FACULTADE DE FILOLOXÍA

THE INFLUENCE OF FEMINISM AND LGBTQ+ MOVEMENTS ON LANGUAGE CHANGE IN ENGLISH: THE EXPANSION OF GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE

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1 Introduction

In the last few decades, the debate on the use of gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language has gained more and more prevalence in many fields. The origins of the endorsement of the use of this type of language are very much intertwined with the feminist movement and the emergence of queer studies in the 1990s. However, gender-neutral language has always faced opposition from certain sectors of society who deem it unnecessary and/or a corruption of language. In spite of such resistance, in the last two decades, there has been a shift in society's opinion on gender-neutral language as we have seen how some organisations, such as dictionaries and governmental authorities, have started to implement gender-neutral guidelines.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore the relationship between the feminist and LGBTQ+ movements and the expansion of gender neutral-language in the English language. The interest on this topic rises from a personal interest on how society's gender construct is transmitted through language and how it can affect gender minorities and oppressed genders. Additionally, the exponential growth in the last few years, mainly in social media and amongst young people, of the promotion and use of gender-neutral has also arouse a personal interest on its history and possible benefits. For the purpose of investigating the aforesaid matters, this dissertation will first provide a theoretical background based on relevant investigations and theories on the topics. All the information will be gathered from pertinent books and webpages. Then, a small corpus search will be realised with a view to investigate if there has been an increase in the use of gender-neutral terms.

Regarding the structure of this dissertation, it is composed of four themed chapters. In Chapter 2, an outline on the history of the LGBTQ+ and feminist movements, focusing mainly on the United Kingdom and the United States of America, and an explanation of the difference between the notions of sex and gender will be given. This will set the grounds to the next chapter in which we will examine the construction of gender through language and what gendering entails for oppressed gender identities. Chapter 4 is concerned with the origins of gender-neutral language and a discussion on whether it is needed in today's society. The dissertation will then go on, in the Chapter 5, with a small corpus search on the gender-neutral words *actor*, *police officer* and *firefighter*. The results will be discussed and, in the case of them showcasing an increase in the usage of such words, we will review whether it has been a consequence of the aforementioned

movements. To sum up, a conclusion about all the gathered information will be given at the end.

2 Chapter 2. Context

2.1 History of feminism

2.1.1 Beginnings

The roots of feminist movement have been widely discussed. Some situate its birth in ancient Greece with Sappho, others maintain that feminism had its inception in the medieval period with figures such as Hildegard of Bingen or Christine de Pisan (Rampton, 2015). Nonetheless, based on the entry *feminism* in Encyclopedia Britannica (Burkett & Brunell, 2021), in Western history, there is proof that there were protests against women's restrained and subjugated position in society already from ancient times. It is known that, in the 3rd century BCE, Capitoline Hill and the Forum in ancient Rome were blocked by women after consul Marcus Porcius Cato tried to stop the abolishment of laws that restricted women from using expensive goods. Nevertheless, actions like this were scarce for most of the recorded history.

Other attempts to improve women's conditions and status in society were Christine de Pisan's, a French feminist philosopher, demand for female education during the late 14th and early 15th centuries. Then, Laura Cereta, a Venetian woman, would follow de Pisan's footsteps by publishing several letters that presented numerous complaints and challenges that women had to fight against. Such complaints went from the need for female education to marital oppression. By the end of the 16th century, with the publication of Moderata Fonte's *Il merito delle donne*, the criticism of women's situation in society had become a literary subgenre. The debate about women's place in society and the fight for women's education would reach England around that time as well. Throughout the 16th century, pamphleteers and polemicists enrolled in the discussion about the true nature of womanhood. Thus, Jane Anger obtained the title of the 'first feminist pamphleteer in England' after the publication of *Jane Anger, Her Protection for Women* in 1589 which worked as a response to the publication of a series of offensive satiric pieces towards women. At the end of the 17th century, Mary Astell presented a work formed by two volumes by the title *A Serious Proposal to the Ladies* which set out that woman who were not interested in marriage or religious vocation should organise convents where they could teach, study and live.

Despite these complaints and struggles, it was not until the Enlightenment (17th – 18th centuries) when the feminist rhetoric became a coherent movement. During this period, the reformist discourse was at the centre of European society's predicaments as it fought

for liberty, equality and natural rights. However, female intellectuals were quick to notice that women were not included in the rhetoric of the new social reform. As a consequence, they concentrated their energy and power in requiring that the reformist discourse was applicable to both sexes. It was also in this period, more specifically in 1762, when Mary Wollstonecraft, an English writer and advocate for women's social and educational equality (Britannica, Mary Wollstonecraft, 2022), published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman.* This work was crucial in the fight for equality since it challenged the idea that the female sex exists only with the objective of pleasing men. She also defended the idea that women were as rational as men and if they are silly it is only because society has shaped them to be insignificant. Therefore, in order to eradicate this situation, Wollstonecraft proposed that both sexes were given equal opportunities in politics, work and education.

The intellectuals and the society of the Enlightenment had their focus on abolitionism. This movement planted the seed for feminist activism in the United Stated. Subsequently, North American activists came into contact with English female abolitionists with whom they shared the same judgements. Indeed, this shaped the first steps of the feminist movement making women concentrate their efforts towards the same goals which would lead to what feminist history acknowledges as the first feminist wave.

As Martha Rampton explains in her work *Four Waves of Feminism* (Rampton, 2015)), there are three distinct phases of feminism which intellectuals have found difficulties reaching a consensus on how to characterise. Each one of these phases has been labelled as a "wave" of feminism. In this section we will summarise the main characteristics of each wave.

2.1.2 The first feminist wave

Following Rampton's article, the first wave started in the late 19th century and finished in the early 20th century. Its outset was in 1848 during the Seneca Falls Convention, an assembly for women held in New York which pioneered the woman suffrage movement in the US (Britannica, Seneca Falls Convention, 2021). In this convention, not only three hundred women and men demonstrated against inequality, but during its celebration (mainly) Elizabeth Cady Stanton wrote the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments. This manifesto presented the ideology of the new movement, the political strategies that it will abide to as well as display of women's grievances and requirements (Editors, Seneca Falls Convention, 2022).

This first wave aroused in a context of urban industrialism and liberal social politics and, in its beginnings, it was closely related to the temperance and abolitionist movement. Its two main goals were to unlock opportunities for women and fight for women's suffrage. The discussion over women's right to vote and their participation in politics led to the analysis of the distinctions between both sexes in society. Eventually, the right of women to vote was achieved in 1920 in the United States (Editors, Women's Suffrage, 2022) and in 1928 for all women over 21 in Great Britain (Munro, 2013). Moreover, as a way to achieve some freedom, women started to behave in manners that were not expected from them, like public speaking, so that they could challenge the ""cult of domesticity"" (Rampton, 2015).

Nevertheless, attention should be brought upon the fact that this first wave generally concentrated on the struggles of white, cis-gender, middle-class, western women. This meant that women from different ethnicities, sexualities, identities and races were being overlooked during this first period of the movement. A great example of disconformity with such stance was the speech given during the above-mentioned Seneca Falls Convention by African-American Sojourner Truth "Ain't I a Woman?". During her discourse, the ex-slave located herself, and all women that looked like her, as people that endured double oppression as they did not only deal with racism, but also with sexism (Mayordomo, 2020). By doing this, she drew attention to the struggles of those women who did not accommodate to the "normative" notion of woman and she prompted the idea of the need for and intersectional feminist movement.

2.1.3 The second feminist wave

The second wave of feminism took place between 1960 and 1990 and it was complex and diverse. In the United States, it emerged in a social environment marked by anti-war, civil rights movements and the emergence of self-consciousness of several minority groups' all over the world. This new phase specifically began in 1968 and 1969 in Atlantic city, US, with protests against Miss America pageant. Feminist activist considered the contest "a degrading "cattle parade" that reduced women to objects of beauty dominated by a patriarchy that sought to keep them in the home or in dull, low-paying jobs" (Rampton, 2015). This wave focused mainly on sexuality and reproductive rights, the complete elimination of sexism in society as well as on the approval of the Equal Rights Amendment to the Constitution of the United States which would ensure social equality for both sexes.

This stage of the movement was largely theoretical as it merged with other theories such as neo-Marxism and psycho-analytical theory. Moreover, it also criticised and questioned broader notions such as capitalism, patriarchy, normative heterosexuality and women's role in society. The amplification of the movement was not only external due to its contact with other doctrines, but also internal as its intellectuals introduced the differentiation between the concepts of sex and gender, and women of colour and developing nations started to be actively encompassed. Feminists started to speak of women as a social class within society with the purpose of drawing attention to the fact that race, class and gender oppression were interconnected. This induced an intersectional feminist movement which fused with other collectives.

During this time, second wavers also focused on creating women-only spaces as they perceived that women create a special atmosphere that cannot be achieved in mixed-groups. This also relates to their attempt to create a sisterhood-like atmosphere and solidarity within society and the movement. Despite all of this, this wave was mainly marginalised due to the importance the civil rights and anti-war campaigns had during the time.

2.1.4 The third feminist wave

This more individualistic wave of the movement started in the mid-90s. Feminists that formed this wave rejected the idea of an organised and unionised movement which sought common objectives and shared the same grievances. On top of that, due to the influence of post-colonialism, with its reclamation and reconsideration of oppressed racial groups' history and power (Ivison, 2020), post-modernism, which considered that Western intellectual and cultural believes responded to or were influenced by the ruling sections of society (Duignan, 2020), and queer-theory, which dealt with "dissident" sexualities and the deconstruction of gender (Fonseca Hernández & Quintero Soto, 2009), this wave broke with many boundaries (Munro, 2013). It did not only welcome women from all types of backgrounds and origins, but it also surpassed and broke gender stereotypes and limits. These actions went hand-in-hand with the deconstruction of many social constructs such as sexuality, body gender or heteronormativity. Nevertheless, even though this third wave broke away from the former notion of gender and encouraged creativeness and freedom in respect to it, it was also characterised by the readoption of traditionally "girlie" items such as high-heels, low cleavages or make-up. This entailed a division with the previous waves which conceived such products to be components of male oppression.

In this last decade of the 20th century, we have the appearance of grrrl-feminism which displayed strong and empowered woman who avoided victimisation and "defin[ed] feminine beauty for themselves as subjects, not as objects of a sexist patriarchy" (Rampton, 2015). Grrrl-feminism serves as a perfect example of the transversal aspect of the third feminist wave as it was global and multicultural and rejected conservative ideas of identity, sexuality and gender. The internet was crucial for this group. It not only allowed women to create safe and female-only spaces in which the user could freely cross gender boundaries, but it also helped women in spreading their word and carry out debates. Additionally, "grrrls" were the ones to induce a movement that consisted in the appropriation of terms of abuse such as *slut* or *bitch* as solitary terms and which has remained until modern times.

Overall, third-wavers celebrated ambiguity and they did not understand reality as inflexible, as a matter of fact, they believed that reality is "a performance within contingencies" (Rampton, 2015) where diversity is key and differences are situational and alterable. This mindset explains why many feminists had a problem with the title "feminism" as they considered it to be too restrictive and excluding.

