

# Asian Views on Gender-inclusive English

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All languages change (Fromkin and Rodman 1993). Language educators must be aware of these changes and help keep their students up to date with them. One area of change in the English language is the controversial shift from gender-exclusive language, such as “Everyone should do *his* duty” and “*Man* has done great damage to the environment,” to gender-inclusive language such as “Everyone should do *their* duty” and “*People* have done great damage to the environment” (Crystal 1995). We present two studies on the use of gender-inclusive English. The first assesses Asian second-language educationists’ views on this shift in the use of English. The second gathers information on how Singaporean students view and use gender-inclusive English.

## Study One

### The shift to gender-inclusive English

Over the past 30 or so years, English has been changing from gender-exclusive to gender-inclusive. Terms similar but not necessarily completely equivalent to gender-inclusive are gender-neutral, sex-fair, nonsexist, and gender-free (Treichler and Frank 1989). The term gender-inclusive implies that both females and males are explicitly “included” by the language used. For example, “A doctor should help his patients” could be understood as excluding females from being doctors.

There are several aspects of the trend toward gender-inclusive English. This study focused on two:

- the shift away from the use of the gender-exclusive generic “he” (e.g., “A doctor should keep his patients informed”) to gender-inclusive forms (e.g., “Doctors

should keep their patients informed” or “A doctor should keep her or his patients informed”);

- the shift away from the use of gender-exclusive generic “man” (e.g., “Man has lived on the planet for over a million years”) to gender-inclusive forms (e.g., “Humans have lived on the planet for over a million years”).

The term “generic” implies that a word such as “he” is used “generally” to refer to both females and males.

The trend away from gender-exclusive English seems to have begun and gone furthest in countries where English is the main language, what Kachru (1995) calls Inner Circle countries—Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. In some of these countries’ institutions, gender-inclusive language has become the standard to which all writing must conform. For

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example, organizations such as the US National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) have adopted guidelines advocating gender-inclusive language (Nilsen 1987).

The move toward gender-inclusive English began at least as early as the 1970s. In 1972, two major US publishers, McGraw-Hill, and Scott, Foresman, came out with language guidelines (Nilsen 1987). The NCTE guidelines were promulgated in 1976. Rubin, Greene, and Schneider (1994) cite several studies that show significant change in the US.

The shift in language use resulted from social, political, and economic changes in Inner Circle countries, which may not have taken place or may have had different effects in other countries. However, the switch toward gender-inclusive English impacts language use beyond the Inner Circle countries as English is the world's main international language. Related to the international role of English is the presence of English teachers from Inner Circle countries in educational institutions around the world.

Change is not a linear process. For example, Rubin, Greene, and Schneider (1994) cite studies indicating more resistance to gender-inclusive English among US university students than among older people. They also found that this change is not evenly distributed, as females are more likely than males to use gender-inclusive language. Situational variables also affect language use. Rubin and Greene (1991) found that college-age men used less gender-inclusive language when interviewed by people of the same age and sex.

### Gender-inclusive English in Asia

The present study was conducted in Asia, where the role of English, as well as many other phenomena, differs widely from country to country. For instance, English is widely used in daily life in countries such as the Philippines and Singapore. In other countries such as Cambodia, China, and Indonesia, English is a for-

eign language, restricted mostly to international communication.

Moves are underway in Asia to encourage the use of gender-inclusive English (e.g., AWARE 1995). For instance, some recent English-language textbooks produced in the Philippines (Austria 1995; Department of Education, Culture and Sports 1994) and Singapore (Curriculum Development Institute of Singapore 1994) contain gender-inclusive language, although not consistently. However, some would question whether parallel social, political, and economic changes have taken place in this region, and if they have, whether they are beneficial changes that should be sanctioned and supported by changes in language use. As English becomes more and more an international language with emerging local varieties, perhaps the varieties of English used in Asian countries (which are in either Kachru's Outer Circle or Expanding Circle) need not conform to changes that the language is undergoing in Inner Circle countries.

Aegintitou et al. (1994: 10) investigated the views of 57 English-language teachers studying in England and were informed by the 14 Malaysian teachers that gender-inclusive English there was "not that popular yet..., except for a few terms." Our study sought to further examine Asian second-language educationists' views on the issue of gender-inclusive English.

### Methodology

#### *Participants*

Thirty-five nonnative-speaker English-language educators from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand participated in the study. They were attending one of three courses on Applied Linguistics at the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization (SEAMEO) Regional Language Centre (RELC) in Singapore and had an average of 12 years experience as teachers, material

writers, and curriculum planners. Other than George M. Jacobs, who was a lecturer, all the researchers in the study were also participants.

### *Procedure*

Mr. Jacobs was interested in studying Asian second-language educators' opinions and experiences related to gender-inclusive English, and asked if any of the course members were interested in forming a research team. Four educators volunteered. The topic had been discussed briefly under the general heading of sociolinguistics, and members of two courses had read "Gender in the EFL Classroom" by Sunderland (1992), which discusses gender-inclusive language and other related issues. Mr. Jacobs said that although he used gender-inclusive English, he felt that each person should be allowed to make her or his own informed choice on the matter, and that course members' use of gender-inclusive or gender-exclusive language would have no bearing on their grades.

