Gender-specific Asymmetries in Chinese Language

Introduction

Chinese language is an ideographical language. It is not a "gender language". The so-called gender language means a language that has grammatical gender to distinguish words between masculine, feminine and/or neutral class. Lexical specification of a noun is specified as female-specific or male-specific. This sort of features is characterized by many Indo-European or Semitic languages such as Arabic, Danish, Dutch, French, German, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Polish, Russian, Spanish and others (Hellinger & Bubmann, 2002: 5).

A question then echoes from the mind, namely, Chinese does not belong to Indo-European or Semitic languages, so how does this non-gender language express gender-related messages linguistically? Would a language without grammatical gender be less sexist when women and men are addressed and portrayed? Before we set up to the actual analysis, a brief review about the study of language and gender will be helpful to gather background information relevant to this investigation.

Literature Review

The literature review will touch two major domains. One is about the study of language and gender and the other is about critical discourse analysis (CDA). The former aims to provide the background of the study and the later will provide the theoretical framework for the ensuing analysis.

 The study of language and gender has attracted considerable attention in the world in the past decades. Interest should be stimulated by the new wave of the Women's Movement in the relationships between gender and language among the researchers in the world. The year 1975 can be regarded as a milestone in the study of language and gender in the West. In that year three important books were published. They are Robin Lakoff's work *Language and Women's Place*, Thorne and Henley's co-edited collection named *Language and Sex: Difference and Dominance*, and Key's book about *Male /Female Language*. From the publications one can see that researchers are from the West and the materials used to illustrate their arguments are mainly from European languages in the Western world (Wood, 2005).

It is true that research on language and gender in the Chinese cultural world remained silent, comparing it to the academic circles in the West. Linguistic research focusing on language and gender were insufficient. As mentioned, most of the existing research has mainly been conducted by the Western scholars with the European languages as the illustrating materials. Given this situation, research from a different cultural and social environment other than those in the Western society deserves attention and interest. It is hypothesized that the formal and functional manifestations of gender in the area of human references follow general structure on more or less similar principles. So, if language is semiotic, there must be a set of devices to express and construct gender related messages. To approach the objective, this paper will investigate how Chinese language, which lacks grammatical gender, differs from the European languages and conveys female-specific and male-specific ideas through linguistic means. The present study about the similar issue in a different cultural context deserves attention and findings based on the research will bring about cross-cultural references and enrich our understanding about the nature of the language.

To study language and gender, there are many approaches orienting from different domains that can be used as guiding disciplines in the analysis. For the objective of this study, CDA will be used as the theoretical framework. This discipline focuses on real instances of social interaction and its theoretical framework has distinctive power to view the relationship between language and society, language and gender, language and other social variables. The strength of the critical approach sees language use as a form of social practice (Fairclough, 1995) and it interprets social practice from linguistic perspective by intervening on the side of dominated and disadvantaged groups. A

study in light of CDA focuses on the exploration on a dialectical relationship between a particular discursive event with the macro-social structure and micro-conversational settings. CDA holds the notion that language use is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped. It constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people (Fariclough & Wodak, 1997: 258). According to the idea, the constitutive aspect helps to sustain and reproduce the social status quo and it contributes to transforming it as well.

Since language is so socially constitutive, it therefore gives rise to important issues of its power and function setting up influential ideological effects. Simply put, language use can help produce and reproduce unequal power relations between social classes, ethnic groups and gender categories. For example, power asymmetry will be realized through an unequal representation and positioning of women and men in different status. Considering this particular inherent function, language in use may be ideology-laden and may be sexist passing off conventional beliefs and prejudice. Sexism in language usually lies beneath the surface. To unfold such underlying qualities, CDA provides a critical perspective to make the covert aspects visible to people.

The brief introduction of the related theoretical background about the language and gender study has indicated the importance of the current study in the different social cultural world. In addition, the description of CDA has laid the theoretical framework in directing the analysis in the following part.