2.1.5 The fourth feminist wave?

There is some controversy on whether there is or there is not a fourth wave in the feminist movement. According to Martha Rampton (Rampton, 2015), this wave is not fully formed, it is still in its developing stage. Newcomers, this is, those that would constitute this new wave, believe that third wave feminism is either too optimistic when thinking that society is on its way to achieving gender equality or hampered by people who do not want to notice the sad reality. Furthermore, as Ealasaid Munro examines (Munro, 2013), there are some commentators that maintain that the internet is the key that has set off the shift from the third wave to the fourth. The internet has been used as a very powerful and significant tool in this stage of feminism in which women of all kinds can denounce misogynistic and sexist behaviours. Nevertheless, some critics have pointed out that the internet cannot be the only motive to establish a new era.

Going back to Rampton's (2015) article, the fourth wave shares some aspects with the previous one such as the importance of intersectionality in order to fully comprehend women's oppression or the problematic of the word "feminist". This latter point is related to one of the main predicaments that this wave faces: how society is gendered and genders other human beings. However, fourth-wavers, contrary to their immediate predecessors,

who mostly thrived in the academic realm, are said to be aiming to bring back discussions to the public domain. Lastly, fourth wavers present a diversity of purpose as they do not have one or a set of fixed collective objectives (Munro, 2013).

2.2 History of the LGBTQ+ community

2.2.1 Origins

Even though it may seem that the LGBTQ+ community and all the sexualities and identities it includes are something recent, the truth is that queerness and "deviant" (in contrast to what is seen as "normal" by society, this is, heteronormativity) sexualities and identities have been around for as long as the human species has records. In her brief compilation of the *History of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Social Movements* (Morris, 2009), Bonnie J. Morris explains that there is proof that same-sex love and homosexual activity have existed in every culture. Already in ancient Greece, homosexual relationships have been documented. Sappho's famous poems about same-sex desire are a case in point. In the case of Israel, we can guess that such relationships also happened given that the Bible prohibited them. There are also records of different cultures situated between Albania and Afghanistan that have raised children as the opposite sex, there are also the well-known "Two-Spirit" people[1] characteristic of Native Americans and the "female husbands" of Kenya[2]. Therefore, it can be stated that there are plenty of examples that illustrate the idea that LGBTQ+ individuals have existed across centuries.

However, many of the practices mentioned above became known through the eyes of western or white travellers and were quickly branded as "other, foreign, savage, a medical issue, or evidence of a lower racial hierarchy" (Morris, 2009). European colonisers and

[1] "Traditionally, Native American two-spirit people were male, female, and sometimes intersexed individuals who combined activities of both men and women with traits unique to their status as two-spirit people. In most tribes, they were considered neither men nor women; they occupied a distinct, alternative gender status. In tribes where two-spirit males and females were referred to with the same term, this status amounted to a third gender. In other cases, two-spirit females were referred to with a distinct term and, therefore, constituted a fourth gender. Although there were important variations in two-spirit roles across North America, they shared some common traits" (Indian Health Service, n.d.)

[2] "In Igboland, women who were considered exceptional in the eyes of society due to their wealth and/or social standing, and those who were past menopause could marry wives for themselves, for their husbands, for their sons, and/or for their siblings. In Igboland, such arrangements involved two women undergoing formal marriage rites; the requisite bride price was paid by one party as in a heterosexual marriage. The woman who paid the bride price of the other woman became the sociological 'husband'.[…] These influential women were usually viewed as men, due to the fluidity of gender in the pre-colonial Igbo context […] She was treated like a man and her opinion was first sought in the gathering of opinions. In any ceremony, she enjoyed equal privilege with her male counterparts" (Kenneth Chukwuemeka Nwoko as quoted in Boakye, 2018)

Christian missionaries disapproved of anything that did not obey their contemporary "male" and "female" roles which turned into the criminalisation of any type of homosexual or "abnormal" practices, also known as sodomy in the "New World", name that colonisers used to refer to the American continent. All of this deeply damaged the view that many cultures had of these sexualities and identities. In spite of the fact that western society firmly condemned such practices, during war times same-sex relationships flourished owing to the fact that women were left behind to take care of the house and family work and men established strong relationships among each other. These relationships escaped scrutiny since there was no possibility of pregnancy.

Cross-dressing is another practice that has been commonly associated with homosexuality. It usually entails that person gets dressed, publicly or privately, as the opposite gender. In early modern Europe and America cross-dressing, even for people that did not identify themselves as transgender, became popular. This was a practice performed mainly by women who were denied certain opportunities and rights due to their sex. These women would disguise themselves by dressing up as men in order to access experiences or income that were reserved for men. Some examples are Malinda Blalock or Elisa Bernerström who disguised as men to be able to enlist in the army (Trista, 2019). Nevertheless, in the artistic field, many men achieved success by cross-dressing, for instance in Shakespeare's theatre where men took on female roles, owing to the fact that women were banned from working in such environments. A famous case of male cross-dressers is that of Frederick Park and Ernest Boulton, also known as Fanny and Stella. Both were young office employees who performed in drag[3] during the evenings in theatrical events. However, in contrast with their peers, they did not only use their female-attires for performances, indeed, they exhibited them around town. These actions, together with other "suspicious" relationships with other men, led them to get arrested and face trial in London in 1870 (McManus, 2018). Spaces like theatres probably became a safe space for LGBTQ+ individuals who managed to mask their real selves in a way in which society would not notice.

2.2.2 From the 19th to the 20th century

In regard to formal studies about sexually "deviant" individuals or marginalised identities, there is little information in the western world up until the 19th century when the term

[3] "sometimes used generically as a synonym for crossdressing, particularly when an individual is described as being "in drag"" (Serano, 2015-2016)

"homosexuality" was firstly coined. In this period, the emergence of studies that examined human sexual behaviour, this is, sexology, led to the first observations of homosexual people. Such observations brought some portion of tolerance towards them. Writings from early sexologists, such as Westphal or Richard von Krafft-Ebing, displayed a condolent judgement towards homosexuality and bisexuality. On the contrary, some intellectuals of the field labelled as abnormal and perverted concepts such as "third sex". The research on human sexual behaviours became more notorious and the public's curiosity increased making those who identified with certain behaviours and practices determined to learn more through magazines and presentations. In Germany, in the early 20th century (Charité, n.d.), researcher Magnus Hirschfeld founded Berlin's Institute for Sexual Science as a means to gather more information on this discipline. The institute ended up holding the most important archive of gay cultural history in Europe. However, even though between the two World Wars Germany had a blooming gay bar scene and had established several liberal laws, during Hitler's dictatorship, this tolerance disappeared and the library was destroyed on 1933.

Concurrently, in the United States, before World War II (from now on WWII) gay life prospered in private circles, however little effort was being put in creating aid groups in support of the gay and lesbian community. The eruption of WWII meant that many soldiers from narrow-minded and isolated areas were introduced to these marginalised groups whose members were also serving in the military. This provoked homosexual individuals to be somehow tolerated in the military service, but of course privately. Not much later, around the 50s, as a consequence of the civil rights movement people started to carry out political demands on fair mental health, employment and public policy for gay men and lesbians. Notoriously, it was in 1947 when Alfred Kinsey suggested in a study that sexuality is actually a spectrum which ranges from completely homosexual to completely heterosexual. Three years later, Harry Hay and Chuck Rowland founded the Mattachine Society which would become the first organisation in support of homosexual men who suffered oppression as a consequence of being a cultural minority. In 1955, a similar organisation named Daughters of Bilitis would be launched by Phyllis Lyon and Del Martin as a support system for lesbians. These significant organisations were met with the endorsement of influential sociologists and psychologists like Donald Webster Cory who, in 1951, presented his work "The Homosexual in America" in which he identified lesbians and gay men as a legitimate minority group.

With the success of the civil right movement in achieving the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of race, in 1965, the first gay right marches occurred in Philadelphia and Washington D.C. Then, on the 28 of June 1969, one of the most significant moments in the liberation of the LGBTQ+ community took place: Stonewall. Stonewall was a gay bar in New York which on said night was raided by the police. This raid sparked what would become a four-night uprising against the police in which individuals of marginalised identities and sexualities fought for their freedom (Geoghegan, 2019). Stonewall would become a staple in LGBTQ+ history and would kick off a public movement for the liberation of queer people through its commemoration every June in the form of "pride marches". All of this led to a crucial moment in 1973 when the American Psychiatric Association ceased to consider homosexuality an "illness". Nevertheless, this progress did not transfer to everyday life where homosexual men and women were still highly stigmatised and at risk of being victims of violence or being put on conversion therapy.

After that, the gay liberation movement experienced a flourishment in the political field since many political gay organisations arose. However, lesbians started to notice the lack of female leaders in this gay groups and, influenced by the second wave feminist movement, began forming their own societies, music festivals, bookstores, etc. On top of that, both movements, LGBT and feminism, united forces since they shared most of their demands. The first march for gay rights happened in Washington D.C at the end of the decade. Unfortunately, the 80s saw a major setback with the emergence of the AIDS epidemic which entailed the death of millions of people. The epidemic affected mainly homosexual and bisexual men, transgender women and black and latino men (Otten, 2022). Besides, the relation doctors and other health institutions traced between the disease and the LGBTQ+ community produced once more a strong stigma and discrimination towards the collective (Otten, 2022). Nonetheless, the epidemic also stirred up the creation of groups such as AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power (ACT UP) and Queer Nation who demanded compassion and medical funding.

In the US, the end of the 20th century inaugurated a new chapter for queer individuals as celebrities like Ellen DeGeneres "came out of the closet" on national television and gave the movement media visibility. This visibility created a space for transgender and intersex voices who required gender and women's studies to be inclusive of transgender and non-binary identities.

2.2.3 The 21st century

The new century came in with great legal gains for the collective with the help of the internet and online campaign networking. In the year 2000, Holland was the first country to recognise same-sex marriage followed by Belgium in 2003 and Spain in 2005 (RTVE.es, 2019). In the US, under the Vermont law same-sex civil unions were recognised in the year 2000 and state sodomy laws disappeared making homosexual people free from criminal categorisation. As for the United Kingdom, it was not until 5 years later when same-sex civil unions would become legal (EFE / EL HUFFINGTON POST, 2013).

Transgender activism and discussion about gender identity became very prominent. A focus on terminology that questioned gender identification based on the binarism "woman/man" also rose and transphobia and cissexism[4] became important subjects of debate. Additionally, the arrival of the internet meant that the activist labour shifted from traditional gathering spaces, such as bars and festivals, to the online realm which provided a safe space free from boundaries that could reach vast amounts of people. The LGBTQ+ community moved towards greater inclusivity which prompted the creation of the concept of queerness. In Julia Serano's words "queer" is "a reclaimed word that has since become a widely accepted umbrella term for gender and sexual minorities/LGBTQ+ people." (Serano, 2015-2016).

On a world-wide perspective, the community put its attention on fighting international struggles such as the illegal status homosexuality still held in many countries. Remarkable were the remarks made by Pope Francis during an interview in 2013 in which he stated: "If a person is gay and seeks God and has good will, who am I to judge?" (BBC News, 2013). These words gave hope to many LGBTQ+ Catholics.

