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**BENEVOLENT SEXIST TENDENCIES IN GENDER ASSESSMENT IN THE ENGLISH
TERM OF ENDEARMENT “BABY” AND ITS VARIATIONS**

Abstract

The present article aims to analyze benevolent sexist tendencies in the process of gender assessment in the English term of endearment “baby” and its variations. Representing the social, cultural and psychological aspects of a particular linguistic community, studying address terms closely, terms of endearment among them, can reveal much about language and people. The data for the study is retrieved from the online surveys specifically made for the research about the relationship between this aspect of language and gender. The results align with the theories of benevolent and indirect sexism, as well as with the results of other studies about gender and language conducted by scholars interested in this topic.

Keywords: *language and gender; terms of address; terms of endearment; sexism.*

1. Introduction

While sexism has been a topic of scholarly debate for over a century, it started to concern linguistic circles only around 1960s. Various scholars have compiled research in order to expose sexist tendencies that exist within languages all over the world. There is no clear cut approach to the issue although some theories have come to establish the general framework within which the new studies on the topic can be carried out.

Address terms are an essential part of proper speech etiquette as they have the potential to represent social and cultural ideals. As a result, especially in the age of globalization where we are constantly being exposed to the different communication norms of various cultures, it is important to study address terms more closely. Terms of endearment compile an important chunk within the system of address terminology and can reveal some interesting linguistic peculiarities, such as those connected to gender and sexism. In this respect, the study of particular terms can offer valuable information about the specifics of linguistics as well as cultural ideologies within a particular linguistic community.

In the present article, several theories have been combined to examine benevolent sexist tendencies in the process of gender assessment in the English term of endearment “baby” and its variations. The theory of Benevolent Sexism was created by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske in the late 1990s, as a part of a more elaborate Ambivalent Sexism theory (2001). Two scholars tried to explore the views on sexism in a more detailed manner, considering the likelihood of diverse sexist attitudes that could include both positive and negative attitudes toward women. Glick and Fiske coined the term "Ambivalent Sexism" in order to better explain the complexities of gender-based biases. For the purposes of this article, this study combines the theory of Benevolent Sexism with Sara Mills’s theory (2008) of two forms of sexism that prevail in language. The results are analyzed based on similar studies conducted by Lakoff (1975) as well as Boasso, Covert and Ruscher (2012).

The data were retrieved from the study conducted by the author on the process of gender assessment in the English terms of endearments in English mono and bilingual individuals. The results are analyzed according to the theories and research conducted by various scholars interested in the relationship between language and gender. Glick and Fiske’s theory of Benevolent Sexism being the basis, Lakoff’s (1975), Boasso, Covert and Ruscher’s (2012) findings provide a valuable ground for the comparison. Furthermore, the results prove the existence of indirect sexism (Mills, 2008) in the utilization of the particular term of endearment.

The objective of the current research is to expose the underlying existence of the benevolent and indirect sexist tendencies that exist in the minds of the people within a particular linguistic community (native English speakers in this case). This is achieved by discussing how the participants of the study (and the non-participants observed by them) utilize the selection and usage of the English term of endearment – “baby” and its variation in their linguistic activity. The results align with the assumption that the ways the term of endearment “baby” and its variations are being employed, do indeed carry sexist implications as they are mostly directed towards women in specific contexts, such as for instance, the so-called “baby-talk”.

1. Theoretical Framework

1.1 Language and gender

Initially, the study of language and gender concentrated on the analysis of the different linguistic techniques employed by men and women in their discourse. At the moment, the focus has turned to

language and gender philosophies, which represent speakers' stereotypical interpretations of gender roles, gender dynamics, and gender-appropriate language use created, replicated, questioned, and negotiated in conversation and other types of discourse (Pavlenko,2005). According to current studies, gender is not only a socially constructed system but a hierarchy in which maleness is respected rather than femaleness; this system of social ranking is related to other social structures and power dynamics. In the majority of linguistic communities across the world, women's speech is less valued than male speech (Gal, 1991).

