A THREE DIMENSIONAL ANALYSIS OF INSULTS IN TLEMCEN: ANTHROPOLOGICAL, PRAGMATIC AND SOCIOLINGUISTIC

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ABSTRACT

People's communication involves various types of speech. Arguably, taboo language can be considered as the type of speech which is regarded as immoral and inappropriate. Nevertheless, this phenomenon exists and is frequently used in all cultures in spite of its nastiness. Indeed, such linguistic behaviour is classified into categories; insults and name-calling are our concern in this research paper. These words however are often acquired within the family environment, typically outside the classroom, because they belong to taboo categories in general and they are considered as a sin in our religion. We can say that the process of speaking includes all sorts of things. Insults for instance are regarded as an inappropriate speech act that is able to infringe the rules as well as relations between individuals. Yet, they can also be a source of causing shame and embarrassment when they are used inappropriately. Such inappropriate use may be perceived as rudeness and impoliteness as it may result in many conflicts either physical or psychological.

Keywords: Communication, speech, taboo, insults, embarrassment, impoliteness.

INTRODUCTION

Actually, the combination of three fields of study namely, anthropology, pragmatics and sociolinguistics make up the theoretical backbone of our research paper. The former is concerned with the distinction between the sacred and the profane. The second however deals with the ethnography of speaking including speech acts as crucial elements in a given speech community in addition to politeness and impoliteness as two other important items which enable the speaker to differentiate between nice and bad behaviours. Indeed, men and women are said to use language differently. Thus, gender, which is considered as a very important variable to analyze the use of language in society, is taken into account to demonstrate how men and women use and perceive insults. Actually, women use soft and prestigious language in order to attain respect and to 'look like' ladies, whereas men generally do not care too much about their speech; they look only for ways which enable them to keep their virility. Besides, the emotional impact of insults and name-calling depends on people's experience with a culture and its language conventions. So, as previously mentioned and in order to have a clear idea about the above cited issues and about how they are used in society, we have approached three levels of analysis mainly anthropology, pragmatics and sociolinguistics.

Anthropological Analysis

First and foremost, one should note that the sacred is separated from the profane by a taboo or a limit and that the majority of ideas and arguments on the dichotomy profane- sacred derive largely from the anthropology of religion where it was used for the first time. Second, the word 'sacred' comes from the Latin word *sacer,* meaning "to set apart". Generally, religion attempts to offer answers to our needs and clarifies the ambiguities around us. It claims for

society cohesion through its shared beliefs which offer a set of explanations to our actions. As it underlines rules of conducts that enable us to judge certain matters. So, in a sense, religion serves to unite a society under a system of beliefs which enables people to successfully and peacefully interact. Most importantly, religion defines and explains cultures because the culture itself can be better understood when we study its religion.

Basically, the sacred is the aim of all religious traditions that teach us wisdom and rules of life. This idea is sustained by Durkheim (2001.47) who believed that the dichotomy sacred/ profane represents the main characteristic of religion. He states that "religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden". In more simple and clearer terms, taboo as a logical term, is characterized by the equation: infringement implies sanction. This means that the sacred is a two- edge phenomenon; it can provide us with respect and esteem, but if we approach it without regard for its power and limits with the profane, it can lead us to punishment or public shame. In essence, transgression refers to the exceeding of bounds or limits, the infringement, violation of a law or a convention, or simply breaking the rules of good conduct. And it is through these acts of disobedience, that the sacred world is experienced and discovered. Smith (2008: 20) has recently argued that:

> These binary distinctions are 'imaginative templates' which 'enable societies to make sense of the world' by discerning the sacred from the profane, the pure from the polluted' or the good from the evil.

In the same line of thought, Freud (1983.20) defines the concept of taboo as follows:

> The word 'taboo' denotes everything, whether a person or a place or a thing or a transitory condition, which is the vehicle or source of this mysterious attribute. It also denotes the prohibitions arising from the same attribute. And, finally, it has a connotation which includes alike 'sacred' and 'above the ordinary', as well as 'dangerous', 'unclean' and 'uncanny'.

In sum, the profane world is the world of the taboo and transgression does not only deny or destroy the taboo; it exceeds it, and if we do not comply, it will definitely result in sanctions.