Going back to the US, the biennium 2015-2016 was full of great media achievements for the LGBTQ+ collective, for instance, the Olympic champion Bruce Jenner publicly came out as transgender and started her transition to Caitlyn Jenner, the Supreme Court recognised same-sex marriage and the renowned Oscars nominated transgender and lesbian-themed movies *Carol* and *The Danish Girl*. It was also during this period, when the community increased their intersectional activism as a result of intense racial

[4] "the belief or assumption that cis people's gender identities, expressions, and embodiments are more natural and legitimate than those of trans people." (Serano, 2015-2016)

confrontations and tragedies. This would make visible the junction between issues of gender identity, race, class and sexism which would be pushed even further after the attacks on the Pulse Club in Orlando. The Pulse Club shooting in Orlando, US, was a mass shooting that took place the 12th of June 2016 in the Pulse, a very well know dance club amongst LGBTQ+ individuals, in which 49 people died and more than 50 resulted wounded. At the time, it became the deadliest shooting in US history (Ray, 2022). This shooting was condemned as an undeniable hate crime against LGBTQ+ individuals.

2.3 Differentiating sex and gender

As we have seen up until this point one major matter of contention that both movements have been facing for decades is the struggle with gender issues and how society heavily stands on gender binarism. However, before entering the realm of the relationship between society, language and gender, we tackle the difference between the terms sex and gender. Not clarifying these two terms could bring about misunderstandings.

According to Muehlenhard & Peterson (2011), the first differentiation between the terms sex and gender was made in 1950 by John Money and his colleagues. For them, sex referred to the physical attributes of an individual and gender referred to the conduct and the psychological attributes of the person. However, from that moment on, these two concepts would present slight modifications throughout different authors and study fields. Regarding the feminist theory, one of the most important and influential works to address this differentiation, more specifically the construction of gender (Scholz, 2008), must be *The Second Sex* by Simone de Beauvoir where she famously claimed "[o]ne is not born, but rather becomes, a woman" (1949; as quoted in Butler, 1986). This statement incited a revision of the ideas that the feminist movement used to hold and, consequently, it motivated a shift in the movement.

In order to better explain the difference between the terms sex and gender, the explanation given by Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet in their book *Language and Gender* (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 10) will be used. In this book they express:

> Sex is a biological categorization based primarily on reproductive potential, whereas gender is the social elaboration of biological sex. Gender builds on biological sex, it exaggerates biological difference and, indeed, it carries biological difference into domains in which it is completely irrelevant. […] However, there is no obvious point at which sex leaves off and gender begins, partly because there is no single objective

> biological criterion for male or female sex. Sex is based on a combination of anatomical, endocrinal and chromosomal features, and the selection among these criteria for sex assignment is based very much on cultural beliefs about what actually makes something male or female. Thus the very definition of the biological categories male and female, and people's understanding of themselves and others as male or female, is ultimately social.

It is clear that the necessity of differentiating people in regards of sex and gender is central to how society is constructed. So much so, that, even though there are individuals who do not present standardised genitals, this is, intersex people, there is not a clear place for them in any society. [5] As matter of fact, parents of intersexed infants are advised by doctors to put the child through surgery in order to bring them closer to one of the two categories. In addition, there are plenty of cases in which biological differences have been pointed at as the main factor for certain dissimilarities between genders. For instance, it has been widely suggested that men are more aggressive than women due to their higher levels of testosterone and that women's bigger sensitivity is attributable to a lack of brain lateralisation, which men apparently do have making them more "rational". However, studies about brain-based differences between both sexes are still in developing stages making nothing of what has been stated a 100% conclusive. But both the general public and scientists do not usually question such results. This perfectly shows how eager humans are in trying to reinforce the dichotomy between both categories.

Now we know that gender[6] does not have a biological basis and it is nothing more than a social construct which mandates how people should behave in order to stick to society's functioning and its standards. Nevertheless, this does not mean that gender is something that has been imposed on us, we, as individuals, also build ourselves around masculine or feminine conducts, adhering more or less our behaviour to one of the two (Connell, 2009). In itself gender is a performance and gendered performances can actually be realised by anyone. There is nothing that biologically constrains someone with a penis from wearing a skirt or a dress, likewise, no biological characteristic constrains someone with ovaries, uterus and a vulva from asking their opposite-sex partner to marry them. However, such actions are broadly applied to one or the other gender. What is more,

[5] It should be noted that there are a number of societies in the world are more prone to certain kinds of intersex children and which have social categories to represent them. Nevertheless, even in such societies these people are seen as anomalous. (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003)

[6] To read more on the history of gender studies see Raewyn Connell's *Gender in World Perspective*

those who do not comply with the performances expected from their gender are generally perceived by society as "deviant". Interestingly, gender performance is more constricted for men than for women. Two great examples of these are that boys are more likely to be corrected when wanting to play with socially-considered "girl toys" and that, although women are nowadays able to wear trousers, men still cannot wear skirts without their sexuality being questioned. This is known as gender asymmetry (we will elaborate on this later) and it has led to men enforcing gender differences more than women.

Gender is key factor in our daily life, our world is shaped by it. It is so integrated in society that in most situations we do not even notice it. In society, gender tends to be thought of as something binary, you are either a man or a woman. Studies and literature on gender, however, have demonstrated that, in reality, gender is a "continuum of overlapping femininities and masculinities" (Motschenbacher, 2010). As Raewyn Connell (Connell, 2009) puts it, creating a gendered persona is not an easy task and it is often stroke by tensions which result in unstable outcomes like feminine men or masculine women. In her work, Connell affirms that psychological research has demonstrated that most humans present a blend of feminine and masculine attributes in varying percentages from one individual to another.

To sum up, gender and sex are two terms that serve to differentiate a biological characteristics and social constructs. Although gender has been thought to have a biological basis, it is nothing more than a performance. It is central to every human's life as the world is shaped on basis of the binarism woman/men. However, even though such binarism seems to be strict, in reality, gender is a continuum. More importantly, the men/woman binarism has entailed many struggles for women and non-binary conforming people. Such problems and their consequences will be dealt with in the following chapter.

3 Chapter 3. Language and gender

In this chapter we will present the ways in which gender is expressed and the repercussion of gendering. In order to do so, we will firstly explain what natural gender is and how it works in English. Furthermore, we will inspect how speakers of English construct gender through different grammatical and discursive resources. And, finally, we will examine what are some of the consequences gendering has both on people who identify as women and for those gender identities who do not fall into the gender binary.

3.1 How do speakers of English express gender through language?

3.1.1 Natural gender in English

Most of the world's languages present a grammatical category by which nouns are classified known as gender. This category is used in some languages to exhibit contrast between inanimate/ animate or feminine/masculine/ neuter nouns. However, gender in languages can either be natural or grammatical.

On the one hand, grammatical gender "is associated with arbitrary word classes, and signals grammatical relationships between words in a sentence" (Crystal, 1992, p. 151). A language that displays grammatical gender must have minimum two gender classes, but there can be more, and all nouns are divided among those classes. Each class can either present distinct grammatical forms or associate other words to a noun grammatically. In some grammatical languages, in order to know to which gender a noun belongs to, one might be able to guess it thanks to their form or their meaning. Yet, in most languages, this category is arbitrary making it impossible to guess the class of a noun. Furthermore, something to be noted is the fact that the gender displayed grammatically is not necessarily related to the sex of the gendered subject. (Trask, 1999, p. 100)

On the other hand, some languages can exhibit natural gender which means that nouns are classified in relation to the sex of their referent (Crystal, 1992, p. 151). Even though present-day English does not mark grammatical gender, it displays a number of sex-marked nouns and pronouns like *woman/man, husband/wife* or *he/she*, which make it a natural gender language. (Trask, 1999, p. 100)

In contrast with this commonly held view of the way languages deal with the representation of gender, Motschenbacher (2010) suggests that linguistics should deconstruct the grammatical vs. natural gender binarism. He states that such classification

is “far too simplistic to characterise the complexities of the interrelation between gender and language structure in any language” (Motschenbacher, 2010). He reproaches that , in the case of languages with grammatical gender, grammar is not the only mechanism that languages use to construct gender and, regarding languages with natural gender, they do not only use lexical processes to attribute gender, but they also resort to referential gender (this concept will be explained below). He, then, enumerates four linguistic categories that help gender construction universally: social, lexical, referential and grammatical gender. In order to fully understand how gender is formally constructed in the English language I will focus on Motschenbacher’s explanation of lexical, social and referential gender which are the three linguistic categories that English displays.

3.1.1.1 Lexical gender

In this category we have those personal nouns which hold the semantic meaning of ‘female’ and ‘male’ regardless of the context in which they appear. This is the case of words of the semantic field of kinship (e.g. *father/mother*), nobility titles (e.g. *duke/duchess*), terms of address (*Ms./ Mr./ Miss/ Mrs*.) and personal nouns that denote female or male human beings (*boy/girl*). In addition, there are derivational affixes which are gender specific. Consider, for instance English *-ess* which creates feminine derivatives of lexically masculine nouns (e.g. *steward- stewardess*). In regard to personal pronouns, in English most are lexically gender-neutral except for third person singular, therefore, when speakers choose to use personal nouns that are lexically gendered, they are directly and deliberately denoting gender. Moreover, this type of personal pronouns require agreement with anaphoric pronouns.

Overall, lexical gender bases its differentiation of female/male on semantics, not on biology. Gender deconstruction in this linguistic category would be extremely difficult due to its firm correlation to gender binarism, as Motschenbacher (2010, p. 64) clearly describes:

> lexical gender is about categorising the gender continuum into two, and only two, mutually exclusive binary macro-categories ‘female’ and ‘male, and hence abstracts away from intra-gender differences.

3.1.1.2 Social gender

This linguistic category is intimately intertwined with social stereotypes that assign certain positions to women or men. A very well-established example would be nouns such as *nurse* and *farmer* which, lexically speaking, are gender-neutral, but, socially, they are gendered. When using the word *nurse,* usually, English speakers would think about a woman, while, in the case of *farmer,* it would be thought to be referring to a man. Nevertheless, there are other instances of socially gendered nouns that are not so fixed, like *doctor* or *teacher*. Therefore, social gender is about common gender associations. What is more, some associations can be so ingrained in the collective mindset that, in order to clarify the gender of the person, explicit gender marking might be necessary (e.g. *man nurse*, *woman doctor*).

3.1.1.3 Referential gender

Referential gender is concerned with the particular person to whom a pronoun or personal noun refers to in a specific context. This category is very useful when personal nouns that are lexically, grammatically or socially gendered do not fully correspond with the reality that is being expressed. This is the case, for instance, of lexical or grammatical masculine nouns that are used as generics like *guys,* which is a masculine noun that sometimes is used to allude to mixed-sex/gender groups or all-female groups of people. In English, owing to its lack of grammatical gender, this way of gendering is necessary when a noun is lexically gender-neutral and the speaker wishes to specify if the individual is male or female. In such cases, the speaker might choose to make use of anaphoric pronouns basing their choice on referential gender (e.g. *this child- he*/*she*).

