*Samyukta: A Journal of Gender and Culture*
*Vol.11, No.2, July 2026*

# Role of Sexism and Gender Stereotyping on Male Default Language Use.

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**Abstract:** Gender bias in default language—utilizing masculine generic words for persons whose sex is unknown—is an implicit cue to long-standing and deeply held views about gender roles. Past research has demonstrated that male generics routinely elicit mental images of men and support androcentric perspectives regardless of language used. This study investigated whether acceptance of gender stereotypes, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism predicted use of masculine generic words by Indian youth. A sample of cross-sectional subjects completed a pronoun-choice task, the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory (ASI), and the Gender Stereotype Scale; each measure was reliable. The correlations found that both increased levels of acceptance of gender stereotypes and benevolent sexism correlated with increased reliance on male generics; however, the correlation with hostile sexism was lessened. The regression results indicated that acceptance of gender stereotypes and benevolent sexism were the two most significant predictors of the use of masculine generics; furthermore, males relied upon masculine generics more so than did females. These results demonstrate the manner in which even subtle sexist orientations can foster and continue gender biased language, and therefore, there is a clear need for gender inclusivity and interventions.

**Keywords:** Male-default language, Gender Stereotyping, Ambivalent Sexism, Benevolent Sexism, Gender Bias in Language.

## Section 1- Introduction

Language plays a central role in shaping how people perceive social reality, including how they understand and represent gender. Although often assumed to be neutral, everyday language contains subtle patterns that reflect and reinforce social hierarchies. One such pattern is the tendency to treat the masculine as the default representation of humanity. Across many languages and cultural contexts, masculine terms and pronouns are frequently used to refer to people in general, even when gender is unspecified or mixed. This phenomenon, known as male-default language or masculine generic usage, reflects a broader cognitive and social bias in which men are implicitly viewed as the standard human category while women are perceived as a deviation from that norm (Bailey et al., 2020; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017).

Psychological and linguistic research has shown that language does not merely describe reality but actively shapes thought and perception. Linguistic forms influence how individuals imagine social categories, interpret roles, and construct mental representations of people (Sczesny et al., 2016; Salsabila et al., 2024). When masculine pronouns such as “he” or gender-marked role nouns are used generically, listeners and readers tend to visualize male referents more readily than female ones (Redl et al., 2021; Noll et al., 2018). Thus, even when speakers intend inclusivity, masculine generics often lead to male-biased mental representations. Over time, repeated exposure to such patterns contributes to the cognitive invisibility of women and reinforces androcentric norms in social cognition (Bailey et al., 2020; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017).

**Male-default language** is not only a linguistic phenomenon but also a psychological one. Its occurrence reflects underlying gender schemas—mental structures that organize beliefs about men and women—and broader cultural stereotypes about gender roles. Gender stereotypes refer to socially shared beliefs about the traits, roles, and behaviors considered appropriate for men and women (Goodhew et al., 2021; Sczesny et al., 2016). Societies commonly associate agency, authority, and universality with men, while women are linked to care, emotion, and domesticity. These stereotypes influence expectations about who occupies social roles and therefore affect how people interpret or produce language referring to unspecified individuals. For instance, when a role noun such as “doctor” or “leader” is

encountered, people are more likely to assume a male referent because these roles align with dominant gender stereotypes (Gabriel et al., 2008; Goodhew et al., 2021). Thus, gender stereotyping provides an important cognitive pathway through which male-default language emerges.

**Sexism** refers to ideological beliefs and attitudes that maintain gender inequality and traditional gender roles (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Contemporary theory distinguishes between hostile sexism, which involves overtly negative evaluations of women, and benevolent sexism, which includes seemingly positive but paternalistic beliefs that portray women as needing protection and guidance (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Barreto et al., 2009). Although benevolent sexism appears positive, both forms reinforce the notion that men represent competence, authority, and normality, whereas women occupy secondary or specialized roles. Such ideological beliefs shape how individuals perceive gender categories and may influence their linguistic choices, including the tendency to default to masculine references when speaking about people in general (Bailey et al., 2020; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017).