Gender asymmetries of language are reproduced by language and gender constructs that attribute certain meanings to different social roles, behaviors and phenomena. According to recent research, discourses, be it public and private, written or oral, are critical for the building and negotiation of dominant vs. powerless gender roles (Pavlenko, 2005). For instance, Kiesling (2007) exposed that the “preferred” display of masculinity through language in the United States is that performed by and typically associated with a heterosexual white middle-class cisgender male. On the contrary, queer males or minorities are much less influential, relevant and almost forgotten aside from some specific contexts.

Overall, in recent years, it has been established within the field of linguistics that the relationship between gender and language is neither overt nor unilinear. Most linguistic attitudes and activities implicitly index gender and are influenced by language and gender ideologies. Silverstein (1985) proposes a distinction between two kinds of gender indexicals: categorical/overt and statistical/covert.

Independent of the meaning of the communication, categorical/overt linguistic practices explicitly index the gender of the speaker, audience, or both. Forms of address belong to this type of gender indexes. Unlike overt indexing, covert indexes can only be analyzed within a certain context; it is also necessary that ideologies of language and gender are applied in the process of analysis.

According to Aikhenvald (2019), the social ramifications of becoming a male or a woman are often associated with the choice of linguistic gender. This is known as social gender, a concept concerned with the conflicting positions of men and women, as well as how they are manifested in cultural practices, ritualized behavior, and societal stereotypes.

Furthermore, Van Dijk (1997), in talking about language, gender and power dynamics, points out that the symbolic power characteristics such as status, control over linguistic, economic and political resources and access to them, played out in various ways through different discourses, link individuals back to social structures.

When discussing the relationship between linguistic and social gender we refer to Wales (1996) according to whom the term gender includes the classification of nouns, pronouns and noun constructions in terms of different characteristics expressed in their semantic meaning. One of the most important characteristics is biological sex. Biber (1999) further explains that gender, aside from being the reflection of reality, is a social construct created by the agreement of individuals living within the same linguistic community and depends on an individual choice. The choice, in turn, is determined by a particular linguistic situation and is expressed in the discourse.

In English, gender is a nominative category. It is explicitly expressed in the third person singular pronouns. In the case of nouns, it can be expressed using lexical markers that are mostly applied to coin words of “feminine” gender such as, for instance, waiter/waitress, prince/princess. Some adjectives can be differentiated in this way as according to Lakoff (1975) specific adjectives are used exclusively towards women (adorable, bitchy etc.) while some are used to refer mostly to men (handsome, asshole ect.).

1.2 Terms of endearment

According to Fasold (1990), terms of address are words that are used by speaker(s) to address their interlocutor(s) while communicating. Address types, as an essential part of the interface between language and culture, may offer useful sociolinguistic knowledge about the interlocutors, their relationships, and their circumstances. One of the most important researches on address type and social relationships has been conducted by Brown and Gilman (1960). They proposed the notions of power and solidarity which determine the choice of address forms within a certain community or a specific linguistic situation.

Terms of endearment are just one type of address words. Endearments are part of larger structures, in particular, that of speech behavior and speech etiquette. The two, and logically terms of endearments as well, are specific to the various cultures and types of communication across the world. Endearment terms remain a supplementary instrument as their collection and usage are

dictated by the essence of interlocutor activity. Usage of terms of endearment within the discourse shows the conveyance of a positive attitude as well as politeness.

The reason why women and men use the terms of endearment in a different way, according to Lakoff (2004), is because of their difference on a social ladder. Therefore, the semantics of the words most clearly reflect the ideologies of sex and gender that are established within particular linguistic communities as well as society at large.

Ornet and Whitehead (1983) exemplify this statement by analyzing different linguistic behaviors. More prestigious linguistic behavior is connected with the public sphere, communication styles and genres that men have an access to while the traditional “feminine” communication norms go against what is being considered to be a “good communicator” (charismatic leader with good oratory skills, wit, directness and objectivity).

Another thing to consider is the fact, that studies show (Lakoff, 2004) that the terms of endearment are used mostly by heterosexual men towards women and very rarely towards men. Valuable research was conducted by Boasso, Covert and Ruscher’s (2012) that further confirmed that men tend to use terms of endearment towards women, children and the elderly more often than the other way around. The authors discuss some factors that determine the usage of the terms of endearments that have clear implications of benevolent sexism.