To sum up, following Motschenbacher (2010) words, it should be taken into consideration that all of these categories are used in different degrees. Additionally, one word can be subject to more than one of these categories which can lead to conflicts between them (e.g. the example we have just describe above). In his words, this "representation contradicts a strictly binary model of gender".[7]

3.2 Constructing gender through language

As we have stated before, gender is at the centre of our social world. It is so embedded in our society that we cannot avoid gendering in almost any situation. In the previous section, we have provided an explanation on how English formally conveys gender

[7] For a more in-depth analysis of these categories see (Motschenbacher, 2010, pp. 64-88)

through language, however, it is also significant to understand how individuals create gendered ideologies, identities and relations in their everyday-life (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). In their analysis of social change Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) point to face-to-face interaction as the foundation of such tasks and, at the core of face-to-face interaction, we have conversations. It is through this human action that "[t]he individual connects to the social world at that nexus where we balance who we are in relation to others, and who others will allow us to be" (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003). By engaging in this action, individuals start shaping themselves and others in relation to our social world and an essential aspect of it is gender. Taking this into consideration, it comes as no surprise that gender and language are deeply interconnected and that human beings use language to genderise almost everything around them. Gendered verbal practices aid in the reinforcement of gender dichotomy as happens, for example, every time a teacher addresses a group of students as "girls and boys" or every time gender is taught as opposition girl/boy (gendered talk is especially prominent in schools) (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003).

As noted by Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003), "language is a highly structured system of signs, or combinations of form and meaning" and gender is deeply rooted in those signs, even to the point that it can be the whole purpose of one. We can apply gender in many ways and we can do it even at times when gender has nothing to do with the topic of conversation. Furthermore, when presenting ourselves we use linguistic resources like choice of vocabulary, pitch and tone or grammatical patterns that show gendered characteristics of us. These resources can also exhibit someone's stand on the gendered persona of an interlocutor and their analysis can help us defy or reproduce traditional concepts of masculinity and femininity. In their book, the authors display a thorough analysis on how the linguistic system helps build and reflect our social world. Nevertheless, in what follows I have chosen to highlight here some of their examples that illustrate how different linguistic levels can help in the reinforcement of gender dichotomy.

Regarding phonology, even though phonemes cannot bear meaning by themselves, gender can be manifested in different realisations of a given phoneme. For example, the realisation of the phoneme /s/, in which the tip of the tongue is situated at the edge of the front teeth, is broadly associated with women as well as with homosexual men and prissiness. Moreover, according to Strand & Johnson (1996; as quoted in Eckert &

McConnell-Ginet, 2003), people's presumptions about the gender of the interlocutor can even influence how listeners hear phonemes At this level we also have prosody, voice quality, rhythm and tune which are also full of social stereotypes about gender. However, most of these phonological aspects have not been of greatly studied in relation with gender studies, at least until recently, therefore strongly funded examples cannot be given (see David Graddol, 1989; Mendoza-Denton, 2008).

Concerning grammar, a speaker can construct gender when using morphemes that indicate gender difference (e.g. *-ess*, which has already been explained above). By deciding to use *duchess* instead of *duke*, the speaker is indexing gender and indicating that the refered individual is socially assumed to be a woman. In addition, by using female/male third person singular pronouns one is also making reference to one's sex. Therefore, in English, everytime someone wants to allude to a third person, they are obliged to make assumptions (unless they personally know the gender with which the person identifies as) on their gender. Also social gender makes it difficult (sometimes even impossible) for speakers to avoid or ignore gender. For instance, if someone who works as a model does not want to disclose their gender, they might feel obliged to do it if they feel like they are being misgendered as a result of the social belief that models tend to be women.

Lexis is strongly connected with gender, since it is a receptacle of cultural deeds. Moreover, although lexicon is flexible due to its rapid capacity to absorb changes, gender-marked lexical units are more elaborated and multilayered than those found in morphology. The selection of lexical items can also vary depending on the speaker and this can also be related to gender norms, for instance, women are expected to swear less than men, although such claim has not been completely proved to be true.

Lexis is also linked with semantics and pragmatics this is because, for instace, words that were once used to label certain things can gather meanings that at first seem not to be related (e.g *vixen*). These cases might also exhibit gender inbalance as words that are used to address or characterise women show a tendency towards derogation. Such pragmatic and semantic amplifications are not part of the language naturally; by contrast, they come to be pejorative after generations of use. What is more, in the last decades, there has been a rise of movements that are trying to get rid of derogative or insulting meanings.

Regarding syntax, inspite of the fact that there is nothing intrinsically gendered about syntax, the way in which a syntactic unit is formulated can insinuate gender biases. As a case in point, linguist Julia Penelope (cited in Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003) claims that, as a way of pulling away attention from the oppression of women at the hands of men, agentless passives are used. This can be seen seen in the phrase: *she was raped*. In it, we can see that there is no subject, as if the the raped woman had been attacked by an unknown entity shifting, thus, the attention (or even the blame) from the raper to the raped. Additionally, syntax can be related to discourse and, at that level, there is also gendered linguistic activity. For instance, in many texts the agents of the action are male, while female parcipants are usually receivers of the action (that if they are even part of the action).

Further to all of these language components, there are three key elements of human communication that can also play a part in gendering or making remarks about gender: encoded meaning, saying/interpreting and implying/inferring. As for the first one, it has to do with the meaning certain words have encrypted in them, for example, *woman, lady* and *dame* encode the same information, this is, they all refer to females, nevertheless, they do not encode the same expressive meaning as it is manifested on the fact that they cannot no be used freely in different contexts. Then, to completly undertand what is being said, participants of a communicative interaction have to take notice on what is being said/interpreted. In order to do so they will need to understand the characteristics of the context in which the text is being uttered. Finally, implying/inferring appertains to what is indirectly being said with a comment. For example, when saying "boys will be boys" one is implying/inferring that boys might display certain punishable behaviours, but because it is "part of their nature" one cannot do anything.

3.2.1 Use of generics in language

An interesting practice which is widely executed in almost all languages is the use generics to refer to human beings. When generalising, the speaker also willingly describes the world in which they live, therefore, generics many times show genderised attributes of the world. Consequently, this practice is relevant to the construction of gender as it is commonly executed by using masculine forms.

Generics, according to Motschenbacher (2010), are "all linguistic forms that may be used to refer to people in non-specific contexts in which referential gender is (presumably) mixed, unknown or irrelevant". However, sometimes generics can be

gender-biased, this is, they can evoke interpretations that are more gender-specific than requested by the speaker. These gender-biased generics can be divided into two types: false generics and masculine/femenine generics. In view of the topic of this dissertation, we will focus our attention on false generics since they are the ones that English posseses. But, before further explanings false generics, it should be taken into consideration that English presents personal nouns and pronouns, like *person* or *they,* that can perfectly execute the task of gender-neutral generics. In spite of this, Modern English still exhibits a range of gendered generics.

English, as has already been stated before, is a natural gender language that exclusively posseses male generics linked to lexical gender.[8] The most commonly used gender-biased generics are genric *he/him/his/himself*, *man* and *man*-compounds (e.g. *chairman*, *policeman*). The issues that these terms raise is that they have been demonstrated to elicit male-specific interpretations more than all-gender inclusive interpretations. What is more, owing to the fact that they show ambiguity in certain contexts, as sometimes it is not clear whether they are referring to a all-male or mixed groups, these terms have come to be regarded as 'pseudo-generic' or 'false generic'. Generics that show a male specific preference imply a 'male= people bias' (e.g. '*Man has populated this earth for many centuries*') and lexically gender-neutral personal forms (e.g. *doctor*, *lawyer*) show a 'people= male bias', this means that, even thought lexically they do not specify a gender, they are percieved to reference males. Interestingly, although most false generics have a predisposition towards male constructions, there are also female-biased generics[9] (e.g. *nurse, secretary*).

3.3 The consequences of gendering

Up until this point we have presented how the English language genderises and how English speakers can utilise different linguistic resources to create and describe gendered realities. However, as Judith Butler (1997, p. 8) states,

> We do things with language, produce effects with language, and we do things to language, but language is also the thing that we do. **Language is a name for our**

[8]Motschenbacher, 2010, pp. 92-94 further explains the difference between male/masculine and female/feminine generics

[9] To see more on female/feminine generics and female biased false generics Motschenbacher (2010) chapter 6

> **doing**: both "what" we do (the name for the action that we characteristically perform) and that which we effect, the act **and its consequences**. (my emphasis)

Based on this statement, it can be said that language has its consequences on everything that surrounds us, therefore, it would be interesting to examine what gendering entails for individuals.

As Deborah Cameron indicates in her book *Feminism and Linguistic Theory* (1992), many gender/sex-related language studies, such as sociolinguistics and 'folklinguistics',[10] centre their object of study on dissimilarities between both genders and/or sexes regarding their linguistic behaviour. Nevertheless, there does not seem to be as much literature on the consequences that gendered language and certain language usages have on oppressed and minority gender/sex groups. On account of this, in this section, a presentation of some of the repercussions of such language on people who ascribe and do not ascribe themselves to the gender binary will be given. But, firstly, we will provide a look into the concept of gender binarism.

3.3.1 Binarism

The word binarism comes from the adjective *binary* which means "relating to or consisting of two things, in which everything is either one thing or the other" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). Therefore, binarism is a way of thinking through which things are classified as total opposites with no middle ground, like, for instance, good and evil: you are either a bad or a good person, there is no in-between. By applying this to gender, it can be stated that 'gender binarism' is the belief that there are only two genders, feminine and masculine, and that you either belong to one category or the other. This thought was debunked once gender started to be seen, in the academic realm, as a spectrum more than as something dichotomous. However, to this day, the most commonly held view is that gender is a binary matter.

As mentioned in the third section of chapter 2, gender binarism has caused many problems in people's daily life due to the fact that there are individuals who do not completely fit in the general gender construct. There are women who exhibit socially considered masculine attributes and men who display socially conceived female characteristics. Their existence is so noteworthy that there are words to describe their

[10] "study of speakers' opinions and beliefs about language, language varieties, and language usage. […]. Also called perceptual dialectology." (Nordquist, 2019)

"deviance" such as *tomboy* for the former and *sissy* for the latter. These words are usually used in a derogatory way so as to clearly point out that such individuals are anomalous and, many times, not welcomed. Nevertheless, it should be taken into consideration that these people might still conform to the gender binary as sexually attributed males might still consider themselves as part of the masculine gender and sexually characterised females might include themselves in the feminine gender. Noticeably, this leads us to those human beings that do not ascribe themselves to the gender binary.

3.3.1.1 Outside the gender binary: transgender, non-binary and/or genderqueer people

The world is full of people and each one of them has their own life and reality, therefore, there are as many realities as people are in the world. Each person can decide to live their life as they want to, however, sometimes the oppression of societal expectations and norms can stop some people from being their truest selves. In spite of the oppression and suppression of certain issues by society, there are people who are still able to thrive outside the norm. All of this can be applied to gender. As we have indicated above, there are individuals who do not identify themselves inside the gender binary woman/man. This people are part of the LGBTQ+ community and usually insert themselves in the transgender, non-binary or/and genderqueer realm. However, these labels, under which they can present themselves, can be a little bit confusing. For that reason, we will try and define them.

