Men's Language and Masculine Identity Construction in Sexist Jokes

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Abstract

The power imbalance between men and women in society is reflected in their language use and it may be reinforced in sexist jokes. This is a sociolinguistic study on men's language in sexist jokes on the Internet. This study is aimed at investigating men's linguistic features and the masculine identities represented by those features. This is a descriptive qualitative study with complementary quantitative analysis. The theories of Tannen's men language (1990) and Kiesling's masculine identities (2007) were used as references to analyze the data. The results show that men's identity of competing for solidarity embodied in discourses of insults, teasing, and joking is the most dominant identity represented in sexist jokes. This is in line with the main intention of sexist humor to laugh at women's inferiority. Meanwhile, men's dominance realized in report talk becomes the second most prevalent identity. The identities of politeness oaf, indicated by direct command, and freedom, shown by swearing and taboo words, are not influential as both do not contribute to the making of humorous expressions. These imply that context and communication purposes motivate speakers to use gender-related features. Reflecting that most of the masculine identities and the language features in sexist jokes represent men's superiority, this kind of humor can be a way to maintain gender asymmetry in society. Besides, although humor leads to laughter and is considered healthy, sexist humor is dangerous as the expressions subordinate women. Therefore, being critical when reading the jokes and trying to avoid such jokes in communication is suggested.
Keywords: men's language, masculinities, sexist jokes, social dominance

1. INTRODUCTION

Joke has been known as a uniting social activity (Meyer, 2000) and it also serves some physiological benefits and can function as a health booster (Wilkins & Eisenbraun, 2009). However, some jokes are in fact not entertaining. Several kinds of humor are considered negative, such as ethnic jokes, political humor, and gender humor (Pasaribu & Kadarisman, 2016). Those are marginal forms of humor conveyed in the form of sarcasm or insult where the one being amused is the speaker himself. In gender humor, the source of laughter comes from gender matters, and women are often targeted as the object of the derogatory language used there (Bergmann, 1986). This kind of humor is easily found around us, especially on the Internet. Despite the danger for humiliating women, many social researchers regard the function of sexist jokes as something 'not serious enough' (Nasreen, 2021).

Sexist joke delivered by men, which laugh at women's inferiority, is not only a means to show power and control in the social domain (Schwars, 2010) but it is also an expression of prejudice against women (Abrams, Bippus, & McGaughey, 2015). Therefore, investigating sexist humor can be a way to look at men's dominance in society. Moreover, humor provides much information about its surrounding, as it offers us knowledge about standardized images of society (Laineste, 2008) and its socio-structural dynamics (Abrams, Bippus, & McGaughey, 2015).

Aside from the content, the language used by men in the jokes might also reflect their superiority. Some linguists claim that men's language behaviors show that they are socially more dominant than women. They are dominant because of their consistent coerciveness and because "they are the default human category in language, in society, and in most studies of language and gender" (Kiesling, 2007, p. 655). Besides, the language style of men is heard as showing their toughness, lack of affect, competitiveness, independence, competence, hierarchy, and control (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). They tend to take control in conversation by specifying topics (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015), grabbing the floor through interruption, and hogging the floor by talking too much (Coates, 2013). They seek the upper hand and avoid others from dominating them because they see the world as a place where people seek to gain status and maintain it (Tannen, 1990).

That the way men talk reveals their social superiority proves that speakers use their language to do social things, such as expressing identity. Identity is "the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups or categories" (Kroskrity, 2000). Since gender identity is constructed rather than inherited, speakers do use particular linguistic characteristics to attain group identity (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). They want to fit into a certain group and be differentiated from the other group(s). Being assigned to having 'not feminine' characteristics, men, according to Kiesling (2007), have to work hard to maintain the appearance of masculinity. The linguistic strategies they use are the ones functioning as indexicals indicating the masculine identity and stereotypically masculine characteristics, such as authority, dominance, aggression, and strength (Wolff & Puts, 2010).