In order to help participants gain a basic understanding of the issue, the research team prepared a 45-minute presentation on the topic. After listening to the presentation, participants were asked to complete a questionnaire (Appendix 1). The questionnaire was developed by the researchers and had been shown to two of the course members before being finalized to secure feedback on its clarity and completeness.

Data were also obtained via audiotaped interviews (Appendix 2) with a stratified random sample of nine participants, one from each country. The semi-structured interviews (Nunan 1992) were designed to gain greater insight into issues that emerged from the questionnaire. Data on participants' actual language use were collected by analyzing the written exams of 18 participants who were members of the same course. The exam, for a course on language acquisition, was done after the discussion of the Sunderland article but before

the research team's presentation. Finally, the second draft of this research report was distributed to 24 of the participants for their feedback.

### Results and discussion

Key results of the questionnaire will be presented and discussed in light of the insights gained from the interviews. Then, the findings from participants' writing will be presented.

For item 5 on the questionnaire, 32 out of the 35 participants reported, not surprisingly, that they had been taught gender-exclusive English as students. The few who had been taught gender-inclusive English said they learned it at university. One interviewee reported having an American lecturer at her Singapore university around 1983 who vehemently demanded that only gender-inclusive English be used, although this was an extreme case.

In response to item 6, slightly more than half the participants indicated that they had heard of gender-inclusive language before taking the course. Some who had not heard of it were aware of the phenomenon but had not seen it given a name before. For example, one of the researchers from the Philippines noted that although gender-inclusive English was used in the handouts at inservice courses for teachers that she had attended in her country, the topic had never been mentioned.

The majority, 19, indicated that they taught or wrote materials using gender-exclusive English; 15 indicated gender-inclusive English; and one wrote "both," even though it was not an option on the questionnaire (item 8). The percentage using gender-inclusive English was greater than what some researchers had expected. A Malaysian interviewee explained his use of gender-inclusive English by saying that was what he found in the proficiency textbooks provided by the Ministry of Education.

Regarding the expected reaction of administrators to the use of gender-inclusive English

(item 10), most participants, 26, felt it would be neutral, 7 felt it would be positive, and only 2 felt it would be negative. The expected reaction of society in general (item 11) was roughly the same, with three switching from neutral to negative. Several interviewees suggested that one possible explanation for the lack of emotion on this issue may be that because English is a second language for most Asians, issues regarding the language itself are less deeply felt than among native speakers.

In response to item 12, the majority of participants, 29, reported that they would use gender-inclusive rather than gender-exclusive English in their teaching and materials writing in the future. Of the rest, two were male and four female. Among the reasons given by those who said they would use gender-inclusive English included the following:

- It is fairer to females.
- It avoids possible confusion about whether females are included when the generic “he” and generic “man” are used.
- It is present in instructional materials.
- They believe that gender-inclusive English is the emerging world standard.

The idea that gender-inclusive English is fairer to females fits the Whorfian Hypothesis (Whorf 1956) that language influences people’s perception of the world. The belief that gender-inclusive English reduces possible confusion is supported by research by Martyna (1980), Wilson (1978), and others cited by Wolfson, which found the use of the generic “he” to be ambiguous for some people.

Another reason why so many participants seemed willing to change to gender-inclusive English may have been that many educators come to RELC looking to gain new ideas to share with colleagues. Gender-inclusive English may be seen as one of the “latest things,” as it is used by the majority of RELC lecturers. One lecturer who has not changed has been heard to express his regret.

Several reasons were given by those who said they would not teach gender-inclusive English:

- the lack of materials in gender-inclusive English;
- the concern that many people (possibly including those who mark national and international exams) believe gender-exclusive English to be correct;
- the tradition of using gender-exclusive English;
- the belief that some gender-inclusive usage, e.g., “he or she,” is inelegant;
- the worry that making students aware of two choices—gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive English—would confuse and annoy them; and
- the view that the issue is not important enough to make the effort to change worthwhile.

Some of the interviewees stated that were it not for the first, second, and fifth reasons, they would teach the gender-inclusive forms.

As to the analysis of participants’ own writing in their language acquisition examination, some participants used both gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive. Of the 17 who participated in this phase of the study, 10 used gender-exclusive language, 7 did not. Gender-inclusive language was explicitly used in all but two of these seven cases. For example, one participant wrote, “If someone wants to get the job, they have to know and use the standard language.” An instance of gender-exclusive English was the participant who wrote, “A learner is a blank slate, whereby he has nothing in his mind.” As mentioned earlier, these sentences were written before the researchers’ presentation to the participants.

In summary, the findings of this study suggest that the trend among Asian nonnative-speaker English-language educators mirrors the trend toward greater use of gender-inclusive English. However, as Rubin, Greene, and Schneider (1994) reported in regard to the US,

among the participants in this study, the trend is not a homogeneous or linear one. Furthermore, even educators who support gender-inclusive English may not be able to implement their view due to situational constraints.

