

Inherent Linguistic Bias against Women in the Dzongkha Language: An Explorative study on Female Stereotyping and Gender Discrimination.

Tshering Yangki & Jigme Dorji

Abstract

Gender discrimination is driven by perceptions and attitudes which are inseparable from the language in which people form their ideas. Language, therefore, is considered to be one of the most powerful means that propagates and reinforces gender discrimination and stereotyping. Language that expresses bias in favor of one sex, and treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner is called a sexist language. In most cases, languages are characterized by the inherent biases against women. Thus, this paper discusses some of the most prominent and common sexism in the Dzongkha Language: sexism in Dzongkha words, proverbs and select-Buddhist texts. Through a feminist stylistic analysis, this paper concedes that the Dzongkha Language, or more specifically certain words, proverbs, and excerpts from Dzongkha literature display an ambivalent attitude towards women – at times displaying patriarchal and even misogynistic views. The findings indicated that gender discrimination indeed remains in the corners of the words and phrases Bhutanese use every day. An observation has also been made on the increasing gender sensitivity in the use of Dzongkha words over the years, which helped to reduce the traditionally super-masculine tendencies in the language. Examples of sexist words and proverbs have been used to illustrate context, and make a case on how language can subtly shape perception. The findings reveal that the sexist tendencies in the national language reflect the existing sociocultural norms and expectations of women in Bhutanese society, with the implications of influencing perceptions regarding women's roles and worth in the society.

Introduction

The increasing interaction with external cultures is often perceived as a potential threat to Bhutanese culture, as the population appears to be swayed by Western ideals and is seemingly drifting from traditional customs. However, an examination of the national language utilized by the Bhutanese may reveal a different narrative—suggesting that the core values and norms have largely persisted, particularly in relation to the use of language and its implications for women.

Similarly, although reports and research point out that gender discrimination in the country is negligible as compared to other countries or especially to the other South-Asian countries, (e.g., Global Gender Gap Report, 2022; Priyadarshini, 2014) a close examination of the language reveals underlying values that support, portray and propagate men's superiority over women.

Like most languages in the world, the national language of Bhutan, Dzongkha contains sexist words and phrases that devalue women's worth. There is no denying that the country has made significant progress in its efforts to make a gender-inclusive society in workplace and politics including many gender-sensitive policies, (e.g., National Gender Equality Policy 2020) but the language and its sexist nature has not been explored (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). According to Catalán, the use of language results in influencing how individuals perceive their society and the norms in that particular society (as cited in Umera-Okeke, 2012, p. 4). Sociolinguists have also recognized that people's socio-cultural behaviors and attitudes as well as thoughts are reflected in their use of the language. Therefore, examining sexism will assist in formulating gender sensitive educational materials, and also implicate policies and language usage in the social realm. This article therefore, explores the tendencies in the national language of Bhutan – Dzongkha – towards sexism, and examine the cultural nuances or norms that incline towards the existence of gender stereotyping in the country. This study recognizes the commonly accepted nexus between gender inequality and socio-cultural and religious context and draws from the work of others on linguistic sexism in other cultures and societies to analyze and interpret some of the most prominent and common sexism in Dzongkha Language: in words, phrases, and proverbs, and in Buddhist literature. An observation has also been made on the increasing gender sensitivity in the use of Dzongkha words over

the years, which helped to reduce the traditionally super-masculine tendencies in the language.

Language and Sexism

Language is a tool for communication; it enables people to express their needs, desires and expectations, making life easier as a result of being able to understand one another. However, language can also be used as a tool to harm a person or a group of people. One area where language is used to such effect is gender discrimination as Menegatti and Rubini pointed out, “language is one of the most powerful means through which sexism and gender discrimination are perpetrated and reproduced” (2017, p. 1). Thus, uncovering asymmetries and inconsistencies in use of language is a prominent approach in studying sexism in language in the feminist critical linguistic analysis (Simpson, 1993). In many societies, it is found to be the case that language is used in a manner that one sex, usually men, is portrayed as more superior one as compared to the other, the women. According to Lei (2006), any characteristics of men appear to be considered as the complete representation for all other humans irrespective of the sexes, which risks making women “invisible” in language or “excluding” women (p. 1). Penelope (1988) further argued on this point stating that the continuation of the use of such sexist language that supposes “women are included” will only exclude women from the “worldly spheres” (p.7). This biased nature of language, shows the historically evolved ways of defining the limits of femininity and masculinity (Cameron,1985).

