

**Sexism in Language: Do Fiction Writers Assign Agentive and Patient Roles
Equally to Male and Female Characters?**

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Abstract

Problem Statement: Studies have shown that language is used discriminatorily to women and men. Hence, there have been movements against gender biased language—the movements which are reported so successful especially in the West.

Purpose of Study: This paper however argues that discrimination stems from speakers' minds; and hence performing gender neutral language alone does not confirm gender neutrality of the performer. The reliable way of judging gender neutrality would then be studying the speakers' minds.

Method: The study applied psychoanalytic literary criticism as a gateway to the unconscious minds of American authors—to find out how gender neutral they were at cognitive level. Through psychoanalytic literary criticism, authors' suppressed desires would find their way out onto their works in a distorted form. Along these lines, the study assessed the equality in assigning agentive and patient semantic roles between males and females in American fictions—to find out who between males and females were frequently assigned agentive and patient roles of the reciprocal verbs: *kiss*, *hug*, *marry*, and *divorce*.

Findings: The study found out that males were assigned more agentive roles in *kiss* and *hug*, and females in *divorce*. Moreover, both were assigned almost equal roles in *marry*.

Conclusion: The implication of the findings is that speakers' unconscious mind is basically gender biased along gender stereotypes.

Keywords: language and gender, language thought and society, linguistic relativity, psychoanalytic literary criticism, literary realism

Introduction

Studies (Coates, 1986; Lei, 2006; Woolf, 1990; Mills, 2008; Mills and Mullany, 2011) have shown that language is used discriminatorily in referring to women and men respectively. Mills and Mullany (2011, p. 145) say that women are portrayed negatively through language or are generalized through language based on men and women stereotypes. Examples given in English language are: the use of masculine generic nouns to refer to both men and women and not vice versa: for instance ‘*man is mortal*’; whereby ‘*man*’ in this case refers to both men and women. Similarly, the use of pronoun ‘*he*’; as a generic pronoun; for example ‘someone must be aware of what *he* is going to encounter’. The use of ‘*man*’ and ‘*he*’ in the both examples refers to both men and women; and thus they are generic in favour of male gender (as long as the equivalent terms for females namely: ‘*woman*’ and ‘*she*’ cannot be used to refer males consecutively). Secondly, the terms used to refer to females are routinely derived from the terms referring males; for instance, *manageress* from *manager*, *goddess* from *god*, *princess* from *prince*, *sailorette* from *sailor*; just to mention a few (See, Lei, 2006; Mills, 2008, p. 10). It is also observed that most of such terms referring to females derived from the males’ terms have different connotations from their parent terms. For instance, it is reported that the term *mistress* is derived from *mister*, yet the term *mistress* refers to a partner in extramarital affairs (which is actually negative compared to ‘*mister*’ that is simply means a male counterpart). Similarly, ‘*governor*’ refers to a person appointed to govern a province or state, meanwhile the word “*governess*” used for counterpart female simply refers to a ‘*nurse maid*’ (Lei, 2006, p. 89). Moreover, some titles are traditionally man oriented: implying that women were not thought of holding such titles. Examples of such titles are: *chairman*, *congressman*, *newsman*, *footballer*, *foreman*, *professor*, *engineer*, *lawyer*, *doctor* and so forth (Lei, 2006, p. 88). More exhibition of sexism in language at work is the tendency to associate female candidates with negative connotations in the circumstance where a common term is used to refer to both men and women. The case in point is the term *professional* –which is generic for both men and women. Nonetheless, the connotative meaning of the word *professional* is only used for women—to mean a prostitute. Sexism in language is also shown in the proverbs such as:

'seven women in their right senses are surpassed by a mad man; a woman has cheated even the devil, women have got long hair and short sense' and so forth (Lei, 2006, p. 90).

Additionally, it is reported that men also infringe women's right to speak in a conversation involving men and women. Coates (1986, p. 100-101) and Aksu (2005, p. 16) report that men interrupt women more and also do take considerably long time to encourage them to continue speaking through particle markers in the conversation. In their view, these men's techniques eventually turn off women from taking active part in the conversation: that is, women eventually choose to be listeners than speakers; possibly to avoid embarrassment they are likely to incur. Coates (ibid) adds that other characteristics of men's conversation such as the use of swear words and interruptive forms; all lead to the inequality between men and women in a conversation.

In literature (that this works focuses on), women are reported to be not represented in equal image as men (Newell, 1996, p. 186, 171). Woolf (1990) reports that women wrote little fictions for themselves between 15th century and 19th century due to the law and custom restrictions during the era—that did not permit women to produce their own literature. Consequently, men who wrote about women in that era would constantly portray them as insignificant beings compared to men. Woolf (1990, p. 34) reports that in the 19th century there was little improvement which saw the increase of women starting writing fiction for themselves. Nevertheless, it is reported that even the most of the 19th century literature by women themselves is focusing only on limited themes; probably because women did not engage in some activities and hence lacked experience to write about them. According to Kaplan (1990, p. 58), women are portrayed in the 19th century literature as people in subordinate positions—following the fact that most of the themes of literature they produced in this era are about right claiming.

Articulated Success of the Anti-Discriminatory Language Campaigns

Following women's historical backwardness, there have been movements among the feminists to reduce sexual discrimination and sex role stereotypes in among other things the use of gender biased language. In the Western countries this movement has been going on since 1970's (Lei, 2006, p. 90, Mills, 2008, p. 11; Mills & Mullany, 2011, p. 145, 146, Mills, 2012). Following these movements, scholars report that the

language has greatly changed in favour of females. Mills and Mullany (ibid) report a study of gender-related language change that was exhibited by comparing an article entitled ‘*The Good Wife’s Guide*’ published by *Housekeeping* in 1955; and its rewritten version in *Glamour Magazine* in 2009. Their observation is that the representation of woman and the style of language have changed a lot over this time: denoting that the campaigns against portrayal and sexism have been a success (at least at conscious level). Other reported successes in making language gender neutral in English language are: the use of *Ms.* instead of *Miss.* and *Mrs.*, substituting the use of man as a generic term with the expressions such as ‘*someone has to be careful, he or she should make sure that everything is right* and so forth. Moreover, there has also been the introduction of gender sensitive terms like saying: *person to person* instead of *man to man*, *police officer* instead of *policeman*, *business executive* instead of *businessman*, *chairperson* instead of *chairman*, *human resource* instead of *manpower*, *artificial* instead of *man-made*, *layperson* instead of *layman* and so forth (Lei, 2006, p. 91).

Nevertheless, challenges such as the acceptability of such terms have been reported. Mills and Mullany (2011; p. 146) hold that feminists have to work very hard to change the language or to get a new word accepted simply because the opposed sexist terms are well established and are readily available to speakers for use. That is, speakers sometimes think that the alternative terms are ‘forced’ onto them; and hence seems to protest by not using them or use them hesitantly—if needs be. Mills, (op. cit) reports of the use of items like *chairperson* with a tonal change when referring to a woman chair by some speakers who choose to use the term. Similarly, because the terms are not natural, some users find using them ridiculous, and hence normally hesitate using them. Mills (2008, p. 16) is also of the view that the newly innovated terms (supposed to be neutral) are sometimes used to refer to women only, not men. Her case in point is, ‘*chairperson*’ which she claims to be mostly used to refer to a woman chair, and that *chairman* is mostly used to refer to a man chair. Another observation is also made in reference to changing individual words. Mills and Mullany (2011, p. 160) are of the view that focusing on the word’s meanings is not necessarily a solution to a sexist language as long as the context may still be sexist.

