marked terms. The protagonist in a joke is assumed to be male unless otherwise noted.[9] And when the customary gender assumption is violated, the effect can be slightly strange or disorienting. This can be made clearer by taking some actual beginning sentences of jokes and anecdotes and seeing what happens when gender references are switched. The following are typical opening sentences taken from Chinese joke books:

Yǒu yíge rén, lǎopo sǐ le.
有一个人，老婆死了。
("There was a person [*rén*] whose wife died.")

Yǒu yíge rén, húzi hěn cháng.
有一个人，胡子很长。
("There was a person [*rén*] who had a long beard.")

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[9] Many people have noted that jokes in English that start out with male protagonists ("A man goes into a bar and orders a drink...") do not establish expectations related to the man's gender, whereas jokes beginning with a female character ("A woman goes into a bar and orders a drink...") create the anticipation that the woman's *sex* is going to play some crucial role in the story. Linguistically-aware feminist friends of mine who try randomly to include women characters in jokes are often met with some puzzlement at the punchline. "But why a *woman*?..." the listener asks, feeling (perhaps justifiably) that the joke-teller would not have "gone out of their way" to introduce a woman into the discourse for "no reason at all". A woman in a joke is still perceived as a *special case*. It would be as if the joke began "A 650-lb. fat man walked into a bar and ordered a drink...", after which the ensuing story made no further mention of the man's obesity. The information would be perceived as being gratuitous.

The *rén* in these examples is clearly male. If the word *rén* were truly gender neutral, one would expect that the word could equally apply to female characters in a similar context. However, note the effect of the word in similar sentences where the referent is female:

Yǒu yíge rén, zhàngfu sǐ le.
有一个人，丈夫死了。
("There was a person [*rén*] whose husband died.")

Yǒu yíge rén, shēncái hěn miáotiao.
有一个人，身材很苗条。
("There was a person [*rén*] who had a slender figure." The word *miáotiao* 苗条 is used exclusively to describe women.)

Most Chinese speakers notice a slight sense of strangeness about these examples. One almost feels as if a crucial bit of information was missing from the outset—namely, the sex of the new person introduced into the discourse. Since "female" is not specified, the assumption is that the person is male, and thus one feels slightly "tricked" when the second part of the sentence reveals the person to be female.

This sort of "substitution game" reveals even more striking asymmetries if one tries to substitute the word *rén* for gender-specific terms. For example, note the following two sentences, both taken from Chinese joke books:

Sentence 1:
Yǒu yíge laǒtóur, tiāntiān ràng tā lǎopo zuò niúròu miàn.
有一个老头儿，天天让他老婆做牛肉面...
("There was an old man who had his wife make him beef noodles every day.")

Sentence 2:
Yǒu yíwèi xiǎojie zài haǐtān shài tàiyáng, chuāngzhe sāndiǎnshì yóuyǒngyī...
有一位小姐在海滩晒太阳，穿着三点式游泳衣...
("There was a young woman sunbathing at the beach, wearing a bikini...")

What happens if we replace the words *lǎotóur* 老头儿 ("old man"), and *xiǎojie* 小姐 ("young woman") with the supposedly gender-neutral *rén* 人?:

Sentence 1a:
Yǒu yíge rén, tiāntiān ràng tā lǎopo zuò niúròu miàn.
有一个人，天天让他老婆做牛肉面...
("There was a person [*rén*] who had his wife make him beef noodles every day.")

Sentence 2a:
Yǒu yíge rén zài haǐtān shài tàiyáng, chuāngzhe sāndiǎnshì yóuyǒngyī...
有一个人在海滩晒太阳，穿着三点式游泳衣...
("There was a person [*rén*] sunbathing at the beach, wearing a bikini...")

Because of the strong male default for *rén,* the actual information lost by its substitution in sentence 1a. is merely the age of the (male) person in question, and so the immediate effect is benign; the listener experiences no gender confusion. The substitution of *rén* in 2a., however, seems to have a slightly strange and disorienting effect; a subtle, subconscious assumption about the gender of the person is violated. In such contexts it would seem somewhat more natural to be more specific: *yí wèi xiǎojiě* 一位小姐 ("a young lady"), *yíge nǚde* 一个女的 ("a female"), etc.

Thus the word *rén* in actual use is not as gender-neutral as is usually supposed; psycholinguistically, it has strong implicit masculine connotations. As the usage patterns of the word become fixed in their cultural context, the implicit male imagery of *rén* in everyday discourse gradually becomes the "normative" case, with *nǚrén* 女人, "*female* person", becoming a specially marked form.[10]

There are, of course, several compounds in which *rén* 人 connotes females, for example *měirén* 美人, *jiārén* 佳人, *lìrén* 丽人 (all three basically meaning "beautiful woman"), *nèirén* 内人 ("interior/inside person", i.e. "wife"), *méirén* 媒人[11] ("matchmaker, go-between"), but these are special cases that clearly denote traditional or stereotypical female attributes or roles. Most other compounds predictably behave according to the principle of the "male as default": *yàorén* 要人 ("VIP"), *shèngrén* 圣人 ("sage"), *cáirén* 才人 ("person of talent"), *wěirén* 伟人 ("great person"), *fāmíngrén* 发明人 ("inventor"), etc., all of which are equally unmarked, but are most often assumed to be male in actual daily use. Of course, this is because in a male-dominated culture, VIP's, sages, great personages, inventors, etc. will *statistically* more often be male, and thus it is easy for these unmarked terms to take on masculine connotations. We will have more to say about this below, but it is important to note here that often terms like *shèngrén* 圣人 ("sage") and *cáirén* 才人 ("person of talent") have special female-marked equivalents like *shèngnü* 圣女 ("*female* sage") and *cáinǚ* 才女 ("*female* person of talent"), and the presence of these gendered lexical items serve to reinforce the masculine associations of the unmarked items, much in the way that the masculine assumptions of words like *comedian* and *hero* are reinforced by the existence of female-marked alternatives like *comedienne* and *heroine*. And, as usual with such terms, the male form in the plural can denote both sexes, whereas the female term is restricted to women; a list of "historical heroes" might include Joan of Arc, but a list of "historical heroines" could never include, say, Paul Revere.

