

# **Gender Differences in Advertisements**

**–A Study of Adjectives and Nouns in the Language of Advertisements**

**Jie Yang  
Kristianstad University  
English Department  
The C-level of English Linguistics  
Elective course: Language and Gender  
Autumn, 2010  
Tutor: Anna Ekstrom**

## **Table of Contents**

1. Introduction.....	1
1.1 Aim and Scope.....	2
1.2 Material.....	2
1.3 Method.....	3
2. Theoretical Background.....	4
2.1 Nouns and Adjectives.....	4
2.2 Advertisements.....	7
2.3 Advertisements and Gender Culture.....	8
2.4 Language and Gender.....	9
3. Analysis and Discussion.....	10
3.1 Nouns.....	10
3.2 Adjectives.....	15
3.3 Nouns and Adjectives: A Combined Discussion.....	17
3.4 Gender Differences in Nouns and Adjectives.....	21
4. Conclusion.....	24
References.....	25

## 1. Introduction

Gender is a relatively new field in sociolinguistics. Gender studies arose with the reaction against the main stream in which males were the center of society (Coates, 1993). Although the campaigns for women's rights to vote began before the early nineteenth century, it would not be until 1872 that it became a national movement in United Kingdom. In 1918, women above the age of 30 gained legal rights to vote as men (Wikipedia. 2010/12/1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's\\_suffrage\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_suffrage_in_the_United_Kingdom)). Since then, there have been changes not only in workplace, at home but also in minds and attitudes.

In the past, a lot of scientific studies were done to provide proof that women were inferior to men. Although there were also some findings proving that women were better than men in some places like endurance, studies mainly focused on differences between women and men, instead of similarities. Feminists studying language too have been mostly interested in gender differences, and they believe through linguistic behavior, the nature and status of women can be revealed (Cameron, 1992).

The relationship between advertisements and gender may have caught some researchers' attention, since advertisements become a part of people's everyday life. Advertisements can be found in all kinds of mass media, from newspapers, magazines to radio and television. They are the media and tools used by producers to convey certain messages about the products. To persuade customers, advertisements have to cater to different kinds of customers.

It is not unusual to observe a beautiful and attractive woman appearing in an advertisement for male customers or a seemingly perfect woman in an advertisement for a female product. Studies on gender and advertisements are divided into two directions –mold and mirror: either gender differences in reality leads to those portrayed in advertisement, or advertisements are in a way shaping people's minds about different genders.

Many magazines often divide the public into female readership and male readership. There are magazines for teenage boys and teenage girls separately, and

their content and language are often gender stereotypic (Willemsen, 1998). Some famous magazines like *Elle*, *Bazaar* and *Marie Claire* provide leading fashion for women all around the world. It seems that magazines like *Playboy*, *FHM* have excluded female readers and only focused on supposed male interests.

As the development of mass media goes on, the focus has transferred from advertisements on newspapers and magazines to those on radios or television. Pictures, music, characters and elaborately designed plots can be very effective persuaders, while language remains to be fundamental as a communicative device in human society. Previous scholars have made quantitative studies on gender and language. It is said by many scholars that women and men differ in usage of language (Smith, 1985; Tannen, 1990; Coates, 1993). The question is whether it gives a reason for advertisers to use different languages in advertisements for female customers and male customers separately, which consequently influences people's usage of language. It is still under discussion whether females and males are linguistically distinguished by nature or by society.

## 1.1 Aim and Scope

The aim of present investigation is to study the use of nouns and adjectives in English-speaking advertisements, which aim separately to females and males, in order to seek possible gender differences. The focus is to see if the gender differences existing in the language of advertisement conform to what is generally expected about women and men.

## 1.2 Material

Topics in female magazines and male magazines are catering separately to supposed interests of women and men. A total number of 18 advertisements have been taken from female magazines and male magazines. The first three advertisements from each magazine have been collected as samples. For male magazines, there are 9 advertisements: three from *Car and Driver* (issued in July, 2010), three from *World*

*Soccer* (issued in October, 2010) and three from *Esquire* (issued in March, 2010). For female magazines, there are 9 ads too, three from *Elle* (issued in August, 2010, US edition), three from *True Romance* (issued in December, 2009) and three from *Live It* (issued in April, 2010).

*Car and Driver* has been the world's most popular automotive magazine for more than 50 years. Its demographic profile of total adults, surveyed in 2005, showed that 87% of readers are male while female readers occupy only 13%. *World Soccer* is an English language football magazine, specializing in the international football scene. And *Esquire*, founded in October 1933, has been transferred to emphasizing on men's fashion. On the cover of the magazine (March 2010), it claims: "The essentials...everything a man needs to know, in 70 pages."

*Elle* is a worldwide magazine that focuses on women's fashion, beauty, health, and entertainment. In French, *elle* means *she*. Stories in *True Romance* are based on real, first-person experiences focusing on a variety of issues considered to be important to women. It is a magazine edited by women and for women. *Live it* is India's first IT magazine for female readers. It is claimed to be a magazine for contemporary women.

Cars and football are common fields within men's interests as fashion, love and relations are women's interests. Internet and high tech used to be considered as male-dominant, while fashion and clothing would be women's things. To some extent, *Esquire* and *Live It* can be regarded as contradiction of the tradition and reflection of changes. Advertisements in these two magazines will be given close attention.

### 1.3 Method

The 18 advertisements are the first three ones in each magazine. The division between female magazine and male magazine is made according to the gender of their readership, and their contents, which is about stereotypical women and men's interests.