Overall, despite such challenges, many scholars agree that an overt sexism (the usage of language that can be straightforwardly identified as sexist through the use of linguistic markers or through the analysis of the preposition of the expression) is at least

successfully contained—especially in the Western countries (Mills, *ibid*, p. 11). Mills and Mullany (2011) add that feminist language policies have made a great impact in such a way that it is now rare to find an overt sexism in a university or trade union documentation. Additionally, they claim that most publishing houses have developed policies ensuring that discriminatory language does not occur in the published materials.

Nonetheless, the studies have also reported that an indirect sexism (expressing sexism in a way that is not directly obvious and in a way that enables a speaker to deny a responsibility to the use) continues. Mills and Mullany (2011, p. 145) assert that feminist discriminatory language are such conventionalized thinking within society that suppressing the overt form is not a victory over the practice as the new forms will emerge. Mills (*ibid*, 12) gives the new form of indirect sexism as humour and irony; whereby women are stereotyped through expressions or fictions; which actors cannot be held responsible for: as long as they belong to the genre of humour or irony. This implies that the movement of political correctness is only partly successful.

In these lines of thinking, the study was interested to work out the success of a campaign against sexism at subconscious level by analyzing a corpus of fiction writings. This was done in line with Mills and Mullany (2011) who say:

With corpus linguistics, we can develop a form of analysis of sexism which can examine the way that emotive connotations accrue over time to words associated with women. We can also be aware of context in the development of these meanings, so that we can recognise that simply replacing words with more neutral terms will not solve the problem (p. 160, *the emphasis is mine*)

The quote implies that the restriction of the use of certain phrases alone is not enough to achieve the ‘political correctness’—because sexism is such institutionalized and crystallized in the thoughts of language users for quiet long time that those who are sexist will still find other ways to express sexism (Mills, 2008, p. 17). In this regard, it is worth finding out the success of the campaign in the minds of the language users (competence) – studying the minds of language users to find out whether they are gender neutral cognitively or not – rather than judging their gender neutrality by solely observing their language performance.

One avenue to get to know the thoughts of the users regarding this phenomenon is resorting to their unconscious production of language. This study considered the act of assigning semantic roles in fiction works an instance where a performer produces

language at subconscious level (without his conscious thought). Thus, the study was convinced that studying this process would reveal the real gender content in the minds of performers. In line with this, the study was interested to find out how authors of fictions assign semantic roles between men and women in their fiction works? That is, in reciprocal actions such as *hugging* or *kissing*, who is mostly assigned *active* role (agent) and who is mostly assigned *passive* role (patient)? That is, who mostly *kiss* and *hug* and who is regularly *hugged* and *kissed* between man and woman in such reciprocal actions? The principle which justified this test is because the reciprocal verbs involved in these actions equally allow both participants to assume any semantic role between male and female; hence there is no any justification for one gender to be assigned more roles; especially if the activity described is hypothetical as in fictions. A pattern in assigning more roles to one gender would therefore suggest gendered-thinking in the minds of the performers.

Fictitious Texts Analysis as a Window to the Underlying Thought of the Language Users

The analysis of fictitious texts to know the thought of the language users is accounted for by psychoanalytic literary criticism, founded by Sigmund Freud and advanced by other scholars like Carl Jung and Jacques Lacan. Psychoanalysis is an approach to getting to the minds of the authors or the readers via literary works. The analysis is based on Freud's argument that childhood experiences lead to the development of three divisions in the mind: *the ego*, *the id*, and *the superego*; whereby, the *ego* is the conscious part of the brain a person is aware of and the *id* is the unconscious or repressed desires a person has, (such as the Oedipus complex desires), while the *superego* is the conscience part of the brain that determines the person's judgement.

In literary criticism therefore, psychoanalytic criticism looks for the influences of all the three parts of the mind on literature (WiseGeek, 2012). This approach presupposes that there are a lot of unfulfilled desires that human have (*id*), but which they suppress when conscious (mostly because they are not desirable according to norms and laws of the society in question). However, when a human being is in unconscious state (like in dream/or in a literary writing or performance), it is reported that such suppressed contents (desires) in human mind find their way out in a distorted

form—because *superego* becomes a bit lax at this state (Freud, 2010). Fluck puts it that literature is a space containing fantasy and personal frustration where readers' anxieties are expressed and resolved symbolically (Fluck, 1987, as cited in Newell, 1996, p. 171). So, in line with this approach, a literary text (like dream) is produced or consumed when the mind is unconscious (like in dream). That is, authors or/and readers let what is filling their minds out without their advert. Department of English and Literature (2008) puts it that the hidden or disguised motives come out the way they could not come out when the person in question were rational. In this way, we can use a literary text as a window to clamorous instincts in the author's mind—that they would not let us know when they were conscious. That is, through literature, we can get to know the author's childhood trauma, family life, sexual conflicts, unresolved emotions, psychological conflicts, guilty, ambivalences and fixations among other things: that he has kept secret for himself throughout his life (Delahoyde, 2011). In other words, one can learn what the author did not intend to reveal as he happens to reveal them unconsciously when producing the work of art like fiction. WiseGeek (2012) states the goal of this technique as understanding the unconscious symbols and desires thorough the interpretation of the more obvious content.

Regarding this study, it is reported that the campaign against anti-discriminatory language against women is a success at conscious level (performance level in line with de Saussure) as proved by statistical findings and observations. The analysis of fiction works by this study was thus expected to evaluate if such people praised for using gender sensitive language at the conscious level are truly conscious cognitively as they appear to be at unconscious level.

Corpus Based Analysis of *Agentive* and *Patient* Roles Assignment to Male and Female Characters

This was a corpus based study set out to find if there is an advert bias in assigning *agentive* and *patient* roles to fictitious characters by the fiction authors. The study engaged reciprocal verbs: *kiss*, *hug*, *divorce* and *marry* simply because of their ability to either assign equal roles or biased roles to their arguments.

The Reciprocal Verbs

The reciprocal verbs are the verbs which denote eventuality that involves reciprocity between its participants (Siloni, 2008, p. 451). In a simple language, reciprocal verbs are capable of reversing actions to both participants. For instance, in the sentence, ‘Marwa and Achieng kissed’; the word (predicate) *kiss* is reciprocal as it shows that Marwa kissed Achieng and Achieng also kissed Marwa. That is, the action is reversible between the participants; as each of the participants can be *agent* and also *patient* of the action: *kissing* in this case. Biber, et al., (1999, p. 48) report that in some cases, reciprocity is marked by the reciprocal pronouns in English language: normally by the use of the pronoun *each other* or *one another*. Some of the verbs that shows reciprocity in English and of course in many other languages are verbs like: *love, write, kiss, understand, speak, know, argue, hate, meet, telephone, resemble, clung, hug* and so forth. As earlier stated, this study focused on only four English reciprocal verbs namely: *hug, kiss, divorce* and *marry*.

The Argument Structure of the Reciprocal Verbs

The notion of argument structure of reciprocal verbs is based on the notions of *valency* and *transitivity*. Valency refers to the number and nature of the dependents of the predicators (Lyons, 1981, p. 116). In other words, the numbers of gaps (places) needed to be filled for a construction with the *predicate* in question to be well formed. The *predicate* in this case might be a verb or a pronoun. This study focused on verbs because it is the category relevant to this study. For instance, the verb *put* has a valency of 3. That is to say, for a well formed construction with the verb *put*, three gaps have to be filled. One gap is *agent* (one who does the action), the second gap is *theme* (a thing to be put) and the other gap is *location* (where the object is to be put). On the other hand, *sleep* has a valency of 1 and *give* has *valency of 3*,—in the same fashion illustrated by *put* above. Furthermore, similar to valency is *transitivity* which refers to the association between the verb and the object. Verbs that do not need objects are said to be *intransitive* while those that needs objects are said to be *transitive*. That is, the phenomenon of *transitivity* strictly focuses on the NPs after the verb, not other gaps like location or goal. Nonetheless, despite this definite patterning of predicators in terms of the number of the valency as shown above, it is worth noting at this juncture that a good

number of verbs allow more than one patterning in constructions (Biber, et al., 1999, p. 141).

