

Did Man Make Language?

Alison Assiter

Males, as the dominant group, have produced language, thought and reality.

This sentence appears on page 143 of Dale Spender's book *Man Made Language*. Spender believes that 'maleness' pervades language as a whole. Moreover, according to her, the reality most of us inhabit most of the time is a male one because language (male language) creates reality. I shall argue that though Dale's examples are interesting, her major claims about language are sometimes unclear, and that where they are clear, they are positively *damaging* for women. I do not want to concede to the opposition, however, that there is no 'sexist' bias in the English language at all. I shall offer the outline of an alternative account of sexism in one area of language, the purportedly gender-neutral uses of the class noun 'man' and the pronoun 'he'.

Spender

In her book, *Man Made Language*, Dale Spender argues two things: (i) that language determines the limits of our world; constructs our reality (see e.g. Spender [1] p.139) and (ii) that language is man made - it is created by the males of the species and is still primarily under male control (see e.g. Spender p.12 and throughout the book). She believes that there is a 'man's language' and a 'woman's language'; there are men's and women's meanings (see pp.68, 77, 81, 84, 95, 102, 135). While the former are 'authoritative', 'serious', 'direct', the latter lack all of these qualities. And she goes further. It is not surprising, she asserts, that men's and women's languages are seen to possess these various qualities - the one set, perferved, strong, positive; the other weak, negative - because the very terms in which research projects have been set up, the rules governing them, the kinds of questions asked, reflect a male bias. This utter and total mastery over language, Spender contends, is one means by which males have ensured their primacy (p.12). The English language is inclined towards males both in syntax and semantics. (Spender refers to English. Indeed, she argues that the supposed 'natural' gender in English as opposed to the grammatical one in German, where a wife takes the neuter gender, reflects a *greater* degree of sexist bias.)

Spender presents a formidable array of examples in support of her thesis. She points out that the meaning of some words is different when applied to females and males. For instance: 'He's a professional'; 'she's a professional' (p.19). Pairs of terms which appear to have approximately the same sense,

the only difference being that the one is applied to males while the other is used for females, become non-equivalent, the female expression taking on derogatory significance: viz. 'Lord' and 'Lady'. 'Lord' preserves its initial meaning whereas 'Lady' has undergone a 'process of democratic levelling' and is no longer reserved for women of high rank (p.17).

I believe, however, that Dale's main claims are often ambiguous and that they are problematic. She does not explicitly characterise the theory of meaning upon which she relies, nor does she make reference to a number of distinctions linguists and philosophers of language have drawn. I'll refer briefly to some of these in order to bring to light some of the ambiguities and problems in her reasoning.

Some difficulties in Spender's reasoning

One distinction philosophers have seen fit to draw is that between the 'sense' (Sinn) of a sign, and its reference (Bedeutung). Frege described the former as the 'mode of presentation' of the sign and the latter as the object it picks out - its bearer [2]. He pointed to this difference as a way out of a puzzle about identity: the two expressions 'the morning star' and 'the evening star' are identical insofar as they pick out the same object (in reference), but they differ in sense. A philosopher from a different tradition has made a similar kind of point: Saussure's 'signified' is analogous to the Fregean 'sense' [3].

Spender claims that language creates reality. She would presumably concur with Frege's view, therefore, that the 'sense' of an expression determines its reference [4]. The sense of the term 'table', for instance, determines which object it picks out. Now Spender believes that language creates reality and that language is man made. The senses of all expressions in language are thus determined by the males of the species. Hence, the references, too, of every sign will have been decided upon by the males. Now, immediately, there is an ambiguity in Spender's case. In addition to the 'male' language, she believes that there is a 'women's language'. Is it her belief that the sense, and hence the reference, of the word 'table' was originally determined by the males of the species and that the females now use the expression in a male way? Or does she think that there is a 'masculine' and a 'feminine' sense for the expression? If the latter, are we to suppose that there are masculine and feminine referents for this term? Or do we conclude that the two referents coincide in this case? And, if they coincide here, why do they and what

