

## Feminism, Philosophy of Science, and Their Influence on Women's Language

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### **Abstract**

In this paper, the writer aims to delineate the relationship between feminism, philosophy of science, and women's language. In her description, the writer refers to scientific works about feminism, philosophy, language, and gender as well as her research about gossip, conducted for her Master's degree at Universitas Katolik Indonesia (Unika) Atma Jaya, Jakarta. In this paper, the writer first discusses sex, gender, and feminism. Next, the writer describes the relationship between feminism and the philosophy of science. The writer later examines the relationship between feminism and language as well as studies about those topics. Later, the writer describes her research about gossip among female participants, conducted on the data from the U.S. TV series, *Sex and the City*, and based on the model of analysis proposed by Jennifer Coates. In the end, the writer states that feminism, a school of thought as well as a social, political, and cultural movement contesting the inequality of women, has developed from the thoughts of philosophers and later influenced the development of science and research about language and gender and that the use of language by women and the reality of women, formed by their use of the language, can hopefully be better understood and that this understanding can better help in the execution of researches about women's language.

**Keywords:** *Feminism, Philosophy of Science, Women's Language*

## Introduction

Sex refers to biological differences<sup>1</sup>. In the beginning, there were two kinds of sexes, namely male and female. But, in its development, there are other kinds of sexes that are different from the first two. Gender refers to the differentiation based on sexes, which is formed socially and culturally. Everything which can be exchanged between the male and female is an issue of gender. In discussing this issue of gender, there are two leading theories, namely nurture and nature theories, and another prominent theory that is developed from and a compromise of the previous two, namely equilibrium theory<sup>2</sup>. The nurture theory states that the distinction between men and women is a social and cultural construct resulting in the distinction of their tasks and roles. The nature theory states that the distinction between men and women is naturally given and thus must be accepted and that biological differences indicate and implicate different tasks and roles, some of which can be exchanged but some others cannot. The equilibrium theory emphasizes the partnership and harmony between men and women and perceives no contradiction between them. Feminism refers

to a school of thoughts and a movement, which demands a reconsideration of the thoughts and views of women. This school of thought and movement refuses differentiation of men and women, which is shaped socially and culturally.

Initially, there were three waves of feminism<sup>3</sup>. The first wave of feminism originated with the movement associated with the French Revolution in 1789. The most famous thinker of this period was Mary Wollstonecraft with her book, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, published in 1782. This first wave of feminism includes liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist Marxist feminism. The second wave of feminism shifted the direction of its activities from practical to theoretical ones. In this period the influential figure of feminism was Simone de Beauvoir with her book *The Second Sex*, which was published in 1949. This second wave of feminism includes existentialist feminism. The third wave of feminism was influenced by post-modernism and had influential figures, such as Helen Cixous and Julia Kristeva. Third-wave feminism includes global multicultural feminism, third-world feminism, and

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<sup>1</sup> Embun Kenyowati Ekosiwi, "Ilmu Pengetahuan dan Gender". PowerPoint slides presented at the class of *Filsafat Ilmu Pengetahuan* (Depok: Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, Universitas Indonesia, 2019), 2-14.

<sup>2</sup> Ade Kartini and Asep Maulana, "REDEFINISI GENDER DAN SEKS". *An-Nisa': Jurnal Kajian*

*Perempuan Dan Keislaman* 12 No. 2 (2019): 217 -39. <https://doi.org/10.35719/annisa.v12i2.18>.

<sup>3</sup> Rosemarie Putnam Tong, *Feminist Thought: Pengantar Paling Komprehensif kepada Aliran Utama Pemikiran Feminis* (Yogyakarta: Jalasutra, 2017), 15-404.

ecofeminism. Afterwards, post-feminism emerged which was a reaction to the contradictions and shortcomings of second and third-wave feminism. Post-feminism fights for gender relations that are no longer defined through gender binarity and gender roles. Post-feminism is a critical way to understand the changing relations that occur between feminism, femininity, and popular culture.

