Gendered Representations in Language: A Corpus-Based Comparative Study of Adjective-Noun Collocations for Marital Relationships

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Abstract—In language teaching, a study of the corpora gives teachers access to authentic texts and the language of these texts is the language used in real-life communication. Social structures and culture-defined representations of gender influence sexist language or choice of words based on gender bias. Based on the premise that adjectives as 'describing words' help define and express human behaviour, attitude and psyche, this research paper tries to explore and compare collocational behaviour of adjectives using four pairs of female and male nouns for marital relationships (*bachelor* and *spinster, bridegroom* and *bride, husband* and *wife,* and *widower* and *widow*) in the British and the Indian contexts. Considering that these four noun pairs sequentially represent the four stages in a marital relationship, this comparative analysis tries to demonstrate with collocational evidence the categorization of social identity and power distribution, the presence of sexism in language usage, and analyzes and interprets the cultural meanings they embody. By examining the gendered adjective-noun collocational frequencies and dispersions in the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Kolhapur Corpus of Indian English (KC), this paper seeks to present certain key perspectives in gender representations in two diverse socio-cultural and historical backgrounds and analyze how gendered language is used by native and non-native speakers.

Index Terms—gendered language, gendered representation, marital relationships, sexism, power distribution

I. INTRODUCTION

Language as a vehicle of thought espouses and expresses the psyche and the sociocultural milieu in which it is spoken or written. With the advancement in computer technology, some samples of such real-life language across cultures have been converted into recorded resources called corpora that can be effectively used for various types of language analysis. Corpus linguistics focuses on the study of large collections of computerized texts of a specific language (written and spoken) and the texts are often carefully sampled in order to be representative of that language (Baker, 2010a). A true corpus study would often comprise of both qualitative and quantitative methods: "Association patterns represent quantitative relations, measuring the extent to which features and variants are associated with contextual factors. However, functional (qualitative) interpretation is also an essential step in any corpus-based analysis" (Biber et al., 1988, p. 4). The late 1980s witnessed an increased use of corpora in English language teaching and research and its 'authentic' appeal has revolutionized these two areas of applied linguistics.

Authenticity of corpus-based approach to language teaching would mean that it is based on real and actual usage, and on authentic occurrences of language as it is expressed, written and used by English speakers in various contexts. Corpus linguistics relies heavily on computer-based tools and is primarily focused on providing "a ready resource of natural, or authentic, texts for language learning" (Reppen, 2010, p. 4). In second language teaching/learning contexts, an approach of this nature would greatly benefit teachers/learners in understanding the nuances of target language use. The corpus tools help investigate actual usages or the characteristics of certain language genres which effectively contribute toward better syllabus design and more effective classroom practices that further a better understanding of cultural contexts. Since corpora contain statistically proven evidence of the used language, they can hugely impact language teaching and learning (Johansson, 2009; Leńko-Szymańska, 2014). To this extent, this comparative study of two corpora of two different cultures (British and Indian) is an effort to understand the use of words to define marital relationships in specific socio-cultural contexts and thus facilitate better language acquisition and use.

Throughout history, there have been numerous social, political and economic inequalities between the sexes. Language itself is sometimes referred to as 'man-made'. This paper seeks to search for and retrieve these patterns from two English corpora of hugely different social contexts: the British and the Indian. Adjectival collocations for four noun pairs representing marital relationships are the main focus of this study. It is based on the premise that adjectives as 'describing words' help define and express human behaviour, attitude and psyche and that marriage and the stages preceding and ensuing it are very important in every human being's social representation.

II. GENDER ANALYSIS OF CORPORA: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

In the past, a number of studies have examined gendered items in corpora. Kjellmer (1986) considered the collocations of masculine and feminine pronouns along with the words '*man/men*' and '*woman/women*' and analysed their frequency and distribution in the 1961 Brown and London-Oslo-Bergen (LOB) corpora. In 2002, Sigley and Holmes also did a similar study using the Brown and LOB corpora, along with Freiburg-Brown Corpus of American English (1991-2), the Wellington Corpus of Written New Zealand English (1986-90) and the Freiburg-LOB Corpus of British English (1990-1). Both studies revealed that there existed a masculine bias with more 'masculine' items than 'feminine ones' in the corpora. However, Sigley and Holmes made an interesting discovery. They found that over the years there had been a move towards non-sexist language. They reported that there have been reductions in the use of the archaic pseudo-polite term '*lady*' for the female, the all-inclusive term '*man*' for the male, and the '*-cess*' and '*-ette*' suffixes.

