

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) activism in the United States has a long and complex history. Elakor (cited in: Wexelbaum, 2011, p.5) describes LGBTQ community as a diverse group of people, difficult to identify as one community due to differences in class, culture, education, career path, and political affiliation. Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals spectrum in LGBTQ community have fought for their civil rights, which come to a result when the Supreme Court of the United States guaranteed the right to marry for same-sex couples on June 26, 2015. The issue has unified the LGBTQ community and propelled them into national and international spotlight. According to Choi (2013, p. 5), LGBTQ people in the United States are able to come together as a community due to the circumstance that they share an equivalent experience in combating various forms of discrimination in regards to their sexual orientation and/or their gender identity.

Despite of the completion by Lesbians, Gays and Bisexuals who are granted the legalization of same-sex marriage by the government, the rest of LGBTQ spectrum (namely Transgender and Queer) consider that they still receive unjust treatment. In their case, the discrimination takes place in a form of slurs and insensitive or offensive comments about their gender identity. For instance, findings from GLSEN's National

Education Climate Survey consistently show that nine out of ten LGBTQ individuals repeatedly hear the word “gay” used in a negative way and three-fourths of individuals regularly hear remarks, such as “faggot” (pejorative term used chiefly in North America primarily to refer a queer individual) or “dyke” (slang noun meaning a feminine queer) in daily conversation (Ventur, 2016, p.3). These findings indicate that the language used in everyday discourse plays a major part in marginalizing LGBTQ community.

In addition, Transgender and Queer spectrum in the community claim that they face discrimination which is deeply rooted in how language is exercised. Elrod (2014, p.11) emphasizes that their main concern is on the lack of inclusivity because in the English language, the word "he" is used to refer to males and "she" to refer to females, but some people in LGBTQ community identify themselves as neither gender, both gender, or other variation. This infers that the English language creates the expectation that sex ought to be on a binary through the use of “he” or “she” to describe human beings. King (2016, p. 17) argues that this usage of language leaves no room for other options and makes it difficult for English speakers to conceive any middle ground.

To overcome this, transgender and genderqueer community advocate for Preferred Gender Pronoun (PGP) to be employed in communicating with them. Chase and Ressler define PGP as the pronoun or set of pronouns that an individual would like others to use when talking to or about that individual (2009, p. 24). Some people prefer to use non-binary gender or gender inclusive pronouns due to the sense of inclusivity

and to liberate themselves from the confinement of generic binary pronouns. The most commonly used singular non-binary gender pronouns in English are ‘they’ (similar to plural pronoun), ze (sometimes spelled zie) and hir for Queer and Transgender (Li m, 2016, p.38).

The use of non-binary gender pronoun has been growing in various platforms such as internet fanfiction, Tumblr blogs and social media conversation (Oakley, 2016, p. 8). The underlying problem of this research, however is the practice of proposing this method to higher education. This is seen in writing guidelines of various universities in the United States such as University of Pittsburgh, University of Minnesota, Michigan State University and Appalachian State University. These universities are the forerunners in using non-binary gender pronoun as their guidelines which are widely accessible on each university websites. Their college officials claim that the university students want the use of gender pronouns not to be restricted just amongst them; they want to use it in academic writings and even lectures and seminars (Walker, 2017, p.2). This phenomenon implies that preferred gender pronouns advocacy has proliferated in academic sphere, in favor of LGBTQ activists who claim that this practice helps them in combating discrimination.

Scelfofeb describes universities in United States as inclusive and progressive learning institutions associated with left-wing liberals due to the fact that they promote equality, minority rights and social justice (2015, p.1). Due to this circumstance, LGBTQ activism is able to flourish and advocates of preferred gender pronouns are

able to exploit higher education as their main platform. Regardless of the fact that United States universities have a tendency to be progressive and often time associated with left-wing, academicians from the other side of political spectrum (i.e. right-wing conservative) also co-exist in the academic environment (Cramer, 2014, p.7). A recent study for instance, shows that 72% of 1,643 academics identified themselves as being 'liberal in the US sense and only 15% as being 'conservative'. According to Prolic (2017, p.2) these numbers are arguably problematic because as places of higher learning and intellectual challenge, universities should not be converting students to their left-leaning views. Instead, students should be fostering diversity of opinion and not treating conservatives as total oddities. The phenomenon of preferred gender pronoun in university writing guidelines implies that progressiveness is being glorified more than ever before, to the point that it stifles freedom of speech by restricting what people should and should not say (Craig, 2016, p.2). Thus, the ideological divergence between the two continuums will be the fundamental issue of this research.

Previous studies have shown positive impression in using non-binary gender pronouns for individuals within LGBTQ community. King (2016, p. 11) concludes that the practice enables a combat to hegemonic heteronormativity because discrimination is connected to heteronormative language and it has the potential to be undone through the use of sensitive and inclusive language. In alignment with this, Oakley (2016, p. 2) states that the practice of using preferred gender pronouns promotes a better mental health for transgender and genderqueer by lessening fuels of anxiety, depression and

other stress-related mental and creating an embraced affordance in community-accepted conventions of gender identity construction. Lim (2016, p.54) highlights that the use of non-binary gender pronoun helps maintaining inclusivity by strengthening cohesion between non-LGBTQ people with Transgender and Queer. Lastly, Miltersen's finding suggests that the pronouns are used to express, explore, and negotiate the identities, in particular in relation to gender identities. (2016, p. 24). Those findings complement each other by showing various claims of necessity and urgency in favor of using preferred gender pronoun. This shows that it is important to elaborate a juxtaposing perspective in regards to this issue.

