

## 1.2 THE PROBLEM OF TEACHING NON-SEXIST STYLE OF ENGLISH AND AVOIDANCE OF LINGUISTIC SEXISM IN TEACHING PROCESS

**Introduction:** Language is an outcome of social activities and an instrument of gender and identity formation and, further its development. Since language is a social tool, judgment is an inherent practice in its use; as judgment is an inevitable practice in any social setting. Gender is one of the most basic criteria of classifying people into groups (Bodine, 1975). Hence, language has always been an arena for gender identity construction. Discussing language and gender in the English language, one should speak about natural gender of nouns in the English language, social questions concerning gender related changes in language, and the new non-sexist terminology to replace or provide other options to sexist forms (Hayes, 2000).

Sociolinguistic studies define a number of factors that influence the way people speak and are spoken off. It depends on the points like social class, education background, a neighborhood a person grows in, occupation, upbringing and many other factors. All these factors play a major role in defining our speech acts and linguistic varieties we select to communicate (Bevik, 2013).

**An overview of language and gender studies:** The studies of language and gender show that the meanings are originated by language, emphasizing the fact that linguistic features are not explicitly related to individual's characteristics, such as sex (Litosseliti, 2013).

In last decades, there have been important actions taken in order to get rid of biased interpretations of sexes and language discrimination guidelines (for example, *The Linguistic Society of America Guidelines for Nonsexist Usage*). Hence, language changes should be reflected and activated in all spheres of our discourse practices like legal, educational or social practices.

Before discussing gender, sex, language, and sexuality in language, which are the concepts of sociolinguistic study, one has to define the terms properly. By sex categories we mean a biological distinction between males and females. On the other hand, gender also based on a biological distinction, does not always refer to sex categories (Cameron, 1992). Moreover, it is something more – it is how people *do* it meaning how people identify and develop themselves in society. Nevertheless, gender is something people *do* rather than some feature people *have*.

Referring to the works of famous feminists like Frank (1989) and Spender (1998) languages are sexist, and, one might claim that the world itself is represented from the masculine point of view, and, accordingly, it creates the base of the language bias and stereotypical beliefs of the opposite sex. The biased concerns of the portrayals of men and women in stereotypical positions, marking men as generics, while relegating women to the unmarked category by making them suffer a linguistic discrimination. As for Cameron (1998), sexism in language is not simply to label the world from man's perspectives, but it is rather how specific subsystems represent gender, and whether it is about masculine terms or suffixes indicating femininity. Cameron (1985) mentions that "*in the mouths of sexists, language can always be sexist*". Feminist language reform is aimed to achieve social changes in the community which in its

turn seeks for equity and equality (Cameron, 1992). English is most commonly used pluricentric language in the world with its modern grammatical gender free language system. Sexist language is the one that displays bias in favor of one sex over another, and thus, treats the other sex in a discriminatory way. In most cases, this bias is in favor of men and against women (Cook, 2003).

Gender is in fact a matter of social development that does not have to respond to the traits assigned for biological sex of a person, hence, it generally does. However, important note has to be made here: it should be agreed to what extent biological and social sex make difference, and to what extent these two agree that it is just an outcome of culture and society practices.

**Avoidance of linguistic sexism and its inclusion in the teaching process:** Education is a powerful tool that promotes an arousing opportunities of new roles for women and men as well as new ways of making use of language that demonstrates changes that have happened in community during the last past decades (Davies, 2007).

Linguistic sexism implies the relationship between language and gender. Language is considered to be a tool of communication and a means of knowledge of the world. Language is a dynamic and reflexive domain; as a result, it expresses all changes in society and in its turn, it leads to the changes in society. Society is built upon values, and language is a reflection of those values (Eckert, 2003).

Common examples of linguistic sexism are found in the works of Spender (1995) and Doyle (1998): address forms and titles, morphological marking (female suffixes: *actor – actress, waiter – waitress*, etc), a considerable amount of derogative terms referred to women, *he/man* and their generic meanings, job titles, and occupational inclinations and tendencies.