Firstly, all the adjectives and nouns used in the 18 advertisements are collected. As to which word class a word belongs to is depending on the context. Secondly, nouns and adjectives are discussed separately to see if there is gender difference in the usage

of nouns and adjectives and what the proportions of neutral ones and non-neutral ones are. Non-neutral words do not necessarily mean they are sexist in themselves, for there is hardly sexist language used in the sample magazines. Advertisers in the six magazines tend to use non-neutral words to refer to something that is considered to be appealing to readers of a certain gender. References of these words used in female and male advertisements appeared to be differentiated according to gender. Neutral words, on the other hand, have neither gender connotations nor gender references. Then, sample words are categorized according to their commonness in what they refer to. Some nouns and some adjectives may refer to or modify things belonging to the same category, for example: the noun *happiness* and the adjective *exciting* belong to the category of *Emotion*, and the noun *punch* indicates physical strength, while the adjective *un-compromising* refers to mental strength. The question that whether these categories are believed to be female (male) interests or female (male) characteristics is discussed. The combined analysis of nouns and adjectives is the main part in this study.

## **2. Theoretical Background**

A retrospect of previous work on adjectives and nouns, advertisements in general and its relation to gender as well as the relation between advertisement and gender is helpful in the study of present work.

### **2.1 Nouns and Adjectives**

There are many words in the English vocabulary, and these words can be categorized into different classes. In *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, words are classified according to grammatical functions. Nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs are referred to as open word classes, in which old words die and new ones are born. Pronouns, prepositions, conjunctions, and determiners (including articles) are closed classes because their membership is fixed (*Oxford Dictionaries Online*). Some words can belong to different word classes. For example, the word *work* can be used either as a noun in

sentence *her work is to raise her children* or as a verb in sentence *she worked hard*. Then, what is the total number of English words? In the second edition of the 20-volume *Oxford English Dictionary*, one can find 171,476 words for current use, and 47,156 obsolete words, plus around 9,500 derivative words. Over half of these words are nouns, and about a quarter are adjectives (*Oxford Dictionaries Online*).

A noun, as defined in *Oxford Dictionaries Online*, is “a word (other than a pronoun) used to identify any of a class of people, places, or things (common noun), or to name a particular one of these (proper noun)” (*Oxford Dictionaries Online*). In the English language, nouns are usually classified into seven groups: proper nouns, common nouns, countable and uncountable nouns, collective nouns, concrete nouns and abstract nouns. A proper noun is often used to represent a unique entity while a common noun represents a class of entities. Countable nouns can have plural forms while uncountable nouns cannot. Collective nouns refer to groups while appearing in single forms. (Wikipedia.. 2010/12/1. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun#Classification\\_of\\_nouns\\_in\\_English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun#Classification_of_nouns_in_English).) For example, the word *children* is a noun. It is a common noun, used in plural form, and its single form *child* is countable and concrete. In some cases, there is overlapping among these groups, which means that a noun can have characteristics of several groups at the same time. Some collective words like *men*, however, can represent different groups of entities. It can not only refer to a single gender whose opposite is women, but also human beings in general (Smith, 1985). The development of English nouns, as well as English language as a whole, concerns not only historical facets but also social factors including gender and social class. As John Searle (2008) tells us, “Once we have a language, we have a social contract (Searle, 2008:443).”

Adjective is defined as “a word naming an attribute of a noun” (*Oxford Dictionaries Online*). Adjectives cannot be identified merely by their forms. There are some criteria for adjectives: they can freely occur in attributive function or in predicative function. They can be premodified by intensifier *very* and they can take comparative and superlative forms (*A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*, 1995: 402-403). For example, the word *pretty* in the phrase *a pretty girl* is

an adjective. It occurs in attributive function, but can also be used predicatively. It can be premodified by *very* or written into *prettier* and *prettiest*. Some words cannot meet all of the criteria, but are still adjectives, for example the word *melodic*, which does not have comparative and superlative forms. Some adjectives cannot be used in conditions required in the criteria. For example, the word *alone* cannot be used attributively. On the contrary, the word *mere* cannot be used predicatively.

Some size adjectives, though not used in comparative and superlative forms, can still acquire degree readings. For example, in the sentence *Jack is a big stamp-collector*, the word *big* has nothing to do with one's physical size, but refers to a high degree (Morzycki, 2009). According to Morzycki, this phenomenon can persist in a variety of contexts, including comparatives, equatives, as long as the size adjectives are in attributive positions and only predicate bigness. Some adjectives can have a comparison connotation when they relate to a norm class, for example, the word *tall* in the sentence *John is tall* (Staab and Hahn, 1997). When an adjective with comparison connotation is uttered or heard, people have undergone an underlying conceptual process, in which a comparison of the subject and the normality is made.

An experiment reported by Phillip M. Smith (1985: 107) about personality adjectives is very inspiring. In the experiment, one hundred and thirty-four students (70 women, 64 men) and sixty-six non students (30 women, 36 men), whose ages were between 19 and 26, participated. They are given questionnaires with 120 personality-descriptive adjectives. Questions were about participant's attitudes toward those words, like what extent do they believe each word is the characteristic of women or men, which words can describe themselves and if they (females and males separately) act in the manner described by the adjectives, to what extent they would be met with social approval. The result is a cross-tabulation of items of their sex-stereotypicality and social desirability. Although items like *adventurous*, *decisive*, *active*, *sense of humor*, and *independent* are desirable for both genders, they belong to masculine stereotype items. Some others like *appearance-oriented*, *sensitive*, *warm*, and *like art and music* are stereotypically believed to be what women's personality is like.



