

A Comparative Study of English and French Gender

Beny Hamdani¹

benyhamdani.ielts9.consultation@gmail.com

Dian Luthfiyati²

dianluthfiyati@unisla.ac.id

Raudhatul Islam³

raudhatulislam@gmail.com

Husnul Hotimah⁴

hosnolkhotimah@gmail.com

Abstract

This article looks critically the comparison between English and French Gender. The problem that will be discussed in this article is: What kind of similarities and differences do they have in gender, especially in distinguishing male from female persons? The significance of the study are to get inputs on gender in English and French in order to improve their ability in understanding gender from both languages . One of the characteristics of Indo-European language is gender, which classifies nouns to express sex distinctions. The following discussion will deal with two forms of gender, natural and grammatical gender, and the ways of showing gender. From the linguistics analysis of English and French gender that has been done in this article and the comparison between them, it can be concluded that both languages have some differences and similarities in the application of gender. The differences are focused on the kinds of gender used, English uses natural gender while French uses grammatical gender. The use of grammatical gender makes French does not have neuter gender. So the inanimate objects are considered to have gender, masculine or feminine, and the ways of showing their gender are afforded by the use of article, le for masculine and la for feminine.

Keywords : Language, Gender, English, French.

¹ English Education Study Program, Faculty of Scientific Studies, Islamic University of Zainul Hasan Genggong Kraksaan Probolinggo

² Islamic University of Lamongan

³ English Education Study Program, Faculty of Scientific Studies, Islamic University of Zainul Hasan Genggong Kraksaan Probolinggo

⁴ English Education Study Program, Faculty of Scientific Studies, Islamic University of Zainul Hasan Genggong Kraksaan Probolinggo

Introduction

Gender is the classification of nouns and pronouns according to the sex (or the absence of sex) denoted (Harman, 1973:20). The word gender (from Latin Genus) means race of kind, and in Indo European language. It is always an expression of sex distinction (Hatman, 1973:20). Actually, there are three kinds of Gender, masculine, feminine and neuter, though some members of Indo European family (.e.g. French and Spanish) only have two of them, masculine and feminine. In French, Gender is not always an expression of sex distinction because nouns which have no sex are considered to have sex. So there is no neuter Gender, which usually denotes to a lack of sex.

English which also belongs to Indo European family classifies nouns and pronouns into three Genders. English Gender is determined by meaning. All nouns naming creature are masculine or feminine according to the sex of the individual, and all other nouns are neuter. It means that nouns that refer to male creatures such as man and boy are masculine, nouns that refer to female creatures such as woman and girl are feminine and nouns that refer to inanimate objects such as chair and table are generally neuter. Although English and French have different type of Gender, they also have similarity in the way they differ female from male.

Kerf (1990) states that the comparison between two languages or more is supposed as old as the birth of the language itself. It is true because in acquiring another language people are always interested in knowing or in analyzing how far the differences and the similarities among the aspects of the languages are. There is a branch of linguistics that deals with the comparison between two languages or more. That is comparative linguistics. The comparative linguistics is a branch of linguistics that tries to attain the basic understanding about the development of languages and language family among the languages over the world and tries to find the influences of the interrelationship among the languages ever met in the course of history (Kerf, 1990:2).

According to Keraf (1990:3), comparative linguistics is divided into sub branches. They are : a. Typological comparative linguistics, studies about the major characteristics of each form and structure between languages, b. Historical comparative linguistics, studies the comparison of language from history's point of view, c. Areal comparative linguistics, explains the relations among the languages in the past.

All of the three sub branches above will be taken in the discussion of this article between English and French. The background of the choosing of this article is that there are differences and similarities between English and French Gender. The problem that will be discussed in this article is : What kind of similarities and differences do they have in gender, especially in distinguishing male from female persons? The significance of the study is to get inputs on gender in English and French in order to improve their ability in understanding gender from both languages.

English is a descendent of Indo European family of languages. It is classified as a Teutonic language. That is to say, it belongs to the group of languages to which German, Dutch, Flemish, Danish, Swedish, and Norwegian also belong. We can see that these languages have similarity in grammatical structure and many common words.

The settlement of three Germanic tribes, Angles, Saxon, and Jutes, in the middle of the fifth century is beginning of the history of the English language. The grouping of tribes was not permanent, since a vigorous ruler sometimes succeeded for a short time in uniting two or more kingdoms, but seven kingdoms can be distinguished as having a fairly stable existence, and these are described as the Anglo Saxon Heptarchy (Brook, 1958,40).

Since English is considered as a living language, a language that is constantly changing, it is possible to divide the history of the English Language into three periods, known respectively as Old English, Middle English, and Modern English. The Old English period extends from 450 to 1150 and is sometimes described as the period of full interaction, since during most of this period the

ending of the nouns, the adjectives, and the verbs are preserved more or less unimpaired. The Middle English period extend from 1150 to 1500. During this period the inflection, which had begun to break down toward the end of the old English period, became freaky reduced and it is described as the period of leveled inflection. The language since 1500 is modern English and it is described as the period of lost inflection.