PRAGMATIC ANALYSIS
Classification of Speech

Speech belongs to aspects of behaviour through which human beings communicate and influence one another. Furthermore, it is always required in order to accomplish a social activity, that is, speech is employed to obtain information, to express emotions and so on. As Malinowski (1923) claimed "In its primitive uses, language functions as a link in concerted human activity, as a piece of human behaviour. It is a mode of action and not an instrument of reflection".

The study of speech as part of social interaction has involved many disciplines namely linguistics, sociolinguistics and anthropology where we find a crucial contribution named the ethnography of speaking or ethnography of communication put forward by Dell Hymes

(1974) . This framework takes into consideration a variety of factors that are included in the speaking act, as it describes the most important ones for the sake of achieving specific communicative objectives. We shall now mention the acronyms of the word SPEAKING:

-S- Setting and Scenes

Setting refers to the time and place i.e. circumstances in which speech has taken place, whereas scene refers to occasions and events that help to create particular types of speech. For instance speech used at court is not the same as the one used at home. Furthermore, speech is supposed to define the scene, because certain types of speech are regarded inappropriate in certain circumstances.

-P- Participants

This factor includes the speaker-listener relationship in addition to the various combinations that one of them may occupy, for instance the speaker can be an addressor and the listener an addressee or sender receiver. So, a conversation generally includes a speaker and hearer who fulfill different roles in particular scenes.

-E- Ends

Ends refers to conventions recognized and put forward by society, and to the outcomes as well as personal goals that the members of speech community wish to attain on particular occasions.

-A- Act Sequence

This term refers to the various forms of speaking and to their real content as it includes the way these forms are used. For instance casual conversations, speech of the president or public lectures each go with particular and different kinds of language and topics chosen to talk about.

-K- Key

Hymes means by 'key' the way in which the message is transmitted or conveyed, in other terms key includes the manner, the tone of voice and even spirit and attitudes which can be either serious or mocking. Gestures used in certain kinds of behaviours can also be included in this part.

-I- Instrumentalities

Instrumentalities refer to the choice of the channel which may be oral or written and to the type of language chosen to be used in a conversation such as dialect, code or register and so on.

-N- Norms of interaction and interpretation (N)

This factor refers to the particular behaviours, properties and norms of interaction that help to fasten and approach the members of a speech community. In other words it refers to what is culturally and socially expected from the speaker.

-G- Genre

The last term refers to the type of speech itself which can take either the form of a poem, proverb, riddle or a lecture.

This formula of SPEAKING offered by Hymes under the form of an acronym is deemed necessary to explain the complexity of speech. Moreover, the formula may serve the speaker's awareness of his speech that should include all the eight items in order to handle a successful conversation and to be a competent speaker of a language. Consequently communicative competence is required to achieve a variety of targets such as the ones mentioned above. Saville-Troike (1996:363) points out:

> Communicative competence extends to both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviours are appropriate in various contexts, what the routines for turn-taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline, and the like- in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative dimensions in particular social settings.

These were then the pragmatic aspects of communicative competence that have to do with how language is used in communication situations to achieve the speaker's purposes. Furthermore, Malinowski (ibid) argues that one of the fundamental purposes of speech is to make social relations stronger what he called "*phatic communion*". He means by Phatic Communion the kind of talking which everybody employs in order to recognize each other's presence and value particularly. An extremely influential classification of speech introduced by J. L. Austin (1962) the British philosopher, is worth mentioning. This classification known as speech acts was further developed by J.R.Searle. Speech acts are usually defined in terms of speaker intentions and beliefs, whereas the nature of conversations or utterances depends crucially on interaction between speaker and hearer.

Speech Acts

Thus, within this classification we aim to demonstrate the ability of a well-socialized speaker to know when certain speech acts, namely insults, are required, appropriate or inappropriate in order to successfully participate as a member of a speech community.

In fact, speech act theorists distinguish between three aspects of utterances; the locutionary act, the illocutionary force and the perlocutionary effect. First, the locutionary act refers to actions of performing words into convenient and correct sentences. Second, the illocutionary act is achieved only if we take into account the conventions of a society; in other words action intended by the speakers in order to produce an utterance. Finally, the perlocutionary act represents the effect that an utterance has on the feeling or attitudes of the listener.