A detailed study by Pearce in 2008 (as cited in Baker, 2010b) examined the BNC from a somewhat different perspective. Pearce looked at the collocates of the lemmas of *man* and *woman* and studied which verbs collocated with *man* and *woman* when they occurred as subject or object. He found that women tended to take the object of verbs which denoted sexual violence, coercion and observation such as *rape*, *categorise*, *exhibit*, *monitor*, *regulate*, and *define*. Women were the subject of verbs which constructed them as irritating: *fuss*, *nag*, *cluck*, *taunt*, *annoy* and *berate*. On the other hand, men were both the subject and object of non-sexual violence verbs, collocating with words like *oppress*, *pounce*, *raid*, *ransack* and *betray*. Men were also the subject of seduction verbs like *bewitch*, *captivate*, *charm* and *flatter* (p. 10). While gender differences have been the focal point of many corpus studies, some have found similarities too. Rayson et al. (1997; as cited in Baker, 2010b) note that the differences these studies found only reflect tendencies not absolutes (p. 150), while Schmid (2003; as cited in Baker, 2010b) concludes that for men and women these tendencies do not intersect (p. 219).

More recently, Alghamidi's corpus analysis of gender representation in video advertisements in the Arab context reveals that although the ads do not promote gender sexism, obscene connotations, or opposite gender relationship, they promote conventional notions of the male and female body, a conceptual and emotional image of each gender within the social limitations and ethical laws of the Arab world (Alghamidi, 2020, p. 46). Taking on a wider canvas, the present study aims to compare two corpora (the BNC and the Kolhapur Corpus) of two different cultures and demonstrate with collocational evidence the categorization of social identity and power distribution, the presence of sexism in language, and their cultural meaning while analyzing the adjective-noun collocations for different stages of marital relationships. It is a hope that such a study would further a greater understanding of sociocultural contexts and constructs in both L1 and L2 of language learners and teachers.

III. METHOD

For the purpose of this study, two corpora have been used: one, British and the other, Indian. Both the corpora are fully available online although full accessibility is granted only after a free account with a username and password is created. The British National Corpus (BNC), as detailed in their webpage (Version 3, BNC XML Edition), is relatively a very large corpus when compared to the Kolhapur Corpus (KC) of Indian English. The BNC has both written (90%) and spoken texts (10%) and it is a 100-million-word collection of samples that represent a broad cross-section of British English from the later part of the 20th century. The latest edition is the BNC XML Edition, released in 2007. The written part of the BNC contains extracts from "regional and national newspapers, specialist periodicals and journals for all ages and interests, academic books and popular fiction, published and unpublished letters and memoranda, school and university essays, among several other kinds of text" (BNC, 2009). The spoken part consists of "orthographic transcriptions of unscripted informal conversations, and spoken language collected in different contexts, ranging from formal business or government meetings to radio shows and phone-ins" (BNC, 2009).

The Kolhapur Corpus consists approximately of a million words of Indian written English dating from 1978. It is hosted by a web-based interface called CQPweb (Corpus Query Processor) developed by Andrew Hardie and Sebastian Hoffman of Lancaster University. The texts are selected from 15 categories, parallel to those of the LOB and Brown Corpora. It includes 500 sample texts under the following categories: "press reportage, editorial, and reviews; books on religion, skills, trades and hobbies, and popular lore; Belles Lettres; miscellaneous government documents, foundation reports, industry reports, college catalogue, and industry house organ; learned and scientific writings; general fiction; mystery and detective fiction; science fiction; adventure (western fiction); romance and love story; and humour" (Shastri et al., 1986).