## 2.2 Advertisements

The activity of advertising is nothing new. Early forms of advertising were often carried out by criers employed by shopkeepers or sellers themselves. Sometimes they took the goods along, and shouted a message throughout the market to attract people's attention. The modern form of advertising was pioneered by some medicine shows, which combined entertainment with the effort to sell products. (Encyclopedia Online)

From the economic perspective, advertising has two functions. One is to persuade potential customers, the other is to provide information. According to Marcus Ling and fellow scholars (1999), it is informative functions that are of paramount importance. "Advertising provides valuable information for consumers as they usually have limited data about all available rival products." (Ling et al., 1999: 129) This is crucial in a world which is filled with imperfect and uncertain knowledge.

Strong (1926) discusses his thesis made in 1925, in which he believed that advertisement is first, to make a reader want, and second, to present a solution by telling the customer that his/her desire can be adequately satisfied by means of the advertiser's commodity. "Unless the individual feels a want it is almost useless to discuss a solution. Consequently, making a man want (if he does not already want) is the more fundamental of the two aims and, for the sake of advertising efficiency, should come first." (Strong, 1926: 346) His studies were suggesting better ways to improve the efficiency of advertisements from perspective of applied psychology, in other words, to make advertisements more powerful.

Studies on how to make advertisements more effective continued afterwards. For instance, Herpen et al. (2000) examines differences in the information content of magazine advertisements across transition economy adopted by former Eastern Europe and market economy in other European countries.

Some scholars divide the development of advertising into four stages: the product information stage, the product image stage, the personalization stage and the lifestyle stage (Cheng & Schweitzer, 1996). Information conveyed in advertisements is turning

from impersonal to personal. As in Herpen et al.'s study (2000), people in former communist countries are believed to prefer clear and credible advertisements, which are also easy to understand, while consumers in western countries prefer images. Advertisers are changing advertising strategies to make advertisements more attractive and influential.

The extent and locations of advertisements are part of advertising strategies too. Probart et al. (2006) revealed the influence of advertisements by discovering the extent and locations of soft drink advertisements on high school campuses in Pennsylvania and identifying factors related to the extent of these advertisements. In their research, 271 school foodservice directors in a random sample of high schools in Pennsylvania participated and 84% of them returned surveys. About two thirds of respondents indicated soft drink advertisements exist in at least one location in their school, and the most prevalent locations are on vending machines (62%), while school grounds, such as playing fields, occupy 27%. Slightly more than 10% of respondents indicated soft drink advertisements displayed in the cafeteria. The widespread existence of advertisements for soft drinks on high school campuses, as they concluded, is conflicting with the expectation of establishing a nutrition-friendly environment in schools. To obtain youth customers, advertisements can be found not only in public society but also on campus. The number and location of advertisements is a factor related to the power of advertisement.

### 2.3 Advertisements and Gender Culture

As a product of human culture, advertisements can reveal many cultural factors. Morris and Lee (2005) looked into appearances and portrayals of people in commercial print messages from 43 countries and explained them from two cultural dimensions– individualism-collectivism and femininity-masculinity. In their study, culture is believed to affect advertising content. In masculine countries, men are more often portrayed in traditional image than in feminine countries.

Researches on magazine and television advertising conducted in many countries

suggest a high degree of sexism toward women. For example, Matud, Rodriguez and Espinosa study on Spanish daily newspapers (2010), and Arima studies on Japanese television advertisements (2003). Women tend to be portrayed either in a degrading or demeaning fashion or in sex-role stereotypic behaviors. Frith, Cheng and Shaw (2004) made a comparison between Asian and Western models in women's magazine advertisements to explore how women are depicted. Gender difference in advertisements is not a phenomenon existing only in developing countries but a phenomenon across the world. However, previous work, like those mentioned above, mainly focuses on television advertising or pictures, models appearing in magazines or newspapers. Very few touch upon the language used in advertisements. This may be due to the development of mass media, with which advertisements are not confined within printed materials any more and there are more ways for advertisers to attract public's attention and popularize their products.

## 2.4 Language and Gender

Lakoff's pioneering work *Language and Woman's Place* (1975) revealed the difference existed in the way women and men use language. The way we talk is governed by the way we feel about the real world. Women are taught to behave properly, and to talk like ladies. There is women's language which men are reluctant to use. Although Lakoff's hypothesis about language and gender in some cases has been found incorrect, her work gave necessary shape to later research.

In response to women's language, Smith (1985) proposes men's language, in which generic nouns and pronouns that are marked for masculinity are used to refer to people in general terms or individuals with indefinite gender.

Based on Lakoff's work, Coates (1993) provides sociolinguistic evidence to the relation of language and gender and its causes and consequences. The process of standardization leads to the development of so-called correctness. The higher status one social group obtained the less they will be confined by the rule of correctness. Thus due to women's insecure social position, they are more sensitive to linguistic

norms than men. Coates also expanded Lakoff's study on politeness and believed that women and men have different standard on communicative competence.

When many scholars are focusing on gender differences in conversational practice (Graddol & Swann, 1989; Tannen, 1990), others are studying the difference in pronunciation and grammar. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2003) record the work of John Bradley, who looks into the language of Yanyuwa within aboriginal Australia and finds out distinctive dialects for females and males.

