

PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF GENERIC MASCULINE IN SPANISH

**CARTHAGE COLLEGE**

**DEPARTMENT OF MODERN LANGUAGES**

**PERCEPTIONS OF THE USE OF GENERIC MASCULINE IN SPANISH**

**BY STUDENTS OF SPANISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE**

**AND ITS RELATIONSHIP TO A SEXIST USE OF THE LANGUAGE.**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The aim of this study was to understand both the effects that the use of the masculine generic and the use of gender-fair language have on students of Spanish as a second language. Its purpose was not only to answer the question whether students of Spanish as a second language are aware of the masculine generic and the effects its use can have in the creation of images but also to create new approaches to the teaching and the use of it in classes of Spanish as a second language. The sample of the study consisted of 40 students (32 women and 8 men), who at the time of the study were enrolled at a small private Midwestern liberal arts college.

The participants were asked to read two unfinished sentences, which included the use of masculine generic, neutral form, dual form or alternative form, and write a brief story to continue the sentence. In each of these stories, participants were asked to include protagonists in their stories and name them with Spanish names. Afterwards, participants had to complete Mark's (1973) questionnaire assessing imaging ability. The results were analyzed using a Chi Square test with a level of significance of 0.10. The results support findings in previous research, confirming that the use of the masculine generic does not only evoke male imagery but also, that students of Spanish as a second language are not aware of the generic value of the masculine generic.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Overview

Over the last four decades, it is clear that there has been an increased interest in the promotion of a more gender fair language, leading to the publication of guidelines for non-sexist usage of various languages. In the case of European Spanish, following the criticism of lexico-grammatical disymmetries (Bengoechea, 2010) and the growth of the feminist movement in Spain during the 1980s, some of the first Spanish guidelines for non-sexist language were published, *Ministerio de Educación y ciencia* (1986) UNESCO (1990) followed by numerous others from autonomous regions of Spain e.g., Valencian, Departamento de la Dona/Instituto de la Mujer (1987), town councils, regional administrations, etc. These guidelines, were in line with the previously studies published in other languages, such as English, French or German.

These guidelines base their concern on the avoidance of the use of the *masculine generic*, i.e., “linguistic forms that are used sex-specially in reference to men and generically in reference to mixed groups” (Kaufmann & Bohner, 2014) or as Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen, and Sczesny (2007) state “linguistic forms with a double function: They are used sex-specifically in reference to male persons and generically in reference to mixed groups and *to people whose sex is unknown or irrelevant*” (my emphasis) and the substitution of it by more gender fair forms. The reason behind this is that the extended use of the generic masculine can “reinforce sexist ideas” (Martyna, 1980) and “sexist attitudes and behaviors in a subtle, psychological manner” (Gastill, 1990) and would lead to the creation of a male imagery and, therefore, the perpetuation of linguistic sexism, leaving women invisible (Gastill, 1990; Hamilton, 1988; Braun, Sczesny & Stahlberg, 2005). Some research in Spanish has been conducted on these matters (Nissen, 2013;

Núñez Cedeño, 1999) however, little research has been done into the perceptions of the generic masculine by students of Spanish as a second language.

### **1.2 Purpose of the study**

Following this line of thought, in the current study the researcher will study the differences, if any, in the creation of mental images with the use of the generic masculine, in contrast to a more gender-fair usage in students of Spanish as a second language attending to a small, private, Midwestern liberal arts college. The results of this study may help to create new educational and linguistic approaches to the use of generic masculine in class and the introduction and study of more innovative and current alternatives to the generic masculine in order to promote a more gender fair language for students of Spanish as a second language.

### **1.3 Guiding Questions**

This study will investigate the following research questions:

- Are the students of Spanish as a second language aware of the generic value of the generic masculine in Spanish?
- Does the use of the generic masculine affect the student's understanding?
- Does the use of the generic masculine lead to the creation of more male imagery?
- What is the relationship, if any, between the use of generic masculine in Spanish and the perceptions of its use by students of Spanish as a second language?

### **1.4 Hypotheses**

First, the results of this study will help to support or reject the following hypotheses:

- Hypothesis 1<sub>0</sub>: The use of Spanish's generic masculine does not lead to the creation of male imagery in students of Spanish as a second language.

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- Hypothesis 1<sub>1</sub>: The use of Spanish's generic masculine does lead to the creation of male imagery in students of Spanish as a second language.
- Hypothesis 2<sub>0</sub>: Students of Spanish as a second language are aware of the generic value of the generic masculine and are able to understand the concept of the generic masculine and separate it from the grammatical gender of the sentence.
- Hypothesis 2<sub>1</sub>: Students of Spanish as a second language are not aware of the generic value of the generic masculine and are not able to understand the concept of the generic masculine and separate it from the grammatical gender of the sentence.
- Hypothesis 3<sub>0</sub>: Texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do show gender bias.
- Hypothesis 3<sub>1</sub>: Texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do not show any gender bias.

### **1.5 Terminology**

- **Generic masculine**: “linguistic forms with a double function: they are used sex-specifically in reference to male persons and generically in reference to mixed groups and to people whose sex is unknown or irrelevant” (Stahlberg et al., 2007)
- **Gender fair language (GFL)** also known as **gender-neutral language** (Sarrasin et al., 2012) or **gender inclusive language** (Stout and Dasgupta, 2011): Refers to that use of the language that tries to eradicate the structural asymmetry existent between men and women by addressing both women and men and to reduce stereotyping and discrimination in language.
- **Linguistic sexism**: “uso discriminatorio del lenguaje por razón de sexo que puede contribuir a destacar el papel preponderante de un sexo respecto a otro, o a ocultar la presencia o contribución de uno de ellos (*principalmente a la mujer*)” (my emphasis) [unfair and

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discriminatory use of the language because of the sex. This can contribute to highlight the main role of one sex over the other or hide the presence and contribution of the other.”