Compared to the studies on women's language, research on men's language, especially ones correlating between the linguistic features and masculine identities is quite rare (Coates, 2013; Kiesling, 2007, Lawson, 2020). Only in the past 25 years, research in that field has come into focus, starting from Johnson and Meinhof (1997) whose articles provide a critical analysis of men's interactional norms across a range of contexts to Baker and Balirano (2018) on language uses and queer masculinities in several old and new media. While the contexts of those studies are mostly on real interactions, both face to face and online, and on telecommunication media, spoken as well as written, none is conducted in sexist jokes which serve negative and aggressive amusement. Therefore, men's language practices and the masculine identities represented in sexist jokes become the focus of this study.

Such study, on men and masculinity, needs to be investigated if power relations between men and women are to be changed for the better. Besides, considering that institutional sexism, sexual discrimination, and gender-based inequality seem to be recurring in recent society (Lawson, 2020), this study is vital to be conducted. Moreover, analyzing men's linguistic practices can also improve our insight into how men maintain gender superiority and what masculine traits they performed in a particular context, such as sexist humor that is intended to humiliate and disparage women through linguistic means. Besides, the study is also essential to raise people's awareness of the danger of gender-based verbal abuse. Considering these significances, this study aims to reveal what linguistic features are employed by men in sexist humor and what masculine identities are constructed from those features.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1 Men's Language

Men speak differently from women. Each group has linguistic territories associated with their domains. Some linguists say that the way men speak shows that they are more dominant than women. Trudgill (2000) stated that in a conversation, the dominant speakers, more often male, play a dominant role, use more imperatives, and employ fewer interrogatives than people who take a subordinate role. Eckert and McConnel-Ginet (2013) add that boys carry over boyish patterns of self-aggrandizement into manhood, competing with others to establish their claims to hierarchical status, offering instruction instead sympathy, displaying their ideas and claims for others to confirm as well as relishing in defending them against expected attacks, and seeking out large audiences and avoiding showing themselves as vulnerable. Similarly, Fillmer and Haswell (1977) also suggest that males' speech is bold, aggressive, straightforward, and focus on essential things.

Some aspects of men's conversational practice, as stated by Coates (2013), are minimal responses, commands, and directives, as well as swearing and taboo language. Besides, she added that men use two conversational strategies to achieve dominance in a talk: grabbing the floor through interruptions and hogging the floor by contributing much. Tannen (1990) said similar things by stating that men's language is regarded as report talk since for most men, talk is a way to maintain independence and status. They do report talk by showing knowledge and capability and by holding center stage through verbal

performance such as storytelling, joking, or giving information. As cited by Talbot (2019), Tannen characterized men's styles of talk as problem-solving, report, lecturing, public, status, oppositional, and independence.

Since this study correlates men's language features to masculine identities, the men's linguistic practices mentioned by Tannen (1990) appear to be closely related to the masculine identities proposed by Kiesling (2007) in his Men, Masculinity, and Language. Therefore, to see what linguistic features are employed by men in sexist jokes, this study used Tannen's (1990) categories: report talk, command, and swearing/profanity. In Tannen's theory, joking is included in the report talk. However, considering sexist jokes as the context of the study, joking is separated from report talk because they denote different masculine identities.

2.2 Identity Construction and Masculinities

The use of particular languages and linguistic forms not only provides information about the speakers' social background, but may also construct their identity (Holmes, 2012). It is because gender is performative (Lawson, 2020). Any action and linguistic form performed by a speaker carry meaning and are interpreted by others based on the history and norms of a particular group (Kiesling, 2019). This implied that besides being formed from their performance, identity is also assigned by others. Within the two kinds of self-categorization, personal and social identity (Turner et al., 1992), the latter emphasizes differences that may lead to competition causing one social group to consider itself superior to another group (Pound, 2008).