Feminists have been fighting for the political equality of women since the 1960s, but political equality requires philosophical equality<sup>4</sup>. Therefore, Simone de Beauvoir's work entitled *The Second Sex* in 1949, which states that men are considered the norm while women are "the other," is a turning point in political philosophy for modern feminists because it motivates women in this world to reflect on his political and social position and seek to improve it. After Beauvoir, in her *Sexual Politics* published in 1970, Kate Millet stated that the political domination of women by men is found in every institution, every economic relationship, every personal relationship, and every literary work, in society throughout history, and Millet mentioned this male-dominated system of patriarchy is the norm in every arena of our

lives. Sherry Ortner, a feminist philosopher, argues that "nature" is often associated with women, while "culture" is associated with men. Women are considered as representations who are "closer" to nature because they give birth and take care of children, cook food, and keep the house, while "culture" as a context of political power and human achievement is considered the domain of men. This natural/cultural distinction should be recognized as a way to strip women of power. Susan Bordo and Genevieve Lloyd state that Descartes and Plato associate the reason and mind as part of masculinity and the body as part of femininity, and therefore Descartes and Plato are considered to justify the authority of men over women. If the mind is considered a masculine characteristic, this means that men are considered to be better at making moral decisions, compared to women. Carol Gilligan, a Harvard psychologist, refutes that opinion based on research she did in the early 1980s. She stated that women are able to make moral decisions based on different thoughts but with the same sincerity and maturity compared to men. Gilligan stated that women tend to think of ethics based on personal moral obligations rather than moral

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<sup>4</sup>Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy*,

(Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 336-338.

principles of right and wrong, which are abstract and impersonal.

Based on the thoughts of feminists such as Gilligan, Millet, and Beauvoir above, some feminist thinkers state that scientific methodologies and knowledge standards have so far used masculine models and therefore propose a feminist model of the scientific method, or a model of the scientific method, which includes women's observations, resulting in a different kind of scientific knowledge<sup>5</sup>. There are two philosophers who stand out with regard to this feminist approach to science, namely Sarah Harding and Helen Longino. Harding argues that science will achieve its goals only if gender plays an important role in the epistemology of science. According to Harding, women have different opinions about the rules of nature because they live in a different environment than men. If we start researching women's lives, we can increase our knowledge of the natural and social sciences. By improving the traditional philosophy of science and adopting new feminist epistemic categories, we produce better science, one that is free from distortion and bias. Harding's opinion is based on two empirical statements. First, gender produces biased scientific thinking. Second, involving

more women in science can increase the attainment of that science. Longino does not argue for an exclusively feminist approach but focuses on evidence and objectivity. According to Longino, our belief background is tainted by bias, but if we use a better belief background, namely one contributed by the feminist research community, we will gain better knowledge. In relation to Longino's opinion, the transformation of the philosophy of science requires the philosophy of science to widen the scope of its explanation by including various kinds of research communities because it is the community that is the final determinant, not the evidence.

Feminists have often criticized the practice of language because it supports a sexist view of reality<sup>6</sup>. For example, the use of the words "chairman" and "policeman" refers to both genders, and the use of the word "man" refers to humans. One solution to this problem is the use of plural pronouns such as "they" and "their" even though the reference is singular or alternating between "he" and "she". Perhaps one effective way to avoid using sexist language is to change the reality to which it refers. If women appear more often in roles that have power and authority, language will reflect this.

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<sup>5</sup> Stathis Psillos and Martin Curd, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Science*, (New York: Routledge, 2008), 182-192.

<sup>6</sup> Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy*, (Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 336-338.

The following are studies in the field of language in line with the development of feminism theory in parts of the world that use English<sup>7</sup>. From the 1960s to the 1980s a political movement called the second wave feminism developed and included liberal feminism, cultural feminism, and radical feminism. This second wave of feminism focuses on gender differences as the basis of feminist thought. Liberal feminism was very influential in early research related to language, gender, and sexuality and still has an impact today.

