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# Women Changing Language

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## Women Changing Language

Anne Pauwels (1998)

London and New York: Addison Wesley Longman

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This book is concerned with language planning and language reform. Language planning is defined as “coordinated measures taken to select, codify and, if necessary, to change the grammatical, lexical, or semantic features of a language and to disseminate the corpus agreed upon.”

The author starts from an unquestioned and unquestionable feminist perspective. Object of study is language change, examined, discussed and then overruled: language *is* sexist and reflects the sexes' unequal status. The author, with her, question what can and should be done about it. Feminist language planning stems from a linguistic motivation. It involves analysis of the problem followed by modification, replacement of words and expressions.

There have been many books and articles on this subject, witness the lengthy bibliography.

out among the better documented, with the main conclusions of many studies reported on student/scholar to conduct such studies (there is no lack of material!) and realise for him/ the merit of examining the workings of sexism in several languages, including lesser known language does not prove necessary. This highlights the fact that sexist practices reflect a common norm (generic use of male terms to designate all human beings), women as a deviation from relations between grammatical gender and linguistic (and extra linguistic) sexism, lexical g

In chapter 2, Anne Pauwels examines how sexism works in language. She uses a number of language and EFL/ESL), the mass media, law, religion and other domains. All this data is fed to feminism, and particularly to language issues from a feminist point of view. The evidence needed to eradicate sexism from language (and society) can be measured by the degree of ]

In the next two chapters, after wondering if sexist language should be changed, the author in which this has been done and can be done, examining the respective merits of the solutions which agencies are most likely to implement language change.

Chapter 6 discusses the difficulties faced by language reformers, and the various arguments of its urgency: denial that sexism in language exists, accusations of censorship or attacks against (accompanied by a refusal to see that language is not static, that it is continually evolving), compared to other areas of discrimination against women, ridiculing the proposed language reform.

Finally, chapter 7 attempts to assess whether progress has been made, whether change has been made, far from it. In many areas, nothing has changed. It particularly breaks my French even further behind many countries in this domain. Anne Pauwels shows how the most of advances at all. For example, the use of Ms. is often introduced as yet another category, which merely points out a woman as a feminist! Or the use of the suffix *-person* (as in *chairperson*) seem to have occurred mostly in written language, where they are both easier to use and more frequently than men.

Still, Anne Pauwels tries to find ground for hope in spite of the strong resistance that language reform faces. To gauge the impact of language reform, she thinks the greatest impact has been on raising awareness. Furthermore, she feels that the actions in favour of language reform have at least “established a new meaning, no longer satisfied with being consumers of language” (p. 223).

While this book may not break new ground, it offers a very comprehensive approach to the topic, is readable, and provides enough repetitions and summaries to ensure that the messages stick. It is a must-read for lecturers in sociolinguistics and women’s studies, of course, but it should also be prescribed

teach native or foreign languages. It is especially important for teachers of English, as projects have been discussed for nearly three decades now, and these countries have seen more success

Language is a very sensitive, very personally-felt issue; touching it causes reactions that are often difficult. School is definitely the place to start raising awareness in those matters.

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