

CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS OF LEXICAL ITEMS INVOLVING SEXISM IN ENGLISH AND KOREAN¹

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1. Introduction

It is well known that language is understood in socio-cultural contexts. Traditionally Korea is a Confucian society where women should be subordinated by men, whereas America is a society where equal rights are emphasized between males and females.

Under such different socio-cultural circumstances, there will be different social status between males and females in the two cultures, and their different social status will be differently reflected in their languages.

Since Lakoff's comprehensive study, "Language and Woman's Place" (1973), many studies have been done to show that the sexes use language differently, and that language affects the sexes differently (Henley & Thorne 1975). As Miller & Swift (1991:120) relevantly point out, the phenomenon of "women's language" is apparently directly related to the almost universal judgement that women are inferior to men. Although women claim equal rights in English, sexism is still shown in many lexical items.

This contrastive study is a socio-linguistic presentation of the currently used lexical items referring to males and females in English and Korean. In this paper, I will investigate how various types of lexical items differently show sexism or sex-based linguistic variations in forms and meanings in English and Korean. Words associated with males more often have positive connotations; they convey notions of power, prestige and leadership. In contrast, female words more often convey a sense of the trivial (Lakoff 1973). These notions are a good basis for accounting for the sex-biased words in this paper.

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In what follows, I will discuss four categories: address titles, gender-specific nouns, compound words, and metaphorical slang.

2. Address titles

The purpose of a social title is to indicate respect for the person addressed (Miller & Swift 1991:172). Differences in forms based on sex are common in titles of address. There is a lack of parallelism between the two languages in titles of address.

(1) English		Korean
Mr.	→	- <i>Kun</i> / - <i>ssi</i>
Mrs.	→	- <i>yosa</i> / - <i>ssi</i>
Miss.	→	- <i>yang</i> / - <i>ssi</i>
Ms.	→	?

Recently, American feminists have attempted to replace *Mrs.* and *Miss.* with *Ms.* in order to remedy the imbalance with the male word, *Mr.* This strongly suggests women's increasing equal rights to men. This is in keeping with Key's point (1975) that females attempt some kind of equilibrium by reaching a higher status in language to compensate for their lower status as members of society. However, this kind of attempt has not been made in Korea and thus Korean has no particular title corresponding to *Ms.*

It is worthwhile to note that Korean has a neutral title, -*ssi*, which includes all three, *Mr.* and *Mrs./Miss.*, but English has no corresponding neutral title. In Korean, linguistic sexism is shown in the neutral, -*ssi* when it is combined with a name. When -*ssi* is used to address a male, it can accompany the last name (LNT), the first name (FNT), or both last name and first name (LFNT). But when -*ssi* is used to address a female, it can accompany only last name (FNT) or last and first name (LFNT) regardless of marital status. This shows that there is more limitation on the use of -*ssi* for a female than a male. In this connection, English shows equality in that all titles are combined with last name regardless of sex (TLN) (Brown & Ford 1964). The Korean rules are shown to be more complicated than the American ones.

Semantically, English titles like *Mr.* and *Mrs./Miss.* express politeness or respect to the addressee. On the other hand, Korean feminine, -*yosa/-yang* corresponding to *Mrs./Miss.* have negative connotations and thus females don't like to be addressed like that, whereas masculine -*kun* 'Mr.' has no negative connotation. In English, *sir* and *mam* are used respectfully. In Korean *sensayngnim* corresponding to *sir* is highly polite, whereas the feminine, *acumeni* 'mam' has a negative connotation. The Korean case shows that a term applied to women is more likely to assume derogatory sexual connotations than that applied to men.

In the socio-cultural aspect, as far as names are concerned, Korean women keep their family names even after marriage, whereas women in America usually assume their husband's surname. This contrast shows more equality between the sexes in Korean while showing women's inferiority to men in English. However,

there is a recent tendency that women in America do not assume their husband's surname.