**Gender Stereotypes** can be defined as generalized beliefs of the qualities, roles and behavior that are socially acceptable for males or females. In this way, Gender Stereotypes serve as Cognitively Simplified Schemas for Social Perception by allowing people to quickly perceive themselves or others, through their gender category (Bem, 1981). From a social-cognitive viewpoint, gender stereotypes will operate automatically and determine how an individual interprets information and makes judgments about other people (Fiske & Taylor, 1991). Researchers have consistently shown gender stereotypes represent men as agentic, assertive, competent, and women as communal, nurturing, and emotionally expressive (Eagly & Wood, 2012). These stereotypes not only define how we view one another, but they help to establish our interpretation of language. When using gender-neutral language (for example, "Doctor," "Leader," "Scientist") people who hold strong gender stereotypes will tend to rely on male representations, especially when they relate to masculine-type roles. Therefore, gender stereotypes affect both explicit attitudes towards gender and how people cognitively process language; consequently, gender stereotypes affect how people understand and mentally represent language.

Despite extensive research on masculine generics, gender stereotypes, and sexism individually, relatively few studies have examined how these psychological constructs interact to predict male-default language use. Much of the linguistic literature has focused on structural aspects of language, demonstrating that masculine forms bias interpretation toward men (Redl et al., 2021; Noll et al., 2018). Separately, social psychological research has established that sexist attitudes and gender stereotypes influence perception, evaluation, and social judgment (Barreto et al., 2009; Goodhew et al., 2021). However, the link between individual differences in sexism and stereotyping and actual pronoun choice or referential language behavior remains underexplored. Understanding this link is important because it moves beyond demonstrating that language can be biased to explain why some individuals are more likely than others to reproduce such bias.

This gap is particularly evident in non-Western and multilingual contexts such as India. Indian societies exhibit strong and persistent gender norms shaped by cultural traditions, socialization practices, and institutional structures. Linguistic practices across Indian languages often encode gender distinctions, and social discourse continues to reflect male-centric assumptions in many domains (Das, 2023; Jan, 2025). At the same time, young adults in educational settings are increasingly exposed to gender-egalitarian ideas and inclusive language movements. This coexistence of traditional norms and emerging egalitarian values makes the Indian young adult population especially relevant for examining psychological predictors of gendered language use. Yet empirical psycholinguistic and social-cognitive research on male-default language within Indian samples remains limited.

The current study was based on the idea that male-default language is not just a structure of language, but a cognitive phenomenon based on gender ideologies. Male-default language could be considered an action-oriented example of androcentric thinking – the practice of representing men as the typical/standard/human example of humanity. Androcentric thinking will express itself through language and the social, cultural cognitive frameworks we use to define our world and make sense of our experiences. These same cognitive frameworks create stereotypes of what it means to be “man” and/or “woman,” and those stereotypes establish culturally shared definitions of who is competent, authoritative, and representative of prototypically

"human." As a result, if men are generally seen as the standard or universal representation of human experience, people are more likely to rely on male referents/pronouns when gender is left unspecified.

Given that language is a significant factor in establishing social inclusion, a sense of belonging, and social representation, identifying the cognitive factors that lead to male-default language is particularly relevant. Using masculine terms to represent general groups has the potential to exclude women and other gender non-conforming individuals from conceptualizations of professions, leadership positions, and citizenship (Sczesny et al., 2016; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017). Previous research has demonstrated that repeated exposure to masculine generics reduces the mental presence of women and enhances the association of occupations with gender. Consequently, studying individual differences that lead to male-default language usage advances beyond the theoretical level to inform practical communication approaches and promote gender equality efforts.

## Section 2- Review of Literature

It is significant that Ambivalent Sexism Theory, which **Glick and Fiske (1996)** developed, differentiates between hostile sexism and benevolent sexism, as it illustrates how sexism is not merely negativity, but includes positive and protective sentiments that support inequality. Benevolent sexism, therefore, legitimizes patriarchal structures such as masculine referents being used as a default authority in general discourse, which is why this theory is important to understand when examining male-default language.

The researchers **Swim et al. (1995),** studied the differences between what they called "modern" and "old-fashioned" sexism, and showed that while the overt hostility towards gender had decreased; many of the same biases remain in a more subtle way. They showed that the ways in which we now express prejudice is no longer always overt but often expressed through our daily language use. Therefore, using male-default forms could represent a more indirect way of expressing gender-based bias, as opposed to a clearly biased action.