These are the dimensions of speech acts which cannot be performed separately; that is, we always find these three aspects in a single utterance. In more simple and clearer terms, one specific insult may offend one particular addressee while it may not injure another because this fact depends on the speaker's intention in producing that utterance; in other words, this represents the illocutionary force of insult.

Indeed, as already mentioned, insults aim at damaging and injuring the addressee's reputation as shown in the following definition taken from Oxford English Dictionary and quoted in Jucker and Taavitsainen (2000.72):

> Insult is an act, or the action, of insulting (…); injuriously
> contemptuous speech or behaviour; scornful utterance or action
> intended to wound self-respect; an affront, indignity, outrage.
> (OED 'insult' n.).

These are the most important features which include to a large extent the effects of insults on the target, that is, the perlocutionary dimension. To sum up, then, the illocutuonary force of an insult describes the primary act the speaker performs such as attack, assault or contemptuous remark, nasty comments and so on. These are forms of insult, whatever the reaction of the target. The perlocutionary effect on the other hand consists of offended and wounded feelings.

In addition, in spite of all its forms, insult can be reduced according to Jucker and Taavitsainen (ibid.73) to the following three essential elements: "first, a predication about the target", for instance the speaker utters things which characterize his identity, profession and so on. "Second, this predication is perceived as inadequate and demeaning the target". "And third, the target experiences this predication as a face threatening speaker intention", that is to say, he believes that the speaker employed the predication with the intention to hurt him.

Theory of Politeness/Impoliteness
Politeness

Although taboo words are part of every culture and language, the topic is poorly studied because of its sensitive nature. Jay (1999: 10) claims that "the topic of taboo speech is so taboo that it has not been regarded as a legitimate topic for scholarly examination". Thus, when scholars disregard or consider taboo as irrelevant to understand language, or in other words when they neglect the utility of taboo words in humans' life, we are thus left with polite language only. So, the human nature in its entirety including anger, hate, and frustration and so on is disregarded as if these feelings and emotions had no role in the human language and life.

Consequently, it is necessary to study the linguistic taboos in any society from a socio-cultural perspective, because it may be helpful to the understanding of human nature and psyche. Bower (1981) quoted in Jay (ibid: 158) argues that "the emotional aspects of words are an inherent part of their semantic meanings and that the emotional context for a word's use is stored along with its semantic and syntactic properties". In other terms, the emotional level attained through the utterance of a taboo experience is part of its semantic sense. This idea explains the emotional force of insulting words and their capacity to demean the listener. One should note that the main home for politeness studies is sociopragmatics, and the extreme degree of offensiveness of words is always determined by pragmatic variables such

as speaker-listener relationship and social settings, in addition to the words chosen and the tone of voice. One reason why this is the home for the study of impoliteness is that most work on politeness has been produced in this field. Leech (2003, 104) (quoted in Culpeper 2011:5) states that:

> Politeness is situated in the field of sociopragmatics, because that research is geared towards "explaining communicative behaviour". Likewise, investigating impoliteness involves the study of particular communicative behaviours in social interaction.

Politeness is best expressed through good manners. Its user often aims at making the others more relaxed and comfortable. Besides it is always linked with the idea that all people have an attribute which is called 'face'. A sociological notion to account for politeness in behaviour, borrowed by the British social anthropologists Brown and Levinson from the work of the sociologist Goffman is worth mentioning. First, Goffman (1955:213, 1967:23) states in this respect:

> Face means: the positive social value a person effectively claims for himself by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of selfdelineated in terms of approved social attributes…

Similarly, Brown and Levinson (1978) identify two kinds of politeness, deriving from Goffman's concept of face. They argue that "politeness strategies are developed in order to save the hearer's face". Face in term of politeness, refers to the respect that an individual has for him or herself, and maintaining that self-esteem in public or private situations. It is deemed as a basic want which every member knows and desires. Moreover, they distinguish between two types of politeness, positive and negative politeness. Both types involve maintaining positive or negative face, where positive face is defined as "the addressee's perennial desire that his wants…should be thought of as desirable", and negative face as the addressee's "want to have his freedom of action unhindered and his attention unimpeded" Brown and Levinson (ibid:101-129). Thus, positive politeness refers to the want of each individual that his interests and intentions will be covetable to the others, that is, the person who chooses to use positive politeness aims at establishing a good relationship between parties and demonstrating closeness and affiliation, as he respects the person's need to be liked and understood; direct speech acts, and compliments are parts of positive politeness. Negative politeness however, designates the want of every 'competent adult member' that his actions will be unimpeded by others. For instance making requests less infringing allows people to act freely. In other words, it has to do with deference, distance, formality and the use of speech acts indirectly.

