

CONSTRUCTING AND MAINTAINING SEXIST IDEOLOGIES:
HORSES SWEAT, MEN PERSPIRE, WOMEN GLOW

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1. Introduction

... the rules for meaning, which are part of language are not natural; they were not present in the world and merely awaiting discovery by human beings. On the contrary anything could be discovered, for without them there is no frame of reference, no order, no possibility for systematic interpretation and understanding. Once made, however, these rules have a habit of becoming self-validating and self-perpetuating, regardless of any misapprehensions on which they may have initially been based. (Spender 1980: 3)

Abundant literature exists about language and sexist ideologies (e.g., Spender 1980; Smith 1985; Poynton 1985; Hellinger 1989; see also the articles in Seidel 1988; a good representative introductory reader on these issues has recently been published by Coates 1998). Guidelines are given for administrators, educators, and people in power to avoid sexist language. Through their work, linguists (mostly female linguists) have tried to make the society and the decision-makers notice and correct the practices that suppress women and prevent equal pay and opportunities from being realised. Linguistic research has frequently focused on "valued texts" – texts that matter in society. But as Hasan (1986: 125) points out, "ideologies live through the common everyday actions – both, verbal and non-verbal."

This paper exemplifies how constructing and maintaining sexist ideologies happens in two very trivial texts about the Sauna – that famous Finnish bath that is now known almost all over the world in its varied forms. These two texts are interesting because they present a concept that belongs to another culture to an audience with different cultural background and values. The texts are written to introduce a new concept to the society, but at the same time

they display the social organisation and values existing in that society at the time when they were written. The theoretical framework used for the analysis is a systemic-functional one, and the analysis demonstrates the choices of the view which is also constructed for us in the saying "horses sweat, men perspire and women glow".

2. About the Sauna and the texts analysed

Taking the Sauna – the Finnish bath – is for a Finn an event to which s/he has been socialised ever since babyhood. Earlier, the sauna was the place where life even began for many Finns, because, being a place where hot water was readily available, it was also used for giving birth. (More detailed descriptions of the sauna are available in most encyclopaedias or tourist guides on Finland.) The Sauna is one Finnish concept that has successfully been marketed abroad and has found its way to distant countries, e.g. to Australia where the texts analysed here were discovered.

Since the procedure of taking a sauna may be a new experience in the country to which the sauna has been "transported", the manufacturers, the importers, or caretakers of electric commercial saunas often provide the customers some instructions concerning how to take a sauna. I do not know who wrote the texts that will be analysed here. I found the texts at a sauna of a university sports centre in the early 1980's. When entering this sauna, the visitor was given a sheet of paper. On one side, there was an instructional text titled "Viking Sauna Bathing Instructions", and obviously this text was the one that the saunatakers were supposed to read first, if they were newcomers, so they would know which procedural steps are necessary when taking a sauna. This text will not be discussed here (it is, however, analysed in Ventola, in preparation). On the other side, the readers could find Text 1 and Text 2 which are given later in this paper.

3. About the generic function of the texts

Why these two texts were written, in addition to the generically instructional, step-by-step text, is not that obvious. They seem to be mixed in their *generic function and realisation* (for the notion of genre, see e.g., Martin 1992; Eggins 1994; Eggins – Martin 1997). Text 1 is partly instructional in realisation (indicated e.g., by imperative clauses: *Take to cold water slowly; but do try it; do not use the cold water for too long a period*). Text 2 is not so realised; it is more informative. Partly, both texts are descriptive, highlighting the effects of the sauna: *the blood circulation to the skin area is boosted* (Text 1), *Blood circulation is accelerated* (Text 2). Both texts promote the sauna to the readers, but they do it quite differently according to the gender of the readers, as will

