

MILLENNIALS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS REFERENCES OF “PEREMPUAN” IN GREAT DICTIONARY OF INDONESIAN LANGUAGE (KBBI)

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ABSTRACT

This study is a mini case study focusing on millennials' perception towards the references of “perempuan” or “woman” from Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia (KBBI) or Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language. This research applies a quantitative method with description approach. The researcher collected the data through an online questionnaire which involved 116 respondents aged from 16-30 years old. The researcher asked the respondents to fill the questionnaire focusing on showing their tendency to the gender-based references and showing their perception to the definition in the dictionary. In findings, the respondents correlate matriarchal domestic responsibility, such as “raising child”, in an even view between man and woman. On the other hand, the participants of the research had a growing neutrality over the previously male dominated terms, such as “hardworking” and “boss”. Despite the progressivity, millennials still have a high tendency of maintaining derogatory references against woman, such as “prostitute” and “slut”. The study also shows that 65.5% of respondents disagree with the definition of “perempuan” in KBBI. They challenge the definition under the idea of gender equality. Millennials' perspective of the language differs from maintaining the definition to shifting the conservative image of woman to more progressive. Meanwhile, the other 34.5% agree with the definition in KBBI. They highlighted the relevancy of the definition with the traditional views of women focusing on women's biological features.

Keywords: Millennials, Perception, Reference, perempuan, KBBI

INTRODUCTION

This study investigates public perception towards the references of “perempuan” or “woman” from *Kamus Besar Bahasa Indonesia* (KBBI) or Great Dictionary of the Indonesian Language. The paper addresses the emerging public challenges from the stereotypical references of women in sociolinguistic perspective (CNN Indonesia 2021; KumparanNews 2021).

In February 2021, a group of women activists and *Komnas Perempuan* (Indonesian National Commission of Women's Protection) raised a concern against the definition of “perempuan” (CNN Indonesia 2021). They deem that the definition is sexist and not relevant to the modern depiction of women. To clarify the situation, the official institution of KBBI explains that the word's meaning and its collocation came to display the historical reference of women and resulted from corpus-driven research (Tim Penyusun KBBI 2021). The institution mentions that the definition has been written since 1988 in the first published edition of KBBI.

The shifting attitude to the definition comes from the dynamic changes of social and cultural behaviour (Giles and Rakić 2014; Krauss and Chiu 2005). Despite many Indonesian women are still living in patriarchal system (Arivia and Subono 2017; Booth 2016), the awareness to criticize the references of “perempuan” shows the societies' progressive perspective in seeing women not only based on their undermining stereotype, but also including their positive gender role.

Sociolinguistics covers this issue, whether the preferences or the gender, within the umbrella of language attitude and gender study (Bell 2014; Garrett 2001). Language value explains societies' language preferences related with psychological and social behaviour determined by social standard (Bell 2014). The preferences result in specific attitudes in valuing language.

Perception towards language often be discussed in the scope of language attitude research. Here are some brief reviews of previous research. The international study for stereotypical language against women is focusing on women's language choices in dialogue reflected from their daily communication (Gold, *et al.* 2015; Ladegaard, 1998; Scott, 1993). Apart from that, Gold *et al.* (2015) observes the attitude

of native and non-native English speaker to gender-based lexis (such as: *sexy, tomboy, slut, gay*, etc.). The research finds that the transformation of the lexis' meaning follows the societies' condition. Then, Scott (1993) conducts a study of language attitudes towards gender stereotypes. He proves that there is a correlation between liberal and conservative ideologies within sexist language in English. Lastly, in a study of sexism in gendered language (French, Germany, and English) towards university students, the respondents show that there is a growing positive attitude to neutral gender pronouns than to the sexist language (Sarrasin, Gabriel, and Gyga 2012).

In summary, I find the research above sharing similar methodologies. The data is gathered through direct collection, such as interview, observation, and questionnaire. They found it as an effective way to understand language attitudes in society, whether in a small or an extensive scope. I also find the possibility of incorporating social views against gendered language within social language study with resourceful publications in International context. Yet, the study is very limited in Indonesian context.

In this research, the researcher aims to use the methodologies above with an intention to fill the gap of study in Indonesian specific language attitudes in gender context. Specifically, the researcher conducted a mini case study to get rich fodder in fulfilling personal curiosity on millennials' perspective towards references of gender-based lexical in Indonesian context. This study has been minimally conducted by any Indonesian researcher, and it is interesting to begin it with this small initiative.