1.3 Benevolent Sexism

Benevolent sexism is a term coined by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske as a part of the Ambivalent Sexism theory. To comprehend the essence of Ambivalent Sexism one must consider the factors that determine its very existence. These factors include parental and loving attitudes towards women and the “feminine”, known as compassionate sexism; as well as malicious and distrusting attitudes, known as hostile sexism. These two views are referred to as ambivalent sexism because they imply attitudes that seem to be both positive and negative.

In this respect, benevolent sexism can be better described as a collection of attitudes or beliefs about women that classify them as innocent, pure, loving, caring, empathetic and delicate. Rather than being openly misogynistic, these views are often motivated by a desire to defend or cherish

women. In certain cases, these attitudes could be referred to as traditional values like that of chivalry. Despite the apparent positive characteristics, benevolent sexist practices are often risky and harmful to women's rights and in some cases could even be threatening. The theory further subdivides the types of benevolent sexism into complementary gender differentiation, protective paternalism and heterosexual intimacy. In the first case, women are seen as weak and in the need of protection from men; they are seen as "childish." Women should be treasured, respected, and revered, and they want a male presence in their lives to look after them. In the second case, women should display all characteristics that are considered to be traditionally feminine, such as, sweet and gentle attitude, loving and caring towards others, especially men, purity and innocence. In the last case, men are being viewed as flawed, or as less of a man unless they have a woman romantic partner.

1.4 Indirect Sexism

In her book *Language and Sexism*, Sara Mills distinguishes between overt and indirect sexism. According to her, overt or direct sexism is a form of sexism that can be easily defined via certain language markers. She claims that the proclivity for discriminatory vocabulary continues but has been modified in shape, blatant sexism covered up or supplemented with subtle sexism. She states that indirect sexism occurs when “gender is not oriented explicitly in the interaction; however, the presuppositions underlying this utterance are gendered and based on sexist beliefs” (Mills, 2008, p. 128).

A statement may be considered sexist if it contains outdated ideas about women, such as women should stay at home and take care of the family, or if it implies that men are the focus of all, or if it implies that what women do is irrelevant or not as significant as what men do (Mills, 2008, p. 2). These kinds of statements can be expressed directly or indirectly.

Indirect sexism is difficult to detect and therefore difficult to respond to as it often contains the elements of humor or praise. Mills provides rather specific examples in order to demonstrate the type as well as requirements for recognizing and confronting this form of sexism in language. For instance, one form of indirect sexism is collocation, a word that is collocated in a way that it always somehow refers to women.

It should be noted that the question of an anti-indirect sexism campaign that could be implemented into anti-sexism linguistic reform is not answered. Taking into consideration the

subtle nature of this form of sexism Mills' approach makes sense. She has done the job of pointing out the issue. What should be done in order to abolish or minimize the use of indirect sexist language rests upon us.

2. Methodology

The data for the present article was retrieved from the data compiled for another study on the linguistics tendencies in the process of gender assessment in English terms of endearments in English mono and bilingual individuals.

2.1. Research instruments

The data were taken from the two surveys created by the author for the above- mentioned study. Surveys were posted online on social media platforms (such as Facebook and Twitter) for a limited amount of time. The first survey was conducted to select the most frequently used term of endearment among English native and non-native speakers. The participants could choose from the pre-selected terms (baby, dear, honey, love, angel, queen, king, princess/prince, sweet, puppy, kitten, bunny) of endearment and its variations that were offered or add their own term if it was not included in the list.

The second survey had a form of an online interview with 20 native English speakers, mono as well as bilinguals to expose the gender assessment tendencies through the ways they select and use previously selected terms of endearment. For the purposes of the study participants were asked to provide some personal details such as their gender identity, age, whether they were mono or bilingual, what languages they spoke in case of bilingualism and the gender identity of those they refer to with the selected term of endearment. Furthermore, they were asked to discuss the gender assessment techniques they utilize when using a particular word individually, or notice as being employed by others around them and in society at large.