A simple query for a particular word in both the corpora yielded the following information: the number of occurrences of a particular word in the entire corpora and their frequency per million words. However, while it was possible to get the list of collocates from particular word in the BNC through a simple query, it had to be done manually in the CQPweb. However, it was not difficult though by virtue of its comparatively smaller size. Despite being much smaller than BNC, the KC still remains as the only representative corpus of Indian English.

IV. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Does equal frequency mean equal representation of the sexes? It does not necessarily need to be so. Nevertheless, it can indicate, as in this study, how society views marital statuses and sexes representing it. Among the four pairs of nouns for marital relationships, the female nouns seem to be having a higher rate of representation than male nouns in terms of both occurrence and frequency (see Table 1). An interesting phenomenon that emerges from the query is about the data regarding *spinster* and *widow*. *Spinster* has lesser frequency than *bachelor* in both corpora. Both nouns refer to a state of 'separation' before marriage. However, the nouns referring to a state of 'separation' after marriage caused by death of one spouse have completely opposite data. *Widow* has a much higher frequency than *Widower*. It can reveal an interesting societal outlook. A widower is more likely to find a bride and enter into another marriage while the widow is less likely to enter into such a union. Therefore, references to a widow are more pronounced in written and spoken texts. This factor of differences in the frequency of occurrences for *widow/widower* and *bachelor/spinster* can be best explained by a quote from each corpus. In the BNC, we find that "a widower or divorced man was three times as likely to remarry as his female counterpart throughout the period" (GUW, 26); and in the KC "agriculture implies marriage and a bachelor or spinster does not make sense in rural India..." (KOL, J30).

TABLE 1
FREQUENCIES OF GENDERED NOUNS FOR MARITAL RELATIONSHIPS

Gendered Nouns	Number of Occurrences		Frequency per Million Words	
	BNC	KC	BNC	KC
bachelor	416	10	4.16	8.75
spinster	134	4	1.34	3.50
bridegroom	145	13	1.45	11.38
bride	1063	51	10.63	44.65
husband	10581	223	105.81	195.24
wife	16257	340	162.57	297.67
widower	158	5	1.58	4.38
widow	1510	14	15.10	12.26

V. SOCIAL IDENTITY AND POWER DISTRIBUTION

Power is not distributed equally in society. Certain sections possess and impose more power than others. The distribution of power between genders is often uneven. Men, in general, are considered to be physically stronger than women and as natural extension, a large share of wealth and economic and political power is held by men (Jutting et al., 2006). Such asymmetry is evident in the adjectives especially for the nouns connoting the marital status when the man and the woman are together: *bridegroom* and *bride*, *husband* and *wife*. A number of adjectives describing physical strength, violence and endurance are strongly associated with *bridegroom* and *husband* than *bride* and *wife*. They include *forceful*, *perfect*, and *eternal* (Table 3); and *brutal*, *irate*, *bullying*, *errant*, *morose*, *cruel*, and *gallant* (Table 4). Such patterns conform to the social expectation of the male of the species to be active, dominant, aggressive and strong. There are some interesting references to female dominance but usually portrayed in a negative sense. In the BNC, for instance, *domineering* is used for wife but the context is one of ridicule: "They became adept at portraying well-known types such as the domineering wife, her hen-pecked husband..." (A12, 1108). In the BNC, the adjective '*faithful*' collocates with both *wife* and *husband*, but *unfaithful* only with the wife. Interestingly, *unfaithful* collocates only with *husband* in the KC: "...into an unfaithful husband and the arch tempter of the same woman whom he saved" (KOL, J61). This could be a social statement that in a strongly male-controlled society like India only the husband has the license to be unfaithful and not the woman.

Men are apparently stronger than women, and exercise ownership which is possibly the most obvious form of power, especially in a marital relationship. The female tendency as well as social representation is one of being recipients of the exercise of power by others, most importantly through sexual violence and categorization. The most spiteful of all adjectives to denote sexuality, reproductive status and character are reserved for the female. In the BNC, a *spinster* is *sex-starved*, *cold-hearted*, *love-starved*, *over-made-up*, *waspish*, *dried-up*, *nervy*, *repressed*, *jealous*, and *frustrated*; but a bachelor is *eligible*, *hard-eyed*, *happy-go-lucky*, *madcap*, *contented*, *elusive*, and *respectable* (Table 2). A *bride* can be *bartered*, *battered*, *miserable*, *starving*, and *tearful*; on the other hand, the *bridegroom* is *perfect*, and *eternal* (Table 3).