be shown later (see also Goffman 1976; for the language of advertising in general, see e.g., Vestergaard – Schroder 1985; Cook 1992). In this promotional respect they are very close to the texts of advertisements, e.g., in appeal to the needs, *Skin needs moisture* (Text 1) and convincing the readers of the advantages, *regularly taken Saunas provide a certain way to a more comfortable and relaxed life through both its physical as well as its very definite physiological benefits* (Text 2). Text 2 even seems to appeal to the readers through scientific facts and historical explanation. From the point of view of generic realisation and the intended function, the texts are not extremely well-designed and written (see also Martin 1986). The focus of the analysis presented here is, however, not on the generic features of the texts, but rather on how gender as part of the interpersonal meaning influences the construction of the texts and how that also influences the construction of the ideational meanings in the texts. That is, I am interested in why the writer has written two separate texts and how the writer's perception of the gender of the reader makes him/her construct linguistically a relatively stereotypical view of how men and women are supposed to experience the sauna differently, thus helping the maintenance of sexist views in the society.

4. Register realisations in the texts

Both of the texts appear in the same context. In the systemic-functional approach, this level of analysis is called *register*, and the text will be analysed in terms of the variables of *Field* (the technical orientation of the text or the "subject matter", relating to the ideational function of language), *Mode* (the medium for communication, relating to the textual function of language) and *Tenor* (the participant relations, relating to the interpersonal function of language) (see Martin 1992; Eggins 1994; Halliday 1994). I shall first discuss the kind of register orientation to the texts their headings give to the reader and then how certain register features are further realised in the actual texts.

4.1. The headings of the texts

The wordings in the titles of the texts are supposed to give readers some orientation to the informative content (Field) of the texts. But as will be shown below they will also give us indications of the writer-reader relationships (Tenor). The wording may immediately suggest to us who the intended readers will be. If we saw the title (i), *Regular Sauna will make you a new person*, we would simply consider that the text that is being offered for reading is meant for both female and male readers. Similarly, if we read (ii), *Health treatment with Sauna for you*. If, however, we have the title (iii), *Beauty treatment with Sauna for you*, most of us would say that the intended reader

of the text is a female. What kind of a meaning is constructed here by these differences in these wordings? Grammatically speaking, *health treatment* and *beauty treatment* display the same structure: a nominal group, which in functional terms can be analysed as Classifier ^ Thing (followed by a Qualifier; see Halliday 1994 for the analytical terms). Semantically the lexical items *health* and *beauty* are not that far apart either – we could consider them related at least collocationally on the discourse semantic level. Titles (i) and (ii) seem to us more neutral as far as the gender of the intended reader is concerned than the title (iii). When we later read the texts analysed, we soon notice that the Classifier *beauty* in the wording *beauty treatment* is just the first realisation of the consistent lexicogrammatical choices that indicates to us that the reader of the text with that particular title is intended to be female. The title orients us immediately into the “feminine world” – if a man enters this world, he would be considered “sissy” or perhaps “gay” in the Australian cultural context where this text was found.

Headings usually predict the linguistic choices in the text itself. Thus we could find that both Title (i) and (ii), and perhaps even Title (iii) could be followed by a text that started with *Good health is preserved by four bulwarks, nutrition, digestion, exercise and sleep*. But only the following text, beginning, *In a sauna, you have the means of enjoying one of the most invigorating beauty treatments of all*, matches up with the intended gender-reader expectations awakened by Title (iii). This becomes even clearer when we look at the original headings and the text beginnings, where instead of *you* we have *women* as the addressees. Title (ii) was a constructed heading for the purpose of linguistic contrast. Titles (i) and (iii) were slightly modified for the discussion. The original titles make the intended addressee-orientation in terms of gender quite clear. Title (i) reads in its original form *Regular Sauna will make you a new man* (my emphasis) and Title (iii) *Beauty treatment with Sauna for women* (my emphasis). Title (i) is a major clause realised by a declarative mood and its orientation is informational, whereas Title (ii) is a minor clause realised by a mood and its orientation is interpersonal.

Whoever wrote the texts following these titles seems to subscribe to the view that “there’s a man’s world” and “there’s a woman’s world”; some texts are meant for males to read and others are written for females. This view is constructed to the reader, although the readers are in fact about to experience the same “real world experience”, i.e. physically taking a sauna. But the texts give us a slightly different view of how the sauna should affect a man and a woman and how they and their bodies should feel and experience the sauna. Let us look at the texts and consider the gender-biased linguistic realisations in the two texts in detail.