The English language has undergone such change in the course of time that one cannot read old English paper without special study because of the employment of certain characters that no longer form a part of English alphabet. In general the differences between old and modern English concern spelling, pronunciation, the vocabulary, and the grammar. The spelling and the pronunciation between old and modern English are not very fundamental, because the spelling represent no difference in the spoken language and the pronunciation obey certain laws as a result of which we soon learn to recognize the old and the modern English equivalent. Another difference is found in the vocabulary that is almost purely Teutonic, has disappeared from the language since the Norman Conquest brought French into English. The most fundamental feature that distinguish old English from the language of today is its grammar,. On the one hand old English is a synthetic language, one which indicates the relation of the words in a sentence largely by means of inflection. We can see that theoretically the adjectives has different form for each of the three genders, such as gode for masculine, God-a for feminine, an god for neuter, on the masculine, god for neuter. On the other hand Modern English is an analytic languages, one which makes extensive use of prepositions and auxiliary verbs makes extensive use of prepositions an auxiliary verbs and depends upon word order to show other relationships (baugh, 1985:54).

There is no such convenient division between Middle English and Modern English as that which the Norman Conquest provides between them. There are some events that influence the difference between Middle English and Modern English. First, the invention of printing, which was introduced into England by Caxton, became important when the gradual spread of education increased the number of

people who could read. Then another important event in the early modern English is Renaissance that caused a lot of loan words from Latin to enter England. One of the characteristic features of modern English period is the enlargement of the vocabulary, By Renaissance in England; many writers deliberately enrich the language by borrowing words from Latin, Greek, Spanish, and French (Baugh, 1985:258).

Although Latin was by far the main source of loan words in the early modern period, a number of words were borrowed from other languages too. This can be seen in the military term, life science and also the general vocabulary of English words. They were borrowed from French such as bayonet and feint (military words), anatomy and muscle (life-science) and entrance and invite (general vocabulary). Besides Italian, Greek, Spanish and Portuguese were also the languages from which English borrowed the vocabularies (Baugh, 1985).

French came from the Indo European family of languages and it was one of the branches of Italic or Latin. It is spoken by some 75 million people of the world (Lindquist, 1962:205). This language is one of the important languages of the international diplomacy that is used in some conferences.

The history of French was begun when the Roman came to Gaul, the ancient of France, six years before the birth of Christ. It is one of the most important of the Roman languages, those languages that grew out of the tongue of the ancient Roman (Dider, 1975).

A Rome colonized Spain and Gaul, the district of west of the black sea, Northern Africa, the island of Mediterranean and even Britain, Latin spread into all these regions until its limit became practically continuous with those of the Roman Empire the language, though in altered form, to the present day (Baugh, 1985:26). The Roman languages which are descended from Latin, and while independent in the eighth century after Christ are as follows:

1. Portuguese
2. Spanish (Castilian)
3. Catalan (in eastern Spain)

4. Provançal (in the southern third of France).
5. French
6. Rhaetoromanic (in the Grisons, Tyrol and Friuli).
7. Italian
8. Dalmatian (extinct, crowded out by Italian).
9. Romanian.

(Pederson, 1965:93)

The various languages that represent the survival of Latin in the different part of the Roman Empire are known as the Romance or Romanic Languages. Some of them have since spread into other territory, particularly in the new world. The most extensive of the romance languages are French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Italian. French is primary the language of Northern France although it is the language of literature and education throughout the country. There were a number of dialects in the middle ages, some of them are Norman, Picard, Burgundian and that of the Ile-de-France. But with the establishment of the Capetians as kings of France and the rise of Paris as the national capital city. The dialect of Paris or Ile-de-France gradually won recognition as the official and literary language. Since the thirteenth century the Paris dialect has been standard French (Baugh, 1985:26).

Research Method

The type of data is qualitative data that obtained by doing a library research. It means that the data and information in this article are collected from books or other references and collections from library or other sources. This article uses a descriptive method.

Findings and Discussion

GENDER OF NOUNS

One of the characteristics of Indo-European language is gender, which classifies nouns to express sex distinctions. The following discussion will deal with

two forms of gender, natural and grammatical gender, and the ways of showing gender.

THE FORM OF GENDER

NATURAL GENDER

Natural gender corresponds to the natural sex. It means that nouns designating males generally masculine and females feminine, those indicating a lack of sex are neuter. English can be categorized into this type of gender. It can be seen from the nouns which name living creatures are masculine or feminine, and the nouns which indicate a lack of sex are neuter. It means that nouns that refer to male creatures such as boy, man, cock are masculine, nouns that refer to female creatures such as girl, woman, hen are feminine, and nouns that refer to inanimate object such as chair, table, pen are neuter.