From the discussion above, I am interested to dig deeper regarding millennial's perception towards references, specifically to the word "*perempuan*" in KBBI. In this research I raised two questions to ask.

1. How are millennials' perception towards references of "*perempuan*" in KBBI?
2. Is their perception maintained or shifted?

Answering the questions, this paper aims to explain millennials' perception towards gender-based references of "*perempuan*". Besides, I also want to reveal the tendency of their perception of gender-based references of "*perempuan*" whether it is maintained or shifted.

METHODOLOGY

This research applies a quantitative method with descriptive approach. The researcher collected the data from distributing online questionnaires. The questionnaire is designed with close-ended and open-ended questions. In the close-ended section, the respondents were given multiple choice questions which gained people's perception of gender-based lexis and matched them with the choice of gender. To get further confirmation of the choices, the researcher provides a set of open-ended questions which ask people about the existence of gender lexical correlation of "*perempuan*" in KBBI and its relevance to their perspective. The questionnaire was distributed online with GForms along with its statement of consent.

There are a total of 116 respondents (34 males and 82 females). Their age group differs from 16-20 (21 respondents), 21-25 (63 respondents), and 26-30 (32 respondents). The researcher analysed the data by tabulating the information to get the trending information. Then, the researcher presents the findings within graphics and tables to get a summarized picture from the research. Further, the researcher elaborated the findings and discussed the millennials' perception towards references of "*perempuan*" supported with relevant literatures.

ANALYSIS

This part is divided into two specific parts: (a) highlighted support to maintain conservative image of woman and (b) rise of neutral perspective of gender-based lexical references.

Highlighted Support to Maintain Conservative Image of Woman

Contextually, "*perempuan*" is defined in KBBI as follows.

Figure 1. Definition of “*perempuan*” accessed in online KBBIPranala (link): <https://kbbi.web.id/perempuan>

perempuan /pe-rem-pu-an/ *n* 1 orang (manusia) yang mempunyai puki, dapat menstruasi, hamil, melahirkan anak, dan menyusui; wanita; 2 istri; bini: -- *nya sedang hamil*; 3 betina (khusus untuk hewan); *bunyi -- di air, pb* ramai (gaduh sekali);
 -- *geladak* pelacur;
 -- *jahat* 1 perempuan yang buruk kelakuannya (suka menipu dan sebagainya); 2 perempuan nakal;
 -- *jalan* pelacur;
 -- *jalang* 1 perempuan yang nakal dan liar yang suka melacurkan diri; 2 pelacur; wanita tuna susila;
 -- *jangak* perempuan cabul (buruk kelakuannya);
 -- *lacur* pelacur; wanita tuna susila;
 -- *lecah* pelacur;
 -- *nakal* perempuan (wanita) tuna susila; pelacur; sundal;
 -- *simpanan* istri gelap;
keperempuanan /ke-pe-rem-pu-an-an/ *n* 1 perihal perempuan; 2 kehormatan sebagai perempuan: *banyak tentara pendudukan yang melanggar -- wanita desa*

There are three definitions of women. First definition defines “*perempuan*” based on their unique physical condition as a human who has vagina, experience period, giving birth, and breastfeeding. Second definition explains the role in marriage as a wife. Third definition defines “*perempuan*” as a female animal.

Further, the dictionary projects some lexical references which have mostly negative views of “*perempuan*”, such as sex worker (*geladak, leach, lacur, jalang, jangak, nakal, jalanan, simpanan*). The definition clearly raised the belief of men’s domination where women are seen as having secondary and subordinate views in society (Sarrasin, Gabriel, & Gyax, 2012; Scott, 1993).

From the definition above, I addressed 14 gender-based lexical references below and raised questions to the respondents on whether they are correlated with male, female, or both of them (neutral). The result is displayed as follows.

