

## SEXIST LANGUAGE IN “*THE LORD OF THE RINGS*” FILM TRILOGY

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### Abstrak

Stereotipe dan prasangka adalah fasilitas yang digunakan masyarakat untuk merasa aman dalam posisinya di kehidupan sosial, maka dari itu kedua hal tersebut menjadi tradisi di kehidupan kita (Lippman, 1956). Seksisme adalah stereotipe yaitu membedakan atau mengkritik orang-orang berdasarkan jenis kelamin mereka, yang mana hal ini dapat menyebabkan diskriminasi dan perlakuan yang tidak seimbang pada masyarakat berdasarkan jenis kelamin. Seksisme dapat tercerminkan dari berbagai aspek yang berkontribusi dalam kebiasaan dan tradisi kita, salah satunya adalah bahasa. Bahasa seksis, sadar atau tidak, telah tergambarkan di berbagai hal dalam kehidupan kita, termasuk dalam media seperti film. Artikel ini meneliti bahasa seksis di trilogi film “The Lord of the Rings”.

Artikel ini menggunakan teori seksisme dari Sara Mills, yang mengklasifikasi bahasa seksis menjadi bahasa seksis yang terang-terangan dan bahasa seksis yang tersamarkan. Dalam trilogi film “The Lord of the Rings”, terdapat enam dari delapan tipe bahasa seksis yang terang-terangan: penamaan, kata ganti orang ketiga secara umum, kata benda secara umum, istilah non-paralel, dan derivasi. Sedangkan untuk bahasa seksis yang tersamarkan, ada dua tipe dalam film tersebut: metafora dan persangkaan. Dengan mengobservasi kategori-kategori bahasa seksis di trilogi film ini, efek penggunaan bahasa seksis terhadap karakter wanita di film tersebut dapat ditelusuri lebih lanjut.

**Kata Kunci:** Bahasa Inggris, Bahasa Seksis, Jenis Kelamin, Diskriminasi

### Abstract

Stereotypes and prejudices are the facilities for people in order to feel safe in their position in society, hence they become our tradition in life (Lippmann, 1956). Sexism is a stereotype of differentiating or judging people based on their gender, which cause discrimination and unequal treatment to the genders. Sexism can be displayed in every aspects that contribute to our habit and tradition, one of them is language. Sexist language, consciously or not, has been portrayed in everything in our life, including media such as film. This article observed sexist language in “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy.

This study uses Sara Mills sexism theory, which classifies sexist language into overt and indirect sexism. In “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy, there are six types that are included to overt sexism: naming, generic pronouns, generic nouns, compound words, non-parallel terms, and derivational. For the indirect sexism, there are two types in the film: metaphors and presuppositions. By observing the categories of sexist language, the effects of its usage towards the female character in the film can be observed.

**.Keywords:** English, Sexist Language, Gender, Discrimination

### INTRODUCTION

Sexism, in short, can be described as a judgment which is established by the gender difference. This perception has grown within our society for a long time and has been causing pros and contras among the public. It is undeniable that sexism is one of the most applied stereotypes in our society. There are many positive and negative judgments and perceptions about how sexism exists in our social life. One side says there should be no unequal treatment between males and females due to

human rights. The other side states males and females are destined to be different so it is normal to give unequal treatment and compensation. Those variations of opinions are undeniable and likely to forever exist in our social life.

Nevertheless, sex differences, which are mainly supported by biological features such as brain volume, hormones, etc., were assumed to be supporting materials of a different way for both sex to adapt in society. According to Buss in Swann, Langlois, & Gilbert (1998), evolutionary psychologists presumed that historically,

men and women had different adaptive problems and challenges, causing them to have different adaptive behavior.

Negative effects of sexism mostly occur to women. In society, women are often treated differently than men in negative way. Considered as inferior, women have been portrayed as the less important gender. Society has been always underestimating women as inferior, and view men as the superior gender in various aspects. It is no longer rare for society to also give different treatments to each genders.

Sexism stereotype is depicted in numerous parts of human behaviors and the matters that contribute to them, one of those is language. Linguists have shown that meaning does not simply exist in a text but is the result of the process of suiting and a set of relations between the social system where the text is produced and used by the writer and the reader. They go on to show that this process of using language to define oneself can have effects on the language system as a whole and ultimately on the way that society is structured (Mills, 1995).

The sexism in language is occasionally so obvious, bare, and even offensive. On the other hand it can also appear implicitly in forms of phrases such as metaphors and proverbs. Both forms bring out the impression and message of gender-inequality and lessening especially for women nevertheless. Therefore sexist language is divided to certain categories. The category distinction is based on a sexist language theory by Sarah Mills. Mills stated that sexism in language is divided into two main categories. The first category is the language that clearly shows inequality between male and female that is titled as overt sexism. The second category is the language that does not clearly shows the inequality that is called as indirect sexism. The divisions of these categories will be discussed further in chapter two.