Asymmetry in pronoun usage

The masculine default for the word *rén* 人 naturally bleeds into the third-person masculine singular in Chinese, *tā* 他, which also has strong male defaults, as in the following example:

Dāng yíge rén gǔqi yǒngqì jiù huì zǒu xiàng tā suǒ xǐwàng qù de dìfang.

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[10] Farris (1988) also points out that *rén* 人 in idioms often has strong male defaults, as in the idiom *Rén jié dì líng* 人杰地灵 ("When the people [*rén*] are heroic, the country is auspicious"), and the proverb used to describe a promiscuous woman, *Rén jǐn kě fū* 人尽可夫 ("Any person [*rén*, i.e., "man" in this case] can be her husband").

[11] Note that the female radical in the first character of this compound further reinforces the default female associations of the word.

当一个人鼓起勇气就会走向他所希望去的地方。
("When a person [*rén* 人] musters [his] courage, [he] will head in the direction he [*tā* 他] wants to go.")

The problem here is exactly isomorphic to the tradition in English of using the word *he* in generic contexts. Does the use of *tā* 他 here assume a male referent, or is the usage truly generic? As with English, the usual response is that the pronoun *tā* 他 in such contexts has simply taken on a generic meaning, and does not exclude women. But how valid is this justification? In recent years there have been psycholinguistic studies that cast doubt on such claims:

(1) The male generic is problematic when the referent is female. In one sense, the best evidence that the generic *he/tā* is not truly gender neutral is that when the referent is clearly female, the male pronoun results in a ludicrous clash of imagery. Sentences like "Everyone in New York State is entitled to an abortion if he wants it" (Hill & Mannheim 1992, p. 388), and "Menstrual pain accounts for an enormous loss of manpower hours," (Martyna 1983, p. 31). Examples in Chinese are equally bizarre. No competent Chinese writer would ever produce a sentence like the following: *Dāng yíge rén shēng haízi de shíhou, tā...* 当一个人生孩子的时候，他... ("When a person gives birth to a child, he [他]..."). The evidence is that, unless the context demands a female, the default image is of a male.

(2) The word *she/tā* 她 tends to be used in cases where the referent is likely to be female. An survey of psychology textbooks (American Psychological Association, 1975) found that hypothetical professors, physicians, and psychologists in college textbooks tended to be referred to with the pronoun *he*, while the pronoun *she* was more common when the antecedent references were hypothetical nurses, teachers, and librarians. While I know of no formal survey of such pronoun usages in Chinese, my own impression is that Chinese texts also tend to apply the female pronoun in contexts where a generic pronoun would seem to be required, though the occupation in question is statistically more likely to be female. (*Yòuéryuán lǎoshī gōngzuò hěn xīnkǔ, érqiě tāmen de gōngzī hěn dī.* 幼儿园老师工作很辛苦，而且她们的工资很低。"Chinese Kindergarten teachers have a hard job, plus their [她们的] pay is low.") Again, if the masculine pronoun truly has a generic function, why would writers feel the need to opt for the female pronoun for occupations traditionally held by women?

(3) Experiments show that readers tend to identify the referent for generic masculine pronouns as male, not neutral. MacKay (1980) actually conducted an experiment to test gender imagery associated with the generic use of *he*. Ten U.C.L.A. students (five male and five female) were given two paragraphs containing the generic *he* referring to neutral antecedents (*person*, *writer*, etc.). After reading the paragraphs, they answered three multiple choice questions, one of which indirectly assessed comprehension of the generic *he* and its antecedents. In reference to a textbook paragraph about "a beginning writer", the question testing comprehension of the pronoun *he* was: "The beginning writer discussed in the paragraph is (a) male; (b) female; (c) either male or female." Only 20% of the subjects consistently chose alternative (c); 80% of the subjects revealed masculine imagery on 63% of the trials, responding with (a) "male", rather than (c). Women made exactly as many errors as men, and in *no case* did the error involve choosing (b)

"female". More evidence for masculine associations of the generic *he* comes from Martyna (1978a, 1978b), who showed that women use *he* as a default pronoun less than men do, more often preferring alternatives such as *they* and *he or she*. While one must be cautious in inferring psychological facts about Chinese based on evidence from the English psycholinguistic world, one can be relatively certain that the default masculine *tā* 他 also semantically triggers the notion of "*male* person" rather than simply "person".

Many Chinese writers have become aware of this problem, and have begun to apply the same solution available to writers of English, namely using "他或她" or "他/她" ("he or she", "he/she") for each referent of unspecified sex. Of course, as many have pointed out, this solution raises the problem of the male-dominant order of dyads; the "natural" male-female ordering perpetuates the sexist assumption of the male as prior, while reversing the order ("she or he", 她或他) is seen as distractingly unusual or even stridently political. The only other alternative, namely alternating the two orderings randomly in a book or article, is felt by many to be equally distracting and burdensome.