Reciprocal verbs are the case in point: as they are able to arrange their arguments in two patterns namely: transitively or intransitively. Consider the following patterns adopted from Biber, et al., (1999, p. 148).

- a) As intransitives**
 - i.** John and Marry *kissed*
 - ii.** Helen and Jack *met* yesterday
- b) As transitive**
 - i.** John *kissed* Marry
 - ii.** Jack *met* Helen

The patterning in category **a)** is obviously different from the patterning in category **b)**. That is, the patterning in category **a)** above shows the reciprocity of the action of *kissing* and *meeting* (bidirectional activity). Sentences shown in pattern **a)** can sometimes be reinforced by the reciprocal pronouns such as *each other* or *one another*. Conversely, the patterning in **b)** shows the transitivity of the action of kissing. In a simple language, in the category **b)**, the action is unidirectional; whereby the subject is the *agent* while the object is either *theme*, *recipient*, *patient*, *beneficiary* or *affected*.

The Reciprocal Verbs and the Semantic Roles

Semantic roles are the semantic labels that show how things and people participate in a particular action described by the predicate (Hurford and Heasley, 1983). That is, semantic relations describe a relationship that holds between the predicate and its arguments. For example, in the sentence, *Rashidi hit a dog with a stick*: there are three participants namely: *Rashidi*, *dog* and *stick* in the action of *beating*. Semantic roles show how these three participants participated in the action of beating. *Rashidi* participated as initiator of the action (*agent*), *dog* as the affected (*patient*) and *stick* as the instrument for accomplishing the action (*instrument*).

Reciprocal verbs used in this study '*kiss*', '*hug*', *divorce* and *marry* need at least two participants: *agent* on the one hand, and *patient* or *theme* or *affected* or *beneficiary* or *experiencer* on the other hand. *Agent* is the participant whose meaning is specified in the verb as doing the action described intentionally. It is the initiator of some action-capable of acting with volition (Hurford, et al. 2007; Saeed, 1997). Examples of *agents*

are the subjects of the predicates like “*kill*”, “*eat*”, “*hit*”, “*smash*”, “*kick*”, and “*watch*” e.g. *John* kicked the ball; or *John* hit Alex with a stone. Deliberation or intention is thus a key element that outlaws inanimate from being agent; and differentiates the role of *agent* from other roles such as *force* or *instrument*. For example, in the sentence: *Fire* burnt *the bush*. *Fire* in this case cannot be the *agent* simply because it has no volition that characterize *agent*. Furthermore, *experiencer* is a typically a person who is mentally aware of, or perceives or experiences the action or state described by the sentence, but who is not in control of the situation (Hurford, et al. 2007, p. 251); and *affected (patient)* is a person or a thing upon which the action is carried out (Hurford, et al. p. 246). Meanwhile, *beneficiary* is a person for whose benefit or whose detriment of the action described by the sentence is carried out.

However, to avoid confusion, this study will only consider two possible semantic roles namely: *agent* and *patient*. *Agent* in this case is the one who is in control of the action. This implies that assignment of *agentive* role to male or female is the assignment of the active role in the action. In this study therefore, assignment of more *agentive* roles to males would suggest prominence assignment to the candidate in question. That is, it implies giving them a control of a reciprocal action; which by its design is emancipatory to both participants. Conversely, *patient* refers to a passive participant acted upon by *agent*. Nevertheless, in a reciprocal action, the *agent* and *patient* are actually supposed to take part in the action. The assignment of more *patient* roles to females would thus suggest a diminution: as inactive objects acted upon by active male agents and vice versa.

Material and Methods

Source of Data

This was a corpus based study using Contemporary American Corpus (COCA) which is available online. The study used only the fiction component of the corpus— which consists of 85 million words from the novels and short stories published from 1990 to 2011.

This study focused on how the semantic roles are assigned to male and female respectively in the four reciprocal verbs namely: *hug*, *kiss*, *marry* and *divorce*. As it has been presented above; these reciprocal verbs can pattern their arguments in two distinct

ways: (a) as intransitive. E.g. *Mary and John* hugged, or *Peter and Mariam* kissed (b) as transitive e.g. *Mary* hugged *John* or *Peter* Kissed *Mariam*.

In regard to this study, occurrence of *intransitive pattern* involving male and female suggests gender equality and sensitivity—as both participants (male and female) are assigned equal roles—as allowed by the reciprocal verbs. On the other hand, the occurrence of *transitive patterns* suggests inequality in role assignments: because one participant is assigned the role of agentive (active role) while the other is assigned the role of patient (inactive role). In this regard, the study focused on whom between male and female is assigned more roles of *agentive* and *patient* than the other.

Research Procedure

1. The first step was to go to the Contemporary American Corpus (COCA)—which is available online at <http://corpus2.byu.edu/coca/>
2. The second step was to type a word or a phrase in the search engine and to retrieve the occurrences of the word or the phrase in question

Extract 1

The retrieved occurrences of “Kissed” as a keyword in context

CLICK FOR MORE CONTEXT				<input type="checkbox"/> [?]	SAVE LIST	CHOOSE LIST	CREATE NEW LIST	<input type="text"/>	[?]
1	2011	SPOK	CBS_Early	A	B	C	leaving for work that morning. JAMES-HENSLEE-1Hu: Had me coffee ready for work, kissed her good-bye and she waved good-bye out			
2	2011	SPOK	CNN_News	A	B	C	of my leg with me talking to him, telling him I loved him and kissed him. So he saved my life and gave his for it. And you			
3	2011	SPOK	Fox_Live	A	B	C	were so robbed of our beautiful princess. UNIDENTIFIED-MALE: We made breakfast and she kissed me good-bye and said I love you			
4	2011	SPOK	CNN_Showbiz	A	B	C	, Paris reportedly liked what Kim said in that article so much that the two kissed and made up. I actually think Kim is just fine witho			
5	2011	FIC	Analog	A	B	C	. " I am so glad you're here. " She leaned in and kissed him on the lips before he realized what she intended, then walked quickly to			
6	2011	FIC	FantasySciFi	A	B	C	happened on the march. To the lowing of oxen, I stroked her and kissed her and made much of her. After a time, she forgot in mid-s			
7	2011	FIC	FantasySciFi	A	B	C	"ll get chilled or the mosquitoes will find you. " He leaned over and kissed her cheek. " See you in the morning. " She remained there			
8	2011	FIC	FantasySciFi	A	B	C	collapsed onto the sheets beside her she didn't roll away. Instead, she kissed him gently on the forehead, hummed a soft refrain fro			

3. The next step was to sample the 100 occurrences out of long list of the retrieved occurrences and to save such sample either as *the basic search sample* or *the repeat search sample*

Extract 2

COCA's window showing how to sample the occurrences to a convenient number

SECTION: NO LIMITS						PAGE: << < 1 / 66 > >>
[Return to frequency list]						SAMPLE: 100 200 500 1000
CLICK FOR MORE CONTEXT		<input type="checkbox"/> [?]	SAVE LIST	CHOOSE LIST	-----	CREATE NEW LIST
1	2011 SPOK CBS_Early	A B C				SAMPLE 1 [?]
2	2011 SPOK CNN_News	A B C				
3	2011 SPOK Fox_Live	A B C				

4. Then the researcher would read each list in the expanded context to trace the position of agent and patient in respect to the verb.
5. He would then judge each list along four dimensions: male and female kiss (m&fKISS); male kissing female (mKISSf); female kissing male (fKISSm) or (Non-applicable)(The nature of the names and the gender indicative personal pronouns helped in identify male and female participants of a reciprocal action in question. Where the gender of a participant in an action could not be ascertained in the context, the occurrence would be judged as Non-applicable). The illustration of the procedure is given in the extract three below.