(*mainly women*)] (Sánchez-Apellániz, 2009)

### **1.6 Chapter summary**

The rising concern during the 1980s by feminist linguists about the social disparity and the linguistic asymmetry women have to suffer in daily language use, raised awareness of the different sexist ways in which the language was used to discriminate against women and to make them invisible. During the last four decades, a large amount of research has been dedicated to study and to search for alternatives to make language more gender fair (*Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia*, 1986; UNESCO, 1990). One of the topics that has received much attention in the field of language and gender is the use of generic masculine to refer to both women and men in mixed groups. Much research has been done on the use and the effects that its use can have in the creation of mental images for native speakers of the language (Gastill, 1990; Hamilton, 1988; Braun, Sczesny & Stahlberg, 2005; Martyna, 1980). We know little about the effects its use has on students of Spanish as a second language. Are these students aware of the masculine generic? Indeed, are these students aware of the generic value, of the generic masculine? This study will answer those questions while its results will help to, if it is needed, create new approaches to the teaching and the use of the generic masculine in classes of Spanish as a second language.

## **CHAPTER 2. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1 Language and Thought**

Since the beginning of humankind, language has been part of the human core. Language not only allows human beings to communicate with others but also to express themselves. “El lenguaje hace pensamiento, se piensa cuando se habla y, al mismo, representa y construye la realidad” [language creates thought, when one speaks, one thinks, and at the same time, it (language) represents and constructs reality] (Jiménez Rodrigo, Román Onsaló & Traverso Cortes, 2011), this is closely related to the weak version of the well-known Sapir-Whorfian hypothesis (Whorf, 1956) which states that language affects, or strongly affects, thought (Henley, 1989). With language, human beings construct their world, their reality, in fact, they make sense of their world. Language is not rigid, it is changing constantly, it is a social construct and reflects its speakers’ perception of the society they live in. As Judith Butler states, “We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both “what” we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences.” (Butler, 1997) Due to its close relationship to society, language helps to create and organize mental constructions that will lead to the creation of power relationships, contributing to the recognition or invisibility of certain subjects. Because of this, feminist linguists have paid much attention to the role language has played in the perpetuation and legitimization of not only social asymmetries but also linguistic asymmetries between men and women (i.e., the use and perpetuation of a sex biased language).

As Susan Sontag claimed in Henley:

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... For, however advanced our ideas, every time we speak we continue to affirm the superiority (activity) or men and the inferiority (passivity) of women. It is “grammatically correct” to assume that agents, active persons are men. Grammar, the ultimate arena of sexist brainwashing, conceals the very existence of women –except in special situations. (1989, p. 61)

However, related to the relationship between language and society, first, one must ask him/herself if a language can be sexist. As Sontag states (Henley, 1989), “language is not, of course, the source of prejudice that identifies “men” as the human race, and associates most human activities with men only. Language merely expresses the sexist order that has prevailed throughout history (p.61). In the case of the Spanish language, it cannot be sexist by itself, and it cannot be blamed for the existence of sexism. In fact, the blame lies with the linguistic resources the speakers of the language decide to use and the patriarchal culture and context, that has been inherited in which everyone is immersed (Garcia Meseguer, 2002; Moreno Cabrera, 2012).

### **2.2 About the Question of the Generic Masculine**

Much research has been devoted to the pernicious use of the generic masculine. That is to say, “the practice of considering the man/the male as the prototype for human representation” reducing “the woman/female to the status of the “subsumed”, the “invisible”, or the “marked” ...” (Pauwels, 2003). According to E. Lledó Cunill:

Uno de los fenómenos más graves de discriminación lingüística radica en un aspecto gramatical que articula tanto el castellano como otras muchas lenguas y que consiste en el uso del género masculino como neutro, es decir, utilizándolo como si abarcara masculino y femenino. Esta regla, ... como el resto de reglas gramaticales que se han dictado, no es

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de orden natural, eterno e inmutable, sino un claro reflejo de la visión androcéntrica del mundo y de la lengua.

[One of the most pernicious cases of linguistic sexism is one grammatical aspect that can be found in Spanish as well in other languages and it consists of the use of the generic masculine as a neuter form. That is to say, it is used to combine masculine and feminine. This rule, ... as the rest of the grammatical rules dictated throughout history, it is not of natural order, everlasting or unchangeable, if not, it is a clear example of the androcentric vision of the world and the language] (1992, p.28).

Those who fight against a sexist use of the language have challenged the use of the masculine generic, showing that the absence of female pronouns leads to male imagery, leading to women's alienation (Bengoechea, 2000, p.38), furthermore, probing the harm it can create.

The study of the use and the cognitive effects of the generic masculine in English have been studied empirically since the early 1970s. One of the first studies is by Hamilton (1988). Hamilton tested 120 college students (60 women and 60 men) use of the masculine generic by completing sentences using masculine or unbiased generics and then describing those images and giving a first name to fit the person they visualized in each sentence. Results showed that male subjects were more male-biased overall than were the female subjects.

Gastil (1990) studied the creation of male imagery by the use of the generic *he* in relation to *he/she* and the plural *they*. College students were asked to read twelve sentences, 6 target sentences and 6 filler sentences, aloud, which contained one of the three generic pronouns that are used to refer to neutral subjects, such as "person" or "pedestrian". After students read the twelve sentences aloud and described the images that were formed in their minds, they were asked to recall whether the subjects of those (target) sentences were male, female, both (male

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and female) or neither (no human beings in the image). After transcribing and coding the data according to male, female, mixed or neither, each student received a score for the number of target sentences that evoked male, female, mixed images or neither. This data was analyzed using pronoun condition, gender, imaging ability as independent variables and image scores as dependent variables, examining the propensity to male, female, mixed, and self-images. Results showed that the use of the generic *he* evoked a disproportionate number of male images while the plural *they* was comprehended as a generic pronoun for both male and females. Nevertheless, the results also showed that he/she was still understood by male subjects in a manner similar to *he*.