The main character associated with liberal feminist linguistics is Robin Lakoff with her work, *Language and Women's Place*, published in 1975. In her work Lakoff describes an ideology that insults and belittles women and the way women speak. A recent work by Judith Baxter published in 2010 on the way women in business leadership positions speak suggests a similar point of view. In her work Baxter finds that gender-based ideology in a male-dominated workplace limits women's access to power in the business world. Liberal cultural feminism supports equality between the genders. The most influential and representative figure of this approach is Deborah Tannen with her

book, *You Just Don't Understand*, which was published in 1990. Tannen stated in her book that women and men often misunderstand because of different interaction styles, which are influenced by gender. Radical cultural feminism states that women's ways of thinking, acting, and speaking are better than men's ways. Janet Holmes in 1993 stated that New Zealand women are ideal speakers or attractive interlocutors, while Jennifer Coates in 1996 pointed out that women's talk among their female friends is a model of the relationship that should occur.

Radical feminism argues that the root of the problem of social inequality is gender inequality, which is based on the structural and systematic subordination of women by men or patriarchy. There are two influential figures in this radical feminism, namely Susan Brownmiller and Andrea Dworkin, who argue that sexual violence against women by men is the basis of patriarchy and allows men to maintain their dominance over women. The linguistic dimension of rape as an issue of radical feminism is found in a study conducted by Susan Ehrlich and published in 2001. This study shows that the discourse of rape culture penetrates the legal system that structurally harms women as victims and

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<sup>7</sup>Mary Bucholtz, "The Feminist Foundations of Language, Gender, and Sexuality Research" (2014),

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6cz7k5s8> (accessed December 8, 2019).

survivors of rape cases. Material feminism which is based on Marxist and socialist viewpoints holds that the subordination of women is the main result of class oppression. The scope of linguistic research related to material feminism is broad, from Eckert's 1989 study of gender, class, and variation; ideology and reality of women as mothers and wives in nuclear families by Sunderland in 2006 and Kendal in 2008; the role of language in marketing to female and male consumers by Barnwell in 2004 and Lazar in 2006; and research on language and gender-based practices by Speer and Green in 2007. Multiracial feminism and post-colonial feminism are concerned with investigating the intersection of race and ethnicity with class, gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of subjectivity in relation to power. One of the main contributions of multiracial feminism research in linguistics relates to the tendency of linguistics to marginalize the experiences of women of color. In the United States, most linguistic research relates to African-American women, such as the ones done by Morgan in 1999, Troutman in 2001, Jacobs-Huey in 2006, and Lanehart in 2009. Feminist linguistic studies with post-colonial settings can be found in the research of Escure in 2001 and Meyerhoff in 2004 on

gender and creole language, Walters in 1999 and Sadiqi in 2008 on gender and multilingualism in post-colonial societies, and Mills in 1991 and Irvine in 2001 on the gender-based representation of the colonized.

As stated in the introductory paragraph above, the author is very interested in feminism, philosophy, and language. When the writer attended the Master's Program in Applied English Linguistics at Unika Atma Jaya in 2008, the writer conducted research related to women and their use of language for her thesis<sup>8</sup>. In this study, the writer aims to find the characteristics of the English language used by a group of women when gossiping. Therefore, the writer also aims to find the function and formal characteristics of the conversation. The writer's research data are 16 conversations in 12 episodes of the U.S. English television series, *Sex and the City*. By referring to the research conducted by Jennifer Coates<sup>9</sup>, the data were analyzed based on the setting of the place, participants, topics, and the formal characteristics of the conversation. These formal traits were analyzed to determine whether they functioned as markers of cooperative conversation. The writer's research showed that gossip among female participants took

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<sup>8</sup>Srisna J. Lahay, *Gossip among Female Friends: Cooperative or Competitive?* (Surabaya: Global Aksara Pers, 2021), 149-152.

