"The Influence of Language on the Perception of Gender"

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THE INFLUENCE OF LANGUAGE ON THE PERCEPTION OF GENDER

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the relationship between language and thought, and language and gender perception. Language is one of our central means of self-expression and communication. As much as we use it to express our thoughts and aspects of our identity, it can also be a powerful tool which can have a significant effect on how others perceive us. This thesis will be looking at gender, gender perception and other related concepts, and investigating how they relate to linguistic gender, gendered and genderless languages, as well as gender-neutral language. The data involved will comprise various web and journal articles, dissertations, books, chapters from collections of essays, and several studies and experiments conducted in recent years.

Keywords: linguistics, semantics, gender, linguistic gender, grammatical gender, gender perception, gender roles, gender-neutral language, gender inequality, sexism

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1. INTRODUCTION

There are many ways we can outline what the term language stands for. Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2005) defines language as: 1) "the system of communication in speech and writing that is used by people of a particular country or area", and 2) "the use by humans of a system of sounds and words to communicate" (Hornby, A. S., pp. 862). We can also describe it as "a particular style of speaking or writing" or "a way of expressing ideas and feelings using movements, symbols and sound" (Hornby, A. S., pp. 862-863).

Just as there are various definitions of language as an abstract concept, there are several types of language in practical use. Natural or ordinary languages are those that have emerged and evolved among humans through repetitive use over an extended period of time. In addition, they can be encoded into secondary media by means of visual, auditory or tactile stimuli - e.g. Braille, sign language, writing, whistling or Morse code. On the other hand, there are constructed and formal languages. Both are consciously created and can be used for various purposes, such as fictional languages in TV shows (Klingon), languages that are devised for international communication (Esperanto) or languages specifically designed for mathematics, computer science or linguistics (Lyons, 1991, pp. 68-70).

Despite their differences in form and style and variations in use, all types of language have something in common - they are all used for some sort of communication. Whichever language we use to communicate, it is the main way we express ourselves; our interests, fears, wishes, dreams, insecurities, questions, thoughts and feelings. It is how we form our beliefs and values, make decisions and navigate the world around us. Language does not only affect our growth and

development, it is the foundation of a multitude of everlasting and prevalent concepts which are in turn the foundation of society as a whole: religion, politics, social stratification, various ideologies, and entertainment, to name a few. It enables us to examine the past, explore the present and ponder about the future.

The aim of this paper is to explore the relationship between language and identity; more precisely, something that would appear to be one of the most permeating aspects of human identity - gender. By using examples and analyzing language as a structured unit, this thesis aims at illuminating how language affects the way we think, namely, how it affects the way we think about gender. As was mentioned before, there are many different forms of language and they each have a specific relationship to gender. However, having in mind the immense amount of research that has been done in this field, for practical purposes, this thesis will be focusing primarily on spoken and written natural languages.

Section 1 outlines the difference between sex and gender as well as states that and analyzes why gender roles and gender expression are a social construct. Section 2 proposes a look at different aspects of linguistic gender relevant to the English language; lexical, social, referential and grammatical gender are discussed. This section also shows what role each of these play in everyday language and how they affect our thoughts and perception of gender in society. It includes examples of diverse languages with the goal of demonstrating the vast variety of linguistic gender and further supporting the central claim that language shapes our thoughts and perception of gender. Section 3 analyzes gender discrimination, gender bias and sexism as some of the relevant concepts that need to be properly understood and recognized in order to fully comprehend the extent of the effect language has on all areas of society. Section 4 compares gendered and genderless languages by looking at how they perceive objects according to their grammatical gender or lack thereof. Section

5 discusses gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language as an attempt to avoid bias towards a particular sex or gender. Finally, Section 6 is a case study which examines specific occurrences of gendered language in a political context and proposes ways of improving political discourse and environment so as to be more gender-inclusive.

2. SEX, GENDER, GENDER ROLES AND GENDER EXPRESSION

Although sex and gender are still somewhat used interchangeably and have been typically regarded as synonymous, they carry entirely different meanings. The most widespread use of the term 'sex' is to refer to the two major forms of individuals that are differentiated as female or male based primarily on their genes, hormones and reproductive organs (Newman, "Sex and Gender"). There are many various instances where the individual does not fit the typical definition of either of the two categories and is therefore referred to as intersex. Gender, on the other hand, is a broader term than sex, employed to denote the range of characteristics related to masculinity, femininity and everything in-between and outside of the binary ends on the gender spectrum. These characteristics usually include gender roles, gender identity and gender expression[1] (Newman, "Sex and Gender"). In the past, the term 'gender' has sometimes been used to encompass both sex and gender; however, in the past two decades the public has become more conscious of both binary and non-binary transgender identities as well as the flexibility of gender roles, and the term 'gender' is nowadays used separately from 'sex' more often than it used to be. This, of course, is a result of a long-term effort from activist organizations, groups and individuals fighting for LGBTIQ rights.

The terms gender roles and gender expression more or less go hand in hand, in that gender roles are a sex-based social construct and gender expression is then a person's choice of how they express their gender, meaning someone of a male sex could have a feminine gender expression and vice versa (Newman, "Sex and Gender"). When an individual behaves in such gender non-

[1] Gender identity, as opposed to gender roles, is an individual's sense or "internal knowledge" of their gender and as such is an innate part of their being. It can either be congruent with the sex they were assigned at birth or it can differ from it. When someone's gender identity does not correspond to their birth sex, that person falls under the umbrella term *transgender*. On the other hand, gender expression is the way a person externally expresses their gender identity, usually through clothes, body language, speech, haircut, etc. ("Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Definitions").

conforming ways i.e. deviates from their expected gender roles, they will most likely be perceived and treated negatively, which can then affect their life and wellbeing in harmful and intense ways. However, this negative treatment is often distributed unevenly. For instance, in most cases society will react far less harshly to a woman or a girl having masculine attributes or expressing masculine interests than to a man or a boy displaying feminine attributes or expressing feminine interests. This statement can be illustrated quite nicely if one simply looks at the varying reactions to the phrases *tomboy girl* vs. *nancy boy* to find that "society responds differently to gender non-conformity depending on whether an individual is adopting or abandoning masculinity" (Blair, "Has Gender Always Been Binary?").

The gender binary certainly appears to be such a deep-seated concept in modern society that people often get confused or even upset when they cannot determine someone's gender or sexuality. Human beings as a species tend to categorize almost everything they encounter in their environment, and while that can be very useful and practical, sometimes it can also be detrimental and insensitive to many individuals.

