

Linguistic Sexism and Gender Stereotypes in Malay-English Drama

Khaleda Alia Binti Mohamad Jamil¹, Nur Hanani Binti Nordin^{2*}
Amy Sofeena Binti Kamarulzaman³, Farhanah Syazwani Binti Md Safian⁴
Nur Zafirah Binti Zainol⁵, Nur Faiqah Binti Mohamed Ismail⁶
Noor Ahnis Binti Othman⁷, Farah Adilah Binti Mohd Faisal⁸

¹Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, 43800 Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: khaledaalia@uitm.edu.my

²Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, 43800, Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: hananinordin@uitm.edu.my

³Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: sofeena@uitm.edu.my

⁴Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: farhanahsafian@uitm.edu.my

⁵Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: zafirahzainol@uitm.edu.my

⁶Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: faiqahismail@uitm.edu.my

⁷Akademi Pengajian Bahasa, Universiti Teknologi MARA, 40450 Shah Alam, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: noorahnis@uitm.edu.my

⁸Centre of Foundation Studies, Universiti Teknologi MARA, Cawangan Selangor, Kampus Dengkil, 43800 Dengkil, Selangor, Malaysia.

Email: farahadilahfaisal@uitm.edu.my

ABSTRACT

CORRESPONDING

AUTHOR (*):

Nur Hanani Binti Nordin
(hananinordin@uitm.edu.my)

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Sexism, a silent threat to society since decades ago, has now become more rampant especially with the technology revolution. Past studies have identified that gender inequality occur in school textbooks and children's story books and efforts have been taken to alleviate the issue. However, there is a huge gap in analysing sexism in the realm of media specifically on tv dramas. This paper attempts to shed light on sexism and gender stereotype in Malay-English TV Drama as represented in the selected sitcom namely *Oi Jaga Mulut*, *Show Me the Money*, *Kopitiam* and *Kopitiam the series*. Qualitative content analysis was employed in investigating sixteen episodes (4 episodes from each drama). Linguistic sexism was analysed using [Nayef and El-Nashar \(2019\)](#) linguistic taxonomy that includes collocations, presuppositions and transitivity. Meanwhile, social construction theory by [Howard and Hollander \(1997\)](#) was used to explain the social meanings in the gender stereotypes from the characters' behaviour, physical attributes and gendered social roles in the drama. The findings indicated that the portrayal of women's images and roles in the television dramas was gradually changing towards a more positive picture by showing them as educated and more independent with professional

careers of their own. Nonetheless, there was still discrimination in gender roles and sexism associated with this gender that existed in the Malay-English dramas. Findings were also discussed in relation to culture and social norms that exist in Malaysia. Overall, the results suggest more local television dramas to be oriented to contents that are informative, educational and inspiring women.

Contribution/Originality: This study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by investigating on the linguistic sexism and gender stereotyping, particularly in English-medium Malay dramas which are believed to be underexplored as compared to Malay-language media.

1. Introduction

In modern society, with the arrival of globalization, the mass media are seen as an influential tool that can shape behaviour and capitalize on social structure on how people perceive things. Several studies have suggested that society, as the main consumers of the media, are often passive and uncritical of the messages conveyed to them (Livingstone & Das, 2020; Tandoc & Maitra, 2021; Napoli, 2019). Although subjectification of gender in the media domain persists, research shows that females tend to be more affected than males, which contributes to ongoing gender bias and stereotyping (Smith et al., 2022; Gill & Orgad, 2021). Scholars around the world have extensively examined the issue of how women are portrayed on television, with particular focus on television dramas (Smith & Johnson, 2020; Park & Lee, 2021; Martinez et al., 2019). Women on screen are commonly portrayed within stereotypes such as family-centric housewives who are subordinate in various realms, whether in the workplace, at home, or as sexual objects (Haris et al., 2023; Thompson, 2023).

Furthermore, framing the gender agenda is however a struggle in the local context given the condition of the diversities and how heavily the political and ethnic system control the social norms in Malaysian scenario (Balraj-Ambigapathy, 2021). Recent studies continue to document how Malaysian media perpetuates gender stereotypes, often portraying women in subordinate roles and reinforcing patriarchal norms, with limited government intervention to address these biases (Mohd Arsad, Muhmad Pirus & Mohamad Nasir, 2023; All Women's Action Society, 2023; Azmawati, 2023). These media portrayals contribute to the entrenchment of gender inequality by normalizing discriminatory attitudes and limiting women's representation in leadership and decision-making roles. Due to the consistent of the issue, therefore, it is helpful to understand the cultural and social gender phenomenon through analysing media messages. Hence, this study is interested to look on the influence of media consumption by identifying the length of sexism and gender inequality pertain within the roles of the characters in the contemporary local drama.

There is a substantial body of research focused on linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes within the realm of media studies. Firstly, study by Nayef and El-Nashar (2014) on analysing sexism in colloquial Cairene Arabic joke was done to examine how language is used in subordinate mode of discourse to disparage women. The research used qualitative and quantitative content analysis of sexist jokes found in the internet. The findings are helpful for the current study as it helps navigate the process of

extracting data by firstly classified the jokes according to research questions and later examined separately to dispense with any joke which did not deem sexist and results were compared. However, the study lacks a gender stereotype analysis because it solely focuses on the use of sexist jokes, which is unrelated to the current study's goals.

