



# Language and Inclusivity: A Qualitative Study on Gender Fair Language

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**Abstract:** There are two major goals of this research. Firstly, to confirm the components that affect gender neutral language and secondly, to find out how these components might be adjusted to understand the mindset of the college students on gender neutral language. This study was initiated by implementing qualitative interviews on college students from both government and private colleges in and around the city of Kolkata. The sample size for this study was taken as 40. After the interviews content analysis was implemented followed by data triangulation method for optimal verification of the result. Cohen's kappa was tested to find out the concordance between the author and coder pair. This study focused on six factors which are expected to influence gender neutral language. The factors were language feminization and neutralization, heteronormative perspective of the society, use and effect of language and linguistics, effect of education on gender neutral language, gender equality related to house-hold duties and responsibilities and gender preferences for profession. Respondents agreed that all these factors effect gender neutral language and the factor of effect of education on gender neutral language was totally agreed by all the participants. Through this study the authors determined the concept of gender-neutral language and its perspective among the students. A comprehensive gender-neutral language model has been proposed which is expected to attain gain in future direction of gender-neutral language. The specifications of this study can be implemented on different sample and age group.

**Index Terms - Gender neutral language, college students, education on gender neutral language, gender equality related to house-hold duties and responsibilities, cohen's kappa**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Human language is arbitrary and is formed through social conformity. Language is a crucial carrier of communication and also stores within itself a plethora of ideologies which perpetually mirrors societal and cultural beliefs. Language becomes the bearer of the multiple patterns, norms, and stereotypes of its contemporary times. As the primary features of language is its dynamicity and its diachronic nature, it continuously adapts itself to the societal standards of a particular time and spatial realm. Language subsequently works in coherence with these factors.

According to the American Psychological Association (APA) Gender Stereotype has been defined as 'a relatively fixed, overly simplified concept of the attitudes and behaviors considered normal and appropriate for a male or female in a particular culture. Gender stereotypes often support the social conditioning of gender roles.' Language and gender stereotypes are intricately linked with each other. We unintentionally tend to expose our gender stereotypes in the words that we use in our everyday conversations.

Gender stereotypes are often interwoven with language and are indoctrinated into individuals from the days of infancy when an individual begins to learn a language. Kimmel and Aronson (2017) have discussed how the meaning of gender differs among various groups of individuals be it men or women within any culture at any given point of time and that our experiences are also structured by class, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, and region of the country. A child preliminarily adopts the language that is passed on to him by the primary social group in their life, in most instances this group refers to the family.

Gendered language thus affects perceptions, behavior, and acts as a mirror to social realities. Thus, the association of language and gender stereotypes begins at the initial stages of childhood. This in turn is encoded by the language norms used by other primary and secondary groups in one's life. Language also broadcasts the gender biases we unconsciously or consciously hold with respect to various professions, tasks, and other activities. Educational institutions are also one of the primary groups along with other groups that reinforce gendered stereotypes; Linguistically, gendered examples are introduced into a child's vocabulary at the primary level, thereby reinstating gendered norms and behaviors that are also dominant in the contemporary society, this in turn affects the child's perception of gender in relation to occupational and professional roles.

Gender stereotyping is described by the United Nations as ‘the practice of assigning specific attributes, characteristics, or roles to an individual woman or man solely based on her or his involvement in a social group of women or men.’ Language more than often exercises gender stereotyping due to its lack of inclusiveness. Language thus becomes sexist on accounts of consciously or unconsciously assuming certain traits, professions, and occupations in association to a particular gender thus making these attributes gender exclusive.

Although we try to eliminate stereotype, most often it is the language that we use that reflects a gendered perspective on various topics. Thus, where gendered stereotypes exist as preconceived notions in regard to gender or sex-roles, gendered language, contrarily, reinforces and reflects these ingrained preconceived notions, knowingly and even unknowingly. Gender Fair Language or Gender-neutral language, in stark contrast, is void of sexist connotations and is primarily inclusive and its objective is to do away with linguistic terminology that is inherently gendered and discriminatory.

Gender Neutral Language doesn't only encourage inclusivity but works to eradicate gender biases at the grassroot levels. For this paper the data has been collected from the college students residing in Kolkata city. College students were selected because they are the youth and future of the society. It is extremely necessary to take the view points of the college students.