Extract 3

The COCA's window illustrating how the occurrences were judged along the roles

The screenshot shows a search interface for the word 'kissed' in the COCA corpus. It lists 8 occurrences with their respective source texts and interpretations. The interpretations are: m KISS f, Not applicable, f KISS m, Not applicable, f KISS m, Not applicable, m KISS f, and m KISS f.

Occurrence No.	Source	Text Snippet	Interpretation
1	COCA:2004-FIC FantasySciFi	fished out a small package, about the size of a box of cold tablets, and passed it to Wilson, then walked away. Once he got into his apartment, Wilson found Ellen rocking Jason in the rocking chair by the front window. Jason was asleep. He bent over and kissed her and she held onto his arm. "Who was that man taking to you on the sidewalk?" she asked softly, nodding toward the window. "I do n't know," Wilson told her. "Some kind of woo-woo nut, I guess." Ellen looked at	m KISS f
2	COCA:2000-FIC Ploughshares	an inch of clean air above the water's surface, and I inhaled. And then I exhaled. # I woke with my head on the other shore where Wylie must have dragged me to keep me from drowning. My legs still hung in the water, and tiny minnows kissed, kissed away the charred pieces of skin, peeling like stubborn hangnails. My head was heavy when I tried to raise it. The sun's reflection on the surface or the sun itself churned around in a drying cycle. Or maybe it was the fire, still burning, still chasing us.	Not applicable
3	COCA:1998-FIC Ploughshares	soothe him before they crashed. "I love you," she murmured to him, her hand poised across his brow, as if to check for one last fever. "I love you, little Bobby, little dear one. You've had a beautiful life." Then she kissed him over and over until the end. She wasn't able to hold onto him when they struck the ground. He'd hurtled forward through time and space, a frail illustration of the laws of physics, the rest of his life condensed to a few brief seconds of fear.	f KISS m
4	COCA:1997-FIC HarpersMag	dearest... you have comforted me no end! "My soul was flooded with happiness, and I thanked Zoe again and again, and she thanked me. And both of us, overjoyed, thankful, kissed each other's hands, commending each other on our high-mindedness. I kissed her hands; she kissed my forehead, the stubble of my beard. It seems that forgetting all etiquette I even hugged her! And let me tell you, this declaration of non-love was sweeter than any declaration of love could be! Joyful, rosy, trembling all over, we rushed	Not applicable
5	COCA:2003-FIC Ploughshares	." Would you like to live forever? " # "I have done so already," he replied at once. "Each moment you are gone is an eternity to me." # Beatrice laughed then, delighted by the way all doors opened to new places. Impulsively she kissed Roberto, sliding her hand behind his neck and her tongue into his mouth, where it bloomed like a flower struck by light. # Summer grew rich and dense, and then, subtly, it began to wane. A few leaves drifted to the ground, and overnight the dogwoods turned	f KISS m
6	COCA:1996-FIC Bk:HerOwnRules	she was up to something, and all the time. Up to no good, my father always said. He was her firstborn and her favorite of her four children. I P93 recall that she had a good sense of humor and was a marvelous raconteur. I think she must have kissed the Blamey Stone. " "Was she Irish? " "She was. My grandfather met her in Dublin. At a ball. He had gone there to shoot Mathilde busted in from the bedroom with Vincent in her wake. " Would you like to have help with your	Not applicable
7	COCA:1992-FIC KansasQ	the kitchen for towels. He cleaned up the mess on the couch as well as he could, then took Carla's hand and helped her out of the chair. They walked into the bedroom, and as they passed the door to Arlene's room called out good night. # Lindsay kissed her and held her close. It's all right, he said, it can happen to anyone. But Carla had already seen a certain look in his patrician eyes. # She felt barely able to take off her clothes. She pulled her dress over her head slowly, rolled down	m KISS f
8	COCA:2010-FIC Bk:ThisIsWhereWeLive	forehead against hers. " You OK? " he asked, and ran his hands up and down her bare arms, checking for breaks or abrasions. " I'm fine," she said. " In fact, I'm kind of turned on. Is that weird? " Jeremy kissed her nose and then her upper lip and let his torso rest against hers. " Earthquakes are a known aphrodisiac," he said, his hand sliding toward the hem of her dress. She kicked a piece of broken glass away with the toe of her sandal and tugged at the waistband	m KISS f

6. Nextly, the findings for each of the occurrence was recorded in a form like this below:

Table 1

The model recording sheet for the data

E.g. Data Form for 'KISS'								
List No.	The basic search sample				The repeat search sample			
	m&fKISS	mKISSf	fKISSm	Non-App.	m&fKISS	mKISSf	fKISSm	Non-App.
1		√				√		
2	√							√
3				√			√	
4			√		√			
5				√				√
Tally	01	01	01	02	01	01	01	02
%	20%	20%	20%	40%	20%	20%	20%	40%

7. He then calculated the tallies into percentages
8. Sorting the Applicable columns from the Non-applicables and calculating the percentage of the former exclusively

Findings of the Study

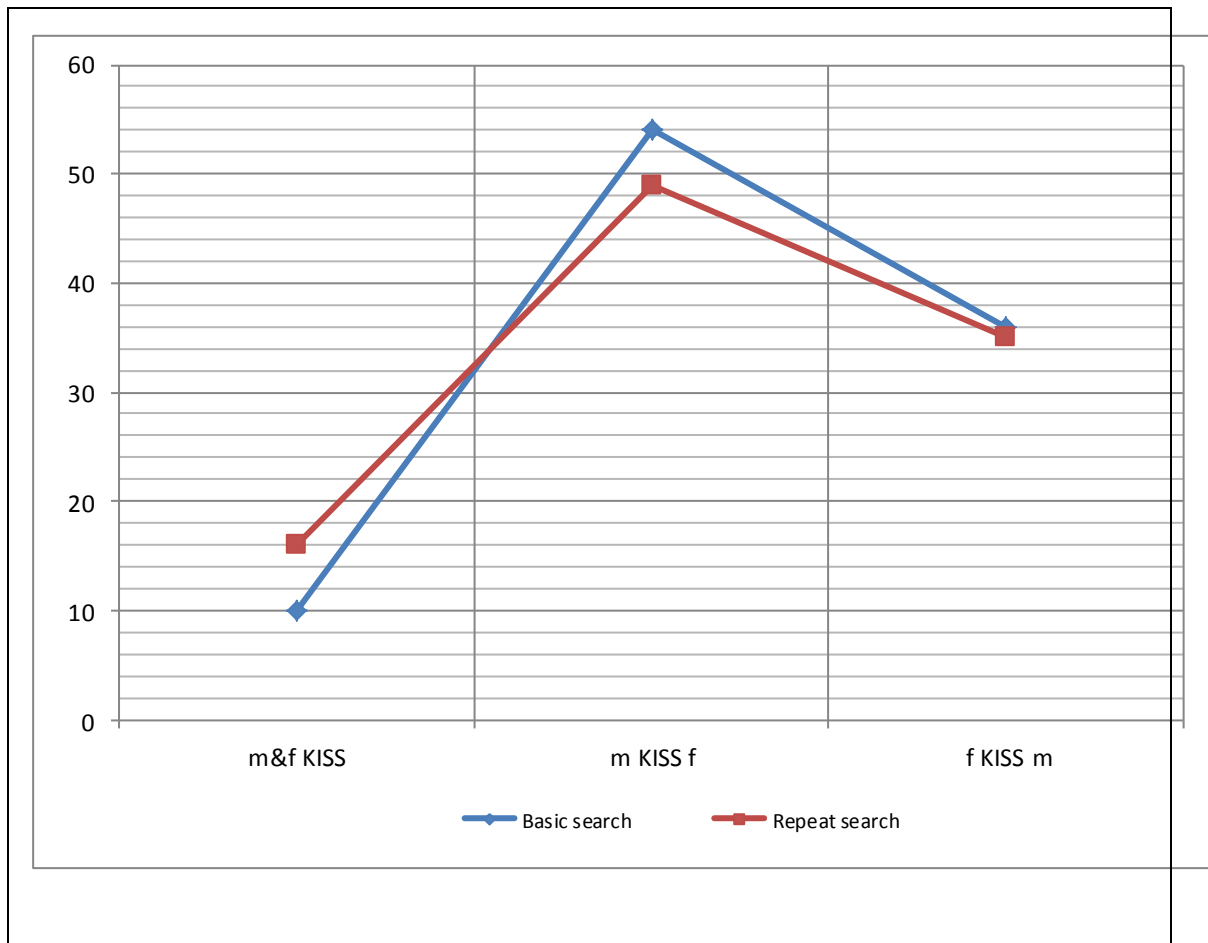
Keyword in Context Search for the Predicate ‘kiss’