Nonetheless, findings from those four previous studies are still insufficient because they overlook a number of major drawbacks. From linguistic perspective, PGP arguably creates variation in heteronormative language which still utilizes "he" and "she" in everyday. Also, in terms of morphology and semantic, this usage creates variation in word coinage and promotes ambiguity. The concept derives from Dennis Barron a linguist who argues that non-binary gender pronouns such as *zie* and *hir* are considered to be artificially made and are ill-served by the standard English singular pronoun set. Language authorities Lindley Murray, Joseph Priestly, and Hugh Blair, amongst others, campaigned against pronoun irregularities in pronoun use, such as lack of agreement in gender and number. In addition, 'they' as a singular pronoun opens up a room for vagueness in compare to 'they' as plural pronoun (Barron, 2009, p. 25). The

proponents of PGP propose this linguistic reform despite of the fact that it sparked controversy among academician.

One of the most notorious case is Dr. Peterson (cited in: Conrad, 2017, p. 1) who believes that others do not have the authority to require Peterson to address transgender and genderqueer students in a newly-hatched vocabulary devised to oppress the gender-binary conventional practice. Most importantly, Peterson claims that the requirement to use preferred gender pronoun infringes on freedom of thought and speech. He argues that language is key to social change—and to the rise of left-wing bias (Cited in: Beatty, 2017, p.2). Language is the crucial battleground and changes in language prompt changes in perception; significant changes in moral perception can begin with linguistic assaults based on individual desires rather than moral categories. Based on Peterson's argumentation, to conduct an in-depth research and to distinct from previous studies, this study will not only analyze the phenomenon from linguistic standpoint, but also ideological perspective.

This research argues that ideological divergence in academic sphere prompted by this phenomenon will stimulate proliferation of politically correct language, i.e. linguistic concept of using inclusive and neutral language, based upon the idea that language represents thought, and may even control thought (Van Boven, 2000, p. 22). In academic writing, politically correct language tries to control students' thought by limiting or expanding what pronoun to use in describing certain individual. The practice of using politically correct language has previously started in various platforms

such as internet fanfiction, Tumblr blogs and social media conversation (Oakley, 2016, p. 8). The proliferation towards academic sphere shows that political correctness is a tool used by preferred gender pronouns advocates to promote of left-wing propaganda. This claim is based on Jordan Peterson's assertion (cited: in Tucker and VanDenbaukel, 2016. p.16). that preferred gender pronoun advocacy shares strong structural similarities with the Marxist ideology that drove Soviet Communist. As an ideology, both Marxism and Political Correctness views culture as the basis of class struggle and relies on deconstruction to undermine underlying cultural values in order to pave the way to fundamentally transform a society (Kimball, 2007, p 5). Political correctness takes form as Cultural Marxism which is an ideology derived from critique of traditional morality and values whose goal is a global keeping with the principle's Marxist theory (Lind, 2004, p, 2). Thus, politically correct language is seen as a concrete example of how ideology (i.e. Cultural Marxism) is able to hijack language.

Based on the elaboration above, this research will be conducted in two layers. On the first layer of this study, the writer will deploy morphological and semantic classification of preferred gender pronouns to investigate linguistics variation. Linguistics analysis is inevitably essential to scrutinize the nature of this phenomenon because to explore further from theoretical and ideological standpoint we need to understand it from its origin and meaning. Secondly, to examine political correctness as a left-wing propaganda the writer will investigate the relation between this phenomenon with Cultural-Marxism. The data is employed to analyze university

writing guidelines from University of Pittsburgh, University of Minnesota, State University of Michigan and Appalachian State University.

1.2 Research Problems

1. How politically correct language contrasts the heteronormative linguistic principles in morphology and semantics?
2. How Cultural-Marxism is manifested through politically correct language?

1.3 Objectives of Study

There are a number of purposes of this study:

- 1 To analyze the heteronormative linguistics variation of non-binary gender pronouns
- 2 To investigate the utilization of Cultural-Marxism in politically correct language.

1.4 Scope of Study

The writer limits the scope on analyzing the use of various non-binary pronouns promoted in academic writing guidelines from University of Pittsburg, University of Minnesota, Michigan State University and Appalachian State University.

1.5 Significance of Study

The outcomes of this study are expected to contribute benefit in several aspects. First of all, this study is a significant endeavor for a robust linguistic analysis in

morphology and semantics which will enhance further understanding of word coinage and semantic ambiguity. Secondly, from the perspective of cultural study, this study will enhance critical thinking in analyzing current issues about LGBTQ community behavior on the sphere of academic writing. Thirdly, this study will prompt further scrutiny of the use of non-binary pronoun as a tool for left-wing propaganda. Lastly, this study will serve as a reference for future researchers on the subject of linguistic and cultural studies.