This problem does not arise in the Chinese spoken language, of course, since the word *tā* simply codes for third-person singular, the male-female-neuter/inanimate distinctions reflected only later on in the writing system. This seems to be a case where the handling of gender information in the lexicon can have psycholinguistic implications for linguistic relativity. From the point of view of English, it is interesting that often a person not present can be mentioned continually in a given discourse for quite some time without the listener necessarily assigning a gender to the mental representation for that person. Many years ago I was part of a translation team in Beijing that included a female physics professor who had left the team early on, and who several members had never met. Since we were revising texts she had translated, her name came up dozens of times over the course of several weeks. At one point far into the project, one of the members asked "Is this Professor Wang a man or a woman?" My colleague was able to build up a quite complex mental image of the person that nevertheless did not include what for English speakers would be the most basic and (seemingly) crucial bit of information: her gender. This state of affairs is quite impossible in any language with gendered pronouns (and gender-explicit given names), but I have since encountered it countless times in the Chinese linguistic environment.[12]

It is instructive to look at the origins of the character *tā* 她 to see how sexist defaults led to the current situation with the Chinese pronoun system. Prior to the May Fourth Movement, there was only one written form for the third-person singular, the gender-neutral character *tā* 他. Later, due to the influence of foreign languages and the necessities of translation, prominent figures in the May Fourth Movement such as Lu Xun and Zhou Zuoren began to suggest creating a new character or characters to represent male and female third-person pronouns in the written language. According to

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[12] It should be noted that even in the case where the sex of the person is obvious or specifically noted in Chinese, the *information* about their gender is still not a property of the *word* itself, but rather incorporated as background knowledge. Thus one constantly hears Chinese people who speak English as a second language—even those who speak English quite fluently and who have been in the United States for years—make elementary mistakes in pronoun usage like "You should meet my wife, he...I mean *she*...", whereas speakers of European languages seldom make this mistake. Chinese speakers are simply not accustomed to including information about the person's gender in the pronoun itself.

Ling (1989), the first to advocate the use of 她 as the feminine written form while using the existing 他 as the masculine form was the poet and linguist Liu Bannong (刘半农 1891-1934). Interestingly, though Liu's proposal elicited much debate as to whether the introduction of any new characters was truly necessary, no one at the time raised the obvious possibility of creating a symmetrical character for the masculine third-person singular as well, thus leaving 他 as a gender-inclusive third-person pronoun. In the 1920's a few writers did propose, in the interests of gender equality, such a character with a "male" radical, written 𠚪 . Poet Liu Dabai (刘大白 1880-1932) actually employed this character in his writing for a time during the early 1930's, but the character never achieved the widespread popularity of 她. Ling (1989) explains the reason for the failure of the character 𠚪 as follows:

> Since the third-person pronoun in Chinese was originally genderless, there was an objective need to create feminine and neutral characters 她 and 它 for the third-person singular. Thus, there was no need to denote masculinity; and since there was no need for such a character, to create one naturally would have been superfluous."[13]

It is mildly incredible that a contemporary scholar researching the very origins of this asymmetrical "solution" to the Chinese pronoun problem would blindly perpetuate the very sexist assumptions that gave rise to the situation. It is jolting and disheartening to see the flawed logical argument that evidently was subconsciously operative at the time here spelled out so transparently and uncritically. That Ling can baldly assert that there was somehow an "objective need" for *feminine and gender-neutral* characters when he has just stated that the original character 他 was *already* gender-neutral is a testament to the intellectual stranglehold male chauvinist assumptions can exert on people.[14] Note also that he seems not to have noticed that originally 他 was not, strictly speaking, gender-neutral, but rather gender-*inclusive*, covering either male or female, while 它 ("it") was truly genderless, used for inanimate reference.

The "inevitable" failure of the symmetric character 𠚪 meant that, once again women were linguistically relegated to a *special* class. If the non-sexist solution had been adopted, modern written Mandarin would have the following symmetrical, gender-equal pronoun system:

他 ⟶ |人 "person, human"

𠚪 ⟶ |男人 "man"

她 ⟶ |女人 "woman"

Instead, the pronoun system which resulted from the introduction of 她 is thus:

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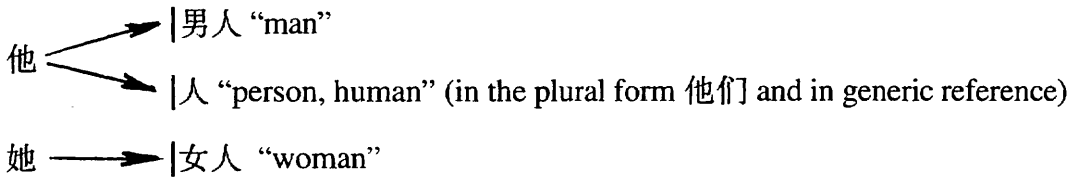
[13] Original Chinese: "因为汉语第三人称代词原本无性的分别，由于客观的需要创造了阴性和中性的她字和它字，因此阳性也就再无必要表示了。既无必需，却又便要造新字，自然便成了赘疣。"

[14] This sort of logical lapse based on deeply-ingrained assumptions is actually rather pervasive. I once ran across a college French textbook that stated matter-of-factly that "Unlike French, English-language nouns have no feminine form"; the assumption being that, in a language without grammatical gender, *all* the nouns are masculine by default!