Not only showing a speaker's identity, but language is also a medium through which ideas about acceptable social norms in a particular society are transmitted (McCann, Plummer, & Minichiello, 2010), including the ideals of masculinity and femininity as well as which behaviors are appropriate and which are not (Plester, 2015). Masculinity is "a set of performances that one carries out by using linguistic and other meaning-making resources within normative constraints about how a man should sound, appear and behave" (Milani, 2015, p. 10).

What appears to be masculine characteristics are varied. In the context of Western society, masculinity involves the idea of "young, urban, white, northern heterosexual, Protestant father of college education, fully employed, of good complexion, and a recent record in sports" (Goffman 1963, p. 128). Pearson and VanHorn's study (2004) found that when men were asked about their masculine characteristics, they responded in terms of 1) interests and abilities, such as working with tools and spending most of the time outdoors, 2) circumstances, such as being drafted and been shooting for so long, 3) physical characteristics, and 4) personality characteristics. Within these varied kinds of masculinity, a small subset that is most valorized is hegemonic masculinity (Kiesling, 2007). It is "the currently most honored way of being a man [which requires] all other men to position themselves in relation to it" (Connell & Messerschmidt 2005, p. 832). As it is a foremost gender identity and an important cultural reference point, many men would strive to attain it (Lawson, 2020) through the linguistic forms they use.

Kiesling (2007) stated several masculine identities that are reflected in men's linguistic patterns. The first is dominance in conversation which is created from some features, such as interruption, silence, showing superior knowledge, and some other ways depending on the context. The second is competing discourses, such as insults and boasts, aimed at building fraternity because of the clash between dominance and solidarity. The third is the lack of politeness markers because they avoid feminine identity or sexual promiscuity. The fourth is men's tendency to use vernacular forms because it has covert prestige by indicating toughness and working-class masculinity. Because of the comprehensive correlation between language and masculinity as well as its relevance to the context of sexist jokes, the masculine identity categorization proposed by Kiesling (2007) is used as one of the main references in this study.

2.3 On Sexist Jokes

Jokes which should be a medium to relieve stress and break a strained situation may contain stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against a group of people. The sexist joke is one of them. It is a kind of humor that disparages women or men; this kind of humor has been established as a communicative behavior in society. What is told in a sexist joke is not a joke at all. It is instead "a form of power that is used to oppress and subordinate entire groups of people" (Bemiller & Schneider, 2010, p. 463). As it potentially legitimizes prejudice in society, Ford (2000) regards such humor as a powerful language that should be perceived through a critical lens.

In many cultures, the woman is mostly the one that becomes the object of sexist jokes (Bergmann, 1986). Cantor (1976) proposes three reasons underlying it: 1) the socialization process in society that supports the idea of female inferiority, 2) the different cultural expectations about the males' and females' appropriate behavior, and 3) people's perceptions, resulted from their expectation, toward other people's particular behavior. It means that men are appropriate to deliver sarcasm and they may be reputed as clever and witty whereas women to deliver sarcasm will be regarded as cruel. Thus, a joke will be viewed as humorous when the gender victims are the inferior ones.

Seeing that a sexist joke is a form of disparagement that derogates and belittles women as its target (Thomae & Pina, 2015), Bemiller and Schneider (2010) regard this as an example of covert violence against women as it intends to humiliate and subordinate women. This implies that gender joke is a negative phenomenon. However, since joking is an obvious men's language feature (Labov, 1972; Tannen, 1990) and sexist humor is one of the men's ways to establish masculine prototypicality (Kehily & Nayak, 1997), this can be the right object to study men's superiority reflected from their language features along with the constructed masculine identities.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

Aiming at providing an in-depth and interpreted understanding of men's language and the constructed masculine identities in sexist jokes on the internet, this was essentially a descriptive qualitative study. However, to support the qualitative analysis to see which feature is frequently used and which one is less dominant, complementary quantitative data analysis resulted in statistical findings were involved. The data were in the forms of

words, phrases, and sentences uttered by male characters in sexist jokes on the Internet. 54 jokes taken from several joke sites on the Internet were the sources of data in this study.