Firstly, following Julia Serano's definition (2015-2016), we will take a look at her explanation of transgender:

> **Transgender**: the most commonly accepted umbrella term for people who transgress gender norms or defy traditional gender categories in some way. Activists in the 1990s forwarded this term to unite transsexuals, crossdressers, drag artists, butch women, feminine men, and people who are androgynous, intersex, non-binary, and possibly others (as discussed in Outspoken, pp. 257-268; see also here). While the word was intended to be inclusive of all gender-variant people (in the hopes of organizing the largest possible coalition to challenge the gender binary), some individuals or subgroups have objected to being included under the label (see e.g., Whipping Girl, p. 26; Outspoken, pp. 179-188, also here), while some who identify with the term have attempted to exclude other subgroups from using or being included under the label (e.g., some have objected to the inclusion of drag performers and other non-transsexual gender non-conforming people). Unfortunately, many people in the cis mainstream are unaware of the broad coalition of identities that

> exist under the transgender umbrella, leading them to mistakenly equate the word "transgender" with transsexuals (even though the latter are merely one subgroup). […]

As we can see, for Serano, transgender is the term that encapsulates all identities that fall outside the traditional gender binary. This definition is used by many people, nevertheless, there are some individuals who do not feel welcome under the 'transgender' label mainly by binary transgender individuals. This might be because they feel like their experience with gender is different from binary transgender people and, therefore, they might consider themselves "not trans enough". Consequently, those who do not identify themselves as transgender might use labels such as non-binary, genderqueer and/or gender non-conforming. But, before diving into the description of these three terms, we shall inspect the difference between gender identity and gender expression. Concerning the former concept, it refers to each person's own sense of gender and whether they situate themselves outside or along the gender continuum. As for gender expression, it concerns the outward expression of gender, whether one ascribes or rejects the stereotypical ways of externally manifesting masculinity or femininity (e.g. hair, make-up, clothes, etc.) (Matsuno & Budge, 2017).

Going back to the different tags, non-binary is:

> a term that defines several gender identity groups, including (but not limited to): (a) an individual whose gender identity falls between or outside male and female identities, (b) an individual who can experience being a man or woman at separate times, or (c) an individual who does not experience having a gender identity or rejects having a gender identity. (Matsuno & Budge, 2017)

Additionally, Serano (2015-2016) situates this label within trans-linked discourses, but it should be borne in mind that not all transgender people identify as non-binary and vice versa (The Rainbow Project, n.d.). Inside this label, we can include people who are agender, bigender, genderfluid, etc. As for genderqueer and gender non-conforming we will also use the definition given by Serano (2015-2016):

> **Genderqueer**: An identity label used by many people who view their gender as falling outside of the male/female or man/woman binaries. It is sometimes used as an umbrella term for non-binary-identified people. […]

> **Gender Non-Conforming**: refers to people or behaviors that defy societal gender norms. It is sometimes used as an alternative umbrella label for transgender or gender-variant people […]

According to The Rainbow Project (n.d.), the latter label presents a similar dilemma as non-binarism: many gender non-conforming people identify themselves as transgender, but not all. Furthermore, writer Eris Young in his book *They/Them/Their: A Guide to Nonbinary and Genderqueer Identities* uses the terms genderqueer and gender non-binarism interchangeably, claiming that they are "a bit abstract" (Young, 2019). Taking all of this into consideration, I have chosen to use the terms transgender, non-binary and genderqueer as umbrella terms and synonyms for the rest of the dissertation for commodity. Nevertheless, it should not be overlooked that these are distinct concepts and that each person is entitled to identify themselves with whatever label they feel most comfortable with.

Overall, this is a very brief presentation of the main tags that people who do not conform to the conventional gender binary might use. However, each one of these labels contains many distinct and more specific terms such as intergender, demigender or the ones previously mentioned. Sadly, we cannot look into each one of them. Subsequently, now that genderqueerness has been clarified, we will return to the consequences of gendered language.

3.3.2 The consequences of gendered language for individuals who identify as women

One of the main dilemmas that experts point at when discussing gender is the existence of asymmetry between males and females. As Eckert & McConnell-Ginet explain (2003), male-perceived practices are higher valued in society than female-perceived ones. This can be seen, for instance, in the fact that 'male activities' are sensed as appropriate for females, while 'female activities' are seen as only suitable for females (e.g. if a little girl is seen playing with what is commonly conceived as a 'boy toy' she will not be as reprimanded as if a little boy is seen playing with a 'girl toy'). We can translate this by saying that

> female activities and behaviour emerge as *marked*- as reserved for a special subset of the population – while male activities and behaviours emerge as *unmarked* or *normal* […] This asymmetry is partially a function of cultural devaluation of women and of the feminine (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003, p. 21)

Unquestionably, this asymmetry extends to the linguistic domain too. Through language the idea that masculinity is superior is reinforced. In English, for example, does this by *marking* the meaning 'feminine' or by using masculine generics (*he, man(kind),* etc.). For the purpose of better illustrating this, a brief examination of a language behaviours in English that support gender asymmetry will be provided.

On the subject of markedness in language, we firstly shall take a look at Motschenbacher's (2010, p. 94) description of the concept:

> Markedness is a tool for establishing linguistic manifestations of normative ideologies. More specifically, it is a useful concept to show whether women or men are perceived to be more prototypical members of certain social groups.

Furthermore, markedness can appear in the following aspects (i); morphology (e.g. *waiter-waitr**ess***), where the derivative form is the marked one. Nonetheless, there is a very interesting case, that of *widow* and *widower,* where the derivative form is not the feminine, but the masculine. In fact, in the OED (2022), it can be checked that the origin of *widower* is by derivation of the word *widow* plus the suffix *-er.* Going back to the aspects, morphological markedness is related to distributional markedness, which happens when the more complex form, the derivative one, shows lower distribution in comparison to the less complex as a cause of its complexity; and (ii) semantics, where one of the forms is deemed as less "specific in its referential potential" (Motschenbacher, 2010). [11] Taking all of this into consideration and according to several scholars (see, e.g., Cameron, 1992; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2003), the marked category in gendered language is, without a doubt, the feminine.

This markedness can overtly be perceived in the use of generics. In English, we can divide generics into two groups: male-gendered and gender-neutral generics. When male-gendered/false generics occur, as Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) note, *woman* [12] "may be marked against the default background of *man*" and when gender-neutral generics appear, those individuals who are not part of the default category might be potentially excluded. As a matter of fact, due to the institutionalisation of the use of *man* as a general denomination, discursive patterns are prone to only count as generic members those individuals who are not marked. Furthermore, empirical research demonstrates that,

[11] See (Motschenbacher, 2010) to learn more about the inconsistencies of "the traditional application of markedness to the description of gendered linguistic forms"
[12] here referring to all linguistic forms conveying 'female' meaning, same with *men*

when there is a linguistic form that opposes to a another that alludes the meaning 'feminine' and it is used in a gender-inclusive manner, people tend to understand that the utterance is only making reference to men. On the other hand, sex-indefinite generic terms, also known as false generics, are words that do not display an explicit gender-mark, but that through other genderising patterns (e.g. referential, social or lexical) express gender. These generic terms can many times be understood to be applying only to males (e.g. *doctor, president*) erasing the existence of women in certain spheres. Interestingly, this can also happen all the way around, there are sex-indefinite terms that can be assumed to apply only to women (e.g. *nurse, cheerleader*), however, in order to operate, these cases have a need for more contextual information. Overall, the use of these generics has a devastating impact in the representation and visibility of women. This might cause, in many instances, that women will be left behind or that they might not even be taken into consideration.

Besides all of this, the use of language has been demonstrated to show sexist patterns in many other linguistic realms. Deborah Cameron (1992) considers that 'sexist language' are those linguistic behaviours that work in favour of the system that oppress women by reinforcing the inequality between men a women and their sex roles. As a matter of fact, feminists have commented on the fact that lexicon and grammar in English have many attributes that undermine, insult and omit women. As we have already dealt with grammar, now we will now examine how lexicon, particularly insults, can abuse women and what are their repercussions.

Insults destined for women come in various forms: from the most apparently "sweet" ones to the most overtly aggressive. Concerning the first group, we can include terms of address such as *love, dear, honey,* which are usually directed towards women. At first, it might seem like there is nothing wrong with such way of addressing someone. However, it must be taken into account that those terms of address are suitable in contexts in which the interlocutor is close with the addressee. Many times, men feel like they have the right to use terms of endearment with women with whom they might not be intimate with or who are not subordinate to them. But, what does this entail? As terms of endearment tend to connote intimacy between humans, if used in a situation with a stranger they happen to turn into a manifestation of disrespectfulness and as expressed by Cameron (1992) "they are and unilateral declaration by the man that he need not trouble about the formalities expected between non-intimates".

Further on this, Cameron presents stronger insults which include ‘street remarks’ and verbal violence against women. Street remarks are comments, normally unwelcomed and uncalled for, made by men aimed at women in the street. As sociologist Carol Brooks Gardner (cited in Cameron, 1992) points out, there are classes of people that are more prone to be the recipients of comments in a public setting. Gardner named these people ‘open persons’ and women are one of those classes, together with children and some disabled people. Remarkably, street remarks exhibit a double standard as women do not have the same rights to address men in the same way. These comments can have a wide variety of repercussions on women which go from feelings unsafety and danger to feelings of culpability and (sexual) objectification.

With respect to verbal violence, in the lexicon of the English language, as in many others, it has been widely studied that there are more words available to insult women than men. Moreover, words that make reference to women’s bodies are seen as more of a taboo and, in some semantic fields like words that denote sexual behaviour, there are little equivalent terms between both genders (e.g. *slag, bitch, nympho* which are only used when referring to women). All of this is firmly connected with the idea that women should not desire sexual contact while men should be insatiable, in fact, some behaviours done my men are linguistically praised, while for women, they are condemned. This is related to Muriel Schulz’s (1975; as cited in Cameron, 1992) suggestion that, once a term became associated to women, semantic derogation took place by taking in negative and sexual connotations (e.g. *tramp, bachelor/spinster*). This shows “a reality in which men regard [women] as inferior and define [women] above all in terms of our sexual attributes” (Cameron, 1992). What is more,

> The linguistic practices we have been considering have a function over and above simply ‘reflecting cultural beliefs’ about the inferiority and sexual nature of women. […] For women, these practices *create* a certain reality in and of themselves: they are, in fact, a form of social control and definition. (1992, p. 109)

Cameron further elaborates on the matter of social control by citing sociologist Sue Lees’ investigation on the effects of slurs on young women. In that investigation, Lees came to the conclusion that young women control their sexual behaviour and self-presentation in order to avoid being labelled slags. Therefore, insults are used as a way to keep women in line and, most notably, women do not have a way of counterattack with the same means.

In conclusion, the way language uses gender and the way people use language has a very damaging and undermining effect on women's lives and they shape women's experience of reality. Before going ahead with the next section, the reader is invited to bear in mind that the above-mentioned ways of displaying gender asymmetry and its consequences are only a small number, in fact, there are many linguistic (and, of course, non-linguistic) behaviours that have been used for centuries to relegate, erase and penalise women. Overall, language is another active component of the cultural tendency to enhance the (fake) naturalness of the dichotomy between 'male' and 'female', so that the restrictiveness and inequality of the dichotomy can be disguised (Cameron, 1992), and to naturalise certain behaviours of both sexes by giving them an 'innate' property.