Contrary to today's beliefs about gender, both gender roles and gender expression differ not only from culture to culture but have had many variations throughout history. One of the biggest gender stereotypes present mainly in Europe and the US is that pink is a feminine color associated with girls while blue is viewed as masculine and intended for boys. This, however, used to be the complete opposite. Before the end of World War I, the social convention dictated that "… the generally accepted rule is pink for the boys, and blue for the girls. The reason is that pink, being a more decided and stronger color, is more suitable for the boy, while blue, which is more delicate and dainty, is prettier for the girl." (Maglaty, "When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?"). Moreover, dresses were considered a gender-neutral article of clothing and were worn by boys, as well as

girls, until they were six or seven years old. Furthermore, children used to predominantly wear white because it was practical - white cotton could be bleached. Pink and blue were introduced as colors for babies in the mid-19th century, but did not enter the mainstream until the 1940s. The chief two factors that led to the reversal were capitalism and consumerism, as Americans' preferences were thus interpreted by different manufacturers and companies. The unisex style became all the rage once more in the mid-1960s, with the start of the women's liberation movement and its rejection of fashion and preconceived notions of femininity, and continued until the 1980s, when prenatal testing became highly popular. This meant that parents would want to know the sex of their future baby as soon as possible so they could buy proper merchandise. Clothing, bed cribs, blankets, toys, accessories and much more became highly individualized so it would sell better. What is more, according to child development experts, children are not aware of their gender until they are three or four years old, and do not know it is permanent for the following two or three years. During this time they are constantly inundated with subtle but pervasive gender-based advertising which affects their way of perceiving gender and social conventions (Maglaty, "When Did Girls Start Wearing Pink?").

Even the word 'girl' has had a certain degree of versatility. When it first came to use in English in the 1300s, 'girl' was gender-neutral and was used to indicate a young person in general. If someone wanted to differentiate between the binary sexes, they would use 'knave girl' for a boy and 'gay girl' for a girl. The shift towards the more gendered use of the word started in the 1400s and was completely incorporated by the next century, for reasons that still remain unknown. The origin of the word is unknown as well, although it is speculated to have come from *gyrela*, an Old English word for garment, or from Middle Low German *Gör* or *Göre*, meaning girl or small child (Ha, "The word "girl" also used to mean "boy"). In recent history, in certain areas of discourse,

specifically the LGBT community - and primarily among the (male) gay members - 'girl', in addition to 'sister', 'queen', 'diva', 'miss', and other traditionally feminine expressions, has been increasingly used to refer to people with gender identities and gender expressions that do not necessarily correlate with the typical definition of 'female' and/or 'femininity' (Hall, Kira, and Anna Livia, 1997). By the same token, in English, gay men frequently use the pronoun *she* when talking about other gay men.[2]

Having all this in mind and seeing as so much that constitutes gender normativity today is considered to have always been present in the same manner and form, it is very much worth examining how different cultures defined and performed gender within different historical periods. This - certainly - cannot be a complete and detailed insight into the history of gender but rather a brief overview of some of the most notable communities and nations which have defied the binary concept of gender for centuries, some even for millennia. It is important to consider this for several reasons. Firstly, gaining insight into how humanity has changed over time allows us to understand that human beings are not black and white or two-dimensional, they are complex and multifaceted organisms and therefore cannot thrive in boxes. As human beings go through everlasting changes, customs change with them, as was shown in the example with the colors pink and blue. Secondly, following that logic, we can draw a parallel between this and language. Language, much like human beings, is fluid and flexible; it changes alongside us and adapts to the way we live at a given time. I would argue that this, however, does not always happen randomly, but is often a result of premeditation and planning incited by societal or cultural changes; revolutions, rebellions and riots through which individuals and similarly, communities recognize and formulate their need to

[2] Granted, this use of *she* is "not intended to reflect a feminine persona so much as to dissociate the speaker from heterosexual alliance. As such, it is a statement of sexual orientation rather than of sexual identity." (Hall, Kira, and Anna Livia, 1997, pp. 380)

redefine themselves and their identity. It seems that it is thanks to its distinct property of malleability that we are able to adapt language to whatever our current needs are; the words and expressions we use and the way we use them are not set in stone.

For all of recorded history and on nearly every continent, many cultures have actively recognized and integrated more than two genders. In India, *hijra* is a third gender that has been present for thousands of years, but only received official legal recognition as a third gender in 2014. *Hijras* are people who were assigned male at birth, but take on traditional female roles in society. Despite being legally recognized, discrimination against *hijras* is still omnipresent and they are often forced to become sex workers or end up homeless. Similarly, Native Americans have always recognized a third gender called "two-spirit".[3] These people are believed to possess the spirit of a woman and a man which gives them abilities that "ordinary" men and women do not have. In Hawaii, there also exists a third gender called *mahu*, which falls somewhere between or outside of the binary ends of the gender spectrum. They are highly respected and mostly operate as healers, teachers or caretakers. On the other hand, Sulawesi, a small island in Indonesia, unofficially recognizes five genders. The first two are male and female, whereas the next two are *calalai* - people assigned female at birth who behave like traditional men, and *calabai* - people assigned male at birth who behave like traditional women. The fifth gender is called *bissu* and is considered to be a combination of the previous four genders, usually functioning as a shaman or priest (Trently, "10 Examples Of Nonbinary Genders Throughout History"). All of these gender identities are still

[3] This term was originally created in 1990 to distinguish Native Americans from non-Native peoples as well as replace the old term *berdache*, which was considered offensive. However, it has received criticism from traditional communities with their own, pre-existent terms and by those who reject the implication that Natives believe these individuals are "both male and female". "Nations and tribes used various words to describe various genders, sexes and sexualities. Many had separate words for the Western constructs of gays, lesbians, bisexuals, intersex individuals… Even these categories are limiting, because they are based on Western language and ideas rooted in a dichotomous relationship between gender, sex, and sexuality. This language barrier limits our understanding of the traditional roles within Native American/First Nations cultures." (O'Brien, 2009. p.64)

present in modern society, but there are some examples of genders that no longer exist. One of these was called *quariwarmi*, a third-gender shaman present in pre-colonial Andean culture, in the Inca Empire. This shaman would perform holy rituals to honor the god the Incas worshipped, *chuqui chinchay*, who was a dual-gendered god (Horswell, 2010). They were adorned in androgynous garments as "a visible sign of a third space that negotiated between the masculine and the feminine, the present and the past, the living and the dead. Their shamanic presence invoked the androgynous creative force often represented in Andean mythology." (Horswell, 2010).