The present research aims to investigate the factors which affect gender neutral language and secondly, how these factors might be modified to assess college students' perspective of gender-neutral language. The present paper is categorized as follows; first, the theoretical background of the study is discussed, followed by the methodology used. Then, the results of the study are presented along with the discussion and implication. At the end, the report concludes with the shortcomings of the study and recommendations for the future research.

## II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This theoretical background provides a picture of how we are using gender fair language and gender inclusive language in our day to day lives. These are major topics in the field of sociolinguistics which are now being discussed. Literature reviews related to ‘Gender fair language (GFL)’ and ‘Gender inclusive language’ are provided below. In a research by Harris, Blencowe and Telem (2017), it has been suggested that language-induced stereotyping can be strenuous to overcome. Even though it has been clearly stated that the masculine generics, for instance, he/him should include all genders, the usage of male pronouns have caused readers to imagine it to be referred to men. In an example, a group of college students were asked to complete sentences about professionals using the gender-neutral.

The college students have reported portraying fewer men in comparison to those who have completed the sentences using he/him, even when both the groups were clearly informed that pronouns were meant for men and women. There is a drawn conclusion that societies with gendered language consistently show greater gender disparity than societies with neutral language. Taking the aforementioned study for instance, the Russian/Spanish-speaking participants on the social attitude scale, they showed more sexism than their English-speaking counterparts.

Similarly, by using the Global Gender Gap Index, which measures national gender gaps based on economic, political, educational, and health-related criteria. Bosson, Prewitt-Freilino, & Taylor (2005) have indicated that countries where more than 70% of the population spoke a gendered language, they have scored lower on both the overall index and on economic subscales. In this context, it shows that language not only reflects and defines culture, but it helps shape cultural norms.

A study by Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser (2016) studies the use of the gender-unfair language, especially while referring to those of masculine generics, which have restricted the visibility of women as well as the cognitive availability of female exemplars as stated by Stahlberg et al., (2007). This might have been disadvantageous for women. For example, in personnel selection. This can be corrected by enhancing women's visibility by the use of novel feminine forms (Stout & Dasgupta, 2011). However, even this may have negative consequences. Therefore it should, for example, be prevented in women's professional self-reference (Horvath, Merkel, Maass, & Sczesny 2016)( Formanowicz et al., 2013 ). As a result, when women avoid using the gender fair language such as avoiding the feminine job titles in grammatical gender languages just as to defend themselves from accusations of incompetence and lower status. This will also help to keep gender stereotyping and social discrimination at bay. The main aim of Gender-fair language (GFL) is to reduce gender stereotyping and gender discrimination.

There are two approaches that can be used to make gender-fair improvements in both written and spoken language, ensuring that women and men are treated equally. Neutralization and feminization are the two ways in which we can reduce gender discrimination and stereotyping. When male-masculine forms like (policeman) are replaced with gender-unmarked forms like (police officer), neutralization occurs, while feminization occurs when feminine forms are used to make female referents visible (i.e., instead if salesman the term sales women is used). The most fundamental asymmetry is in the usage of the masculine generics. Taking for example, in the English language the generic ‘he’ can be used when gender is irrelevant (e.g., the user... he). This pseudo-generic ‘he,’ i.e., the use of ‘man’ to refer to all of humanity, implies that all humans are male. Hence, this masculine form not only designate men but also mixed-gender groups as well as other groups whose gender is unknown, uncertain or unspecified (Stahlberg et al., 2007).

Feminine forms unlike male forms do not operate generically, they are exclusively used to refer to women and females. (Hellinger and Bufmann, 2001). Masculine forms are and were used to represent all human beings is in accord with traditional patriarchy, which allows men to have more power and higher social status than women (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). A large-scale content analysis research of 800,000 Reuters news messages published in English between the time span of 1996 to 1997 indicated that the pronoun

'he' was more frequently used than 'she' in the newspapers and media and also appeared to have of more positive contexts associated to it (Sendén, Sikström, & Lindholm, 2015).