Consequently, in later years, the same authors, [Nayef and El-Nashar \(2019\)](#) produced another study in focusing on linguistic sexism but this time the approach is on analysing verbal violence in the Egyptian sitcom. Like the earlier research, this study utilized both qualitative and quantitative methods; however, it further incorporated in [Mills \(2008\)](#) that linguistic taxonomy is used to examine three forms of subtle sexism: collocations, transitivity, and presupposition. This study gives benefit to the current study in analysing the sexist language but at the same time the study does not analyse it according to cultural or societal views that contribute to linguistic sexism, in which what the current study aims to investigate. Finally, another study in the media context was found from [Siddiqi, Aleem and Bains \(2018\)](#) on analysing sexism in internet memes. Similar to [Nayef and El-Nashar \(2019\)](#), the study also used quantitative and qualitative content analysis to explore how humour increases tolerance towards sexism. Comparatively, the study by [Siddiqi, Aleem and Bains \(2018\)](#) was guided by framework on social construction theory to see how texts and images have strong social relations with the cultural context they are constructed in. The study gives comprehensive view on analysing beyond just words but at the same time finding the cause of why sexist language is highly used from the socio-cultural context.

Conversely, research on linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in Malay-English drama remains limited. A substantial number of previous literature reviews have focused on the media representation of women in print and television commercials, news stories, editorial cartoons, and lyric songs (e.g., [CreativeX, 2023](#); [Sulastri, 2019](#); [Yong, 2021](#); [Imran-Ho & Ruzy Suliza, 2020](#); [Balraj-Ambigapathy, 2021](#)). These studies reveal that despite some progress, stereotypical portrayals of women persist, often confining them to traditional roles such as homemakers or sexual objects, while underrepresenting diverse groups such as older women and women of color. But little research has been done on analysing linguistic sexism and gender inequality in local English drama. There are however, several studies that did on the gender representation in television drama but the focus is only on the gender roles pertain in the Malay dramas. For example, research by [Lee \(2018\)](#) on constituting (fe)male in Malay TV has used social construction theory to see how females in Malay TV are constructed according to traditional Malay identities and how these Malay culture influenced Malay female roles in media screen. Similar as previous study, it focuses only on Malay drama and only looking through women representation through gender role stereotypes, but no attempt has been made to analyse the language. While it is important to view the gender roles in order to identify the discrimination, there is also equal need to see the kind of language used during interaction. This is because language can also implant certain ideologies in the audience, and with globalization rapidly expanding, language is constantly evolving, which in turn heavily reflects the changes occurring in society ([Nguyen & Lee, 2021](#)).

Overall, based from the previous findings, social construction theory is highly used in the previous research simply because gender is a social construct and such theory when it implements in the media screen reflects the society's beliefs on how they view gender stereotypes. Besides, this theory also accommodates on looking beyond the gender categories and drawing what constitutes towards believing certain gender norms in our daily practices. Plus, the method of the current study is content analysis since the

previous studies have used extensively content analysis as their methods in analysing dramas and movies. Finally, this study also hopes to fill in the gaps where previous studies only paid attention on Malay medium drama and on Malay characters. Therefore, the current study gives concentration on English medium drama to see whether findings from all the previous studies are still being practiced regardless of the language.

1.1. Research Questions

To achieve the objectives of this research paper, the following questions are explored:

- i. What vocabulary is employed to depict male and female characters in the dialogues?
- ii. In what ways are the characters stereotypically portrayed based on their social roles and activities within the drama?
- iii. How do these gender stereotypes mirror Malaysian culture?

2. Literature Review

This section examines the essential concepts and previous studies related to linguistic sexism, gender stereotypes, gender roles stereotypes in TV drama within the framework of social construction theory.

2.1. Theories of Language and Gender

Language is employed by individuals to shape their understanding of society, structure acquired knowledge and new information, and integrate the norms and social behaviors of their community into everyday life. Therefore, the existence and evolution of language are closely connected to human social attitudes and are significantly influenced by their societal perspectives. One of the most prevalent topics that has been discussed for a long time is the gender difference in English studies as a linguistic variable (Mahmud, 2018; Aisah & Fatmasari, 2020; Obidovna, 2022). Recent research continues to explore how male and female English language learners differ in proficiency, use of adjectives, emotional expressions, and communication styles. For instance, females tend to use more adjectives, adverbs, and polite interrogative forms, while males are more direct and use more imperative sentences (Prabha & Raja, 2021). Since we live in a patriarchal world that values one dominant gender over the other, hence this mirrors on the language that is constructed on the way society behaves. Therefore, the relation between language and gender has become one of the major issues in sociolinguistics since early 1970s.

Since one of the first parts that has been measured rampantly in gender difference is through language use, hence it is only significant to find evidence by looking at the historical background in order to understand the reasons of this phenomena. Historically, the preliminary work on language and gender was first done by Jespersen (1922) in his book entitled "*Its Nature, Development and Origin*" where he reveals that men and women have different ways of speaking and women are seen as less capable language users than men. In his 1922 book "*Language: Its Nature, Development and Origin*," Jespersen (1922) expressed views that women tend to be more talkative and gossip more than men. His observations reflected the linguistic and social attitudes of his time, which have since been critiqued for perpetuating gender stereotypes. As a result, women are incapable of making intellectual conversations as compared to men.

2.2. Sexism in Language

Sexist language has been one of the key issues within feminist linguistics that concerns on language and gender, which has forced people to carefully consider their own and their surroundings' use of language. According to the [Oxford University Press \(2010\)](#), defines sexism as any prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination directed at a particular gender, whether male or female. Furthermore, sexism is not limited to behaviors or actions alone. [Nguyen and Lee \(2021\)](#) highlight that since sexism involves attitudes or behaviors that demean one gender, language naturally becomes a primary medium through which these attitudes and behaviors are communicated. Everyday language usage often contains examples of sexism, and the English language is frequently noted as a prominent example where sexist expressions occur. For instance, sexist language is especially common in situations that describe activity with lesser difficulty like girly or sissy. The terms given are considered sexist as it perpetuates stereotype that women are categorised as weak humans and thus only do simple and less extreme tasks.