As we have seen in this section, gender as a social concept has been present in humankind for millennia, differing in attributes and expression from culture to culture; from one historical period to another, all the while being met with varying degrees of (dis)approval. While gender is vastly shaped by the social conventions prevalent in a certain culture at a certain time, it is also undeniably shaped by the language used to talk about and refer to different gender identities and sexes. The next section will look at types of linguistic gender relevant to the English language and its relationship to our perception of social gender.

3. TYPES OF LINGUISTIC GENDER

3.1. Lexical gender

In the area of linguistics, gender is a way of categorizing nouns according to universal features of sex, humanness and animacy, and allows insight into social life and cognitive behavioral patterns (Aikhenvald, 2016). Linguistic gender has a well-established meaning as a technical concept and can be analyzed from several perspectives (Carvalho, "Gender and Language").

In traditional discussions on language and gender, the term "lexical" is generally used to "relate gender to extra-linguistic features, being thus an important parameter in the structure of kinship terminologies, titles, and a good deal of common personal names" (Carvalho, "Gender and Language"). For example, most languages have certain categories of nouns that are predominantly likely to be lexically gendered, e.g. personal nouns. Lexical gender would thus be present in kinship terms, e.g. *mother*, *grandfather*, s*ister*, *brother*, etc., address terms (*Mrs.*, *Mr.*, *Ms.*, *Miss*), and personal nouns denoting female and male individuals in general (*girl*, *woman*, *boy*, *man*). From a lexical perspective, "most personal nouns in English are gender-indifferent; that is, they carry neither the semantic feature [female] nor [male]" (Motschenbacher, 2009, pp. 3), e.g. *person*, *secretary*, *farmer*, *surgeon*. A similar thing is present in body-part vocabulary, particularly in those lexical items that represent primary and secondary sex characteristics. For this reason, words such as *vulva*, *breasts*, *prostate* or *penis* more or less have the same effect on discourse gendering as do the aforementioned personal nouns denoting male and female human beings. In other words, body-part vocabulary is often a direct gender index (Ochs, 1992). As a consequence, lexical gender becomes a system of organizing the gender spectrum to fit into two binary macro-categories, "male" and "female" (Motschenbacher, 2009, pp. 3).

3.2. Social gender

Social gender, also called sociocultural gender, refers to the binary set of characteristics and roles assigned to men and women respectively, by a given society or culture. In case grammatical and lexical gender are both insufficient for explaining the behavior of the associated words, social gender will be specified by the use of personal pronouns (Carvalho, "Gender and Language"). Because of the existence of social roles and gender characteristics, lexically gender-indifferent personal nouns such as *surgeon* or *secretary* will in practice be anything but gender-neutral. Whereas *surgeon* is more likely to be perceived as male, *secretary* is biased towards women. These two examples are actually part of a larger pattern where many terms for higher job titles, e.g. *scientist, lawyer, judge, professor* usually acquire male pronouns when the referential gender is unknown or irrelevant (Motschenbacher, 2009, pp. 3). In the same way, terms for lower job titles, e.g. *nurse, secretary, maid, cashier, teacher* tend to be accompanied by female pronouns. Nonetheless, when it comes to nouns like *client, agent, patient, pedestrian* or any other noun that is truly linguistically gender-indifferent, the well-anchored practice prescribes the use of *he* rather than *she* in neutral settings (Motschenbacher, 2009, pp. 3). This feature of social gender is directly linked to inequalities between women and men in the labor market, which will be discussed in further detail in the next section.

3.3. Referential gender

The term referential gender is used to relate "linguistic expressions to non-linguistic reality" (Carvalho, "Gender and Language") i.e. categorize a referent in the external world as *male*, *female* or *gender-indifferent*. Exemplifications of referential gendering of the first two kinds can be found in areas such as job titles ending in *-man* (e.g. *businessman*, *mailman*, *chairman*, *policeman*, *cameraman*, *salesman*), and *-ess* (e.g. *waitress*, *stewardess*, *actress*, *authoress*, *poetess*[4]), respectively. Some job titles also replace the suffix *-man* with *-woman* if the referent is female (e.g. *alderwoman*, *saleswoman*, *policewoman*, *businesswoman*), even though this is often considered pejorative. For this reason, the implementation and more frequent use of gender-neutral alternatives for job titles and other gendered nouns has experienced a surge in the past few decades. These and other examples of gender-neutral alternatives to historically gender-binary words will be discussed in more detail in the final section.

Referential gendering can be directly spotted in many other expressions, e.g. *mankind*, *man-eating*, *man-made*, *freshman*[5], *forefathers* or *brotherhood*, but it can be rather difficult to notice in other nouns. This can once again be illustrated appropriately by looking at body-part vocabulary, which, like lexical gender, shows many similarities with personal nouns. Both lexically and socially gendered body-part terms can be equally related to female and male bodies. When imagining a

[4] The term *actress*, along with many others (*sculptress*, *doctress*, *lawyeress*, *comedienne*, *usherette*, etc.) are marked with respect to the "original" masculine form (*actor*, *sculptor*, *doctor*, *lawyer*, *comedian*, *usher*), meaning that a mixed-gender group of individuals can only be described using the masculine form, which can therefore function as a gender-neutral term (Aarts, Bas, and April McMahon, 2008). Using the masculine form is seen as a favorable option amongst advocates of gender-neutral language, who condemn the use of feminine forms. Many of the aforementioned terms are seldom used, and although the term *actress* is still present, increasing numbers of women have started referring to themselves as *actors*.

[5] The term *man* is supposedly derived from one of the following roots: Germanic **manna-*, Sanskrit *manuh*, Indo-Iranian **manu-*, or Old High German *mennisco*, all meaning "man" or "person". It developed into the Old English *man(n)*, primarily denoting an adult male person, but also "someone", "one" and humanity in general (The American Heritage Dictionary, 2020).

stereotypical female or male body one can still refer to a woman's *muscles* or a man's *eyelashes*, even though these may not be the first associations one might have when talking about their respective bodies. More to the point, keeping in mind the many transgender identities, we could even be referring to a certain man's *vagina* or a certain woman's *penis*. (Motschenbacher, 2009, pp. 4).