The preference for gender-inclusive English found among participants in this study contrasts with the findings of an informal study done in 1987 with lecturers of the English Language Proficiency Unit of the National University of Singapore (Ferryman 1995). In that study, the majority of the 35 lecturers, approximately one-fifth of whom were Westerners, said that they would mark gender-inclusive English as wrong. Perhaps a different result would have been obtained were that study repeated today.

#### Implications for teaching

Sunderland (1992) maintains that gender-exclusive/-inclusive language, the focus of the present study, is one of three gender-related areas that need attention in the classroom. The two other areas are

- instructional materials, which feature more frequent appearance of males, stereotyped images of females and males, e.g., females as passive, males as active (Carroll and Kowitz 1994); and
- classroom processes, where there is lower participation by females than males in teacher-learner and learner-learner classroom interaction (Holmes 1994).

Sunderland argues that these three areas are interrelated and that change is underway, although not homogeneously.

Language educators have a special role to play in language change, and, as is highlighted in the “Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language” in NCTE publications, “Whether the members work as teachers, authors, or editors, they not only help shape students’ language patterns but are also viewed by the public as

custodians of what is ‘correct’ in the language” (NCTE [1976], cited in Nilsen [1987]: 38).

The issue of gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive language impacts pedagogy in several ways:

- the choice of coursebooks and other instructional materials;
- the choice of grammar books and other reference works;
- the language that educationists use when talking to students;
- the feedback that students receive on their language production; and
- the scoring of tests and other assessment instruments.

The NCTE recommended but did not mandate gender-inclusive language. Gender-exclusive language was permitted in NCTE publications if the authors stated that it was their specific intention to use such language (Nilsen 1987). Nilsen cites the example of an article submitted to an NCTE publication. The editor changed the gender-exclusive language to gender-inclusive, but the author refused to allow the altered article to be published. This sparked a debate within NCTE, which resulted in an amendment to the organization’s guidelines, allowing authors to refuse to change to gender-inclusive language. As the 1985 version of the guidelines states, “The role of education is to make choices available, not to limit opportunities. Censorship removes possibilities; these guidelines extend what is available by offering alternatives to traditional usages and to editorial choices that restrict meaning” (NCTE [1985], cited in Nilsen [1987]: 54).

Such thinking is in line with Wolfson (1989), who concludes that learners of English as a second language should be made aware of how and why English is changing, the implications of the language that the learners decide to use, and the fact that this is a controversial issue. She advocates letting learners make their own



informed decision based on their own cultural values. Wolfson (1989: 183) argues that “[i]t is not the right or the obligation of teachers to try to change these cultural values....”

A similar stance has been taken in regard to two standardized international tests of English proficiency—International English Language Testing System (IELTS) and ACCESS (given to those wishing to immigrate to Australia). Ingram (1995), a key developer of both tests, states that although inclusive language is becoming increasingly routine in Inner Circle varieties of English, and the specifications for the two exams advocate its use, caution is used to avoid discrimination against examinees from countries where inclusive English has not been encountered or taught and/or is seen as a trivial matter or in contradiction with the examinees’ culture.

We agree. Further, teachers can help students analyze the language they encounter and produce in the classroom and in materials. We can tell them that they have to make their own choices, no matter how much they may want the teacher and the coursebook to tell them the “right” answer. Such an awareness-raising approach facilitates the development of thinking skills (Adams 1989). We are not, however, advocating neutrality. We believe that at the same time that educators should respect students’ right to make their own informed choices, we should also tell them of the informed choices we have made and the rationale behind our choices.

Based on our own analysis of our different educational contexts, the investigators in the present study use gender-inclusive English for the practical reason that, fortunately, it seems to be the emerging international standard. Nevertheless, even if it were not becoming the standard, we would support its use because of its role in promoting equality. As Rubin and Greene (1992: 34) point out, “Curriculum decisions...require a commitment to what ought to be as well as knowledge of what is.”

#### Limitations of and suggestions for future research

The research had many limitations, and the findings should be interpreted with caution for a number of reasons:

- The number of participants in the study, 35, is far too small to generate conclusions about the views of second-language educators in eight countries, let alone for all of Asia.
- As Rubin, Greene, and Schneider (1994) point out, expressed attitudes are not always accurate indicators of what people actually do or even believe. Thus, although most participants indicated that they would teach gender-inclusive English, no data were collected on their actual teaching practices.
- Where participants were asked to choose between gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive English, perhaps they also should have been able to choose both. Several participants indicated that this was their real view on some of the items. Indeed, this issue, like so many others, is much more complicated than any either/or choices would indicate.