Findings and Discussions

In this section, examination will focus on gender-related linguistic properties such as referential terms, word formations, syntactic structures, semantic connotations, social gender and idiomatic expressions.

Gender-linked References

Addressing each other is a daily practice. That is why this topic is one of the hot issues addressed in the sociolinguistic area. While it may be possible in many situations to avoid referring to someone's race or nationality, it is difficult to avoid categorizing people by gender when addressing each other. For instance, when we refer to someone's occupation, we would say "She is a doctor" or "He is a driver; " identifying a person's sex becomes priority whenever a third person pronoun is involved. Thus, gender is closely relevant to language use when human beings refer to each other. In English, the use of the male term *he* refers to both males in particular and when being gender-neutral although feminists believe that the third-person singular pronoun should not stand for the whole human set (Schneider & Hacker, 1973).

The prescription of generic masculine or male generic has long been the center of debates about linguistic sexism in English. Fortunately, such a problem does not incur in oral Chinese discourse because the third person in oral Chinese does not distinguish females from males. The Chinese referrers "他" (ta), meaning "he" and "她" (ta), meaning "she" are pronounced exactly the same so there is no need in oral Chinese to distinguish a male from a female when referring to a third person singular. However, this "gender neutral" in the oral discourse does not occur in written discourse because Chinese has to distinguish a female from a male in the third person singular in writing. So the generic masculine "他" (ta) in Chinese like the word "he" in English generally stands for all human beings in communication.

The absence of a masculine generic "he" in oral Chinese does not suggest that gender-related discrimination is lessened in Chinese. Lack of grammatical gender in spoken discourse does not secure Chinese to be free of gender-related discrimination. Asymmetry in address forms is one of the salient ways that reflects social hierarchy. As we all know, the accepted asymmetric naming convention in Chinese is for women to continue to adopt their husbands' names after marriage. Changes in address may be indicative of the social changes undertaken concerning the

relationships between women and men. The asymmetric naming convention of adopting the husband's family name has been changed since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949. However, in rural areas and also in the Special Administration Region of Hong Kong, the traditional naming convention is popular. Such a naming convention makes women less visible and disappearing from an autonomous existence. The fact that a woman's marital status is of priority and the norm for children to take the father's family name as their last name indicates that the modern society is still a society of patriarchic heritage.

Another asymmetry instance exists in addressing is that even when both women and men enjoy similar status, women suffer from covert discrimination. This claim is backed up by the research conducted by some students on how male and female professors were referred to by secretaries and other staff in a large northeastern university in the U.S. (Wolfson, 1989). The study found that secretaries used titles and last names for male faculty or even young male faculty but first names for female faculty in most cases. In contrast to the findings of the previous research, an opposite result came out based on the writer's investigation about the address forms used by the public servants in the workplace in the capital city of Beijing (Yan, 2002). The survey finds out that the public servants at the ministries of the central government prefer to use more formal address forms to address female counterparts. These female servants in turn prefer to be addressed with more formal terms, when the addressers and addressees are of similar age and rank. A strong correlation between gender and address forms emerges from the execution of the address forms by civil servants in this specific community.

The quantitative information in the analysis gives an impression that women in the administrative section enjoy as much status as their male counterparts. However, given the current situation of women's status in Chinese society, this conclusion is hardly true. Let us have a look at the reality of how men and women occupy the powerful positions. For example, in the Chinese Tenth National People's Congress in 2006, only 23 % of female members constituted the whole set of representatives. In the most recent 17th Plenary of the Chinese Central Party held in October 2007, the highest rank of the committee bureau has 31 seats but there is only one female representative in the whole group. The number of female civil servants constitutes a very small proportion and remains on the lower decision-making levels.

Based on the characteristics of the current society, this paper argues that when age and rank are similar, asymmetry in forms of address may be accounted for female uncertainty about their position or impact from the workplace. This serves as an account for the more formal address forms often being used by female public servants to reassure their positions in the male-dominated society. Overt politeness shown in the use of address forms in the specific context may not necessarily mean that women's positions have been greatly improved. On the contrary, we consider women still disadvantaged in the current society.