4.2. Texts: Constructing Field according to gender

The texts (1) and (2) have been broken into clauses and clause complexes for easy reference (alpha/beta refer to hypotaxis; 1 and 2 to parataxis).

Text 1

Beauty treatment with sauna for women

(1) In a sauna, women have the means of enjoying one of the most invigorating beauty treatments of all. (2) Simply, it is the subjection of the skin to a perspiration inducing, humidity free warmth, followed by an application of cold water and fifteen minutes of rest. (3) This will help even the most jaded complexion to respond in a positively wonderful way. (4.1) You will revel like a child in the blissful feeling of soothing air of the Sauna (4.2.) and after the following cold shower, the glorious, stretched-out, good-for-the figure sensation has no equal. (5) The minimum rest period that completes the Viking sauna bath will leave you so refreshed and revitalised with both an inner and outer flow of well-being.

(6) After the pore expanding Sauna and a shower of cold water which will dilate the pores (sic), the blood circulation to the skin area is boosted. (7) There is nothing else equal to it. (8.1) A real beauty tonic that all can enjoy throughout the year, (8.2.) no matter what the weather. (9) Cold water baths are a part of the treatment at the world’s most expensive beauty clinics. (10.alpha) With Sauna there is no need for any shock tactics (10.beta) as, after a ten to fifteen minute session, your body becomes insulated against both heat and cold quite naturally. (11) Cold water will be just as pleasant as tepid water, winter or summer. (12) A few seconds of straight cold are enough. (13) After a rub down, re-enter the Sauna for a further ten minutes of relaxing warmth (14) – time for another shower. (15.1.alpha) Take to cold water slowly (15.1.beta) if you feel you must (15.2) but do try it, however briefly. (16.1.1) Do not use the cold water for too long a period (16.1.2) or you will become chilled (16.2.) and it is quite essential to have the rest period. (17) Just as one of the best ways to help lifeless hair is to tone up the scalp with a cold water rinse after shampooing, so a tired-looking complexion will benefit from all the Sauna and cold water it can get. (18.1) Skin needs moisture, (18.2.) and it is the exercise a Sauna gives to the underlying tissues that is so very beneficial. (19.beta.1) When the skin tissues age and dry up – (19.beta.2) as they must – without any exercise to keep them supple and healthy, (19. alpha) it will speed up the development of dried-up wrinkled and “crepe-looking” skin, especially with our harsh climate. (20) Hence the heavy bloom, without the need for expensive lotions.

Text 2

Regular Sauna will make you a new man

(1) Good health is preserved by four bulwarks, nutrition, digestion, exercise and sleep. (2.1) Each of these four factors is constantly dependant (sic) on one another (2.2.alpha) and in addition they are all dependent on an overall factor we call the morale of the individual, (2.2.beta) for the mind and body are inseparable. (3) A fact now established is that good health and bad health is psychosomatic, that is, due to both psychological and to physical cause. (4) Sauna is a proven method of body care that the Finnish people have enjoyed for over a thousand years. (5) Similar types of baths were keeping Plato and his contemporaries in good shape in around the year 400 B.C. (6) The modern Viking Sauna has not in any fundamental way altered the proven system of bathing in dehumidified air, heated to about 180° F which is followed by a cool water wash and a rest period. (7.alpha) It is equally true today as it was in ancient times (7.beta) that regularly taken Saunas provide a certain way to a more comfortable and relaxed life through both its physical as well as its very definite physiological benefits. (8) More takes place during a Sauna in the way of therapy than the obvious profuse perspiration and skin cleaning in depth. (9) Muscle tissue is freed of unwanted lactic exertion. (10) Blood circulation is accelerated. (11) The entire nervous system is fully relaxed. (12) Wonderful medicine this for modern day stresses (sic).