Some ideas suggest themselves for future research:

- As indicated above, Asian educators’ behavior in their teaching, materials writing, etc. should be studied.
- Asian students’ views and practices should be investigated.
- The gender-exclusive/-inclusive issue deserves attention in other languages (Ho Wah Kam, personal communication). Two studies currently underway, by Jacobs, Sevier, and Teo (in progress), and Zhuo (1995), address the second and third research ideas, respectively. In addition, Gomard (1995) found that changes toward gender-inclusive language were also underway in Danish and German.

## Conclusion

We want to stress the context-dependent nature of language use. We urge that educators make their own decision based on their linguistic and sociocultural knowledge and beliefs, and that they encourage their students to do the same. As Martin (1989: 62-3) writes:

Conscious knowledge of language and the way it functions in social contexts then enables us to make choices, to exercise control. As long as we are ignorant of language, it and ideological systems it embraces control us. Learning about language means learning to choose. Knowledge is power. Meaning is choice. Please choose.

## Study Two

Ripple effects: The case of gender-inclusive language in Singapore

Singapore has developed its own indigenized variety of English (Tay 1993). As the English that develops in Outer and Expanding Circle countries reflects their linguistic and cultural situation (Kachru 1995), it may be asked whether or not the conditions that led to the shift toward gender-inclusive English in Inner Circle countries are also present in Singapore and elsewhere. Such an analysis is beyond the scope of this article. This study was restricted to examining the presence or absence of gender-inclusive English in the writing of a group of Singaporeans. The researchers are aware of no previous studies of this issue.

Singapore is an Outer Circle country. A former British colony, this multilingual nation now has English as one of its four official languages, the medium of instruction from the first year of schooling, and its main lingua franca (Cheah 1996). Most Singaporeans are not native speakers of English, and the government has generally succeeded in helping people maintain proficiency in one of the other

three official languages—Chinese, Malay, and Tamil.

Singapore's prestige English-language newspaper, *The Straits Times*, uses gender-exclusive English. Referring to similar efforts at language reform, this time in support of people with disabilities, one of its columnists (Tan [1995: 7], cited in Gupta and Chew [1995]) spoke out against what he called "the style of the politically correct in the West," fearing that it would impoverish the English language, curb freedom of expression, and have no effect because "sticks and stones can break my bones but words can never hurt me."

Changes in labor and educational patterns that have occurred in Inner Circle countries, such as greater work-force participation by women, more women in prestige occupations, and higher levels of educational attainment by women, are also present in Singapore (Arumainathan 1973; Lau 1993). Such social changes are believed to correlate with language change (Wolfson 1989).

## Purpose of the study

The study aimed to answer the following questions:

- What are the opinions of Singapore junior-college students and their teachers on the use of gender-inclusive English? Do opinions differ according to the sex of the students?
- What percentage of Singapore junior-college students write in gender-inclusive English?

## Methods

### *The sample*

Participants were students at a Singapore junior college, and four of their English and literature teachers. Students who do well on the Cambridge ordinary-level exam, taken at about age 16, are eligible to attend junior col-

lege. These two-year institutions prepare students for the Cambridge advanced-level exam, which is a key criterion for university admission. Both the ordinary-level and advanced-level are external exams for all major school subjects, including English.

Writing scripts from 181 students (93 female and 88 male) were examined, while 258 students (141 female and 117 male) completed a questionnaire on their views and practices regarding gender-inclusive English. As the questionnaires were done anonymously, it was not possible to know if some of the students whose writing was examined had also completed the questionnaire. Six students—four females and two males—were interviewed. They had been selected by one of their teachers as representing a random sample of students. Four teachers—two females and two males—were interviewed. Three were Singaporean, one British. They had been recommended by the same teacher as representing a cross-section of experienced teachers. Their teaching experience ranged from 7 to 20 years.

### *Materials*

The 15-item student questionnaire used in this study (Appendix 3) was an adaptation of one used by Rubin, Greene, and Schneider (1994) to collect data on the views and practices of students at a US university regarding gender-exclusive/-inclusive English. The questionnaire had two sections. The first was designed to provide data on (i) students' awareness of the issue, (ii) practices at their previous and current educational institutions, (iii) their views on the fairness of gender-exclusive English, and (iv) their level of concern about the issue. The second section of the questionnaire provided demographic data, i.e., students' sex.

The interview questions for the students were open-ended, designed to probe deeply into the issues raised in the questionnaire. The teachers were asked open-ended questions about (i) their own awareness of the issue, (ii)

whether they mentioned the topic in their classes, (iii) whether they graded gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English differently, (iv) which form they thought students used most, and (v) which form students were exposed to in their reading.

### *Data collection*

Data were collected through (i) the questionnaire completed by students, (ii) the interviews with students and teachers, and (iii) the students' writing. Students completed the questionnaire in a large lecture hall with guidance from Mr. Jacobs. They were told not to write their names on the questionnaire and assured that it was not connected to their grades. Mr. Jacobs then gave them a two-minute introduction to the topic, after which he went through each item, explaining it and giving students time to complete it before proceeding to the next item. After the questionnaires were completed, he gave students a 35-minute presentation on the larger issue of language variation and change. He did not state his own views on the issue—he supports and uses gender-inclusive usage but believes people should make their own informed decisions—until the end of the presentation, long after the questionnaires had been collected.