3.4. Grammatical gender

Grammatical gender is a particular form of noun class system where the division of noun classes forms an agreement system with another part within a certain language, like pronouns, adjectives, articles or verbs. Grammatical gender can be found in roughly 25% of the total known number of the world's languages (Carvalho, "Gender and Language"). This includes some Indo-European languages (e.g. Spanish, French, Russian, German), Afroasiatic languages (e.g. Arabic, Hebrew, Maltese) and other language families such as several Australian Aboriginal languages, some Dravidian and Niger-Congo languages. These (and other languages with some form of grammatical gender that have not been mentioned here) fall into different systems of gender division based on their own specific way of categorizing nouns and gender agreement.

Common gender divisions include masculine-feminine; masculine-feminine-neuter; common-neuter; or animate-inanimate. Grammatical gender becomes noticeable when words like articles, adjectives, verbs or pronouns change their form according to the gender of the noun they refer to and thus create gender agreement. Continuing with the case of body-part vocabulary as a gender-relevant linguistic feature, in languages with a 'masculine-feminine' nominal lexicon, grammatical gender can also play a part in the creation of a gendered body. To exemplify, lexemes referring to female genitals are predominantly grammatically feminine (e.g. Germ. *die Vulva*, *die*

Vagina), whereas lexemes referring to male genitals are primarily grammatically masculine (e.g. Germ. *der Penis*, *der Phallus*) (Motschenbacher, 2009, pp. 20).

To summarize, lexical, referential and grammatical gender all appear to have a pervasive bond with social gender, which will be analyzed in Section 4. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suggest that the construction of the first three kinds of linguistic genders in a language would be reflected in the speakers' cognitive functions. In turn, those speakers would be projecting their mental framework impacted by their language onto the language itself. This hypothesis will be further investigated in the following section.

4. GENDER INEQUALITY, GENDER BIAS AND SEXISM

While the previous section dealt with different aspects of gender from a largely linguistic perspective, only occasionally referring to its various social implications by means of examples, primarily for the sake of better illustrating the technical terms employed, this section dives deeper into the widespread and firmly established effects language has on gender in society.

One of the central implicit claims that has been at the core of this thesis so far is that language and thought, or cognition, mutually influence one another. This position is also known as the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. The original version is linguistically deterministic in its nature, which is why many modern-day linguists favor a weaker, more moderate Whorfianism. This version focuses on the following: 1) it emphasizes "the potential for thinking to be 'influenced' rather than unavoidably 'determined' by language; 2) "it is a two-way process, so that 'the kind of language we use' is also influenced by 'the way we see the world'"; and 3) it emphasizes the social context of language use (Brala-Vukanović, Marija, pp. 143). A few excellent examples that show how language and thought mutually affect each other are gender inequality, gender bias and sexism.

Gender inequality has been extremely pervasive and entrenched in society for centuries. Despite the significant strides that have been made in the last century toward achieving gender equality, it is still present in most, if not all areas of life and most frequently affects cisgender[6] and transgender women. Among the many practices steadily and continuously used for perpetuating gender inequality is language, the ways of which will be presented in this section. What is interesting about language in this context is that gender bias and sexism do not necessarily have to be directly or explicitly expressed. Language can serve as an incredibly useful way of covertly and

[6] *Cisgender*, as opposed to *transgender*, is an adjective relating to a person whose gender identity corresponds to the sex they were assigned at birth.

subtly but unswervingly augmenting the issue at hand. A good example of this is looking at what kind of language society uses to talk and refer to boys and girls, which in turn affects how most people believe men and women innately talk themselves.

According to UNESCO, early childhood, which is defined as the period from birth to eight years of age, is a time of exceptional growth where brain development reaches its peak. This is also the time when children are the most sensitive to and influenced by their environment (UNESCO, "Early Childhood Care and Education"). As a result, the language used to talk to children at this stage of their development is highly likely to have a great and long-lasting effect on the individuals they will grow to become.

In a qualitative study conducted from July 2015 through April 2016, Heidi M. Gansen sought to examine gender socialization through disciplinary interactions in preschool classrooms. She observed 116 children, mostly 3 to 5 years old, and 22 teachers; spending over 400 hours in total studying their behavior. Gansen found that in preschool, teachers discipline girls and boys differently, and use gendered stories as a justification for the existence of not only these disparities, but their gendered beliefs and expectations as well. Their gendered beliefs extend so far that they result in equally gendered disciplinary responses to children's misdemeanor. An example of a such gendered punishment involved push-ups for boys and cleaning for girls. Furthermore, during her interview with Gansen, one teacher (and director at one of the preschools) specified DNA (genes) as an explanation for the discrepancies in boys' and girls' behavior: "It's basically just their DNA and unless you understand their DNA, you're not going to get it. Girls are going to be whiney, that's how they are. Boys are going to shove each other, that's what they do. You just have to teach them appropriate ways to do it." (Gansen, 2018). In other words, if you believe boys and girls will inherently behave in some predetermined way, and you treat them according to those beliefs, you

are not leaving them much room to explore their identity on their own. Hence, your expectations end up governing children's actions.[7]

When children grow up having this kind of influence exerted over them, it is also how they come to view themselves once they have reached adulthood. The amount of consequences this difference in treatment has resulted in is vast. One of the main areas where gender inequality is most noticeable is the workplace. Job stratification across different genders is a complex issue that stems from various factors. For example, gender stereotypes have a lot to do with education and work choices, and combining them with one's private life. Previous work experience, which is in turn linked to education and work choices, plays a role in job stratification, too. Taking into account the number of hours spent working, breaks in employment (e.g. for having and raising children), underrepresentation of women in economic and political decision-making positions, and the fact that women continue to shoulder most of private domestic and care work[8], it is no wonder that in the EU, the gender employment gap recently stood at 11%, with the gender pay gap standing at 16%, meaning women on average earn 16% less per hour than men.[9] On top of that, nearly one third of men is employed in higher-paid sectors: science, mathematics, engineering and technology.[10]

Another example of gender inequality is the frequently employed generic *he*. It is supposed that the pronoun *he* had been used for both men and women during the Middle English and Modern English period (Wagner, 2003). This can be compared to the use of *man* to refer to a human being

[7] This example could fall under the category of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Coined by Robert Merton in 1948, the phrase *self-fulfilling prophecy* was introduced to illustrate "a *false* definition of the situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come *true*" (Merton, 1968, pp. 477)
[8] "Women's Situation in the Labour Market." *European Commission*
[9] "The Gender Pay Gap Situation in the EU." *European Commission*
[10] "Women's Situation in the Labour Market." *European Commission*

or humankind in general. The generic *he* has progressively been a source of heated arguments, since it seems to evince bias towards men and against women. The use of *he*, *him* and *his* as a gender-neutral pronoun has conventionally been considered grammatically correct in formal English, but such use might also be deemed to be a gender agreement violation (Miller, Casey and Kate Swift, 1995).