Like English, French also uses natural gender in classifying nouns. Nouns such as pere (father), Homme (man), which refer to male person are masculine, and nouns such as mere (Mother), Femme (girl) which refer to female person are feminine. However, there is no neuter gender in French because besides the natural gender, French also uses the other form of gender that will be discussed in the next discussion, grammatical gender.

Grammatical Gender

Different from natural gender, grammatical gender does not classify nouns according to the natural sex. It means that inanimate objects are considered to have sex. They are grouped into masculine or feminine and their distributions are arbitrary. In English, when we speak of a ship as a feminine noun, sun and moon as masculine or feminine is a matter of rhetoric not grammar because it is a personification (Bough, 1935:11).

We know that there are only two genders in French, masculine and feminine. So inanimate objects such as cahier (book), sac (bag), stylo (pen), table (table), chaise (chair), and porte (door) are considered to be masculine or feminine arbitrarily, some help in knowing these genders are afforded by the using of the

definite article, le for masculine (le cahier, le sac, le stylo) and la for feminine (la table, la chaise, la porte).

The ways of showing gender

There are several ways to distinguish masculine nouns from feminine nouns.

They are as shown below:

A. By different words

Both English and French use different words to distinguish male person from female person.

In English

Masculine	Feminine
Father	Mother
Boy	Girl
Uncle	Aunt
Husband	Wife
King	Queen
Brother	Sister

In French

Masculine	Feminine
Pere	Mere
Homme	Femme
Oncle	Tante
Frere	Soeur
Neveu	Niece
Garcon	Fille

B. By different endings

Some suffixes are used to make a distinction for gender which are usually added to the masculine noun. In English, many feminine nouns are differentiated from corresponding masculine forms by using the suffix –ess.

Example:

Masculine	Feminine
Actor	Actress
Author	Authoress
Baron	Baroness
Count	Countess
Host	Hostess
Poet	Poetess
Prince	Princess
Waiter	Waitress

(Harman, 1931:27).

Certain nouns, mostly proper, borrowed from Greek, Latin, French, Spanish, etc. retain their original gender with or without Anglicized spelling.

Example,

Masculine	Feminine
Agustus	Agustine
Carl	Caroline
Joseph	Josephine
Harry	Harriet

(Harman, 1931:27)

Other less frequently used English suffixes denoting a female person are---ine (Hero-Heroine), ----ix (Aviator-Aviatrix, Testator-testatrix), and -ette (Suffragist-suffragette), launderer-Launderette) (Frank, 1972:17).

In French, we recognize some suffixes that form feminine nouns i.e. -e, -ere, -euse, -trice,-esse, and -se. these suffixes have different distribution either they are added or changing the end of the masculine noun.

Example :

Suffix	Masculine	Feminine	Meaning
-e	Ami	Amie	Friend
	Cousin	Cousine	Cousin
	Clint	Cliente	Client
-ere	Boucher	Bouchere	
-euse	Danceur	Danceuse	Dancer
	Houeur	Joueuse	Gambler
	Voleur	Veleuse	Robber
-trice	Expediteur	Expeditrice	Expeditor
	Instituteur	intitutrice	Teacher
-esse	Docteur	Doctoresse	Doctor
	Duc	Duchesse	Duke-Duches
	Hot	Hotese	Host-Hostes
-se	Epoux	Epouse	Husband-Wife

(Didier, 1935:81)

C. By compounding

The last way to distinguish gender is by compounding an element of known gender with another element (Harman, 1931:27). However, we find only English that uses this way of showing gender.

Example :

Masculine	Feminine
Billygoat	Nannygoat
Englishman	Englishwoman
Gentleman	Gentlewoman
Milkman	Milkwoman
Manservant	Maidservant
Peacock	Peahen
Boyfriend	Girlfriend

(Harman, 1931:27)

Conclusion and Suggestion

From the linguistics analysis of English and French gender that has been done in this article and the comparison between them, it can be concluded that both languages have some differences and similarities in the application of gender. The differences are focused on the kinds of gender used, English uses natural gender while French uses grammatical gender. The use of grammatical gender makes French does not have neuter gender. So the inanimate objects are considered to have gender, masculine or feminine, and the ways of showing their gender are afforded by the use of article, *le* for masculine and *la* for feminine.

Another difference is in the personal pronouns especially for the third person. The third person singular in English has different form for neuter while French does not have neuter form. There are only masculine and feminine. The third person plural in English is only one form (they) but in French it is (Elles). So the English third person plural does not denote gender but denote plural number.

On the other hands, the similarities are in the distinguishing of the male persons and the female persons. Both languages use different words and different endings to distinguish female persons to male persons. The differences and the similarities are important things to understand gender as one of the basic principles in understanding a language for the language learners.

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