After the presentation, 10-minute interviews were conducted with the six students in groups of three in an open area on campus. The four teachers, none of whom had attended the presentation, were interviewed individually in a study room in the college library. Each interview lasted from 10 to 15 minutes.

As part of their preparation for the advanced-level exam, each student wrote a practice essay in response to 1 of 12 writing prompts similar to those that appear on the exam. The essays had been written before the questionnaire data were collected. Afterward, writing scripts for three of the prompts were chosen for analysis, as these three prompts seemed to generate many instances of third-person singular, a lan-



guage feature that may be relatively useful for understanding people's practices regarding gender-exclusive/-inclusive language. The topics of these three prompts were (i) the meaning of love, (ii) problems faced by teenagers, and (iii) whether or not it is worthwhile for a country to spend its time and money to train athletes for international competition. The typical script was approximately 633 words long, based on nine randomly selected scripts.

### *Data analysis*

Descriptive statistics were obtained for the questions in section 1 of the questionnaire. Then, data on respondents' sex from section 2 of the questionnaire were used to run chi-square tests to see if significant differences existed between females and males in their responses to items 4 and 5 of section 1: (i) whether they used gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English more frequently and (ii) whether they believed gender-exclusive English is unfair to females, respectively. In item 4, responses indicating "I don't remember" were dropped from the chi-square calculation. A significance level of .05 was used for all inferential statistics in the study. Data from the interviews were combined with those from the questionnaire to better understand student behaviors in their essay writing, to which we now turn.

The writing scripts were coded into one of six categories based on the presence of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive language. The categories were

- gender-exclusive only;
- gender-inclusive only;
- mixed gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive, more gender-exclusive;
- mixed, more gender-inclusive;
- mixed, equal number of instances of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive; and
- not explicitly gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive.

The coding was done by two of the authors, who first met to discuss randomly selected scripts and to agree on coding definitions. Inter-rater agreement, established by the two researchers independently coding eight scripts, was 100%. (Inter-rater agreement refers to the extent to which two or more raters code the same scripts in the same way.) The two researchers then divided the rest of the scripts and coded them. Any instances of questionable coding were noted for later discussion.

Rubin, Greene, and Schneider (1994) coded the use of plural forms, e.g., "Architects should keep their clients informed" (fourth category above), as gender-inclusive. While the researchers in the current study believe that this is one of the best ways to implement gender-inclusive English, it was not coded as such here because it was not possible to unambiguously see it in this way.

The resulting coding of students' writing on the practice exam was analyzed using descriptive statistics to see

- how many students were in each category,
- how many used explicitly gender-inclusive forms (combining the second to fifth categories), and
- how many students did not use gender-exclusive language (combining the second to sixth categories).

To see if the writing of females and males differed in terms of the use of explicit gender-exclusive/-inclusive forms, a chi-square test was conducted, comparing the frequency of people of each sex in category one and those in a combination of the second to fifth categories.

## Results

### *Questionnaires*

Descriptive statistics from the student questionnaires will be presented first (see Table 1), followed by inferential statistics.

Approximately half the students had heard of the issue of language and gender (item 1). As to whether gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English had been taught at their primary and secondary schools (item 2), of those students who could remember the issue arising, 31% indicated gender-exclusive, 6% gender-inclusive, and 35% said either was acceptable. At the junior college where they were studying (item 3), the percentage of students indicating that gender-exclusive English was taught fell to 19%, while 6% indicated gender-inclusive was the norm, and 40% said either was acceptable. As to their own writing (item 4), 61% reported using gender-exclusive English, 29% gender-inclusive, and 10% stated that they could not remember. When asked if gender-exclusive English was unfair to females

(item 5), 65% replied that it was not and 35% that it was. Chi-square analyses of responses to item 4 showed no significant difference in the number of females and males reporting use of gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English in their writing ( $\chi^2=.23$ ). However, on item 5 significantly more females indicated that they felt gender-exclusive English was unfair to females ( $\chi^2=15.98$ ).

### Interviews

In their interviews, the six students gave several reasons why some of them preferred gender-exclusive English:

- It is the conventional way.
- Teachers had told them to use it.
- Alternatives were unfamiliar or clumsy (e.g.,

**TABLE 1. Student responses to questionnaire on their past experiences, current practices, and views related to the issue of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive English (%)**