In the process of data collection, the data were recorded on the data sheet based on the frame of the research. They were then analyzed based on the theory of men's linguistic features by Tannen (1990) and masculine identities by Kiesling (2007). Data interpretation was then conducted by drawing the implication of the quantitative data, interpreting the qualitative data in words by considering the linguistic and non-linguistic contexts, and comparing the results to previous studies or relevant literature.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Men and women have their own linguistic features because there is a tendency that particular words would appear with greater frequency in their speech. While women's language positions women as deficient to men since they are less confident in what they say (by using more tag questions, hedging devices, rising intonation) and less able to contribute to serious activities in the social domain (by employing more empty adjectives and lexicon specific to domestic domains) (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015), men's language is seen as competitive because they need to maintain the status they have got from the society that they are more dominant and superior than women (Holmes, 2012).

Men's competitiveness and their effort to maintain their superiority are reflected in their linguistic features in sexist jokes. The findings of men's masculine identities constructed from their linguistic features are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Men's Masculine Identities Constructed from Their Language Use

No.	Men's Identity	Men's Language	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Dominance	Report talks	20	37.04%
2.	Competing for solidarity	Insult, joking, teasing	24	44.44%
3.	Politeness oaf	Direct command	3	5.56%
4.	Freedom	Swearing and taboo words	7	12.96%
		Total	54	100.00%

4.1 Report talk representing the identity of social dominance

Dominance, which is always associated with power and hierarchy, is one of the cultural discourses of masculinity; so people would expect men to employ language features showing those stances (Kiesling, 2007). One of the ways to show dominance is by report talk. While women's language of conversation is primarily the language of rapport which functions to establish connections and negotiate relationships, that of men is called report talk since for them talk is a means to maintain independence and status in a hierarchical social order (Tannen, 1990). Tannen further explains that report talk can be done by showing knowledge and skill as well as by holding the center point through verbal performance such

as storytelling, joking, or giving information. However, since a joke's greater function is to create affiliation through competing, in this study, joking represents the identity of competing for solidarity.

Men's social dominance realized by the employment of report talk becomes the second most prevalent identity in the sexist jokes under study (37.04%) since most jokes in the form of dialogue put a woman as one who does not know many things and she frequently asks questions to men so that there is a greater tendency of men to show knowledge and give information. The report talk in this study is performed in two different ways: showing knowledge or information and storytelling. One that functions to show knowledge is depicted in except 1.

> 1) Fem: Okay, why are women paid less than men for doing the same job that a
>   man does?
>   Neg: **It says in the Bible that women are worth less than men**.
>   Fem: Where does it say that? I don't think so.
>   Neg: **Well, you do agree that woman was made from a rib, correct?**
>   Fem: Yeah, so?
>   Neg: **Well, there you have it. A rib is a cheaper cut of meat!**
>   (PC/1/1)

In the joke, the negotiator is showing his knowledge of the reason underlying the different payments the woman received for the same job done by men and women. Although in reality most women, especially feminists, have known the reason why women get a lower pay scale than men for the same job they do, in this joke the feminist is put as somebody who does not know the reason. To justify the different pay scales given to men and women, the negotiator quotes the Bible to support this unfairness. Thus, paying women less than men for the same job they have done is justifiable.

In excerpt 1, men's views of what questioning is all about are also shown. While women see questions as a way to maintain a conversation, men treat them as information requests (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015). Therefore, a question delivered to a man can be a means for them to show dominance by showing their knowledge and skills. This is their way to 'hog the floor' by giving many contributions in an interaction (Coates, 2013). Therefore, Talbot (2019) characterized 'lecturing' as one of the men's conversational styles.

The second way to do report talk is by storytelling. In the sexist jokes under analysis, it is also found that men sometimes tell a story to their interlocutor on an account of past events or experiences.