A detailed analysis of the texts would demand a thorough display of the generic structures of the texts and all their registerial features. Here the purpose is, however, to highlight the choices that show us how the two texts are different and why they are different. The mixed realisations of genre were already commented upon above. The register feature that will not be discussed further here is Mode – the language realisation variation of mode choices along the scale of spoken, face-to-face language to more written, language-as-reflection. This variable would be interesting if we contrasted the texts to some other texts, but not when comparing them with one another. Thus, the major focus of interest will be on the Field and the Tenor relationships in these two texts and their realisations.

As the text unfolds, the Field of the texts – the sauna and the things and activities associated with it – becomes obvious to the readers through grammatical and lexical realisations. The texts are about the sauna, about the water that is thrown on the stones and about the steam or the steamy air that is thus produced and its effects on human skin – perspiration. The texts obviously have to have linguistic realisations (wordings) that make the reader understand

what the writer is technically on about (Field). In Text 1 items realising the Field begin to appear immediately at the beginning of the text: *a sauna; the skin; a perspiration inducing, humidity free warmth; cold water; air of the Sauna cold shower*; and so on. In Text 2, the establishment of the Sauna Field begins much later in the text (clause 4): *sauna; bath; dehumidified air; cool water wash; perspiration*; and so on. All these realisations seem to reflect the same real world experience for all those who are taking the sauna. Yet this is not so. The texts are promoting the real world experience as two kind of different experiences, depending whether you are a man or a woman. The effects of the sauna on the woman are seen in a different light from that on the man. Women are socialised into a different kind of a world than men and then texts are written for them women and men are interpersonally and ideationally positioned differently. This is the reason why two texts are necessary instead of one. Below I shall try to highlight some of the choices that construct the two different sauna experiences for us.

What is naturally important in taking a sauna is the achieved effect and the reactions of the body. Here we find that the Field is no longer constructed objectively; the texts construct “the body and its reactions to the sauna” in a gender-biased way in their linguistic realisations. Even if the title of Text were changed, the male readers would never read this text to the end, because of this gender-bias. I shall discuss the creation of this bias in the two texts under the headings of (4.2.1.) the effect of water and steam/air, (4.2.2) the effects on skin, (4.2.3) “Body & Beauty” vs. “Body & Mind” focus, and (4.2.4) the sauna as a “beauty treatment” vs. a “medical treatment”.

4.2.1. The effect of water and steam/air

Water is necessary in the sauna for two reasons: for creating the steam and for washing yourself. The two texts portray the effects of these activities quite differently. In both texts the steam/air is partly described objectively, e.g. *a perspiration inducing; humidity free warmth* (1: 2) and *the proven system of bathing in dehumidified air* (2: 6). But partly the air in the sauna gets gender-biased “undertones”. As a female sauna-goer you are supposed to *revel like a child in the blissful feeling of soothing air of the Sauna* (Text 1: 4.1), whereas a male sauna-goer is supposed to experience it more objectively as being merely *dehumidified and heated to about 180° F* (Text 2: 6). That the air in the sauna is “dehumidified” is actually a misrepresentation of at least the Finnish sauna, because humidity is an essential part of the Finnish sauna – throwing water on the stones of the sauna stove increases the humidity in the sauna and that is what makes you perspire. But in this particular sauna at the sports centre where the texts were found, throwing water on the stones was

strictly forbidden and I certainly have visited saunas in Australia where there are no stones to be heated to throw water upon at all.

The function and the procedure for taking cold showers (or preferably jumping into the lake in the Finnish context) is the same for both females and the males, although the texts seem to promote the effects quite differently. In Text 1, the cold shower gives a woman *the glorious, stretched-out, good-for-the-figure sensation [that] has no equal* (4.2) and “boosts” the blood circulation (6); it functions as *a real beauty tonic* (8.1). (But contrary to the claim made in the text about the cold water *dilating* – expanding – the pores, the cold shower is supposed to close the pores.) Text 2 merely mentions in a matter-of-fact manner that taking a cold shower belongs to the procedure of taking the sauna – nothing is said of its particular effects, although the list of the overall effects of the sauna mentions *the obvious profuse perspiration and skin cleaning in depth* (8), the effect on *muscle tissue* (9), the fact that *blood circulation is accelerated* (10), as well as the *relaxation of the entire nervous system* (11).