In comparing the systems of addressing by title and name, symmetrical and asymmetrical patterns are found in both speech communities. However, there have been efforts to reduce linguistic sexism in English, but not in Korean.

3. Gender-specific common nouns

There are many pairs of personal nouns which reveal sexual connotations. Consider the basic and general pair, *woman/man*. English, *woman* is expressed by more than one word in Korean: *yeca* and *yeseng*. The more common word, *yeca* has a negative connotation, whereas *yeseng* is a polite form, but its usage is limited to formal situations like in print or on air. The corresponding English, *woman*, is a general term for an adult female human being which has a good connotation. The masculine counterparts, *man* and the corresponding Korean *namca*, both have good connotations.

The next pair to consider is *lady/gentleman*. There have been different view points on the connotations of *lady* to a great extent. It is, however, safe to say here that it often has positive connotations like nobility, dignity, politeness and good manners, but sometimes a negative connotation like condescension, particularly in job terminology (Lakoff 1973:59) such as the *cleaning lady*, which may be replaced by the *cleaning woman*. On the other hand, Korean *suknye* is regarded as highly polite in any context. The English term, *lady*², can be used for direct address in some cases, but the Korean term *suknye* can never be used for direct address. The masculine counterparts, *gentleman* and the corresponding Korean, *sinsa*, both have the good connotation of courtesy.

As for the connotations of the words, *spinster* and *bachelor*, Lakoff (1973:66) notes that *bachelor* is at least a neutral term, often used a compliment, and *spinster* normally seems to be used pejoratively, with connotations of prissiness, fussiness, and so on. Many of my informants (particularly "younger generation") disagree with Lakoff, saying that his assertion that *bachelor* connotes 'compliment' is too strong, and connotations of prissiness and fussiness for *spinster* are getting much weaker. They, however, agree with Lakoff's other point (1973:67) that the metaphorical connotations of *bachelor* suggest sexual freedom; of *spinster*, puritanism or celibacy. These metaphorical connotations are true for Korean counterparts, *chongkak* 'bachelor' and *chenye* 'spinster'. The point here is, however, that Korean feminine, *chenye* 'spinster' connotes a strong virginity that reflects the Korean Confucian idea that a spinster should remain virgin until marriage.

Consider the *husband/wife* pair. English *husband* corresponds to Korean *nam-pyen*. Both items have good connotations. On the other hand, English *wife* corresponds to Korean *anay*, literally, 'inside person'. This strongly reflects the traditional Confucian idea that a wife should remain within the confines of the family compound or stay out of sight inside the wall of the house (Crane 1978:39). In

² This term is, however, usually not used by educated people usually, and does not sound polite.

this sense, Korean *anay* 'wife' is more negative than its English counterpart.

There is one pair of nouns in English to which Korean has nothing to correspond: *guy/guys*. It is interesting that the singular, *guy*, is a masculine term for a boy or young man, but its plural covers not only a group of men, but also a mixed group or even a group of girls or women. Lawson (1982:158) notes that *guys* in the expression "you guys" is lexically meaningless, because it does not particularize *you*. Rather, it serves as almost a suffix to *you* to suggest friendliness, camaraderie, informality. This pair shows sexism and asymmetry in English. It is agreed that Korean has no corresponding items to *guy/guys*.

There is a pair in English which is semantically widened in Korean. English, girlfriend/boyfriend usually means 'someone with whom one has a romantic relationship', but their corresponding Korean, *yecachinku/namcachinku* used to indicate all friends of the same sex, but the current use of it is extended to include a lover in the case of the opposite sex³. This, in part, reflects the change of language use in progress in modern Korean society.

4. Compound words

In this section, I will examine two factors: compound ordering and affixes.

In Korean, when a compound word has a positive connotation, a male component always comes before a female component.