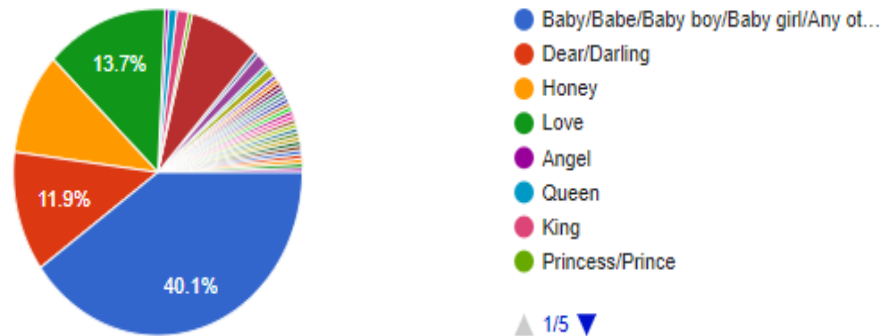
2.2. Data collection and results

In the first survey, from the 150 native English speakers (111, 74% monolinguals and 39, 26% bilinguals combined) 71 (47.3%) chose "baby" and its variations as the most frequently used terms

of endearment. This survey was done to choose the terms of endearment the author would be focusing on, on the basis of the frequency of usage among English speakers.

What is your most used term of endearment (please select one option)

227 responses



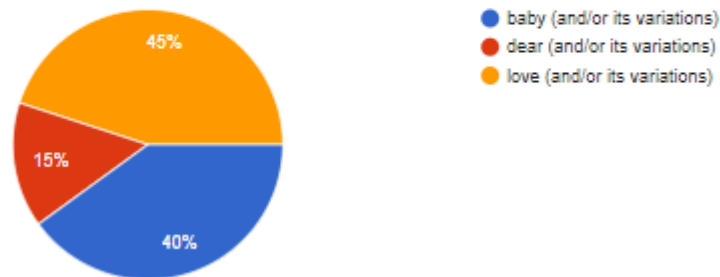
1. First survey about the most frequently used English terms of endearment.

The second survey determined the tendencies of gender assessment in the selected term of endearment. 20 participants were once again asked to disclose their personal information, i.e. their age and gender identity, and whether they were a mono- or bilingual native English speaker, as well as the gender identity of those they address with the selected term of endearment. Two main questions that the participants had to elaborate on, were whether they thought the terms of endearment, in this case, “baby” and/or their variations, are gendered; meaning whether the socio-biological notion of gender affects the meaning of the word in the process of its usage by them and who they address with this term. Another question asked the participants to think about the issue not from an individual but a general point of view and explain if the term of endearment, in this case, “baby” and/or its variations, is masculine, feminine or completely gender-neutral.

From 20 individuals that participated in the study, for the 8 (40%) of them, the most frequently used term was “baby” and its variations. It should be noted that the other 12 (60%) participants talked about the term in various contexts. Furthermore, the only variation of the term “baby” selected by the participants was “babe”. The participants were asked to elaborate on the individual as well as general usage of the selected term when discussing its grammatical and lexico-semantic gender assessment tendencies.

Which one out of these terms of endearment: baby, dear, love (or the variations of them such as: babe, baby girl, baby boy, bub, bubby, darling, lovey ect..)do you use most frequently?

20 responses

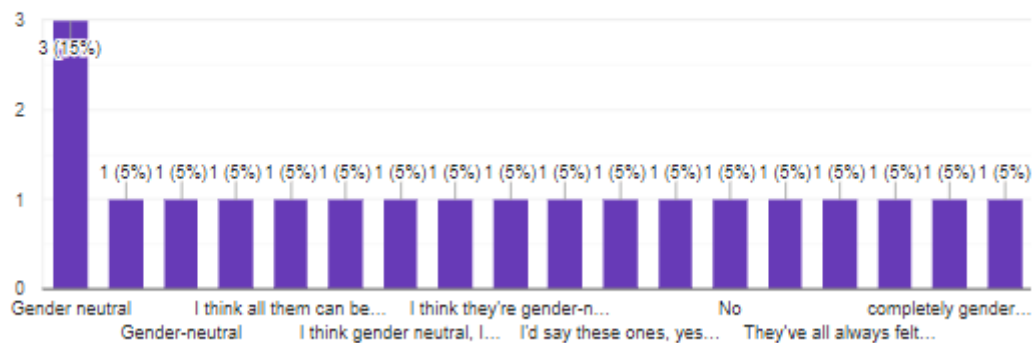


2. *From the second survey for the native English speakers about the gender assessment tendencies in the English terms of endearment (baby, dear, love) and their variations.*