4.2.2. The effects on skin

In Text 2, the word *skin* is mentioned only once in *skin cleaning in depth* (8). In Text 1, in contrast, the word *skin* occurs several times: *the subsection of the skin* (2), *the skin area* (6), *skin needs moisture* (18.1.), *the skin tissues age and dry up* (19.beta.1), *dried-up, wrinkled and ‘crepe-looking skin’* (19 alpha). Furthermore, in Text 1 the synonym, *complexion*, is also used twice in *the most jaded complexion* (3), *a tired-looking complexion* (17). *Complexion* is a word that appears more frequently in connection with females than males. Thus, its synonymous use is not surprising here. In Text 2, the message is that the sauna ‘cleans the skin in depth’ (8). In Text 1, the effect of the sauna (steam, cold showers, rest periods) resembles a magical metamorphosis – an ugly duckling becomes a swan: *the sauna will help even the jaded complexion to respond in a positively wonderful way* (3), *the cold shower gives one a glorious, stretched-out, good-for-the-figure sensation – equal to no other previous experience* (4.2.), *the rest periods refresh and revitalise* (5) and *the sauna and the cold water gets even a tired-looking complexion* (17) *to bloom, without the need for expensive lotions* (20). Much of the language resembles the language used in cosmetics advertisements appealing to the positive, luxurious effects of the product and to the economical factors.

4.2.3. “Sauna & Body & Beauty” vs. “Sauna & Body & Mind”

Whereas Text 1 concentrates on creating the effects of the sauna mainly in terms of Body & Beauty, Text 2 creates a link between Body & Mind. We have already noticed in the examples highlighted above how the effects of the

sauna in Text 1 touch the female body as a whole or run down the body lightly like the water in the shower, invigorating, refreshing and revitalising and rejuvenating the skin. The effect of the sauna in Text 2 is deeper; it influences the mind. Both texts include the word *exercise*. But in Text 1 the word is connected with preventing the skin tissues the unavoidable process of ageing: *and it is the exercise a Sauna gives to the underlying tissues that is so beneficial* (18.2.); *When the skin tissues age and dry up – as then must – without any exercise to keep them supple and healthy* (1: 19 beta 1, 2), whereas in Text 2 it is presented as one of the principles for good total “body care”: *nutrition, digestion, exercise and sleep* (1). In Text 2, the effects of the sauna are linked with the well-being of the Body & Mind, not just caring about “the outer looks”, but rather about “the inner looks”, in terms of the morale and the well-being of the mind. The reader is convinced of the benefits of the sauna by an appeal to the facts discovered in the sciences concerned with psychosomatic, psychological and physiological matters. The image that such great minds as that of Plato already enjoyed a bath similar to the sauna fortifies the picture of the connection of the Sauna & Body & Mind. Any man would be delighted to have a fit, Greek-statue looking, well-built body and to be able to think like Plato.

4.2.4. The sauna as a “beauty treatment” vs. a “medical treatment”

The two texts portray the sauna to the readers as two different kinds of institutions. For women readers of Text 1, the sauna is an institution comparable to *the world’s most expensive beauty clinics* (9), only cheaper. It offers *invigorating beauty treatments* (1) and leaves you with *an inner and outer flow of well-being* (5). Although it is mentioned that the sauna and the cold showers *boost your blood circulation*, the major focus is, however, the beauty treatment of the skin. Text 1 offers women moments of luxury at an affordable price – there is no *need for expensive lotions* (20) or special programmes like *shock tactics* (10.alpha). What good housewives are valued for is their sense for economising.

The male readers of Text 2 are enticed to go to the sauna for a medical treatment. The sauna is *a proven method of body care* (4) which keeps you in *good shape* (5), like similar baths did *Plato and his contemporaries*. The *benefits* are *physical and physiological* and lead to *a more comfortable and relaxed life* (7.beta). The sauna influences the muscle tissue and frees it from *unwanted lactic excursion* (9), *accelerates blood circulation* (10), *relaxes the entire nervous system* (11). It is not *a beauty treatment*, but *medicine* (12) for the modern man against his stressful life style. Parts of the text read like the sections from the directions of how to use some medicines and the descriptions of what its effects are. The sauna is for a woman skin-deep – a beauty treatment preventing

ageing of the skin, but for a man it is a medical treatment for keeping his body and mind toned.