Sexist language can be found in various things such as in movies. As a literary work with a main purpose of entertainment, movies are proven to be highly influencing. In order to be entertaining much, the compositions in the movie (plot, characters, settings, etc.) are created to be able to leave impressions to the audience. Nowadays, it is no longer a new thing for us to find people whose life are exceedingly influenced by movies, considering movie is one of literary works, which become some of many aspects that are viewed as something that can be an inspiration in living a person's life.

This article discusses sexist language as a social stereotype that are found in our society through movie as visual media, which is film trilogy. The goal of this research is to describe the sexist language that is contained in the characters' dialogue and the narrator's

monologue in “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy. In “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy, there are more than one language that are spoken by the characters. The languages are English, and the others are fantasy languages created by the author of the novel which this trilogy film is adapted from, such as *Sindarin* and *Quenya* that are spoken by the elves, and *Black Speech* spoken by Sauron as the main antagonist character. This research only took data from the English conversations in the film trilogy.

*The Lord of the Rings* film trilogy was adapted from an epic high fantasy novel by J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings*. The setting was in earlier age of middle-earth, where there were still kingdoms and fantasy creatures, therefore the language was still influenced by earlier form of English, despite the fact that the film also included other fantasy language spoken by the characters. The novel itself was written in 1937, which was exactly when the first wave of feminism happened. The first wave of feminism was the era when women were restricted to have the same rights with men, such as having well-education and vote rights in late 19<sup>th</sup> century and earlier 20<sup>th</sup> century. The discrimination against women was highly influenced by World War I thus caused major negative effects for women. From this point of view, first wave feminists demanded “equal-opportunities feminism” or “equity feminism,” which means women and men should be treated equally. Women should be able to gain the same rights and positions as men, and their contributions and competences should also be admitted (Krolokke & Sorensen, 2006).

During the observation, the researcher took a previous study from Narista Sandra entitled “The Sexist Language Used by the Characters in The Duchess Movie”. The previous study described the sexist expressions that are uttered by some specific characters in *The Duchess* movie and classify them into types of sexism in language according to the theory of Sara Mills. In this study, the researcher tried to observe further than only identifying and classifying the sexist language.

This research itself attempts to develop the discussed problems in sexist language topic, so it is expected by this research, sexist language from the movie can be reflected to real life where people interact and deal with stereotypes in society. Thus, this research aims to observe the types of sexist language in “*The Lord of the Rings*” film trilogy and the linguistic features of them, and also the effect of sexist language's usage toward the characters. This research was organized for the main purpose of convincing people, especially English speakers and learners, to increase their awareness of sexism in English, because avoiding multiple types of

sexist expression has become a necessity in using English.

## METHOD

The study used qualitative approach with descriptive format. The source of the data is the film trilogy *The Lord of the Rings* which consists of three movies. They are *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, and *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. The particular subject of the data is English as the language which is spoken by all the characters in the movies as the dialogue and the narrative, regarding the fact that the characters also speak other languages in the film. The main instrument of this observation was the researcher herself. The technique of collecting and analyzing the data was by watching the film trilogy, after that the researcher collected the sexist language and gained the dialogue and the narrator transcriptions from the internet to prevent any mistyping. Then the next step was classifying the data based on the two classifications of sexism: overt and direct sexism. The third step was identifying the effects of the sexist language toward the characters and described them.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Among all creatures in Middle Earth, LOTR’s setting of place, hobbits are the only creature that use family name system, as it is seen in the data below

Bilbo : Mrs. **Bracegirdle**, how nice to see you! Welcome, welcome. Are all these children yours?  
Mrs.Bracegirdle : (Laughs and nods)  
Bilbo : Good gracious, you have been productive.

This is an example of overt sexism in naming. The practice of this application of family names are considered man-made while women are not included to it. Therefore, this kind of practice cause advantages to males (Mills, 2008).

Men dominance continues to show its existence. In the data below, there is a masculine generic pronoun which can be mistaken to refer to both genders

Frodo : You’re late.  
Gandalf : A wizard is never late, Frodo Baggins, nor is **he** early. **He** arrives precisely when **he** means to.

The male generic pronoun *he* is used as a reference to replace human in general, both women and men. Therefore, the generic pronoun is a display of social inequality between men and women, where men are considered as superior, more important, and more

“noticeable” by using the male term to replace both gender.