Sexist language is considered to be any language that is supposed to include all people, but, un/intentionally, excludes gender – either masculine or feminine. Sexist language is common in job or occupation titles, e.g. all *doctors* are men or all *secretaries* are women. Besides, sexism is viewed to be engraved in the morphology of language. There has been a gender marking in agent nouns in the English language, which has treated men and women differently (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). This fact states that naming practices for males and females are often asymmetrical. The base structures of English words seem to always have masculine meanings referring to the fact that feminine terms are created through adding derivational morphemes. Another classic example of linguistic sexism in English might be easily witnessed in the pronominal pronoun usage: when masculine pronouns *he, his, him* are referred to a person of either sex. When such terms are applied, the misinterpretation and miscommunication comes onto the stage by vividly eliminating females from consideration. Nonsexist language practice is any verbal or nonverbal communication that does not assign any female or male roles referring to their biological sex (Wardhaugh, 2006). *Man* and *he* are probably the most frequent masculine generics to be found in English, the forms that denominate masculine sense, however, are still applied to refer to both genders, hence, leading and provoking ambiguity. The ideology of male superiority supports the idea that being human equals to being male (Eckert,

2003). A lexical gender is an essential measure factor in the framework of kinship terminology, address terms, and a number of primary and commonly used personal nouns. It is worth mentioning that language becomes gendered because of various linguistic asymmetries and false generics, which portray the status of women and men in different ways. Gender asymmetry is expressed when gender is lexically marked, even though it is necessary to do it (e.g. *steward/stewardess*). Societal gender fairness is probably concerning the ability to decrease sexism in language, gender unfair treatment and stereotypes tied up to gender (Bevik, 2013). Semantic gender is most commonly recognized in genderless languages. Semantic gender in the form of referential gender (noun or pronoun's gender) refers to the actual gender use of the referent. Semantic gender may often be linked to inanimate nouns, for instance, there is a concord that *ships* in English are feminine gender, and as a result, they are addressed as *she* (Sunderland, 2000).

Educational environment plays a major role in the construction and the reproduction of a range of gendered norms and identities. Classroom activities require students to interact with each other, which leads to collaborative talks. Martyna (1980) mentions that in educational materials, e.g. the sex-specific *he* shows up five to ten times for every single generic *he*. The disagreements concerning teaching nonsexist language use breaks into two groups: (1) there are explicit social senses for proceeding to apply and teach the use of sexist language; (2) there is correspondingly solid position of teaching accuracy in language use. Language teaching needs to be aimed to provide learners with an explicit, unambiguous and concise language use, once again pointing out to the fact that there is nothing precise concerning referring females through generic *he/man* forms. Educational materials, which cross out against stereotypical elements for females and males, are among the instruments educators and scholars are questioned to produce for learners (O'Grady, 1997).

Schau and Scott (1986) have studied instructional materials to define if sex-neutral language materials contribute in developing gender balanced references without harmfully influencing the reading comprehension of learners. They discovered that rather than having a negative impact, sex-fair materials had quite positive results. Moreover, their observations showed that students' learning outcomes got better, and that sex-fair language materials did not impede with either boys or girls' learning outcomes. They concluded that instructional materials present numerous sex role models for their learners, as a result, these materials affect their learning comprehension. However, it is important to mention that gender-unspecified language does not always guide to gender fair beliefs. It is notwithstanding to mention that learners revealed to sex-fair materials progress less *traditional* sex-role outlooks. Therefore, the more sexist elements are found in educational materials, the more sexist attitudes might develop among learners.

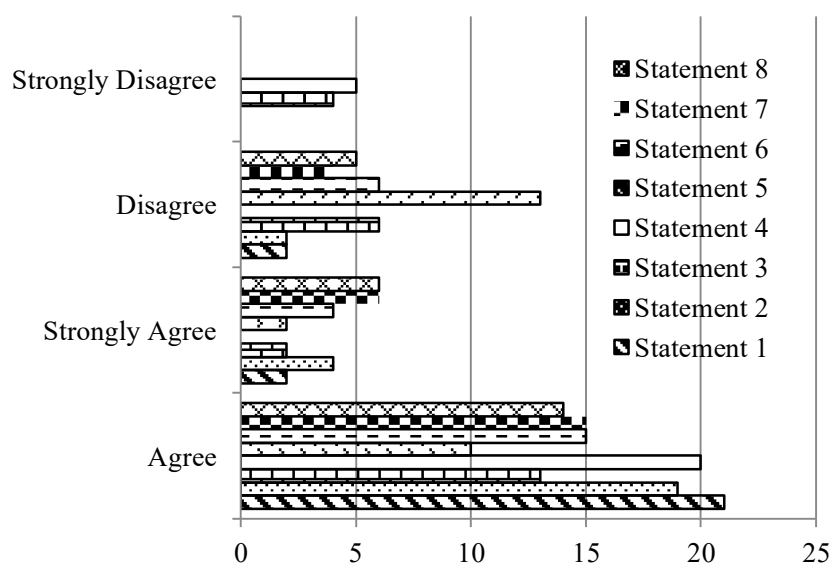
The *aim of the article* is to research the existence of gender-related problems of teaching and learning of English pronominal usage in ELT settings.