5. Discussion

This paper has dealt with the concept of a sauna and how it and its use and effects are introduced to members of another culture – to Australians. Three texts were found to be used for this purpose. The first text is instructional text in its nature (although not well-written, either, for its purpose, as discussed in Ventola forthcoming), and its purpose is clear – to take a person not accustomed to taking saunas through the whole procedure. This text is functionally motivated, considering the strangeness of the procedure from the point of view of members of the other culture.

But two further texts appeared additionally in the same context – one clearly addressing the female readers and the other the male readers. Why was it necessary to write these two further texts? If the function of these texts is considered merely promotional, would not a single text have been sufficient? After all, both females and the males experience the same phenomenon. Because the sauna in Finland belongs to the individual's socialisation pattern, no instructional and promotional texts for taking the sauna are necessary for the Finnish men and women, although perhaps also Finnish men and women may ultimately experience the sauna differently. Usually the families take the sauna together when the children are small. When they grow up, they take the sauna on their own or with members of the same sex – the latter applies also to sauna-taking in the public saunas.

Why in the Australian context was it necessary to write separate texts for females and males for the event of taking the sauna and its effects? The need to write these different texts must arise from the society itself. It is well perceivable that the reasons for writing the analysed texts lies in the perceptions of female and male roles in the early 1980's and earlier in Australia. Australia has been known as "the land of mateship" (Dixson 1976: 11; Bell 1974: 43-44) and the picture of an Australian woman is complex, due to the convict, frontier, and immigration history of Australian women. In the 1970's Bell (1974: 68) writes:

Historically in Australia the woman was generally not given much importance ... It is very probable that even today most Australian men believe they are superior to women ... [There is also] the common belief that women are often intellectually naive ... in Australia it is still widely assumed that women are more emotional than men and therefore lack the basic inborn ability to understand more complex issues.

Whoever wrote the two texts analysed here seemed to share these views still in the 1980's in Australia.

The paper has illustrated how the topic which basically deals with the same real world experience is technically constructed linguistically ideationally (Field) and interpersonally (Tenor) differently for two audiences – the female and male sauna-goers. If one just reads one text and not the other – as guided by the exclusiveness of the titles of texts – then one perhaps never gets to notice and think how gender-biased the texts are. (The same applies if we only read women's romances or the *Playboy*.) And Australia is not the only place we can find examples of this kind.

In constructing such gender-biased views in everyday texts like these, we simply ensure the continuation of role beliefs and their realisations in our societies. Women are forever considered as "silly, little women who only care for their looks" and for whom beauty is an essential commodity in their eternal pursuit of "trapping a man for marriage". Men, in contrast, are set to function in a more serious world. Their concern is the world of science, philosophy, economy and politics – thus, even the sauna needs to be introduced to them in those "more weighty" terms and not in terms of beauty and luxury.

Such everyday, non-valuable texts as the ones used for illustration and analyses here are basically the texts that construct and maintain the ideological views of what we are as women and men and how we interact with one another and with members of other cultures. Linguists' work is to draw the public's attention to these factors and to ensure that such biased views no longer continue to exist in our societies.

Text 2 could today be intended for female readers, too. Many doors have during the past decade opened to women – not just the doors to the gym. But I am afraid that texts like Text 1 are still being written – in spite of the fact that female linguists have already for so long paid so much attention to such gender-biased writing, as pointed out by Poynton (1985: 3):

The feminist stance, speaking on behalf of women, has been highly critical of contemporary society. Feminists have seen women's interests as consistently subordinated to those of men, women's personalities systematically distorted in the service of their subordination, women's capacities underrated or denied, their desire for autonomy frustrated and ridiculed, their sexuality at one and the same time denied, feared, and exploited, and their image trivialised and sentimentalised.

The question for the next millennium is: can we afford to keep on passing this kind of gender-biased ideology from generation to generation in texts of all kinds we write?

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