While sexist language can target both men and women, research has consistently shown that its harmful and disempowering effects are more commonly experienced by women. In the literature, there are many examples of past studies that describes women who suffer the most from the sexist structure of language such as ([Sensales & Areni, 2020](#); [Payne, 2019](#); [Anuar Yatim & Pamasivam, 2015](#); [Nayef & El-Nashar, 2014](#); [Umera-Okeke, 2012](#); [Chung, 2007](#)). In the literature, many past studies describe how women suffer the most from the sexist structure of language ([Sensales & Areni, 2020](#); [Payne, 2019](#); [Anuar Yatim & Pamasivam, 2015](#); [Nayef & El-Nashar, 2019](#); [Chung, 2020](#)). For instance, [Anuar Yatim and Pamasivam \(2015\)](#) examined linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in essays authored by Malay male university students, uncovering consistent semantic patterns that uphold conventional gender roles and stereotypes targeting women. Similarly, other studies have documented how language use perpetuates gender bias by embedding sexist ideologies and marginalizing women in various social contexts ([Sensales & Areni, 2020](#); [Payne, 2019](#)). These findings highlight the enduring nature of linguistic sexism and its impact on women's social positioning across different cultures and languages.

Television dramas are powerful agents that can influence people's lives tremendously from their lifestyle choices, identity formation up until knowledge construction that are manifested through one's way of dressing, expressing oneself, behave and interact with each other ([Chung, 2007](#)). In Malaysia, gender is largely influenced by factors such as ethnicity, religion, and social class ([Ambigapathy, 2000](#)). Several local studies ([Faridah, 2014](#); [Strumska-Cylwik, 2014](#); [Fuziah, 2004](#)) have revealed that representations in Malay films are deeply rooted in the prevailing social and cultural values. For instance, the society typically labels a woman unmarried by 27 as a spinster. Additionally, from a religious standpoint, marriage is often portrayed as a devotional obligation that allows women to fulfill their roles. These findings demonstrate that cultural and religious norms significantly shape both the depiction and experiences of women in Malaysia, recurring as key themes in Malaysian dramas.

2.3. Gender Stereotypes

[Brugeilles and Cromer \(2009\)](#) describe sex as the biological distinctions between males and females, focusing mainly on physical differences such as genitalia and reproductive functions. In contrast, gender refers to the cultural and social distinctions assigned to

men and women, differentiating them through concepts such as masculinity and femininity.

Clarifying the difference between sex and gender at the beginning aids in understanding gender stereotypes. [Hamilton and Troler \(1986\)](#) originally characterized a stereotype as a cognitive structure encompassing the perceiver's knowledge, beliefs, and expectations about a specific social group. [Mackie et al. \(1996\)](#) emphasize three central aspects of this definition: (1) the stereotype as a cognitive framework; (2) the integration of knowledge, beliefs, and expectations; and (3) the focus on particular human social groups. They argue that stereotypes exist within the mind of individuals shaped by personal experiences and interpretations and are not merely universally shared cultural beliefs. While individuals may hold varying stereotypes due to diverse experiences, shared social contexts often lead to common stereotypes within groups or societies. Additionally, [Mills \(2008\)](#) interprets stereotypes as behavioral patterns formed within communities that influence how members assess linguistic behavior. In this view, socially developed stereotypes affect individuals' language style and content.

This study adopts [Mills \(2003\)](#) definition of stereotypes to examine how gender stereotypes influence the beliefs and attitudes of speaking communities about masculinity and femininity. Additionally, it is inevitable that traits associated with both genders become generalized, with society imposing expectations on how individuals should behave ([Mills, 2011](#)). For example, a woman who is direct, competitive, and assertive—traits commonly linked to masculinity—may be negatively judged as overly aggressive, domineering, or unfeminine. Moreover, gender stereotypes embedded in language demonstrate how language acts as a powerful means through which gender discrimination is sustained and reproduced.

2.4. Gender Role Stereotypes in TV Drama

Media has long been acknowledged as a vital medium for conveying a wide array of messages about gender. Gender roles are defined by the behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs a society attributes to men and women, which generate cultural stereotypes that influence gender identity. Prominent theorists argue that gender identity and norms surrounding gender roles are acquired through socialization ([Durkin, 1995](#); [Remafedi, 1990](#); [Peirce, 1989](#); [Mackey & Hess, 1982](#)). Socialization is the process by which individuals internalize cultural values, beliefs, attitudes, and norms, becoming functional members of society. This process reflects societal prescriptions of social roles, encompassing activities, occupations, and personality traits.

In media socialization, people learn about gender roles by observing media depictions and imitating the behavioral models presented. Multiple empirical studies reveal that media consumption, especially television watching, exerts a small yet significant influence on gender role attitudes and gender-related behaviors ([Coyne et al., 2016](#); [Kistler & Lee, 2009](#)).

Such categorisation has been well-grounded in most of the media studies that focuses on gender role stereotypes and can be applied in different contexts, and one of it being in Malaysian context. As an illustration, [Ibrahim's et al. \(2017\)](#) study on portrayal of women's images in television drama has narrated how characters in the drama are grouped into three recurring themes namely domestic roles, occupational roles and personal characteristics. The third theme emerges as the study is interested to look into

how females' characters are being shown in the media. Additionally, an old research by [Ariffin \(1997\)](#) on Malaysian women in the modern era has highlighted that woman are often segmentized into stereotype roles such as domestic roles and parental roles. Nevertheless, it does not go unnoticed from the observation on the part where gender role stereotypes in the Malaysian media shows strong relation with religion and traditional culture has reflected on how influential social patriarchal situation within the local society. Hence, this study is interested to see how media's influence on the construction of life is depicted through the characters' portrayals from the selected drama.

2.5. Social Construction Theory

Since the interest of this study is to observe the ways television imparts information on how gender roles are constructed from the society and how tv texts invite particular interpretations with regard to the gender equality in the drama, therefore it is only reasonable to present those in relation with society and traditional norms and practices in order to understand the structure.

There is substantial literature on social construction theory. [Howard and Hollander \(1997\)](#), trace the social constructionist approach back to symbolic interactionism, which emphasizes how individuals interact within specific social contexts to shape their shared reality. Due to the positive reception and frequent application of their theory in later studies, this research adopts their framework. The theory explains how reality is constructed through character roles and television dialogues via a three-phase process: externalization, objectivation, and internalization.