The predicate ‘*kissed*’ was searched through the corpus of American fictions and 5071 hits were retrieved. The past tense form was used as a search word to enhance the retrieval of agentive and patient arguments—which are possible with the verb class, as opposed to the adjective or noun classes. The researcher sampled 100 out of these hits and saved the list as *the basic search sample*. The researcher then reran the search using the same word and retrieved the constant list of 5071 hits. He again randomly sampled 100 hits from the list and saved it as *the repeat search sample*. The next step was to read each *hit* in a broader context, identify the pattern involved, record it and calculate the percentage of occurrences.

Eventually in *the basic search sample*: *m&f KISS* occurrence was 10%; *mKISSf* was 54% and *fKISSm* was 36%. In *the repeat search sample*: *m&f KISS* occurrence was 16%; *mKISSf* was 49% and *fKISSm* was 35%. Findings in both *the basic search sample* and *repeat search sample* are represented by the following line graph.

Graph 1

The frequency of occurrence of the argument structure for the predicate kiss in the corpus



Key:

m&fKISS=male and female kiss

mKISSf=male kiss female

fKISSm=female kiss male

As the graph above shows, both the *basic search* and *repeat search* shows a definite trend. The occurrences of reciprocity in ‘*kissing*’ between males and females was very low; while the frequency of males kissing females in both searches was higher; as compared to the frequency of females kissing males.

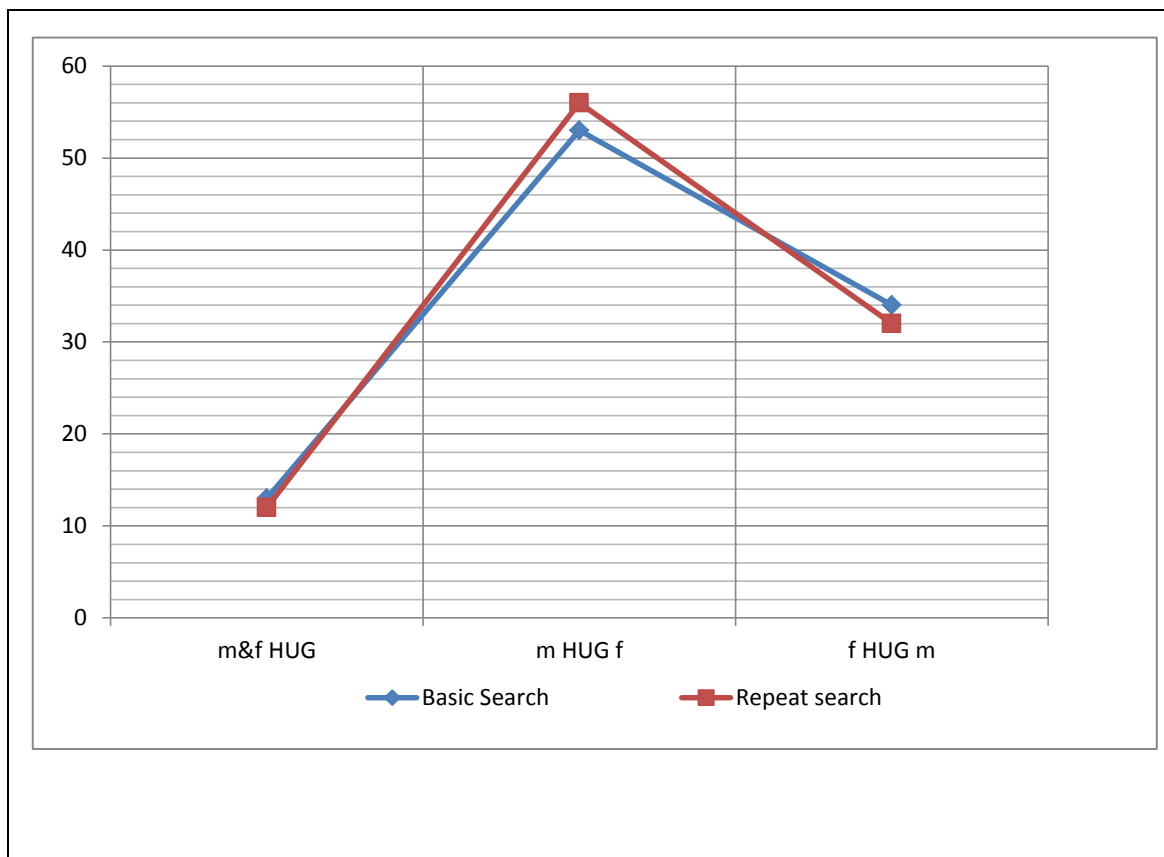
Keyword in Context Search for the Predicate ‘hug’

The predicate ‘*hugged*’ was searched through the corpus and 2073 hits were retrieved. The past tense form ‘*hugged*’ was used as a search word so as to eliminate the adjective class; which do not show agentive and patient arguments targeted by the study. The researcher then sampled 100 hits out of the list and saved it as *the basic search sample*. The researcher then re-launched a new search which retrieved the constant list of 2073 hits. He again randomly sampled 100 hits and saved it as *the repeat search sample*. The next step was to read each hit in the expanded context, locate the arguments along gender, tally the occurrences, calculate the percentage of occurrences and record the finding.

Eventually in *the basic search sample*: *m&f HUG* occurrence was 13%; *mHUGf* was 53% and *fHUGm* was 34%. In *the repeat search sample*: *m&f HUG* occurrence was 12%; *mHUGf* was 56% and *fHUGm* was 32%. Findings in both *the basic search sample* and *repeat search sample* are represented by the following line graph.

Graph 2

The frequency of occurrence of the argument pattern for the predicate hug in the corpus



Key:

m&fHUG=male and female hug

mHUGf=male hug female

fHUGm=female hug male

As the graph above shows, the occurrences of reciprocity in ‘*hugging*’ between males and females was very low; the frequent occurrences were of males hugging females as compared to females hugging males.