3.3.3 The consequences of gendered language for individuals that do not ascribe to the gender binary

Transgender, non-binary or non-gender conforming individuals face a set of different consequences due to certain language usages. Consequently, in this section we will present some of those consequences. However, it should be kept in mind that non-binary and binary transgender people who wish to identify themselves and to be referred to by others with feminine nouns and pronouns might also face the above-presented consequences.

Due to our dichotomous social construct of gender we tend to generalise gender identities by just considering that people are either men or women. Additionally, we are also prone to think that everybody aligns their sex with their gender. However, these generalisations can mean that a great number of gender experiences get erased from our reality through misrepresentation of self-identities or by exhibiting gender biases (Motschenbacher, 2010). This can be extremely harmful given that "[c]ategorizing oneself and others can be an important part of affirming social affiliations, of developing and cultivating a social identity" as Eckert & McConnell-Ginet (2003) accurately comment.

Further to generalising gender, one can wound another person's gender identity by attacking (purposefully or not) what Motschenbacher identifies as *gender face*. Motschenbacher bases this concept in Brown and Levison's (1987) application to linguistic discussions of politeness of *face*, which goes back to Goffman's concept. Based on Brown and Levison's usage, *face* is " a person's sense of self-identity that is vulnerable to various threats in actual communication" (Motschenbacher, 2010). The concept of

gender face, like *face*, can be divided into: *positive gender face* and *negative gender face.* The former one refers to the individual's wish to have their desired gender be accepted, acknowledged and liked by society, while *negative gender face* has to do with one's freedom to practice and present their gender however they want without restrictions from anyone. *Gender faces* are two facets of a person which one can offend through linguistic forms.

Concerning this last idea, the author introduces Butler's (1997; as cited in Motschenbacher, 2010) (and other poststructuralist intellectuals) considerations on the idea that alluding to other people through linguistic forms is indubitably bound to wound them. To further ellaborate on this last point, according Butler's work, she claims that although at first it might seem like speakers are free to say anything they want, they are still obliged to use linguistic categories which withhold certain historical meanings. Nevertheless, Heiko Motschenbacher also develops Butler's work on linguistic wounding by presenting the concepts of 'linguistic wounding1' and 'linguistic wounding2'. Regarding the first type of wounding, it is perceived as such by the actors of an exchange, whilst the second is concerned with the violence of naming in itself, but it is not perceived as wounding. First and second-order linguistic wounding are not two different categories, but a continuum, this means, that every time a 'linguistic wounding1' takes place, 'linguistic wounding2' is also occurs (but it does not happen the other way around). Moreover, they are both significant as both take part in normative gender construction. Overall, the consequences of this type of woundings lie on the fact that, even if they want, gender non-conforming individuals might never scape former meanings which can be used against them as a way of insulting and harming them.

Noticeably, there seems to be a lack of research on how concrete linguistic forms influence non-binary people's life experiences. However, the most salient linguistic assaults that they seem to face is misgendering, "ungendering" and "deadnaming". According to McNamarah (2021, p. 2252) misgendering is:

> both the imposition of terms, honorifics, names, or pronouns at odds with a referent's gender, as well as the failure to use terms, honorifics, names, and pronouns in line with a referent's gender.

Additionally, "ungendering" refers to:

> the asymmetrical use of gendered titles, terms, or pronouns for cisgender people[13] but not for genderdiverse ones. It may also involve the deliberate use of gender-neutral language where the referent explicitly identifies with a gender. (2021, p. 2253)

In order to present the latter form of assualt, "deadnaming", first we have to understand what a deadname is. Sometimes transgender people decide to drop their birth-name and they give themselves a new name that better represents them. The dropped name receives the title of "deadname". Therefore, "deadnaming" is the action of addressing a trasngender person who has decided to change their name by their previous one. Undeniably, all these acts can have great impacts on different aspects of a transgender person's life (from here onwards I will be refering to these three acts as "misgendering"). McNamarah, in their[14] article, presents a pretty thorough description of some consequences that these attacks might produce on transgender people. They name: disrespect and disregard, embarrassment and humiliation, social subordination to cisgender individuals, deprivation of privacy and safety, dehumanisation and objectification, gender policing**,** epistemic injustice, diminution of autonomy, gender sadism and measurable psychological and physiological injuries. In order to avoid making this section exceedingly long, a briefly description of the most seemingly obscure effects will be given.

First of all, there is "epistemic injustice" which, following Miranda Fricker's work (2007; as cited in McNamarah, 2021), McNamarah divides into: testimonial injustice and hermeneutical injustice. The former takes place when a person's words are considered disingenous and/or unbelievable on the basis of their identity. As for the latter, it occurs when society conceives a situation as unintelligible owing to the fact that the person who undergoes such circumstances "does not contribute to the collective socio-epistemic structures that create shared social meaning" (McNamarah, 2021). Hermeneutical injustice can occur to genderqueer people when there is a lack of tools that represent certain gender realities on the basis of identity discrimination. Next, we have the diminution of autonomy. To choose one's gender identity or expression is an act of autonomy, therefore, when someone misgenders another individual, they are ignoring and belittling their autonomous decision to present themselves however they choose to.

[13] Cisgender people are those individuals whose gender aligns with their sex.
[14] The author goes by the pronouns *they/them* as seen in their social media

Following this, there is gender sadism which refers to the feeling of satisfaction, pleasure and/or superiority when refusing to accept gender minorities as socially equal.

Finally, all of the effects McNamarah lists can culminate in psychological and physiological injuries. Many studies have found that misgendering, in all its forms, can be considered a form of microaggression [15] which can cause deep harm. Some non-binary and binary transgender individuals show anxiety, feelings of apathy, hopelessness, depression and suicidal thoughts. Moreover, they might have bad self-perception and they might feel invalidated. This can lead to emotional distress, depression or post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

[15] "A statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination or prejudice against members of a marginalized group such as a racial minority." (OED Online, 2022)

4 Chapter 4. The influence of the feminist and the LGBTQ+ community movements on the English language: gender-neutral language

For decades there has been an active aim to change sexist and/ or gender-excluding language practices. Probably, the best-known movements are the feminisation of language, this is, the intention to create female-gendered counterparts for all male-gendered nouns, pronouns and adjectives, and gender-neutral language which foments the usage of language gender remarks. The focus of this chapter is the latter one. Therefore, we will now provide a brief history of gender-neutral language, an up-to-date definition of it and, finally, we will see some of its advantages and disadvantages.

4.1 The beginnings of gender-neutral language

The origins of gender-neutral language are intimately linked with the feminist movement. During the second wave of the movement, as we have previously described, feminists were really interested in getting rid of every ounce of sexism in society, this included language. During the 70s this intention gained many adepts and more women started to speak up against sexist language. They focused, mainly, on the use of generic *he* and the visibility of females in different spaces by feminising certain nouns, pronouns and adjectives like, for instance, job titles (Hord, 2016). An example of this linguistic battle would be when women at Harvard University started to protest against the use of generic masculine forms used in theological discussions and, unsurprisingly, their protests were met with a considerable amount of objections by some linguists, who classified these women's complaints as 'pronoun envy' (Cameron, 1992). Over the years, this struggle for changing the language would receive the name 'feminist language reform' or 'feminist language planning' and it would expand to the rest of the linguistic realms like, for instance, discourse.

Gender-neutral language entered the academic field as an object of study, as noted by Hord (2016), with Dennis Baron, who was one of the first linguists to look into the history of gender-neutral language with his book *Grammar and Gender* published in 1986. In this body of work, among many other issues, he examines the two-hundred-year history of grammarians' search for an epicene pronoun. Baron lists more than eighty gender-neutral pronouns coming to the final conclusion that the best chance English has of having an epicene pronoun is by using singular *they*. However, a few years earlier, in 1980, a very significant book was published on the non-sexist language matter: Casey Miller and Kate Swift's *The Handbook of Non-sexist Writing*. This guide, which was their second

attempt to promote non-sexist language, provided an in-depth analysis on how English communicates sexist notions and provides some tips on how to avoid such uses of language. It became, and still is to this day, the book of reference for non-sexist language and further fuelled the fight for gender-inclusive language.

4.2 The arrival of the LGBTQ+ community

Although there is no marked date or period in which the LGBTQ+ community started to get enrolled in gender-inclusive language, it is true that the collective has probably been an active advocate for the language reform from its beginnings. This is due to the fact that many lesbian and bisexual women were also feminist activists. However, it was during the decade of the 1990s to 2000s when both movements collided in their entirety as women's studies amplified their object of interest to include lesbian, gay and transgender struggles and started to be regarded as 'gender studies' (Connell, 2009). Further to this, during that same decade, 'transgender' became a more widespread identity label (Valentine, 2007 as cited in Zimman, 2017) which gave visibility to trans identities and their problems. Nevertheless, for many years, the popular belief was that all transgender people were transsexuals. Contrary to those beliefs, transexuality is a label within transgender identities, which is generally used by individuals whose transition involves medical procedures like hormones or surgery[16] (Abrams, 2019). Therefore, it could be stated that the general impression was that trangenderism only designated female-to-male or male-to-female transgender people that had gone or were going through medical procedures. There was seemingly little knowledge about individuals outside the gender binary. Non-binary people[17] probably started gaining some amount of visibility after Alex MacFarlane, an intersex person, attained the first 'indeterminate' passport and birth certificate in 2003 in Australia (Butler J. , 2003). However, most likely it was not until the second and third decades of the 20th century when genderqueer identities became more prevalent with many celebrities like Jaden Smith, son of Will Smith, or Demi Lovato sharing their non-binary identities with the public.

With the intention of giving visibility and accomodating all gender identities, transgender individuals, and the rest of the LGBTQ+ community, started to fight for a

[16] It should be reported that many transgender people find trouble with the 'transsexual' label as it was historically used in the fields of medicine and psychology to name transgender individuals as mentally ill or deviant. Therefore, this term should not be used to refer to a transgender person that has not made clear that they identify as such. (Abrams, 2019)

[17] Here I am only alluding to people who do not identify within the female-male binary

more gender-inclusive language too. As the feminist language reform had been mainly focused on eliminating all sexist remarks from language, during the 1990s with the rise of queer linguistics (Livia & Hall, 1997 as cited in Zimman, 2017), the LGBTQ+ community started to bring up practices that perpetuated heteronormatity, homophobia and gender normativity. Unsurprisingly, some of these practices included language. This prompted the emergence of the transgender language reform[18] which would strive for the removal of transphobia and cissexism in language. (Zimman, 2017)

4.3 Defining gender-neutral language

As can be seen, both the feminist and the LGBTQ+ movements have their own language reform and each has its own objectives: the feminist movement seeks the elimination of sexist remarks that eclipse women and the LGBTQ+ community, mainly the transgender community, quest for a language stripped off of gender and hetero-normativity and transphobia. Nevertheless, in many points, both reforms share the same intentions and, what works for one, might also work for the other. As a matter of fact, both reforms, in a way, look for and would benefit from a use of language that does not reflect gender biases and that can reflect as many gender realities as possible. This can be achieved with the use of gender-neutral language. However, with the unification of both reforms, how can 'gender-neutral language' be defined?