In addition to showing that a person's use of subtle sexist language impacts their judgment of others, as well as their own self-perceived prejudices, **Swim et al. (2004)** demonstrated that even if individuals acknowledge that they do not hold prejudice against certain groups, they can still exhibit biased behavior, simply based upon the use of specific types of language. These results emphasize that individuals' habitual language choices can create inequality, and potentially reinforce inequality, in a manner that is not necessarily intended or recognized.

While **Balhorn (2004)** discussed the history of the English language regarding the use of singular "they," and showed that the English language has been capable of gender-neutral pronoun alternatives for thousands of years, he illustrated that there have historically been strict prescriptive rules regarding the use of masculine generics. Therefore, male-default forms are not grammatically required, but socially and culturally accepted.

**Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen & Sczesny (2007)** conducted a meta-analysis of prior studies that investigated how masculine generics produce male-biased mental images and found that masculine forms produced male images regardless of whether the term was defined as generic or not. The authors found that the male image created is an automatic process of cognition and is not something that is consciously done by the individual.

As part of an investigation into how masculine and feminine nouns affect mental representation in multiple languages, **Gabriel et al. (2008)** completed cross-linguistic studies comparing how masculine and feminine nouns produce male or female mental representations in English, French, and German. The results of their study indicated that masculine nouns produced male mental representations in all three languages, and that this occurred even when the occupation represented by the noun was gender neutral. Their results illustrate that the form of the grammar can elicit androcentric cognition.

Through an experiment in which participants were asked to quickly determine whether the continuation of a sentence included either a male or a female, **Gygax et al. (2008)** demonstrated that the use of masculine generics influences real-time sentence processing. Their results indicated that participants were faster to complete sentences

containing males than females, which illustrated that male mental images were activated earlier in the process. These results provide additional evidence that male-default cognition is a component of comprehension processes.

Although **Barreto et al. (2009)** did not focus on language as a source of sexism, their research on the effects of contemporary sexism on women's sense of belonging and performance indicate that even though subtle sexism may not be overtly hostile, it can undermine a woman's feelings of inclusion and her ability to perform tasks and participate in activities.

**Douglas and Sutton (2014)** demonstrated that individuals who possess system-justifying beliefs, such as those who believe that the current social order should continue, are more likely to defend sexist language practices. This was one of the first studies to examine how ideology relates to attitudes toward gender-based language bias, and provide empirical evidence that sexism predicts an individual's preference for sexist language.

Using a design where women read about a group described in masculine terms, **Vainapel et al. (2015)** demonstrated that the use of masculine generics can decrease women's identification with a group described in masculine terms. The results of their study indicate that the use of male-default language can exclude women from participating in a group, and therefore, reinforces the idea that male-default language is damaging to society.

Developing a model of how children develop their sense of gender and how they learn to view themselves relative to others, **Bigler and Leaper (2015)** demonstrated that children can internalize gender-based hierarchies by repeatedly hearing gender-based language. Therefore, children can begin to exhibit male-default thinking early in their lives.

Using a longitudinal design where attitudes toward the Swedish gender-neutral pronoun "hen" were measured before and after the pronoun was officially introduced, **Gustafsson Sendén et al. (2015)** demonstrated that over time, individuals become increasingly accepting of using gender-neutral pronouns. Their results suggest that linguistic reform can help to create a cultural shift in how individuals view and interact with each other.

Reviewing literature on how the use of gender-fair language affects gender-based mental imagery and evaluations, **Sczesny et al. (2016)** found that the use of gender-fair language can reduce male-bias in mental imagery and evaluations, however, they also reported that some individuals will resist using gender-fair language due to their ideological views. As a result, it was suggested that individuals' ideological views can influence their choice of language.

Based on the fact that masculine generics create structural invisibility of women by positioning men as the normative human category, **Menegatti and Rubini (2017)** argued that the continued use of masculine generics is a significant contributor to the ongoing inequalities in society.

Comparing two strategies that can be used to reduce male-bias in language, **Lindqvist et al. (2018)** demonstrated that both strategies can effectively reduce male-bias, however, both strategies can increase the cognitive load associated with processing gender-fair language. Therefore, their results demonstrate that male-default forms are both cognitively efficient and socially ingrained.

Demonstrating personality characteristics and rigid adherence to traditional ideologies predicted resistance to gender-neutral pronouns, **Bradley et al. (2019)** provided direct evidence that ideological rigidity can predict an individual's preference for gender-specific language.