Braun, Sczesny and Stahlberg's (2005) conducted, over a period of several years, six experiments among native speakers of German in order to assess the cognitive effects of the generic masculine in German. The first two experiments dealt with how the designation of a group using masculine generics or alternative forms influenced the distribution of sexes in that group. Both experiments showed that, depending on the type of pronoun, females were less represented by masculine generics and females tended to be more represented by the male/female pair. The third experiment aimed to test the number of female responses to questions asked with the generic masculine about their favorite heroes, musicians, etc.... The fourth experiment, was a replicate of the previous experiment but with different material. Instead of asking subjects for their personal opinion, researchers were interested in the cognitive availability or recall of female and male characters depending on the generics used in the questions. In experiment number five, the researchers expanded their study into the type of responses subjects gave, when different generics used. Lastly, experiment 6 tested the effects of generics and reaction times. The basic question was whether masculine generics, compared to

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feminizing generics, make people think of female exemplars of a particular category with a certain delay. In general, results from each of the different experiments showed that the use of masculine generics produced more images of males while triggering the lowest or slowest cognitive inclusion of women. Alternative forms made women cognitively more visible and led to a higher representation of women in a given category.

Connected with the hypothesis that the use of the generic masculine leads to invisibility, Stout (2009) studied the existing relationship between the use of gender-exclusive language and ostracism in two experiments. In the study 169 undergraduate students participated. The first experiment examined whether the exposure to gender-biased language in a professional environment produces feelings of exclusion (i.e., ostracism) among women and then rated the investment in their jobs. Results of the first experiment corroborated the results of earlier studies (mentioned above) that women felt more excluded when the masculine generic was used and experience the least personal investment in the job when exposed to gender-exclusive language versus more inclusive language. However, results from experiment two did not match the results of previous studies. The researchers speculated that this result could be attributable to the role that awareness of one's ostracized status might play in women's reactions to this form of subtle ostracism.

### **2.3 About the Generic Masculine in Spanish**

#### **2.3.1 Gender and Languages**

In order to talk about gender and languages, it is necessary to first clarify some terms. According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary "gender" refers to the cultural and social traits typically associated with one sex, and as Judith Lorber states " (gender) is constantly created and

re-created out of human interaction, out of social life, and is the texture and order of that social life” (Lorber, 1994) whereas “sex” refers to biological aspects.

In every language gender is represented somehow, therefore, according to Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen and Sczesny (2007) the structural variations concerning the representation of gender lead to the distinction of three types of languages: Grammatical gender languages, natural gender languages and genderless languages. In grammatically gendered languages, such as German, Spanish or Russian, gender is coded as a grammatical category. Every noun is assigned either feminine or masculine (or neuter in some languages). Articles, adjectives and pronouns carry gender markers that reference to the gender of the noun and “agree” with the noun: “**La** escritora alemana estaba contenta de ser **la** elegida”. In naturally gender languages, like English or Scandinavian, there is no grammatical marking of gender in nouns, and most personal nouns refer to both genders, however, personal pronouns reflect the gender of human beings. There are also languages, such as Finnish, Turkish or Chinese without grammatical gender at all, neither in the noun system nor in personal pronouns. Gender in these languages is expressed by lexical means, that is through specific words, such as in Turkish, *erkek* “male” or *kadin* “female”.

Nevertheless, as Stahlberg et al. (2007) claims “expressing or concealing sex in language is not in itself sexist or non-sexist. The decisive question is whether references to sex are symmetrical, that is, whether women and men are treated linguistically in the same or an equal manner” (p.167).

### **2.3.2 Male as a Norm**

One of the most blatant asymmetries in language is the use of the generic masculine, which can be defined as a linguistic form that can be used to sex-specifically refer to male persons and generically to a mixed group whose sex is unknown or irrelevant. Creating an

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analogy between maleness and humanness (Braun et al. 2005). In grammatical gender languages, such as Spanish, the generic masculine can be interpreted grammatically as the masculine as well as the lexically “male” expression.

### 5.2 El español medio ve mucha televisión

[The average Spaniard (masc.) watches a lot of television]

### 5.2 Los estudiantes de esta universidad están muy involucrados en causas sociales

[The students (masc.) of this university are very involved in social causes]

### 5.2 Cuidado con los peatones

[Watch out for the pedestrians (masc.)]

The debate over the use of the generic masculine, divides into three groups: those who perceive the use of the generic masculine as reminiscent of the androcentric view of the world in which the male is depicted as the norm and the female as deviant; those who are in favor of a more symmetrical and gender-fair language for both women and men (Bengoechea, 2011; Pauwells, 2003; Jiménez et al. 2011; Moreno Cabrera, 2012); and those linguistic purists who argue that the use of masculine generic forms to refer to a mixed group of people is arbitrary and has nothing to do with sexist attitudes (García Meseguer, 2002). In fact, one of the highest authorities of the Spanish language, La Real Academia Española (RAE), has openly expressed its opposition to the policies and recommendations to avoid a sexist use of the language and has discouraged the use of the double forms in masculine and feminine and other forms of inclusive language considering them artificial, unnecessary. Moreover, it has also showed favor for the use of the masculine generic based on the economy principle of the language and principle of least effort (Real Academia Española, 2006).

Moreover, the use of the masculine generic can also lead to ambiguity because it can be

used to describe either sex-specific group (male) or mixed/unspecific sex-group in the absence of contextual clues. As Braun, Sczesny and Stahlberg (Braun et al. 2005) claim:

there are, in fact, many contexts where the effects of (extra-linguistic) male predominance and masculine generic should add up to make people think first and foremost of males ... It can be expected, therefore, that masculine generics are associated more closely with the image of a male than with the image of a female” (p. 6).