determines when they do not? The claim that the senses of all expressions were originally determined by males is a much more plausible one than the view that all terms now still have masculine and feminine senses, but it is a weaker thesis. It lends support to the view that 'reality' is male only in an attenuated sense. To draw an analogy: a house that is designed by an architect is, in a sense, the architect's - it is his or her creation. But it probably belongs to somebody else. On the present interpretation of Spender, language would be 'male' only in the sense that the house is the architect's. Perhaps an architect can make things difficult for the occupants of buildings he or she has designed. He or she might have created a house with a dining room far from a kitchen, and this would have made things awkward, indefinitely, for a housewife. Similarly, the male 'designers' of language may have created difficulties for females which last as long as the language survives. But this makes language male no more than it makes the house the architect's. Certainly the man's creation here, *ex hypothesi*, makes matters different for women. Just as the housewife may continue, for a long period of time, blaming the architect for his inconvenient design, so may the female language user (if she were aware of the problem) criticise the men who 'produced' the language. But the housewife can neither blame subsequent architects for her architect's creation nor could she (or would she) make out that any one architect owns the house. Similarly, female language users would be wrong to blame all men - unless they consciously continued the tradition of the language creators - for their predecessors' folly; they would be mistaken too, were they to make out that any man 'owned' language as a result of their progenitors' act.

If we are to take the other way of interpreting Spender's claim that there is a male and female language: that there are *now* two sets of senses, we come up against another major problem. If language creates the world, and if there is a man's language (a man's set of senses), and a woman's one, and if the two do not overlap, it follows that there is a man's world and a woman's world, and ne'er the twain shall meet. The wife inhabits one world, and her husband [5] another. So what, you may say. The point is important, however. If wife and husband live in different worlds, not only do they fail to communicate with one another (a well-known syndrome if the stories are to be believed) but they may be unable to understand one another. This cannot be put to rights by careful and painstaking effort on the part of both parties; it is an unalterable state of affairs. Quine and Feyerabend described this phenomenon as the 'incommensurability' of theories: if the corresponding terms in any two theories differ in sense, and sense determines reference, then the two terms pick out different objects. No two propositions - one from each theory - can contradict one another. They will be simply equivocal. I shall return to this point below.

I have mentioned some problems that present themselves with Spender's thought, if we point to one distinction philosophers and linguists have made. If we refer to a further set of distinctions, difficulties of another kind become apparent. Chomsky [6] differentiated linguistic competence - the system of rules and norms of a language, from performance; actual speech behaviour. Chomsky's pair corresponds roughly to Saussure's '*langue*' and '*parole*'. Inside the latter domain, another philosopher, J.L. Austin [7] distinguished amongst types of acts. First of all, there is the locutionary act - the act of uttering an expression with a definite sense and reference; and then there is the illocutionary act, what I may do

in performing the locutionary act, e.g. I may make a promise in uttering the word 'I promise': and finally there is the perlocutionary act - the act I may succeed in performing by means of my illocutionary act, e.g. in saying 'the door is open', I may perform the perlocutionary act of getting you to shut it. Supposing we were to take Spender's claim as applying to linguistic performance, her reasoning is ambiguous as between these three. At one point she suggests that the same linguistic behaviour may be found in members of each gender, but that the descriptions given of the behaviour are gender-specific. For instance, Spender criticizes Robin Lakoff for using a derogatory term like 'flowery' to characterise women's language. She suggests that some less denigratory term would have been applied to that very same behaviour in a male. However, if she admits that the behaviour could be the same, she may be conceding to her opponents that the language is the same. Witness the expression: 'I think that's a good idea'. Used by a male chairing a meeting, it could be interpreted as an authoritative, finalising remark; whereas the same utterance issuing from the mouth of a female from the floor might well be interpreted as expressing hesitation, diffidence. The respective illocutionary acts here may well be very different. The male may have performed the act of closing the discussion; while the act of the female may have been that of agreeing with the previous speaker. Additionally, the relative perlocutionary acts may differ from one another: perhaps the male carried out the perlocutionary act of getting the meeting to move on to the next topic; maybe the female performed the act of getting the meeting to continue the discussion along the lines suggested by the previous speaker. However, the *locutionary* acts are the same in each case. Significantly, here, it is the relative illocutionary and perlocutionary acts which appear to exhibit the sexist bias: whilst it is the locutionary acts - what is said - which deal with reality. Where Spender takes for granted the existence of 'women's language', she is assuming its existence in the illocutionary and perlocutionary acts. But if she wishes to argue that 'male' language produces a male world, she must demonstrate that there is a gender-related difference in language-use specifically in the *locutionary* act, for it is here that reference to reality takes place.