Gender-neutral language, also known as non-sexist or gender inclusive, is the name given to language that refers to both sexes, does not foment inequality between men and women (Kabba, 2011) and that does not overtly exhibit gender binarism, this is, it does not refer to men or women specifically. Additionally, gender-neutrality also seeks the eradication of cissexist views and transphobic expressions. Some examples of gender neutral language in English would be; avoiding *man*-compounds or male generics, for example, instead of using *policeman* or *fireman*, *police officer* or *firefighter* would be used; rejecting gendered pronouns in contexts where gender does not want to be disclosed or a person's gender is unknown, in such cases, pronouns might be disjointed, *he or she*/ *his or hers*/ *s/he*, or singular *they* might be used, for instance; recasting unnecessary-gendered sentences so that a sentence like *pick up a baby when he cries* would become *always pick up a crying baby* or, through pluralisation, *pick up babies when they cry*

[18] For a more in-depth analysis on some of the language changes the transgender language reform is trying to introduce see Zimman, 2017, pp. 89-100

(Cameron, 1992); or using epicene versions of words, for example, instead of using *mom* and *dad* one could use *parent* or, rather than *girl* or *boy*, utilise *child* (Zimman, 2017).

Interestingly, gender-neutral language has gained many adepts outside the movements where it was generated and developed. Many institutions like Harvard University, the United Nations or the European Parliament have already implemented the use of gender-inclusive language. In addition, they have created gender-neutral guidelines for their employees and anyone who might find it useful. In such guidelines, they suggest and foment the use of different linguistic gender-inclusive devices (e.g. see Harvard University, 2022; United Nations, n.d.; High-Level Group on Gender Equality and Diversity, 2018). This is significant since it shows that the effort being made has had results, at least in the political and some areas of the intellectual sphere.

However, there are still certain sections of the aforesaid movements, mainly the feminist movement, that do not fully believe in the (possible) existence of a neutral language. One case in point would be radical feminists. In her book *Feminism and linguistic theory* (1992), Deborah Cameron presents the opinion that some 'radical' theorists hold about the idea that society just needs to erase sexist expressions and substitute them with non-sexist ones. When Cameron talks about 'radical feminism' she refers to a tradition of thought that originated in English-speaking cultures, specially during the 1960s in the United States of America. Althought radical feminism has a diverse make-up, Cameron places its distinct braches under one tradition charaterised by "autonomous smal-group organisation (normally excluding men and often suing the technique of CR[19])" and a concern with gender. Radical theorists believe in the inexistence of a current neutral language on the account of the fact that, for them, the whole system is in itself sexist as it is controlled and belongs to men. Cameron explains this by saying:

> Radical feminist linguistic theories hold that language determines (or in a weaker formulation, places significant constraints on) our thought and perception, and thus our reality. A second theme is that men control language as they control other resources within a patriarchal society. Men determine how language is used and what it means; and consequently language enshrines a male and misogynist view of the

[19] Consciousness-raising: "originally U.S. the activity or experience of increasing a person's sensitivity or awareness, esp. in social or political matters" (OED Online, 2022). To learn about consciousness-raising and feminism see e.g. (Sisterhood and After Research Team, 2013)

> world. Thirdly, radical theorists assume that women are placed at a disadvantage as language-users. They may use the 'male' language, thus falsifying their experience and perceptions. This is 'alienation'. Or they may try to express themselves more authentically, in which case they will soon encounter a lack of suitable linguistic resources, and fall silent. (1992, p. 130)

With the purpose of "escaping" this men-ruled world, radical feminists like Mary Daly and Adrienne Rich (1978; 1980; as cited in Cameron, 1992) maintain that women can still encounter a "whole, authetic female self (The Inner Eye/ 'I') through a process of personal and political transformation". Moreover, they deem it important to pay attention to language as it can "remake us" throught its repossession.

In spite of the fact that gender-neutral language might not be acknowledged by every fraction of the feminist and LGBTQ+ movements, it has shown to be the better solution for the issues of both movements. In addition, the fact that many organisations have already implemented gender-neutral language in their work spaces further proves its success and acceptance.

4.4 Is gender-neutral language necessary?

Feminists and the LGBTQ+ community have vehemently expressed the need for a gender-neutral usage of language in order to a have a tool that can express genderless and inclusive messages, nonetheless there are still many people who do not understand why gender-neutral language is necessary. Therefore, in this section, we will mention some positive outcomes that the use of gender-neutral language can have on society and on individuals.

First of all, gender-neutral language can help with inclusivity of gender minorities and women, hence with their representation and visibility too. According to the OED Online (2022), *inclusivity* means "`[t]he fact or quality of being inclusive; (now) esp. the practice or policy of not excluding any person on the grounds of race, gender, religion, age, disability, etc.; inclusiveness.". As we have seen before, the use of gendered language creates unwanted gender-biased concepts in our minds. This provokes the exclusion and invisibility of certain factions of society and, as mentioned in the previous chapter, this linguistic isolation can have detrimental consequences on gender oppressed groups. With the use of gender-neutral language, we are actively and symbolically including all types of people, regardless of their gender, due to the fact that there is no gender specification in play.

Prewitt-Freilino et. al. (2012) provide a really clear example on how gender neutral language helps with inclusivity. They present a situation in which a career choice has to be made. They propose that, if a profession or field is presented with the masculine forms, women may not feel identified or included making them reject or not consider pursuing it. As a case in point, Prewitt-Freilino et. al. make reference to Bem and Bem's (1973) and Briere and Lanktree's (1983) investigations. In regard to the former, they found out that only 5% of the female participants applied for a job described only with male generics, in contrast with the 25% of women who applied for the job that used gender-neutral vocabulary. With respect to the latter, evidence shows that women were more interested in having a future career in psychology once they had read "an excerpt about ethical standards for psychologists" (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2012) written in a gender neutral way, than when they read the same excerpt with male generics. Further to these investigations, Prewitt-Freilino et. al. present a third study on the matter of the use of male generics, this is, Hamilton et. al.'s (Hamilton, Hunter, & Stuart-Smith, 1992) analysis on the use of gender neutral-language vs. male generics in legal contexts. Here Hamilton et. al. prove that the use of generics in legal situations "can dramatically affect people's perceptions of an individual's guilt or innocence" (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2012). In the study, in the context of a mock case, students were asked to decide if a woman had acted in self-defence or not. The 72 participants were divided into groups of 24 and were given the definition of 'self-defence', one group received a definition with the use of *he*, another group received a definition with the use of *he or she* and the last group with the use of *she*. From the first group only five students were inclined toward the acknowledgment of self-defence, from the second sixteen and from the last one eleven. All of these investigations further highlight the importance of gender-inclusive language as it can shape one's life and "have a dramatic impact on people's judgments, decisions, and behaviors" (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2012).

Moreover, while gender-neutral language does not directly benefit the representation and visibility of gender-oppresed groups, it does serve as a really valuable instrument to represent individuals of such groups. By this I mean that, if, for instance, in a movie a director wishes to have a genderqueer lead that goes by gender-neutral nouns and pronouns the utilisation of gender-neutral vocabulary is a necessary tool that will play a significant part in the formation of the character. The production of such a movie will then boost the representation and visibilisation of gender minorities. Another example

would be: in a school-setting, the school has set a day with the fire department for them to give a talk to children about their job, the teacher presents the firefighters as *firefighters* and not as *firemen* and into the clasroom come one woman, one man and one transgender person, by referring to them as *firefighters* the children will implement in their mindset that *firefighters* do not have an specific gender. However, if in the same situation the teacher would have referred to them as *firemen* the designation, due to its integration of the word *men*, would most probably confuse the students as not all the presenters are men. Therefore, althought gender-neutral language does not represent or visibilise gender minorities or women it does *accompany* their representation and visibility.

Specifically concerning trans identities, as Zimman (2017, pp. 101-102) rightly states

> it is language that serves as the most pervasive ground on which trans identities are delegitimised and transphobic violence is perpetuated. By the same token, it is also the ground on which trans identities can be affirmed, reclaimed and celebrated.

Gender-neutral language can be a one of the tools with which gender minorities can replace cissexist language patterns that invisibilise and oppress them and, through its usage, they may gain dignity and affirmation (Zimman, 2017). Moreover, gender-neutral language might aid in the creation of genderqueer-friendly spaces by providing gender unbiased vocabulary. What is more, through silence, stigmatised actions and identites are affirmed and perpetuaded, therefore, by *vocalising* the realities of certain fractions of the population we can de-stigmatise and visibilise them (Lavin & Barnes, 2020). This would most likely prompt changes in cultural and social attitudes towards gender minorites. In the case of transgender individuals, gender-neutral language, and more specifically, gender neutral pronouns would very much help in the matter about which we previously talked about, misgendering. As we have already seen, misgendering is a big issue for genderqueer people as it can provoke very serious effects on the perception they have of themselves and on the perception other people have of them. This effect can even go as far as causing life-threatening mental illnesses. The use of gender-neutral language can also be of great advantage when a person does not know how the other person identifies as and it will serve as a tool until the other person specifies the gender with which they identify and the pronouns they like people to use to refer to them.

Lastly, the use of gender-neutral language “reflects [our] awareness of the world’s expanded undertanding of gender” (Herzer, 2021). This means that by making the

concious choice to use inclusive language you are accepting and being aware that the gender binary is not a "requiste" or essential for being human, gender is nothing more than a social construction. Furthermore, previous research on the influence of gender-neutral language on gender stereotypes and discrimination has shown that gender inclusivity in language can mitigate gender conventions and discrimination (Sczesny, Formanowicz, & Moser, 2016)[20].

4.4.1 The case of *hen* in Swedish

According to Gustafsson Sendén et. al. (2015), in 2012 Swedish introduced a parallel gender-neutral third person pronoun to its existing gendered pronouns *hon* 'she' and *han* 'he'. This new pronoun is said to have been firstly coined during the 1960s after linguist Rolf Dunås started the discussion on the need of a gender-neutral pronoun (Asklöv, 2022). However, it did not gain popularity until it appeared in a children's book in 2012. In this book, the author instead of using the typical gendered pronouns, they used the gender-neutral pronoun *hen*. This arouse a great deal of heated discussions about its use and it consequences. Nevertheless, years later, in July of 2014, The Swedish Academy (the unofficial academy of the Swedish language) would include the term in their next glossary. In Gustafsson Sendén et. al. study (2015) on changing the attitudes of Swedish people towards the new pronoun, they found that in the beginning the resistance towards *hen* was high , but over time it lessened and people started to view it in a positive light. The favourable consideration of people towards the word encouraged the increase in its use. So much that

> In 2018, there were 133 *han* and *hon* used for every one *hen*. In 2012, when the debate started, that number was 416. The year before that, when *hen* was merely a twinkle in its non-binary parent's eye, was 13,000. (Asklöv, 2022)

Moreover, the pronoun is now normalised in news articles where it is used when the gender of the person in unknown or not relevant. *Hen* also comes in handy to replace expressions such as *han eller hon, han/hon* or *vederbörande* (respectively, 'he and she', 'hen/she' and 'the person concerned') which enhances the flow of the text (Asklöv, 2022). Nevertheless, *hen* has shown to be more succesful amongst younger generations and

[20] As Sczesny et. al. signal, such researches are not completely conclusive as the current evidence finds is basis on "experimental paradigms with different kinds of measures"

people who share certain ideologies. Probably with the passing of time it will become more or more normalised.