### **2.3.3 Investigation of the Masculine Generic and Alternatives Forms in Spanish**

The research into the effects of the use of masculine generics versus more gender fair forms has been carried out mostly for English and German. In Spanish it is important to mention the studies conducted by Nissen (2013) and Christiane Kaufmann and Gerd Bohner (2014). Nissen (2013) carried out an investigation in 1995 and 2005 in three different universities in Spain with native speakers of Spanish with the aim of testing the way in which certain word forms evoke mental representations in the reader of women, men or both. Each of the questionnaires contained twelve different sentences which contained gaps for the participant to fill with two first names. In questionnaire A, the nouns were written using only masculine generic forms such as *los alumnos* “the pupils” or *los ciudadanos* “the citizens”. The nouns in questionnaire B were written in gender neutral forms (e.g. *el profesorado* “the teacher staff”), and lastly, nouns in questionnaire C, contained dual forms such as *los interesados/las interesadas* “the people interested (masc.)/the people interested (fem.)”. In order to avoid the ambiguity between the lexical meaning and the possible grammatical meaning of the generic masculine, sentences contained plural nouns. Once the students had read an introductory text intended to prevent the respondents from guessing the real objective of the study, the participants were asked to fill in

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the gaps of the sentences with first names. Results of this study concluded that there was no real connection between certain linguistic forms and the mental representations evoked in people's minds. Nevertheless, the results showed that some associations have changed over time, suggesting that the male biased that existed in the first study (1995) seems to have vanished in the span of ten years.

Other significant research conducted in the Spanish language has been carried out by Christiane Kaufmann and Gerd Bohner (2014). In this study, using the methodology of a short-story created by Heise (2000), the researchers compared the effects of the conventional generic masculine to alternative gender-fair forms such as the x-form and the slash form in Spanish. As Kaufmann and Bohner indicate “the x-form is less used and known ... its form is not pronounceable either, but consistently applicable in written language. The X-form is mostly found in left-wing feminist political contexts, representing a more radical form than the slash form, and also symbolizes a rejection of the normative binary sex and gender system of society (for more theoretical background to this critique, see Butler, 1990)” (2014). Nonetheless, the slash form is more popular and it is the recommended form in guidelines on the topic of gender-fair language (i.e. los/las ministros).

For the Kaufmann and Bohner study, 195 Chilean university students were asked to read the beginning of two short stories in which groups of people were referred to with either masculine generic or one of the two gender-fair alternative forms. Participants were then asked to give names to the stories' protagonists. Students who read the short story that used the generic masculine were significantly more likely to give male names to the story's protagonist whereas students who read the story using one of the alternative forms were less likely to give male names to the story's protagonist.

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In summary, while there has been research done on the effects of the generic masculine and the use of more gender-fair language alternatives, these studies have been conducted specifically to assess the effects and perceptions their usage produce on native speakers of the language, in this case, Spanish. To date there has been little research into the effects that the use of the Spanish generic masculine may have on students of Spanish as a second language. Therefore, the present study will investigate how the generic masculine affects the perceptions of native speakers of English studying Spanish as a second language.

### **2.4 Chapter summary**

This chapter dealt first with the question of how languages can shape perception of gender (Jiménez et al. 2011; Whorf, 1956; Butler, 1997). A number of studies conducted since the 1980s suggest that the use of the generic masculine may lead to the creation and perpetuation of power relationships between men and women and contribute to the recognition of males and the invisibility of women (Butler, 1997; Henley, 1989; Gastil, 1990; Martyna, 1980; Hamilton, 1980; Braun et al. 2005; Pauwels, 2003, Nissen, 2013; Kaufmann & Bohner, 2014).

## CHAPTER 3.

### METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1 Sample

The participants in the study were 40 students (32 women and 8 men) attending a small, private, liberal arts college in the Midwest. The subjects were full-time students enrolled at the college pursuing a variety academic majors at the time of the experiment. All of participants were concurrently majoring or minoring in Spanish and were enrolled at the time of the experiment in advanced classes of Spanish (3100 and higher).

#### 3.2 Study Design

Using Heise's (2000) short-story-paradigm, 4 different models were written. Model A, consisted of two short stories<sup>1</sup> using dual forms (trabajadores y trabajadoras [workers (male) and workers (female)], model B, consisted of two short stories written using masculine generic (amigos [friends]), model C, included two short stories written using neutral forms (personas [people]) and lastly model D, had two short stories written using new forms of gender fair language (amigxs [friends (males/females)]) (See Appendix A for short-story sentences models). Depending on the number of students per class, the researcher made sure that each of the four models had similar number of participants. After explaining the objective of the research and asking the participants to fill in the consent form, students were asked to first read the two sentences given in their model and then to continue them with a brief story in which they would include protagonists and would name them using Spanish names. The reason behind this was to avoid confusion with the use of names in their native language (English) that could be for both

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<sup>1</sup> The short stories were written by the researcher for the purpose of this study. Paying special attention to avoid

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women and men. Once they wrote the short story for each sentence, they were asked to respond to the Vividness of Visual Imagery questionnaire. (See Appendix B for Mark's (1973) Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire.)

### **3.3 Materials**

The materials included four models, each of them with two unfinished sentences, included different approaches to the current study. One model used the masculine generic, another model used a neutral form, another a dual form and the final model an alternative form (See Appendix A for short-story sentences- Models.) Additionally, as a control tool, participants were asked to respond to Mark's questionnaire assessing imaging ability (1973). (See Appendix B for Mark's (1973) Vividness of Visual Imagery Questionnaire.)

### **3.4 Procedures**

The participants and the researcher met in the classrooms where the students were having one of their advanced classes of Spanish. The researcher handed the models to the students in no particular order, making sure each model was given to at least one student. The students were asked to read the two unfinished sentences and write a short story to complete each of them. Furthermore, they were asked to include characters to their story and name those characters with Spanish names. The number of characters for each story was not established by the researcher, nevertheless, due to the nature of the sentences all of them referred to at least two people or a group of people. This was done in order to avoid confusion between the use of the masculine to refer to generic masculine in singular forms and grammatical gender in singular forms (i.e., "después de comer el paciente tiene que descansar" [after eating the patient needs to rest]). After explaining the instructions in English, the researcher remained in the classroom and reminded the

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students to complete Mark's (1973) Questionnaire on Vividness of Visual Imagery once they finished writing the short stories.

