

# Sexism in Moroccan Arabic: Gender Differences in Perceptions and Use of Language

Zineb El Abboubi

*Chouaib Doukali University, El Jadida*



# Outline

1. Introduction
2. Background
3. Literature Review
4. Method
5. Results
6. Discussion



# 1. INTRODUCTION



## Introduction

---

- Sexist language is language that expresses bias in favor of one sex and thus treats the other sex in a discriminatory manner. In most cases, the bias is in favor of men and against women.
- The purpose of this study is to discuss both the impact of possible sex-based differences and the awareness and recognition of sexist attitudes in Moroccan Arabic.

# 2. Background



# Language is:

---

- A system of symbols we use to communicate with each other
- A powerful means through which sexism and gender discrimination are perpetrated and reproduced
- A system that reproduces societal asymmetries of status and power in favor of men

- 
- The rationale for studying sexism in language has been largely derived from the arguments of Sapir (1970) and Whorf (1956) that the nature of language influences and structures, if not determines, social relations.
  - Language changes continuously, along with the larger social context in which it is used. Therefore, questions about it can never be considered definitively settled.

# 3. Literature Review





## Literature Review

---

- Language can be seen as a “fixed and closed system”, or as system which is “dynamic, complex and subject to change”. Litosseliti (2006: 9-10)
- Language use constitutes social reality, so it has the potential to help both establish and sustain power relations, identities and values. Litosseliti (2006:19)

“

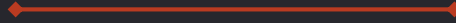


*Language is, in fact, the means by  
which the patriarchal system  
exercises its power and  
superiority.*

*Derdar (2017: 3)*

- Moroccan Arabic is sexist and it can be attested in five major domains: (i) grammar, (ii) professional occupations, (iii) relationships, (iv) character stereotyping, and (v) discourse. Sadiqi (2003: 141)
- Sexism in language and the linguistic derogation of women can be seen in the cultural aspects of language. Hachimi (2001)
- Commonly held attitudes.

“



*This is a kind of language used in general by young Moroccans of low levels of education and sometimes also by educated young men to display virility. Surprisingly, when a female enters the scene of the interaction, all these linguistic patterns will be substituted by what we might call neutral adjectives [...] Here we see how the linguistic patterns inherent to the language of men and women in Moroccan society are somehow delimited by 'psycho-linguistic' borders.*

*Anssari-Naim (2016)*

# 4. Method



## Method

---

- Quantitative data: questionnaire
- Convenient Sampling
- Sample: university students from the department of English (69 males and 71 females) at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities of Ain Chock.

# Questionnaire

---

## Part I

1. To what extent do you consider sexist language a problem in Moroccan Arabic (darija)?
2. To what extent do you feel that some students are negatively affected by sexist language?
3. To what extent do you think our usage of Moroccan Arabic (darija) is sexist inside the university?
4. Did your own usage of Moroccan Arabic (darija) change during the last few years?
5. Where does the pressure to change your usage of sexist language come from?

## Part II

1. “Man up”
2. “The king and his wife will visit South Africa”
3. “Men provide for their wives”
4. “Cavemen used to hunt for food”
5. “Women prefer quiet work places”
6. “Call a nurse”
7. “She knows how to cook, she is fit for marriage”
8. “A woman has a value in the house even if she could be like a donkey”