Female Radical in Word Formation

Word-formation is another particularly sensitive area in which gender may be communicated through references in language. Language will undergo processes of change in the creation and use of new feminine/female occupational terms. It is inevitable that new nouns will have to be coined to represent them. Formation of words in Chinese differs from that in English. A word is formed by combining graphs with radicals. Many Chinese characters are formulated by compounding graphs with radicals. The female character "女" nu (female) is an instance of word formation and is characterized by the association with discrimination. When it becomes a radical, the compound word is often associated with negative meanings.

A close study of the character 女 "female" has provided insights to understanding the meanings implied. As an ideographic language, the word bears rich imaginations. In light of the ideographic information (Ji: 2002:22), this character was a drawing wherein a woman was portrayed kneeling on the ground with the arms bounded on the back. From the creation of the character in the ancient

time, we can see that females have been placed in the inferior position ever since the creation of the character 女(female) in Chinese.

Examination reveals some interesting findings embedded in the Chinese character 女 (female). Based on the *Modern Chinese Dictionary*[①], a total of 178 characters, which have the female radical as the component in the formation of words have been identified. Semantically, these characters can be roughly divided into five sets.

1. Kinship relations: Words such as 妈 ma (mother), 姑gu (aunt), 婶 shen (aunt), 嫂 sao (sister-in-law) are terms used to refer to various kinds of female relations.
2. Family names: In ancient time, tribes were dominated by women who were the head of the house. Therefore, many family names were derived from words that have the female radical as a component. Words such as 姜 jiang, 晏 yan, 姚 yao, 嫉 ji, etc. are ancient family names in the matriarchal society.
3. Positive connotations: Words such as 妩媚 (lovely, charming of a woman), 娇娆 (enchantingly beautiful), 婵娟(lovely, beautiful of a woman), 娈, 娴(refined, elegance of a woman), 婀娜(lithe and graceful of a woman's carriage), 妍(beautiful), 姹(beautiful), 婷,(graceful) 媛(a beautiful woman), 妙(young and beautiful) are examples associating with positive meanings.
4. Negative connotations: Words such as 妖 yao, generally means "evil" and "promiscuous" (usually of women). 嫌(dislike, suspicion) 嫉妒(be jealous);, 嫚(scorn, humiliate) are associated with bad meanings.
5. Other meanings: Take the word 始 shi (beginning), for example, is formed with the female radical with half of the character 胎 tai (carrying a baby), which means the starting or beginning.   The combination of the two components has formed a new character.

Words in Group 3 and Group 4 will be examined in detail because they are associated with gender specific meanings. There is a total of 30 characters identified linking with distasteful associations and another set of 30 characters linking with positive connotations. The criteria of classifying them into negative or positive categories are based on two criteria. Firstly, we will take a look at the meaning of the word itself. Take the character 妖 (yao), for example, it generally means "evil/promiscuous". Interestingly, this negative meaning is usually associated with women. Secondly, we will refer to the meaning of the word in the bound phrases, where the female radical character serves as a component in the word formation. The character 妖(yao), in the bound phrases are generally linked with negative meanings. Please refer to Table 2.

Table 2: Female signific in the bounded phases

1. 妖魔鬼怪   (demons and ghosts)
2. 妖风   (evil wind)
3. 妖精 (evil spirit)，
4. 妖孽 (a person associated with evil or misfortune)
5. 妖言 (fallacy)
6. 奸淫（illicit sexual relation）
7. 奸猾 （treacherous)

8. 奸笑 (sinister smile)

9. 奸贼 (traitor)

10. 奸计 （an evil plot)

11. 耍流氓 (behave like a hoodlum)，

12. 耍手腕（play tricks）

13. 耍赖 （act shamelessly）

14. 耍嘴皮子（be a sick talker）

15. 妖娆 （charming and bewitching)

16. 妖道 (witch)

17. 妖媚 (seductively charming)