Sexism, therefore, is interpreted as any behavior, written, spoken or anything else that presents one sex as superior to the other (Umera-Okeke, 2012). This portrayal at times is explicit and accepted, while at other times it is subtle and implied; and in many societies this has been overlooked because of its subtle nature. However, it is found that, “language subtly reproduces the societal asymmetries of status and power in favor of men, which are attached to the corresponding social roles” (Menegatti & Rubini, 2017, p. 1).

Sociolinguists acknowledge that individuals' socio-cultural behaviors, attitudes, and cognitive processes are manifested in their linguistic choices. Consequently, the manner in which language is employed to reinforce male dominance can shape

societal perceptions, positioning females as subordinates and males as superiors. Cameron, in support, asserts “our language is sexist: that is, they represent or name the world from a masculine viewpoint and in accordance with stereotyped beliefs about the sexes (as cited in Umera-Okeke, 2012, p. 4)”. Thus, the focus of research on sexist language has been on its role in perpetuating male dominance (Philips, 1980).

Several studies have examined the presence of sexism in the English language. Both He (2010) and Chen (2016) highlight the cultural biases and unjust attitudes towards women that are reflected in the language. Similarly, Penelope, for instance, argues that phrases like "All men are created equal" or "God created man in his own image" (1988, p.7) perpetuate sexist language by effectively excluding women. Such use of masculine generics, according to Todd-Mancillas (1981) can lead to gender-biased perceptions. Similarly, proverbs in the English Language are also found to contain numerous such examples where women are not only excluded but are derogated and are presented as lowly creatures. The English proverb “He who follows his wife's advice will never see the face of god” according to Lei is of men “stretching” their prejudice towards women, that they are not really equals (2006).

Similarly, women are characterized and stereotyped as beautiful, polite, talkative, inferior and less capable than men in Malay and Korean proverbs (Kim et al., 2019) which reflects the widely accepted prejudice and biased against women in their societies. Sanauddin’s (2015) study on linguistic sexism and proverbs in Paskistan suggests that proverbs present a ‘patriarchal reality’ as a discourse of sexist and patriarchal ideology which interpret and reinforce the view point of the dominant group. These findings on linguistic biases underscore the need for exploring sexist tendencies in different languages. This article thus explores the sexist tendencies in the Dzongkha language which marginalize and belittle women in Bhutanese society, with the implications that these norms reflect the existing sociocultural views and expectations of women, thus affecting the perceptions regarding women's roles and worth in the society.

Methodology

The research adopted feministic stylistics approach to analyze linguistic sexism in Dzongkha language. The materials collected from 30 students and ten Dzongkha

lecturers of College of Language and Culture Studies in addition to the Buddhist literature texts used for undergraduate programme at the college consisted of Dzongkha words, phrases, proverbs, sayings, verses and expressions representing sexism in Dzongkha language. The materials were analysed by adopting selected features from the feminist stylistic (Mills,1995) at word and discourse level; gendered generic words, naming of females and males and how female and male characters are described. To balance the academic and scholarly analysis with everyday perspectives, further interview with Dzongkha speaking elderly citizens was conducted to draw mundane understanding of the women-concerning Dzongkha words and proverbs.

Data Findings

1. Sexism in Dzongkha Words

1.1 མོ་རེངས་མོ། (*mo rengsmo*) is the most commonly used synonym for 'women' in the Dzongkha language. It literally means 'single lady'. However, the word is used derogatively to imply that women are "stupid, ignorant, and dependent."

1.2 བྱ་མེད། (*bud med*); (mi'i gral nas bud cing med pas na bud med). This literally means the 'one fallen from the human race and that does not exist in the human race' is the other common word for women. This word portrays men as a norm for the human species, and women as sub-human or a less of a human.

1.3 ལྷན་བུ། (*skye's bu*) is the Dzongkha word for a person referring to both men and women, the suffix – bu' in the word means a 'son'; a male-oriented, presenting men as human default and our collective identity as masculine.

1.4 ཁོང། (*Khong*) is the Dzongkha collective pronoun for 'They'- is a derivative of 'Kho', masculine pronoun, 'he'. Dzongkha does not possess a third person pronoun which is gender-neutral, rendering women invisible in certain linguistic contexts.