Table 1. Millennial’s Perception on Lexical-references

No	References	Gender		
		Male	Female	Neutral
1	Jalang	33 (28.4%)	81 (69.8%)	2 (1.7%)
2	Karir	5 (4.3%)	17 (14.75)	94 (81%)
3	Professional	11 (9.5%)	2 (1.7%)	103 (88.8%)
4	Pelacur	-	87 (75%)	29 (25%)
5	Simpanan	3 (2.6%)	44 (37.9%)	69 (59.5%)
6	Bos	31 (26.7%)	1 (0.9%)	84 (72.4%)
7	Rumah Tangga	5 (4.3%)	27 (23.3%)	84 (72.4%)
8	Memasak	-	41 (35.3%)	75 (64.7%)
9	Mengurus anak	-	41 (35.3%)	75 (64.7%)
10	Menghidupi Keluarga	58 (50%)	1 (0.9%)	57 (49.1%)
11	Cabul	84 (72.4%)	2(1.7%)	30 (25.9%)
12	Gagah dan Berani	92 (79.3%)	-	24 (20.7%)
13	Lemah lembut	-	82 (70.7%)	34 (29.3%)
14	Pekerja keras	20 (17.2%)	3 (2.6%)	93 (80.2%)

Six closest references associated with woman shows the attitude behaviour of millennials through conservative image of women valued as sex visualization and social construct of woman’s role in family (Felmlee, Rodis, & Zhang, 2020). More than 80 of 116 respondents agree that terms of “*jalang* or bitch” and “*pelacur* or prostitute” belong to women. They also believed women are stereotyped as “*lemah lembut* or gentle”.

From the depiction above, “prostitute and bitch” associate women with a derogatory and dehumanizing perspective in society (Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018). Sex industries, as the oldest and forever business are being dominated by women workers (Ditmore, 2006). The domination created one perspective in understanding lexical “*prostitute*” as women only terms.

Table 2. Attitude to definition of “*perempuan*” in KBBI

Perception	Age	Respondents	Percentage
Agree	16-20	8	20%
	21-25	17	42%
	26-30	15	38%
Total	40		34.5%
Disagree	16-20	13	17%
	21-25	46	61%
	26-30	17	22%
Total	76		65.5%

In further explanation, the researcher then asked open-ended questions related to the definition of women in KBBI. I do realize the majority of respondents disagree with the definition and deem to challenge the definition (it will be explained more in the next discussion). Meanwhile, 40 respondents (34.5%) agree with the definition explained due to the default of a woman's biological condition. They argued that the definition is still relevant in society (see appendix).

Meanwhile, for the correlated lexis, the respondents still deem women's derogatory stereotype as normal. None of the respondents specifically associates “prostitute” with “man”. This idea is relevant to the dominant narratives that women worked as sex workers and served man as buyer (Jovanovski & Tyler, 2018). Further, this definition also shows the un-familiarity of Indonesian millennials with male sex workers which is highlighted in the encyclopedia of prostitutes and sex workers (Ditmore 2006).

In conclusion, Indonesian millennials have the tendency to maintain conservative image of women. They still match language choices of subordinating female terms against women. Despite having un-popularity for challenging the definition, the result also shows millennials' un-familiarity to men's involvement within domestic and also commercial sex roles.

Rise of Neutral Perspective to Gender-Based Lexical References

Sexist or gendered language refers to specific word, phrases, or expression specifically defined as masculine or feminine (Sarrasin, Gabriel, & Gygax, 2012). Sexist language is controversial since it raises negative stigma and discrimination against specific gender. In this case, women are mainly investigated as objects in many sexist language researches (Braun & Kitzinger, 2001; Meyer, 2016; Scott, 1993).

Feminism developed in the middle of the 19th century in Europe and spread the principle of women equality and advanced to get men's opportunities in performing social life (Offen 1988). Along with social development, new terms challenge sexist language as neutral language where specific language used and preferences does not belong to specific gender.

In this research (see table 1 and 2), there is a rising tendency of millennials' attitude towards neutral gender-based lexical references. Some references dissociate woman or man.