It should be assessed that the main question of the questionnaire “is the particular term gendered” entails the meaning of the aspects of biosocial gender and the stereotypes connected to it affecting the semantic meaning of the word. Do participants experience this process on an individual level or if they do not is it relevant to the rest of society? It’s interesting to note that when asked to discuss whether the term of endearment is gendered all monolingual participants agreed that the term is completely gender-neutral and did not further elaborate on the answer. Such clear cut answers have been given in the case of only two bilingual individuals; one of them having Welsh as L2, the other Bengali. In Welsh, all nouns possess either masculine or feminine grammatical gender (BBC, *Cymru Wales Learn Welsh - Grammar*). The Bengali language does not have a category of gender (Desai et al., 2015).

In general, are terms of endearment: baby, dear, love (and/or its variations) masculine, feminine or completely gender-neutral? (you can discuss the term of your choice, all of them or as many as you want)

20 responses



3. Second survey for the native English speakers about the gender assessment tendencies in the English terms of endearment (baby, dear, love) and their variations.

Despite the majority of participants claiming the term is gender-neutral, the analysis of their answers exposes a contradictory reality. Most participants who claimed the term is gender-neutral did so in answering from their individual point of view and some noted that the reality is different within the society where most people have different opinions influenced by the dominant ideologies of a patriarchal society.

In the case of the term “baby”, even those who claimed that in their usage the term is gender-neutral and the gender identity or biological sex of the addressee does not influence its usage commented that, in general, the term may be viewed as “feminine” or that it is “feminine” as it is mostly used towards women.

Among monolingual participants, a male individual noted that he uses the term towards his spouse, which he confirmed to be a woman. Between two women monolingual participants, one of them confirmed that she uses the term to address male romantic partners while the other uses the term to address women, romantic partners and girlfriends.

The situation is different when it comes to bilingual participants. The participants who discussed the term “baby” or its variation “babe” in any context were those whose L2 included Syrian Arabic, Spanish, Bengali, Portuguese, Russian/Polish and Afrikaans. Among those languages, modern Bengali and Afrikaans do not possess the grammatical category of gender (Desai et al., 2015; Carstens, 2019) . Syrian Arabic, Spanish and Portuguese differentiate between the feminine and masculine gender categories. Russian and Polish have an additional neuter gender category (Corbett, 2013, Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2011; Gygax et al., 2019).

A non-binary bilingual participant with Spanish as their L2 noted that they use the terms of endearment towards their non-binary romantic partner. In particular, when using the term “baby”, the preferred form is its variation “babe” because they think the variation seems more gender-neutral. The participant confirmed that they think the term “baby” is completely gender-neutral compared to the more gendered terms such as “doll” and “darling”.

Another bilingual respondent with Russian and Polish as their L2 stated that despite the Russian equivalent of the term “baby” (детка, крошка) being feminine, people tend to use both terms in a gender-neutral way (meaning towards any individual despite their biological sex or gender identity).

On the contrary, the other bilingual participant with the language that does not possess the category of gender at all as their L2 (Afrikaans), said that despite the term being gender-neutral she uses it only towards other women and thinks it does have feminine connotations. This individual agreed that the lexico-semantics of the terms of endearment should not be affected or motivated by bio-social definitions of gender but the reality is different: *“In general I believe that baby is perceived as feminine while the others are more readily seen as gender-neutral”*

The bilingual participant with Bengali as their L2 responded that they use the term towards women mostly as it’s more comfortable for them that way, but the term overall is gender-neutral.

The bilingual participant with Syrian Arabic as their L2 said that they use the term “baby” to address anyone despite their biological sex or gender identity, but compared to other terms of endearment the term “baby” has more of feminine connotations to it. (Here, as well as in all

answers concerned the use of “baby” in English, we should bear in mind that as the term in English does not have a grammatical category of gender, it being “gendered” or “gender-neutral” refers to the lexico-semantics of the word). This participant confirmed that there is no equivalent to the term “baby” in Arabic. The closest equivalent to the term could be considered the word حبيبي Habibi which is of masculine grammatical gender and is used towards males or in a gender-neutral way in certain situations. /يتبنيح/ Habibti is of feminine grammatical gender and used towards women; the direct translation in English would be “my love”.