> 2) A man : **I had it all - money, a beautiful house, a big car, the love of a
>   beautiful**
>   **woman; then, Pow! it was all gone!**
>   A friend: What happened?
>   A man   : My wife found out...
>   (PC/14/9)

In excerpt 2, the man is telling his friend about his experience that he was a rich man and had a beautiful lover but finally those all were gone because his wife knows his wealth. Through the joke, it reveals that although in these recent days some women have shown their independence by their involvement in providing the family needs by joining the labor force, sexist humor still constructs women as "gold diggers" who engage with men in a close relationship just to take advantage of their money and wealth.

In almost all jokes containing storytelling features in this study, men employ this feature by telling things they are proud of. This is in line with Johnstone's study in 1990 (as cited in Talbot, 2019) that when a man tells a story, the main character is usually himself or another man and he will talk about exploits that display his own skill, courage, and wit. Thus, storytelling is another way for a man to hog the floor in a conversation arena. It serves to maintain dominance and status not only from the way the speaker holds the floor but also from the content delivered in the story.

From the discussion above, it can be concluded that report talk can be a strategy that men use to gain dominance or become the center of attention because "norms for male interaction seem to be those of public referentially-oriented interaction" (Holmes, 2012, p. 315). For them, report talk is a means to maintain independence and negotiate and hold status in the hierarchical social order (Tannen, 1990). When men are doing the report talk by showing their knowledge and competence or by attracting others' attention by showing a verbal performance, they will be at the center stage of a conversation.

4.2 Joking representing the identity of competing for solidarity

Joking is a specifically male activity (Labov, 1972). It is regarded as men's conversational style because women are considered poor at telling jokes as they lack a sense of humor (Coates, 2013). While women's talk is typically cooperative, agreeing, and supportive, mock insults and abuse are men's ways to express solidarity and maintain social relationships (Holmes, 2012). The solidarity and social relationship meant by Holmes is directed to the interlocutor.

With 44.44% of occurrences, competing for solidarity becomes the most prevalent masculine identity represented in the sexist jokes on the Internet. This identity is embodied in men's way of talking which often insults or teases others with an intention of creating a stronger bond with either a woman he teases or a man he talks to.

3) Wife : Darling, honestly what age would you say I am?
   Luke : **Judging from your skin, twenty; your hair, eighteen; and your figure, twenty-five**.
   Wife : Oh, you flatterer!
   Luke : **Hey, wait a minute! I haven't added them up yet.**

<div align="right">(AA/10/37)</div>

Tricking a woman by complimenting her appearance which looks younger than her real age is Luke's way to deceive his wife. He does so because he knows that women are contented if they are praised for their bodies or appearance. However, after the wife is comforted by the husband's compliment, he states the thing he really wants to say that the wife's age is old

enough. The last utterance becomes the punch line of the joke. This way of creating laughter is the most dominant in the study since this competing for solidarity strategy fits the sexist jokes' intention to disparage women because insulting and teasing are effective ways to ridicule women.

Another topic associated with women frequently explored as a source of amusement in sexist jokes is domestic jobs.

4) Wife : What's on TV?
   Husband : **Dust.**

(TWF/3/11)

In excerpt 4, women's regular activity of cleaning the house is employed to create laughter. The question delivered by the wife is actually meant to ask her husband to tell what program is being broadcasted on the TV. However, to make it fun, he exploits the ambiguity of the word "on" stated by his wife by answering "dust". 'Dust' spoken by the husband is a powder of dirt on the TV, not the program which is broadcasted.

The two jokes in excerpts 3 and 4 are both delivered by husbands to their wives. Although the wives might feel annoyed for being tricked, the laughter created by the amusing statement makes their bonds to their husbands stronger. Thus, the teasing delivered in a conversation among people in a close relationship can strengthen the participants' bonds. Men's tendency to use such overtly competitive and distancing forms is an effect of the clash between their dominance and solidarity (Kiesling, 2007) because men tend to express and create affiliation by opposition (Tannen, 1990).