The *main task for the research* is (1) to explore the influence of *he/man* approach in current days in English classroom; (2) to review stereotypical features of men and women in educational materials; (3) to suggest the ways of making gender-exclusive language a gender inclusive one.

**Research methods and materials:** For this particular piece of research, the quantitative research approach was applied with the purpose of ensuring the research paper with validity and reliability. Based on the responses gained through the application of a questionnaire, the research attempts to study, investigate and examine the problem of teaching non-sexist style of English in contemporary English language classroom, and stereotypical traits bound up around men and women's language interpretation. With the purpose of discovering the main solutions of the pointed problems, the scientific works of the question in point: (Romaine, 1982). *Women, Men and Language: A Sociolinguistic Account of Gender Differences in Language*, Margaret Piercey "Sexism in the English Language Classroom" (Bodine, 1975). *Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar: Singular 'They', Sex-Indefinite 'He', and 'He or She'. Language in Society*, and Daryen Vandeputte "Language Variation and Gender through the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, a Historical Study" were analyzed and explored.

The *research tool* was the questionnaire that was conducted and sent via email to 25 English language educators in Georgia. The research employed a purposeful selection method, where 25 English language teachers from Georgia interested in the field of the study in point volunteered to participate in the survey. It is important to mention that the research provided the participants with confidentiality, where all necessary permissions were obtained. There were 8 statements in the questionnaire where the English language teachers had to make a choice whether they *agree*, *strongly agree*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. The responses were analyzed and presented in the charts in appendix. Research findings are considered to evidence the validity and reliability of the research hypothesis.

**Data analysis and results:** Referring to the responses collected from 25 English language teachers regarding the problem of teaching non-sexist style of English, the overall feedback concerning eight statements in question are presented in the bar chart below.



**Figure 1: Overall Feedback from 25 English language teachers**

Source: presented results are based on author's research

With regard to the first statement that states that sexist language practices might limit learners' thinking and understanding, almost all participants (21 out of 25) agree with it, which means that sexist language should be eliminated from educational sector. In the reference of the second statement that mentions that language is a pure outcome of social activities and is an instrument of gender and identity formation, and, further its development, 19 participants agree with this statement, while only 2 subjects do not agree, that once again indicates to the fact that language is a reflection of society it dwells in. Concerning the third statement that is about man having a power and superiority over woman that serves a base of language discrimination against females, the opinions seem to be split, which might be explained by the current campaigns of raising awareness of gender free language policy. Almost all participants (20 out of 25) agree with the statement that mentions that by sex categories we only mean a biological distinction between males and females by stating that there is only one biological distinction – either males or females.

As for the fifth statement which states that stereotypical features of men and women in educational materials have a negative impact on learners' academic outcomes, it seems that majority disagrees with this point, which might be explained by the fact that modern English language textbooks have become more gender neutral. According to the participants' replies, concerning the statement six which is about *he/man* approach – referring to both sexes interchangeably, existence of sexism in language is a current day teaching problem in English language classroom, with which the majority agrees that it is an existing obstacle in current day English classroom. With the respect to the seventh statement that alludes that the necessity of arising awareness of neutrality in language is needed not only among females who search for equality and equity with respect to language and gender, but also among many members of transgender communities, most participants either agree or strongly agree, while only 4 participants disagree with this statement, which might point to the fact that contemporary language practices need to include all people in active language use despite their sex/gender differences. And finally, the last statement which states that the more sexist elements are found in educational materials, the more sexist attitudes develop among learners, there is still major number of participants who agrees with this statement that once again highlights the fact that sexist language exists and it creates obstacles in language teaching.

Referring to responses collected from 25 participants of the research study, in general, the participants believe that gender has a great role in English language classroom. Moreover, culture is considered to be an influential factor in establishing language learning environment.

Teachers have to be aware of the fact that they need to allocate significant amount of time to sociolinguistic variation and critical awareness. Moreover, teachers need to teach all language varieties and alternatives of gender neutral language practices. A great attention should be given to teaching learners about the importance of the gender neutral forms to study and apply in language use.

**Conclusion:** With regard to linguistic change as an important role in social change, it obviously tries to draw relations between gender-related linguistic phenomena and

gender inequality or discrimination in language teaching. The research of language and gender presents that the meanings are created by language, emphasizing the fact that linguistic characteristics are not distinctly associated with individual peculiarities, such as sex, hence, there are diverse gender ideologies that build up day-to-day communications and practices, and present them in a sensible manner of social practices. The paper has given the insights of existing teaching problem of non-sexist style of language teaching for analyzing the connections between language and gender studies in contemporary global community.