The stories of the participants were divided into the four models existing and coded according to whether their imagined protagonists were male or female. Students' responses were coded and analyzed using a chi-square test. Because the sample data was very small, it is important to keep in mind that using chi square test may generate smaller expected values which consequently, may affect the chi square approximation. Nevertheless, this can be resolve by adding 0.5 to all observed frequencies or by increasing the sample size. Chi Square test is used to investigate the relationship between two categorical variables which are first, the usage of masculine generic, dual nouns, neutral nouns or x-form depending on the model and secondly, the socio-cultural gender associated to the names given to the protagonists of the stories, therefore, images created, with a level of significance 0.10. The reason to use 0.10 instead of 0.05 is due to the small sample of the study and because there is limited quantitative research in this specific field. The results comparing gender-fair language models are shown in table 1 and masculine generic are shown in table 2 (appendix C).

### **3.5 Chapter summary**

This chapter described the methodology used in this study, which included a sample of 40 students (32 women and 8 men), who at the time of the study were enrolled at a small, private, Midwestern, liberal arts college. Although, all of the participants were pursuing different degrees, all of them were also pursuing either a major or a minor in Spanish and were advanced students of Spanish. The participants were asked to read two unfinished sentences, which included the use of masculine generic, neutral form, dual form or alternative form, depending on the form they were randomly assigned, and write a brief story to continue the sentence. In each

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of these stories, participants were asked to include protagonists in their stories and name them with Spanish names. Afterwards, participants had to complete Mark's (1973) questionnaire assessing imaging ability. Data was coded and analyzed using as variables the names of the protagonists evoked (i.e. male or female) within the model given. Data was analyzed using a chi square test.

### **CHAPTER 4. RESULTS**

#### **4.1 Overview**

The aim of the present study was to determine the effects that the use of Spanish's generic masculine may have into the creation of mental images and understanding in students of Spanish as a second language, by testing the hypotheses of previous studies conducted in other languages that the use of the masculine generic promotes a disproportionate number of male images. A chi square analysis will be used to decide whether to accept or reject the hypotheses enumerated in Chapter 1.

#### **4.2 Hypotheses**

The present study's aim was to investigate the relation between perception and language use. The hypotheses tested on this study are the following:

- Hypothesis 1<sub>0</sub>: The use of Spanish's generic masculine does not lead to the creation of male imagery in students of Spanish as a second language.
- Hypothesis 1<sub>1</sub>: The use of Spanish's generic masculine does lead to the creation of male imagery in students of Spanish as a second language.
- Hypothesis 2<sub>0</sub>: Students of Spanish as a second language are aware of the generic value of the generic masculine and are able to understand the concept of the generic masculine and separate it from the grammatical gender of the sentence.

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- Hypothesis 2<sub>1</sub>: Students of Spanish as a second language are not aware of the generic value of the generic masculine and are not able to understand the concept of the generic masculine and separate it from the grammatical gender of the sentence.
- Hypothesis 3<sub>0</sub>: Texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do show gender bias.
- Hypothesis 3<sub>1</sub>: Texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do not show any gender bias.

### **4.3 Results**

The results<sup>2</sup> of the study help to answer the previously stated hypotheses:

- Research hypothesis 1 is accepted and Null hypothesis is rejected. This means that the use of Spanish's generic masculine does lead to the creation of male imagery in students of Spanish as a second language.
- Research hypothesis 2 is accepted and Null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, this means that students of Spanish as a second language are not aware of the generic value of Spanish's generic masculine and are not able to understand the concept of the generic masculine and separate it from the grammatical gender of the sentence.
- Research Hypothesis 3 is rejected and Null hypothesis is accepted. This means that texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do show gender bias.

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<sup>2</sup> Further information about data analysis and results can be found in Appendix C.

#### **4.4 Chapter Summary**

This chapter presented the data analysis results that were obtained from the chi square test conducted. The data was divided into two variables, model used (DN, MG, NN, XF) and the images evoked (male, female); the analysis results obtained have accepted two research hypotheses of the three stated, hence their null hypothesis have been rejected, except for one which has been accepted and its research hypothesis has been rejected.

**CHAPTER 5.****DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS****5.1 Discussion of results**

STUDENT	EXERCISE A DUAL NOUNS		STUDENT	EXERCISE B MASCULINE GENERIC		STUDENT	EXERCISE C NEUTRAL NOUNS		STUDENT	EXERCISE D X-FORM	
	FEMALE	MALE		FEMALE	M A L E		FEMALE	M A L E		FEMALE	MALE
STUDENT 1	1	1	STUDENT 1	2	1	STUDENT 1	4	3	STUDENT 1	3	3
STUDENT 2	3	2	STUDENT 2	1	5	STUDENT 2	4	2	STUDENT 2	5	2
STUDENT 3	6	3	STUDENT 3	3	3	STUDENT 3	4	3	STUDENT 3	3	4
STUDENT 4	3	4	STUDENT 4	3	4	STUDENT 4	3	4	STUDENT 4	4	3
STUDENT 5	4	3	STUDENT 5	3	4	STUDENT 5	1	1	STUDENT 5	6	1
STUDENT 6	1	1	STUDENT 6	1	5	STUDENT 6	5	3	STUDENT 6	3	3
STUDENT 7	4	4	STUDENT 7	2	5	STUDENT 7	5	4	STUDENT 7	3	0
STUDENT 8	3	2	STUDENT 8	3	4	STUDENT 8	2	2	STUDENT 8	4	3
STUDENT 9	4	3	STUDENT 9	0	0	STUDENT 9	3	2	STUDENT 9	1	2
STUDENT 10	5	5	STUDENT 10	3	4	STUDENT 10	1	3			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>21</b>

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The results of this study have shown the need to accept two out of the three the research hypotheses, albeit, findings have also shown the need to reject one of the research hypothesis while having to accept its null hypothesis. The first research hypothesis was that the use of the masculine generic leads to the creation of a disproportionate number of male images in students of Spanish as a second language, therefore, creating male biased in the language. This hypothesis was formulated due to numerous studies, which have shown that the use of masculine generics either in English or German<sup>3</sup> creates more male-biased imagery in the user's mind (Hamilton, 1988; Heise, 2000), moreover, there was also a study conducted by Nissen (2005) in 1995 and 2005 in which results showed that the use of a "masculine form is not automatically connected with a male image" and "that there is no clear-cut correspondence between certain linguistic forms and the mental (gender-) representations evoked in peoples' minds" (p.117). Nevertheless, the results of this study have confirmed previous findings in other research studies that use of masculine generics does evoke more male imagery (Kaufmann & Bohner, 2014) and had a male bias which could reinforce sexist thought (Gastil, 1990). In fact, results have shown that the use of the masculine generic leads to a greater number of male images, from a total of 56 images evoked, 35 images are male (62.5%) meanwhile only 21 are female (37.5%).