The highest amount of sexist language in LOTR film trilogy is the masculine generic noun *man* and *men*, for example:

Galadriel : And Nine...nine rings were gifted to the race of **Men**, who above all else desire power. For within these rings was bound the strength and the will to govern each race.

*Men* in this case refers to human in general, men and women, but it only uses men to refer both of the genders. Man and woman are supposed to be treated equally, but in English lexicon the word *man* has higher status as the male human being and also the whole race (He, 2010). This causes an understanding that women are not included to this race. An inequality is obviously shown here, because the sexist language creates an attitude of women being inferior to men.

Another example is the conversation below:

Gandalf : This is but a taste of the terror that Saruman will unleash. All the more potent for he is driven now by fear of Sauron. Ride out and meet him head on. Draw him away from your women and children. You must fight.  
Aragorn : You have 2000 good **men** riding north as we speak. Éomer is loyal to you. His **men** will return and fight for their king.  
Gandalf : They will be 300 leagues from here by now. Éomer cannot help us. I know what it is that you want of me, but I will not bring further death to my people. I will not risk open war.

The word *men* refers to soldiers in an army. In Middle Earth’s kingdoms, it is a common fact that only men who are allowed to join the army of the kingdom and attend wars, while women should stay away from it in order to be unharmed, just as what Gandalf says that the enemy should be drawn away from the women and children. It shows that women do not have the same skill with men to be soldiers. They are depicted as the weaker gender, thus they are not allowed to go to war.

There are also compound words that are included to overt sexism, for example:

Galadriel : It began with the forging of the Great Rings. Three were given to the Elves: immortal, wisest, fairest of all beings. Seven to the Dwarf Lords: great miners and **craftsmen** of the mountain hall.



In morphology, compounding is a way of word-building by combining roots, and the much smaller category of phrasal words. Phrasal words are items that have internal structure of phrases, then it has syntactical function as words (McCarthy, 2002). *Craftsmen* is a compound word created by combining the words *crafts* and *men*, and has the meaning of people whose professions are specific crafting. *Craftsmen* is often used as the general term for this profession, but adding the word *men* also indicates that only male people who have the skill and are appropriate to do this profession.

Another example of compound word that becomes masculine term is as follows:

Aragorn : *Gollum. He has tracked us since Moria. I had hoped we would lose him on the river. But he's too clever a **waterman**.*

Boromir : *And if he alerts the enemy to our whereabouts, it will make the crossing even more dangerous.*

*Waterman* is derived by compounding *water* and *man*. *Waterman* means a person who has the knowledge and ability to do activities that are related to water such as boat-rowing. The word-formation process uses the male term as a consideration of the general term.

For sexist compound words that use feminine terms, most of them are used as media to put women into different group compared to men, reflecting an inequality and discrimination. For example:

Witch-King : *Give up the halfling, **She-Elf**!*

Arwen : *If you want him, come and claim him.*

The word *She-Elf* is a compound word from the word *elf* that is combined with *she* as an indication that the elf is a female. This is categorized as overt sexism, by combining the general term "*elf*" with "*she*" to create the feminine term. Whereas, the male is allowed to be titled as only *elf*. This creates a perception that women are inferior, dependent, and they need men in every aspect.

Other example of compound word that has the aim of differentiating women to men is as follows:

Pippin : *Why are there so few of you when you have lived so long? Are there **Ent children**?*

Treebeard : *Bru-ra-hroom. There have been no **Entings** for a terrible long count of years.*

Merry : *Why is that?*

Treebeard : *We lost the **Entwives**.*

*Entwives* is a compound word that is formed from the words *Ent* and *wives*, means the female Ents that are married with the male Ents. However, the male Ents do not call themselves as Ent-husband, instead they call

themselves as *Ents*, and meanwhile *Ents* is also considered as the general term. A sense of exclusion exists for female, because they have to be distinguished based on marital status.

The next type of overt sexism is the non-parallel terms, such as *Mr – Mrs/Ms*, *master – mistress*, *lord – lady*, and *king – queen*. For example of non-parallel terms in LOTR is as follows:

Bilbo : ***Mrs.** Bracegirdle, how nice to see you! Welcome, welcome. Are all these children yours?*

The data above contains the feminine non-parallel term *Mrs*, which has the pair that is *Mr* such as in the following example:

Butterbur : *Good evening, little masters. If you're seeking accommodation, we've got some nice, cozy Hobbit sized rooms available. **Mr...**ah...*

Frodo : *Underhill ... my name's Underhill.*

According to Oxford dictionary, *Mr* is used as a title before a surname or full name to address or refer to a man, without a higher or honorific or professional title to be added to the name. The pair of a *Mr* is a *Ms/Mrs*. A *Ms* is an unmarried woman or girl, or to that a married woman retaining her maiden name for professional purposes. While "*Mr*" can be titled to both married and unmarried men with no differentiation, women should be divided to *Ms* and *Mrs*, pointing out the unequal treatment to both genders.