(2)	<i>nam nye</i>	'men and women'
	<i>sonyen sonye</i>	'boys and girls'
	<i>nampyen anay</i>	'husband and wife'
	<i>sennam sennye</i>	'good man and good woman'
	<i>pu mo</i>	'father and mother'
	<i>ca nye</i>	'son and daughter'

Interestingly enough, when a compound word has a negative connotation, the order is reversed, and the female component necessarily comes first with the male component following.

(3)	<i>nyen nom</i>	'a bitch and a son of bitch'
	<i>kyecip sanay</i>	'a bitch and a son of bitch'
	<i>amnom susnom</i>	'a bitch and a son of bitch'
	<i>pi pok</i>	'female servant and male servant'

The implication of the order is well supported by the comparison of English *ladies and gentlemen* with the corresponding Korean *sinsa and suknye* 'gentlemen and ladies'. Unlike English which has the order, Female plus Male, Korean has a fixed order of positive connotation, Male plus Female. Since ladies are respected in America, there is a 'ladies first' expression, whereas Korean has the opposite

³ In English, 'girlfriend' is also used by girls to refer to their friends (usually a relatively close friend). 'Boyfriend', however, is not used in a parallel situation.

custom that 'women and men traditionally did not walk side by side on the street' (Crane 1978:46).

As for English, interviews with native speakers show that in word pairs like *male and female*, *men and women*, *husbands and wives*, *boys and girls*, the order is not necessarily fixed but a little flexible. Miller and Swift (1991:174) point out that occasionally reversing the order has two advantages: it counters the implication that members of the male sex rate a priority, and it helps to jog attention by avoiding the habitual. The flexible order in English implies equality, while the fixed order shows sexism in Korean.

Unlike the compounding ordering, the use of affixes shows sexism in English. When a word has a positive meaning, a masculine word is a major component, and a female suffix is passively attached to the masculine word.

- (4) hero/heroine, actor/actress, count/countess
duke/duchess, master/mistress, poet/poetess, etc.

On the other hand, when a word has a negative connotation, a feminine word is a major component and a masculine suffix is attached to the feminine word. For example, if the marriage ends in death, the woman is a widow and the *-er* suffix is attached to it to make *widower*. If marriage ends in divorce, the woman gets the title of *divorcee* while the man is usually described with a statement such as "He is divorced." (Nilsen 1979:104).

In this category of compounds, sexism is differently or less expressed in Korean. Specifically, irrespective of whether a word has a positive or negative connotation, a feminine affix *yo* is attached to a sex-neutral word (or a masculine word)⁴: *paywu* 'actor' - *yepaywu* 'actress', *siin* 'poet' - *yesiin* 'poetess', *kongcak* 'duke' - *yekongcak* 'duchess', *ihonnam* 'man who is divorced' - *ihonye* 'divorcee'. Or, each sex has an independent word: *kwapu* 'widow' - *holapi* 'widower'.

It is known that in English there is an attempt to neutralize words specifying masculinity to *-person* compounds, e.g. *chairman* to *chairperson*, *salesman* to *salesperson*, etc. The use of *-person* is intended "to get rid of sex reference altogether, to confirm equality by insisting on our common humanness" (Miller & Swift 1991:137). However, some compounds such as *freshman* which imply a male norm are still used since the corresponding generic compounds such as *freshperson* sound awkward.

In Korean, this kind of sexism is not shown, since all compounds of this kind consistently involve the neutral word, person rather than a sex-biased component. For example, *uychang* corresponding to *chairperson* literally means 'top person in a meeting or association'. *Panmaywen* corresponding to *salesperson* literally means 'person who sells something'. This category is a good case which shows sex-based linguistic equality in Korean, whereas English personal nouns are sex-biased, though there is an effort to relieve it.

⁴ This is still considered sexism in that the unmarked neutral form is that of referring to males.

5. Metaphorical slang

Males and females are often metaphorically compared to animals, plants or things, etc. There are many metaphorical slang items used to refer to males or females. However, I will concentrate on the items which can be seen as corresponding to each other between English and Korean in their metaphorical meanings.