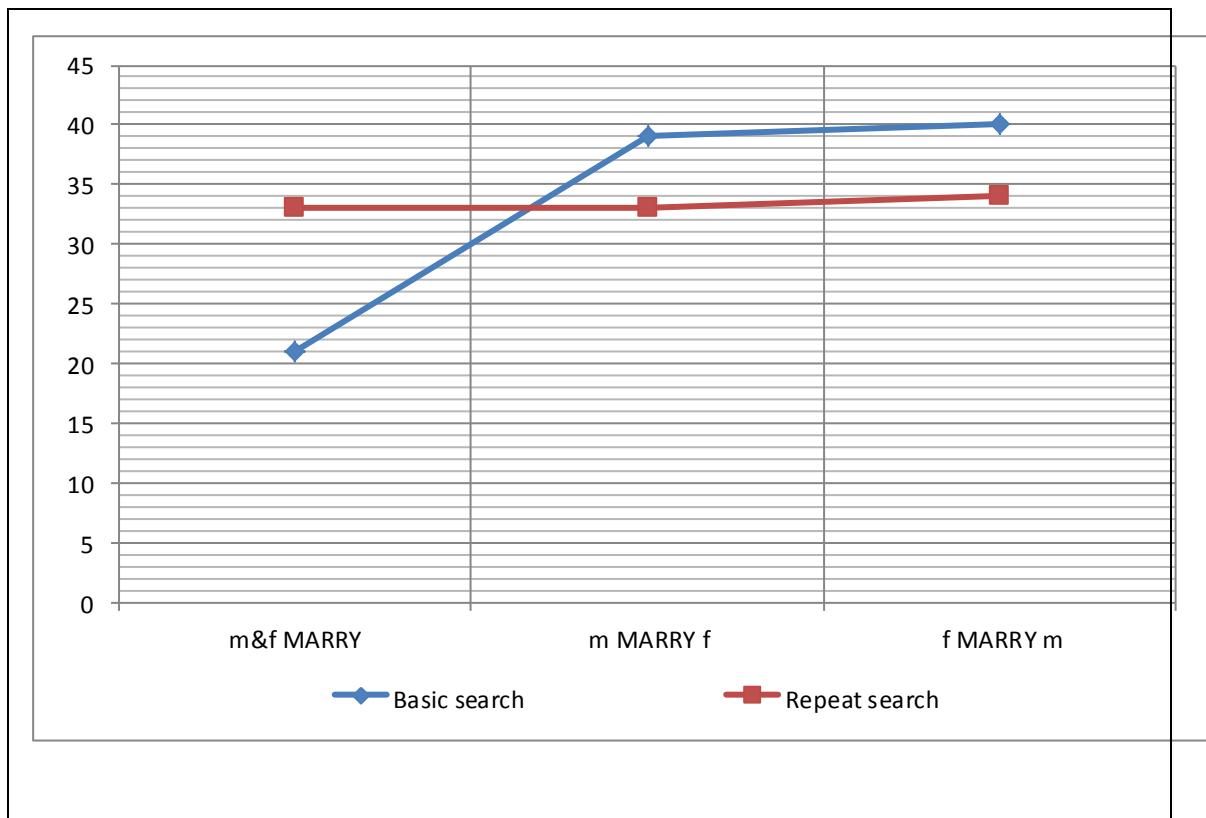
Keyword in Context Search for the Predicate ‘marry’

Moreover, the past tense word-form ‘*married*’ was searched through the corpus, and 12,312 hits were retrieved. The past tense word-form was used as a search word to retrieve the verb class; which would show agentive and patient roles focused by this study. The researcher sampled 100 out of these hits and saved the list as *the basic search sample*. The researcher then reran the search and retrieved the constant list of 12,312 hits. He again sampled the 100 hits randomly and saved it as *the repeat search sample*. The next step was to read each hit in the expanded context, tally the occurrences, calculate the percentage of occurrences and record the finding.

Eventually, in *the basic search sample*: *m&fMARRY* occurrence was 21%; *mMARRYf* was 39% and *fMARRYm* was 40%. In *the repeat search sample*: *m&fMARRY* occurrence was 33%; *mMARRYf* was 33% and *fMARRYm* was 34%. Findings in both *the basic search sample* and *repeat search sample* are represented by the following line graph.

Graph 3

The frequency of occurrence of the argument pattern for the predicate marry in the corpus



Key:

m&fMARRY=male and female marry

mMARRYf=male marry female

fMARRYm=female marry male

As the graph above shows, there were more occurrences of reciprocity in 'marrying' between male and female as compared to the occurrences in 'hugging' and 'kissing'. Moreover, there was almost equal distribution of the agentive roles in 'marrying' to both males and females.

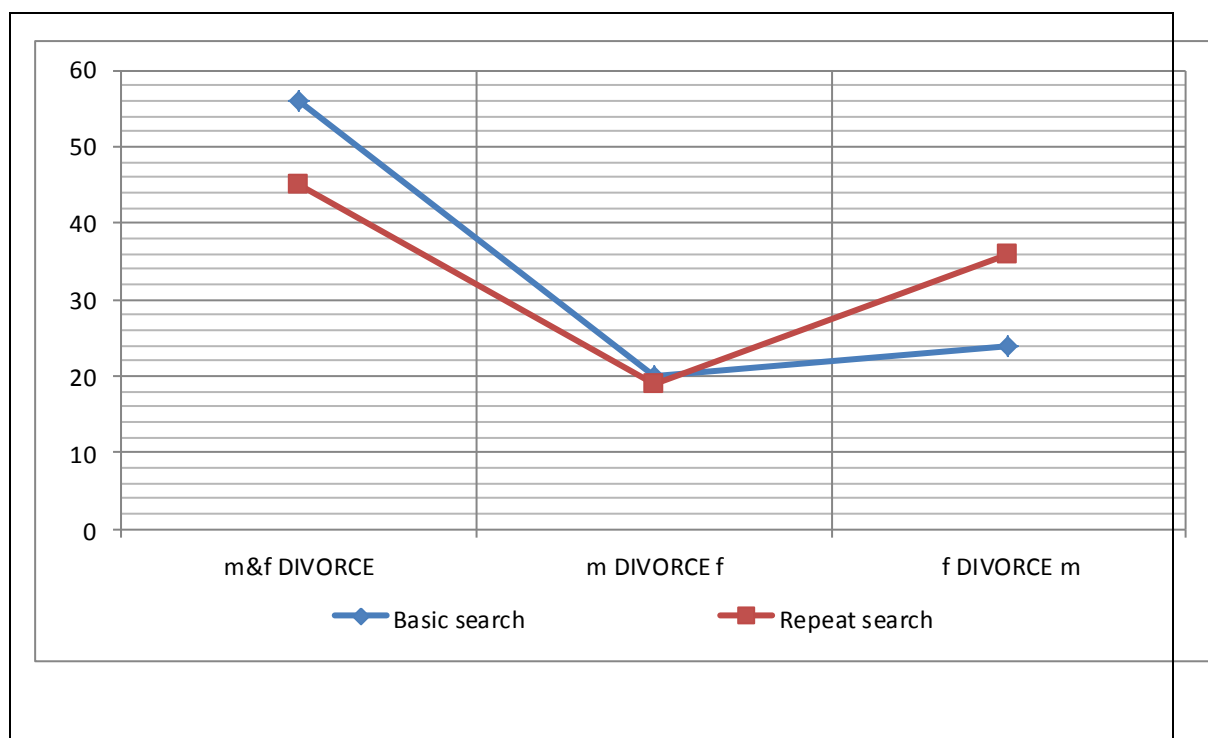
Keyword in Context Search for the Predicate 'divorce'