As part of an examination of how masculinity affects the association of humanity with "men" versus "women", **Bailey et al. (2020)** demonstrated that people implicitly associate "men" more strongly with humanity than "women." Therefore, it was demonstrated that male-default language can serve as an indicator of male-as-norm schemas, which occur at a cognitive level.

**MacArthur, Cundiff, and Mehl (2020)** studied real-world talk and found a common way for students at universities to speak in terms of "male-default" in their phrasing. The results they found show that androcentric language is frequently used in everyday conversation - not only in experiments.

**Jain, Kaur, and Jain (2020)** demonstrated the validity of the Ambivalent Sexism Inventory with samples in India; they confirmed the existence of both hostile and benevolent sexism in the culture relevant to this current study.

Using eye tracking, **Redl et al. (2021)** were able to show that males immediately interpret masculine generics as such. Their results confirm that male-default processing occurs automatically.

**Goodhew et al. (2021)** demonstrated that gender stereotypes are immediately activated when an individual comprehends a sentence; consequently, gender stereotypes affect how one interprets occupational roles.

**Borghi and Mazzuca (2023)** integrated grounded cognition with linguistic relativity and concluded that repeated exposure to linguistic patterns can form abstract social categories, such as gender.

**Das (2023)** studied gender bias in Indian proverbs and culturally based expressions and demonstrated that male-centric norms continue to exist within traditional linguistic forms.

**Renström (2025)** found that conservative ideologies correlate with a greater reluctance to use non-binary pronouns, which indicates that an individual's system of beliefs influences their preference for linguistic usage.

Since masculine generics activate male representations, stereotypes guide the interpretation of words, and sexist ideology legitimates male centrality, it is logically possible that individuals who endorse more extreme gender stereotypes and ambivalence towards sex will also tend to default to masculine references when gender is unspecified.

Therefore, the present study attempts to integrate the psychological, cognitive, and ideological aspects of language to investigate whether gender stereotyping, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism predict male-default language use among Indian young adults. This study fills a large gap by transitioning from explanations based on the structure of language to explaining individual difference variables related to how gender bias in language is cognitively sustained.

## Section 3- Methodology

**Research Design-** This study applied a cross-sectional correlational research design to investigate how ambivalence towards both sexisms, along with gender-stereotyping may predict the use of male-default language. This design will allow the researchers to assess the relationship between these variables and not manipulate them. Additionally, this study also explored gender differences in the use of male-default language using comparative statistical methods.

**Hypotheses-** Hypothesis H1. The greater an individual endorses stereotypes about gender, then the more they will use male-default language.

Hypothesis H2. An individuals' level of benevolent sexism will be positively related to their use of male-default language.

Hypothesis H3. An individual's level of hostile sexism will be positively related to their use of male-default language.

Hypothesis H4. Gender stereotyping, benevolent sexism, and hostile sexism will significantly contribute to predicting an individual's use of male-default language as measured by a multiple regression model.

Hypothesis H5. Males will report using male-default language at a statistically significant higher rate than females.

**Participant Sample**- The participant sample consisted of 184 young adults- 106 of them were female, while 78 were male, who completed the survey and had complete responses after eliminating those with missing values via list-wise deletion. The participant sample included individuals from various education and work backgrounds.

**Inclusion Criteria-** Individuals aged 18- 35 years, Indian nationality, ability to read and understand English language.

**Exclusion Criteria**- Individuals below or above 18 years and 35 years respectively, non- Indian participants, inability to read or understand English language.

**Sampling Procedure-** Sampling procedures consisted of a combination of convenience and snow-ball sampling methods. Participation was voluntary and participants provided written informed consent prior to completion of the survey. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the data collection process.

**Tools Employed-**

**Pronoun Choice Task-** The Pronoun Choice Task (PCT) is a 17-item language assessment tool developed to measure an individual's use of masculine pronouns ("He") when describing occupations or roles in gender-neutral contexts. The PCT was developed as a result of prior studies on male generic bias. The PCT includes three response options for each of the 17 items: "He", "She" and "They". The PCT uses simple, neutral language to describe the role or occupation and does not include any information regarding the gender of the person described.

A pilot study (n=30) was conducted to determine whether the PCT was clear and provided sufficient variability. Results indicated that participants completed a mean of 8 items (SD = 6.08). Additionally, the PCT had very good internal consistency ($\alpha$ = .946). Although analysis of the distribution of the PCT scores indicated that there was a deviation from normality ($p < .05$), the results of the normality tests did not prevent the researchers from conducting parametric statistical analyses in the main study (n=184).