Questionnaire item	Female	Male	Total
1. Heard of the issue of language and gender			
a. Yes	75 (29)	54 (21)	129 (50)
b. No	66 (26)	63 (24)	129 (50)
2. Primary and secondary school teachers' policy			
a. Generally taught gender-exclusive	48 (18)	33 (13)	81 (31)
b. Generally taught gender inclusive	9 (3)	6 (2)	15 (6)
c. Generally said either was acceptable	47 (18)	44 (17)	91 (35)
d. I don't remember	36 (14)	38 (15)	74 (28)
3. Junior college teachers' policy			
a. Generally taught gender-exclusive	25 (10)	23 (9)	48 (19)
b. Generally taught gender-inclusive	9 (4)	7 (3)	16 (6)
c. Generally said either was acceptable	58 (23)	46 (18)	104 (40)
d. I don't remember	49 (19)	41 (16)	90 (35)
4. In your own writing, which do you use more frequently?			
a. Gender-exclusive	89 (34)	68 (26)	157 (61)
b. Gender-inclusive	45 (17)	30 (12)	75 (29)
c. I don't remember	7 (3)	19 (7)	26 (10)
5. Do you believe that gender-exclusive English is unfair to females?			
a. Yes	64 (25)	25 (10)	89 (35)
b. No	77 (30)	91 (35)	168 (65)

Note: Discrepancies in percentage totals are due to rounding errors. Discrepancies in response totals are not corrected due to difficulty of retrieving the records.

“An architect should keep his or her clients informed” meant extra words and effort).

- Gender-exclusive English was not wrong.

One male student who used gender-inclusive English stated that he had asked one of his secondary-school teachers about which to use. After being told it was optional, he elected to use the gender-inclusive because he saw it as fairer. All students seemed to feel that the language people heard and saw did not have a big impact on their thoughts or actions.

In their interviews, the four teachers stated that they were all aware of the issue of gender-exclusive/-inclusive English. Not surprisingly, the British interviewee became familiar with the general issue of language and gender the earliest, in the 1970s in his home country. He now makes a conscious effort to use gender-inclusive English. One Singaporean stated that he first became aware of the issue in 1987 while working on a Ministry of Education project to write history textbooks, when a British consultant changed “mankind” to “humanity.” This gave rise to a lot of discussion and led the teacher to use gender-inclusive English.

The teachers felt their students used more gender-exclusive English, but all accepted either gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive forms, with the exception of singular forms of “they,” e.g., “An architect should keep their clients informed.” However, there was less unanimity as to the teachers’ own language use.

The two males reported using more gender-inclusive English than did the two females.

One female teacher noted that students were exposed to a lot of gender-inclusive English, as they read periodicals from the US. The effect of the periodicals would constitute a less personal, but perhaps more powerful for being more pervasive, form of ripple effect from an Inner Circle country.

### *Writing scripts*

Table 2 shows the coding of the writing scripts into the six categories by the writer’s sex. When categories 2-5—the categories that involve at least some use of explicit gender-inclusive English—are combined, it can be seen that more than half the students were using at least some gender-inclusive forms in their writing, not to mention the fact that category 6, into which 17% of students fell, can also be counted as gender-inclusive. Results of the chi-square test showed no significant difference in the use of gender-exclusive/-inclusive forms between females and males ( $X=1.92$ ).

### Discussion

#### *The research questions*

The study began with two research questions:

- What are the opinions of Singapore junior-college students and their teachers on

**TABLE 2. Coding of students’ writing scripts by sex of writer (%)**

<i>Category</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Total</i>
1. Gender-exclusive only	21 (12)	28 (15)	49 (27)
2. Gender-inclusive only	12 (7)	16 (9)	28 (15)
3. Mixed, more gender-exclusive	24 (13)	20 (11)	44 (24)
4. Mixed, more gender-inclusive	16 (9)	10 (6)	26 (14)
5. Mixed, equal number of instances of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive	4 (2)	0 (0)	4 (2)
6. No explicit gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive	11 (6)	19 (10)	30 (17)
TOTALS	88 (49)	93 (51)	181

Note: Discrepancies in percentage totals are due to rounding errors.

the issue of the use of gender-inclusive English? Do they differ according to the sex of the students?

- What percentage of Singapore junior-college students use gender-inclusive English in their writing?

The data show that gender-inclusive English was widely, but not unanimously, acceptable among students and teachers, with female students tending to view it more favorably than males. Further, almost 50% of students' writing contained at least one instance of explicit gender-inclusive English, and only 27% contained only gender-exclusive forms. However, there were no significant differences between sexes in their reported and observed use of gender-exclusive/-inclusive forms in writing.

The findings of this study demonstrate that gender-inclusive forms are present in the English of an important segment of Singaporeans. Further evidence of the incomplete transition to gender-inclusive in Singapore English comes from no less than Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong who, in an address to university students about his party's election manifesto, was quoted in a local newspaper as saying: "In Singapore 21, every Singaporean can dream. More than that, he or she can fulfil his or her dream. Not just the 5Cs...but the non-materialistic aspects of life too! And everyone can be the best he is capable of" (Ng 1996: 3).

Lack of previous studies makes it difficult to speculate on whether the data in this study represent a trend toward greater use of gender-inclusive English, but given the trend internationally, at least in Inner Circle countries, it may be reasonable to suggest that gender-inclusive usage has increased and will continue increasing. This is in line with a study of the views and practices of 35 Asian second-language educationists, mostly from Southeast Asia, on gender-exclusive/-inclusive English (Jacobs et al. 1996).