Sense and reference; locutionary, illocutionary acts, etc., are two sorts of distinctions philosophers and linguists have drawn. By making them we have brought to light some ambiguities in Spender's reasoning. A further area which might reveal difficulties is that of speakers' intentions. On one theory of meaning [8], the intentions of the speaker contribute to determining what the speaker meant by his or her utterance. But others disagree [9]. They would argue that what I intend to say when I use a form of words is often no good indication at all of what I have really said.

Spender argues that males intended to construct language in such a way as to ensure their dominance. (See Chapter 5.) She makes the point that a male grammarian in the 18th century, writing mainly for a male audience, ruled that 'the male gender is *more comprehensive* than the female', meaning, Spender suggests, that one male counted for more than one woman (see p.148). Dale contends that this event took place in order to ensure male dominance, and was designed with that purpose in view.

She tells us also that the use of the pronoun 'he' to cover both sexes was not just something that took on as custom and habit; it was deliberately enshrined in an Act of Parliament in 1850 (p.150). As she points out, there were no female members of Parliament

to vote against this Act. Now, granted, the Act was passed by males, and there was no woman to vote against it. But this does not of itself prove that the men passed the Act in order to ensure their dominance. That, in fact, would be a highly esoteric view of their intentions. In fact, the Act did not concern the use of the pronoun 'he' generally. It was passed in order to simplify the language used in Acts of Parliament. Its title is: 'An Act for shortening the Language used in Acts of Parliament'; and it says: 'Be it enacted, That in all Acts to be hereafter made Words importing the Masculine Gender shall be deemed and taken to include Females, and the singular to include the Plural... and the Word "Month" to mean Calendar Month ... and "County" shall be held to mean also County of a Town or City...' [10] The intention of the man introducing the Bill was to shorten the language used in Acts of Parliament, not at all to ensure male dominance. The sentence about the masculine gender occurs in a passage containing several other proposals for the abbreviation of language, none of which concerns the relations between the sexes.

Spender's way of presenting the evidence makes it look as though men have always worn dominance on their shirtsleeves, blatantly, for all, including themselves, to see. But they haven't. Though the effect of the use of 'he/man' language may be to subjugate the female sex, it is ludicrous to suppose that every man who has ever used such language intended to do that by his use of it. Many men may have had every intention of *not* doing women down, yet they may still have done so, precisely because their language has an effect that is not apparent to them.

I have mentioned some problems in Spender's reasoning arising out of her failure to distinguish features of language use to which philosophers and linguists have drawn attention. But I want to argue more strongly that Spender's thesis about language is positively *damaging* for women. I believe this to be the case for four main reasons.

Spender's thesis is damaging for women

First of all, on one interpretation of Spender, her thesis is just too bland to be of any value to women. Saying that all language is 'male' serves to divert attention away from those areas of language which really are sexist.

Secondly, there is the phenomenon to which I have already alluded: the fact that her thesis leads to incommensurability. This is damaging for women, I believe, for the following reason: if husband and wife can neither understand nor communicate with one another, then the wife cannot present criticism of the husband's use of language which he can come to accept. She and he will continue, whatever she says, to occupy their respective universes: he his, she hers. She cannot begin to enter his, nor he hers.

Now whether or not women will agree with me that this is damaging for them may depend on their politics. Some feminists will draw the conclusion that this state of affairs is not deleterious to the feminist cause; rather, what it entails is that women should have nothing whatsoever to do with men. Men inhabit their patriarchal realm; women live in a different world - and women should do their level best to ensure that the two universes don't overlap in any sense. Whatever men do, they will be revealing their oppressive natures, so women should have nothing to do with them.

Notice that Spender's picture of language leads to this separatist position. If men and women inhabit different worlds as a result of their language

use, then women are unable to communicate with men. They are consequently unable to change men, and they might as well start building their own world, independently of the male oppressor. This is not a positive reason for separatism: rather separatism is an effect of a thesis about language.