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to confirm that the PCT measured only one construct. Sampling adequacy for EFA was excellent (KMO = .913; $p<.01$). The EFA also supported a one factor solution for the PCT which explained 41.5% of the variance in the sample. Loadings ranged from moderate to strong (.49 – .74) and indicated that all 17 items of the PCT measured the same construct, namely, male default language tendency.

As the PCT measures observable language behavior and is not intended to be used as a measure of personality or mental health, it is not a diagnostic instrument. All ethical guidelines were followed including obtaining informed consent, voluntary participation, maintaining participant confidentiality, providing the right to withdraw at any time, and providing a debriefing session after completion of the study. There

was minimal risk associated with participating in this study and no personal identifiable data was collected.

Internal Consistency Reliability and Normality Indices for Pilot Study- A pilot study (n = 30) was conducted to evaluate the internal consistency reliability of the measurement instrument and to check if the distribution of the scores of the instrument is normal. The results indicated a prominent level of internal consistency reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .946$), and the distribution of the scores appeared to be normally distributed.

**Ambivalent Sexism Inventory -** Ambivalent sexism was assessed by means of the 22- item Ambivalent Sexism Inventory measuring hostile sexism, benevolent sexism. Participants responded in terms of their degree of agreement with each statement using a Likert-type scale. Scores are therefore higher as participants' endorsement of the statements is greater, i.e., higher scores indicate a stronger endorsement of sexist views. Developed by Peter Glick and Susan Fiske, Indian adaptation by Suparna Jain, Shradha Jain, Manpreet Kaur.

**Gender Stereotyping Scale-** Gender stereotyping was measured by a standardized 23- item Gender Stereotype Scale which measures how strongly an individual endorses stereotypical gender roles, and stereotypes regarding men and women. The higher the score, the stronger gender stereotypic views are. Developed and validated by Arjun Sekhar PM and J Parameswari.

**Statistical Methods Used**

IBM SPSS software was used to analyze the data collected in the study.

To calculate the descriptive statistics for all the study variables, such as means and standard deviations, SPSS was used. To establish the internal consistency reliability for the Male-Default Language Measure, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated using SPSS.

Using Pearson correlation coefficients, the association between male-default language use, hostile sexism, benevolent sexism and gender stereotyping were investigated.

An independent samples t-test was performed to compare the mean levels of male-default language use of males and females.

Finally, multiple linear regression analysis was performed to establish if hostile sexism, benevolent sexism and gender stereotyping could predict male-default language use.

$p < 0.05$ was considered statistically significant.

**Section 4- Results**

**Descriptive statistics and reliability-** The 17-item pronoun-choice task produced a total score with M = 6.98 (SD = 5.15; N = 184). Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was used to confirm that the PCT measured only one construct. Sampling adequacy for EFA was excellent (KMO = .913; p<.01) Internal consistency was excellent (Cronbach's α = .946) 1. The Shapiro-Wilk test indicated a deviation from normality (p =.009) 2, a limitation noted when interpreting parametric tests.

| Cronbach's Alpha | N of Items |
|---|---|
| .946 | 17 |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy. | | .913 |
| Bartlett's Test of Sphericity | Approx. Chi-Square | 1298.8 |
| | df | 136 |
| | Sig. | <.001 |

| | Mean | Std. Deviation | N |
|---|---|---|---|
| PCTTOTAL | 6.98 | 5.150 | 184 |
| GSSTOTAL | 43.31 | 15.604 | 184 |
| ASIHSTOTAL | 17.65 | 6.790 | 184 |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ASIBSTOTAL | 11.01 | 7.957 | 184 |

**Bivariate correlations-** Pearson correlations showed modest to strong associations between Male default Language and the predictor variables: Gender Stereotyping (r =.353, p < .001), Benevolent Sexism (r =.288, p < .001), and Hostile Sexism (r =.132, p < .001) 3. All three correlations were significant at the .001 level.