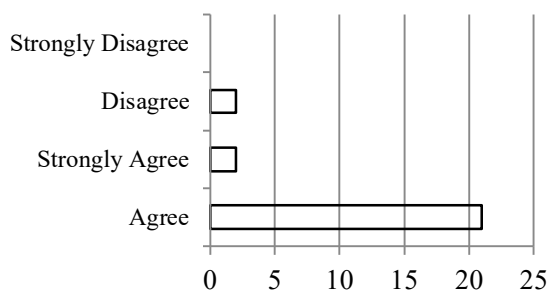
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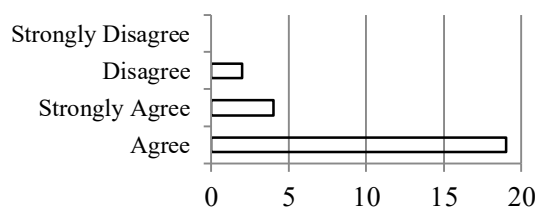
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## APPENDIX

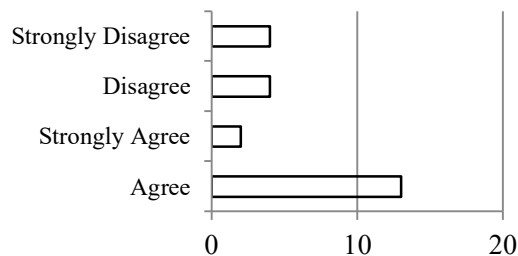
*Statement 1: Sexist language practices might limit learners' thinking and understanding*



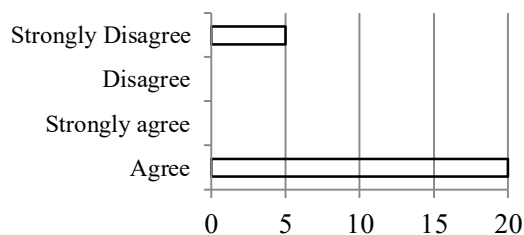
*Statement 2: Language is a pure outcome of society activities and an instrument of gender and identity formation and, further its development*



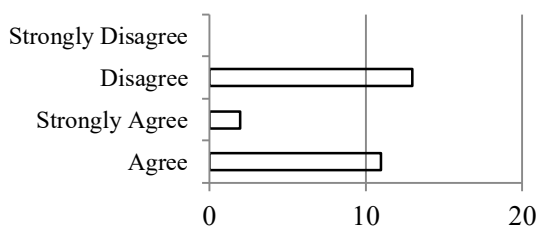
*Statement 3: Man has a power and superiority over woman that serves a base of language discrimination against females*



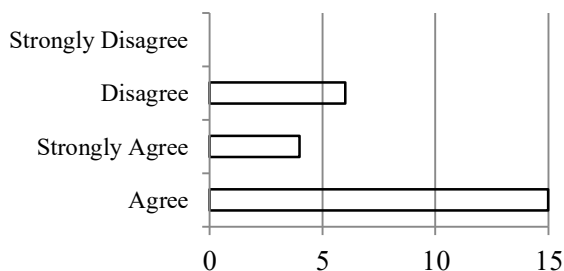
*Statement 4: By sex categories we only mean a biological distinction between males and females*



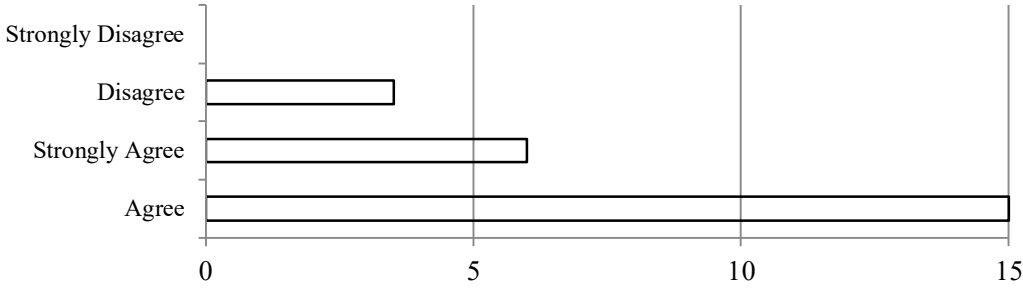
*Statement 5: Stereotypical features of men and women in educational materials have a negative impact on learners' academic outcomes*



*Statement 6: He/man approach – referring to both sexes interchangeably, is a current day teaching problem in the English classroom*



*Statement 7: The necessity of arising awareness of neutrality in language is needed not only among females who search for equality and equity with respect to language and gender, but also among many members of transgender communities*



*Statement 8: The necessity of arising awareness of neutrality in language is needed not only among females who search for equality and equity with respect to language and gender, but also among many members of transgender communities*

