

The LSA Guidelines for Nonsexist Usage

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The following guidelines were approved by the Executive Committee as suggestions for the preparation of written and oral presentations in linguistics (5/95).

Sexist practices are those that contribute to demeaning or ignoring women (or men) or to stereotyping either sex; sexism is often not a matter of intention but of effect. These guidelines reflect a growing body of research which indicates that many people find sexist language offensive. Although linguists (like all scholars) need to guard against sexist linguistic and scholarly practices in their main texts and accompanying citations and acknowledgments, sexism in the linguistics literature is most often obvious in constructed example sentences. Sometimes this is the result of an effort to inject humor in otherwise dry prose, sometimes it is due to the use of traditional examples, and sometimes it is simply due to inattention. For fuller discussion of the perception and effects of sexist language and a much more comprehensive set of guidelines that offers help with alternatives, see Francine Wattman Frank & Paula A. Treichler, *Language, Gender, and Professional Writing* (New York: Modern Language Association, 1989). See also Barrie Thorne, Cheris Kramarae & Nancy Henley, *Language, Gender and Society* (Cambridge, MA: Newbury House, 1983) and Sally McConnell-Ginet, Ruth Borker & Nelly Furman, *Women and Language in Literature in Society* (New York: Praeger, 1980).

1. Whenever possible, use plurals (people, they) and other appropriate alternatives, rather than only masculine pronouns and "pseudo-generics" such as man, unless referring specifically to males.

In glossing forms from another language, it is possible to use forms such as 3ps (third person singular) in place of pronouns, thus avoiding the introduction of gender-specificity or asymmetry when it is absent in the original. For example, sentences referring to an individual whose sex is not identified are incorrectly translated into English sentences with the pronoun he, which unambiguously conveys maleness in reference to specific individuals. Some writers have found the use of he or she, s/he, and he/she/it to be helpful in this regard. Others find it useful to alternate the use of masculine and feminine pronouns where appropriate.

2. Avoid generic statements which inaccurately refer only to one sex (e.g., "Speakers use language for many purposes-to argue with their wives..." or "Americans use lots of obscenities but not around women").

3. Whenever possible, use terms that avoid sexual stereotyping. Such terms as server, professor, and nurse can be effectively used as gender neutral; marked terms like waitress, lady professor, and male nurse cannot.

4. Use parallel forms of reference for women and men, e.g. do not cite a male scholar by surname only and a female scholar by first name or initial plus surname.

5. In constructing example sentences, avoid gender-stereotyped characterizations.

6. Avoid peopling your examples exclusively with one sex, or consistently putting reference to males before reference to females. (Historically, grammar books stipulated that references to males should precede references to females-see Ann Bodine.*Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar*. Language in Society 4:129-46, 1975.) The use of sex-ambiguous names such as Chris, Dana, Kim, Lee, and Pat will sometimes help avoid stereotyping either males or females.