2.5.1 Phase I: Externalization

This phase refers to the creation of social order by a society. This social world comprises cultural patterns, including values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations that have been maintained over time. According to [Howard and Hollander \(1997\)](#), these aspects of reality are created through communication, social rituals, and engagement with symbols and material realities in daily life.

2.5.2 Phase II: Objectivation

Objectivation describes how repeated human activities evolve into established habits or patterns. These behaviours or beliefs come to hold meaning for those who engage in them routinely. [Howard and Hollander \(1997\)](#) define objectivation as "the process by which the externalized products of human activity attain the character of objectivity", meaning such social constructs become accepted social facts.

2.5.3 Phase III: Internalization

During this phase, it involves socialization, whereby societal norms and values are transmitted to the next generation and become internalized as personal norms and identities ([Howards & Hollander, 1997](#)). This phase marks the embedding of social reality into individual routines, perpetuating these norms across generations.

3. Research Methods

3.1. Research Design

This study employed qualitative content analysis to examine how male and female characters are portrayed and constructed in Malay-English TV dramas. Content analysis was chosen as the qualitative research method to address the study's research questions for several reasons. Notably, media content analysis has long been a preferred approach for investigating representations of issues such as violence, racism, and the depiction of women in both television programs and films. This study adopted purposive sampling method which involves identifying and selecting particular drama that suits the criterion of the sample (Patton, 2002). The reason of using such sampling method was to ensure that the selected dramas had rich information that related closely with the focus of the current study.

3.2. Selection of Drama

There were four local Malay drama carefully selected for the analysis purposes which were *Oi Jaga Mulut!* (2017-2019), *Show Me the Money* (2003-2004), *Kopitiam* (1998-2003), and *Kopitiam Double Shot* (2019-2020). Since the current study also examines linguistic features, each character in the drama plays a distinct role in conveying ideologies and perceptions on various matters. The specific choice of words in the scripted dialogue is crucial for analyzing the linguistic aspect, in addition to exploring gender representation (Rahman & Lee, 2022). Table 1 provides the overview of drama selected for this study.

Table 1: Summary of Drama Selected

Information	Oi Jaga Mulut	Show Me the Money	Kopitiam	Kopitiam Double Shot
Year it aired	2017-2019	2003-2004	1998-2003	2019- 2020
Network it aired	iFlix	Netflix	Netflix	Viu
Total season	2	2	7	1
Total episode per season	14	13	13	10

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

The current research aimed to explore the linguistic sexism and gender stereotypes in the selected Malay-English TV Drama. Based on the selection of the samples for the study previously, four local dramas were adopted in order to fulfil the objectives and answer research questions.

3.3.1. Media Search Procedures

The first step of data collection and sampling for the media search was done through random research from the web utilizing Google.com. The following terms were used: "Malaysia English TV Drama" and "TV Malay-English Drama". The results yielded by Google.com showed millions of findings but after filtering through, only the first page of the Google search is the most relatable to the terms used. Among those articles were "TV Series, Malaysia (Sorted by Popularity Ascending) from IMDB website, "Full List of Malaysian Movies and TV Shows on Netflix" from ReelGood website and "Watch these 8

nostalgic local dramas to reminisce good old days while in self-isolation” by LifeStyleAsia article. Furthermore, the results of the findings did not present from the latest article to the oldest, but instead present the most viewed or clicked article in the order. Each of the findings identified were then carefully analysed the content and the most relevant to the current study were from IMDB website and LifeStyleAsia website. The reasons for the selection of these two websites were because both are credible sources in media entertainment industry be it locally as well as globally. Hence, to assist in filtering the options of a more related drama, further analysing is done through LifeStyleAsia website. The list of the local drama recommended in the article written by [Teo \(2020\)](#) are mostly in English language and can be accessed through Netflix, which is another stream of downloaded movie or tv series platform.

3.3.2. Selection of Media Sources and Episodes

The second step of collecting the data involved selection of media sources. Based on the research done on the media sources, four local English TV Drama were chosen which were *Oi Jaga Mulut*, *Kopitiam*, *Kopitiam Double Shot* and *Show Me the Money*. The selection criteria were based on the parameter drawn by [Rightler-McDaniels \(2014\)](#). The summary of the selection criteria of drama is as below:

- i. The television series must able to be accessed on internet platform.
- ii. Each show must be interacting in English language or Malaysian English from the characters.
- iii. The television series must show feature of both gender characters portrayal.
- iv. The television series must fall under situational comedy or sitcom genre.

After addressing all criteria, then the selection of episodes from the dramas were done for in-depth analysis. Similar to the criteria on the drama, the selection criteria of the episodes also following [Rightler-McDaniels \(2014\)](#) parameter. To further narrow down the selected episode, each episode must contain the following criteria:

- i. The television episode must run between 20-30 mins only.
- ii. The collection of four episodes will be selected respectively from each TV drama, making it total sixteen episodes from four different drama respectively.
- iii. The selection of episode is not in consecutive order but must consist of the feature of both male and female lead roles in the chosen two episodes.

The reason that the selection of each episode must run between the given time was due to the time constraint of collecting the data. Another reason of the criteria of the episodes that need to feature both female and male as the lead roles was because of the purpose of the study which is to see the gender stereotype and linguistic sexism in the drama, hence it is significant to see it from both genders and constitutes towards diverse roles and situations. Moreover, it is also significant that selection of these episodes is based on relation with cultural aspects as well as social hierarchies from the supporting characters ([Ibrahim et al., 2017](#)).

3.3.3. Transcription of the Episodes

After carefully selecting the episodes, the researcher repeatedly watched each one. Two viewings were dedicated to transcription, during which initial themes started to surface. The study refers to [Table 2](#), conventions by [Du Bois \(1991\)](#) to construct the transcription in order to identify the linguistic characteristics from the TV drama.

