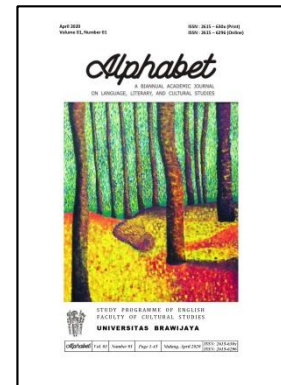# ALPHABET

# Indonesian Speakers' Perspective in Distinguishing Gender Based on Indonesian Vocabularies

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**How to cite this article :**

Setra, M.S.D. (et.al). (2020). Indonesian speakers' perspective in distinguishing gender based on Indonesian vocabularies. *Alphabet*, *03*(01), 42-45. doi: 10.21776/ ub.alphabet.2020.03.01.06.

# Indonesian Speakers' Perspective in Distinguishing Gender Based on Indonesian Vocabularies

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**Abstract**

Language and gender are related in the practice. According to Coates (1998), language simply reflects social divisions and inequalities. The gender distinction in many languages spoken worldwide, in practices are separated into gendered and genderless languages, which means language differences between men and women are a mirror of social differences, and these differences will persist as long as society perceives men and women as being different and unequal. We can observe this in various languages that have gender classifications in their vocabulary and also the use of different words by looking at the gender and number of interlocutors who speak the language, which has indeed been determined by generations by the speakers and also the committee of the language hall of the language. This research will proves that Indonesian speakers which known as a Genderless Language, showed their differences in judge nonsense words either masculine or feminine or also cannot identify. Therefore the data were taken by Interview with a Questionnaire which contains sentences.

**Keywords** : Language, gender, Indonesian words.

Languages are used by people to communicate. But not all people use the languages with the same strategy. Even one language could be used in varied strategies. One of the strategies to use language is communicating by the system of gender. This is supported by the theory from Meyerhoff (in Huriyah, 2017: 133) that men and women do not use linguistic choices to express their masculine and feminine identities, but they prefer to use gendered linguistic strategies like how people communicate with body gestures, with repertoire and ritual actions according to the clothes people wear with graphic images and all kinds of cultural practices. People can call these signifying practices as well as communication ideas, which communicate a lot about the identity, ambition and attitude of the communicator.

The fact is that language and gender are related in the practice. Some theories are created by experts to explain this relation. According

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to Coates (1998), language simply reflects social divisions and inequalities. He added that linguistic differences are the reflection of social differences, and as long as society views men and women as different and unequal, the differences in the language of men and women will continue to exist. This is linked by the theory from Spender (1985) which said the position of division and inequality is actually created through sexist linguistic behavior. This means that language helps shape the boundaries of our reality. Language is a tool for structuring, classifying, and manipulating the world. Furthermore, Wardhaugh (2006) argued that any explanation of language and gender must explore the enmity and mutual influence between the two. Speech serves to create and maintain gender stereotypes and male dominance. Speech not only reflects our space in culture and society, but also helps create that space.

The objective of the study is to examine if a speaker of a language that does not have gender distinctions in their sentences can recognize the gender differences in the language that they use. In this study, we would use Bahasa Indonesia as a subject because Bahasa Indonesia is a language with no significant gender differences in its grammar.

There are some previous studies which discuss language and gender. There is a study named "Does Grammatical Gender Influence Perception? A Study Of Polish And French Speakers " by Haertle. I. (2017). The purpose of this study is to examine how the Polish and French speakers determine the gender perception or grammatical gender on the object of each language. The research uses a method by giving the pictures of the object in French and Polish to the participants to determine the grammatical gender, the French speaker had to answer the grammatical gender of Polish objects and the Polish speaker had to answer the grammatical gender of the French object.

Another study was conducted by Rodina and Westergaard (2015) titled "Grammatical Gender in Norwegian: Language Acquisition and Language Change". They investigate the production of gender in a Norwegian dialect (Tromsø) by several groups of child and adult speakers. They found considerable differences between the groups, which indicate a surprisingly rapid change taking place in the dialect that involves the loss of feminine gender marking on the indefinite article and possibly the loss of feminine gender altogether. This means that the traditional three-gender system (masculine, feminine, neuter) is replaced by a two-gender system (common, neuter).

In both formal and informal situations, men and women can be dominant. It depends on the discussion topic. Furthermore, the speaker's position may have an impact on the amount of time he or she takes to speak. For instance, if a woman holds a position of leadership in a community. She must speak more actively than the others in this situation. According to some experts, women employ more standard speech forms than males because they are more aware of their standing. According to Lakoff (1975: 46), females employ more intensifiers than males, such as so, incredibly, pretty, terribly, quite quiet, and so on. Women, on the other hand, according to Wenjing (2012: 40), are more concerned with the refinement of their language.