Another non-parallel term in LOTR is *lord – lady*, for example:

Haldir : *Caras Galadon. The heart of Elvendom on earth. Realm of the **Lord** Celeborn and of Galadriel, **Lady** of Light.*

In its usage, *lord* is not usually used to refer ordinary men, instead it is properly specialized for men who have royal blood relation or honorable status. Meanwhile, *lady* can be referred to every woman from every rank because it is a formal addressing to refer them. Additionally, the title *lady* now has pejorative meaning. According to Suzanne Romaine in Encyclopedia of Life Support System's website, *lady* became a synonym of prostitute in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, while *lord* in fact reserves its original meaning until now. Those two evidences proves inequality to those terms.

Furthermore, in LOTR there is also overt sexism in derivational form. Derivation in morphology is a way of word-building by adding bound morphemes that are not usually given separate listings in dictionary, the

morphemes are called affixes (Yule, 2010). The example is the conversation below:

Gimli : *Stay close, young Hobbits ... they say a great **sorceress** lives in these woods. An Elf-witch of terrible power. All who look upon her fall under her spell.*

The overt sexism is the word *sorceress* that is a derivational. The word is derived by combining the male term sorcerer with the suffix *-ess* to be the female term, showing the dependence of women to men.

Despite the overt sexism, LOTR also contains numbers of indirect sexism. Nowadays it seems that sexism in English is mostly indirect sexism, which is sexism that establishes itself at the level of presupposition. It is and also through innuendo, irony and humor, or which is prefaced by disclaimers or hesitation (Mills, 2003).

However, there are only two out of six types of indirect sexism in the film, which are metaphors and presuppositions. For the indirectly sexist metaphor, the example is:

Gimli : *Well, here's one Dwarf she won't ensnare so easily. **I have the eyes of a hawk and the ears of a fox!***

Through metaphors, people express pictures of reality, but they are charged with an ideological reflects, thus they cause a bias on the part of a speech community towards other groups of people, morals, situations and events (Rodriguez, 2009). Hawk is a bird that has very good sight and is often used to symbolize power and freedom, while a fox is a wild animal that has very good hearing. Both of the animals are used to symbolize a man, defines him as having a very good sight and hearing. Those two animals are wild, depicting wild and free life of men.

For the metaphor which described women in the film can be seen in the conversation below:

Grima : *Oh, he must have died sometime in the night. What a tragedy for the king to lose his only son and heir. I understand. His passing is hard to accept. Especially now that your brother has deserted you.*

Éowyn : *Leave me alone, snake!*

Grima : *Oh, but you are alone. Who knows what you've spoken to the darkness in the bitter watches of the night when all your life seems to shrink. The walls of your bower closing in about you. A hutch to trammel some wild thing in.*

*So fair, so cold. Like a morning pale spring*

*still clinging to winter's chill.*

Éowyn : *Your words are poison.*

Metaphors are not separated from our perceptions and conceptions in the real world and society. Matter fact, they are very firmly rooted in it (Rodriguez, 2009). Women are described to be as similar as spring that still has the chill of winter, so fair and so cold. This metaphor has goals of being both complement and sarcasm to women, connote them as so fair and beautiful like spring, nevertheless they are also described as very cold or arrogant and always ignore the people that come to approach them.

Sexist presupposition early assumptions in an argument that has prejudices of gender in them (Mills, 2008). Such assumptions which exist in LOTR film are mainly related to occupations, for example are two conversations below:

(1) Aragorn : ***Riders** of Rohan, what news from the Mark?*

Eomer : *What business does an Elf, a Man and a Dwarf have in the Riddermark? Speak quickly!*

(2) Aragorn : ***Farmer, farriers, stable boys. These are no soldiers.***

Gimli : *Most have seen too many winters.*

Legolas : *Or too few. Look at them. They're frightened. I can see it in their eyes.*

Riders, farmer, farriers, and soldiers do not overtly show sexism, but the terms are assumed as occupations for male. It is because in society, those occupations are commonly had by men, and women are not supposed to have them. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet in Mills (2008) stated that, as a result of such assumptions create an effect that if people recognize such occupations are actually addressed for women, it will bring disjuncture and that leads to disbelief.