Gender-fair language (GFL) was introduced in order to reduce the structural asymmetry and a broader attempt to decrease stereotyping and discrimination in the field of language (Fairclough, 2003; Fasoli, Maass, Paladino, & Sulpizio, 2017). GFL seeks to eliminate asymmetries in referring to and discussing women and men by replacing masculine forms (policeman) with gender-unmarked forms (police officer), or by using both masculine and feminine forms (i.e., the applicant... he or she rather than that of the applicant... he). Language plays a significant role in shaping an individual's behaviour and attitudes. Moreover, the language that are used by mentors and educators in academic fields are also extremely influential and provides a model for students and society as a whole. Words often unconsciously reflect preconceived and incorrect notions about the gender roles, hence conscious effort should be made to use language that acts against stereotypes, constrains, or excludes other minorities. Language encodes gender, and this may be associated with social gender equality (Stahlberg et al., 2007). This hypothesis was tested in 111 countries with various language systems (Prewitt-Freilino et al., 2012).

In the research, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index was used to determine gender equality (Hausmann et al., 2009). According to the results of this study, countries with grammatical gender languages have lower levels of social gender equality than countries with natural gender languages or genderless languages. Further, a survey conducted by Wasserman and Weseley (2009) on 'sexist attitudes' provided further evidence for this relationship.

When the survey was conducted in a grammatical gender language such as (Spanish or French), respondents (native speakers of English as well as bilinguals) expressed more sexist attitudes than when the survey was conducted in a natural gender language (English). These results indicate that grammatical gender languages (Spanish or French) present a rather complex and difficult case in terms of gender-fairness or gender equality. The masculine generics such as 'He' elicits a male bias in mental representations, according to research, and this causes readers and listeners to focus on male figures and attributes rather than female exemplars (Stahlberg et al., 2007). The effects of linguistic forms on mental representations were measured using various experimental methodologies. For instance, Jacobson and Insko (1985) conducted a study in which participants were asked to complete sentences in a passage or paragraph using various pronouns and nouns (e.g., he, she, he/she, the prosecutor, the client, etc.).

After perceiving gender-related (e.g., mother, father, nurse, doctor) or gender-neutral primes, Banaji and Hardin (1996) assessed reaction times when classifying gender-related (such as he, she) or neutral pronouns (such as it, me) as female or male (e.g., parent, student). The masculine bias in language has been observed in English (Crawford and English, 1984; Gastil, 1990), French (Chatard et al., 2005; Gabriel et al., 2008), German (Heise, 2000; Irmen, 2007), Italian (Cacciari & Padovani, 2007) and Spanish (Carreiras et al., 1996). Vervecken et al. (2013) observed in his study that when job titles were described in the masculine form (e.g., German Ingenieure, masculine plural of 'engineers'), school children's views of traditionally male employment were affected by the grammatical forms of job titles. In another study, Adult speakers imagined more men in a job as job ads featured more masculine than feminine types (Gaucher et al., 2011). Overall, the validity of the result is supported by the variety of methods used as well as the number of languages for which the male bias of masculine generics has been documented.

### III RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study was carried out by using a qualitative approach. Initially a pilot study was done with 50 college students (Hertzog, 2008) residing at different parts of Kolkata. A pilot study is mainly initiated to validate the constructs available in the extant literature and secondly, to search for new items if possible, to achieve the objectives of the current research. During the pilot survey, heteronormative perspective of the society and gender equality related to household activities', are some of the factors included by the participants.

Based on the results of the pilot survey, a semi structured questionnaire was prepared by the researchers to determine the factors which affect gender neutral terms. With the help of google individual in-depth interviews were conducted and the sessions were all recorded with prior permission from the respondents. Students were selected using a qualitative sampling frame in order to have a wide range of demographic characteristics. Purposive sampling was used to collect the data. 8 different colleges of Kolkata city were selected for data collection procedure. It included only the government and privately owned colleges across the city.

Different colleges were selected because of difference in culture and curriculum. Government colleges have their own rules and regulations which are different from the privately owned college. After taking consent from the participants, the interviews were recorded. The size of the present study is 40 (18 males and 22 females). It included both undergraduate and post graduate students. The demographic characteristics of the samples in the present study are illustrated below in the table. (Table I)

Table 1: Demographic profile of the respondents (n=40)

Demographic profile	Description	No. of respondents	Frequency
<b>Age</b>	18-20	11	28%
	20-22	21	53%
	22-24	8	20%
<b>Gender</b>	Male	18	45%
	Female	22	55%
<b>Educational qualification</b>	Undergraduate	23	58%
	Post graduate	17	43%
<b>Family type</b>	Joint Family	19	48%
	Nuclear Family	21	53%

According to Marshal et al. (2013), a sample size of 40 can be used if the researchers are able to devote sufficient attention and time to thoroughly analyse the results. According to some researchers, the sample size may be as large as 20 or even more. Trotten (2012), on the other hand, stated that there is no specific limit on sample size and that it is entirely dependent on the researchers' vigilance.