1.5 བུ་གཟི། (*bu gzhi*), Dzongkha word for child is a collective noun with masculine ending.

1.6 འཕུལ་སྒོར་ཅན། (*phrul skor can*) ; is the dzongkha equivalent word for the English word Minx or Coquettish. This word is often used with another suffix as in *Thrukogyem* meaning the 'queen of coquettish'.

1.7 གཞུང་བཞོང་མ། སྤང་འཛོང་མ། ལུས་འཛོང་མ། (*smad tshong malgzhang bysongmallus 'tshong ma*): are the Dzongkha words for prostitute. Driven by the suffix *Ma* the words are female-indicative and means 'she who sells her body'. These words are also used in order to describe women with multiple marriages highlighting their derogatory implication.

2. Sexism in Dzongkha Proverbs

Proverbs are said to offer an important set of instructions for members in every culture. Seller underscored the importance of proverbs as a reflection of culture in the line "Proverbs reunite the listeners with his or her ancestors" (as cited in Samovar & Porter, 2004). Bhutanese conversation in Dzongkha mostly also involves drawing references to age-old sayings, and proverbs. Bhutanese, in fact worship these verbal assertions as source of wisdom to reason out situations, as a rationale for different moves and to explain consequences. While there are Bhutanese proverbs concerning all walks of life, the ones associated with women almost always seems to throw sobering light on their worldly pursuits or put them at the losing end of the argument.

The following is a list of proverbs and sayings in Dzongkha, each attempt to reinforce the degree to which masculine or feminine traits are valued or scorned. They are all direct translations of the original Dzongkha phrases.

2.1 ལོ་དང་མེད་བར་ན་སྐྱེ་བབས་དགུ། སྐྱེ་བབས་དགུ་གི་ལོ་སྐྱེས་མཚོ།

There is a difference of nine births between men and women; Men are higher by nine births.

This proverb reflects a deeply ingrained patriarchal belief that men are inherently superior to women, suggesting a hierarchical gap symbolized by "nine births." In the Bhutanese cultural context, it reinforces the idea that men hold a higher, more elevated status by destiny, perpetuating gender inequality.

2.2 ལུང་མེད་མེད་ན་ཕུང་མེད།

No women, no dispute

2.3 ལུང་གི་རྩ་བ་བྱད་མེད།

The root of discord is women

These proverbs blame women for conflicts and disagreements, reinforcing the stereotype that they are the source of societal problems.

2.4 ལྐལ་བ་ཡོད་ན་བྱ། ལྐལ་བ་མེད་ན་བྱམོ།

If fortunate, boy

If unfortunate, girl

This proverb reflects a deeply ingrained gender bias that assigns value and worth based on a child's gender, reinforcing the stereotype that boys are inherently more desirable than girls. It suggests that boys are seen as lucky or fortunate, while girls are viewed as a burden or misfortune in Bhutan.

2.5 ལྷན་རྒྱུང་ངོ་རིས་ལེགས་ཅུང་། བསམ་པའི་དོན་ཉིང་དུག་མས།

Although a woman's face is beautiful, her heart is venomous.

This saying reinforces a common stereotype about women that suggests that a pretty woman might have a deceptive personality beneath her beauty. It's a stereotype that connects physical beauty with inner flaws.

2.6. བྱི་ལུ་མནོ་ནི་བྱི་ཚོ། བྱོ་ལུ་མནོ་ནི་ལེབ་ས།

Cat only thinks of rat, woman only profit

This proverb portrays women as inherently self-serving or profit-seeker, equating their motivations to a cat's singular focus on catching a rat. Such a viewpoint perpetuates negative assumptions about women's intentions and capabilities.

2.7 ལྷན་རྒྱུང་ལེགས་ཅུང་བྱ་མེད་ས་གཅིག། ལ་ག་ལེགས་ཅུང་འཇུ་མེད་ས་ཅིག།

A maiden's beauty lasts only until her first childbirth, and a worth of a cloth until its first wash.

This proverb suggests that a woman's value is closely tied to her physical beauty which diminishes after childbirth.