### The Effect of Sexist Language towards the Character

This part of discussion focuses on Éowyn as one of the main female characters in LOTR film trilogy. Eowyn is unlike other female characters in LOTR, as she is able to see her limitation and wish for something beyond the male-defined boundaries of her experience (Maness, 2010). This character is strengthened by the existence of sexist language that exists to against her, all of them have intention of discriminating her as someone who should not have the same rights, position, and responsibility as men.

Aragorn : *You have some skill with a blade.*

Éowyn : *Women of this country learned long ago: those without swords may still die upon them. I fear neither death nor pain.*

Aragorn : *What do you fear, my lady?*

Éowyn : *A **cage**. To stay behind bars until use and old age accept them. And all chance of valor has gone beyond recall or desire*

Aragorn : *You’re a daughter of kings, a **shield-maiden** of Rohan. I do not think that will be your fate.*

Éowyn tells Aragorn that she is not afraid of death or pain, but she fears the “cage” which restrains her from her desire of having the same rights as men until she becomes old. This reveals that she as the female character gives an implicit information that the limitations for her are worse than death and pain, hence she prefers to be dead or in pain rather than to be limited by rules, norms, and restrictions that are based on gender stereotype in their surroundings until they become old, implying that this kind of limitation has been applied for a very long time and has become something that is ordinary in her society which is the royal environment. Moreover, Aragorn admits it himself that Eowyn is a *shield-maiden*, who is supposed to stand alongside men in battles to fights as a warrior. However, the word *shield-maiden* here is used as something to support the limitations toward Eowyn.

Another evidence that Eowyn does not want to be left behind can be seen in the conversation between her and Aragorn below:

Éowyn : *Aragorn! Aragorn! **I’m to be sent with the women into the caves.***

Aragorn : *That is an honorable charge.*

Éowyn : ***To mind the children, to find food and bedding with the men return. What renown is there in that?***

Aragorn : *My lady, a time may come for valor without renown. Who then will your people look to in the last defense?*

Éowyn : *Let me stand at your side.*

Aragorn : *It is not in my power to command it.*

The conversation do not contain sexist language, but it happens to be additional evidence of Eowyn struggle to gain gender equality. She does not want to be ordinary like other women who, to most people at that time, should

do only home duties, mind the children, cook, find place to sleep, and passively wait for the men to return. She does not want to be such a “servant” only that should stay inside home without giving further contribution to her kingdom.

Mills (2008) wrote that this condition of women in LOTR film trilogy still happens nowadays, which can only be fix by a conflict and resistance from men, which later is applied by Éowyn. Realized of the unequal treatment for women especially herself, Éowyn seeks for resistance from the restrictions for her. In order to gain the same position, she disguises herself as a man and fights the next day. Éowyn’s action, according to Heller in Maness (1995) is seen as a heroism in order to step on the rebellion of a woman against the conventional rules for females, hence accepting masculinity is a way to release herself from the restrictions.

Éowyn’s struggle against unequal treatments toward women, especially sexist language, reaches its culmination point when she fights the Witch-King of Angmar, as their conversation is as follows:

Witch-King : *You fool. No **man** can kill me ... Die now!*

Éowyn : *I am no **man**!*

This scene is the peak of her yearning for equal treatment for female and a freedom from the domination of men, by stating that the whole human beings are not only men, and men are not the only ones who can war, but women also capable of doing what men can do.

## CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

In the results, the characters are shown to use both overt and indirect sexism. Those results are divided to types as follows: overt sexism in naming, generic pronoun, generic noun, compound words, non-parallel terms, and derivational. For indirect sexism, there are two out of six types, which are metaphors and presuppositions.

The effects of sexist language in “The Lord of the Rings” film trilogy are mainly seen to happen toward Éowyn as one of the main female characters. The impacts are bad for her. She is a royal family and a shield-maiden for her kingdom, however she is rejected to attend war and ordered to stay with her people. Therefore, she feels like she is in a “cage” where she cannot as much as she wants. As a result, she struggles for gender-equality by increasing her masculinity, refers herself as one of the men, and also disguise herself as a man. Nevertheless, in the end she declares that she is a woman, implying that women can do what men can do while still stick to their femininity.



Consciously or not, sexism in English affected to the unequal treatments and discrimination towards women when they are compared to men. Language is closely related to human's behavior, therefore when English contains sexist language, they will give impact to the social attitude of its speakers, in this case, causing them to have sexist perceptions. This is mostly viewed as something negative by most linguists and feminists, and it is important to erase those concepts. Regarding the fact that in modern era, women have given important role in society developments such as education, technology, science, and many more. As a result, the writer suggest the readers to have efforts of avoiding sexism in English, for example changing the sexist terms into gender-neutral one.

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