While the previous jokes between a man and a woman show that teasing women about ordinary things can instead strengthen a relationship, this study found that when the joke is intended to disparage women, it would be in the form of a dialogue between two men or in a Q&A form. In Q&A form, it is assumed that both question and answer are delivered by men while the woman being targeted by the insult is not present in the conversation.

5) Q: How many feminists does it take to change a light bulb?
   A: Trick question, feminists can't change anything!

(MSJ/1/40)

Although readers do not know who delivers the question and gives the answer, since the joke in excerpt 5 is targeted at feminists, it is assumed that they are men and the content represents men's perspective. The answer in the joke implies that although feminists have done many efforts to make women equal to men, women will not be as intelligent as men. The feminist movement is such an effort for the betterment of women's conditions related to equal opportunity. Sexist jokes targeted at feminists can be a backlash or personal attack on those who try to stop men's domination. This joke is a disparagement of feminists. Therefore, those who will laugh at such a joke are men, people who dislike the feminist movement to stop men's superiority. This is in line with Thomae and Pina's (2015) idea that gender humor may enhance male ingroup cohesion but disparage the outsider group.

Those examples demonstrate that teasing which can stimulate an annoyed reaction or emotion from the interlocutor can be an effective way to maintain solidarity and strengthen

the relationship between conversation participants. However, despite the stronger social relationship that might be created by telling jokes, insulting, especially one which is intended to disparage others, is dangerous as it might humiliate others.

4.3 Direct command representing the identity of politeness oaf

Some linguists have claimed that women are more polite than men because women are 'more oriented to affective, interpersonal meanings than men' (Holmes, 1995: 193) and it is indicated by the use of more particles indexing politeness (Brown, 1998). Talbot (2019) claims the same thing that in many empirical studies, in various situations and in many different cultures and languages, men tend to use politeness strategies a great deal less than women. While women tend to use superpolite forms, one of them is the use of indirect request (Lakoff, 1973), Goodwin (1980) noticed that boys used explicit commands which he calls 'aggravated' directives. West (1998) also found a similar idea among doctors that aggravated forms tend to be used by male doctors.

By looking at the relationship between conversation participants, where getting people to do things is usually stated by those in a position of power (Fairclough, 1989), command is more often used by men than women because it is related to power. Freedom and encouragement to communicate their true intentions are given more to men by society, while subordination, politeness, and compliance are socialized more to women.

With three occurrences only (5.56%), direct command in the form of imperative sentences becomes the feature least likely used by men in sexist jokes.

6) A woman: "I can't take this anymore! I can't just sit here and die like an animal, strapped into a chair. If I am going to die, let me at least die feeling like

a woman. Is there anyone here man enough to make me feel like woman?"

A man : "I can make you feel like a woman before you die. Are you interested?"

A woman: "Yes."

A man : "Here. **Iron this.**"

(JH/6/26)

In excerpt 6, the man's answer is not the one expected by the woman. In the situation of a plane accident, she wanted to feel like a woman by engaging in intercourse with a man before she died as she has not married yet. However, the man thought that the way to make her feel like a real woman is by doing housework such as ironing. Although the last utterance is the punch line, the laughter is not because of the direct command feature, but because of the unexpected response. Therefore, men's language feature of direct command which represents the identity of politeness oaf is not many since it does not contribute to the nature of sexist jokes which insult women in humorous ways.

Another example of commanding is shown in excerpt 7.

7) A woman: I'm awfully cold, would you please go and get me another blanket?
   A man   : Let's just pretend like we're married for this one night.
   A woman: (giggled and agreed)
   A man   : **Well then, go get your own damn blanket!**

(TWF/28/21)

This joke explores a couple's different interpretations of marriage as the laughter trigger. The woman thinks that by agreeing with the man's proposal to pretend they are married he will ask her to sleep beside him and he will hug her to make her warmer because this is what usually a married couple does. However, the man thinks that pretending like they are married means that he can give commands to the woman because, in most marriages, husbands are more dominant than the wife so that they can command their wives as they like.