A cisgender woman with Portuguese as their L2 when asked to elaborate on the gender assessment in the terms of endearment on an individual level said the following: “..*baby, yes - but also endearments in general? I use endearments a lot more with women, including the ones listed (referring to their mother and sister in the previous answer to the question who they address with the terms of endearment).. More than I don't use endearments as often with men regardless of how I see those endearments as being gendered?*” Furthermore, she stated: “*I think baby is somewhere between neutral and feminine, where the other two (referring to the other two terms of endearment in the original study: dear and love) are neutral.*”

Among all participants only one, a bilingual cisgender male with Spanish as their L2, explicitly mentioned that, in their opinion, terms of endearment are gendered as opposite sexes use it to address each other. They also confirmed that they use it “*generally towards women*” with no further elaboration.

A non-binary bilingual individual with Spanish as their L2, provided an interesting insight in saying: “*Personally, no (meaning they think that the terms of endearment are not gendered). But words in my native language are very gendered and even if I don't particularly care, let's say, using what's considered a 'feminine' term of endearment on a man might get me in trouble or a dirty look at least.*” “*Some like baby, dear, love, honey etc are pretty neutral but some are definitely gendered (example: princess, doll, which are very common terms of endearment in my native language and exclusively used for women)...*”

Lastly, a cisgender woman participant with Somali as their L2, when asked to comment on their individual choice and usage of the terms of endearment as well as the general tendencies, answered: *“They can be considered gendered but I use them regardless of gender”*; *“I think they're gender-neutral, but people may regard them as being feminine sometimes”*

3. Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of the answers of mono vs. bilingual native English speakers shows that in the case of monolingual participants the terms of endearment, in this case, “baby” and its variations, stay gender-neutral despite their sex/gender and sexual orientation as well as that of the addressants’.

The survey revealed that bilingual individuals, as opposed to monolingual native English speakers, do not give clear cut answers on whether the terms of endearment, in this case, “baby” and its variations, are gendered. Despite their claim that (except for the one cisgender male participant who explicitly stated he believes all terms of endearment are gendered) in their individual use, the terms of endearments are gender neutral and that they don’t take into consideration the gender identity or biological sex of the addressant (therefore the lexico-semantic meaning of the term is not determined or motivated by bio-social aspects of gender), in general, the reality is different. The bilingual participants with languages that have strictly structured categories of grammatical gender (such as Spanish, Russian, French and Arabic) tend to compare English terms of endearment to the equivalents that exist within their languages. They explain that in their second languages, the usage of terms of endearments as well as their meanings may be heavily gendered since using the traditionally “feminine” term like “baby” to refer to a man may get them in trouble.

The participants distinguish between the more gender-neutral terms of endearment, such as dear, love and the more “feminine” colored “baby”. When talking about “feminized” and “gendered” terms we mean bio-social aspects of gender that influence the lexico-semantic meaning of the word, which, among many things, exposes traditional societal stereotypes and dominant ideologies about various physiological, cultural and social aspects of the existence of men and women within the society. This is following Glick and Fiske’s Benevolent Sexism theory (2001) and becomes even

more obvious when considering the etymology of the word “baby”. In OED, the modern term “baby” is a diminutive of “babe” that by the process of the reverse has become the main variant of the word while “babe” has come to be one of its variations. “Babe”, short for “baban”, comes from Middle English and was used to address infants of any biological sex (or gender identity). “Baban”, in turn, was a word coined probably as an imitation of an infant’s attempts to speak. The noun “baby” being a diminutive is further confirmed by the ending suffix -y. According to Schneider (2003), English diminutives are frequently coined by adding suffixes at the end of nouns. The study conducted by Romaine (1998) showed that in English the diminutives created by adding suffixes -ie/-y are mostly used towards women. Naciscione’s studies (2010) further confirm that when coining diminutives, the term “baby” is often used among lexical markers. One of the connotations of the term: “Childish adult person”, according to the online etymological dictionary etymonline.com, has been acquired during the 17th century. Later on, in the 19th century, people started using it as a term of endearment.