<sup>9</sup>Jennifer Coates, "Groups Revisited: Language in All-Female Groups." In *Women in Their Speech Communities*, edited by Jennifer Coates and Deborah Cameron, (New York: Longman Group, 1988), 78

place in apartments, restaurants, bars, shops, hotels, toilets, and taxis. The conversation participants are the main characters in the film series, who come from the middle class, are white, single, and are in their 30s to 40s. They have been friends since college and live in New York, U.S.A. The topics of conversation revolve around their lives as single women, such as falling in love, dating, getting married, and having sex. Gossip between them serves as a means to share feelings, opinions, and experiences, and at the same time maintain their friendship. The formal characteristics found are topic development, minimal responses, simultaneous speech, and epistemic modality, and these formal characteristics function as markers of cooperative conversational styles. This writer's research corroborates the results of previous studies on women and language, which describe women's ways of thinking, acting, and speaking, different styles of interaction between women and men, as well as conversations between female friends as an ideal model of a positive relationship.

As described above, it is found that feminism, philosophy, and language are interesting topics and are related to one another. Feminism is a fascinating topic to

the writer because the writer is a woman and also because as a woman, the writer often experiences an unpleasant and disrespectful treatment to herself. Through feminism, the writer can understand the condition of herself and also of other women. Through different kinds of research about feminism and language defined above, the writer, who is also a lecturer and researcher of language and culture, can satisfy her curiosity on those two topics and deepen her understanding of language and other subjects related to language, especially feminism and philosophy. Therefore, in this paper, the writer aims at delineating feminism and philosophy, especially philosophy of science, and their influence on the language used by women.

## Method

For this paper, the writer conducts library research as well as a descriptive method to elaborate on the relationship between feminism, philosophy of science, and women's language. Library research is qualitative research that works on the analytical level and has an emic perspective characteristic, i.e. collecting data not based on the perception of the researcher but based on the conceptual and theoretical facts<sup>10</sup>. The

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<sup>10</sup> Amir Hamzah, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan (Library Research): Kajian Filosofis, Teoretis, Aplikasi,*

*Proses, dan Hasil Penelitian*, (Malang: Literasi Nusantara, 2020), 7-10.

data collected for this research are numerous scientific works on feminism, philosophy, language, and gender as well as the writer's research on gossip among female participants when the writer completed her Master's education at Unika Atma Jaya, Jakarta, and these works are later analyzed in order to deliberate on feminism and philosophy of science and their impact on women's language. In her discussion and analysis, first of all, the writer argues about sex, gender, and feminism. Then, the writer discusses feminism and the philosophy of science. The writer later reflects on feminism and language as well as studies related to feminism and language. In this section, the writer also discusses her research on women and gossip, which the writer did when she attended the Master's Program in Applied English Linguistics in 2008, and the relation between this research to feminism and language. At the end of this paper, the writer concludes her discussion about the topics mentioned above.

## **Discussion**

References to sex are biological differences, while references to gender are sex-based differences, which are socially and culturally shaped<sup>11</sup>. The reference to feminism is a school of thoughts and movement that demands a reconsideration of

the thoughts and views of women. Initially there were three waves of feminism. The first wave of feminism originated from the movement associated with the French Revolution in 1789. This first wave of feminism includes liberal feminism, radical feminism, and socialist Marxist feminism. The second wave of feminism shifted the direction of its activities from practical to theoretical ones. This second wave of feminism includes existentialist feminism. The third wave of feminism is influenced by post-modernism. Third-wave feminism includes global multicultural feminism, third-world feminism, and ecofeminism.