So, face means self-esteem, social standing, public self -image, which every individual claims and wants others to respect. Usually, we try to avoid embarrassing the other persons, or making them feel uncomfortable. Nevertheless, Face Threatening Acts (FTA's) are acts which lead to the infringements of the hearers' need to maintain their self-esteem, and respect. Consequently, acts that menace the addressee's positive face are acts in which a speaker demonstrates that he does not support the addressee's positive face or self-image, e.g. complaints, accusations, or taboo utterances. And acts that threaten an addressee's negative

face include instances in which the addressee is pressured to accept or to reject a future act of the speaker, e.g. offers or requests.

According to Brown and Levinson, politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with these FTA's, and in order to avoid an immediate breakdown of communication, FTA requires a mitigating statement or some verbal repair. To sum, positive politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense, try to be friendly with the targets by using compliments, jokes, or nicknames, whereas negative politeness strategies are intended to avoid giving offense by showing deference, e.g. ,giving an opinion. So, politeness plays a significant role in all societies since it founds the basis for a respectful interaction between human beings and for successful conversations. However, this does not imply that people behave correctly all the time; they may be impolite on certain occasions.

Impoliteness

Impoliteness on the other hand, is an important linguistic behaviour that is worth studying. It was systematically looked as the long neglected 'poor cousin' of politeness (Bousfield and Locher 2008:2). This unsuitable and unfortunate behaviour which is closely connected with emotional reactions implies simply deviations from the rules and conventions. Culpeper (ibid: 23) states that "Impoliteness comes about when (1) the speaker communicates face-attack intentionally, or (2) the hearer perceives and/ or constructs behaviour as intentionally face-attacking, or a combination of (1) and (2)". Mouton (2011:59) adds:

> Impoliteness is a negative attitude towards specific behaviours occurring in specific contexts. It is sustained by expectations, desires and/ or beliefs about social organization, including, in particular, how one person's or a group's identities are mediated by others in interaction. Situated behaviours are viewed negatively- considered 'impolite'-when they conflict…Such behaviours always have or are presumed to have emotional consequences for at least one participant, that is, they cause or are presumed to cause offence.

Hence, as the quotation implies, impolite behaviours make the listener's reactions move, because they are offensive to the target as they aim at damaging his reputation and result almost all the time in disputes. However, the emotional impact of these behaviours differs from one person to another because it depends on one's experience with a particular culture and its language conventions.

SOCIOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS
Gender Differences in Speaking

There are various fundamental reasons why women may be linguistically different from men. First men's and women's choice of a given variety or language is connected with masculinity vs. femininity. Women usually look for ways to achieve prestigious ladylike behaviours in their conversations, whereas, men enjoy practicing power in their society and in their conversations. In other words, men's dominance in conversations parallels their dominance in society. Women on the other hand, are regarded as subordinate to men. This is why they use more cooperative ways in their speech. Indeed cooperative discourse is characterized by the great tendency of asking questions. Hirschman (1973:10) notes in this context that "several of

the female-male conversations fell into a question-answer pattern with the females asking the males questions".

Another way in addition to the use of minimal responses to be cooperative, women use more utterances that demand or encourage responses from their fellow speakers than men do. However, these features assigned to women are not natural according to Trudgill (1972), who says that "females, it would appear, are not striving for standard prestigious speech but are striving to use what their peers are using". Contrariwise, men tend to be competitive in conversations so as to maintain their masculinity. To do so, they usually interfere and break the speech of their companion as they challenge or dispute the speech of their partners. Furthermore, men do not care about the comments of others, they ignore them, and if they respond, their answers will be unenthusiastic and indifferent. Hence "cooperative" and "competitive" according to Coates (2004:143) "always come up together in conversation since different ways of talking may share the goal of creating group solidarity".