18. 妖氛 （evil influence)

19. 妖艳 (seductive)

20. 嫌恶 (detest loathe)

21. 嫌疑犯 (suspect)

22. 嫉妒 (be jealous)

23. 奴颜媚骨 （bowing and scraping sycophancy and obsequiousness

24. 奴颜婢 （subservient servile ）

25. 妄下雌雄 (make irresponsible comments)

26. 妄自尊大 （have too high an opinion of oneself

27. 贪婪 (greedy)

A total of 27 entries are listed in the table. Every item has a character that is formed by the female radical as a component. It is noted that all of the meanings in the phases are associated with negative meanings, which are clearly illustrated in the translation presented in the brackets.

As mentioned, the 178 characters that are formed by the signific as a component in the dictionary have been identified. More than one-sixth of Chinese female compound words are associated with negative meanings as shown in group 4. In contrast, the graph 男 (nan), meaning "male' is not linked with bad images at all. In addition, one-sixth of the characters containing female signific seem to have good images as shown in group 3. The numerical results seem fair regarding gender representation. However, a further examination reveals a different picture. Namely, words in group 3 are actually traits that are required for women to have and adjust to men's expectations. Discrimination against females is thus reflected in a subtle way. The seemingly positive-associated traits are Chinese characters which contain female signific words as components in the word formation. These stereotypical feminine traits and specific feminine norms, expectations and requirements are demanded by the male-dominated society as the criterion for a respectable lady. There is no correspondent trait set for men to follow. Such asymmetry suggests that sexist attitudes prevail in language and society.

So gender discrimination in language comes from different dimensions and generally occurs in a covert way. Without conscious awareness, it will easily escape notice in the male-dominated and hierarchical society and will yield an impact on women's development.

Gender-related Order in Expressions

The arrangement of male and female syntactic ordering, in many cases, is largely fixed in Chinese. Syntax of the language provides an interesting illustration of the archaic hierarchical attitudes embedded in the sequential word order. Let us have a look at the syntactic rule that gender-specific words be ordered in a conventional way. It is found that the male-gendered constituent is in most cases preceding the female gendered constituent. The following examples illustrate the ordering.

Table 3 Male and female sequential order in frozen expressions

Chinese Character	Meaning
男女 (nannu)	men and women
父母 (fumu)	father and mother
兄弟姐妹(xiongdi jiemei)	brothers and sisters
儿女 (nuer)	son and daughter
夫妻 (fuqi)	husband and wife
乾坤 (qiankun) [2]	male and female
太阳月亮 (taiyang yueliang) [3]	sun and moon

Many phrases in Chinese are arranged in the defined ordering of male first and female second. To reverse the prescribed order by placing female ahead of male would result in rendering the phrases very odd or even wrong to native Chinese speakers. Take the sample noun phrase 男女 nannu, (men and women), for example, the phrase sounds incorrect to the speakers of Chinese language if we reverse the order of the characters in this phase. In addition, if you change the order of the noun phrase 儿女 ernu (sons and daughters) into女儿 nuer (daughter), the meaning is definitely altered. The former refers to both male and female off-springs but the latter refers to female ones only. Again, if you change the order of the two characters 父母 fumu (father and mother) into母父 mufu (mother and father), the term sounds ungrammatical since the Modern Chinese Dictionary does not have such a noun phrase as an entry. Interestingly, if the above set phrases in Table 4 are in English and put in a reversed order, they are actually acceptable and not necessarily wrong to the English native speakers.

Whorf (1956) distinguished this linguistic category of gender-related ordering as sexist categories. Farris (1988), in the same vein, was the first to examine Chinese with respect to the covert sexist categories. He noted that such gender asymmetry of dyads would encourage sexism in language by relegating women to a secondary position.