The KC does not seem to possess many adjectives for *spinster* and *bride*. The best possible reason could be what Madhu Kishwar says in an essay titled "Love and Marriage", in the book *Off the Beaten Path: Rethinking Gender Justice for Indian Women*: "We are still heavily steeped in the old Indian tradition which holds that voluntary sexual abstinence bestows extraordinary power on human beings.... Our culture has the remarkable ability to provide special space and respect for women who voluntarily opt out of the sexual, marital role" (Kishwar, 1999; as cited in Trimberger, 2008). A *bride* too has no disparaging adjectives in the KC because in India marriage is highly valued and its purpose is family ties, not coupled happiness. Again, as Madhu Kishwar says in the same essay: "...[I]t takes much more than two people to make a good marriage" (Kishwar, 1999; as cited in Trimberger, 2008). But a wife is meted out a different type of treatment almost similar to the BNC. A wife is *mad*, *cheating*, *battled*, *abused*, *koel-throated*, *dependent*, *terrible*, and *pregnant* (Table 4). A widow in the BNC does not have good standing either (Table 5). She is *grief-stricken*, *distraught*, *disagreeable*, *despised*, and *hysterical*. The widow in the KC does not have many adjectives and this could

be due to a sociocultural factor: "Widows are often considered to be cursed, meaning they are thrown out by their families for fear of spreading their bad luck" (Gye, 2013). They are better left ignored.

TABLE 2
ALL ADJECTIVES REFERRING TO *BACHELOR* AND *SPINSTER*

Corpora	Only for *bachelor*	Only for *spinster*	Both
BNC	eligible, old, confirmed, lifelong, hard-eyed, happy-go-lucky, madcap, steadfast, emaciated, innocuous, hapless, agreeable, elusive, respectable, eternal, handsome, bored, cynical, agreeable, chaste, spotless	sex-starved, cold-hearted, love-starved, over-made-up, home-bound, waspish, gossipy, dried-up, nervy, bespectacled, patronized, archetypal, hearty, perennial, repressed, heterosexual, latent, ineffective, jealous, frustrated, helpful, artistic, formidable	elderly, lovely, eccentric, contented
KC	Confirmed	---	---

TABLE 3
ALL ADJECTIVES REFERRING TO *BRIDEGROOM* AND *BRIDE*

Corpora	Only for *bridegroom*	Only for *bride*	Both
BNC	forceful, nervous, perfect, deceased, eternal, handsome, potential	beautiful, lovely, intended, bartered, suitable, blushing, royal, future, jilted, radiant, unwilling, reluctant, battered, miserable, shy, troubled, desperate, hindu, prudent, starving, tearful, languid	prospective, new, young, future,
KC		beautiful, youthful, young, vivacious, hindu	prospective

TABLE 4
ALL ADJECTIVES REFERRING TO *HUSBAND* AND *WIFE*

Corpora	Only for *husband*	Only for *wife*	Both
BNC	second, dead, devoted, ideal, missing, deceased, debtor, handsome, wonderful, brutal, cuckolded, violent, erring, devastated, loyal irate, snoring, ailing, bullying, beloved, invalid, errant, unemployed, morose, lazy, bereaved, drunken, restless, cruel	pregnant, beautiful, dependent, lovely, beloved, divorced, dutiful, cheating, battled, mad, charming, captive, nagging, waiflike, boring, termagant, abused, unfaithful	estranged, devoted, former, future, loving, wedded, domineering, jealous, faithful
KC	introvert, aroused, dead, wedded, leper, loving, irate, gallant, unfaithful, bigamous, handsome, dumb, hen-pecked, neurotic	extrovert, cold, comely, invalid, beautiful frail, koel-throated, little, lovely, good, talkative, excellent, ambitious, ideal, devoted, terrible, pregnant	future