Gender Differences in Using Taboo Language

Sociolinguists have analyzed the effect of independent variables such as gender, age and social class on the use of taboo words. In terms of gender, women are expected to speak properly, Coates, (ibid: 126) notes that:

> Women are more polite, indirect and collaborative in conversation, while men are more impolite, direct and competitive on the other hand, which reveals that "men pursue a style of interaction based on power, while women pursue a style based on solidarity and support.

Drawing on Brown and Levinson's work, Holmes (1995:2) also believes that, women in general are more polite than men, he says in this respect:

> Most women enjoy talk and regard talking as an important means of keeping in touch, especially with friends and intimates. They use language to establish, nurture and develop personal relationships. Men tend to see language more as a tool for obtaining and conveying information.

In addition, women usually use euphemism in order to replace indelicate and rude expressions. Lakoff (2004:80) emphasizes the fact that women's way of speaking is expected to be suitable; he adds that "women are experts at euphemism…while men carelessly blurt". Hence, female/male use of taboo creates different attitudes, because women's use especially of derogatory language is evaluated as the most negative compared to that of their male counterparts. Traditionally, women have been characterized as the best persons on earth who take care of their prestige, etiquette and value within their society. Actually, women often try to escape negative judgments such as the one of belonging to lower or vulgar social status. So, a woman who uses bad language is inevitably inviting herself to receive not only negative social attributes, but also judgments concerning her moral standing and character. Jay (1999: ibid) points that "women are expected to control over their thoughts, while men are free to exhibit hostile and aggressive speech habits". This implies that taboo language is not often associated with women's speech in any culture including all its conventions. In addition, the

use of offensive language according to (de Klerk.1997) "represents an accepted social means of constructing a masculine identity".

Thus, this social and cultural knowledge regarding taboo, rudeness, and impoliteness is acquired as the product of living and a as means of contact with different types of people, because through cultural experiences we learn which words are deemed polite or impolite in particular situations. Cameron (1998:280) emphasizes this idea in the following statement:

> Men and women…are members of cultures in which a large amount of discourse about gender is constantly circulating. They do not only learn, and then mechanically reproduce, ways of speaking 'appropriate' to their own sex; they learn a much broader set of gendered meanings that attach in rather complex ways to different ways of speaking, and they produce their own behaviour in the light of these meanings...

Age is another element that has a greatest effect on using such type of language. De Klerk (1991) writes about this idea: "age is clearly the factor that had the greatest effects on response rates throughout, relating obviously to growing sexual maturity and to increased daring use of taboo items with increasing confidence and social power" (quoted in Murphy 2010:157). Thus, Young people, and adolescent boys in particular, use more taboo language than adults as a form of rebellion or to establish group identity. This trend begins to develop from childhood and continues till adulthood. Relaxed environments are the most frequent places where we hear taboo terms from both genders, as they represent another striking causal factor which encourages the speaker to insult or to break the rule more than formal settings. For instance, the speaker feels more comfortable with this type of language in a pub or a café. Cameron (ibid: 281) adds that:

> Performing masculinity or femininity 'appropriately' cannot mean giving exactly the same performance regardless of the circumstances. It may involve different strategies in mixed and single – sexed company, in private and public settings, in the various social positions that someone might regularly occupy in the course of everyday life.

Status, occupation, and income are also determinant of taboo language appropriateness, because employing such type of language carries strong connotations of lower socio-economic belongings, for instance a doctor or a teacher may use less offensive words than a trade man. In this regard Jay (1992) states:

> There were differences in occupations as a function of gender and status; for example, men were expected to swear more than women in equivalent occupations and higher status personnel (e.g. dean) were expected to swear less than lower status personnel.

In all the cases so far mentioned above, it has been shown that females try to employ better linguistic forms in order to approach prestige, femininity, and deference. Nevertheless, masculinity is generally the only concern of males; this fact does not require too much effort and then leads them to the use of non-sophisticated language.