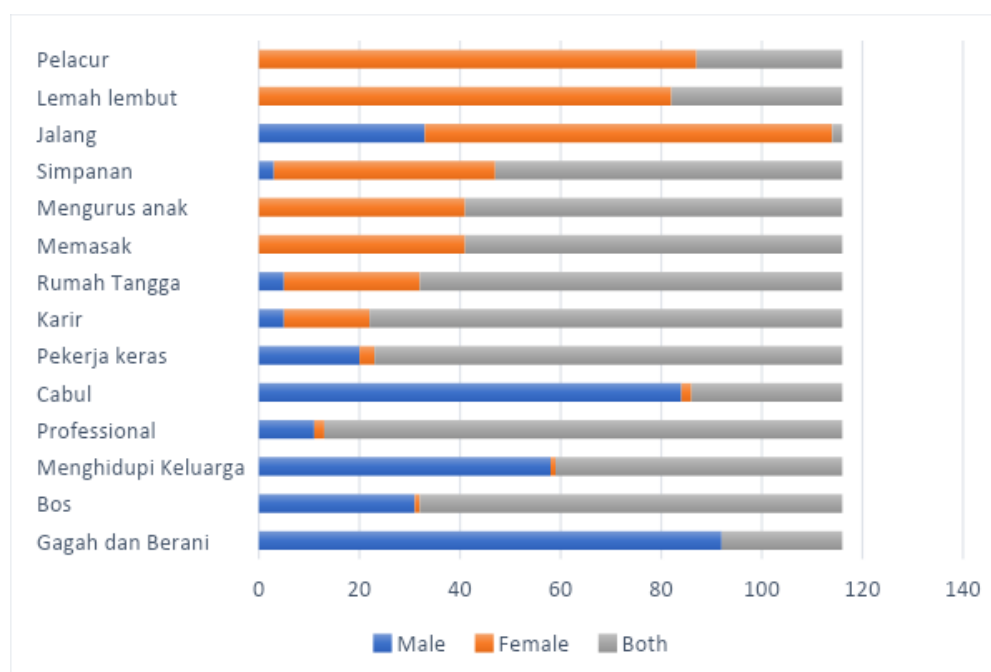


Diagram 1. Lexical references

The chart above depicts the increasing trends of respondents' choice in grey area (represent both or neutral references). The rising trend of neutral choice indicates shifting gender role among them. Positive attitude toward woman and man in the workplace are chosen as neutral lexical references. The words “*karir* or professional”, *bos* or *boss*”, and “*pekerja keras* or hard worker” are not only associated with man.

Apart from the professional terms, domestic lexis also has a shifting attitude. Shifting attitudes from millennials who agree domestic partnership rely on cooperation between men and women. It is depicted by some lexical references like “*Menghidupi keluarga* or supporting family” and “*mengurus anak* or raising child” have more than 40% of millennials' choice. Their behavior towards those lexical references shaped the perspective of gender equality promoted in progressive society. It can be inferred this attitude correlates with millennials' characteristic of changing and transforming their mindset into more modern value. This finding contradicts the past patriarchal values where all family stuff are only handled by women (Arivia and Subono 2017; United Nation 2016).

Millennials have a changing perspective towards the definition and depiction of women. 65.5% of respondents disagree with the definition of “*perempuan*” and their collocated words in KBBI. They believe that woman is more valuable than their negative stereotypes as sex workers or the others negative connotations. Further, they criticize the definition of “*perempuan*” in KBBI as irrelevant since not all women experienced similar biological conditions. They explain that roles, like giving birth and becoming a wife are choices which could not be overgeneralized with a narrow set of definitions (see appendix). In the end, this shifting language attitude is relevant with the characteristics of millennials who are open to progressivity and accept non-traditional values.

From the discussion above, I infer that millennials in Indonesia on this research have popular opinions which favour gender equality. The perspective is translated as a combination of actual and intended behaviour. By default, they are raised in a more modern environment where the access to information is wider, yet they are still seeing the practice of conventional women at home or their surroundings. It resulted in different perspectives of viewing gender roles in their life. Seeing language as representative of social construction, they intended to behave based on what they believe as individuals. The beliefs are constituted by constant real-life exposure of gender issues among them.

In the end, I conclude that the changing and dynamic perspectives of individuals and groups of people in each generation are different. The attempt to change certain systems, either political, social, or language inside a community need to be observed in a timely manner. In this case, despite being a mini-case study, this research shows rich data regarding the shifting attitude amongst millennials regarding how Indonesian dictionary views and supposed to view ‘*perempuan*’. Still, this research has the

potential to grow its scope to see how people perceive sexist language in a wider or a more extensive objects and literatures to discuss.

CONCLUSION

Millennials' perception towards references is divided into two big spectrums; a) maintaining conservative image of woman and b) shifting attitudes to a gender-neutral perspective. Those who agree with the conservative image of woman does not imply their cultural beliefs. Instead, they are likely to prove the variety of perspectives in seeing gender issues. On the other hand, those who disagree with the definition criticize the fixed biological value of woman and their derogatory references. In the end, we can infer that language attitude is useful to cover social polemics related to specific gender-based lexical references.

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