TABLE 5
ALL ADJECTIVES REFERRING TO *WIDOWER* AND *WIDOW*

Corpora	Only for *widower*	Only for *widow*	Both
BNC	sorrowing, fastidious, eccentric, mature	grieved, grief-stricken, distraught, tragic, ill-adjusted, guilt-stricken, grief-obsessed, disconsolate, mournful, disagreeable, predatory, despised, hysterical	elderly, foolish, childless, wealthy, lovely, importunate
KC	middle-aged	frustrated, young, poor, rich, paralysed	---

VI. SEXISM AND CULTURAL STEREOTYPES

Gender stereotypes, as ordered and culturally shared sets of belief about the characteristics of men and women, include information about physical appearance, attitudes and interests, psychological traits, social relations, and occupations (Golombok, 1994; as cited in Pearce, 2008). For man, stereotypical representations include traits such as competitiveness, adventurousness, independence, rationality and aggression. Physically, the stereotypical male is strong, rugged, and muscular. The woman is co-operative, gentle, dependent, emotional and sympathetic, which stereotypically means she is physically weak (Diekman & Eagly, 2000; as cited in Pearce, 2008). Behaviours and traits associated with dominance and aggression are evident in the collocates of *husband* in BNC as well as KC, since being a husband and wife is the only shared period of marital relationship: *brutal*, *irate*, *lazy*, *drunken*, *bigamous*, and restless. Emotional intemperance, a feminine stereotype, is evident in the *wife*: *mad*, *nagging*, *terrible*, and *termagant*. Physical weakness and subordination of the female is evident from the following adjectives: a *spinster* is *home-bound* and *patronised*; a

bride is *bartered*; a *wife* is *dependent*, *captive*, and *devoted*; and a *widow* is *ill-adjusted*. Adjectives of appearance and sexuality are discriminatory especially between a *spinster* and a *bachelor*: a *spinster* is *bespectacled* and *over-made-up*, but a *bachelor* is *handsome*; a *spinster* is *sex-starved* and *heterosexual* and a *bachelor*, on the other hand, is *chaste* and *spotless*.

VII. CONCLUSION

According to Bradley (2007), gender, as a social construct, is established and reproduced in discourse. Texts, in fact, are products of discourse and a corpus analysis of such texts would certainly reveal culturally prominent patterns of representation (Pearce, 2008). This paper focusing on the collocates of marital relationships is an addition to a growing number of corpus-based gender analyses that have attempted to explore gender discrimination at multiple levels and to redress the subordinate status of the female. A comparative study of this nature can contribute to the process of absorbing the best in different cultures especially when it concerns people's roles in marital relationships. A society's tendency to over-focus on gender differences goes on to impact people's lives. Therefore, it is pertinent for a second language learner to understand and assimilate various socio-cultural factors that impact and define the target language. In this context, the following quote by Sunderland (2004) becomes appropriate: "I do not (have not been able to) abandon the idea of gender as premised on 'difference', nor do I wish to, since it is important not to lose sight of the ways in which notions of gender can adversely affect women's access to important linguistic resources and possibilities of expression…" (pp. 16-7).

From an applied linguistic perspective, a deeper understanding of the role of gendered adjectives in cultural contexts and social power-plays would help in effective language acquisition and use. As a natural extension, learning texts and contexts are hugely influenced by prevalent socio-cultural constructs, outlooks, motifs, and beliefs. Hamdan (2008) in his thesis titled, "*Analyzing Aspects of Gender in English Language Jordanian Basic Stage Curriculum from A Socio-Cultural Perspective*" analyzes in detail various gender-focused researches done on several ESL/EFL texts across the globe and makes an interesting observation: "The unrealistic portrayals of men and women, stereotypes involving social roles, occupations, relationships and actions as well as invisibility of female characters in many EFL texts reflect the unequal power that still exists between genders in almost all human cultures through the history of humanity" (pp. 50-1). It is no surprise that language textbooks reflect the social constructs and contexts of the target language. Therefore, it is necessary for language learners to have a broad sociocultural knowledge of their L2 and a comparative study and analysis of the gendered constructs and representations of their L1 and L2 contexts would be of immense help.

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