The second research hypothesis was if the students of Spanish as a second language were aware of the generic value of the masculine generic. The reason behind this hypothesis was first, to test the possible ambiguity of the masculine generic and secondly, to study if students of Spanish as a second language were able to distinguish between the use of the masculine in the

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<sup>3</sup> Those are the languages that hold the most number of studies on the use of the generic masculine. Nevertheless, during the last years there has been an increased in the number of studies which deal with the use of the generic masculine versus more gender-fair forms of the language in other languages such as French, Norwegian, Dutch or comparing several languages (Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, & Oakhill, 2009)

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grammatical form or the lexical form of the masculine as generic as both are written in the masculine form. As professor M<sup>a</sup> Isabel Menéndez Menéndez (2008) states:

Una de las cuestiones más polémicas relacionadas con el sexismo lingüístico proviene de la confusión que se establece entre sexo y género gramatical. Mientras que el sexo es un rasgo biológico que poseen algunos seres vivos, el género gramatical es un rasgo inherente a determinados tipos de palabras, que sirve para clasificar a los sustantivos en masculinos y femeninos ... El funcionamiento que tiene el género gramatical en español afecta en muchas ocasiones al sexismo lingüístico. Mientras que el femenino posee un uso restrictivo (únicamente puede emplearse referido a las mujeres), el género masculino posee un doble valor. Por un lado, el específico, es decir, solo referido a varones (el presidente de la Junta de Andalucía inauguró el acto). Por otro, el genérico, que engloba tanto a mujeres como a hombres (los españoles son todos iguales ante la ley). Este genérico afecta a la visibilización de las mujeres y resulta problemático en muchas ocasiones, pues produce constantes ambigüedades. Por ejemplo, si una persona dice “Mis hermanos van al cine los miércoles”, es imposible saber si la palabra hermanos incluye a hombres y a mujeres o únicamente a varones. Y, en el caso de que las mujeres estén incluidas, está claro que quedan ocultas.

[One of the most controversial topics related to linguistic sexism comes from the confusion established between sex and grammatical gender. While sex is a biological aspect that some living animals possess, grammatical gender is an inherent aspect to certain words, which serve to classify the nouns either as female or male ... The functioning of grammatical gender in Spanish affects in several occasions to linguistic sexism. Whereas the feminine has a restrictive value (only to be used to refer to women),

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masculine generic has a double value. On one hand, the specific to refer to males (The president of the *Junta de Andalucía* opened the event), on the other hand, the generic encompasses women as men (All the Spaniards are equal to the law). This generic affects the visibility of women and tends to be problematic in most of the cases as it produces constant ambiguities. For the example, if a person says “My brothers (siblings) go to the cinema on Wednesday”, it is impossible to know if the word brothers include women and men or solely males. Furthermore, in the case they are included, they are invisible.

In relation to this hypothesis, previous results argued that “although masculine pronouns may be used either sex-specifically or generically, when people encounter masculine pronouns used in a generic context, the sex associated with the pronoun is likely to dominate over the sex associated with the antecedent” (Miller & James, 2009). Results from this research have not only rejected the null hypothesis but also have supported previous findings, and confirmed that students of Spanish as a second language are not able to distinguish between the lexical form and the grammatical form, and due to that, to understand the value of the masculine as generic, that is to say, including both men and women.

The third research hypothesis, which is rejected, dealt with the question if texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do not show gender bias. Although the results of this research support previous findings (Gastill, 1990; Heise, 2000) which showed that the use of more gender fair language lead to female gender bias, it is essential to stress two main differences from the previous studies. First, the sample size which was very small, compared to other studies in the field. Another factor that might explain the difference from previous studies is that from those 40 students, 32 students were female and only 8 were male. This could be related to the idea that participants have been influenced by their own

gender or, as Hamilton (1988) suggested, based on the idea proposed by Silveira (1980) found in Kaufmann and Bohner (2014), “people = self-bias” may be stronger for males than for females, because of the repeated exposure and use of masculine generics such as *he* and *man* and more specifically perceived as “people = male bias” for both men and women. Kaufmann and Bohner (2014) claimed that a man is more likely perceived as a person than is a woman, and a person is more likely believed to be a man than a woman.”

## **5.2 Limitations**

One of the main and most important limitations of this investigation is the sample of the study. While the majority of previous research had larger samples, this study had a sample of just 40 participants, which makes the results of this study less reliable than they would have been if they had been based on a larger sample . Moreover, another aspect to keep in mind is that the sample used for this research, that is university students between the age of 18 and 22 years of age from a small, private, Midwestern college<sup>4</sup>, should not be assumed to have general validity.

Another matter affecting the findings of this study is the different levels of Spanish fluency among the students. Although all the students who participated in the study were enrolled at the time that the research was conducted in advanced classes of Spanish, their competence levels differed widely, affecting to their general reading comprehension and writing skills in Spanish.

Another aspect to consider is the gender distribution of the sample: 32 women and 8 men. As noted above, a greater number of females might have had an influence on the gender

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<sup>4</sup> The sample chosen for this research, students, it is not different from previous studies aforementioned, but, this sample does not represent/reflect the attitudes and understandings of the entire population (students of Spanish as a second language). Hence, taking into elements such as race, gender, age, larger university may be of great value for further research.

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representation evoked because of participant's own gender, albeit, in this research, the majority of the participants were female and still their responses exhibited bias towards the male. The gender distribution of the sample was unavoidable due to the overrepresentation of women among Spanish majors and minors. Therefore, it is highly recommended for future research to have an equal or similar sample of men and women. Furthermore, in order to expand responses and not to base all research into the binary of male vs. female, it could be interesting to use a sample of gender non-conforming people studying Spanish as a second language.