Different ways of asking for action are clearly depicted in excerpt 6 where the woman used indirect request "*Would you please ...?*" and the man used aggravated direct command "*Go get ...!*" Using a super polite form of directive indicated by interrogative form '*Would you ...?*' and an exclamation '*please*' softens the command and makes it less forceful. However, using direct command in the imperative form, as what is stated by the man, moreover with an exclamation expressing an anger '*damn*' is so aggravating. Not only the joke explores male domination in marriage life, but also verbal abuse that is often done by a man.

The way the man speaks in except 6 verifies Hybel's statement that "When men and women talk together, men are more likely to give directives … When men use command, they tend to decide, judge and show the right and power" (1998: p. 99). Such behavior is related to their status and domination in society. Cowan, Drinkard, and MacGavin (1984) stated that the direct method applied by men is claimed to be an effect of social practices which have reserved those strategies for those of higher social status and power. Tannen (1990) also says that men use more commands because telling others what to do is a primary way of establishing status while taking the order is an indicator of low status.

4.4 Swearing and taboo words representing the identity of freedom

Vernacular or non-standard forms, which often identify masculinity and toughness, are used more by men than by women (Holmes, 2012). One of the features of a tough speech is swearing and the use of taboo words. Swearing is "an expression of very strong emotion: anger at specific others or simply deep frustration, often manifest as anger directed at the closest available target" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013, p. 162). Trudgill (2000) argued that there is something valued for men in using 'non-standard' or 'vernacular' variants, such as swearwords, because masculinity and toughness are associated with this working-class speech. Kiesling (2019) thought the same thing that the language used more by working-class speakers has some kind of prestige attached to it, but it is covert as the prestige is not overtly admitted by the speakers.

All swearing and taboo words found in the data are uttered by men. Although using swearing might make the speakers sound macho and indicate their freedom from rules, it does not help provide humorous effects in the spoken utterances. Therefore, swearwords are rarely employed in sexist jokes on the Internet. Only seven jokes (12.96%) included

swearwords in the men's speech. However, a joke might employ more than one swearword as shown in excerpt 7.

> (7) John : Louise, tell me what went on last night.
> Louise: You made a complete ass of yourself, succeeded in antagonizing the entire board of directors, and insulted the chairman of the company to his face
> John : He's an arrogant, self-important prick, **piss on him**!
> Louise: You did. All over his suit. And he fired you.
> John : Well, **screw him**,
> Louise: I did. You're back at work on Monday.
>
> (JH/1/23)

Set in a very informal conversation between husband and wife, the joke portrays the different use of swearwords by man and woman. Louise, the woman, does not employ swearwords. The only disapproving word she utters is 'ass' which means 'a stupid person' to refer to John in the "*You made a complete ass of yourself ...*". Meanwhile, John is swearing twice by using the words 'piss on him' and 'screw him'. The first is uttered after he mentions several characteristics of his boss that '*He's an arrogant, self-important prick...*'. The rude slang '*piss on him*' emphasizes that John extremely dislikes his boss. The second swearword is '*screw him*' which is uttered to express his extreme anger for his director has fired him.

The use of swearwords with their literal interpretation triggers laughter in this joke. 'Piss on him' and 'screw him', the swearwords uttered by John to express his anger, are in fact the things they did. John did piss on the chairman of the company and Louise did have sex with him. Then, after that, the director decided not to discharge John. Louise's utterance implies that she is afraid John will lose his job, so she willingly did anything to make the director not discharge her husband.

The swearwords in excerpt 7 function to express anger. Stapleton (2010) lists the other functions of swearing as expressing humor, creating social bonds, and constructing identity. The identities indexed by swearing are masculinity and its related indexicalities, such as 'roughness' or even simply not being polite (Kiesling, 2019). Choosing a bad word to be inserted in the message they convey is the most frequent way men employ swearwords in sexist jokes. This bad word also serves as an emotive intensifier.