2.8 གྲིང་བྱང་མེད་མོ་རྣམས་གསུམ། ཟසན་པ་བཏང་བའི་ཡུལ་ཡིན།

Generosity is meant for dogs, women, and crows.

This saying insults women by grouping them with animals and crows, implying they are dependent and inferior. It reinforces patriarchal views by portraying women as reliant on men.

2.9 ཞམ་སྤྱོད་གི་ལེམས་འདི་སྤར་རི་གང་ར་ཨིན།

Woman's mind is only a fistful

This proverb suggests that a woman's thought or understanding are limited. It reflects a stereotypical view that a woman's mental capacity is limited.

2.10 ལུ་མངན་བདེ་བ་མང། ལུ་མོ་མངན་སྤྱུག་བཟུལ་མང།

More boys, more joy

More girls, more sorrow.

This proverb encapsulates a stereotype that boys are more valuable and bring more joy to families and communities while linking the presence of girls to suffering and burden.

2.11 རོ་གྲིམ་གི་མཇུག་མ་མ་གཡུག་ན། རོ་གྲིམ་གི་རྟིང་མི་བདེ།

If the female dog does not wiggle its tail, the male dog will not follow

This proverb portrays seduction as a nature of women in the sexual relationships or adultery. It reflects a gendered double standard, where women are unfairly judged for immoral behavior, even when men are equally involved.

2.12 ཞམ་སྤྱོད་ཀྱི་རྩེ་ཐབ་ཀྱི་ཚ་བ།

Even if woman is capable, at the hearth is her place

This proverb reinforces the traditional patriarchal view that a woman's primary role, regardless of her abilities or potential, is confined to domestic duties, particularly in the kitchen. This implies that even if a woman is more skilled, intelligent, or capable,

her worth and place are defined by traditional gender roles. This narrative sustains sexism by restricting women's roles to domestic spaces, marginalizing their participation in professional and leadership capacities.

2.13 ཟུང་མོ་བརྒྱུས་ལྷོ་ཆུལ་ནས། རྒྱུས་པ་གཅིག་གི་ལྷོ་ཆུལ་ཆེ།

Intelligence of one man is better than intelligence of hundred women

This proverb reflects a deeply sexist belief that inherently undermines women's intellectual capacity by suggesting that even the intelligence of a single man surpasses that of many women. It perpetuates the stereotype that men are naturally more capable, rational, or superior, while promoting the notion that women are inherently less capable than men.

2.14 ཕོ་ལོ་ལལ་གསུམ་ནས་ལྷོ་མེད། མོ་ལོ་བཙེན་གཞོན་ལྷོ་མེད།

A man isn't old in his sixties.

A woman isn't young at fifteen

The proverb reflects a deeply sexist perspective rooted in gendered double standards regarding age, attractiveness, and societal value. It implies that men retain their youth and vitality longer than women, while women are seen as losing their youthful appeal and value at an earlier age. It reflects a societal hierarchy that devalues women as they grow older, while maintaining a more lenient view toward aging in men.

2.15 མོ་ལོ་ལལ་མའི་ལྷོ་མེད་ལྷོ་མེད།

A single lady's plan is counterproductive

This proverb conveys the sexist notion that an unmarried woman's plans or decisions are inherently flawed or ineffective. It reflects a cultural bias that undermines the competence and agency of single women, suggesting that their ideas or actions are doomed to fail without the guidance of a man.

2.16 ལུ་མོ་ལྷོ་མེད་མ་དགའ་ལ་དང་། ལྷོ་མེད་མ་དགའ་ལ་མེད།

There is no woman who doesn't like wealth and, no dog that does not like meat.

This proverb portrays women as greedy, implying that all women are materialistic and driven by wealth, similar to a dog's instinctual desire for meat. This reflects a sexist view that reduces women's motivations to superficial and self-serving interests, devaluing their moral values.

2.17 བྱང་མེད་མནོ་རྒྱ་རྒྱུང་།

Women's thinking is limited

This proverb perpetuates the sexist notion that women's intellectual capacity is inherently limited. It justifies excluding women from decision-making roles in society.

2.18 བྱང་མེད་སེམས་ནི་འགྱུར་བ་འཇམ།

Women change their mind easily

This proverb reinforces the stereotype that women are indecisive or fickle, suggesting that they are unreliable. It undermines their credibility in decision-making and leadership roles, thereby justifying male dominance in the society.