The character *rén* 人 serves a double function, either denoting humanity in general, or males in particular. Females are left to a special linguistic category all their own, outside of the general category of human — they are "out of the club", so to speak.

Interestingly, even the *second*-person singular has fallen victim to this phenomenon as more and more people (mainly in Taiwan and Hong Kong) are beginning to use a relatively new character for the second-person singular *nǐ* 妳 ("you [female]") with the female radical (女), which is in opposition to the *formerly* gender-neutral character *nǐ* 你 with the "person" radical (亻). Thus, the exact same gender inequality has been expanded to this case, as well. The character 你 now refers to either males *or* those of unspecified gender (or both males and females in the plural *nǐmen* 你们), whereas the character 妳 can only refer to females.

This introduction of a specific written form to differentiate male from female pronouns opens the door for certain kinds of anthropomorphic assigning of gender to inanimate or conceptual entities. Just as in English it is common to refer to a ships, cars, or countries with gendered pronouns, since the introduction of gendered pronoun characters, Chinese writers now can apply gender to any entity, as in this example:

> 「中國之春」是大陸留學生創辦的刊物。創刊九年來，她已成為...
> "*China Spring* is a publication started by students from the mainland. In the nine years since its publication, she [*tā* 她] has become..."

Of course, China, as other cultures, has always attributed gender to certain inanimate or abstract things (the Communist Party, for example, is characterized as a nurturing mother); this new development merely opens the door to more indiscriminant (and sometimes sexist) anthropomorphism.

Covert sexism involving the female radical 女

Countless scholars have pointed out that a great many characters with the female radical have perjorative, negative, or distasteful meanings (for example, the character *jiān* 姦 (奸) a pictograph with three women, meaning "wicked, evil, treacherous; illicit sexual relations"). But what is seldom noted is the more significant fact, while characters with the female radical are quite numerous (the 1989 edition of *Cihai* 《辞海》 includes a total of 275), there is no male radical at all! (In characters such as *shēng* 甥 ("nephew"), *niǎo* 嫋 ("tease"), and *jiù* 舅 ("uncle"), one could consider that the component 男 carries a masculine semantic function, though in no case does it function as the radical.) But as we have pointed out, in some sense there is no *need* for a male radical, since "male" is the implicit *default* in so many characters and concepts; the seemingly gender-inclusive *rén* radical (亻) in most cases actually signals maleness just as surely as the female radical

marks femaleness. "Persons" are by and large *men*, and thus it is the *female* that is perceived as requiring a special marking.

It is difficult to assess the psycholinguistic salience of radicals for Chinese readers. Some studies suggest that characters, when used as radicals, tend to lose their semantic content. (For example, experimental subjects sometimes do not even notice that groups of stimulus characters share a common radical. See experiments surveyed in Hoosain, 1991, pp. 83-84.) It is almost certainly the case that the importance of radicals in remembering, writing, and understanding characters is highly variable and context-dependent. For instance, while the function of the water radical is no doubt fairly salient in characters like *jiǔ* 酒 ("wine"), *yóu* 油 ("oil"), and *yú* 渔 ("fishing"), no doubt the semantics of the radical is virtually "dead" in characters like *fǎ* 法 ("law") or *Hàn* 汉 ("Han dynasty/nationality/language").

This same degree of variable psychological salience is evident in characters with the female radical. Many such characters are quite obviously related to the social status of women or to female physiology, or stereotypical feminine traits; for example, *qī* 妻 ("wife"), *fù* 妇 ("married woman"), *mǎ* 妈 ("mother"), *jiě* 姐 ("older sister"), *jì* 妓 ("prostitute"), *jià* 嫁 ("to marry [of a woman]"), *jì* 嫉 ("jealous"), *jiān* 奸 ("wicked, evil, treacherous; illicit sexual relations"), *wǎn* 婉 ("beautiful, elegant"), *jiāo* 娇 ("tender, pampered, etc."), *xián* 娴 ("refined, elegant [of a woman]"), *jìn* 妗 ("aunt"), etc. There are other characters with the female radical whose female connotations are quite subtle or only dimly evoked[15]: *miào* 妙 ("marvelous, wonderful"), *xián* 嫌 ("suspicious"), *yú* 娱 ("amusement, pleasure"), *shàn* 嬗 ("change, evolve"), etc. And there are still other characters with the female radical that doubtless evoke no female imagery whatsoever in the minds of speakers: *rú* 如 ("if"), *shǐ* 始 ("begin"), *yào* 要 ("want"), *Yáo* 姚 (a surname), etc. The important point to note is that the feminine associations of various characters carrying the female radical need not be psycholinguistically active in the mind of the reader at each appearance of any given character for the reinforcement of sexist assumptions to be in place. Rather, it is the *cumulative* and pervasive presence of this factor integrated over a lifetime of conscious and subconscious language use that concerns us here.

