

Date and Time: Friday, 5 January 2024 2:59:00PM IST

Job Number: 213878135

Document (1)

1. [Court sets the course, mind your language](#)

Client/Matter: -None-

Search Terms: Hindustan Times Op-ed on how courts are setting the course right by reframing the language and words.

Search Type: Natural Language

Narrowed by:

Content Type
News

Narrowed by
Timeline: Previous 6 Months (After July 05, 2023)

[Court sets the course, mind your language](#)

Hindustan Times

October 4, 2023 Wednesday

Copyright 2023 HT Media Ltd. All [Rights](#) Reserved



Length: 828 [words](#)

Dateline: India

Body

India, Oct. 4 -- In the introduction to the recent guidelines issued by the Supreme [Court](#) (SC) on the use of gender-neutral [language](#), Justice DY Chandrachud writes: "[Language](#) is critical to the life of the law. [Words](#) are the vehicle through which the values of the law are communicated. [Words](#) transmit the ultimate intention of the lawmaker or the judge to the nation. However, the [language](#) a judge uses reflects not only their interpretation of the law, but their perception of society as well. Where the [language](#) of judicial discourse reflects antiquated or incorrect ideas about women, it inhibits the transformative project of the law and the Constitution of India, which seek to secure equal [rights](#) to all persons, irrespective of gender." What is true for the dispensation of justice is also true for workplace and social [settings](#). The common use of masculine pronouns (such as manager, chairman, human) to refer to both men and women can have harmful effects on both men and women.

Lera Boroditsky, (2009) based on her work in MIT labs, showed that [language](#) indeed shaped thought. In testing for qualities assigned to something that is given a feminine or masculine gender in different [languages](#), it was shown that the qualities associated with "key" by Germans, in the German [language](#), "key" is masculine whereas in the Spanish [language](#), "key" is associated with being feminine. For those whom German was their primary [language](#), "key" was associated with adjectives such as "hard, heavy, jagged, metal, serrated, and useful, whereas the Spanish speakers associated "key" with golden, intricate, little, lovely, shiny, and tiny".

The case with the use of the [word](#) 'bridge' is the opposite - it is feminine in German and masculine in Spanish. The [word](#) 'bridge' was associated with adjectives such as beautiful, elegant, fragile, peaceful, pretty, and slender, and Spanish speakers described the bridge as big, dangerous, long, strong, sturdy, and towering. While a key is a key and a bridge is a bridge, the assignment of masculine or feminine changed the perception of key and bridge for German and Spanish speakers.

As leaders, we need to understand that [language](#) has the power to shape social stereotypes, which, in turn, lead to status differentials among men and women employees. Currently, the [language](#) we use pegs women lower and is predominantly androcentric. For example, referring to a mixed group of men and women team members as "guys" may seem innocuous and yet it does exclude the women in the group. It would have been all [right](#), if, for brevity, the leader or others referred to the group as "gals" half the [time](#) and "guys" half the [time](#). Also, why can men be simply referred to as Mr, irrespective of their marital status, and women need to be referred to as Miss, Ms, or Mrs, to identify their marital status?

Two prominent categories of traits - communality which is considering other people (examples include empathic, affectionate, helpful, kind, sympathetic, interpersonally sensitive, nurturant, gentle) and agentic which is dedicated to the pursuit of the self (aggressive, ambitious, dominant, forceful, independent, self-sufficient, self-confident) - have been shown to be linked to stereotypes in leadership. Many of the communal traits are identified with the

Court sets the course, mind your language

feminine and the agentic traits are identified with the masculine. Ideal leaders are typically expected to be agentic by both men and women.

The expectation of communal traits from women in the workplace results in women in the workplace being expected to chime in for all social events - be the pretty face of the organisation, dress up well when there are visitors, serve tea or water when they are at a table (be it at lunch, meeting, or board).

When women refuse to play these roles, they are seen as poor citizens while the same is not said of men managers. Much of this behaviour stems from the stereotypes that are shaped and upheld by the use of gender-biased **language**.

Thus, I hope as leaders we will take note and start paying attention to our **language** and lean in to ask others to pay attention to the **language** used in their teams. Yes, it will seem like extra work in the beginning. People will resist the change but if leaders do not lead change that helps them realise the potential of many and attract talent, what is it that they would rather be doing?

The handbook released by the SC is advisory in nature and not obligatory. It is an opportune moment for leaders (of all kinds of organisations) to use it as a reference point to help start widespread change in the behaviour of their teams.

Neharika Vohra is professor of OB and chairperson, Ashank Desai Centre for Leadership and Organisational Development at IIM Ahmedabad. The views expressed are personal

Published by HT Digital Content Services with permission from **Hindustan Times**. For any query with respect to this article or any other content requirement, please contact Editor at contentservices@htlive.com

Classification

Language: ENGLISH

Publication-Type: Newswire

Subject: GOVERNMENT BODIES & OFFICES (90%); JUDGES (90%); SEX & GENDER ISSUES (90%); SUPREME **COURTS** (90%); CIVIL **RIGHTS** (78%); LAW **COURTS** & TRIBUNALS (78%); PERSONAL PRONOUNS (78%); WOMEN (78%); WOMEN WORKERS (78%)

Geographic: INDIA (91%)

Load-Date: October 4, 2023