Although sex differences in speech have already been noted prior to 1900, the study on gender difference in sociolinguistics has not made a major progress until the uprising of feminist activity. Lakoff (1975), Coates (1993) and some other scholars have made great contribution in this area and paved the way for later researches. To have a better understanding on language and gender in general is helpful for looking into the advertisement language to see if gender differences exist.

### **3. Analysis and Discussion**

The result of the study is divided into four parts. The first two parts separately present results on nouns and adjectives used in advertising language. The main focus is on adjectives and nouns that have gender stereotypical reference. There are similarities in what some nouns and adjectives refer to, and these references are categorized and discussed in section 3.3. The last part focuses on the reason for this phenomenon.

#### **3.1 Nouns**

The number of nouns, neutral nouns and non-neutral nouns as well as their distribution are presented in table 1. There are 173 nouns in total, in which 74.6% are neutral nouns, and only 25.4% are non-neutral ones. Neutral nouns are nouns with general meanings, while non-neutral nouns are used by advertisers to attract interests of a certain gender. More nouns are used in female magazines than in male magazines. According to proportion, non-neutral nouns in male magazines are a little bit more than those in female magazines, but the difference is not obvious. Neutral nouns in

general occupy a large proportion.

**Table 1. The number of nouns, neutral nouns and non-neutral nouns**

	Neutral nouns	Non-neutral nouns	Number of nouns	Percentage of neutral nouns	Percentage of non-neutral nouns
Female magazines	75	19	94	79.8%	20.2%
Male magazines	54	25	79	68.4%	31.6%
Total	129	44	173	74.6%	25.4%

According to Coates (1993), women are believed to be verbose. Female advertisements are probably designed by females and for female customers. Texts in female ads tend to be longer than those in male ads, consequently more nouns are used. However, the style of magazines in which advertisements appearing should also be considered.

Neutral words that have no gender connotation form a large part in the words sample. Among them, words closely related to products themselves, like parts of watch or home decoration and chemical terminology used in cosmetic advertisements, are of great importance, for example:

- (1) *...the Parachrom hairspring and Paraflex shock absorbers make it more reliable...(hairspring and shock absorber)*
- (2) *Petite emerald shamrocks adorn an intricately sculpted solid sterling silver filigree ring accented with four sparkling diamonds...(emerald, diamond, ring and shamrock)*

Being sensitive to gender-role stereotypes, advertisers in western countries are more conscious to avoid portraying female and male in traditional way (Das, 2000). Words used in stereotypical way by advertisers are even less than pictures and images. Among neutral words there are 58 neutral nouns that are closely related to products.

Neutral adjectives of that kind are much fewer--only one in male magazines, and thirteen in female IT magazine, therefore, they are excluded from this part of study. The result of neutral nouns related to products is shown in table 2.

**Table 2. The number of neutral nouns which are closely related to products**

	Number of neutral nouns closely related to products	Types of related products	Number of advertisements for the products
Male magazines	5	Car	2
	16	Watch	3
Female magazines	12	Beauty	4
	7	Jewelry	1
	6	Home decoration	1
	12	IT products	2
Total	58		13

In the male magazines, there are 21 neutral nouns related to products, and the 16 nouns are from advertisements of three watch brands. In the three female magazines, types of related products range from beauty, jewelry, and home decoration to IT products. By contrast, there are limited types in male magazines and all of the three advertisements for male watches are from the male fashion magazine *Esquire*.

The division between neutral and non-neutral words in this study seems to be vague. It is often believed that non-neutral words are sexist, while sexist language that has strong discrimination toward one gender can be hardly found from language used by advertisers in any of the sample magazines. However, sensitive feminists may find neutral words like *he* and *men* offensive when they are used to refer to people in general or individuals of indefinite sex (Smith, 1985: 48). It is possible that in early time women as a powerless group have been neglected and excluded when human beings in general are mentioned. It is the same for words like *spokesman* or *chairman*. Some suffix like *-er*, *-ess*, is regarded to have gender connotation as well. For example, the word *maker* may indicate a dominance of men instead of women who conduct the action. It is interesting to see that when the first letter *m* is capitalized, it

refers to the Mighty God. However, this phenomenon seems reasonable in that God makes man according to His own image, while woman is just subsidiary to man. In table 2, words collected only concern the products, regardless of gender.

Advertisements are catering to readers of magazines. Due to the separation between readers and advertisers, advertisers are actually assuming possible interests of readers (Fairclough, 1989). Therefore, readers of magazines are passively influenced by advertisers' idea about what women and men's interests should be. This kind of influence has begun even before readers' puberty. Magazines for teenage girls are well known for their gender stereotypic content, and teen magazines for girls and boys are widening the gender gap (Willemsen, 1998).

Advertisements in magazines also play a role in dividing two genders as far as related products are concerned. There are many ways to classify products. The most common one may be services versus goods. Das (2000) prefers the way that combines with male and female purchase roles. Generally, automobiles are husband-dominant in making family decisions whereas food, appliances, cosmetics, and jewelry are wife-dominant decisions. There is a similar division in this table. Products like car and watch are dominant in male magazines, while in female magazine, cosmetics and jewelry. Even in the male fashion magazine *Esquire*, more neutral words are used for car and watch products than those for other products, and advertising for clothing use more photographs than words. The only one exception may be the magazine *Live It*, in which the major focus is IT products. 12 in 55 neutral words are distributed to IT products, like *lens*, *zooming* and *satellites* used in camera advertisement. Besides, some compound words like *wide-angle*, *distortion-free* and *high image* function as modifiers, and they are categorized into adjectives. Instead of focusing on the appearance of the camera, the advertisement provides some details about parts of camera. However, even in *Live It* there are still three neutral phrases (*sun protection*, *skin*, and *UVA/UVB rays*) used about beauty products, which have no connection with technological goods but women's products.