I believe that one reason - my third reason - why Spender's picture of language is damaging for women is that separatism - which is a consequence of Spender's view of language - is deleterious to women's cause. First of all, the separatist's characterisation of men as oppressors will be self-confirming, because *any* behaviour on the part of a man will count as oppressive of women. The separatist's picture of males as oppressors may even be self-contradictory, since presumably the ascription of both of any pair of contradictory characteristics to an individual male will equally count as evidence of oppression. Thus a man may be seen to be oppressive if he either shouts at a woman or does not shout at a woman. But that makes the view about male oppression vacuous. Secondly, separatism leads to the view that men are *by nature* oppressors - perhaps biologically or alternatively in virtue of some spiritual essence - whilst

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women are by nature what? Oppressed? Or some alternative? Of course, no Revolutionary Feminist woman would wish to make out that they are, by nature, oppressed; but that looks to be the obvious option available to her.

The separatist may accept that communication has broken down, and suggest that only force can be effective. But force, on its own, unless supplemented by some account of why it may be justified in this case, cannot succeed in changing things for the better. An IRA member *may* (conceivably) get a point across by shooting a politician. But although such violence is nasty anyway, it would be both cruel and pointless, were there no possibility of communicating a case. The separatist, similarly, who resorts to force after admitting the impossibility of arguing a point of view, acts both nastily and pointlessly.

Now, there is one option left for the separatist. She will argue for the elimination of all males. SCUM (The Society for Cutting up Men) proposes a particularly radical form of surgery. Perhaps the separatist who plumbs such depths has gone too far to be taken seriously. Without some males the species as a whole would probably die out (though SCUM believes otherwise). The possibility of nuclear war presents us with a very real threat of the Millennium. Perhaps, historically, it is not accidental that the century which produces the technical means to destroy humanity should also give birth to a movement that believes in the elimination of half of the species.

There is something in Spender which relates to my final criticism of separatism, and which provides further evidence (my fourth reason) of her thesis

being damaging to women. There is an ambiguity in Spender's use of the phrase 'women's meanings'. This ambiguity is obscured by her view that there are two worlds - that of the male as well as the women's world. There are those women's meanings which are pejorative, derogatory, because according to her (or according to those whose research she is quoting) they are characterised that way by males; and there are those new, exciting, different meanings which women begin to discover, as they talk to one another in consciousness-raising groups and such like. In these gatherings, according to her, women begin to grasp that there are male and female worlds; they begin to be critical of the dominant (male) world, and to fashion a new one.

Referring indiscriminately to 'women's meanings' when Spender has these two, quite separate, senses of the expression in view, serves to gloss over the differences between them. According to her, 'women's language' is seen by men as 'flowery' (see Lakoff), irrational, imaginative, etc. Now one possible response to this is to take the very same language but to view it positively - the women themselves may appropriate that 'language' and describe it in positive terms. Thus, to take an analogy, Hélène Cixous [11] describes a Chinese story, which she takes from Sun Tse's manual of strategy - a handbook for the warrior. The story refers to a king, who is reputed to have asked Sun Tse to train his one hundred and eighty wives in the art of war. Instead of learning the code, however, the wives began laughing and chattering and paying no attention to the lesson. To the men, here, these ladies had failed at the art of war. According to Cixous, however, the women's behaviour is to be viewed positively by themselves. Cixous describes the phenomenon as a divergence of 'two economies' - a masculine economy and a feminine one. The masculine economy is governed by order; by rules. The feminine one is quite different. The women's laughter and chatter is seen positively. It is part of their non-rule-governed nature. But to see their behaviour like this is simply to take women as we assume some men have wanted them to be, and to redescribe their behaviour. Women, therefore, will have a 'natural' way of being. Kristéva's [12] work is an example of this same tendency. She speaks of 'feminine' discourses: poetry, irrationality, art, etc., which draw on areas the patriarchal culture represses.

It is not in women's interest, however, simply to remain as they have previously been characterised by males. Their 'natures' are not static. Women are not simply nurturant, passive, poetic and imaginative. They are not irrational. They are also active and rational creatures. Spender's picture of language - by leaving ambiguous the notion of 'women's meanings' - allows for the Kristéva reading of this expression. It allows 'women's language' to be the same as it is characterised by males, instead of being a new and exciting creation of women themselves.

Sexism and 'He/Man' language

I believe, then, not only that there are problems with Dale Spender's thesis about language, but that her view is positively damaging for women. However, I don't want to say that language never exhibits sexism. I do believe the use of the expressions 'he' and 'man', for instance, in their purportedly gender-neutral fashions, reinforces power relations between the sexes. Let's look at some of Spender's examples.