## Method

(1) Non inclusive and non parallel term

(2) Term for an occupation (male), denies the same position to the female

(3) Stereotype that reinforces one sex group

(4) Non-inclusive term for both genders

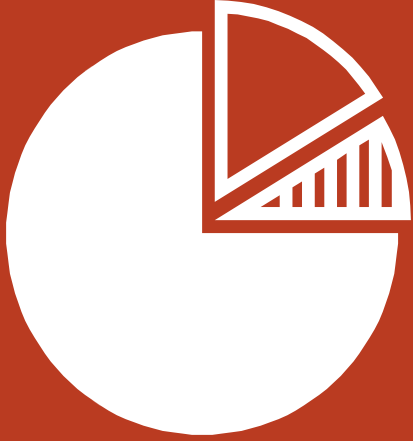
(5) Common stereotype

(6) Use of one gender form for an occupation performed by both genders

(7) Reinforcement of a stereotype

(8) Expressing a positive view in an insulting language



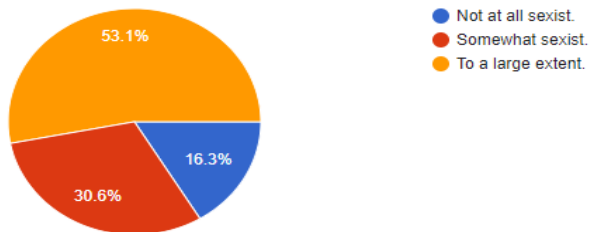


# 5. Results

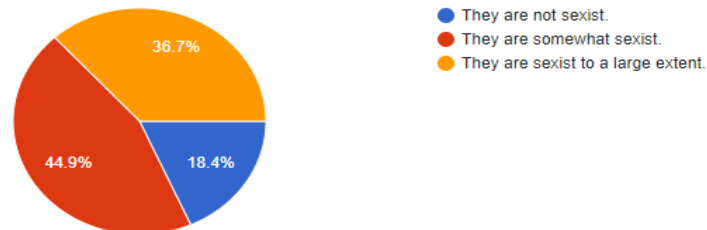


Part I: Perceptions and Attitudes towards Sexist  
Language Use and the Pressure to Change

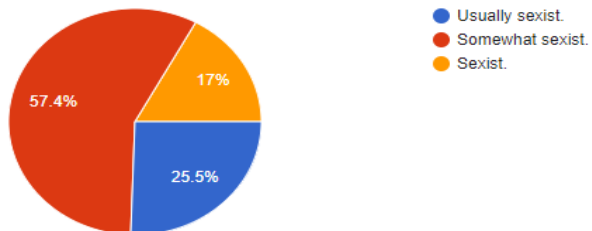
1. To what extent do you consider sexist language a problem in Moroccan Arabic (darija)?



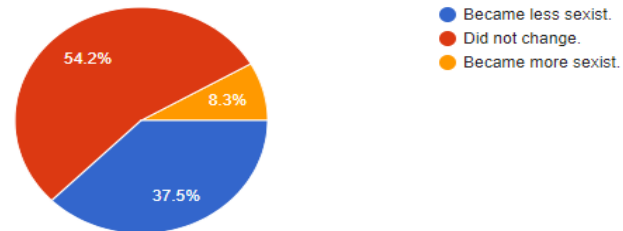
2. To what extent do you feel that some students are negatively affected by sexist language?



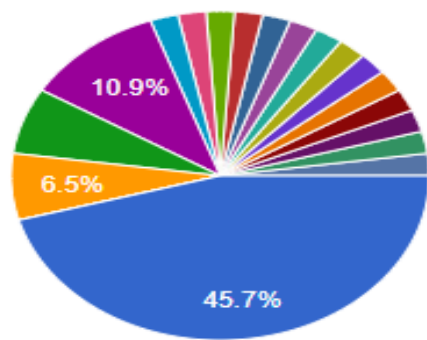
3. To what extent do you think our usage of Moroccan Arabic (darija) is sexist inside the university?



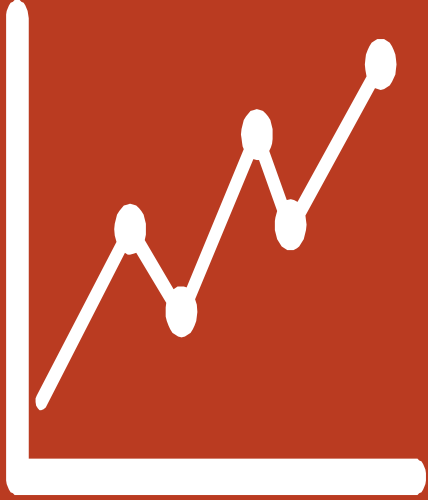
4. Did your own usage of Moroccan Arabic (darija) change during the last few years?



## 5. Where does the pressure to change your usage of sexist language come from?



- Society.
- The government.
- University administration.
- Student activities.
- Particular students.
- My own principles.
- Common sense
- Readings
- Books
- Intellectual endeavor!
- Knowledge.
- Education.
- Religion.
- Books.
- Awareness.