After reviewing all the proposals finally, the researchers thought of selecting 40 as the sample size for the final study which was expected to give a detailed knowledge on the topic. Before the interview, a rapport was developed with the respondents so that they can be comfortable during the interview. Data collection was followed by construction of coding manual. The authors present a coding manual, and a different coding manual is created by an independent coder. Following each build, a table was created containing the frequently accepted items by the respondents.

A pair of responses were arranged in a two-way contingency table for each construct, for a total of 6 constructs to calculate the study's objectives. If both the authors and the coder gave the same rating to an object, they agreed on it. Cohen's kappa was used to assess inter-rater reliability for these variables. A kappa value which falls between 0 to 0.20 falls under 'slight' agreement, 0.21 to 0.40 which indicates a 'fair' agreement, a value of 0.41 to 0.60 could be put under 'moderate' agreement, 0.61 to 0.80 indicated 'substantial' and finally 0.81 to 1.00 was referred to as 'almost perfect' (Landis & Koch, 1977).

## DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### *Language feminization and neutralization*

The respondents were asked about their views on the people working in the sales department. This construct aimed at understanding the respondents' perception on the sales profession and how they would refer to the people working in the sales. The respondent's answers focused mainly on the qualities that a salesperson should possess like 'good communication skills', 'they should be presentable', 'charming', 'confident'. Most of the participants leaned towards gender neutral terms such as 'salesperson', few participants used the term 'salesman' for their response. This indicates that the perception of the job of a person working in the sales department is somewhat gender neutral and most participants were concerned with the characteristics required or demanded from the job. This shows us the increase in language neutralization among the student population. Neutralization is when gender-unmarked forms like (salesperson or salespeople) is used instead of the male-masculine forms like (salesmen). We can therefore say that the college graduate students have shown less biasedness towards a specific gender because they have chosen gender neutral languages mostly.

Some participants were also used two terms simultaneously, like few of the respondents replied by saying:

*'I would refer to them as salesman or saleswoman depending upon the gender of the person.'* *'They can be called as salesmen or salesperson.'*

Similarly, it was also observed whether participants used gender biased terms to address the people working in the police department. Most of the participants have used a gender-neutral term 'police officer' 'police person', 'protector', to to imply the people in the police department. However, a fair number of respondents have used the term, 'policeman' and one has used the title 'sir'. Thus, we can observe that people are still using male centered words that is only inclusive of male population and there are no representations for the female population. This brings to light the issue that one can unlearn gendered language or vocabulary and most importantly



also highlights how gender bias association with occupation can be indoctrinated and how we as a community are taught to associate certain jobs to strict and exclusive gender binaries.

From the above aspect we can observe that the gender-neutral inclination may have risen due to societal promotion of the job for a both genders. In terms of linguistics, the ideology of 'political correctness' is rooted in an effort to eradicate language-based exclusion of different identity groups. Our perception is influenced by our thought processes, which are conditioned by the language we use every day, according to the Sapir-Whorf, or Whorfian theory.

Language shapes our experience in this way, educating us about how to think about and react to it. Language frequently exposes and reinforces our prejudices. As a result, using sexist language encourages discrimination, while using racial language promotes racism, according to the study. The European Parliament was one of the first international organizations to introduce gender-neutral language standards in 2008, in order to accommodate all genders equally. Since the 1980s, attempts have been made to propose a gender-neutral/genderfair/non-sexist use of language, such that no gender is favored and biases against either gender are not perpetuated.