In cases where children are being consistently met with such gender-biased expectations that - for respective genders - differ so much in nature, especially from a very young age, it is not difficult to see how such a crucial period of cognitive development conditioned in this fashion could set the tone for the remainder of one's life. In fact, a person could very well (un)consciously seek to adopt or reject certain character traits, life goals, beliefs or values based solely on this aspect of their upbringing. Now, as a brief thought experiment, let us imagine such an individual: say they grow up to become a parent and decide to raise their child in the same manner they were raised. Of course, as a parent, they feel that they should work to instill their values in their child. So they continuously strive to emphasize the importance of strictly determined gender roles, using language as one of their tools for expressing their beliefs about gender. Assuming this child is living in an environment that is marked by conservative and overall traditional opinions on gender, they would most probably adopt similar views on gender. The hypothetical scenario we just imagined would likely result in a vicious cycle where in a larger community, fixed conceptions of gender would arise and take root over time. Naturally, a few other factors would have to be present for this sort of structure to really hold, but given the fact that in some parts of the world, e.g. some areas of the United States of America or the Balkans, these communities do exist, nurture and take pride in their firmly anchored gender roles, I would have to agree with moderate Whorfianism, maintaining that language and thought do indeed mutually affect each other.

5. COMPARISON OF GENDERED AND GENDERLESS LANGUAGES

So far many aspects of grammatical gender were discussed and some of their meaning, implications and effects were hopefully elucidated. As was delineated in Section 2, common systems of gender division include: masculine, feminine, neuter, and 'animate-inanimate'.[11] There also exist languages which have more than three grammatical genders, some of which can have as many as twenty different genders. Examples of these include: Czech, Slovak, Polish, Bantu languages, and Worrorra, among others.

Just as there are languages that contain various instances of grammatical gender, there are languages which do not contain any distinctions of grammatical gender whatsoever. This type of language is referred to as a genderless language. It is important to differentiate genderless languages from gender-neutral languages, in that gender-neutral languages are neutral with regard to natural gender. Thus a discourse in a genderless language is not necessarily gender-neutral[12], while a gender-neutral discourse does not always take place in a genderless language. To say that a genderless language does not have distinctions of grammatical gender means that there exist no categories necessitating morphological agreement for gender between nouns and associated articles, adjectives, verbs or pronouns (Suleiman, Yasir, 1999). While this is the case, genderless languages in fact do have numerous means of recognizing natural gender, such as gender-specific words (personal nouns, e.g. *mother*, *sister*, *daughter*, *aunt*, *uncle*, etc. or pronouns, e.g. *he*, *she*), in addition to biological and cultural gender-specific context (Suleiman, Yasir, 1999). Some examples

[11] In the 'animate-inanimate' category, nouns that denote animate things commonly belong to one gender, and those that denote inanimate things to another gender (although this may not always be the exact case). Some modern examples of languages that belong to this category are, to some extent, Basque, Ojibwe and Kurmanji (Northern Kurdish) (Corbett, 1991, pp. 20-21).

[12] However, genderless languages do prevent many potentialities for the reinforcement of gender stereotypes as well as sexism and gender inequality.

of genderless languages include: Afrikaans (which has three gendered pronouns, but no other grammatical gender, much like English), Armenian, Esperanto (a constructed language, Esperanto has two gendered pronouns and distinct endings to differentiate natural gender), English (which has three gendered pronouns, but no grammatical gender in the sense of noun class distinctions), Estonian, Finnish, Hungarian, many Austronesian languages (e.g. Gilbertese, Samoan, Tagalog), and some Turkic languages (e.g. Azerbaijani, Bashkir, Turkish).

It has already been mentioned that languages containing grammatical gender can be divided into different categories based on the type and amount of genders they differentiate between. Since each of these categories classifies nouns in different ways, it would be plausible to infer that speakers of languages that fall under different categories would therefore think of nouns (and objects those nouns represent) in distinct manner. That is exactly what Lera Boroditsky, a cognitive scientist and an assistant professor of Cognitive Science at the University of California, San Diego, had researched in her laboratories at Stanford University and MIT.

Boroditsky and her colleagues collected data from Chile, China, Greece, Indonesia, Russia, and Aboriginal Australia. What they found was that speakers of languages from these countries do in fact think differently, and they did so by conducting their research through a series of experiments. Each experiment focused on a different aspect of language in relation to what they were trying to investigate. One of those aspects was time. They decided to test if a small Aboriginal group in northern Australia, the Kuuk Thaayorre, which uses cardinal-direction terms - ‘north’, ‘south’, ‘east’ and ‘west’ - instead of the widespread ‘left’, ‘right’, ‘back’ and ‘forward’, would perceive time just as differently as they do space. Boroditsky and her team gave the Kuuk Thaayorre sets of photographs that displayed some sort of temporal progression (e.g. an aging individual, a fruit being eaten), and asked them to arrange the shuffled photographs in exact

temporal order. They did this in two separate sittings with each person, facing a different cardinal direction on each occasion. Instead of arranging the pictures from left to right, as one might expect an English or a Croatian speaker to do, they arranged them from east to west, despite not being told which direction they were facing. In cases when they were facing east or west, the pictures came towards or away from their body, respectively. This showed Boroditsky that the Kuuk Thaayorre "spontaneously used this spatial orientation to construct their representations of time" (Boroditsky, "How Does Our Language Shape The Way We Think"). This is indeed a very interesting result, and it spurred Boroditsky to explore whether language could affect our perception of other things as well, such as gender. In one study, she asked Spanish and German speakers to describe objects which possessed diametrically opposed gender assignment in those languages.