The influences of gender to language is not simply due to the natural differences of man and women. Rather, it is not focused on who is talking, but what is the effect of the talk in the view of linguistic behavior. The way people use language can be related to the social network they belong to, their habitual activities, their identities as particular kinds of people and their status relative to others. All these things are affected by gender that applies into society. The relation between gender and language is quite complex. Holmes (in Büyükahıska, 2011: 465) stated that there are six candidate universals regarding language and gender: 1. Women and men develop different patterns of language use 2. Women tend to focus on the affective functions of an interaction more often than men do 3. Women tend to use linguistic devices that stress solidarity more often than men do 4. Women tend to interact in ways that will maintain and

increase solidarity, while especially in formal contexts men tend to interact in ways that will maintain and increase their power and status. 5. Women use more standard forms than men from the same social group in the same social context. 6. Women are stylistically more flexible than men.

Grammatical Gender is a basic part of a noun that determines a kind of agreement of a language, such as Article, Adjective, Verb, Numeral, and Proposition that follow the noun. Some languages provide this Grammatical Gender terms features in three gender classes, such as Masculine, Feminine, and Neutral, we can found those classes in German, French, Spanish, Arabic, and etc. Some languages also did not provide the Grammatical Gender in their language, and called by Genderless Language, such as Malay, Indonesian, and English.

## RESEARCH METHOD

### Research Design

This study would use the Descriptive Qualitative Methods by using the Interviews and Questionnaire to find out whether Bahasa Indonesia speakers can see and differentiate the gender in their language.

### Data Sources

The researchers would conduct an Interview with a Questionnaire to the participants to find out whether Bahasa Indonesia speakers can see and differentiate the gender in their language. The Questionnaire is written as a series of sentences. The interviewer will be asked to choose whether the words are Masculine or Feminine or can not identify, and the researcher will pick one of the interviewer's choices at random to ask about the reason for their gender choice.

### Data Collection

The researchers would start to gather data in this study by looking for participants who fulfilled the study criteria, such as Bahasa Indonesia speakers from English Literature students from Brawijaya University.

After the researcher has gathered the participants, The researcher would ask them the question to see if they fulfill the study criteria and explain the research purposes and objective. If the participant matches the study criteria, The researcher would give them a Questionnaire form to fill out and will pick one of the Questionnaire answers at random to ask about the reason for the gender choice.

### Data Analysis

The data will check whether participants can find out which gender is appropriate for the given words and the reasons why they choose that gender in the words provided. In addition, researchers will also analyze whether gender affects their perspective in seeing some Indonesian Language vocabularies.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Our questionnaire form has managed to collect 67 responses in total from 80% female participants and 20% male participants who collectively come from the 19-27 age range. We found some answers related to gender based on Indonesian language vocabularies. The following is the findings of the research.

**Table 1.** Statistics of Indonesian Words

| Indonesian Vocabularies | Gender | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Masculine | Feminine | Neutral |
| Meja | 20 | 2 | 45 |
| Kursi | 10 | 12 | 45 |
| Baju | 1 | 21 | 47 |
| Apel | 6 | 21 | 41 |
| Pir | 6 | 20 | 41 |
| Jeruk | 8 | 16 | 44 |
| Bunga | 0 | 55 | 12 |
| Palu | 55 | 2 | 11 |
| Paku | 54 | 1 | 13 |
| Rumah | 18 | 6 | 45 |
| Mobil | 37 | 1 | 30 |
| Cermin | 1 | 48 | 21 |
| Pensil | 7 | 3 | 58 |
| Pulpen | 10 | 6 | 52 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Handphone | 3 | 5 | 59 |
| Beras | 4 | 25 | 40 |
| Piring | 2 | 28 | 37 |
| Wortel | 2 | 20 | 45 |
| Cabai | 1 | 33 | 33 |
| Topi | 37 | 2 | 29 |

As we can see in table 1 that only 40% categorized the words into masculine and feminine. It means that 60% chosen as neutral which haven't been represented in any gender. However there are several reasons that influence the participants to judge nonsense words

From the findings, the researcher take assumption to answer the research question that most of the volunteers choose the gender based on the identity of the word, that is to say, which gender that mostly relates with the object that is imaged by the words like who uses the object mostly, who eats the object mostly, who wears the object mostly, etc. This strengthens the opinion that Bahasa Indonesia doesn't have rules related with gender, but it can be haphazardly considered as gendered language by considering the relation between the words and gender in reality. For example some sharp things (paku) can be said to be masculine, and vice versa if the object smells good and beautiful (bunga) it can be represented as a woman.

## CONCLUSION

From the description above, it can be concluded that how Indonesian speakers judge nonsense words by looking at the use and stigma on these objects. Most speakers concluded the word as "neutral" or could not be identified because it can be represented as male/female or also both of them. In addition, the character of the nonsense word also affects the respondent's perspective. In this study, the researcher only used a few participants. For further research, it is better if more respondents are selected and not centered in one location only so that the studies that can be presented will be more varied and detailed. In addition, it is also recommended to analyze nonsense words in forms other than nouns, such as adjectives or adverbs..

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