Asymmetries in forms of address

While the system of terms of address in Mandarin is sociolinguistically quite complex and differs from that of English in a number of ways, it is interesting to what extent the sexist asymmetries almost exactly parallel those of English. The standard married-unmarried distinction marked for women in English has traditionally been the case in Chinese, as well (the term *Miss* being equivalent to *xiǎojie* 小姐, and the term *Mrs.* equivalent to *tàitai* 太太), with only one term (*Mr.*, *xiānsheng* 先生) for both married and unmarried males. In addition, just as couples have traditionally been referred

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15 And I am speaking here of the subconscious gender imagery of modern Mandarin speakers with regards to the characters, not of the historical reasons for the use of the female component 女 in the character.

to formally using the husband's name ("Mr. and Mrs. Jack Smith"), so Chinese newspapers refer to Fang Lizhi and his wife as *Fāng Lìzhī fūfù* 方励之夫妇.[16]

Wu (1991) notes that roles of respect and authority such as *shīfù* 师父 ("master craftsman") and *guófù* 国父 ("father of the country") are virtually always accorded to males, and thus the seemingly symmetric terms *shīmǔ* 师母 and *guómǔ* 国母 are merely polite terms of address for the *wives* of such people; terms for independent and equal female fillers of the roles do not exist.[17] By contrast, even though many people now use the gender-specific term *lǎobǎnniáng* 老板娘 ("boss mother") to refer to a woman of the same economic position of power as a *lǎobǎn* 老板 ("boss"), the term is often conflated with the *wife* of a boss who is economically dependent upon her husband; there is no truly independent term for a female boss. One solution to this problem is to simply address the woman with the term that has traditionally denoted the male (*lǎobǎn* 老板), in hopes that the term will assume a gender-neutral quality (much in the way that the word *wēng* 翁, "old man", in *bǎiwànfùwēng* 百万富翁, "millionaire", has lost its literal meaning). However, as with the character *tā* 他, such usages still tend to assume the male as the "normative" or "generic" member, with women once again consigned to a "non-male" role; the few women who succeed in entering into these male occupational domains find that they are nevertheless unable to achieve a fully independent and normative semantic status in the linguistic domain. This often results in such terms, when applied to a woman, being prefixed with *nǚ* 女 or *nǚde* 女的 in everyday discourse in order to avoid the person in question being mistaken for a man. We will have more to say on this topic in the next section.

The term *xiānsheng* 先生, in addition to functioning as a standard term of address for males ("Sir, Mr."), has also traditionally been used in academia as a polite form of address for a teacher who has achieved a great degree of respect and achievement (and such teachers were usually male, of course!). I have been surprised to find that women professors to this day are often respectfully addressed in this way in book inscriptions or letters. *Xiānsheng* as a term of address applied to a woman academician has a double meaning; not only has she achieved great success in her field, but she has also shown herself to be able to compete on equal footing with *men*. Such a term of address not only neutralizes the woman's gender, but once again relegates her to a "special case" within the male-centered domain.

Wu *et al* (1995) point out that *gērmenr* 哥儿们儿 ("pal, buddy", lit. "older brother" + plural suffix), a term connoting a chummy bond between males, has no female

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[16] Chinese is somewhat more egalitarian in this regard, however, since it is possible (but not as common) for the woman to be the defining member of the pair. Thus, while no American newspaper would refer to Elizabeth Taylor and her latest un-famous husband as "Mr. and Mrs. Elizabeth Taylor", Chinese newspapers do occasionally refer to the famous Chinese actress Gong Li 巩俐 and her husband as *Gǒng Lì fūfù* 巩俐夫妇 ("Mr. and Mrs. Gong Li"). But note the strange gender asymmetry that results from such usages; the order of the term of address, *fūfù* 夫妇 ("husband-wife") still falls into the pattern of sexist dyads discussed above. There is no possibility of reversing the order when the woman is the primary member of the pair, e.g. *Gǒng Lì fūfù* 巩俐妇夫 ("Mr. and Mrs. Gong Li"). There remains a residual sense that the wife is still an adjunct to the husband.

[17] Similarly, Hofstadter (1985) notes that an informal title like "the King of Comedy" applied to a male comedic actor implies that the performer is the best among *all* his peers, both male and female, but the title "the Queen of Comedy" applied to a woman implies that she is merely the best such *female* performer.

equivalent. As a result, many men use this gender-marked word to address or refer to close female friends, and many women also use the term among themselves to refer to or directly address other close female friends. Another option that has arisen is to use a parallel term patterned on the male term, *jiěmenr* 姐们儿 (lit. "older sister" + plural suffix). But in both cases, the female is somewhat marginalized; either she borrows a male term that etymologically had (and still retains) male connotations, or she creates a female equivalent that is nonetheless patterned after the male term. Either way, the term is subconsciously perceived as merely a copycat version of a male-defined category.[18]

A full treatment of forms of address in Mandarin is beyond the scope of this paper. But a more systematic survey would no doubt reveal the same underlying pattern throughout; almost invariably, the female is linguistically treated as kind of diminutive version of the male standard, an imitation, or a Johnny-come-lately (or should I coin the term "Janey-come-lately"?).

Asymmetric gender marking in vocabulary items

As already mentioned, many scholars researching sexism in English have noted that women engaged in traditionally male occupations are often referred to with a gender-marked term involving the addition of a prefix "woman" or "female" to the standard occupation term. For example, when a truck driver happens to be a woman, she is referred to as a "woman truck driver" or a "female truck driver". Farris (1989) notes that this state of affairs is seen in Chinese, as well. Just as "doctor" becomes "woman doctor", *yīshēng* 医生 ("doctor"), becomes *nǚ yīshēng* 女医生 ("female doctor"). But if the driver, doctor, author, police officer, scholar, president, etc., is a man, no such male gender marker is added.[19] Using the same logic, we can infer the origin of the term *nǚqiángrén* 女强人 ("female strong person"). If the *qiángrén* 强人 "strong person" in question is male, there is no need to specify the gender — it goes without saying. The case of a female "strong person" is an *exceptional* case, a curious footnote in the male-dominated discourse. In addition, the literary term *zhǔréngōng* 主人公 ("protagonist") includes both male and female characters; the term *nǚzhǔréngōng* 女主人公 ("female protagonist") is gratuitous and only serves to perpetuate the notion of women as special and second class.