# Results



Part II: Recognition of Moroccan Arabic as a Sexist  
Language

**1. Man up!**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	6 (12%)	4 (8%)	5 (10%)	11 (22%)
<b>Males</b>	4 (8%)	10 (20%)	5 (10%)	5 (10%)

**2. The king and his wife will visit South Africa.**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	12 (24%)	9 (18%)	4 (8%)	1 (2%)
<b>Males</b>	16 (32%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	2 (4%)

**3. Men provide for their wives.**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	4 (8%)	3 (6%)	3 (6%)	15 (30%)
<b>Males</b>	4 (8%)	5 (10%)	11 (22%)	4 (8%)

**4. Cavemen used to hunt for food.**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	7 (14%)	13 (26%)	2 (4%)	5 (10%)
<b>Males</b>	12 (24%)	8 (16%)	0 (0.00)	3 (6%)

**5. Women prefer quiet work places.**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	3 (6%)	4 (8%)	9 (18%)	10 (20%)
<b>Males</b>	6 (12%)	10 (20%)	5 (10%)	2 (4%)

**6. Call a nurse!**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	9 (18%)	6 (12%)	4 (8%)	7 (14%)
<b>Males</b>	10 (20%)	8 (16%)	5 (10%)	1 (2%)

**7. She knows how to cook, she is marriage material.**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	1 (2%)	1 (2%)	3 (6%)	21 (42%)
<b>Males</b>	4 (8%)	2 (4%)	7 (14%)	11 (22%)

**8. A woman has a value in the house even if she could be like a donkey.**

	Not at all sexist	Slightly sexist	Moderately sexist	Very sexist
<b>Females</b>	2 (4%)	0 (0.00)	0 (0.00)	23 (46%)
<b>Males</b>	2 (4%)	0 (0.00)	4 (8%)	19 (38%)

# 6. Conclusion



## Conclusion

---

- Language and its meanings as fluid rather than fixed
- Language is dependent on the cultural and social context in which it is embedded
- The case study shows how:
  - Participants recognize sexism as a serious issue in Moroccan Arabic
  - Men are more unaware of sexist language than women.
  - Participants cannot rate a statement as sexist unless it implies direct and explicit sexism
- Participants feel that the pressure to use sexist language comes from society and peer pressure, while the pressure to change sexist language comes from awareness, education and knowledge.

# THANK YOU!

You can find me at:

- [ElAbboubiZineb@gmail.com](mailto:ElAbboubiZineb@gmail.com)





# References

---

- Anssari Naim, S. (2016). *The Politeness/Impoliteness Divide: English-Based Theories and Speech Acts Practice in Moroccan Arabic*. Publicacions de la Universitat de València; 1ª ed. edition.
- Dardar, M. (2017). "Gender and Verbal Violence: a Form of Psychological Abuse in Moroccan Popular Culture". Retrieved from <http://revues.imist.ma>. Vol 1, N° 3.
- Doyle, M. (1998). "Introduction to the A-Z of non-sexist language". In Cameron, Deborah. *The feminist critique of language: A reader*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge.
- *Hachimi, A. (2001)* "Shifting sands: language and gender in Moroccan Arabic". In Marlis Hellinger and Hadumod Bussman (eds) *Gender Across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, Vol. 1. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Litosseliti, L. (2006). *Gender and Language: Theory and Practice*. London: Hodder Arnold.
- Sadiqi, F. (2014). *Moroccan Feminist Discourses*. New York. Palgrave Macmillan.
- Sadiqi, F. (2003). *Women, Gender, and Language in Morocco*. Leiden and Boston. Brill Academic Publishers. Second printing (2009).
- Sheldon, A. (1990). "Kings Are Royaler Than Queens: Socialization". *Young Children*. Vol. 45, No. 2.

A world map with a dark blue background and light blue landmasses. An orange callout box with a white border and a downward-pointing arrow is positioned over Morocco. The text inside the callout box is white and reads "Vernacular Moroccan Arabic".

Vernacular  
Moroccan  
Arabic