Much more neutral nouns are used in female advertisements than in male advertisements. Such nouns in ads for female products are used to give detailed

description of ingredients and effects of cosmetics, and of jewels on rings and on home decoration. Contrastively, only one chemical product in samples of advertisements is for men–deodorant, which is often used while exercising. There are no neutral nouns of detailed description of ingredients or effects but an adjective *cool* is used.

It is possible that usage of neutral words differ by products. Some products like watches and jewels are dedicated; therefore it is necessary and reasonable to give a detailed description of their elements. Larger proportion of neutral words in male magazines is related to names of parts in watches, and in female magazines, names of parts in jewels and home decorations counted 13. Another possible factor concerning the result may be the styles of magazines. *Esquire* tends to use more photos than words in its advertisements. It is often the case that there is not a single word appearing in ads for clothing. And in its three ads for watches there are 16 neutral words. The female magazine *True Romance*, however, uses more language. There are 7 words used in a ring advertisement, and 6 words in home decoration. Throughout the magazine, there is no advertisement that appears without a word in it. *Car and Drivers* is proud for its provision of car advertisements that would guarantee quality rather than just emphasis on appearance. Therefore they would like to use longer text to provide details, and words like *test track* and *warranty* are used in sample car advertisements.

However it is a fact that advertisers tend to provide details in advertisements for female cosmetics, while male cosmetics are much less detailed. And there is an asymmetry in types of products in female and male magazines. Media power is cumulative and powerful because of the scale of mass media and exposure of the public (Fairclough, 1989). Advertisements in magazines and on television can influence people's thought and life. The quantitative information people get from advertisements can turned to be topics in same-sex conversation. Usually topics in all-male conversation are mainly about impersonal subjects, and self-disclosure is avoided. However in all-female conversation, women tend to share personal affairs with friends. (Coates, 1993) Cosmetic is also a frequent topic among women.



Nowadays, it is no longer surprising to find that many girls can name chemical ingredients in certain cosmetics or conditions of body or face, though these girls are not professionals at all. The knowledge they get can be from advertisement. On the other hand, men would like to talk about products like cars, watches and sometimes clothing. Even if they talk about cosmetics, more often than not, they are not familiar with those terms as much as girls are. This phenomenon corresponds with Kehily's study in 1996, which is recorded by Willemsen. In her experiment, girls and boys participated in a discussion about problem pages in teenage girl magazines whose contents are mainly about relationships and sex. A boy in the discussion was asked why boys do not talk about relationships and sex. He said it was "not the thing boys do." (Willemsen, 1998: 860)

### 3.2 Adjectives

Statistic results on adjectives are presented in table 3. There are a total number of 137 adjectives used in the sample advertisements. Similar to nouns, adjectives are used more in female magazines than in male magazines, but according to proportion, male advertisements use much more non-neutral adjectives than female ads. In female magazines neutral adjectives occupy 80% of the total number, while in male magazines percentages of neutral adjectives and non-neutral adjectives do not differ very much.

**Table 3. The number of adjectives, neutral adjectives and non-neutral adjectives**

	Neutral adjectives	Non-neutral adjectives	Number of adjectives	Percentage of neutral adjectives	Percentage of non-neutral adjectives
Female magazines	68	17	85	80%	20%
Male magazines	28	24	52	53.8%	46.2%
Total	96	41	137	70.1%	29.9%

The fact that female ads use much more adjectives is in correspondence with

Willemsen's study(1998), in which he believes that feminine language of girl's magazines contain more adjectives and consist of longer sentences. There are two possible explanations. Firstly, shorter sentences and less language are used in sample magazines for male readers, and consequently fewer nouns and their modifiers are used. Secondly, adjectives are used to modify nouns and often reveal qualities of things or persons. The language used in male advertisements with fewer modifiers seems to be tougher and more straightforward, while the language in female magazines is more colorful. This kind of language difference can be found in the following examples:

(3) *HERBERT NITSCH. AIRLINE PILOT. DEEPSEA DIVER. EXTREME RECORD BREAKER.*

(4) *How beautiful are the rich color, melodic song and graceful form of the bluebird. No wonder it's a symbol of happiness!*

Example 3 is taken from the third advertisement of *Car and Driver*. It appears on the first page of the magazine. Six phrases ended with periods and all letters capitalized, written in white color, and contrasting sharply with black background, which impresses readers with toughness and forcefulness. On the contrary, example 4 taken from female magazine *True Romance* consists of two exclamations and almost every noun has an adjective to modify it. It sounds much more poetic than the previous example.

However, in their shorter texts more adjectives with gender references (46.2% compared to 20%) are used in male magazines, like *peerless*, *unparalleled* used in watch advertisement. It may be because designers of male advertisements are less conscious about gender issues. Compared to products for both genders, designers want to highlight what are believed to be men's superior personality in their products to attract male readers. Some qualities like mental strength in the adjective *uncompromising* are stereotypically believed to be personality of a so called good man (Smith, 1985). Instead, more often than not, such personality is not a requirement

for the general public which includes the female group.