Table 2: Du Bois (1991) Conventions

she's out.	End of intonation unit; falling intonation
,	End of intonation unit; fall-rise intonation
?	End of intonation unit; rising intonation
-	Self-interruption; break in the word, sound abruptly cut off
:	Length
Underline	Emphatic stress of increased amplitude
(.)	Pause of 0.5 seconds or less
(n.n)	Pause of greater than 0.5 seconds, measured by a stopwatch
h	Exhalation (e.g., laughter, sigh); each token marks one pulse
()	Transcriber comment
<>	Uncertain transcription
(O)	Non-vocal noise
□	Overlap beginning and end

3.3.4. Coding frame

Upon finishing with the transcriptions of the selected episodes, the coding process began by first making observations on the similar patterns derived from the episode. Later, the observations were placed into categories and variables that reflected what was found in the literature review in Chapter two. In this study, the previous related studies that was based on the preliminary model was used as a foundation to the inquiry. Therefore, the current study has acquired coding model from the study done by [Abbaspour \(2017\)](#) which included three main categories as tabulated in the [Table 3](#).

Table 3: Three Main Categories for Coding Practices

Categories	Themes	Definitions
Physical appearance	• Beauty or ugliness	Individual looks that declared as attractive or unattractive
	• Body size or shape	Fat, skinny, short, tall
	• Sexualized or non-sexualized clothing	Wearing clothes that identify oneself as showing too much skin or covering up the skin
Gendered social roles	• Traditional gender roles	Under-representation of males and females. Men having masculine traits such as active, adventurous. While women are seen at home and do the cooking.
	• Non-traditional gender roles	Engaging in activities that are out of norm of one gender in modern days
	• Gender typecasting (biasing to certain gender)	Stress on gender specific bifurcation of roles
Behavioural traits	• Equality	Women portrayed as equal to men
	• Exclusive emotional patterns	Patterns that associate certain gender with emotional patterns such as "big boys don't cry".
	• Generalization	Typical representation of gender.

The coding frame was developed both during the video viewings and through coding the drama transcriptions. Following common practice in content analysis ([Zhang & Wildemuth, 2005](#)), counting was used in completing the coding frames, which

encompassed both the characters' verbal expressions and their non-verbal behaviors, including activities and actions.

3.4 Data Analysis Procedure

3.4.1. Textual Analysis

The use of Mills (2008) linguistic sexism taxonomy, adapted from Nayef and El-Nashar (2015) study on the representation of women in Egyptian print media, is an appropriate framework for analyzing linguistic sexism in media content. This framework effectively categorizes direct and indirect sexism through collocations, transitivity, and presupposition.

a) Collocations

This method analyse the connotative meanings of words associated with feminine and masculine nouns, revealing underlying gender associations in dialogue.

b) Transitivity

Transitivity examines the types of verbs used to highlight or downplay actions performed by characters, showing how gender roles are constructed through language.

c) Presupposition

Presupposition as defined by Fairclough (1995), functions ideologically by embedding assumptions as "common sense" within a community, thus normalizing power relations through language.

3.4.2. Gender Stereotypes Analysis

Gender stereotypes analysis which deals with the processes by which the object (i.e. the text) is produced and received by human subjects was done. The film's content was coded for the gendered characteristics of actors throughout the films (masculine and feminine), social roles by the character's biological sex and the appearance of performers based on past research and learned definitions (Jasperson, 2013).

3.4.3. Social Construction Analysis

The social construction analysis aimed to explain the reasons behind the observed depictions of gender stereotypes and sexism using the Social Construction Framework by Howard and Hollander (1997). Findings from the text analysis regarding sexism and gender stereotypes were organized according to the phases of this framework to show how the dramas are constructed in relation to the broader social and cultural context, referencing (Wiersma, 2000). The three phases of this framework are then discussed in detail.

a) Phase 1: Externalization

The term externalization refers to the origin of the social order. This social order consists of cultural patterns that have been developed and maintained over time, encompassing

the values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations characteristic of a particular society (Wiersma, 2000). Table 4 summarizes the gendered social roles adopted in the current study, based on Jespersen (2013) as a cross-reference.

Table 4: Summary of Gendered Social Roles

Gender	Social Roles	Typical Characteristics / Expectations
Female	Damsel in distress, companion, housewife, pink-collar careers (nurse, flight attendant, model, princess, etc.)	Needs to be saved, seen as weak or dependent, associated with domestic roles, goes with the flow, lacks voice or leadership
Male	Hero character, leader, professional roles (police, firefighter, doctor, lawyer, mechanic, race car driver, warrior, etc.)	Strong, charismatic, saves the day, protects others, rules over a group, decisive, problem-solver

b) Phase 2: Objectivation

The second phase involves objectivation which referring to human activity that is continually repeated and has been confirmed as a pattern. In the media realm, language is an important part of objectivation as it does not only entertain the society but also educate them (Howard & Hollander, 1997).

c) Phase 3: Internalization

The final phase, internalization, involves the transmission and continuation of a society's norms and values to subsequent generations. This phase occurs when members of society accept certain beliefs or behaviors as natural or inevitable in a specific way (Wiersma, 2000).

4. Results

4.1. Textual Analysis

In order to answer the research question 1: What vocabulary is employed to depict male and female characters in the dialogues? The following analysis entails as guided by the analytical framework of the study which is on Linguistic Taxonomy (Nayef & El-Nashar, 2019), that comprises three ways of analysing sexist language which are collocations, transitivity and presupposition.

4.1.1. Collocations

The data showed that any language made by the characters that met the criterion of being sexist was that they disparaged certain gender through devaluating the personal characteristics and focusing on the physical appearances of the gender. Table 5 draws a comparison in terms of occurrences of personal and physical attributes.