Virility

Virility, which is the spirit of masculinity, embodies the majority of males' qualities, including body appearance, tone of voice, nerves, and muscles. In other terms, virility is a matter of prowess, strength, and capability to manage life difficulties. These measures in effect, are essential traits of masculinity in the majority of cultures. Virility is then a significant strategy followed by males to express their vigour and vitality, and a way of proving how much men they are, or to show that they deserve to be called real men. In general terms, the announcement of male superiority in his entourage, in addition to the stereotyped principles of power assigned to him are deemed essential for permanent and hegemonic ideas of masculinity. This hegemony is defined by Connell (1994:77) as:

> The currently accepted answer to the question of what is the most essential, natural core and lowest common denomination of masculinity that guarantees (or is considered to guarantee) a man to be recognized as manly, thus making virility not only useful but also an indispensable category of historical analysis of masculinity.

To sum, virility refers to:

- An innate masculine superiority
- A symbol of honour
- Moral and bloody purity
- Power and bravery.

While the term of virility could be summarized in the above few principles, its expression could vary according to different cultural codes, social situations and personal ways of behaving, since virility has to do also with dignity, self-control, compassion, and good manners. Yet, expectations about attributes, behaviours appropriate to women or men and about the relationship between them are shaped by culture of their speech community. So, what about their perception of taboo words in general and insult in particular?

Perception of Offensive Language

It is a natural fact that every day in our lives, we get angry or frustrated when unpleasant or unexpected events occur to us or things in general does not go as we wish. In these situations, the normal reaction is to release or express these strong feelings in a way or another. Generally speaking, offensive speech, insults particularly, are expected to be injurious to its targets so that it is capable to evoke them troubles, humiliation, and inhibition. The idea can be clarified in the following statement:

> Taboo is the prohibition or avoidance in any society of behaviour believed to be harmful to its members in that it would cause them anxiety, embarrassment or shame. He adds that "it is an extremely strong politeness constraint". Wardhaugh (2006:239).

Matsuda et al (1993) and Sullaway (2004:10) outline even the psychological and physiological symptoms positing that "the harms experienced by victims of hateful speech, are similar to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): panic, fear, anxiety, nightmares,

intrusive thoughts of intimidation and denigration." Additionally, both Coates, (1993) and de Klerk (1991 ibid) argue that "the use of expletives is perceived as an intrinsically forceful or aggressive activity" (cited in Locher et al: 293). Thus, it seems clear that negative attitudes are often expected from the addressee. In this context, Jay et al (2008:121) add that "the focus on harm from offensive words is based on their problematic emotive and aversive properties associated with psychological reactance and memorability". Furthermore, the meaning and impact of speech is first determined entirely by the contextual factors, such as the relationship between the speaker and the listener, in addition to the topic under discussion. Second, the most harmful speech is the one which is targeted specifically towards a vulnerable listener. Third, the degree of harm can be observed through changes of the target's behaviour or the type of his reaction.

As for gender differences in perception of offensive words, there is general consensus that males are less influenceable than females. Various theories including biological, social, environmental and cultural determinism have been posited to account for this difference. Dewaele (2004:215) reported that, "overall, female participants gave higher scores than male participant to the perceived power of swear words…"

It is worth noting that the native language plays an important role in the way of perceiving harmful language, because the target is accustomed with these terms and knows very well the meaning of each word. This is why the use and perception of taboo language are often studied with native speakers. This idea is supported by Harris et al (2003:561) who point out that:

> Many studies that included diverse types of emotional phrases confirmed that emotional phrases presented in a first language elicited higher skin conductance responses than emotional phrases in a second language.

In the same line of thought, Dewaele (ibid), manifests that the emotional force of taboo terms perceived in one's native language is higher than the one perceived in foreign languages learned later.

CONCLUSION

We have tried to look at the literature underlying different theories related to the topic at hand, namely anthropology, pragmatics and sociolinguistics to demonstrate how this type of language works in a society. The former clarifies or justifies that sacred is estimated in all religions as it emphasize the rules of wisdom and life, the second is merely included in this research because insult belongs to speech acts, and the latter allows us to describe people's daily behaviours. As a matter of fact dichotomized notions and features of gender remain salient in both expectation and perceptions of everyday communication, and virility generally justifies the dominance of the ideal masculine.

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