Moreover, the predicate 'divorced' was searched through the corpus and 1, 370 hits were retrieved. The past tense word-form was used as a search word to avoid the occurrences of nominal forms of the word; which do not show agentive and patient roles targeted by the study. The researcher sampled 100 out of these hits and saved the

list as *the basic search sample*. The researcher then reran the search which retrieved the constant list of 1,370 hits. He again randomly sampled 100 hits and saved it as *the repeat search sample*. The next step was to read each hit in the expanded context, identify the pattern in question, tally the occurrences, calculate the percentage of occurrences and record the finding. Eventually in *the basic search sample*: *m&fDIVORCE* occurrence was 56%; *mDIVORCEf* was 20% and *fDIVORCEm* was 24%. In *the repeat search sample*: *m&fDIVORCE* occurrence was 45%; *mDIVORCEf* was 19% and *fDIVORCEm* was 36%. Findings in both *the basic search sample* and *repeat search sample* are represented by the following line graph.

Graph 4

The frequency of occurrence of the argument patterns for the predicate divorce in the corpus



Key:

m&fDIVORCE=male and female divorce

mDIVORCEf=male divorce female

fDIVORCEm=female divorce male

As per the above line graph, the occurrences of reciprocity in *divorce* between males and females were higher than in other verbs involved in the study. However, comparatively females were assigned more agentive roles in *divorce* than males.

‘Phrase search: as opposed to keyword in context search

The study also searched the COCA using *phrase search* as opposed to *KWIC search*—this is a search whereby the whole phrase is typed in the search window to retrieve similar phrases in the corpus. The following are the findings:

❖ **Phrase search: *he kissed her* versus *she kissed him*.**

The phrase *he kissed her* retrieved 390 hits while *she kissed her* retrieved 209 hits. Therefore, this suggests that males were given more agentive roles in kissing by the variation of 181 hits.

❖ **Phrase search: *he divorced her* versus *she divorced him***

The phrase *she divorced him* retrieved 12 hits while *he divorced her* retrieved only 7 hits. The variation is 5 hits. Thus, the females were given more agentive roles in divorcing than male counterparts.

❖ **Phrase search: *he hugged her* versus *she hugged him***

The phrase *he hugged her* retrieved 65 hits while the phrase *she hugged him* retrieved only 55 hits. The variation was thus 10 hits. That is to say, men were given more agentive roles in hugging than females.

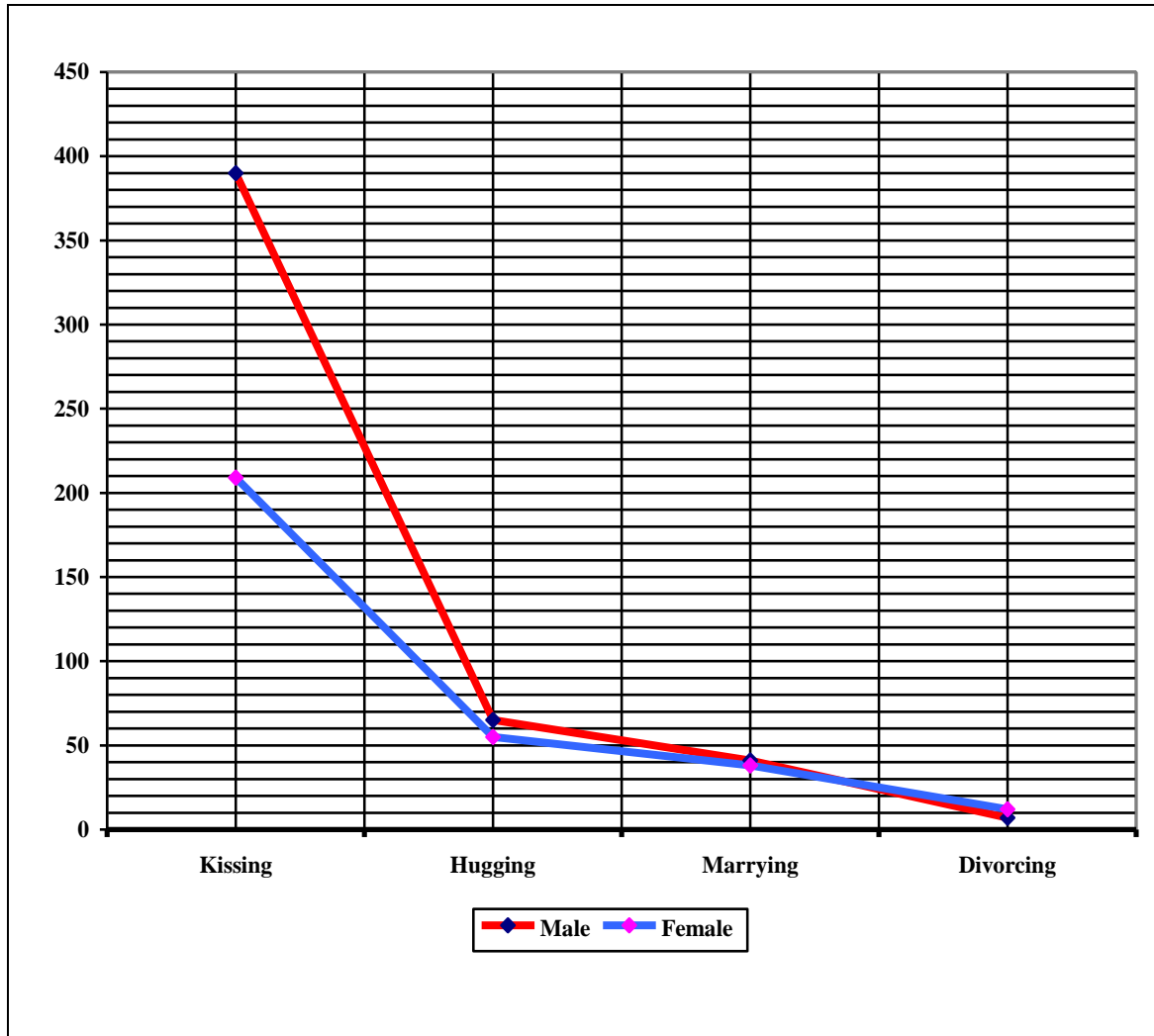
❖ **Phrase search: *he married her* versus *she married him***

The phrase *he married her* retrieved 41 hits, while *she married him* retrieved 38. In this regard, the variation was as minimal as 4 hits.

The general findings of phrase search are summarized through a line graph 5 below:

Graph 5

Variation in frequency of occurrence of agentive roles of the reciprocal predicates with sex



That is, the pattern of the findings from the phrase search corresponds to the pattern of finding from Keyword in Context Search (KWIC). Both shows that males were assigned more agentive roles in kissing and hugging; almost equal roles in marrying; and comparatively less agentive roles in divorcing. Conversely, females were assigned less agentive roles in all verbs; except in divorcing where they (females) were given a slight upper hand than males.

Summary of the Findings

Therefore, the study finds that reciprocity (reversing of the action to both participants) was only 25%. It (reciprocity) was lower with the predicates: kissing, hugging and marrying as neither males nor females were given an upper hand in these actions. Reciprocity was only higher in **divorcing** as both participants were portrayed acting reciprocally most of the times. On the other hand, males were given more agentive roles in **kissing** and **hugging** compared to females. Similarly, females were given more agentive roles in **divorcing** than males, and both males and females were given almost equal roles in **marrying**. In short, authors of fictions subconsciously think that males kiss, hug and then give in marriage more before they are divorced by their partners more than they. On the contrary, they think that females are kissed, hugged and accepted in marriage proposals more before they divorce their male spouses more readily than their male counterparts.