Table 5: Personal vs. Physical Attributes

Gender	TYPE	Personal attributes	Physical attributes
Male characters		25	15
Female characters		51	36

The data shows that languages dealing with personal and physical attributes for females far outnumbered male characters. It is interesting to note that such findings were somewhat contrastive considering the number of male characters was more than the number of female characters. This behaviour is usually expressed by specific lexical word choices which carry sexual related connotations towards women. One prominent example to refer to this physical behaviour can be seen from the drama *Kopitiam* and its sequel, *Kopitiam Double Shot*.

Kong: Hey! Who is this?

Chan: Sexy girl! You like?

Kong: No, la. This one too sexy. Girls nowadays show too much

Chan: Ah, yes, unlike your conservative queen of striptease, Rose Chan!

(*Kopitiam Double Shot*, 2019b)

In this example, the sexist words are apparent in the use of words such as conservative, striptease, sexy girl display negative, derogatory connotations of women. Thus, the character is objectifying a woman. Furthermore, in the later sequel in a much recent year, the sexual connotation towards females was still occurred through the use of taboo words such as boobs and soft hands that were both used in reference to a woman's physical body. Thus, the abovementioned words used by these characters in unsuitable situations in reference to women, exemplifies that male chauvinist qualities by sexually objectifying women through overly sexual and gender assigned lexical choices.

Moreover, there were over 52 sexist and gender stereotypes language dealing with personal attributes. The data showed that instead of viewing women as positive connotations, women were generally seen as otherwise: described as emotional, irrational, sexual seekers, illogical and argumentative. One of the examples from the drama is given below to further depict the scenario:

Tim: We're still in the process of getting to know each other

Alia: Uh...getting to know each other? Are you in a relationship with the kitchen or what? Huh? This is an f&b business, dude!

Tim: Well, you're definitely an effin B...(murmuring)

(*Kopitiam Double Shot*, 2019a)

Based from the excerpt above, the character Tim used the word "B" that implies the meaning for the word bitch that he wanted to throw in to Alia. This is in regards of the context whereby Alia, the manager of the *Kopitiam* shop, furiously asking Tim to do his job properly so they would not receive any more complaints from the customer. However, instead of saying it verbally, he only mentioned the initial B, which based from the context, the audience can immediately grasp what the actual word that Tim wanted to say. This type of figure of speech is called "metonymy". As stated by [Littlemore \(2015\)](#), "*metonymy is a cognitive and linguistic process through which we use one thing to refer to another*".

4.1.2. Transitivity

Based on the analysis of textual data employing Transitivity system of [Halliday's \(2004\)](#) Systematic Functional Linguistics, it has been revealed that both male and female characters were depicted to be involved as Participants in two types of processes which are material and mental. A material process is the process of doing or happening in the

transitive clause with females were highly represented as actors than males. It is notable to mention that such portrayal had reflected the scenario of the selected dramas that females were more dominant characters than males. Examples as seen below with verbs that are italicized and underlines referred to as transitive verbs:

- [1] I (actor) *handle* the accounts (goal)
- [2] She (actor) *always talks* about leaving home (goal)
- [3] I (actor) *have to wait* for Abah (recipient) to do this (goal)

In [1], the excerpt of dialogue was taken from the drama *Kopitiam Double Shot* where the actor was an NP, "I", which referring to the doer, who was the main character, Alia. The actor was doing an action handle, meaning she was the one taking the responsible on her job. The action was extended to the Goal, the accounts.

Meanwhile, both examples in [2] and [3], the Actors were also realized as NP "She" and "I". In example [2], the process was marked by the verb "always talks", which was broadened to the goal "about leaving home". Meanwhile, in example [3], the verb "have to wait" was explained by referring to recipient "Abah" in order to achieve the goal "to do this". Such contrastive between example 2 and 3 here referring to the actor that relied on something to achieve the goal. In example [2], the actor showed independent by having the goal to leave the *kampung*, but on the other hand, in example [3], the actor, relied on the recipient in order to achieve the goal. Such contrast was apparent even when both of the actors were female characters in the drama *Show Me the Money*.

A mental process is the process of thinking, perceiving and feeling (Woolfolk, 2014). Based on the data given above, females were again being represented more than male characters in the processes. Due to that, males were being realized less as the Senser than females and more as phenomenon, which represented them as passive. Through this process, the male characters became the objects of females. One of the mental clauses from the data can be seen below:

- [9] I (*senser*) like him (*phenomenon*)

In the above clause, a Senser is the one that senses, feels, thinks, and wants to perceive. A key characteristic of a Senser is possessing consciousness or human-like qualities (Halliday, 2004). In example, the Senser is represented by the expression of the feeling of "like" in relation to the discount. The entity being sensed or experienced in is termed the Phenomenon. A phenomenon is the participant which is felt, thought, wanted, or perceived (Halliday, 2004). In this instance, the senser, which was Marie from the drama *Kopitiam*, was the one who decided to hire her kitchen assistant for the *Kopitiam*. One of the applicants was Tim, who had no experience before but she decided to hire him because of his good looks. In this manner, Marie had more power than the male character, Tim in deciding whether or not he was accepted for the job.

4.1.3. Presupposition

Presuppositions are cued in texts that producers of texts consider as already established or "given" (Fairclough, 1992). In other words, it is something the speaker assumes to be the case prior to making an utterance. Presuppositions do not belong to texts, but instead they emanate from a text producer's interpretation of intertextual context. Since the dramas revolves around the lifestyle and culture in Malaysia, therefore the sentences

addressed the roles of both genders in various contexts. A sample of the dialogue is as below:

Nasreen: Alaa ma, what's the point of being rich if we can't use all the rich things that we have? *Rugi tau*

Farida: The truth is, I don't really know how to use the machines. You have to read the manual instructions. I have to wait for Abah first to do this.