The ripple effect from Inner Circle countries to an Outer Circle country may be attrib-

uted to a tendency of Outer Circle countries to look to the Inner Circle for usage norms and to want to be up-to-date with the latest in language fashion. At the same time, attention should be brought to other, related changes in Inner Circle countries which have also occurred in Singapore such as those in female labor and education patterns.

#### *Future research*

Topics that future researchers may wish to investigate include

- whether or not similar changes are taking place in the English of other Outer Circle countries, in the English of Expanding Circle countries, as well as in other languages (Gomard 1995);
- the interaction in bilinguals and multilinguals of related changes in their various languages, situational variation in use of gender-exclusive/-inclusive (Rubin, Greene, and Schnieder 1994); and
- changes in teaching methods and materials, which may affect student use of different language forms.

An example of the latter idea is a study of the treatment of female and male characters in Singapore primary-school textbooks (Gupta and Lee 1989; Ong, forthcoming).

#### *Language and society*

One point that stood out from the interviews of the six students was the seeming rejection, even by those who supported the use of gender-inclusive English, of the Whorfian Hypothesis (Whorf 1956) that language plays a powerful role in shaping thinking. One possible explanation of this is that as all these students were bi- if not multilingual, they may feel a less emotional connection to English, seeing it merely as a vehicle for accomplishing tasks rather than as an integral part of their being. Nevertheless, perhaps the link between

thought and language is an area that educators might wish to stress more, as research suggests that gender-exclusive language does indeed affect people's thinking (e.g., McConnell and Fazio [1996]) and especially as social-constructionist views of language (Halliday 1978) gain greater prominence.

In this social-constructionist vein, Cheah (1996: 218), speaking about English, stated: "[B]eyond its instrumental value, the language has also become an important part of being a Singaporean. ... In fact, English is now closely associated with the forging of a new Singaporean identity." Students need to consider the relation between the language choices they make, e.g., using gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English, and the place of females and males in Singapore society.

Freed (1995) noted a trend in the 1990s toward cross-cultural perspectives on the interaction of language and gender. This trend recognizes that gender "is a societal construct that interacts with language as well as with numerous other social, psychological, and political factors in ways that are still poorly understood" (Freed 1995: 9). Perhaps more could be done to move the broader public toward such a view of language as a living, varying organism, and away from one that sees language as fixed, and varieties of language as good or bad, portents of success or failure. With such a dynamic view of language, the waves caused by the ripple effects of social and language change will not catch the public unaware.

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## APPENDIX 1

### Questionnaire

#### Section 1

1. Country \_\_\_\_\_
2. Number of years as educationist \_\_\_\_\_
3. Current position (include education level of students) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Sex \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 2

(Note: Gender-exclusive refers to the use of male nouns and pronouns, such as “man” and “he,” to refer to both males and females. Gender-inclusive refers to the use of nouns and pronouns, such as “humanity” and “they,” which more clearly include females.)

5. When you were a student, were you taught gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
6. Had you heard about gender-inclusive English before coming for this course?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
7. In the English you read in the past year—in and out of school—before coming to RELC, approximately what percentage of the time did you find gender-inclusive English being used? (Circle one.)
  - a. 100%
  - b. 75%
  - c. 50%
  - d. 25%
  - e. 0%
  - f. I didn't pay attention
8. As a teacher or materials writer do you currently teach/use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)

- a. Gender-exclusive
- b. Gender-inclusive

9. Would you advise your colleagues to teach/use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
10. If teachers/materials writers in your country teach their students about gender-inclusive English or use it in the materials they write, what kind of reaction would they receive from administrators? (Circle one.)
  - a. Positive
  - b. Neutral
  - c. Negative
11. If teachers or materials writers in your country teach their students about gender-inclusive English or use it in the materials they write, what kind of reaction would they receive from society? (Circle one.)
  - a. Positive
  - b. Neutral
  - c. Negative
12. Will you in the future teach/use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
13. Would you encourage students to use gender-inclusive English in their writing and speaking? (Circle one.)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

#### Section 3

For each pair of sentences below, put a tick next to the one sentence in the pair that you would generally be most likely to use in your own writing, assuming that you had to choose one.

1. \_\_\_ Parents Evenings are important not only to discuss your child's progress in individual subjects, but also to consider his involvement in this community in general.

- \_\_\_ Parents Evenings are important not only to discuss your children's progress in individual subjects, but also to consider their involvement in this community in general.
2. \_\_\_ The student who is satisfied with his or her performance on the pretest will take the posttest.  
\_\_\_ The student who is satisfied with his performance on the pretest will take the posttest.
3. \_\_\_ Engineers and technologists use physics to solve practical problems for the benefit of mankind.
- \_\_\_ Engineers and technologists use physics to solve practical problems for the benefit of humanity.
4. (Note: Some of those attending the conference may be female.)  
\_\_\_ There are about 100 businesspeople present at the conference.  
\_\_\_ There are about 100 businessmen present at the conference.
5. \_\_\_ The average pupil is worried about his grades.  
\_\_\_ The average pupil is worried about grades.