Hence, as long as semantic roles in fictions is done unconsciously by the authors of fictions, then the existence of these patterns matching the known gender realities (the prevailing social practice and stereotypes) is an exhibition that the thoughts of the authors are probably influenced by the societies in which they live. In this regard, the present study is of the view that the battle against gender discriminatory language has not been won at cognitive level. The unconscious mind of the social members (in this case American authors) is still filled with these gender stereotypes as it was discovered in this study. In this regard, the possibility that these authors might be performing gender neutral language in public does not mean that they are gender neutral cognitively. This therefore suggests that the movement against gender discriminatory language has not been won yet at cognitive level.

Discussion

Assignment of semantic roles of the reciprocal verbs in fiction works ought to be by probability; first because reciprocal verbs allow roles swapping between both participants and secondly because authors of the fictions do not report actual events (that would dictate the true assignment of the actual roles of the participants), but rather report the imaginary events with a possibility of assigning roles at will. It should be even more probable because authors have neither gender idea nor gender sensitivity

when assigning these roles. Nevertheless, the present study still found that American authors of the fictions studied consistently assigned more agentive roles to males and patient roles to females in three out of four reciprocal predicates focused by the study. This finding is very intriguing as it rules out the operation of probability which one would expect in this context. The finding indicates a cognitive bias because logically there is no reason for the males to be assigned more agentive roles of the reciprocal verbs compared to females in the hypothetical events in the fictions. Moreover, the fact that this mental bias corresponds to gender roles assignment in the real world, implies that even the unconscious minds of the members of speech community reacts along the social frameworks. It is similar to an observation by Aksu (2005, p. 16) that lecturers unconsciously tend to call on men to answer questions than women and react positively to men's responses compared to women in classroom context. This is another instance of cognitive bias which is likely taking place without the control of the performers. A similar explanation can be that the cognition of the lecturers is unconsciously shaped by the social contexts and environment.

In this regard, the problem of gender bias appears deep-rooted beyond language level. This finding therefore implies that the movements targeting the use of gender biased language cannot by themselves be successful without addressing other key elements such as thoughts and probably cultures of the users. In the view of this study, discriminatory language production turns out to be just the fruits of the problem rather than the roots.

Banning the use of discriminatory language is in line with the hotly debated Sapir-Whorf conception: 'that language influences thought' (Casacanto, 2008; Saeed, 1997, p. 42). Consonant with this view, language influences thought—hence stopping discriminatory language entails deterring negative gender perceptions at cognitive level. This study however observes a problem with this approach. The view that language influences thought in all its versions is strongly criticized by many scholars who have different views on the chain of influence between the two. Piaget for instance is of the view that thought develops from deeply intimate, personal autistic mental states (Piaget in Lucy, p. 45). That is, it is personal needs that become socialized and internalized in the mind. On the contrary, Vygotsky sees thinking developing from social to the individual (that, it is society that motivates person's thinking, not individual needs that

motivates the person's thinking) (p. 46). He concludes that thought derives from sociocultural experience of the child (p. 46).

In line with the findings of this study, this paper concurs with this last view: that the society might be playing an active role in shaping the thinking of its members. This study found that authors unconsciously assigned semantic roles along gender stereotypes; the fact that suggests that humans' cognition internalizes social stereotypes prevailing in their speech community.

The study furthermore finds that social stereotypes might form a program in the mind which runs automatically even without the authority of the bearer. Ekşi (2009, p. 40) puts it that gender stereotypes for example make women and men develop stereotypically conforming characteristics either consciously or unconsciously. The plausible explanation this study finds about this unconscious response along gender lines is that culture might be influencing thought which eventually influences language. This is consonant with Fairclough (1986, p. 23) who holds that linguistic phenomena are social in the sense that what people speak, listen, write or read are determined socially and have social effects. He is of the view that a particular language follows social conventions of a particular society and on the other hand, determines social conventions of that particular society.

This study would add that the tracing of this gender stereotype in the unconscious minds of the members of the society suggests that social context influences cognition. In this regard, social stereotypes such as gender bias inhabit the minds of the members of speech community even if they do not exhibit them verbally. Regarding this, Newell (1996, pp. 171-2) observes that masculinity is not necessarily conspiratorial and need not to be regarded as consciously thought out strategy by men to ensnare women in negative gender roles, instead it is more of an attitude, a conservative and entrenched way of thinking about gender relations that is passed automatically from parents to children. That is, members of a speech community learn gender stereotypes once they are born in a gender biased society and that their minds register this knowledge permanently in their *'hard disk'*. Hence, the gender bias exists in mind irrespective of conscious efforts by the individuals to avoid it. In similar thought Aksu (2005, p. 12) writes:

In this age of mass media, we are surrounded with images that promote certain gender roles. These hidden forces shape us and our world view, often without us

being aware that they are doing so. Gender stereotypes occur when generic attributes, opinions or roles have been applied towards either gender and the results are apparent everywhere in the society

This study embraces this observation by Aksu (*ibid*) that social contexts plays a great role in determining subconscious thought of its members. It only differs with Aksu (*ibid*) that the tendency started long even before the age of mass media.

Likewise, Hoijer considers language part of culture and that any cultural change automatically leads to a language change (Hoijer in Lucy, 1992, p. 75). He gives semantic change as a typical example of how culture changes language. In his view, semantic expansion, narrowing, shifts combination of old terms into new compounds, words becoming obsolete and the like: are motivated by cultural change in a speech community (p. 76). Therefore, he is of the view that the changes in the vocabulary imply the changes in other related phenomenon such as culture and thought. Hence, Hoijer's view on this matter implies that the movement against discriminatory language (political correctness movement) should also focus on the language related phenomena such as culture and thought—whose changes induce language change as well. He, however, interestingly observes that culture appears to change more rapidly than the language (p. 76). This suggests also that the use of discriminatory language alone does not entail gender bias if the user does not aim at discriminating through those words. This is to say, it is likely that some users use discriminatory words just because they are available to them and are not aware of their associated discriminating purpose. That is for example, the use of discriminatory language by a three years old child does not qualify him/her to be sexist. The explanation is that she/he might be using such words because he/she has found them in use but still does not share the connotative thoughts associated with them in the speech community in question.

So, in this regard, this study is of the view that the criterion for holding somebody responsible for gender discrimination should be their intention rather than words they use. It appears that language is not a default indicator of gender discrimination. The use of sayings and proverbs deemed gender biased for example does not tell that the user is gender biased on purpose.

Conclusion

The study therefore concludes that political correctness focusing on correcting language production cannot achieve its objectives without focusing on cultural change. The evidence suggests that the society influences thought of its members in a great deal and that the product of that effect is what is seen in language produced. The finding also points out that human beings only effortfully control their conscious performances—as stipulated by psychoanalysis theory, yet these conscious efforts are not enough to do away with the concepts deeply imbedded in minds by a complex relationship between language thought and culture. In this regard, the production (performance) of gender neutral language alone is an unreliable criterion for judging the success of a gender discrimination campaign—as the study finds that some conceptions are deeply rooted in members' mind and culture in such a way that they do not actually have control on them. The study also finds that using discriminatory language alone does not reliably indicate that the performer in question is actually discriminating along gender. It appears that many users use these phrases simply because they acquired them from their communities and they are available in their mental lexicon, not because they intend to discriminate anybody with their use.

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