> "The descriptions they gave differed in a way predicted by grammatical gender. For example, when asked to describe a "key" — a word that is masculine in German and feminine in Spanish — the German speakers were more likely to use words like "hard," "heavy," "jagged," "metal," "serrated," and "useful," whereas Spanish speakers were more likely to say "golden," "intricate," "little," "lovely," "shiny," and "tiny." To describe a "bridge," which is feminine in German and masculine in Spanish, the German speakers said "beautiful," "elegant," "fragile," "peaceful," "pretty," and "slender," and the Spanish speakers said "big," "dangerous," "long," "strong," "sturdy," and "towering." This was true even though all testing was done in English, a language without grammatical gender. The same pattern of results also emerged in entirely nonlinguistic tasks (e.g., rating similarity between pictures)." (Boroditsky, "How Does Our Language Shape The Way We Think")

Even though these types of studies have been criticized for several reasons[13], for instance, demonstrating an indeterminate pattern of findings on the whole, they still provide a valuable insight into the relationship between language and cognition.

[13] Theodossia-Soula Pavlidou and Angeliki Alvanoudi, in their paper concerning 'structural relativity', list numerous points as to why Boroditsky's experiments may be flawed: "in sex attribution tasks the subjects may be using grammatical gender as a strategy for performing the task itself. […] the fact that explicit mention of sex is made […] can reveal the purpose of the study and, thus, influence the results […] in the picture similarity experiment the subjects may also be using grammatical gender as a conscious strategy for rating an object as similar to a male or

A similar kind of experiment was undertaken by Mary Flaherty in 2001 at the University College Dublin. It was a cross-cultural study, which had a dual objective: first, to survey the impact of a gender system in a language on perception and gender identification; second, to examine when the relationship between language and thought first forms. To that end, participants involved were from two language groups, one with a gender system - Spanish, and the other without a gender system - English[14] (Flaherty, 2001). Considering what has been discussed in this thesis so far, what Flaherty discovered was not too surprising to find from today's point of view:

> "In each language group, participants were from three age groups: 5-7 years old, 8-10 years old, and adult. In one experiment, participants were asked to put a typical male or female name to 20 objects. In another experiment, participants were asked to assign attributes to the objects. Language gender tags influenced the Spanish adults and the 8- to 10-year-olds in their choice of gender assignment, whereas perceived attributes influenced the younger Spanish children and English speakers (both adults and children). It appears that in a language with a grammatical gender system, such as Spanish, the gender system creeps into perception *after* the gender tags have been acquired." (Flaherty, 2001)

The studies and experiments delineated above serve to further drive the point that language and thought are intertwined in many ways, hence exerting a considerable amount of influence on each other. We have seen that speakers of languages with explicit gender systems tend to view certain concepts, words and objects in a way that differs significantly from the way in which the same concepts, words and objects are perceived by speakers of languages with much less defined or virtually non-existent gender systems. The next section will be looking at one example of

female person. Besides this, instructions in different languages may lead to different understandings of the task involved, eventually triggering different behaviors, which are not necessarily related to "differences in thought" […] Finally, it is not self-evident that 'words' can be equated with 'objects' as it is implicitly done in the experiments conducted by Boroditsky et al. (2003)." (Alvanoudi, Pavlidou, 2013)

[14] Despite the fact English is technically not a gendered language, gender-marked pronouns are still used in informal English. Hopper and LeBaron (1998) use the term *lively style* to refer to the described use of gendered pronouns. For instance, one might say "look at that dog, he is so cute", without possessing any knowledge of the dog's gender.

removing gender bias, but also opening spaces for people and identities which do not conform to prevalent societal standards of gender; namely, gender-neutral language.

6. GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

In an attempt to avoid bias towards a particular gender, a type of language known as gender-neutral language or gender-inclusive language started developing in the late twentieth century, and gained friction in the early 1980s, when feminists Casey Miller and Kate Swift published a manual called *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing*. It contained various examples of gender-neutral language that was intended to reform the prevailing sexist language, which was labelled as exclusionary and dehumanizing towards women. The book also criticized the history of *man* as a false generic and indicated problems that stem from the use of male pronouns as generic pronouns. Miller and Swift offered many alternatives as solutions, a few of which include substitute titles for words including *-man*, a short thesaurus of terms to use in place of terms that are not gender-neutral, and opting for *they* instead of a gendered pronoun (Miller, Casey and Kate Swift, 1995).

The use of singular *they* (and in the same sense *them*, *their*, *theirs* and *themselves*) surfaced in the 14th century, approximately a century after the plural form *they.*[15] It has since entered common use in everyday English as well as some official contexts, although linguists who support prescriptive grammar regard it as an error;[16] in addition to some style guides that maintain it is strictly a conversational term and less suitable in formal writing.[17] Despite this, its sustained use in standard English has become formally accepted with the transformation toward gender-neutral language.[18]

[15] "they, pron., adj., adv., and n." *OED Online*, June 2020
[16] Gerner, 2000
[17] Pinker, 2014, pp. 260
[18] Gardiner, "He, she, they? Why It's Time to Leave This Grammar Rule Behind.", 2016

Recently, the use of singular *they* with known referents has appeared for people who do not identify as female or male, but rather fall somewhere outside of the gender binary[19], as in the following example: "Kaitlyn is one of my best friends, I have known *them* for years. *They* introduced me to painting a while back."[20] Naturally, this is a result of ongoing social changes related to the gender spectrum. Non-binary and gender non-conforming people, as was outlined in Section 1, have existed for eons now and it was only a matter of finding an appropriate gender-neutral pronoun to properly accommodate their identity in language. In point of fact, I have been using singular *they* throughout this thesis, and this, in all likelihood did not pose an issue for the reader trying to infer the intended meaning.

It was previously mentioned that some prescriptivists frown upon the use of singular *they*, stating it does not suffice for a proper noun-pronoun agreement. Be that as it may, I would disagree with their position by referring to a set of admirable qualities which humans possess, in particular: respect, understanding, compassion and support. Sure, most of us are aware of the importance of proper punctuation,[21] but in times where an increasing number of transgender people are facing discrimination in education, healthcare, legal system, judiciary, their workplace or home, and even prison[22], using gender-neutral language to make room for transgender people and women in conversation is the least one can do. Certainly, I do not intend to suggest that unintentionally misgendering someone i.e. not using their preferred pronouns, will directly contribute to such harsh treatment, but what I do wish to say is that by making sure someone feels comfortable in both a formal and informal space, and using the proper pronoun, we can do more good than we think.

[19] "Singular 'They'." *Merriam-Webster*, 2019
[20] Singular *they* was named *Word of the Year* for 2019 by Merriam-Webster. In 2020, the American Dialect Society picked it as *Word of the Decade* for the 2010s, in addition to also naming it *Word of the Year* for 2015.
[21] Notice the difference between "Let's eat grandma." and "Let's eat, grandma."
[22] "Transgender People and the Law." *American Civil Liberties Union*, 2015

7. CASE STUDY

It is safe to say that language pervades nearly every part of our lives and it does so in a great number of ways. We encounter it at home, in school, at work, in public transport, at the grocery store, the gas station, and so on. With technological development into the bargain, we are able to carry language and the information we receive through it wherever we go; both offline and online.