Since China has the longstanding feudalism in history, the remaining phenomenon of male-priority and female-subordinate culture is not surprising. Apart from the fact that gender-related discrimination embedded in the set noun referents, the male and female ordering convention can also be tracked in many Chinese idioms: 郎才女貌 (A talented man matched with a beautiful girl); 夫荣妻贵 (When husband is glorious, wife will be honored); 夫唱妇随 (Husband sings with wife as companion; 男盗女娼 （Man a robber, woman a prostitute）; 龙飞凤舞（Dragon flies and phoenix dances.）[4], all of these expressions are overcastted by women subordinating to men. Sexist category is obvious in terms of the content and syntactic order.

<u>Derogation of Feminine Words</u>

Nouns in language are used to label things. Chinese has lots of paired referents and they were originally intended to contrast with each other in sex referents for the labeling purpose. Theoretically, words for labeling men and women ought to have equivalent meanings. Through the

use of the paired words, evolution of meaning attached to the words for women is contrasted in other ways and gradually linked with different connotations. It is interesting to note that these dyads that are assumed to be equivalent in many cases do not actually undergo the same semantic change. Despite of their originally equal status, some of them have changed to be embedded with other images. This is a widespread cross-cultural phenomenon that words related to men, men's occupations and the like remain relatively stable in their meanings for centuries whereas those denoting women and the female-associated world or things have become worse in quality (Schulz, 1990). Such asymmetry is witnessed in the process of feminine words to have become derogatory. The changing in the feminine member of the paired words denotes a fact that women have been suffering prejudice and placed in an inferior position in society. Take the paired words 鳏夫guanfu (widower), 寡妇guafu (widow) as example. They are paired terms used to refer to a male and a female who have lost their partner. But linguistic discrimination may be inferred from the saying "寡妇门前是非多" (A widow is likely to incur affairs) reveals gender asymmetrical connotations. It is always widow, not widower, who is associated with sexual affairs and the saying may be accounted as discrimination against one sex because we do not have a counterpart to express the similar affair about widowers in Chinese. The example drawn from the daily life is evidence to reveal a problematic tendency which views women primarily as objects of sexual attention. Linguistic representation of women and men will effect and reinforce a certain attitude for people to develop themselves.

Schulz (1990) called this process of meaning change as "semantic derogation". Spender (1980:22-23) gave a typical example of the English word *tart* which has undergone semantic changes in history. The word originally referred to a small pie or pastry. It was first applied to a young woman as a term of love. Later on it changed to mean young women who were sexually desirable; then it referred to women who were careless in their morals, and finally, it changed to mean women of the street.

A similar story of semantic derogation has undergone in the term 小姐 Xiaojie, (Miss) in Chinese. Nowadays, one must be cautious when referring girls by the term小姐 Xiaojie, (Miss), because semantic change has taken place within this term, which is largely associated with a young woman who provides immoral services in return for money. 三陪小姐 (Three-accompanying-Miss) is the typical story happened to the referent of the girl who is engaged in services which are likely to offer sexual services. In order to avoid incurring offensive referring, young women nowadays are addressed alternatively as 小妹 xiaomei (little sister) or 大姐 dajie (senior sister) in service settings.

The term小姐 Xiaojie, (Miss) is seldom used to refer to young women in certain settings in order to eradicate associations with immoral services.

The examples from both English and Chinese have presented a picture of how female referents suffer from derogatory evolution in the linguistic area. It is evident that semantic derogation has undertaken regardless of different cultural contexts.

Social Gender

Social gender has to do with stereotypical assumptions about what are appropriate social roles for women and men. It is a category that refers to the socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985: 173). An illustration of asymmetry in social gender in Chinese is the fact that many higher-status occupational terms such as lawyer, surgeon, scientist and professor will frequently be occupied by the male-specific in contexts where referential gender is either not known or irrelevant. On the other hand, low-status occupational titles such as nurse and secretary are often followed by female-specific. For example, in Chinese we presuppose occupations enjoying high status often referred to by males. Thus we refer to 女博士 nu

bo shi; (female Ph.D), 女记者 nu jizhe (female journalist) 女强人 nu qiangren (female strongperson), 女市长 nu shizhang (female major) 女法官 nu faguan; (female judge), just to name a few. In contrast, if these titles are used to refer to males, no gender-related modifier 男 nan (male) is used to preface the professional titles. Take a recent example in *Wenhui News* (2007, Oct.24), which introduced a group of high ranking officials[⑤]. There are 25 members introduced in the news report. There is only one female member among the highest rank. It is noted that the introduction about her has focused on her gender and elegant manner rather than her other abilities. The title of the news is constructed as *Female Central Political Bureau Member, XXX*.