### 3.3 Nouns and Adjectives: A Combined Discussion

A total number of 137 adjectives and 173 nouns are used in sample advertisements. 85 adjectives and 94 nouns are used in female magazines and 52 adjectives and 79 nouns are used in male magazines. Statistics are shown in table 4. It can be observed from the result that in female magazines more adjectives and nouns are used in the advertisements. In advertisements for female readers, the number of adjectives and nouns are close, whereas in the samples for male readers, the gap is larger. Obviously, nouns are much more preferred than adjectives in male advertisements.

As opposed to neutral nouns and adjectives, the non-neutral ones are the main focus in the third part of study. A large proportion of nouns belong to be neutral, while more non-neutral words can be found in adjectives. Advertisements in female magazine *Live It* provide lengthy information about their products, and most of the words used are neutral ones. *Esquire* compared with *Live It* uses more non-neutral words.

**Table 4. Number of adjectives and nouns**

	Female magazine	Male magazine	Neutral words	Non-neutral words	<i>Live It</i>		<i>Esquire</i>	
					T	UN	T	UN
Adjectives	85	52	96	41	37	1	16	7
Nouns	94	79	129	44	48	3	38	9

T=total; UN=non-neutral

*Live It* and *Esquire* may represent a new trend in that the contents of them touch upon what traditionally belonged to male interests and female interests. However, it is not that there is no gender difference between *Live It* (*Esquire*) and other male (female) magazines. *Live It* in ads for the magazine addresses its readers as *contemporary*

women. The first advertisement in *Live It* is for sun lotion, which has nothing to do with the topic of the magazine: IT products. The three non-neutral nouns and one adjective are from the advertisement for the magazine, and they refer to life and relationship. Advertisers try to tell readers that knowledge in this magazine would bring more excitement to life and closer relationship with friends. On the other hand, *Esquire*, whose topic is male fashion, shows difference from female fashion magazines in its language. From proportion aspect and total number as well, *Esquire* uses more non-neutral words when compared with *Live It*. Adjectives like *uncompromising* refer to the quality of mental strength, whose counterpart can hardly be found in female magazines.

**Table 5. Reference of non-neutral words**

Reference	Color		Relationship		Emotion		Senses	Art
Words	sparkling, silver, rich, glazes, sparkling, blue, color, shimmering, iridescent, high-definition, bright	color	Love, love, love, love, old friend, someone special,	companion	breathtaking, happiness, exciting, excitement dream, dramatic	passion, passion	texture, touches	artistry, song, melodic
The amount of words	11	1	7	1	6	2	2	3
Magazine	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	

**The continued table**

Reference	Quantity		Superiority		Adventure	Strength	Achievement
Words	10-year, 100,000-mile, 1 ( car ) ,10cars, 10 ATM, 41 mm	5-7 days	world's fastest, supercharged, peerless, unparalleled, classic, exceptional, control, first, legendary, hallmark, ultimate, first, professional ultimate, history, world's largest, iconic, best, perfect	perfect, perfect, best, premium, first, the world's largest	athlete, barrier, challenge pilot, diver, record breaker, airliner, freediver, depth, deep, extreme	rugged punch, steel, speed, mercurial, resistant, un-compromising	future, accomplishment
The amount of words	6	1	19	6	11	7	2
Magazine	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male		

Table 5 provides more information about the types of references and their distributions. The word *petite* used in *True Romance* means: (of a woman) attractively

small and dainty (adjective) (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006: 1072). This kind of words cannot be used to modify men or things related to men. However, words like *sparkling*, which means shining brightly with flashes of light (*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*, 2006: 1383), when used to modify a jewel, does not exclusively modify something of women. But words in the list may refer to things advertisers believe would be attractive to one gender. Some words appear to have commonness and have the same or similar reference. In the first part of the table, words with the same references are used more in female magazines; while in the second part, words with other references appear more frequently in male magazines. In female magazines, nouns and adjectives tend to emphasize or refer to color, relationship, emotion, senses, and art; however, in male magazines words related with quantity, superiority, adventure, strength and achievement are mostly used. A comparison with these words and references may reveal a difference in preference of word choice in female and male magazines, furthermore, gender difference in usage of words.

The fact that the usage of language is differentiated according to social groups is nothing new. Looking into the time after the invasion of William the Conqueror, one may observe a division in the usage of language in England. The ruling class used French, whereas the lower classes remained to speak English (English Club, 2010). Thousands of English words came from French in that time. For example, the word *beef* is a dish on the noble's table, while the peasants only had *rabbits* for their meal.

In his work *Language and Social Ontology*, John R. Searle (2008) believes there is a connection between language and the system of status functions. Vocabulary plays its role in revolutionary and reformist social movements. To get hold of the vocabulary is a way to alter the system of status functions. "The feminists were right to see that the vocabulary of 'Lady' and 'Gentleman' already involves a deontology that they wanted to reject. Again, the Communists in Russia wanted people to address each other as 'Comrade' as a way of creating new status functions and destroying old ones." (Searle, 2008: 454)

### 3.4 Gender Differences in Nouns and Adjectives

Being aware of gender differences existing in the society, feminist linguistics began to study the sexual power behind language use, the conventions and behaviors through which language reflects and perpetuates gender inequality (Cameron, 1992). To get hold of words with gender connotation, feminists often refer to morphology and etymology. Words like *actor/actress* are supposed to indicate an inferior position of women. Some feminists once believed that the word *history* bearing an indication of male dominance, and consequently a word *herstory* came into being. Although this claim has been proved not correct by some scholars, the effort cannot be denied. Going through a history book, one will find that the history of human beings is overwhelmingly male dominant. Women's participation is weak, inconspicuous, and negligible. Although the word *history* itself may not be gendered, I do find in male magazines *history*, *legendary*, and *classic* are used to emphasize the superiority of products, while similar words cannot be found in female magazines.