During the time of our growing up, the majority of us are exposed to mass media more or less on a daily basis. The broader its scope is, the more accessible it becomes and therefore helps information travel faster and further.[23] This means that instances of gender-(in)sensitive language, e.g. in political or legal contexts, do not necessarily remain within a confined space, limited to the people physically present there and then. This is to say that overtly sexist statements such as the following: "A woman who rejects motherhood, who refrains from being around the house, however successful her working life is, is deficient, is incomplete," made by Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan in his speech in June 2016,[24] are broadcast to most parts of the world, and thus indirectly exacerbate the plethora of problems caused by the development of radical and patriarchal ideologies in certain countries.

In this section I will analyze some of the political speeches made by Hillary Rodham Clinton and Donald J. Trump in order to exemplify and demonstrate how the gendered language they each used in their 2016 presidential campaign is 1) at least partially a product of the language used to talk about men and women altogether, and 2) had and continues to have, a direct effect on the voters' opinions and consequential election results. To this end, I will be focusing on specific

[23] An important piece of data to note here is that in Europe, men represent ¾ of news sources and subjects ("Sexism: See it. Name it. Stop it." *Human Rights Channel*), which can greatly influence the way articles are written, what kind of photos are featured and which topics and people get the most coverage.
[24] "Turkish president says childless women are 'deficient, incomplete'." *The Guardian*, 2016

parts of Clinton's and Trump's campaign speeches, such as the use of personal pronouns, interruptions, and cognitive and tentative language.

Hillary Rodham Clinton was the first female candidate to have been nominated by a major political party to pursue the US presidency and as such, was entering a predominantly androcentric political arena. She was using her campaign speeches to present and promote her plans for creating a better America, which focused on affordable healthcare, education, inequality, and middle-class incomes, all the while challenging the gender bias in politics which leads to underrepresentation of women in that field. This approach contrasted sharply with Trump's, whose speeches were characterized by his direct, harsh and unyielding rhetoric; while his political and economic agenda comprised tax reduction, energy independence and increase in employment.

For the purposes of this case study, I observed the first presidential debate between Clinton and Trump, which took place on September 26th, 2016. By paying close attention to how the candidates chose to answer questions, I found that there are indeed distinctive gendered differences in their answers.

For example, when asked about why she would be a better choice than Trump to create the kinds of jobs that would raise the American workers' income, Clinton begins by saying: "The central question in this election is really, what kind of country we want to be and what kind of future we'll build together. Today is my granddaughter's 2nd birthday so I think about this a lot. […] I want us to invest in you. I want us to invest in your future."[25] There are several things we can notice in this part of her response. First, she mentions her granddaughter's birthday, which intends to show that she is someone who values family and thinks about their future, and is

[25] "Full video: Trump-Clinton first presidential debate." *YouTube*, uploaded by CBS News, 27 September 2016

therefore able to empathize with other families who might be feeling uncertain about their own future. Next, she uses the personal pronouns *my* and *I* four times. Previous research[26] has suggested that women tend to use the first-person singular pronoun more often than men. These pronouns are frequently used to convey sincerity, dependability and to partially break the personal barriers between the candidate and the voters. Whereas Clinton uses personal pronouns to express crucial personal views and values, Trump employs them to articulate practical ways of making changes, and uses them rarely. In his response to the same question, he states: "I'll be reducing taxes tremendously, […] It's going to be a beautiful thing to watch; companies will come, they will build, they will expand, new companies will start and I look very, very much forward to doing it."[27]

Another interesting side of Clinton's and Trump's performance is the amount of interjections and interruptions they make. In this debate, Trump interrupted either Clinton or the news anchor Lester Holt, who was asking the questions, a total of 14 times in twenty minutes, compared to Clinton's 6 times within the same timeframe. So far the research on interruption has primarily dealt with the analysis of power imbalances between women and men in conversation. The discussion of this issue was generated by West and Zimmerman's (1975; 1983) studies of interruptions in mixed and same-sex conversation. The authors indicated that interruptions can be a conversational control device which can result in a power imbalance if distributed asymmetrically. Moreover, their analyses showed that, in mixed-gender conversations, men employed interruptions far more than women did. West and Zimmerman concluded that men use interruption as a weapon in their arsenal with which they can exert dominance over women. However, some authors[28] offer a counter-argument; namely, that "the use of an interruption or more

[26] Newman, Matthew L., et al. "Gender Differences in Language Use: An Analysis of 14,000 Text Samples." pp. 211-236
[27] "Full video: Trump-Clinton first presidential debate." *YouTube*, uploaded by CBS News, 27 September 2016
[28] Tannen, 1990

generally, simultaneous speech, can also be a way for speakers to show involvement and closeness in a conversation" (Ahrens, 1997). Having in mind that the speakers are in the middle of a political debate, I would say that the chances of the latter being true in this case are slim, and that it is much more likely that both Trump and Clinton are each trying to take control of the conversation. I would also argue that the clear asymmetry between their number of interruptions can in part be attributed to the different styles of upbringing described in Section 4, including gendered language, which leads people to believe men are more assertive and dominant than women, when in reality women (and men) are conditioned to believe this is the case, which of course, affects the way they behave.

The next aspect of their conversational styles I studied was their use of cognitive language. This type of language is often used in campaigns to provide the voters with an insight into the candidates' beliefs, values, morality and the like. It also helps them understand the reasoning behind the choices the candidates have made. For the candidates themselves, cognitive language is a way to present their future plans and how they will involve the implementation of their central campaign themes. During their first presidential debate, Clinton used more cognitive language than Trump, and she used it to express her beliefs, hopes and ambitions about the future, like in the following sentence: "We need to do more to make the contributions we should be making to rebuild the middle class. I don't <u>think</u> top-down works in America, I <u>think</u> building the middle class, investing in the middle class, making college debt-free so more young people can get their education […] those are the kinds of things that will really boost the economy."[29] Conversely, Trump used cognitive language in a head-on, action-oriented manner, as we can see in the next two examples:

[29] "Full video: Trump-Clinton first presidential debate." *YouTube*, uploaded by CBS News, 27 September 2016

1) "[…] Here's the thing: Republicans and Democrats agree that this should be done. Two and a half trillion. I happen to think it's double that, it's probably five trillion dollars that we can't bring into our country […]"[30]

2) "We have the worst revival of our economy since the Great Depression, and believe me, we're in a bubble right now, and the only thing that looks good is the stock market, but if you raise interest rates, even a little bit, that's gonna come crashing down. […] Believe me, the day Obama goes off […] when they raise interest rates, you're gonna see some very bad things happen."[31]

This result is in accord with previous research[32] which shows women as more likely to use cognitive language than men. This can once again be linked to the stereotype that women are more empathetic and sensitive, whereas men are more pragmatic and logical.

