

Representation of Women in the press (1)

In this chapter, I am going to offer some illustration and analysis of the representation of women in the newspapers. Even a small sample, collected routinely without hunting for particularly dramatic examples, suggests that women are constituted in discourse as a special group with its own peculiar characteristics, set out from the population as a whole for exceptional evaluation. Irrationality, familial dependence, powerlessness and sexual and physical excess are some of the attributes predicated of women; these are aspects of the paradigm for this 'group' which have been found also by other writers on sexism in language.

There is now a substantial body of writings on this topic, ranging from descriptive to polemical works. Books on the subject are lively and accessible; they are the sort of book that I would expect readers of my book to enjoy reading, so I will summarize their concerns only very briefly here.¹ It has long been observed in anthropological linguistics that there are many communities which possess different varieties of language, or even different languages, used separately by men and by women; ~~that women and men often possess different vocabularies, and~~ that different kinds of expression are used to refer to men and to women. Contemporary writers on the subject of sexism in language take this observation much further, demonstrating that even in languages such as English which do not have obviously sex-differentiated varieties, gender is thoroughly encoded both in language used by women and, perhaps more so, in language used about women. This coding is found in almost every dimension of linguistic structure; so thoroughly ingrained is it. Linguists and feminists have been concerned with observations such as the

Roger Fowler, Language in the News