Consider the items connoting man's strength or power. English *hunk* which denotes 'a large piece of something such as food' metaphorically refers to 'a strong looking guy'⁵. Another item, *stud* denoting 'a horse' metaphorically refers to 'a man who is very good at sex'. The metaphorical meanings of these two items correspond to those of one Korean lexical item, *hwangso* 'bull'.

English *fox* has a positive metaphorical meaning in that it connotes an attractive woman, whereas its corresponding Korean *yewu* 'fox' has a very negative metaphorical meaning which refers to 'a cunning, crafty woman' or sometimes 'a (negatively) sexy woman (e.g. in the way she dresses or makes herself up). The metaphorical meaning of Korean, *yewu* 'fox', is well expressed in a proverb:

- (5) If you don't beat your wife for three days, she will become a fox and run away to the mountain.

This strongly suggests that a woman should be restrained and suppressed (Kim 1977).

There are, however, some items whose denotation and connotation are exactly same in both English and Korean. English *wolf* and its corresponding Korean *nuktay* both have a negative metaphorical meaning referring to 'non-innocent man'. On the other hand, both English *lamb* and its corresponding Korean *yang* have the same good connotation, 'innocent girl' or 'boy child.'

There are many animal names negatively referring to old women in English: *old hag*, *old crow*, *old bat* and *hen*, etc. In contrast, Korean has only one plant name referring to old women; *halmikkok* 'pasque flower.' Unlike English, Korean *amtalk* 'hen' metaphorically means 'a woman in general regardless of age.' Its negative connotation is observed in a Korean common proverb:

- (6) If a hen cries, the home will be destroyed.

This means that women are not supposed to be talkative or active in social activity (Kim 1977). This connotation is easily understood, considering the implication of the compound *chima palam* 'the wind of the skirts' where *chima* 'skirts,' implies 'women', and *palam* 'wind' implies 'strong power'. Although the expression connotes 'the informal powerful influence of women', it has a strongly negative and sarcastic connotation that women should not be active in social activities. In English the negative meaning of *hen* is observed in the expression like *a hen-pecked husband*.

⁵ In some dialects, it does not mean 'strong' but rather very good looking (i.e. handsome, even sexy).

Consider items connoting 'youth'. English animal names, *filly* 'young female horse', *bird*, and *chick*, all metaphorically refer to a young girl or woman. Korean has only one item which has this metaphorical meaning: *yengge* 'chick'.

The metaphorical items above are mostly derogatory and offensive to women, but not bad to men in both languages. In a sense, this might support Swacker's claim (1975) that the same words sometimes carry different connotations depending on the sex of speaker.

In addition, there are many other realms in which to consider sexism. One of them is exclamation. In the use of exclamation, interviews with native speakers show the following responses:

- (7) female only: *Oh! dear.*
 female mostly: *Oh! my goodness.*
 male mostly: *Oh! man.*
 neutral: *Oh! my god, Oh! boy, wow.*

In contrast, in Korean, almost all exclamations are used only by women: *emena*, *ememe*, *ege*, *egege*, *eccem*, *aikumena*, etc. The neutral exclamation is *aiku* (*map-sosa*) in Korean. In other words, women tend to use more various types of exclamation than men do.

6. Conclusion

I have discussed many lexical items which reveal sexism in English and Korean. It is correct to say that the extent of sexism inherent in the lexical items analyzed is word-specific. However, it is undeniable that masculine words have, in general, positive connotations, whereas most feminine words have negative connotations in both languages. Of particular interest is that many Korean feminine words analyzed in this paper have more negative meanings than Korean masculine words and English feminine words.

Many sex-based lexical items are shown to be accountable in terms of socio-cultural patterns. The Women's Liberation Movement in America has motivated linguistic change to reduce sex-biased linguistic variations, whereas the traditional Confucian ideas in Korea seem to limit linguistic change, although there is some change. This implies that the cultural differences are reflected in language. This relationship of language and culture is in keeping with the earlier point that language is understood in socio-cultural contexts.

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