*Pearson Correlations (N = 184)*

| | | PCTTOTAL | GSSTOTAL | ASIHSTOTAL | ASIBSTOTAL |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Pearson Correlation | PCTTOTAL | 1.000 | .353 | .132 | .288 |
| | GSSTOTAL | .353 | 1.000 | .250 | .707 |
| | ASIHSTOTAL | .132 | .250 | 1.000 | .369 |
| | ASIBSTOTAL | .288 | .707 | .369 | 1.000 |
| Sig. (1-tailed) | PCTTOTAL | . | <.001 | .037 | <.001 |
| | GSSTOTAL | .000 | . | .000 | .000 |
| | ASIHSTOTAL | .037 | .000 | . | .000 |
| | ASIBSTOTAL | .000 | .000 | .000 | . |
| N | PCTTOTAL | 184 | 184 | 184 | 184 |
| | GSSTOTAL | 184 | 184 | 184 | 184 |
| | ASIHSTOTAL | 184 | 184 | 184 | 184 |
| | ASIBSTOTAL | 184 | 184 | 184 | 184 |

**Multiple regression-** A Multiple Regression Analysis investigating the impact of stereotypes of gender, hostile sexism, and benevolent sexism on male-default language use revealed that the overall model was statistically significant ($p < .001$) and explained approximately 13% of the variance in male-default language use. Only gender stereotypes (beta = .300; $p = .003$) were found to be significant predictors in this study. Both hostile sexism (beta = .033; $p = .657$) and benevolent sexism (beta = .063; $p = .538$) were found not to be significant contributors. Multicollinearity was found to be within acceptable levels for this study (vif range = 1.16 – 2.17). Therefore, there is some amount of shared variance between predictors in this study. As such, although the model does significantly predict male-default language use, it appears that a significant portion of variance (87%) remains unaccounted for and therefore suggests that other cognitive, social, contextual, or linguistic factors are contributing to male-default language use and should be investigated further.

*Multiple Regression Analysis*

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | .359[a] | .129 | .114 | 4.847 |

Predictors: (Constant), ASIBSTOTAL, ASIHSTOTAL, GSSTOTAL

**Independent-samples t-tests-** revealed that participants identifying as male (M = 8.81, SD = 5.90) used the masculine generic pronoun more frequently than females (M = 5.64, SD = 4.05); t (182) = -4.32, $p < .001$, Cohen's $d \approx -0.644$. Parallel analyses showed comparable large effects for each predictor (t values ranging from -9.18 to -2.36, all $p < .001$)

*Independent Samples Test*

| | Gender Identity | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| PCTTOTAL | Female | 106 | 5.64 | 4.045 | .393 |
| | Male | 78 | 8.81 | 5.904 | .669 |

**Summary of findings-** The data demonstrates that:

(a) Sexism-related attitudes and gender-stereotype endorsement are robust predictors of male-default pronoun use,

(b) Gender identity accounts for a substantial between-group difference, and

(c) The instrument is highly reliable despite slight non-normality. These outcomes support the hypothesis that sexist and stereotypical beliefs drive the preferential use of "he" over gender-neutral pronouns.

**Section 5- Discussion**

This study investigated how psychological predictors- sexist attitudes and gender stereotype endorsement relate to the use of masculine generics in young adults. As predicted by theory, the findings show that gender stereotyping and benevolent sexism were highly related to the use of masculine generics; however, hostile sexism was unrelated to the use of masculine generics after controlling for gender stereotyping and benevolent sexism. In addition, males reported using male default pronouns more frequently than females.

**Male-Default Language as an Indicator of Gender Ideology-** The findings provide evidence that male-default language can be seen as an indicator of gender ideology. There was a positive moderate relationship between gender stereotyping and male-default pronoun use. Individuals who endorse strong beliefs regarding gender roles were more likely to linguistically represent men as the default human category. This relationship provides evidence for social-cognitive theories of gender that suggest that stereotypes influence perception, memory, and language processing. For example, if masculinity is mentally linked to authority, competence, or general humanness, then masculine pronouns are more likely to automatically come to mind when representing a generic person.

**Benevolent Sexism and Male-Default Language-** In addition to providing evidence that male-default language is not just a structural feature of language, the findings also indicate that male-default language is indicative of ideologically positioned thinking.

Benevolent sexism is defined as having a paternalistic attitude towards women and protecting them. Although benevolent sexism is a means of protecting women, it is also a means of promoting male normativity through positioning men as leaders, protectors, and standard bearers. Consequently, individuals who endorse benevolent sexism may more often default to masculine pronouns when referring to a generic person.