Again, the Chinese word processor I am using to create this document has built in to its character entry dictionary several good examples of this asymmetry. One of the features of the software is that when the user enters a given character, in the character window will automatically appear a list of words and compounds for which the character entered is the first element. When I enter the character *nán* 男 ("man, male"), there

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[18] This state of affairs is quite reminiscent of the way in which the word *guys* as a form of address, which originally was an informal word applied to any group of males with which the speaker wished to convey a sense of comraderie, has been extended to mixed-gender groups or groups of women. The phrase "You guys" is now as likely to be uttered by a sorority member to her fellow members as it is to be said by a football coach to his team. Used in the singular as a common noun rather than a form of address, the word still denotes males only.

[19] If the occupation in question is one normally taken by women — such as nurse, secretary, etc. — a male taking on the role is also often referred to with a correspondingly marked term: "male nurse", "male secretary", etc. However, since the number of professional roles dominated by women has so far been rather small, this mirror-image type of gender marking is far rarer.

automatically pops up a set of characters that can follow it in compouns: *rén* 人 as in the compound *nánrén* 男人 ("man"), *zǐ* 子 as in the compound *nánzǐ* 男子 ("man, male"), and so on. The list is quite small, only nine items. But when I enter the character *nǚ* 女, I get a very different and much longer list of possible compounds, including *nǚgōng* 女工 ("female worker"), *nǚbīng* 女兵 ("female soldier"), *nǚshén* 女神 ("goddess"), *nǚqiángrén* 女强人 ("female strong person"), *nǚqīngnián* 女青年 ("female youth"), *nǚhuáng* 女皇 ("female emperor"), *nǚtóngzhì* 女同志 ("female comrade"), and so on.

Of course, my word processor is not special in this way; there are a greater number of such female-marked terms in any Chinese dictionary. The interesting question is why such words with the *nü* 女 prefix are accorded the status of separate *words*. After all, the characters *nán* 男 and *nǚ* 女 could be affixed to *any* term for *any* occupation or role. If *nǚgōng* 女工 ("female worker") is counted as a lexical item, why not *nángōng* 男工 ("male worker")? If it seemed worthwhile to include the special term *nǚtóngzhì* 女同志 ("female comrade"), why not the symmetrical term *nántóngzhì* 男同志 ("male comrade")? And note that English dictionaries certainly do not include entries like "lady lawyer" or "female doctor", which would be considered compound terms made up of *two* distinct words. Why should the Chinese lexicon include such items?

Part of the explanation may lie with the question of how tightly bound a given Chinese compound is. Because the principle of affixation functions differently in Chinese than in English, and because Chinese has no orthographic convention corresponding to word boundaries in alphabetic languages, word identity is perhaps psycholinguistically less clear in Chinese.[20] Does the prefix *nǚ* 女 ("female") in compounds like *nǚshén* 女神, *nǚhuáng* 女皇, and *nǚ yīshēng* 女医生, result in these being perceived psycholinguistically as analytical two-word phrases corresponding to the English "female god", "female doctor", and "female emperor", or as more tighly-bound chunks like "goddess", "empress" or (to coin an equivalent term) "doctoress"? And do different compounds have different degrees of "wordness", depending on frequency?

This problem is somewhat isomorphic to the word *man* in English, which seems to be bound with various strengths to other words in compounds such as *chairman, postman, ice cream man, straight man, middle man, omsbudman, Superman, he-man, Peking Man, Sand Man, businessman, marksman, bogeyman, salesman, repairman, best man, madman, tax man*, etc. It can be seen from these examples that the notion of a word is rather blurry in English as well, and our notion of which of these lexical items constitute a word and which are composed of two or more words is strongly influenced by our orthographical conventions as well as semantic factors.[21]

At any rate, the perceived need to add a clarifying *nǚ* 女 prefix is often a reflection of the *statistical* distribution of the genders in various occupations in the real world, which often vary from culture to culture. For example, it is simply a statistical fact that

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[20] Hoosain (1992) tested Chinese subjects for their knowledge of word boundaries by asking them to divide the string of characters in various texts into words, and found that even highly-educated Chinese speakers have weak meta-linguistic awareness of the distinction between words vs. characters.

[21] Hofstadter (1985) notes that a possible indication of how tightly these "man" suffixes are bound to the word in question is that in tightly-bound ones the suffix tends to be pronounced with a shwa (chär´mən) rather than with the short vowel (chär´măn), and this may provide a clue as to how strongly the word evokes masculine imagery, as well.

taxicab drivers in both Chinese and American cultures are predominantly male, while nurses are predominantly female, and it would be strange if our mental assumptions did not reflect this fact. In Russia during the last few decades, there have been more female doctors than male doctors, and it would not be surprising to find that the average person in that country would be less likely to have strong male associations for this occupation. Of course, very few such words have 100% male or female default associations in *any* culture; rather, we tend to have certain default *tendencies* based on our experience of the world. Words in English such as "teacher", "rock-and-roll guitarist", "hairdresser", "mayor", "scientist", "serial killer", "nurse", "welder", etc. all have a subtle "halo" of gender associations, just as corresponding words in Chinese have. Though these words have no explicit gender marking and thus *on the surface* are free of any sexist bias, the fact is that the world itself is *not* free of sexist bias, and there are noticeable gender asymmetries in all areas. Though cognitive defaults can sometimes lead one astray, they are merely the mind's pragmatic way of paring down the daunting complexity of the world to a manageable level.[22]