Regarding social gender, Moser (1997) did a comparative study of the gender specific words. His study noted that the Chinese word processor was gender-biased in relation to social gender. He cited an example from the software in the word processor. When the user entered a given character, a list of words and compounds associated with the character would automatically appear in the character window. He compared the two characters of 男 nan (male) and 女 nu (female) to illustrate the point. Namely, the character 男 nan (male) is selected, there automatically pops up a set of characters that could follow it to form compounds. So under the heading of the two characters, a set of nine compounded items appear such as 男人 nanren (man), 男子汉 nanzihan, (man/male) and so on. In contrast, following the character 女 nu (female), a much longer list appears. The number of bound phrases amounts to as many as 46 compounds, including 女神 nushen (goddess), 女工 nugong (female worker）, 女干部 nu ganbu (female cadre), 女兵 nubing (female soldier) and so on.

Ten years have passed since Moser's study (1997). It is necessary to see whether any changes have taken place in the representation of men and men. A check is therefore conducted again to examine these words in the word processor in the computer. The result seems positive because the number of compound phrases has become more balanced. The compound phrases that link with both genders turn out to be a rate of 21 for man-compound entries against 24 for woman-compound ones.

Gender-related Idiomatic Expressions and Proverbs

Metaphors in language are believed to contain rich cultural values. Through analysis one can see that many Chinese metaphors bear negative sexual and moral overtones to describe women. It is noted that women are called 鸟 (bird) or 鸡（chick) when they are young and attractive, but when they are old, they are referred as 猪 (pig) or 狗 (dog). In contrast, male counterparts do not have such referring terms.

The writer has further examined a dictionary entitled the *Synonymy Dictionary* (Mei Jiaju et al., 1996) for comparative study. Sexually promiscuous entries are examined in detail. The finding shoes that the number of terms referring to sexually promiscuous women and men vary greatly in size. Under the entry "Promiscuous Persons", 36 items for women are listed but only 10 for men. In addition, the dictionary has four gender-specific abusive terms identified to refer to women in the dictionary. They are 贱人(jianren, slut, tramp), 祸水(heshui, evil water), 雌老虎(ci laohu, female tiger), and 河东狮子(hedong shizi, Hedong tiger). The asymmetry is obvious because no equivalent terms referring to males have been documented in the same dictionary. Such an unbalanced existence can be viewed as a fact that when we speak, we do not just utter linguistically, but speak culturally and ideologically too. Frozen expressions have been used for a long time and they surely have embodied fundamental collective beliefs and stereotypes. The analysis of the dictionary in terms of the sexually promiscuous terms shows the fact that linguistic discrimination can exist through the presence as well as absence of particular terms in a systematic way (West at al., 1997).

CDA holds that language use is socially constitutive as well as socially shaped. It constitutes situations, objects of knowledge and the social identities of and relationships between people and groups of people (Fariclough & Wodak, 1997: 258). So proverbs and idioms may provide us with rich linguistic source for the study of cultural beliefs and social values of a society, therefore it is assumed that how people use them to describe men and women may reveal their valid attitudes.

An informal survey conducted by the writer in 2002 is presented here to help understand the situation in the Chinese cultural society. The survey required students in the class to write at least two gender-related proverbs or fixed expressions about women and men. These students were asked to do the task instinctively without a second thought. Forty-two subjects participated in the informal survey, with two thirds of them being female subjects. It turned out that a total number of 90 idiomatic expressions, proverbs and frozen folk sayings were written down. The first 10 items in terms of frequency have been selected from the entire set of the idiomatic expressions. Several things are observable from Table 4 below.

