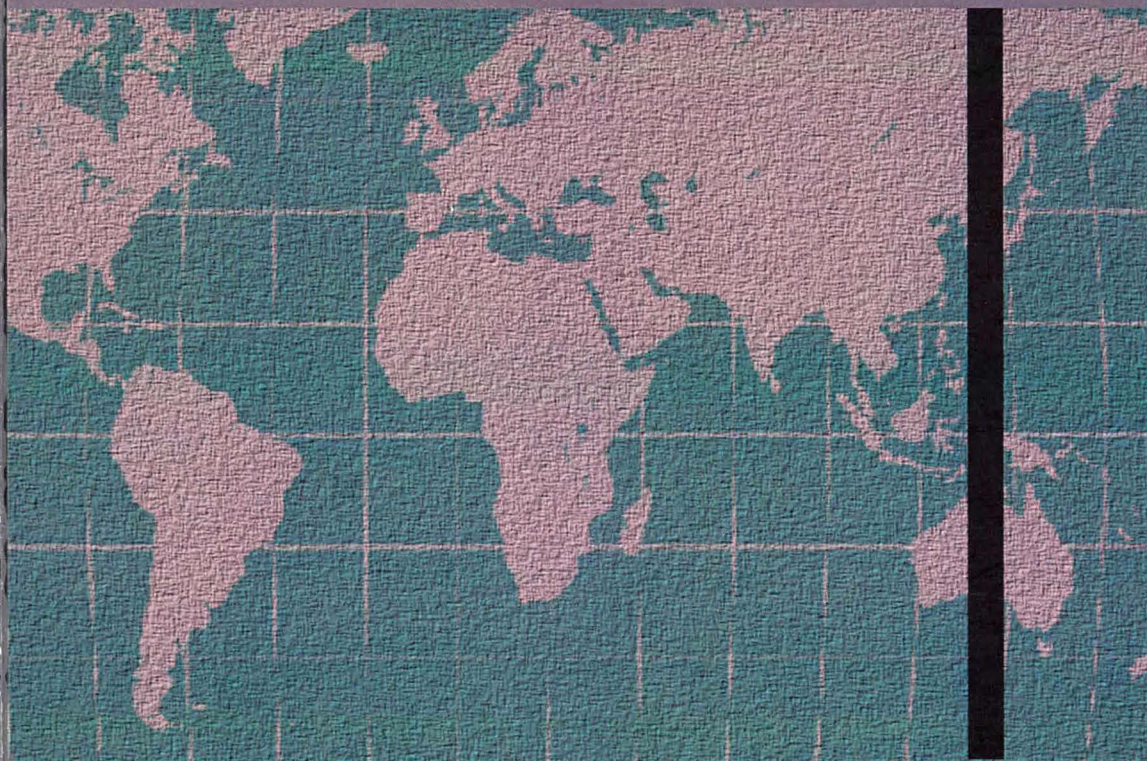


CROSSING BOUNDARIES



**Musings on Language, Literature
and Culture**



IIUM Press

Edited by Md. Mahmudul Hasan

Crossing Boundaries

Musings on Language, Literature and Culture

Edited By

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CHAPTER 4

Awareness of Gender-sensitive Expressions in the Print Media: A Study of Malaysian English Dailies

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Abstract: Most contemporary and sensitive English language users, especially women and those who are careful not to be misunderstood as insensitive language users, do not consider ‘men’ to be synonymous with ‘people’. Therefore users of the English language, and for that matter any language, have to be mindful about the ways gender is expressed in discourse. This paper will deal with the December 2009 print and online editions of some Malaysian English dailies. The study is primarily focused on nouns which are gendered in a way regarded as inappropriate because the noun refers to the wrong gender, or it is expressed in such a manner that it excludes one of the two genders, when both should be rightly included. The paper will confine itself to local (Malaysian) news items. It will elaborate on language use deemed to be sexist and on the proper use of non-sexist language. The findings are expected to bring about greater awareness of gender-sensitive usage of language and lead to its appropriate manifestation in the print media.

Keywords: Sexist language, gender-neutral language, media discourse

Introduction

In recent years, the lexical expression ‘sex’ has been reserved for a reference to biological categories, while ‘gender’ for social and cultural categories (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 1996). The use of ‘men’ as a generic term for people in general or as persons of either sex is now considered old-fashioned (*Macmillan*, 2002, p. 867). According to the *Cambridge International Dictionary of English*, “Many people speaking or writing English today prefer to avoid using language that is sexist” (1995, p. 1305). Before women became more aware of their linguistic rights, it had been a man’s world. But today that it is not so is most obvious.

The US Declaration of Independence proclaimed in 1776 has this noble assertion “... all men are created equal ...”. The famous ‘I have a dream speech’ delivered by Martin Luther King Jr. in 1963 (cited in Johnstone, 2002) has the word ‘brotherhood’. African American women today would have preferred the word ‘solidarity’ or ‘sisterhood’ beside ‘brotherhood’. But those who created the US Constitution in 1787 are still widely referred to as the Founding Fathers (see Barack Obama’s inaugural address) because they were all men, 55 of them. In his inaugural speech to fellow Americans, Obama chose his words carefully. He said “fellow citizens” and not ‘fellow countrymen’, “forebears”, not ‘forefathers’. In various parts of his speech, he mentioned “men and women” and not just ‘men’ to refer generically and respectfully to both sexes.