2.19 རོ་ལས་མོ་སྒྲོང་མཐོ།

Woman sounds louder than man.

This phrase, on the surface, sounds like a praise to women, but it actually implies that women have got no right to sound louder than man, which is an insult to women who are vocal and outspoken, reminding that it should always be men whose voice should be louder, dictating women's domestic subservience.

2.20 མམ་སྐྱ་གིས་དཔོན་འབད་མི་མིང།

Women can never be a leader

This proverb bluntly asserts a sexist belief that women are inherently incapable of leadership, reinforcing patriarchal norms that confine women to subordinate roles. This suggests that leadership is reserved for men and perpetuates gender inequality by restricting access to positions of power for women.

2.21 དག་གཟུགས་ལྷ་བཏགས་པའི་བྱང་མེད།

The body of a woman bears its own enemy

This proverb suggests that a woman's body is a curse. This perspective perpetuates harmful stereotypes that devalue women's physicality and reinforce the notion that their bodies are sources of trouble and shame.

2.22 མོ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་བཟང་། མོ་རང་བཞིན་གྱིས་ངན།

Men are by nature good hearted

Women are by nature evil hearted (Trans, 2022)

This proverb suggests a strong gender bias by attributing inherent moral qualities to men and women, suggesting that men are naturally kind and virtuous while women are inherently malicious or immoral. It reinforces stereotypes that vilify women and idealize men, creating a moral divide between the sexes.

2.23 མོ་ལ་མོ་གིས་བསྐྱར། ཉེ་ལ་སྲུབ་ཀྱིས་བསྐྱར།

A woman controls the direction of a man

A rein controls the direction of a horse.

This proverb suggests that women have a manipulative and controlling influence over men. This reflects a sexist view that undermines women's agency by framing their interactions with men as inherently manipulative and perpetuates a stereotype that positions women as deceptive or cunning.

2.24 མཚན་སྲུ་ལྔ་འདྲུལ་སྐྱོར་རྣམས་ལ་བཙོ་བརྒྱད་ཡོད།

Women have eighteen kinds of coquetry.

This proverb implies that women are inherently deceitful or manipulative, suggesting that they employ various forms of flirtation to achieve their desires. It reinforces negative stereotypes that portray women as superficial and focused on seduction.

2.25 མོ་འཛོམས་སར་རྫོང་གྲུ་མ། མོ་འཛོམས་སར་གཡུ་དྲུ་མ།

When men gather, they break stone. When women gather, they break turquoise.

This proverb undermines women's collaborative efforts by portraying them as futile. It implies that women's unity is counterproductive, associated with damaging precious jewels. In contrast, men's unity is shown as being constructive and productive.

2.26 ལྷོ་མེད་ན་མན་འམ་བཅུ་གས།

If you do not have a maid, bring home a bride.

This proverb suggests that a woman's primary role is as a domestic caretaker. It reinforces traditional gender roles that confine women to household duties, reducing their identity and worth to that of a servant.

2.27 རྩ་དང་རོལ་མོ་རྩུང་བ་ཅིན་ཉན། ཡམ་སྲུ་དང་ཨ་ལོ་དང་བ་ཅིན་ཉན།

Children and women listen better when thrashed

Drums and horns sound better when beaten

This proverb implies that women and children are rightly at the receiving ends of domestic violence, and justifies men physically abusing women to keep her at her best behaviour. This proverb explains Bhutanese society's high tolerance towards violence against women and children.

3. Textual analysis of Buddhist literature texts from the undergraduate Dzongkha course at CLCS. The lines and commentaries from the texts were examined particularly for their portrayal of women and feminine traits. The textual analysis is included because the Bhutanese society places a reverent sacredness on oral communication and people often turn to Buddhist texts for guidance on issues regarding the place of women.

The transliteration of the verses with their direct translation are reproduced below.

3.1 *Synonyms for Women*

There is a famous Dzongkha verse that sums up the synonyms for women from a text called mNgon brJod. The verse goes;

མངོན་བརྗོད་རྒྱ་མཚོ་རྒྱ་ཐོག་ལས། རྒྱ་དམན་སྟོབས་མེད་འཚོང་བྱེད་མ། །གཡོན་མ་བགོད་བྱ་བུད་མེད་མེད།

skye dman stobs med 'ching byed ma g.yon ma bgrod bya bud med ming

Inferior, weak and lust binder, manipulator and object of exploitation are the names of women.