Thus, as with the word *rén* 人, many of these terms carry strong covert male associations. This exerts a subconscious effect on the interpretation of a given sentence. The mind tends to attempt to assign gender imagery to words that otherwise should be neutral. This sentence taken from a Chinese joke book (which I have slightly altered) illustrates the point:

> *Yī wèi xuézhě zài xīn hūn yàn ěr zhī jì, réngrán shǒu bù shì juàn dú shū, zhàngfu fènfèn máiyuàn dào...*
> 一位学者在新婚燕尔之际，仍然手不释卷读书。丈夫忿忿埋怨道...
> ("A just-married scholar on the first night of the honeymoon continued to read and study without letup. Her husband complained, saying...")

Most people feel a slight jolt of surprise upon reading the word *zhàngfu* 丈夫 ("husband"); the default assumption that the scholar is male suddenly has to be mentally revised. (I have switched the sex of protagonists, of course.) In the absence of a gender marker, we assume the person in question to be male; otherwise the sentence would have begun by referring to the scholar as *yī wèi nǚ xuézhě* 一位女学者, "a *female* scholar". Most of the time, in our daily language use, these expectations are not violated, and our defaults pass unnoticed and invisible. It is only when we encounter an atypical situation that we become aware that much of the information of the sentence was not in the sentence itself, but supplied by our default assumptions.

These assumptions are also *context dependent*; the mind takes into account statistical gender probabilities based upon the information given. For example, the word *lǎoshī* 老师 ("teacher"), is perhaps more likely to evoke female imagery when we are speaking of an elementary school teacher, but will be more likely to evoke male imagery when the context refers to college teachers, who are predominantly male.

Again, it should be stressed that this sort of probabilistic default is a natural and useful cognitive function. In dealing with virtually every situation one encounters and in understanding nearly every sentence one hears, it is necessary to call on a host of

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[22] Hofstadter (1985) has the most thought-provoking and entertaining treatment of this cognitive aspect of gender defaults that I know of.

assumptions based upon our experiences in the real world. Since genders are not evenly distributed in all occupations, there will be inevitable gender asymmetries in our default associations. If nothing else, this fact underscores the fact that language reform with regard to sexism cannot be carried out independently of social, economic, and political reforms. As society evolves, the language will natural evolve along with it.

Another linguistic phenomenon related to the gender asymmetry of roles in society is exemplified by words like *jiātíng zhǔfù* 家庭主妇 ("housewife"), *jìnǚ* 妓女 ("prostitute"), *chǔnǚ* 处女 ("virgin"), and the above-mentioned example *guófù* 国父 ("father of the country"). The gender asymmetry of these terms lies not in their gender associations *per se*, but in the fact that there exist no corresponding terms at all for persons of the opposite sex who might occupy these roles. For example, whether in China or the West, the spouse who traditionally remains at home and takes care of the housework has been the wife. Thus, both the word "housewife" in English and *jiātíng zhǔfù* 家庭主妇 in Chinese seem to have no corresponding terms "househusband" or *jiātíng zhǔfū* 家庭主夫 ("househusband").[23] It is the female sex that has historically given sexual favors for monetary return, and hence the term *jìnǚ* 妓女 (literally, "prostitute-female"). Though the emergence of the corresponding phenomenon involving males might seem to require terms like *jìnán* 妓男 ("prostitute-male") or *nánjì* 男妓 ("male-prostitute"), such words have not become common. The case of *chǔnǚ* 处女 ("virgin", literally "in-the-house female") reveals society's different expectations for males and females with regards to sexual morality. Society expects the woman to have no sexual experience before marriage, whereas there is not such a strong requirement for the male; thus the symmetrical term *chǔnán* 处男 ("in-the-house male") never arose in the language. As one final example, teachers in nursery schools are almost exclusively women, and are addressed as *āyí* 阿姨 ("auntie"). Wu (1991) cites an amusing article in the *Guangming Daily* about the phenomenon of males taking on this occupation, reporting that they are sometimes referred to not with the corresponding form of address *shūshu* 叔叔 ("uncle"), as one might expect, but as *húzi āyí* 胡子阿姨 ("bearded aunties")!

Asymmetries in *jià* 嫁 and *qǔ* 娶

As mentioned above, even when two symmetrical terms exist for both genders, there are often differences in the way the terms behave syntactically that reflect sexist attitudes. For example, *qǔ* 娶 ("to marry [of a man]") and *jià* 嫁 ("to marry [of a man]") would at first sight seem to be symmetrical verbs, but the pattern of usage reveals significant differences.[24] Liu (1991) has systematically studied the syntactic behavior of these two words, and has shown how their use embodies traditional sexist traditions and notions concerning marriage in Chinese culture. In the context of usage, the verb *jià* 嫁

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[23] This is related to a term common in American newspapers, *female-headed households*. Virtually no one perceives this term as sexist, and yet the obvious underlying assumption is that any household with both a mother and father is by *default* headed by the male. There is no symmetrical term *male-headed households* to denote single *fathers* with children; or if such a term were used, it would simply be interpreted as denoting the standard nuclear family, in *contrast* to the case where the father was absent.