**The Lack of Relationship Between Hostile Sexism and Male-Default Language-** Although there was a small but significant bivariate relationship between hostile sexism and male-default language, hostile sexism was not a significant predictor of male-default language when benevolent sexism and gender stereotyping were included in the same model.

This relationship is theoretically interesting because hostile sexism is overtly, antagonistically and negatively biased against women, whereas benevolent sexism is covertly, positively, and traditionally gender hierarchical. Male-default language is also a covert and normalized form of bias rather than an overt hostile attitude. It is therefore, theoretically, consistent that benevolent sexism and not hostile sexism would be a better predictor of male-default language.

These findings add to the broader literature on ambivalent sexism by suggesting that more subtle ideological beliefs will be more associated with everyday forms of linguistic bias than overt forms of prejudice.

**The Relationship Between Gender and Male-Default Language-** There was a large gender difference (Cohen's d= .64) in the use of masculine generics. Males reported using male default pronouns much more frequently than females. These findings provide evidence that gender identity is a factor that contributes to the type of language people use.

Social Identity Theory could explain why males may perceive masculine pronouns as more inclusive or normative than females do. Females may perceive male default pronouns as exclusionary and therefore may use female default pronouns more frequently than males do. Females may also be more aware of the potential gender biases associated with language or more motivated to promote inclusiveness.

These gender differences provide evidence that male-default language is socially constructed, not linguistically inevitable. If masculine generics were strictly grammatical habits, then the gender differences in the use of male default pronouns would be unlikely to occur.

**Explaining the Model-** The regression findings indicate that the overall model significantly predicted male-default language use, with gender stereotypes emerging as the only independent predictor. Hostile and benevolent sexism did not independently predict pronoun choice when considered alongside stereotypes. This suggests that male-default language is more strongly influenced by internalized cognitive gender schemas than by explicit sexist attitudes. However, a substantial portion of variance remained unexplained, indicating that additional cognitive, social, cultural, and linguistic factors likely contribute to masculine generic usage and should be explored in future research.

**Theoretical Implications-** The findings of this study expand upon previous research on masculine generics by identifying specific predictors that are related to male-default language use. While many previous studies have shown that masculine generics result in male-biased mental representations, few studies have examined what causes people to vary in their use of male-default language. This study bridges the gap between social-psychological research and linguistic research by identifying gender stereotyping and benevolent sexism as predictors of male-default pronoun use.

Theoretically, the results of this study support the idea that language both reflects and maintains gender ideology. Male-default language may not simply be based upon grammatical conventions but may be maintained psychologically by belief systems that categorize men as the normative human category.

## Section 6- Conclusion

Research has demonstrated that male-default language use is a meaningful reflection of gender ideologies rather than simply a grammatical construct. As this research shows, there are significant correlations between the degree to which individuals endorse traditional gender stereotypes and their use of masculine generic pronouns. Furthermore, the research suggests that even subtle ideological beliefs (i.e., benevolent sexism) have a predictive relationship with male-default language use.

This study also found that while hostile sexism has a relationship with male-default language use; it is not unique from the effects of other ideological factors in predicting pronoun bias. Additionally, this study demonstrated a statistically significant difference in male participants' use of masculine generics compared to female participants' use of feminine generics.

**Implications of the Study-** This study provides implications for promoting gender-inclusive language and highlights the importance of addressing not only the grammatical constructs used to communicate but also the underlying gender ideologies and stereotypes that influence these constructs. It recommends the use of educational programs, awareness campaigns, and institutional guidelines that provide recommendations for using gender-neutral language alternatives as a means of reducing subtle linguistic bias. Furthermore, addressing stereotypes and benevolent sexist beliefs may contribute to more inclusive communication practices.

**Final Thought-** Male-default language represents a subtle yet pervasive form of gender bias that is embedded into everyday discourse. This type of bias may serve to reinforce the social and cognitive perception that men represent the "normal" human category. As such, promoting mindful language use represents an important contribution to broader social and political efforts to achieve gender equity and representation.

**Perspective on Future Directions for the Study-** Future research in this area should focus on a number of avenues. These include: establishing the causality between different types of gender bias and male-default language use via long-term and experimental studies; identifying other factors that predict male-default language use (for example, implicit bias, social and cultural norms, and contextual factors); and conducting cross-cultural and developmental studies to determine how gender ideology interacts with linguistic structure in order to better understand how male-default language can be challenged.

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