Women are called 'K-maen' meaning inferior by birth than men.

'Thobmaed' is another word to describe women. This word explains the lack of physical strength among women.

Women are also called 'Chin jae ma'' meaning the one that binds men in lust.

'Yoen ma ' is yet another dzongka word, and it means shrewd. It is considered that women folks are shrewd.

'Doe ja ma' which literally means the warmth and they are called so, for women are considered to be an object of exploitation by men. Two of the words from these lines are sexually pejorative terms for women.

3.2 Negative Similes and Metaphors

A poetic composition by a well-known Tibetan poet; Bod mKhas Pa uses simile to compare

women to a summer river and disparages women in the following verse;

རང་བཞིན་མི་བརྟན་གྱི་ལྷུ་ལྷུ་བཞོད་པ་ཅན། །

ལྷན་གྱི་ཐུན་མོང་སྤྱད་བྱུང་གྱུར་བའི་ལྷུ། །

དབྱར་གྱི་ཚུ་སྤང་རབ་ཏུ་རྒྱས་པ་དང། །

ལང་ཚོ་མས་ཀྱང་སྐྱུ་བོ་ཐུར་དུ་འདྲེན། །

*Rang bzhin mi brtan gya g.yu'I bgrod pa can Kun gyi thun mong spyad byar gyur pa'I yul
Dbyar gyi chu klung rab tu rgyas pa dang Lang tsho mas kyang skye bo thur du 'dren
Unreliable and unstable by nature*

Taking unpredictable course of action
An object of common use by all
The rising current of summer river
And the glowing beauty of female youth
Can both lead men downhill

3.3. Prescriptive Roles

A Buddhist text on treaties on kingship ; rGyal Po Lugs Kyi bsTan bCos offers a blueprint on the right way of being women in the following lines :

བྱམ་མེད་ན་མས་ནི་ ལ་དང་ལྷོ་ 'ལྷ་མི་མང་བར།
རང་ཁྱོད་ལྟ་ ལྷ་རྩེ་བ། གཞན་ ཁྱོད་དུག་ ལྷ་ར་ འཛོམས་པ།
ཚགས་ཞིབ་གསོག་འཛོག་ མཁས་པ། བྱན་གཡོག་ལྷུགས་ ལྷོང་བདར་ལེགས་པ།
ལྷུང་ དམན་ས་འཛོལ་ཅིང། ལྷུས་དང་ངོ་ཚ་ཆེ་བ་ཞིག་ དགོས།

*Bud med rnam ni kha dang blo sna mi mang bar rang khyo lha ltar rtsi ba gzhan khyo dug
ltar 'dzem pa*

*Tshags zhib gsog 'jog mkhas pa bran g.yog phyugs skyong bdar legs pa
Chung dman sa 'dzin cing khrel dang ngo tsha che ba zhig dgos*

Women should not have too many words and thoughts.
Should treat one's husband as a god.
Should avoid another's husband like a poison
Should be expert at saving.
Should be very good at managing domestic affairs
Should be humble and modest
And need to be endowed with great sensibility and a sense of shame.

4. Occupational nouns and Conventional titles in the Dzongkha Language

Occupational nouns and Conventional titles in Dzongkha Language are all male-indicative:

- 4.1 Tshongpoen (Shopkeeper)
- 4.2 Lopoen (Teacher)
- 4.3 Dasho (High ranking officer)

4.4 Drangpoen (Judge)

4.5 Azhang Gup

4.6. Mangi Ap

Professions involving power and strength are more associated with men, because these high positions are traditionally viewed as ones qualified only by males. It can be clearly seen that men monopolize the high-status professions.

Men are referred to in occupational terms, while women are more often referred to in terms of their relationship to men. For example, as a 'wife':

Dasho Aum

Lobay Aum

Jinda Aum

5. Observation on the growing gender sensitivity in the use of Dzongkha words

5.1 Mangmi

5.2 Lopoem

5.3 Aum Dasho

These are some of the visible deliberate changes observed in the use of titles and nouns in Dzongkha Language in the recent years, and as such reflects our growing sensitivity in the use of gender-sensitive words in contemporary Bhutanese society, highlighting gender-based language reform mostly through an informal adaptation driven by evolving needs.