Table 4 Idiomatic expressions written by the students

Sayings cited by more than 3 students	Frequency	%
A. 女子无才便是德 (Women's virtue lies in their lack of talent.)	21	55%
B. 天下最毒妇人心 (Women are most evil in the world.)	9	21%
C. 唯女子小人难养 (Only women and petty men are difficult to deal with.)	8	20%
D. 红颜祸水 (Women are the source of trouble.)	5	12%
E. 男主外 ,女主内 (Men in charge of outside affairs while women in charge of household duties.)	5	12%
F. 男儿当自强 (Men should be responsible for their own cultivation.)	5	12%
G. 好男不跟女斗 (Men will not dispute with women.)	4	10%
H. 男盗女娼 (The man is a robber, the woman a prostitute.)	4	10%
I. 男尊女卑 (The man is noble, the woman is humble.)	4	10%
J. 不到长城非好汉 (You will not be a man unless you have been to the top of the Great Wall.)	4	10%

The sayings written by the students cam be roughly divided into three types:
● Type 1 including items A, B, C and D are depictions of women only.
● Type 2 including items F and J portray men only.
● Type 3 including items E, G, H and I depict both men and women.

By comparing expressions in Type 1 and Type 2, it is noted that those portray men often emphasize male positive images or stress male-dominance over females. In contrast, expressions which portray women tend to depict the negative images of the sex. In Type 3, a similar dyadic picture emerges when depicting both sexes. In this pattern, a similar theme thus has been again documented by men overpowering women in general. Women as a group obviously become a marked category, and are subject to humble and lower social positions. Obviously, gender-related

proverbs echo the dominant social rules and norms concerning behaviors and roles of men and women in a male-dominant society.

With the numerical analysis on this informal survey, we get to know that over 20% of the subjects selected Items A, B, and C, which explicitly demean women. Though the informal class survey is not strictly designed, it, in a way, recaptures Chinese cultural paradigms of gender relations and influence that appears to reaffirm a gender-related social and cultural hierarchy in a patriarchal society. The result seems worrisome when considering the background of those students. Two thirds of them were female from a famous university in China. Given their educational backgrounds and their relatively high social status in the current Chinese society, the finding is even more worrisome since those who have received higher education are assumed more likely to be facilitated with the concept of gender equality and have less bias against females but this assumption has not been confirmed. The finding from the informal survey may serve as a starting point for further research on gender issues. We probably want to know the attitudes of those who have received less education in the rural areas.

Conclusion

This paper investigates the linguistic representation of women and men displayed at various levels in Chinese. Based on the existence of gender-related representation in the language, it is obvious that linguistic discrimination still prevails in the current Chinese society. Lacking grammatical gender, Chinese has a variety of devices to communicate gender-linked ideas and conceptions. Discrimination is usually covert and difficult to be noticed without conscious awareness. This article points out that gender inequality is harmful because gender-related discrimination and gender asymmetric representations may perpetuate stereotyped roles and reinforce biased attitudes towards women. As a teacher of language, what should we do to eradicate linguistic inequality to help create a fair world for all human beings? Sunderland (1994) has advocated for teachers and those involved in educational and related circles to take action in their professional settings. Are you ready to do something from your position? You are expected to!

<div align="center">**Works Cited**</div>

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Notes:

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[1] 现代汉语词典 *Modern Chinese Dictionary*, revised version in 2004 published by the Commercial Publishing House in Beijing.

[2] 乾 (qian) means heaven whereas 坤 (kun) means earth. Here the two characters symbolize the male and the female.

[3] 太阳(taiyang), the sun symbolizes the male whereas 月亮(yueliang), the moon, symbolizes the female.

[4] 龙 (long) the dragon symbolizes the male whereas 凤(feng) symbolizes phoenix.

[5] Higher officials at the 17th Central Political Bureau of the Chinese Central Party Committee, which was held in Oct. 2007.