> (8) Q: Why did the woman cross the road?
> A: Who cares? What **the hell** is she doing out of the kitchen?
>
> (FC/1/42)

Hell, the obverse of heaven where there is eternal suffering, is a very mild bad word that, in this modern development, is frequently used as an emotive intensifier. Adding an exclamation of 'hell' to ask a question like '*What the hell is she doing out of the kitchen?*' means that the man really needs an answer to the question. The joke implies that seeing a woman out of the kitchen is something unusual and must be questioned. The word 'hell' has gone through several semantic changes from the literal to the metaphorical to the trivial

(Hughes, 2006). A similar phenomenon happened to another swearword functioning as an intensifier that is frequently used in sexist jokes i.e. 'damn' as in '*Your eyesight's damn near perfect*' (TWF/3/13). Rather than being regarded as bad language, the word 'damn' is like an adverb that means 'very'. This implies that employing such a word is not really swearing and not offensive. Hughes (2006) considers both as mild idiomatic oaths whose taboo against the term is receding in present usage.

In the jokes under study, the swearwords, starting from the very mild ones, such as *hell* and *damn* to the strong ones, such as *fuck*, are all uttered by men. Since "using taboo language has a symbolic association with masculinity" (Coates, 2013, p. 98), adhering swearing to one of the men's linguistic features is plausible. The masculine identity of roughness and impoliteness represented by swearword employment, as stated by Kiesling (2019), depicts men as normally disobeying good etiquette and manners. For grown men, the use of swearwords indicates shared freedom from the control of those who have complained about such language in the past: mainly, mothers and schoolteachers (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

That the whole swearwords in the jokes under study are uttered by men also conforms to Broadbridge's statement that a remarkable difference between men and women is the use of swearing and vulgar language and it is illustrated by the prevalence of phrases such as 'ladylike' behavior to refer to women's infrequent use of swearwords, or 'swearing like a trooper' which point to the belief that swearing is a habit purely for men (2003), especially those from uneducated and low social-class (Lakoff, 1973).

6. CONCLUSION

Aside from its nature to trigger laughter, humor can be an important resource to build identity and maintain cultural continuity. Sexist humor, which is mostly targeted at women, can be a medium where men show their masculine identities through language practices. The identity of men who like to create affiliation through competition is the most dominant identity represented by the frequent employment of insults, teasing, and joking. Meanwhile, the second most dominant masculine identity is social dominance indicated by the features of report talk. The prevalence of those two is relevant to the communication context of sexist jokes whose humorous expressions are mostly delivered in the form of competing discourses or information giving. The other two linguistic features which are less frequently employed in sexist jokes are direct command representing men's identity of politeness oaf and swearing or taboo words indicating the identity of freedom. Their infrequent occurrences are probably caused by their functions which do not contribute to triggering laughter or belittling women.

These imply that the context and the purpose of a communication act will influence the gender-related language features used. Since the men in the jokes are telling something humorous to insult women, the features of teasing and report talk become the dominant ones. Both indicate the way the humorous content is delivered. Teasing is when the men convey the humorous content in an unkind way, mostly by attacking women's stereotypical characters, while report talk is when the humorous content is delivered from a story told by a man or from information given by him.

The men's linguistic features along with masculine identities represented in the sexist jokes under study indicate that such humor can be a medium to reinforce men's superiority as they depict men as socially dominant and having more power and freedom than women. Subsequently, this easily found humor may also increase the gender inequality that has existed for so long in society. Considering those effects and the dangerous side of sexist jokes as they also exploit women's inferiority, readers should be critical and avoid using such humor in communication. As the source of data and the theories used in this study are based on Western culture, to enrich the study of language and gender, future researchers are suggested to investigate sexist jokes in different cultures.

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