[24] We note in passing the obvious fact that *both* characters have the female radical 女 —a curious asymmetry from the start.

is associated with concepts like *gěi* 给 ("for, give"), *diào* 掉 ("drop, lose" [resultative verb expressing loss, discarding, or disappearance]), *chūqu* 出去 (resultative suffix expressing movement away, disappearance, or elimination), and so on, whereas the verb *qǔ* 娶 triggers a semantic field of connotations related to "acquisition", "gain", etc. For example:

Chūnhuā jià le gěi Xiǎo Lǐ.
春花嫁了给小李。
("Chunhua married Xiao Li.")

Chūnhuā yòu piàoliang yòu yǒu qián, wèishenme zǒng shì jià bu diào (chūqu)?
春花又漂亮又有钱，为什么总嫁不掉（出去）？
("Chunhua is beautiful and rich. Why hasn't she been married off?")

Xiǎo Zhāng bǎ Chūnhuā qǔ le.
小张把春花娶了。
("Xiao Zhang married Chunhua.")

Chūnhuā bèi Xiǎo Zhāng qǔ le wèi qī.
春花被小张娶了为妻。
("Chunhua was taken by Xiao Zhang as his wife.")

Liu notes that the relationship implied in grammatical oppostion of *qǔ* 娶 and *jià* 嫁 is similar to the opposition of "obtain vs. give" or to that of "agent/actor (施事) vs. object/acted-upon (受事)". Thus *qǔ* 娶 is semantically associated with or functionally equivalent to such concepts as *qǔ* 取 ("to take"), *dé* 得 ("to get, obtain"), *huò* 获 ("achieve, get"), *mǎi* 买 ("buy"), *yíng* 赢 ("win"), etc. The male subject of the verb *qǔ* 取 is always the recipient of the action which is "for" (给, 为) him. *Jià* 嫁, on the other hand, is associated with the category of verbs that includes *sòng* 送 ("give to"), *mài* 卖 ("to sell"), *shū* 输 ("to lose"), etc. In other words, the female is always the *object* of the action—a passive, relatively powerless element, both linguistically and culturally. The covert categories revealed in these patterns are remarkable examples of a social inequality reflected directly in the grammar of the language itself.

Conclusion

All the above phenomena in both English and Chinese have in common the implicit relegating of women to secondary or special status. To borrow a term from linguist Julia Stanley (1977b), females in linguistic discourse occupy what might be called "negative semantic space". The worldview promulgated, says Stanley, is one with males at the center of the universe, defined as the "Self", while women are relegated to the status of "Other". And this gender orientation is expressed in countless explicit and implicit ways, in all the cultural domains in which language plays a part.

To a child, of course, there is no dividing line between language and culture; children learn their native language and absorb the cultural worldview embedded in it before they are able to recognize and cogently analyze the defaults and biases presented to them. Miller & Swift (1977) write of the psychological alienation that girls must confront in learning English, with its historical load of masculine emphasis:

> Even if the female child understands that yes, she too is part of "man", she must still leap the hurdles of all those other terms that she knows from her experience refer to males only. When she is told that we are all brothers, that the brotherhood of man includes sisters, and that the faith of our fathers is also the faith of our mothers, does she really believe it? How does she internalize these concepts? (p. 33)

In adulthood, the gender assumptions embedded in the language become a natural and unconscious part of fluent language use. There is a tight fit between cultural assumptions and linguistic structures, and for this reason few people ever become aware of the implicit gender messages in the language — much less question or challenge them.

It is for this reason that the kinds of covert gender messages embodied in the Chinese language are particularly insidious. Lucy (1992) provides comments on the psycholinguistic significance of Whorf's distinction between overt and covert categories:

> Whorf's principal claim was that speakers can readily reflect on lexical meanings but tend to be completely oblivious to the patterned grammatical meanings which ultimately govern a lexical item. And overt categories were more susceptible to the critical consciousness of speakers than covert categories with their cryptotypes. In short, some aspects of language are more susceptible to *conscious awareness* than are others. These remarks suggest that under certain circumstances speakers can and do reflect upon some aspects of their linguistic categories and that these reflections will be skewed by differential awareness of those categories.... This implies a differential *salience* for thought of some aspects of linguistic form and meaning relative to other aspects. This might be characterized as a differential *intuitive awareness*. (p. 37-38)

The implications for sexism are that further attention must be focussed on the various ways in which gender prejudice is coded and expressed in the language. Hill & Mannheim (1992), in an analysis of the asymmetric pronoun system of English, have this to say about the way such linguistic systems function:

> The category system creates a particular cultural hegemony, the unquestioned acceptance, by both men and women, of men as a normative, unmarked category of person.... The hegemonic structure is reproduced below the speaker's threshold of awareness, unconsciously, but is challenged from above the threshold of awareness, consciously. (pp. 389-90.)

Surely real hope lies in the possibility of a *conscious* challenge to the generally accepted ways of speaking, thinking, and categorizing. Just as awareness of sexist conventions and social arrangements have led to a gradual elimination of their vestiges in the language, so explicit awareness of deeper levels of linguistic sexism can awaken speakers to previously hidden sexist patterns in the culture at large. It is my feeling that cross-cultural comparisons are especially helpful in this regard, since they tend to suggest productive domains less obvious within one linguistic system. I hope studies such as this one will prod researchers in various areas of linguistics into making further contributions in their particular areas. In addition, with the increasing cultural and scientific exchange between China and the West, there is no reason why the international community of scholars cannot begin to address such issues collectively. Given that both cultures share the same kinds of historical gender inequities toward women, it would seem appropriate that we work together in analyzing these problems and, hopefully, opening the door to solutions.

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