Lastly, the researcher wants to stress that while writing the sentences used for the short stories, much thought was given to avoiding stereotyping with regard to stereotypes of gender roles.

### **5.3 Conclusions**

The results of the present study suggest that the use of the generic masculine, does have a male bias for students of Spanish as a second language, in fact, it also shows that students of Spanish as a second language do not understand the generic value of its use. Nevertheless, the former appreciation must be clarified. Although the results of this study have supported the findings of studies of the use of the masculine generic conducted in German and English, the sample chosen for this research, does not represent/reflect the attitudes and understandings of the entire population (students of Spanish as a second language) as it was clear when analyzing the results that they were able to create male and female images for the masculine generic, however, the number of male images evoked were higher than the female, hence, they are *fully* capable to understand the generic value of the generic masculine.

Another important aspect to clarify would be, on how to bring this topic to the Spanish classroom and what are the best approaches to its understanding and use in the classroom setting.

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One of the most effective ways to implement this in a classroom setting is by explaining and incorporating the use of gender-fair language versus generic masculine in real life situations or contexts. Students would benefit from the constant use of both forms, giving them the freedom to choose the form they feel most comfortable with.

To conclude, it is important to highlight that results support the claims of previous researchers that language creates, shapes and organizes mental constructions. In Butler's words, "we do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. Language is a name for our doing: both "what" we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act and its consequences." (1997) However, a few aspects must be addressed.

First, although language matters and shapes our understanding and constructs our reality, implementing changes to the language, such as the use of gender-fair language, will not change the society on its own. In fact, detractors of language change, such as the Real Academia Española [Royal Academy of Spanish Language] state that not only, "los desdoblamientos son artificiosos e innecesarios desde el punto de vista lingüístico" [dual forms are cunning and unnecessary linguistically talking], but also that "va contra el principio de economía del lenguaje y se funda en razones extralingüísticas. Por tanto, deben evitarse estas repeticiones, que generan dificultades sintácticas y de concordancia, y complican innecesariamente la redacción y lectura de los textos" [they are against the economy of language and it is based on extralinguistic questions. Therefore, (dual forms) repetitions should be avoided as they produce syntactic and concordance troubles and, cause unneeded difficulties when writing or reading texts]. Although those who support changes in the language understand that changing the language on its own will not change the masculine social order, researchers Kaufmann and Bohner state "it will call

attention onto this disparity, it can denounce inequalities and inspire people to dare the change. And for this purpose it is absolutely justifiable and even useful that gender-aware language may be unfamiliar to our ears and eyes, sometimes complicated and annoying, or provoking controversies” (2014). As long as there are disparities, injustices, and oppression in our societies and hence, in our languages, there is need to talk about them. To give them voice because as Gloria Anzaldua stated “Wild tongues can't be tamed, they can only be cut out.” (1987)

### **5.5 Chapter summary**

This final chapter discussed the data analysis results, which found that for students of Spanish as a second language the use of the generic masculine does not only evoke male imagery, but also proves that students of Spanish as a second language are not aware of the generic value of the generic masculine. Moreover, the results of this study, although limited, have proven that the use of gender-fair language may result in bias towards female.

Nevertheless, although results from this study did support previous research on the generic masculine conveyed in native speakers of English or German. The researcher also acknowledges the limitations of the present study and suggested different possibilities that could be taken if further research is conducted. Finally, the results from the study allowed the investigator to answer the hypothesis stated and conclude that the use of the generic masculine in students of Spanish as a second language has a male bias.

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## **APPENDIX A. SHORT STORY SENTENCES – MODELS**

### A. DUAL NOUNS

- El grupo de dos amigos y amigas desayunan en la cafetería de la universidad están muy felices porque...
- La empresa “Claramente” premia este año por su trabajo tan eficiente a tres de los trabajadores y trabajadoras del departamento de ventas, además ...

### B. MASCULINE GENERIC

- A el grupo de tres amigos les gustaba quedar todos los viernes en la cafetería “La esquina”, pero un día...
- Los cuatro españoles conducían relajadamente al aeropuerto porque ese día ...
- En la reunión, los cuatro profesores del departamento discuten sobre los problemas encontrados en sus clases y dan su opinión ...

### C. NEUTRAL NOUNS

- En la pared de la clase, había una nota “si quieres venir al parque manda un mensaje de texto”. Las cuatro personas se miraron y ...
- Tres estudiantes leyeron “Existen tres becas (scholarships) de investigación disponibles para tres estudiantes de esta universidad” así que...

### D. ALTERNATIVE FORM – X-FORM

- El grupo de tres amigxs se reunieron en su bar favorito para charlar sobre su vida y su semana...
- Lxs cuatro Españolxs estudian en la universidad de Irlanda para poder mejorar su inglés, sin embargo...

**APPENDIX B . VIVIDNESS OF VISUAL IMAGERY QUESTIONNAIRE (VVIQ)**

**Source:** Marks, D.F. (1973). Visual imagery in the recall of pictures. *British Journal of Psychology*, **64**, (pp.17-24).

For each item on this questionnaire, try to form a visual image, and consider your experience carefully. For any image that you do experience, rate how vivid it is using the five-point scale described below. If you do not have a visual image, rate vividness as ‘1’. Only use ‘5’ for images that are truly as lively and vivid as real seeing. Please note that there are no right or wrong answers to the questions, and that it is not necessarily desirable to experience imagery or, if you do, to have more vivid imagery.

Perfectly clear and vivid as real seeing	5
Clear and reasonably vivid	4
Moderately clear and lively	3
Vague and dim	2
No image at all, you only “know” that you are thinking of the object	1

For items 1-4, think of some relative or friend whom you frequently see (but who is not with you at present) and consider carefully the picture that comes before your mind’s eye.

1. The exact contour of face, head, shoulders and body \_\_\_\_\_
2. Characteristic poses of head, attitudes of body etc. \_\_\_\_\_
3. The precise carriage, length of step etc., in walking \_\_\_\_\_
4. The different colors worn in some familiar clothes \_\_\_\_\_

Visualise a rising sun. Consider carefully the picture that comes before your mind’s eye.