Adjectives used in Smith's questionnaires (1985) have some similarities. Words like *willing to take risks*, *daring*, *adventurous* describe men's braveness and willingness to face any challenges. Some others like *sensitive*, *tender*, *gentle*, *warm*, and *affectionate*, put emphasis on women's feelings and emotions. 80 of the 137 adjectives are listed in the result. Among them about 63 adjectives are considered to be desirable by society, while they are divided into Masculine Stereotype Items and Feminine Stereotype Items. The rests are regarded as only desirable for one gender and neutral or undesirable for another gender.

The social ideology and different social expectations toward women and men revealed in the result is impressive. Human beings are socialized animals. Ants are socialized too, and there is clear distribution of works in the community. Some ants are born to be workers, some are fighters and some are giving birth to next generations. Women and men are born to be biologically different too. However, as a much more complicated community, society may have played a much more crucial role in differentiating the gender of women and men. It has been proved that in a

mixed-gender conversation, men tend to grab the floor, and prevent the speaker from finishing his/her turn. (Coates, 1993: 107-114) If a woman talks relatively more in a board conference, for example, she will be thought as talking too much and less feminine. Women's speech style arises from others' expectation toward them and restrictions and stereotypes against them. When they were very young, parents tend to use more diminutives when speaking to girls while more direct prohibitives to boys. (Eckert, 2003:17) Instead of being restricted by parents, boys would more likely imitate adults' commands and apply them to conversations with other children. It is quite common for parents to encourage and require boys to be brave and more carefree and generous when getting along with other children, especially with girls. On the other hand, they would show more tenderness and comfort to girls and require their behavior and talk properly. In school likewise, teachers tend to be more attracted by boys and more tolerant toward boys' competitive and dominant behavior. Girls would consequently make fewer contributions and appear to be weaker than boys. Unequal treatments and expectations continue as they grow up, and gender differences are enlarged and strengthened. Whether or not being conscious of it, people are bearing throughout their life the thought of how women and men should behave or talk to meet the standard of properness. There may be different reasons for everyone's wish and effort to meet social expectation and requirement. In school, boys and girls may wish to be accepted by their peers, permitted and approved by their teachers (if schools have the right to require girls and boys to wear different school uniforms, they can also have the right to restrict students' behavior). In a family, if a child is not taken good care of, it is often its mother instead of father who is blamed. And in a company, a worker feels accomplished not only because of his/her achievement in the work but also admiration from his/her colleagues. If his/her behavior is considered not proper as far as the person's gender is concerned, approvals must be much less. If a person in the society dares to get rid of all other's expectations and requirements, he/she may worry about losing their positions and identities in the society.

The reason to give detailed explanation about social expectations and people's



feeling obliged to meet those expectations is that when people have wishes, they may try to fulfill them. In this sense, advertisements may be designed to cater to people's wishes by telling them that they can become what they desire to be, if they use the specific products. A typical example is a watch advertisement in *Car and Driver* (July 2010: 7). Instead of introducing watch of this brand, almost the whole text is talking about an athlete. The advertisement describes him as "airline pilot, deepsea diver, and extreme record breaker". As a "peerless" man with "a mind of steel", he is apparently set up as a model for all other men. Such a man would like to choose this watch as "the ideal companion", why not the others. Have it and one will have "great accomplishment" as the athlete does. Two advertisements in female magazines provide ways to improve relationship. Six words are from a ring advertisement, and one word is from the IT magazine advertisement. Among them there are five "love". The only word "companion" in male magazine, however, does not refer to relationship with others.

Advertisers may also use language to refer to things considered to be within female or male interests. The formulation of their different interests can be social products too. Apart from social expectation and restrictions mentioned above, some scientific results may have attributed to the division too. For example, men and women use different parts of their brains (WebMD, July 19, 2006). Men are abstract thinker, while women are concrete thinker. Boys are good at science, while girls good at liberal arts. Girls compared with boys are more sensitive to color. Although these may be true to the general, there are always exceptions. The fact is society is usually catering to the general and neglecting exceptions. The result in the table clearly shows how their interests are separated. Color, relationship, emotion, senses and art are most frequently referred to in female advertisements, while in male ads, adventure, strength and achievement are preferred. In female magazines there are six words related to emotion and two "passion" are use in male magazines. Both of them have used "emotion", whereas words in female magazines are softer and more general. Another comparison can be made in reference to quantity, which male magazines use more than female ones do. And the concept "5-7 days" is actually very vague, while figures

use in ads for male products are much more precise.

At last, advertisements for male watches are different from those for jewels in what they are stressing. Apart from the advertisement which sets a successful athlete as a model, there are other three. Different from jewel ads which describe appearances, these watch ads emphasize on function and precision. Although it may be due to the type of products, after all the only function of jewel lies on its appearance, the asymmetry in distribution of types of products is worth noticing.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The general conclusion of this study is that advertisements in magazines are conveying information about gender differences through their language. The objective for advertisers doing so is to cater to women and men's separate interests and their desire. The formulation of women and men's different interests and their desire to become what advertisements advocate lies in the existence of social expectation and requirements throughout their life. There have been a large number of studies discussing gender role portrayed in advertisement, but not enough in advertising language. The effect of advertising language on people's thought and life is much more important. Only when gender division in language is transcended can inequality in other social issues be diminished.