Limitation of the Study

This study is by no means an exhaustive inventory of sexist words, phrases, and proverbs in Dzongkha Language, but only an attempt to analyze and categorize common ones. Authors also acknowledge translation discrepancies and the potential cultural nuances lost in translation because certain phrases and words lacked direct English equivalents. In contrast to what this study presents about portrayal of Women in Buddhist texts, scholars have explored and pointed to materials with positive stance towards women in the Buddhist texts.

Discussion and Conclusion

The Dzongkha language, particularly certain terms, proverbs, and excerpts from its literature, reveals instances of discriminatory attitudes towards women, often reflecting patriarchal perspectives. It also speculated that the language may have contributed to the persistence of various forms of institutional and societal discrimination against women, shaped by prevailing beliefs and attitudes. Dzongkha language seem to follow a generic masculine framework, reflecting the existing gender-based stereotypes and gendered power structures. The terminologies described above underscore that, while not overt, gender discrimination in Bhutan lies in the words and phrases Bhutanese use every day, and for lack of research, in ways one may not even be aware of.

The data reveals common stereotypes portraying women as weak and incompetent. Dzongkha terms that describe women take the suffix '*Maen*', meaning inferior. The notions of women being inferior and weak physically, emotionally, and intellectually have made way into the linguistic patterns and vocabulary. This, in turn, shapes cultural norms that create "barriers to the broader realization of gender equality" (National Commission for Women and Children, 2020), particularly limiting women's access to leadership roles as evidenced by women's poor representation in politics for instance (Chhoden & Lhamu, 2020). Common expressions such as *Dra Zhu lu tam bai zam bumead* meaning 'inferior being that bears enemy on her body' propagates this stereotype. So strong is this notion that there is a reinforcement to view women's body as its enemy among men and women alike. The enemy that lures sexual harassment, and abuse. The data also show that many Dzongkha words are constructed indicating strong sexist undertone that supports traditional societal values. The Gendered structure of the Dzongkha language that the data demonstrated proved the finding from similar studies that language reinforces historical worldview of male gender as the default.

The mentioned lines from Buddhist literature also insinuates the Buddhist cultures that perceived women as inferior being and lesser birth. It is also common for Bhutanese women to pray for a better rebirth in a male body. One particular

summation that Buddhist Bhutanese make goes, *thus*: 'May I be reborn a male and encounter Dharma'. Although not exhaustive, the presence of the range of pejorative and misogynistic labels in the data suggests a pervasive sense of sexist beliefs and attitudes toward women in the Bhutanese society. As such, it can be argued that the national language Dzongkha has contributed to reinforcing and perpetuating derogatory and stereotypical ideals about women through the generations subtly shaping how Bhutanese perceive roles and abilities based on gender. The list of words, phrases and proverbs in the data indicate subordination and inferiority as they relate to women. These linguistic patterns have huge bearing on people's attitude about men and women, evident in case of Bhutan from the study undertaken by Gross National Happiness Commission in 2001 that reported "Many women believed that it took nine births for a woman to be reborn as a man". They also said that men were relatively 'more free' and did not experience suffering and pain. Almost all the women said that they "preferred to be born male".

Language as the medium through which people conduct relationships, private and public, is said to bear the precise imprint of our cultural attitudes. Studies on gender discrimination and sexist language have noted that the elimination of linguistic sexism lies in social change. Since much of the current gender-related work in Bhutan focuses on institutionalizing gender-sensitive policies and practices, there is a need to place more emphasis on fostering gender-sensitive values and attitudes. Thus, more analysis of our language would raise awareness on gender-sensitive language use. It is essential for policy-making organizations, including the National Commission for Women and Children and the Gross National Happiness Commission, to incorporate linguistic considerations when formulating gender-neutral policies. Additionally, these bodies should launch initiatives aimed at educating the public to challenge gender stereotypes and foster gender sensitivity in their language use. Furthermore, educational institutions can play a significant role by integrating these principles into their curricula and language policies.

References

Badra, D. (2005). *mNgon brJod rGya mTsho'I Chu Thigs*. KMT Publisher: Phuntsholing.