According to the European parliament '*words that are not gender-specific refer to people in general, without mentioning women or men ('chairman' is replaced by 'Chair' or 'chairperson', 'policeman' or 'policewoman' by 'police officer', 'spokesman' by 'spokesperson', 'stewardess' by 'flight attendant', 'headmaster' or 'headmistress' by 'director' or 'principal', etc.).*'

### ***Heteronormative Perspective of the Society***

The next construct aimed at understanding the heteronormative mind sets of the respondents when it comes to marriage and relationship status. 47.05% respondents have used gender neutral terms in order to address the partner of a male friend who is married. These terms mostly include 'spouse' and others include 'partner', 'friend' which not only brings light to gender inclusivity but also is inclusive of all sexualities and free from stigma. 52.94% respondents have used the title 'Mrs.' to denote the same have not only a gendered assumption of the partner but a 'conventional' heteronormative approach to gender and the social institution of marriage. The responses in the two areas do not differ by a lot, we observe that within the youth there is still a slight inclination towards the assumption that a male can marry a female or the opposite sex and not someone of a different gender or same sex.

According to the International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Intersex poll in 2016; Association, 35% of Indian people were in favours of legalizing same-sex marriage, with a further 35% opposed. A survey that was carried out by the Varkey Foundation found that support for same-sex marriage was higher at 53% among 18-21-year-olds individuals.

### ***Use and effect of language and linguistics***

The next construct that the researchers have tried to delve in detail is regarding gender neutral pronouns. In the LGBTQ+ community some people consider themselves to be gender fluid and that is why they may not go by the binary pronouns he or she, instead they choose the pronoun 'they'. This question aimed at investigating the awareness about gender neutral pronouns and their usage in real life. 64.8% respondents replied by saying that they were aware of gender - neutral pronouns and they mentioned the pronoun 'they' while answering this question. However, when asked how they would use the gender-neutral pronoun in everyday life, most of them replied by saying '*to refer to a group of people*', '*mainly to emphasise on plurals.*' Very few people replied by saying:

*'.....to refer to the people who don't abide by any gender, or associate themselves with any male or female.'*

*'.....generally, gender fluid people are called they.'*

*'In the LGBTQ+ population 'they' is used to refer to the gender fluid people.'*

29.7% of the respondents were not at all aware of any gender-neutral pronouns, neither were they aware about their usage or applications in everyday life. The responses of this question showed us that most of the respondents are aware of the gender-neutral pronouns but lack of awareness of the usage of gender-neutral pronouns were observed.

In the field of marketing and business gender neutral pronouns are being used '*Brands are becoming gender-neutral by dropping he/she and using they, them and theirs. Dating apps are now paying close attention to pronoun use, not only to be inclusive, but to give the right message,*' says Lalitha Jaiswal, brand analyst. MNCs and global businesses are also promoting the usage of the gender-neutral pronouns, for example Tinder has 37 gender options on its app, but it also encourages gender-neutral pronouns for their employees and users. In 2018, Google introduced a feature that will no longer auto-suggest pronouns that indicate a specific gender. Respondents have mostly affirmed to the influence of gender on language development and linguistics. The responses highlight how language as a system is socially constructed to conform to gender norms and given that the society is inherently patriarchal, language has come to be imbalanced and conforms to patriarchal ideologies. 70.2% respondents agreed to the fact that gender can influence language development and linguistics and 24.3% respondents disagree to the fact that language had any influence on linguistics. Few of the responses by the people who agreed with the questions gave replies like:

*'.....due to the social change and a vast spectrum of different genders, language is also changing to meet those necessary demands.'*

*'Gender neutral words are used for example we use the word actor for to refer to both male and female actors.'*

*'.....due to today's time and day gender has an impact on language development.'*

*'I think girls use more intellectual vocabulary than boys, boys use less adjectives and are less expressive.'*

*'..... girls speak with a sweeter tone and pitch than guys, boys have a harsher and a deeper tone while they speak. So, I feel girls are delicate when it comes to pronouncing the words and boys have a rougher edge to them.'*

Few respondents were not sure but provided an example of how we as individuals are taught to address certain professions in a gendered way and we too become aware of it. In addition to those others still remain unsure if gender truly has an impact on language development and linguistics and hence, we see an existence of ambiguity and unawareness about the relationship between gender and language development or linguistics. The responses also record the subjective perception pertaining to the questions and adds what individuals might also tend to associate certain professions and thing with the gender that they personally identify with. Thus, language can be seen as gendered from the grassroot level.