## APPENDIX 2

## Interview on the Use of Gender-exclusive/inclusive Language

## Interview questions

1. In the English you read in the past year—in and out of school—before coming to RELC, approximately what percentage of the time did you find gender-inclusive English being used? (Circle one.)
  - a. 100%
  - b. 75%
  - c. 50%
  - d. 25%
  - e. 0%
  - f. I didn't pay attention
 Please expand on this.
  
2. As a teacher or materials writer do you currently teach/use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
 Why? How? For example, will you model this type of English (gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive) in your speaking and writing? Will you use materials which use this type of English? Will you mark students wrong if they use the other type? Will you give students explanations about why they should use that type of English and exercises in which they practice using that type of English?
  
3. Would you advise your colleagues to teach/use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
 How would you go about convincing and teaching colleagues about this?
  
4. Will you in the future teach/use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English? (Circle one.)
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
 Why? Please refer to the various arguments on behalf of each type:
 

*Reasons for using gender-exclusive English:*

  - a. Attitude—Your readers/listeners may think you are a radical feminist who opposes traditional values.
  - b. Correctness—Gender-inclusive English may be considered wrong.
  - c. Tradition—Gender-exclusive English has been the standard way for many years. This was how we were taught.
  - d. Elegance—Expressions such as “he or she” are cumbersome. Just using “he” is more elegant language usage.
  - e. Importance—This whole gender-exclusive/gender-inclusive issue is such a small matter, when there are so many more important matters on which to spend instructional time.
  - f. Effectiveness—Even if gender-inclusive English is used, it will not change the problems that females face. Changing a few pronouns and nouns will not affect people's thinking and behavior.

*Reasons for using gender-inclusive English:*

  - a. Justice—Gender-inclusive English is fairer to females.
  - b. Comprehensibility—When gender-exclusive English is used, some people may not be clear that we are referring to both females and males.
  - c. Attitude—If we use gender-exclusive English, some people may feel that we are against equality for women.
  - d. Correctness—Standards are changing. Now, and especially in the future, gender-exclusive English may be seen as incorrect.
  
5. Would you encourage students to use gender-inclusive English in their writing and speaking? (Circle one.)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
 Why? Why not?
  
6. When you first heard or saw gender-inclusive English, did it sound and look strange to you?
  
7. Who is your favorite movie star? (Just kidding)
  
8. Did you say you will use gender-inclusive English just to please us, the researchers?
  
9. If you had to write an essay in English and the essay would be used by your Ministry of Education to decide whether you would get a better job, would you use gender-exclusive or gender-inclusive English in the essay?

## APPENDIX 3

### Questionnaire

In recent years, concern has arisen that females may be excluded when words such as “mankind,” “chairman,” and “he” are used to refer to both males and females. Some people believe that this is an important issue and changes should be made in English. Other people, however, feel that no changes are needed and/or that it is not an important issue.

We would appreciate your honest responses about this topic. This questionnaire is purely for research purposes and will not affect your marks in any way. Do not write your name on this questionnaire.

Thank you very much for your help.

#### Definitions

Gender-exclusive refers to language in which words specifically referring to males only are used to include both males and females, e.g., fireman, chairman, he/his. (A student should be paid for his work.)

Gender-inclusive refers to language in which both men and women are included, e.g., firefighter, chairperson, he/she or their. (A student should be paid for his/her or their work.)

#### Section 1

Please circle the appropriate response.

1. Have you heard about the issue of language and gender before?
  - a. Yes
  - b. No
 Comments \_\_\_\_\_

2. What has been the typical policy of your past teachers at primary and secondary school concerning the issue of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive English?
  - a. Generally taught gender-exclusive.
  - b. Generally taught gender-inclusive.
  - c. Generally said either was acceptable.
  - d. I don't remember the issue ever came up.
 Comments \_\_\_\_\_

3. What has been the typical policy of your past teachers at junior college concerning the issue of gender-exclusive and gender-inclusive English?
  - a. Generally taught gender-exclusive.
  - b. Generally taught gender-inclusive.
  - c. Generally said either was acceptable.
  - d. I don't remember the issue ever came up.
 Comments \_\_\_\_\_

4. In your own writing, which do you use more frequently?
  - a. Gender-exclusive
  - b. Gender-inclusive
  - c. I don't remember.
 Why? \_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you believe that gender-exclusive English is unfair to females? Please select one answer.
  - a. Yes
 

Why do you believe this? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
 

Why do you believe this? \_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you believe that gender-inclusive English is unfair to males? Please select one answer.
  - a. Yes
 

Why do you believe this? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
 

Why do you believe this? \_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you believe that gender-inclusive English is unfair to females? Please select one answer.
  - a. Yes
 

Why do you believe this? \_\_\_\_\_
  - b. No
 

Why do you believe this? \_\_\_\_\_

#### Section 2

1. Sex: Female \_\_\_\_\_ Male \_\_\_\_\_