She tells us that, in 1746, John Kirkby formulated his 'Eighty-eight grammatical Rules'. One of these, she says, stated that the 'male gender was *more comprehensive* than the female' (p.148). As she points out,

in articulating this norm, Kirkby did not mean that there were more males than females. What he must have been doing was reflecting the common belief, in society at the time, that males counted for more than females. Of course this common belief was actually *true*. It was the aristocracy and the gentry - males - who occupied the positions of power in England: they were the politicians and the doctors, and generally the educated. Women, as Rousseau said (and, of course, he meant upper-class women) were to be educated to be pleasing to men (i.e. males). And even in the working class, the man (the male) held power and authority in the family (though he did not in the work-place). So Kirkby's reasoning did indeed serve to reinforce a state of affairs that was already in existence: the domination of women by men.

Kirkby's Rule that the male gender is more comprehensive than the female makes no sense independently of these facts about 18th-century society. In a society where the roles of men and women were equal, no grammarian would propose that the male gender was 'more comprehensive' than the female. Kirkby did not need to justify his rule, since it was quite acceptable, because it was implicit in 'common sense' assumptions of the period. In fact, if allowed to stand on its own feet, independently of the common sense assumptions which give it some sense, there are no grounds for accepting Kirkby's rule. By articulating these assumptions, and giving them the authority of a grammatical rule, Kirkby was surely reinforcing them. Subsequent usage of the pronoun 'he' in its supposedly gender-neutral manner has continued this process.

With reference to the Act of Parliament mentioned earlier; although, as I have remarked, I disagree with Spender as regards the *intentions* of those proposing the Bill, I do believe that it had the effect, and even the function, of preserving male dominance. Once again, if it had not been for male dominance generally, in society, there would have been no reason for proposing that 'he' should encompass 'she' rather than the other way about. It did not have to be uppermost in the minds of those introducing the Bill that they wanted to ensure male dominance, because the phenomenon was already well entrenched at the time. After all, the proposal that 'she' should encompass 'he' rather than the other way about would have fulfilled equally well their aim of simplifying the language. They would not have been keen on this suggestion. They wouldn't have liked it because they would have believed that it would have led to the subordination of males in some way. Some evidence that this would have been their reaction is provided by a parallel case recently - male nursery school teachers objected when it was proposed that 'she' should be a generic term for them. They resisted the suggestion because they believed it would have implied a lowering of their status.

This latter example suggests that 'he' is not functioning as a generally neutral term at all. 'One' unlike 'man' carries no non-neutral connotations. 'Old' is sometimes used in neutral fashion, as in 'How old are you?', but it is invariably clear from the context that this is how it is intended. In the case of 'man' and 'he', however, the context does not always make it clear that the term is supposed to be being used in a neutral manner. Elaine Morgan describes the writings of evolutionists and ecologists when they say things like the following 'it is just as hard for man to break the habit of thinking of himself as central to the species as it was to think of himself as central to the universe. He sees himself quite unconsciously as the main line of evolution with a female satellite revolving around him...' (Morgan, in Spender, p.152).

The sense of the noun 'man' is *ambiguous*. It is not clear whether or not the expression is to be understood in a neutral manner. The ambiguity allows for the continued subjection of the female. Evolutionists began by thinking neutrally and then, tacitly, switched to thinking in terms only of the male. Employers who advertise for a 'man' can trade on the ambiguity (a) to dissuade women from applying for the job; and (b) to appoint a male.

Here it is the confusion generated by the continued use of 'he' and 'man' in their purportedly neutral senses, I believe, which justifies the claim that continued use of this language serves to reinforce male oppression. So long as we can switch, unconsciously, from the neutral to the non-neutral senses, in one breath, we are silencing and excluding women.

There are two reasons, then, why 'he' language tends to reinforce unequal power relations between the sexes. First of all, the claim that there is a genuinely neutral sense of the term 'he' is, in fact, false; rather the introduction of such language presupposes unequal relations between the sexes. Its continual use reinforces oppression. Secondly, there are often tacit switches from the supposed neutral to the non-neutral sense, slides which confirm that a greater degree of importance is often attached to the male in the neutral use of the expression.