([Show Me the Money, 2003](#))

In the above interaction, one could detect two main presuppositions and several assumptions. The first presupposition concerned her feminine traits where she did not know how to do technical jobs and the second one referred her dependency to her husband. For instance, the hyponym word “waits” which one can presupposed the proposition that only male figure can solve Farida’s problem. The media's portrayal of the character with such traits reinforces the traditional stereotype of women as weak and men as strong. As a result, the depiction presents the widely accepted image of helpless women needing protection from dominant male figures. This mirrors the societal pattern in Malay culture, where women are viewed as dependent on men within a hierarchical system, emphasizing the idea that the domestic sphere is primarily the woman's domain ([Sharifah Zaleha, 2003](#)).

The qualitative content analysis indicated that the differences in character portrayals were influenced more by the television production itself rather than the specific time period in which the programs aired. There were two dramas understudied from two different years; one in 2019 while the other one was in 2003, showed the main character as a submissive who was strongly associated with sexual connotations and as a housewife who was associated with the typical Malay housewife that stressed highly on the traditions and stereotypical judgments. One significant example on the modern drama can be found in the dialogue from ([Kopitiam Double Shot, 2019-2020](#)):

Hanum: *Looks like our kids are hitting it off, right? by the way, if your Alia marries my Rizal she will have to leave this ugly kopitiam. I can't allow it. Anyway, she will have her hands full looking after our grand-children, right? and I am making sure that Rizal is taken care*

Dijah: *Well, I don't think Alia will give up on her business just to look after your son. She's a modern woman you know*

Hanum: *He can't have his wife working here. What are people going to say?*

Dijah: *that she's an independent woman who knows what she wants. Honestly, I don't want her to get married to a mummy's boy. So embarrassing of her!*

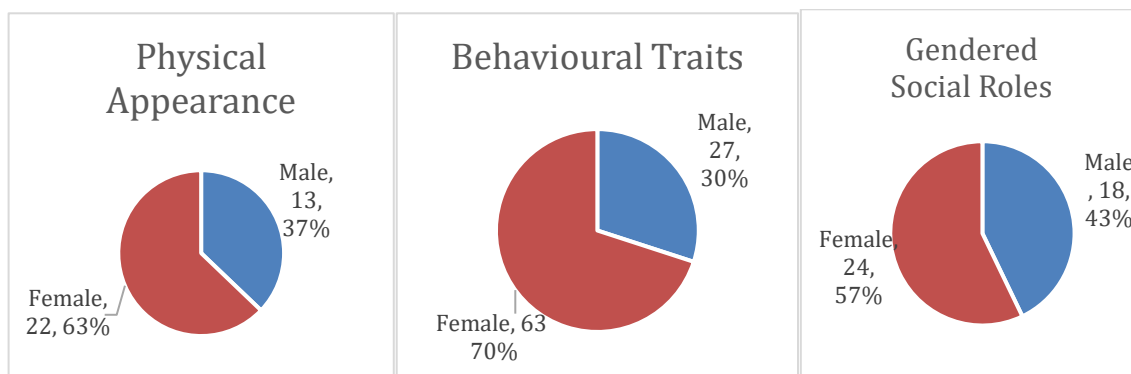
Source: [Kopitiam Double Shot \(2019-2020\)](#)

Based from the dialogue above, the supporting character, Dijah, who was also a mother of Alia, the lead character in *Kopitiam Double Shot* had shown strong supports towards her daughter's future regardless of negative backlash received from her friend, Hanum. Alia, was foregrounded in the show as single and embracing Western-oriented values such as individualism and feminism (Mustaffa & Salleh, 2014). Alia exemplifies the Malaysian youth experiencing cultural hybridity, a phenomenon describing how young people adapt and navigate their identities within Malay contexts amid modernization. This portrayal highlights contemporary issues where being both modern and Malay is not a straightforward experience but rather one marked by coexisting tensions. Additionally, Alia's relationship with her mother, who belongs to a different generation, reflects Asian values emphasizing diligence and family cohesion. This result reflected and supported the already accepted, presupposed assumption of the binary division of the world in which public sphere belongs to men (Nayef & El-Nashar, 2015).

4.2. Characters Analysis

In order to answer research question 2, which emphasizes on the ways characters are being stereotyped in the form of appearances, personalities and social roles, Figure 1 below portrays the cumulative results and these findings are further explained in the sections that follow.

Figure 1: Cumulative Results



4.2.1. Physical Appearance

Physical appearance was measured by examining the show for references to beauty/ugliness, sexualized clothing, and physical features of a person such as fat, curves and big breasts. Overall, physical appearance was found to be more focused on the female characters (63%) as compared to the references to physical appearances being made to male characters. It was found that the cluster of attributed changed over the years of the drama was aired. When the dramas were aired from 1997 to 2003, female characters in TV dramas were identified as attractive, young and pretty. Meanwhile, male characters were more portrayed as attractive in the drama. Two examples of attractive men are found in the drama *Kopitiam* and *Kopitiam Double Shot* where there are two specific episodes that talked about match making to the lead female characters in the drama. The primary criteria for the perfect candidate to match-make was the guy must be attractive enough in the eyes of the match-maker. However, when focusing on the sexualized clothing, it was found that male characters wore less sexualized clothing as compared to females and that all four dramas showcased the supporting roles by male characters have the identical physical appearance which was fat.

4.2.2. Behavioural Traits

The category “behavioural traits” was measured by examining the show for behaviours of emotional, independent/dependent, busybody, fashionable, flirty, quiet/soft, naïve, materialistic, nagging, traditional beliefs, mean, picky and sexual. Interestingly, this category showed the most division between sexes splitting male (30%) and female appearances (70%) as can be seen in the [Figure 1](#). The findings were of interest as they largely reflected societal gender stereotyping. Firstly, “independent” behaviours were demonstrated heavily by females while males were more illustrated as “dependent” characters. These findings were significant as they demonstrated the gap in gender stereotyping in television dramas where women were portrayed as more independent than men.