Political equality for women has been championed by feminists since the 1960s, but political equality requires philosophical equality. Based on the thoughts of feminists such as Gilligan, Millet, and Beauvoir, some feminist thinkers argue that scientific methodologies and knowledge standards have used masculine models so far and therefore propose a feminist model of the scientific method or a scientific method model that includes an observation of women, which will result in a different kind

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<sup>11</sup>Embun Kenyowati Ekosiwi, "Ilmu Pengetahuan dan Gender". PowerPoint slides presented at the class of *Filsafat Ilmu Pengetahuan*,

(Depok: Fakultas Ilmu Pengetahuan Budaya, Universitas Indonesia, 2019), 2-14



of scientific knowledge<sup>12</sup>. Feminists have often criticized the practice of language because it supports a sexist view of reality<sup>13</sup>. Perhaps one effective way to avoid using sexist language is to change the reality to which it refers.

Researches in the field of language are in line with the development of feminism theory in parts of the world that use English<sup>14</sup>. From the 1960s to the 1980s a political movement called second-wave feminism developed and included liberal feminism, cultural feminism, and radical feminism. Liberal feminism was very influential in early research related to language, gender, and sexuality and still has an impact today. Liberal cultural feminism supports equality between the genders. Radical cultural feminism states that women's ways of thinking, acting, and speaking are better than men's ways. Radical feminism argues that the root of the problem of social inequality is gender inequality, which is based on the structural and systematic subordination of women by men or patriarchy. Material feminism which is based

on Marxist and socialist viewpoints holds that the subordination of women is the main result of class oppression.

The scope of linguistic research related to material feminism is broader than research on gender, class, and variety. Multiracial feminism and post-colonial feminism are concerned with the investigation of the intersection of race and ethnicity with class, gender, sexuality, and other dimensions of subjectivity in relation to power.

The research that the writer conducted for her thesis in 2008 illustrates the close relationship between feminism and language use and corroborates the results of previous studies on feminism and women's language<sup>15</sup>. In her study, the writer found the characteristics of the English language used by a group of women when gossiping. The writer's research also showed that gossip between female participants was cooperative and that the topic of conversation and the formal features of language found in conversations between female participants served to maintain friendship between them.

<sup>12</sup> Stathis Psillos and Martin Curd, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Science* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 182-192.

<sup>13</sup> Robert C. Solomon and Kathleen M. Higgins, *The Big Questions: A Short Introduction to Philosophy* (Belmont: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2010), 336-338.

<sup>14</sup> Mary Bucholtz, "The Feminist Foundations of Language, Gender, and Sexuality Research" (2014), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6cz7k5s8>

(accessed December 8, 2019). Stathis Psillos and Martin Curd, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Philosophy of Science* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 182-192.

<sup>15</sup> Srisna J. Lahay, *Gossip among Female Friends: Cooperative or Competitive?* (Surabaya: Global Aksara Pers, 2021), 149-152. Srisna J. Lahay, "Gossip Among Women Friends in the "Sex and the City" TV Series: a Conversational Analysis." Thesis (Unika Atma Jaya Jakarta, 2008), 88-90.

As discussed above, the biological differences between men and women lead to the social and cultural differences of their tasks and roles. This distinction also results in the movement demanding a reassessment of the beliefs and outlooks of women. The social, cultural, and political movement for women's equality requires philosophical equality, and this philosophical equality causes a model of the scientific method that includes observation of women. In response to the feminist criticism of the sexist practice of language and in line with the development of feminism, research about language and gender, especially women's language, has risen since the 1960s. These scientific works including the writer's research demonstrate that sexuality, gender, and language are closely related and that there are still a lot of works that can be done about women's ways of thinking, acting, speaking, and interaction as well as their roles in the society.

## Conclusion

At the end of this paper, the writer would like to convey that feminism, which is a social, political, and cultural movement as well as a school of thoughts challenging the unequal treatment of women, has developed from the thoughts of philosophers and then influenced the development of a scientific method that contains an observation of women and scientific works that illustrate the

relation of language and gender. From the above discussion on feminism, philosophy of science, and women's language, the writer would also like to express that the use of language by women and the reality of women shaped by their use of language can hopefully be better understood and that this understanding can further help researchers conduct their studies related to these topics.

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