Some psychologists, among them Logan Levkoff, agree that the term “baby” infantilizes the addressee (Robb, 2014). This statement is following Boasso, Covert and Ruschers’s study (2012) according to which benevolent sexism in terms of endearment motivates the existence and popularity of gender stereotypes. In particular, it is aligned with one out of three sub-factors of Glick and Fiske’s (2001) benevolent sexism, in which men take pride in and think is necessary to protect women as they are childish and childlike. If we apply Mill’s indirect sexism theory the whole thing becomes even more tricky as according to Boasso, Covert and Ruscher’s research (2012) the terms of endearment with benevolent sexist tendencies within their meanings, do not have a negative connotation in certain situations within a particular discourse. For instance, using the term “baby” to address someone you don’t have a close relationship with is sexist, unless they are a child.

Boasso, Covert and Ruscher (2012) discuss some other factors that determine the usage of the terms of endearments, for instance, when a referrer thinks referent cannot do the assigned task because of their powerlessness or lack of skills and wit. In this case, women, children and the elderly are considered to be equally lacking in power, skills and intelligence as compared to men. Another important sub-factor is the so-called “baby-talk” when talking to adult women as men tend

to think they need encouragement or simplified instructions to accomplish some task. “Baby-talk” is an obvious manifestation of sexism as when used in the discourse with an adult woman it implies that the referer regards the referent as having lesser mental and physical abilities than them (Boasso, Covert and Ruscher 2012).

Aside from this, the scholars pointed out that the connotations of some terms of endearment such as “baby” and “doll” in certain contexts highlight the stereotypical ideologies about women being soft, caring, kind and childlike. Our survey confirmed this statement as the term “baby”, as the participants mentioned several times, is mostly used as a “feminine” term.

Lakoff’s (1973) as well as Boasso, Covert and Ruscher’s (2012) findings that terms of endearment are used by men to refer to women and very rarely other men, has been confirmed by our study as well. None of the male participants have stated that they used the terms of endearment towards their male peers. Neither have the other participants noted such an occurrence in their observations. On the other hand, the majority of the participants of our surveys being women (i.e 140, 61.7% in the first survey and 13, 65% in the second one) once again highlights the tendency of connecting the phenomena of terms of endearments with women and the “feminine”. These, once again prove, that the dominant philosophies and ideas about gender are male -oriented, but so normalized, that most women have them internalized to the point they don’t fully comprehend their sexist nature.

Finally, Mills (1995) talks about small sizes being associated with femininity in her handbook of Feminist Stylistics. When analyzing the group of words that are employed in advertising, marketers use terms such as “baby”, “little” and “small” to describe women or in the cases when their target market consists of mostly women. In the chapter, *Women as the Marked Form* the author highlights the fact that grammatically marked terms that are diminutives of masculine terms and possess specific connotations that masculine terms do not, are coined with the help of suffixes such as: -ette, -ling, -ess, -trix, -enne ect. These suffixes serve to change the semantic meaning of the word in a way that makes it more “feminine”, in particular, makes it smaller, less serious, less important. They use the prime definition of denoting physical smallness and imply the meaning of being in a

hierarchically lower position. It should be noted, however, that physical smallness is traditionally and stereotypically considered to be a desirable trait of a woman.

4. Conclusions

From the analysis of the surveys it's obvious that even if a particular language does not possess the grammatical category of gender, the lexico-semantic aspects of the word are influenced by the bio-social definitions of gender. These are motivated by the dominant ideologies and stereotypes, including benevolent sexism and heteronormativity, that exist within the particular linguistic community or the society at large. As illustrated by the results of the above study this has an effect on the selection and usage of the terms on an individual as well as societal levels and creates certain tendencies of gender assessment in the terms of endearment, out of which benevolent sexism is the most prominent one. Benevolent sexism is subtle in nature therefore, its employments in the gender assessment of the terms of endearment, in this case, "baby" and its variations, could be a clear example of Sara Mill's indirect sexism.

Overall, this type of research reveals that some directly or indirectly offensive and outdated ideas about women are still very much a part of everyday language. On the other hand, this proves once again that language is a direct reflection of the ideologies that shape, motivate and direct the existence of a particular community as well as society at large. In this regard, language reformation, that scholars interested in the topic of gender and language talk about, gains even higher significance. The starting point would be the research of particular languages to reveal the stereotypical tendencies that need to be changed.

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