Secondly, the naïve or stupid behaviours were found to be dominating the percentage by female with 87% and male with 13%. Unlike the attribute of women here were depicted as independent, they were however still prevalent for television dramas to show case them as naïve or innocent. One of the first reported “innocent” incidents were recorded in episode 4, *Kopitiam* where the lead character, Marie was observed to act innocent where she went on talking about her long hours of private conversations that she had with an Internet stranger. She exhibited innocent character in this episode as a result of her innuendo that the guys thought she was doing sexual activity, by quoting “*my hands are so tired from the activity*”. She kept on disclosing her personal matter until Uncle Chan had to step in to interrupt her ongoing chant, which deemed to be inappropriate for a girl to talk in such manner. Granted, even if both dramas are nearly 22 years in gap and that women image in the media screen have improved significantly, but one fact remains true: women occasionally feel compelled to act sweet and innocent in front of men. Although, in reality, acting dumb to get along or attention is a part of human’s personality since males are also guilty in doing that, but when media screen frequently stereotyped females to be the victim of this behaviour, it has somewhat become a gendered strategy.

4.2.3. Gendered Social Roles

Gendered social roles were assessed by reviewing the selected dramas for specific roles such as leader/follower, victim/hero, and engagement in domestic tasks. Female characters accounted for 57% of these gendered roles, while male characters accounted for 43%, resulting in the smallest gender gap observed at 14%. Interestingly, the role of “leader” was predominantly portrayed by females, challenging the stereotype that men typically occupy leadership positions. This strong female leadership was especially noticeable in the dramas *Kopitiam* and *Kopitiam Double Shot*, both of which featured female leads. These dramas broke away from common portrayals by depicting women who are successful and highly educated. Additionally, departures from traditional views were observed in domestic task performance, where male characters were shown engaging in more domestic activities than female characters, particularly in cooking. This contrasts with the typical view in Malaysian households where cooking is generally seen as a female task. However, media portrayals tend to glamorize this role, with male chefs outnumbering female chefs in the food industry ([Ibrahim et al., 2017](#); [Boo, 2021](#)).

4.4. Social Analysis

After categorizing the themes, a social analysis was conducted to explore the reasons behind the depiction of gender stereotypes in the data, linking these portrayals to

Malaysian societal and traditional norms. This analysis was further guided by the social construction theory of (Howard & Hollander, 1997), which highlights how individuals create subjective meanings through patterned social interactions within an objective reality.

The study identified the emergence of modern Malay women striving for independence and financial stability through employment, despite societal challenges. Malaysian society is gradually acknowledging that men need not be the sole breadwinners, with women significantly contributing to improving their families' living standards. However, portrayals also depicted women as victims or flirtatious figures seeking male attention, underscoring how sociocultural backgrounds strongly influence female character construction in Malaysian dramas. Furthermore, men retained advantages, particularly regarding marriage, a recurring theme in dramas like *Kopitiam Double Shot* and *Oi Jaga Mulut*. Women were pressured to marry within a certain age, coinciding with their peak fertility and physical attractiveness. Though female leads were successful and unmarried, they faced more societal pressure to wed compared to men.

According to social construction theory, the process involves externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Objectivation refers to how the social world becomes real through language and imparts meaning to its recipients. Gender roles manifest as media stereotypes, which over time become objectified and accepted as social facts. For these to be internalized, the knowledge conveyed must be legitimized. Ward (2016) argues that sexual objectification causes individuals—especially women—to internalize an observer's perspective, labelled self-objectification, which can negatively affect women's development. Popular culture, particularly TV dramas, serves as a conduit for transmitting these objectified gender roles and stereotypes. The internalization phase was evident in women's speech, reflecting acceptance of submissive roles. According to researchers on gender social construction through language (Fairclough, 1992; West & Zimmerman, 1997; Holmes, 2005), women's speech patterns symbolize their lower social status within a patriarchal culture. Nonetheless, some women adopted a masculine speech style such as arguing, interrogating, criticizing, or mocking male counterparts to assert greater power in specific interactions. Such challenges to male dominance were sometimes met with resistance from male characters in the dialogues.

5. Conclusion

A content analysis of the cumulative of four selected dramas had found both expected and unexpected results in regards to the gender stereotypes. In relation to the sexualized manner has reinforced previous findings from India (Kaul & Shahni, 2010) on their study of Indian television serials that women are projected according to the stereotypical image existing in the society leading to reinforcement of stereotypical role. On the contrary, the typical television portrayal of women that are commonly being presented as submissive and engrossed in common family affection and duties were less emphasized in the dramas. Even though women representation was progressing significantly, there were still instances where women were found to commit stereotypical roles through behavioural traits. This was evident in the data where in comparison with men, women were mostly prescribed within stereotypical traits. Finally, in relation to social construction analysis, the portrayal of asymmetrical gender roles in the dramas showed that these dramas carry ideology of power and domination in the discourse of gender, maintained by the society reflected in the dramas. The fact

that female characters appeared more often and held important roles of participants than males dissociated the dominance of men over women in society.

However, regardless of the positive representation and occurrence of females in the data, these dramas still presented a fair range of human interests, traits, and capabilities through their male characters. Such attempt can be identified from the way the dramas still depicted as having an ability to perform powerful acts such as having a good career, provide for the family and actively contribute and participate to an event. Overall, based on the findings of the current research, it was still visible that female characters were still being subjugated in a sexist and stereotypical even though these characters had been transcended positively over the years. This is consistent with the findings from the previous findings on Malay drama (Lee, 2018; Zainal, 2018; Ibrahim et al., 2017;) even though the current study gave concentration on English medium dramas. Such phenomenon reflects the Malaysian society beliefs on how they treat gender stereotypes and sexism in the everyday lives.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

All materials used for this particular study were readily and publicly available, and no personal data from individuals were collected; therefore, there is no informed consent required for human participation in regards to this research.

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The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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