In this study, however, not enough primary materials are provided. Besides, there is a restriction in the choice of magazines. Styles of magazines may affect the length of text in advertisements and advertising language. More subtle choice of magazine types and wider range in collecting advertisements are expected in the future study.

## References:

### Primary Material

*Car and Driver*. July, 2010.

*World Soccer*. October, 2010.

*Esquire*. March, 2010.

*Elle*. August, 2010. US edition.

*True Romance*. December, 2009.

*Live It*. April, 2010.

### Secondary Material

Arima, A. N. 2003. "Gender stereotypes in Japanese television advertisements." *Sex Roles* 49: 81–90.

Cameron, D. 1992. *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*. New York: Palgrave Publishers.

Cheng, H., & Schweitzer J. C. (1996). "Cultural values reflected in Chinese and US television commercials." *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36: 27–44.

Coates, Jennifer. 1993. *Women, Men and Language*. Harlow: Longman.

*Concise Oxford English Dictionary*. 2006. Catherine Soanes and Angus Stevenson (Eds). UK: Oxford University Press.

Das, M. 2000. "Men and women in Indian magazine advertisements: a preliminary report". *Sex Roles* 43.

Eckert, P. & McConnell-Ginet, S. 2003. *Language and Gender*, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Encyclopedia, <http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/articles/pages/6414/Advertising-Effects.html>. 2010/12/1

English club, <http://www.englishclub.com/english-language-history.htm>. 2010/12/3.

Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and Power*. New York: Longman Inc.

Frith, K.T., Hong Cheng & Ping Shaw. 2004. "Race and beauty: a comparison of Asian and Western models in women's magazine advertisements." *Sex Roles* 50

Wikipedia, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's\\_suffrage\\_in\\_the\\_United\\_Kingdom](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women's_suffrage_in_the_United_Kingdom). 2010/12/1.

- [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun#Classification\\_of\\_nouns\\_in\\_English](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun#Classification_of_nouns_in_English). 2010/12/1.
- Herpen, E. V., Rik Pieters, Jana Fidrmucova & Peter Roosenboom 2000. "The information content of magazine advertising in market and transition economies." *Journal of Consumer Policy* 23: 257-283.
- Lakoff, Robin. 1975. *Language and Woman's Place*. In Mary Bucholtz (Ed.) *Language and Woman's Place: Text and Commentaries*. US: Oxford University Press.
- Ling, M., Kevin Lawler, Norman McBain & Alfredo Moscardini. 1999. "Economics of advertising: emerging functions of Internet advertising." *Netnomics* 1: 127–136
- Matud, M., Carmen Rodríguez & Inmaculada Espinosa. 2010. "Gender in Spanish daily newspapers." *Sex Roles*, (Online First). 14 September 2010.
- Morris, P. K. & Lee, S. "Culture and Advertising: An Empirical Study of Cultural Dimensions on the Characteristics of Advertisements" Presented at the annual meeting of the International Communication Association, New York. Online<PDF>.2009-05-25[http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p12814\\_index.html](http://www.allacademic.com/meta/p12814_index.html)
- Morzycki, Marcin. 2009. "Degree modification of gradable nouns: size adjectives and adnominal degree morphemes." *Natural Language Semantics* 17:175–203
- Oxford English Reference Dictionary*. 2002. Judy Pearsall and Bill Trumble (Eds). UK: Oxford University Press
- Oxford Dictionaries Online*. <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/page/93>. 2010/12/1
- [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m\\_en\\_gb0008690#m\\_en\\_gb0008690](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0008690#m_en_gb0008690). 2010/12/7
- [http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m\\_en\\_gb0566710#m\\_en\\_gb0566710](http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0566710#m_en_gb0566710). 2010/12/7
- [http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m\\_en\\_gb0959620#m\\_en\\_gb0959620](http://oxforddictionaries.com/view/entry/m_en_gb0959620#m_en_gb0959620). 2011/1/11
- Probart, Claudia., Elaine McDonnell, Lisa Bailey-Davis & J. Elaine Weirich . 2006. "Existence and predictors of soft drink advertisements in pennsylvania high schools." *Journal of the American Dietetic Association* 106 (issue 12): 2052-2056.
- Quirk, R., Sidney Greenbaum, Geoffrey Leech & Jan Svartvik. 1995. *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*. London: Longman Group UK Limited.
- Searle, John. 2008. "Language and social ontology." *Theory and Society* 37: 443-459.

- Smith, Phillip M. 1985. *Language, the Sexes and Society*. UK: Basil Blackwell Inc.
- Staab, Steffen & Udo Hahn. 1997. "Conceptualizing adjectives." *Lecture Notes in Computer Science* 1303: 267-278
- Strong, E.K. & J.E. Loveless, 1926. "'Want' and 'solution' advertisements." *Journal of Applied Psychology* 10: 346-366.
- Graddol, D. & John Swann. 1989. *Gender Voices*. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Tannen, Deborah. 1990. *You Just don't Understand: Women and Men in Conversation*. London: Virago Press Limited.
- WebMD <http://www.webmd.com/brain/news/20060719/men-women-use-brain-differently>, 2010/12/4
- Willemsen, T. M. 1998. "Widening the Gender Gap: Teenage Magazines for Girls and Boys." *Sex Role* 38: 851-861.