Use of 'he/man' language specifically, then, does seem to reinforce unequal power relations between the sexes. I would propose, however, that, rather than this indicating that these expressions are part of a male language reflecting a male reality, it suggests that such discourse is *ideological* - it functions to disguise the power relations between the sexes. These relations are not presented clearly, for all to see; rather it is because there is domination of one sex by the other that the expressions 'man' and 'he' can be used in their purportedly neutral senses. But, as we have seen, there is *really* no such thing as a neutral use of them.

To conclude: while I strongly disagree with the 'philosophical' strands in Dale Spender's book, I believe that she presents an array of examples from English, many of which do provide incontrovertible evidence of sexism in language. Recognising that 'he/man' language - as one case of such sexism - reinforces male supremacy is not at all to do away with that primacy. But it is a step in the right direction.

To say, as Spender does, that there are two realities - the male and the female - is not only to make criticism of the male 'reality' impossible, but it is to weaken the feminist case. Supposing that the phenomenon is ubiquitous makes it more difficult to see where sexism in language really operates. [12]

Alison Assiter

Footnotes

- 1 D. Spender, *Man Made Language*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980
- 2 G. Frege, *On Sense and Nominaton*, in H. Frege and W. Sellars (eds.), *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, NY, 1949
- 3 F. de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, McGraw Hill Book Co. Toronto, London, 1966
- 4 See M. Dummet, *Frege: Philosophy of Language*, Duckworth, London, 1973
- 5 I put the point in this picturesque fashion for effect. It is, of course, intended to be generalisable beyond husbands and wives.
- 6 N. Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, MIT, Cambridge, Mass., 1965
- 7 J.L. Austin,
- 8 See, for instance, H.P. Grice, 'Meaning', in *Philosophical Review*, 1966
- 9 For example, Keith Graham, in 'Illocution and Ideology', in *Issues in Marxist Philosophy*, Vol.IV, Harvester, 1981, argues that intentions are sometimes irrelevant in determining which illocutionary act has been performed. The speaker himself, he claims, may sometimes be unaware of the true import of his/her utterance.
- 10 *The Papers of the House of Commons*, 31 January - 15 August 1850, Bills, Papers 1.
- 11 H. Cixous, 'Castration or Decapitation', *Signs*, Autumn 1981
- 12 I should like to thank Jonathan Rée, Martin Boxer and Keith Graham for commenting on an earlier draft of this, and Noël Parker for his assiduous commenting on several versions.

Sexist Language: Fatherfuck or Genderspeak?

Mike Shortland and John Favvel

The numerous recent writings on sexist language have prompted the following exchange of letters between two members of the Collective:

Dear John,

I enclose the book on sexist language [1] I mentioned during our last conversation. I think it ought to be reviewed for the next RP. Would you take it on, perhaps adding in *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing* [2] too. Several of us believe RP should tackle the whole issue of sexist language in a serious and practical way - beyond simply inserting a note inside the back cover of the journal to the effect that 'Authors should write accessibly, and avoid sexist and racist formulations'. (I'm not sure we ought to have such a note anyway; for one thing 'accessibility' is difficult to define *a priori*, and for another it is our job as editors to deal with this. If sexist or racist formulations were intrinsic to the piece we would either not be publishing it, or we would be publishing it precisely for its problematic position on this. This is, of course, to consider hypothetical problems.)

In practice, we work closely with authors to make their work clear in meaning and intention. Beyond that, my initial reaction is to beware of any great reformulations of language beyond those which, for example, would alter gender-specific formulations like 'chairman' to 'chairperson'. I am conservative in this regard not just because I hold the English language in high respect but because the impulse behind some of the linguistic prescriptions being advocated strikes me as crude and poorly thought through.

I have only skimmed through *The Handbook*, but chunks of it remind me of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The whole intention of his Newspeak was that if one could manage to eliminate certain words from normal currency, the emotions the words labelled would also disappear. The point was that unexpressed thoughts and emotions atrophy. There is something frightening - or is it instead liberating? - in the notion that new linguistic structures and contents will reshape a person's view of reality and truth. In any case, is there anything more involved here than a satiric thrust against polysyllabic prose, vague pseudo-scientific concepts and ugly neologisms? Linguistic relativism which, according to Sapir [3], has the real world unconsciously built up on the language habits of different groups is a powerful theory, but how would one go about proving or disproving it? I will grant that the argument that a language biased against one sex can inflict harm upon members of that sex (and perhaps on members of the opposite sex as well) makes great psychological sense.