- Cameron, D. (1985). *Feminism and linguistic theory*. London: Macmillan.
- Chen, Z. (2016). Critical discourse analysis of sexism in English language. *Proceedings of 2016 2nd international conference on humanities and social science research (ICHSSR 2016)*, Singapore. <https://doi.org/10.2991/ichssr-16.2016.79>
- Choden, P. and Lhamu, K. (2020). Bhutanese women in politics: Myths and realities. *Druk Journal, Spring Edition*, BCMD. Thimphu.
- Gross National Happiness Commission. (2001). Gender study in Bhutan. Retrieved from <http://www.gnhc.gov.bt/publications/rep/gpsr.htm>.
- Gyatso, M. (2015). *rGyal Po Lugs Kyi bsTan bCos*. Dharma Publishing: U.S.A.
- Gyeltshen, K. & Phuntsho, N. (2010). *Dzongkha proverbs: Guidelines on usage of proverbs*. Dzongkha Development Training Institute: Thimphu.
- He, G. (2010). An analysis of sexism in English. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, 1(3), 332–335. <https://doi.org/10.4304/jltr.1.3.332-335>
- Jinpa, L.(2001). *Bshes Pa'I sPring Yig*. Sherig Parkhang : Delhi.
- Kim, K. H., Rou, S. Y., Mo, T. I. M. T., & Kim, J. (2019). Female stereotyping and gender socialization through proverbs and idioms: A comparative study of Malaysia and Korea. *Asian Women/Asian Women*, 35(3), 25–44. <https://doi.org/10.14431/aw.2019.09.35.3.25>
- Lei, X. (2006). Sexism in language. *Journal of Language and Linguistics*, 5(1), 87-94. Retrieved from <https://www.semanticscholar.org/paper/Sexism-in-Language-Lei/d03afdaa103c8526b75523cdadbacfd4a4d27041>
- Menegatti, M, & Rubini, M. (2017). Gender bias and sexism in language. [doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.47](https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190228613.013.47)
- Mills, S. (1995). *Feminist stylistics*. London: Routledge
- Mipham, J. (2005). *Norbu Lugs Kyi bsTan bCos*. KMT Publisher: Thimphu
- National Commission for Women and Children. (2020). National gender equality policy 2020. Retrieved from https://www.ncwc.gov.bt/publications/National_gender_equality_policy1583629305.pdf
- Penelope, J. (1988). Prescribed passivity: The language of sexism. Faculty Publications – Department of English. 89. Retrieved from <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/englishfacpubs/89>
- Philips, S. U. (1980). Sex differences and language. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 9(1), 523–544. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.an.09.100180.002515>
- Priyadarshini, V. (2014). Women in Bhutan: Exploring their socio-cultural status in

- the late 20th century. *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress, 75*, 920–927.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/44158477>
- Samovar, L. A., & Porter, R. E. (2004). *Communication between cultures* (Fifth Edition). Beijing: Peking University Press.
- Sanauddin, N. (2015). *Proverbs and patriarchy: analysis of linguistic sexism and gender relations among the Pashtuns of Pakistan - Enlighten Theses*. Retrieved from <https://theses.gla.ac.uk/id/eprint/6243>
- Sczesny, S., Moser, F., & Wood, W. (2015). Beyond sexist beliefs: How do people decide? to use gender-inclusive language? *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 41*(7), 943–954. doi: 10.1177/0146167215585727
- Simpson, P. (1993). *Language, ideology and point of view*. London: Routledge.
- Todd-Mancillas, W. R. (1981). Masculine generics=sexist language: A review of literature and implications for speech communication professionals. *Communication Quarterly, 29*(2), 107–115.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/01463378109369395>
- Tshering, L. (Ed.).(2005). *Bod mKhas sNyan 'Grel*. Gelugpa Students Welfare Committee: Sarnath, Varanasi.
- Umera-Okeke, N. (2012). Linguistic sexism: An Overview of the English language in everyday discourse. *AFRREV LALIGENS: An International Journal of Language, Literature and Gender Studies, 1*, 1-17. Retrieved from <https://www.ajol.info/index.php/laligens/article/view/107910/97744>
- Wangdi, T. (2011). *A rosary of gems: Timeless Bhutanese sayings*. Institute of Language and Culture Studies: Thimphu.
- World Economic Forum. (2022). *Global gender gap report 2022*. Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/publications/global-gender-gap-report-2022/>