According to Coates (1988), the research on language and gender is divided into studies that focus on dominance and those which concentrate on difference in language features of men and women. Additionally, the person who first pioneered in this field was Lakoff (1973) whose work confirmed that women's speech had some features that were different from men's speech.

### ***Effect of Education on Gender Neutral Language***

The present researchers believed that education plays an essential role in gender neutral grammar and vocabulary. The aim of the question was to find out what the participants thought about the present education system and how the education system helps us develop our language and vocabulary. Language having been the first thing a child learns ends up indoctrinating a gender exclusive language if taught so. We end up perceiving gender and its relation to other things such as professions and other activities partly because of what we learn at school. Most participants came up with different opinions and diverse perspectives.

Few of the responses of the students on this construct are as follows:

*'..... students should be taught about gender neutral vocabulary and grammar at school, you need to be educated to use the gender-neutral grammar.'*

*'Children should be exposed to the different words and vocabulary.'*

*'..... education should be more inclusive, and language should be inclusive too.'*

Overall, for this construct respondents agreed to the fact that education does have an impact on gender neutral grammar and they explained that education plays a significant role in our lives and one learns mostly everything from their educational experience, the way the faculties around us communicate definitely influences gender neutral grammar.

Most respondents firmly confirm that the school curriculum doesn't influence gender neutral terminologies as they do not do anything to reinforce gender neutral language or gender fair language. This indicates that at the fundamental grassroots level, inclusion of gender-neutral vocabulary and proper education about neutral words is lacking and hence providing more room for stereotypes and other gender stigmas to grow.

We can thus see that even though educational institutions have the potential to include gender fair language in their curriculum and enhance understanding and implementation of a gender inclusive language, they fail to do so. Furthermore, this affirms that school as an institution does play a major role in the language one develops and the perception of various social norms but unfortunately end up promoting a gender exclusive and gender binary conforming language that reinforces stereotypes, bias and prejudice in young minds without realizing the impact of it.

### ***Gender Equality related to House-hold Duties and Responsibilities***

The next construct tries to investigate the gendered and stereotypical lens pertaining to household activities. Almost all the respondents preferred both genders to participate in household related activities, two of the respondents, however, said they preferred women in the domestic space. This indicates an awareness of the stigma surrounding responsibility of household tasks and the probability of unlearning such norms that ones have been conditioned to. Furthermore, in another respondent's case: continuous exposure to a particular gender (female) employed in household activities from a young age has given rise to the preference of females in the domestic space. *'More than 90% of Indian women participated in unpaid domestic work at home in 2019 compared to 27% of men. On the other hand, only 22% of women participated in employment and related activities compared to 71% of men.'* As mentioned by The Hindu website.

The rigid association as well as repeated and routine like exposure of only females in the household sphere might condition people into associating that gender with that task. Similarly, this may apply to any other profession too. The preference for the female gender only singularly for household activities indicates a strong conventional gender bias and prejudice as well as sheds insight into our patriarchal society and the conventions people have grown into and are thus accustomed to. Most of the respondents who have opted for both, all or no gender, indicate a break from stereotypical learning as a call for individual responsibility and participation in matters such as these, given it is the responsibility of every individual irrespective of their gender to contribute to the household tasks. Another respondent believes that there should be no preference and these tasks should be assigned to individuals based on their ability to perform them and their willingness to do so, and not on the basis of their gender.

Some of the participants however came up with different perspectives when answering the questions. Few of the responses given below indicates the different viewpoints:

*'.....it depends on how the society works.'*

*'In case of household work we relate it to women but in case of the commercial world we relate it to the men, like the chefs are mostly men and not women.'*

*'I think women are more creative in nature so they have a different approach in working like decorating, cooking and males are more mechanical in their approach so they can fix a tap in the house or get things repaired so it depends on the tasks in the household.'*

### **Gender preferences for Profession**

The last construct aimed at exploring the gender preferences related to specific professions. The professions which were incorporated in this study were people working in the army followed by the teaching profession and doctors. Most of the respondents went ahead with the idea that a man is fit for the armed forces and showed a gendered (male-leaning) conception of an individual working in the army. Words associated include 'male commandos', 'tall man', 'huge muscular guy', 'manly figure which is not very feminine' and more. One respondent even accounted that prior to exposure, the image in their head was that of a male but now after answering the questions replied with female. These responses show an inclination towards the male gender for the profession and indirectly dub it as a man's job.