Finally, tentative language is another conversational aspect women are expected to use more often than men. On one occasion, Clinton used tentative speech to make assumptions about Trump's reason for not releasing his tax returns: "You've gotta ask yourself, why won't he release his tax returns? And I think there may be a couple of reasons. First, maybe he's not as rich as he says he is. Second, maybe he's not as charitable as he claims to be. […] And I think, probably he's not all that enthusiastic about having the rest of our country see what the real reasons are."[33] On the other hand, congruent with his preference for a direct style, Trump frequently used tentative speech to either try and make fun of Clinton or attack her. This corresponds to research[34] that implies men are more aggressive and dominant in their speech patterns than women.

[30] "Full video: Trump-Clinton first presidential debate." *YouTube*, uploaded by CBS News, 27 September 2016
[31] (ibid.)
[32] Poole, 1979
[33] "Full video: Trump-Clinton first presidential debate." *YouTube*, uploaded by CBS News, 27 September 2016
[34] Leaper, 2011

These speech patterns are also one of the mostly unconscious factors present in the voters' minds upon deciding which candidate to vote for. As Astor (2019) put it: "In the words of her detractors during the 2016 presidential race, Hillary Clinton was abrasive and shrill. She was aloof. She was unlikable." In 2019, as Senators Kamala Harris, Kirsten Gillibrand and Elizabeth Warren were campaigning for the 2020 Democratic nomination, the same adjectives were coming up in discussions involving the three candidates. The underlying explanation is multifaceted and it ties into much of what has been discussed throughout this thesis.

Firstly, likability has a distinct effect on the voters' decision, especially since they seem to favor men they do not like but believe are qualified. However, even if they know a woman is qualified, but they do not like her, they will not vote for her.[35] This implies that in this society, just being a man is enough to make people think you possess the knowledge necessary to perform well in a job position. The statistics outlined in Section 4 regarding job stratification across different genders and the gender pay gap only further confirm this claim. As a matter of fact, both Clinton and Trump had staggeringly poor favorability ratings; however, among voters who stated they did not like either of the candidates, Trump won by approximately 20 percentage points (Kimmell, 2016).

Secondly, ambition plays an important role in determining who will get the most votes. In a study from 2010,[36] Harvard researchers found that "power-seeking" women were met with disdain and anger, compared to men who were viewed as strong and competent.

[35] Kimmell, 2016
[36] Okimoto, 2010

Thirdly, the qualities that voters admire in politicians - strength, bravery, robustness - are majorly associated with masculinity. This lead many women to try and adopt those characteristics and possibly gain an advantage, but it turned out to be a double-edged sword. Quoting Astor:

> "For one thing, it did not challenge the premise that masculinity is better suited for leadership. It also opened women up to a familiar double standard: A man who speaks authoritatively might be confident or opinionated, while a woman who does the same is arrogant or lecturing. Most pressingly, it created a backlash among some voters who saw women acting "like men" and deemed them inauthentic." (2009)

Finally, women are judged heavily on their appearance, not only on how they dress, but their body language, facial expressions and their voice are all subject to intense and meticulous scrutiny. This leads to instances where they get coached on how to position their arms and control the volume of their voice, and are advised to smile more and look less serious.[37]

This case study demonstrates how great of an impact language can have on the minds of others, and it is not only gendered language that holds this power. Whether certain vocabulary is employed by a woman or a man can be the pivotal reason for our perception of that person. The blatantly obvious gendered nature behind such superficial judgements is repeatedly met with considerable backlash, and yet these judgements do not cease. There are many ways to prevent gender stereotypes and sexism: educating the staff, implementing awareness raising campaigns, and promoting research on the issue are just a few suggestions. The political sector has a duty to lead by example. Be they elected or not, women should always have equal opportunities and freedom as the men do.

[37] Astor, 2019

8. CONCLUSION

In this thesis we have discussed concepts like sex, gender, gender (in)equality and gender bias. We have also talked in detail about linguistic gender, gendered and genderless languages, gender-neutral language, and gender perception. Moreover, we have examined the relationship between each of these terms from various linguistic, sociological and psychological perspectives.

We have seen that gendered language used at home or in classrooms can have a great impact on a person's upbringing from an early stage of life, and that that impact can carry on well into adulthood, where it continues to affect areas such as education, workplace and domestic life. From there, such language and the gender stereotypes it perpetuates can infiltrate our culture, economy and politics; affecting the way political candidates choose to present themselves or how they address public concerns. Likewise, it shapes the voters' beliefs about candidates based on their gender, which affects who gets elected for positions of power. In a similar vein, linguistic gender, especially grammatical gender, is often a key factor in speakers' perception of social gender, as well as gender of objects that do not inherently possess natural gender.

By looking into how gender, gender roles and gender expression have evolved through centuries, we arrive at the conclusion that it is important to look beyond just one culture or one period in time in order to fully grasp the true diversity of humankind. Verily, the language we utilize changes as we do, altering its form and function as time passes, according to our requirements. A good example of this is gender-neutral language, which serves to avoid gender bias and shift the conversation, as it were, towards people who find themselves at the margins of society simply for stepping out of the norm.

Such individuals are often not able to comprehend their identity, express or realize their goals, opportunities and more, precisely because they lack the language to do so. By implementing a more gender-inclusive terminology, we are actively opening spaces for those people, giving them a voice, empowering them, and allowing them to be seen and recognized globally.

All in all, language can be instrumental in many ways. It enables us to express ourselves precisely, poetically, artistically or formally; it can serve is a powerful mechanism for creating opinions, beliefs, values, ideas, ideologies and much else. We are capable of motivating, encouraging and challenging people around us. A single quote or message has the ability to change the course of history. Equally, depending on the language we speak, it is even possible for some of us to perceive time, space, colors, objects and even people, entirely differently than others.

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