5. The sun rising above the horizon into a hazy sky \_\_\_\_\_
6. The sky clears and surrounds the sun with blueness \_\_\_\_\_
7. Clouds. A storm blows up with flashes of lightning \_\_\_\_\_
8. A rainbow appears \_\_\_\_\_

Think of the front of a shop which you often go to. Consider the picture that comes before your mind’s eye.

9. The overall appearance of the shop from the opposite side of the road \_\_\_\_\_
10. A window display including colours, shapes and details Of individual items for sale \_\_\_\_\_
11. You are near the entrance. The colour, shape and details of the door. \_\_\_\_\_
12. You enter the shop and go to the counter. The counter assistant serves you. Money changes hands \_\_\_\_\_

Finally think of a country scene which involves trees, mountains and a lake. Consider the picture that comes before your mind’s eye.

13. The contours of the landscape \_\_\_\_\_
14. The colour and shape of the trees \_\_\_\_\_
15. The colour and shape of the lake \_\_\_\_\_
16. A strong wind blows on the trees and on the lake causing waves in the water. \_\_\_\_\_

**APPENDIX C. TABLES AND DATA**

Table 1.

In this research a Chi Square test has been used to compare and study the relationship between two categorical variables which in the case are first, the usage of dual nouns, neutral nouns or x-form depending on the model and secondly, the socio-cultural gender associated to the names given to the protagonists of the stories, therefore, images evoked, with a level of significance 0.10.

In order to calculate the Chi Square, first, it is necessary to compute the expected frequencies of the corresponding observed frequencies. Expected frequencies are computed by using the following formula.

$$Expected\ Frequency = \frac{(CT) \cdot (RT)}{GT}$$

Model A. Dual Nouns (DN)

Model C. Neutral Nouns (NN)

Model D. X-FORM (XF)

<u>Images evoked</u>	<u>Model</u>						<u>Row Total</u>
	<u>DN</u>		<u>NN</u>		<u>X-FORM</u>		
	<u>Observed</u>	<u>Expected</u>	<u>Observed</u>	<u>Expected</u>	<u>Observed</u>	<u>Expected</u>	
<b>Female</b>	36	38.1	32	32.6	32	29.3	100
<b>Male</b>	33	30.9	27	26.4	21	23.7	81
<b>Total</b>	69	69	59	59	53	53	181

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Table 2.

Model B. Masculine Generic (MG)

The following table holds the data obtained from the masculine generic model. The reason it is separated from the rest of the models, is due to its independent nature in relation with the other models. The data from this table cannot be connected or related to any of the other variables, such as neutral nouns, dual forms or x-form. For hypothesis 1 and 2, the data has to be separated from the other creating its own analysis.

<u>MG</u> <u>Observed</u>	<u>MG</u> <u>Expected</u>
21	28
35	28
56	56

**Test for the MASCULINE GENERIC**

$$x^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Significance level:  $\alpha = 0.10$

Critical Value = C. V = 2.71

$$x^2 = \frac{(21-28)^2}{28} + \frac{(35-28)^2}{28}$$

$$x^2 = 1.75 + 1.75$$

$$x^2 = 3.5 \quad x^2 \text{ critical: } 2.71$$

P.V over 0.10 and 0.05

Decision rule:

Reject  $H_0$  if  $x^2 > 2.71$  at 0.10 level -- Accept  $H_0$  if  $x^2 < 2.71$  at 0.10 level.

Decision is to accept the research hypothesis.

The results of the study help to answer the hypotheses stated in Chapter 1:

- Research hypothesis 1 is accepted and Null hypothesis is rejected. This means that the use of Spanish's generic masculine does lead to the creation of male imagery in students of Spanish as a second language.

**Test for the GENERIC VALUE of Masculine Generic**

$$x^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Significance level:  $\alpha = 0.10$

Critical Value = C. V = 2.71

$$x^2 = \frac{(21-28)^2}{28} + \frac{(35-28)^2}{28}$$

$$x^2 = 1.75 + 1.75$$

$$x^2 = 3.5 \quad x^2 \text{ critical: } 2.71$$

P.V over 0.10 and 0.05

Decision rule:

Reject  $H_0$  if  $x^2 > 2.71$  at 0.10 level -- Accept  $H_0$  if  $x^2 < 2.71$  at 0.10 level.

Decision is to reject the null hypothesis.

The results of the study help to answer the hypotheses stated in chapter 1:

- Null hypothesis 2 is rejected and Research hypothesis is accepted. Therefore, this means that students of Spanish as a second language are not aware of the generic value of Spanish's generic masculine and are not able to understand the concept of the generic masculine and separate it from the grammatical gender of the sentence.

**Test for the GENDER FAIR LANGUAGE**

$$x^2 = \sum \frac{(O - E)^2}{E}$$

Significance level:  $\alpha = 0.10$

DF= (r-1) · (c-1) = (2-1) · (3-1) = (1) · (2) = 2 Critical Value = C. V = 4.61

$$x^2 = \frac{(36-38.1)^2}{38.1} + \frac{(33-30.9)^2}{30.9} + \frac{(32-32.6)^2}{32.6} + \frac{(27-26.4)^2}{26.4} + \frac{(32-29.3)^2}{29.3} + \frac{(21-23.7)^2}{23.7}$$

$$x^2 = 0.1157 + 0.1427 + 0.0110 + 0.0136 + 0.2488 + 0.3075$$

$$x^2 = 0.8393 \quad x^2 \text{ critical: } 4.61$$

P.V between 0.9 and 0.10

Decision rule:

Reject  $H_0$  if  $x^2 > 4.61$  at 0.10 level -- Accept  $H_0$  if  $x^2 < 4.61$  at 0.10 level

Decision is to accept the null hypothesis

The results of the study help to answer the hypotheses stated in chapter 1:

- Research Hypothesis 3 is rejected and Null hypothesis is accepted. This means that texts in which the use of the generic masculine has been replaced by forms of gender fair language do show gender bias.