We can thus see that the perception regarding individuals working in the army is gendered, and patriarchal. It also indicates that there are certain gendered physical standards and traditionally gender associated traits that are associated with individuals working in the army. The overall response also indicates an indoctrination of stigma regarding the gender of the individuals working in the army. Thus, we can see a strong stereotype and gender exclusive image and association when it comes to individuals working in the army as well as indoctrinated perception of those working in the army and singular association of one particular gender with the profession. The remainder of the response indicate a gender-neutral image.

While stating the pronouns for the teaching profession 48.8% expressed 'she/her' denoting a gender exclusive view that women are often perceived for the role of a teacher and majority of the views are biased. 27% respondents used a gender-neutral pronoun which includes an inclusive perception free from gender bias in terms of occupational role and 24.3% respondents have chosen 'he/him'.

40.5% of the respondents used the pronouns 'she/her' for the role of a physician. 10.8% respondents used a gender-neutral pronoun which includes an inclusive perception free from gender bias in terms of occupational role and 43.2% respondents have chosen 'he/him'. This goes to show that there still exists a lot of gender stigmatization surrounding the professions. A kappa value of 0.683 was found out which falls under 'substantial' agreement between the authors and the independent coder (Landis & Koch, 1977). This result portrays and proves the validity of the construct wise items which were accepted by all the respondents.

### **CONCLUSION**

From the above study we can come to certain conclusion. There was a greater use of genderneutral terms and words among the college students. This shows the rising use of 'neutralization', neutralization is when gender-unmarked forms like (salesperson or salespeople) is used instead of the male-masculine forms like (salesmen). A significant number of college students still view the world through their heteronormative mindsets because when asked the question 'What word would you use to refer to the partner of a male friend who is married?' most answered 'wife' or described female features, instead of using gender neutral terms like spouse or partner. Most of the college students were not aware of gender-neutral pronouns and their usage in the LGBTQ+ community. The usage of gender-neutral pronouns were also less.

Majority of the college students agreed to the fact that gender has an influence on language development. Almost all the college students believe that education has a major role to play when it comes to gender neutral language and changes in the education system is also very important when it comes to the encouragement and promotion of gender inclusive language. Most of the college students preferred both the genders to participate in household related activities. Overall awareness about gender neutral language is less. We need to use more inclusive language in our daily life and also make people aware about their usages in workplaces and educational institutions and communities.

### *Limitations and Future Scope of the Study*

Certain shortfalls of this research are listed. The study focused on the student population, and the data was collected from 40 students ages ranging from 18 to 24 years old. Thus, the study was limited to a specific age group. It is expected that if the age range was increased then the result might have been different. Due to the current situation of the pandemic, telephonic interviews were conducted instead of face-to-face interview.

Report was built up through social media and over telephonic conversation. This might have affected the responses of the interviewees although the researchers tried their best to make the respondents comfortable. The data was collected from Kolkata city which is a metropolitan. Respondents from different metropolitan cities might have various viewpoints.

### *Implications*

The main aim of this study is to establish the influence of language on perception of gender and occupational studies, to determine the role of education in the inculcation of the gender fair language/reinforcement of gender exclusive language, and to determine the perception of gender and occupational roles exposed through the use of language in daily discourse.

Only a few researches have been conducted in this specific field, and it is very necessary to raise awareness about gender neutral language. Many jobs are associated with a particular gender. The jobs should not be gender specific but should include each and every gender. By conducting this research study, we help to bring about awareness in this specific field. It strives to bring about change in the mindset of the people and how they perceive gender as a whole. It also strives to bring awareness to the importance of being knowledgeable about the various gender that are present today and to use the preferred pronoun towards certain people. In recent years, we've learned that there are a variety of people who choose to use gender neutral pronouns and words instead of referring to themselves as male or female. This study also indicates that, for the youth's improvement and awareness, the educational system needs to update and alter those stereotypical thoughts.

The mindset of the students was studied and keenly observed to understand their perspectives and agendas. The youths are the future of our society hence their views are extremely essential for the progression of mankind. Moreover, Kolkata city, being a metropolitan was also taken into consideration by the researchers. It was assumed by the researchers that people residing in a metropolitan city would have better knowledge and understanding of gender-neutral language.

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