Swedish is the first language to incorporate a completely new gender-neutral pronoun in their language (Gustafsson Sendén, Bäck, & Lindqvist, 2015). Its success shows us that people do want and are willing to change their liguistic behavious in order to accommodate to other persons' reality. Furthermore, this situation also manifests that the use of gender-neutral language can be helpful for many different fields of society. The success of *hen* might also serve as an example of what singular *they* can become and achieve in the English language.

4.5 Some problems of gender-neutral language

In spite of the fact that gender-neutral language has many advantages and can motivate the visibility and inclusion of oppressed genders, it can also endanger the visibility of people who identify as women. Many intellectual feminists have pointed out that gender-neutrality can sometimes invisibilise the existence and presence of women in some fields and contexts. This happens when gender neutral nouns and adjectives are socially gendered (e.g *farmer* and *handsome*). This socially gendered words can be very ingrained in a society's mindset and whenever they are utilised they incite a mental picture in which women are not included. This, of course, also pertains transgender individuals, but feminists seem to exhibit a bigger dilemma with it as these type of words completely invisibilise their position in areas where before women did not have the right to be or were not commonly included. For instance, *soldier* is a non-gendered word, however, for many centuries women were not able to enroll in the military. Consequently, when somebody utters the word *soldier* without an explicit allusion to their gender, it might evoke a mental image in which the referred person is a man. This completely erases the presence and existence of women in the military sector.

To further delve into this issue, in 2012, Prewitt-Freilino et. al. conducted an study comparing how gender equality varied from countries which use gendered, natural and genderless languages (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2012). In this study, Prewitt-Freilino found evidence that demonstrates that countries where natural and genderless languages are spoken exhibit higher gender equality between men and women than countries with gendered languages. Further to that, countries with natural gender languages seem to be slightly more gender equal than those with a genderless language. Prewitt-Freilino et al. suggest that this could be due to the ability that natural languages

have to create new words which would help produce symmetrical terms that visibilise women. Besides, unlike grammatically gendered languages, natural gender languages "do not depend upon gendered structures that would limit the legibility or intelligibility of symmetrical revisions" (Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell, & Laakso, 2012). In regards to genderless languages, Prewitt-Freilino et. al. make reference to Stahlberg et. al. (2007) who indicate that, even though such languages are thought to be more gender neutral or fair than languages with grammatical or natural gender, studies have demonstrated that gender neutral terms can still be decoded by the audience in a gender-biased way. In their review, conducted an investigation on gender neutral terms in Spanish, English, Turkish and German which served as alternatives of masculine generics. In such investigation, the results proved that those terms still continue to connote a male bias, while, in situations when gender symmetrical versions (e.g. "he or she") were used, a bigger inclusion of women was promoted. Prewitt-Freilino et. al (2012, pp. 278-279) further elaborate on the topic by saying:

> genderless languages [..] can include seemingly gender neutral terms that in fact connote a male bias (just as natural and gendered languages), but because they do not possess grammatical gender, it is not possible to use female pronouns or nouns to "emphasize women's presence in the world," which could mean "androcentricity in a genderless language may even increase the lexical, semantic and conceptual invisibility of women" (Engelberg 2002, p.128).

This further proves and supports the idea that some gender-neutral words can still carry gender biases that could have damaging repercussions for the visibility of women.

5 Chapter 5. Empirical analysis: *actor, police officer* and *firefighter*

5.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to a practical analysis in which I will explore whether the use of the gender-neutral nouns *actor*, *police officer* and *firefighter* has changed in relation to their male/female-gendered counterparts over the last thirty years (from 1990 until 2019).

5.2 Methodology

For my purposes I have chosen the nouns *actor*, *police officer* and *firefighter* and the gendered equivalents of the latter two *policeman/woman* and *fireman/woman.* These terms were selected for various reasons. As for *actor*, it presents a unique case since, even though it does have a female equivalent (*actress*), in recent years there has been a shift in the entertainment industry towards the use of the male form as a gender-inclusive form used to refer to any gender. Therefore, it would be interesting to examine whether there has been an increase in the use of *actor* with reference to females. Concerning *police officer* and *firefighter*, these are two job titles of two labour fields that have predominantly been attributed to men as they require physical characteristics, such as strength or muscled bodies, which are widely ascribed to "manly" men. This belief has motivated that for many years people who were part of the fire department were regarded as *firemen* and people in the police office as *policemen.* However, in the last few years, these forces have been actively trying to recruit more women (e.g. How to recruit more female officers, n.d.; Aziz, 2022) and more women have been applying to such jobs (e.g. College of policing, 2021). This has prompted the use of gender-neutral job titles as well as the arousal of feminine forms (*police-woman* and *firewoman*). Further to this, job titles have been a controversial issue for the feminist movement for decades (see Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013). Consequently, it would be interesting to see if there has been a rise in the use of the gender-neutral forms and if these appear with female referents. Furthermore, I will explore whether the rise of the gender-neutral terms has happened hand-in-hand with a decrease in the use of the male/female-gendered forms. Overall, this could indicate whether the influence of the LGBTQ+ and feminist movements on the use of gender-inclusive language has had any real effects.

This empirical study is based on dictionary evidence (OED) as well as corpus data (COCA and GoogleBooks). In what follows, I will briefly describe the three sources of data.

The Oxford English Dictionary is regarded as the "authority of the English language" (Oxford University Press, n.d.). It originated 150 years ago and, at present, it contains 600.000 words. Its uniqueness stems from the fact that it not only contains the current meanings of words, but it also displays their whole history, from their first written appearance and origin to their current form "traced through 3 million quotations" (Oxford University Press, n.d.) extracted from all types of texts. Moreover, the OED also provides the pronunciation in different accents of the words. (Oxford University Press, n.d.). Regarding the three nouns under analysis, the OED will be used to check whether there is any significant information about their history and/or meaning.

Secondly, I will use the COCA corpus (Davies, 2008-), a corpus of Contemporary American English which contains data from 1990 to the present day. Nowadays, COCA is composed of more than one billion words and a wide range of genres that go from transcripts of conversations to subtitles of television and movies and including academic texts. Moreover, this corpus contains 20 million words from every year between 1990 and 2019. These characteristics permit the retrieval of relevant data on "the frequency of words, phrases and grammatical constructions" throughout several genres and years (COCA Corpus, 2020). I will use the corpus to check the frequency of the nouns, as well as their collocation with female referents.

In order to examine the use of gender-neutral words applied to female referents, I will conduct an examination of collocates[21,22]. According to the Collins Dictionary (Collins Cobuild, 2001), "[i]n linguistics, a collocate of a particular word is another word which often occurs with that word." The analysis of collocates is relevant as it can tell us how often a word appears with other linguistic expressions. In order to do this, I have searched for the personal pronouns *he/she* in a window of four words before and after the search item. I have divided the searches in three decades (1990 to 1999, 2000 to 2009 and 2010 to 2019) so as to explore whether there has been a change over time. In the analysis of collocates, I have proceeded to discard false positives, this is, instances, for example, where the feminine pronoun appears close to the word, but it is not the referent of the

[21] Concerning the results of the collocates, COCA, in its general-overview page of the results, shows one number which does not coincide with the number of results one can find in the "Context" page (this last one is always higher). Therefore, I have chosen to insert in the different tables the number of the "Context" page.

[22] As will be seen there are some results on the table that will not add up to the "Frequency" number. This due to the fact that, in COCA, there are some contexts which do not appear in the list, but the engine counts them as if they were there.

noun (e.g. *she told the actor to stop smoking*). Finally, after eliminating all false positives, I have examined if there has been and increase or decrease in the application of the gender-inclusive words to women.

The data obtained from the corpus have been complemented with data from Ngram Viewer (Michel, et al., 2010) in order to see the evolution in the use of the gender-neutral and male-gendered (therefore, *actor* will not be an object of examination) terms in the last 59 years (1960-2019). Ngram Viewer is a tool belonging to Google Books that shows a graph which displays "how those phrases [expressions or words] have occurred in a corpus of books (e.g., "British English", "English Fiction", "French") over the selected years" (Google Ngram Viewer Team, n.d.). The Ngram Viewer corpora consist of books of various genres from American and British English as well as books written in English but published in other countries. Additionally, the corpora also have books written in other languages like Spanish, French or German, but these are not relevant for our research. In this tool, I have settled the settings to show me the trends of the English corpus of 2019, which consists of books in English published in any country, between the aforementioned years.

In the following section I will deal with each of the nouns in detail.

5.2.1 Actor

The OED provides many definitions for *actor*, but the one we are interested in is the fourth sense, which states the following:

> A person who acts a part on stage or (in later use also) in a film, on television, etc.; a dramatic performer, a player. Frequently in figurative context. Also in extended use: a person who behaves in a theatrical manner; a person skilled in dissimulation. (OED Online, 2022)

As can be perceived, the definition keeps gender-inclusive terminology which means that this term can be used to refer to any gender. Nevertheless, the online version shows a small entry beneath the definition which indicates "[o]n the use of actor with reference to a female performer, see note at actress n. 2a." sending us to the online page of the word *actress*. If we click on the link, one can encounter the definition of said word which almost fully replicates that of *actor*, but with the specification that *actress* is used only when the person is a woman. Additionally, underneath the definition the authors of the dictionary further explain:

> Women did not appear on stage in public in England until after the Restoration of 1660, following which the terms *actor* and *actress* were both used to describe female performers. Later, actor was often restricted to men, with *actress* as the usual term for women. Although *actress* remains in general use, *actor* is increasingly preferred for performers of both sexes as a gender-neutral term. (OED Online, 2022)

For the noun *actor* I will be only analysing examples in which the term collocates with *he/she* in the context. The table below illustrates the results of the analysis:

Years	**Words**	**Frequency**	**False positives with *she***	**True positives with *she***	**Other uses**
1990-1999	*He*	661			
	She	79	53	20	6
2000-2009	*He*	713			
	She	93	45	32	14
2010-2019	*He*	1203			
	She	192	77	95	14

Table 1. Third person singular pronouns collocating with the noun *actor*

As we can see in the given results, overall, there are way more results with the masculine pronoun than with the feminine. Between 1990 and 1999, of the 79 feminine collocates 53 were false positives, 20 actually showed that the referent of *actor* was a woman and 6 exhibited a generic use of the word or the context was not enough to affirm whether the referent was male or female. Concerning the subsequent decade, it can be seen that the results of the feminine pronoun, present a decrease in the number false positives, whilst the number of true positives goes up to 32. In addition, the section "Other uses" showcases a growth of more than the double. Finally, in the last analysed decade, both frequencies increase again with *she* displaying an increase of almost 100 more results. Interestingly, 95 of the 192 results are true positives staying above the number of false positives.

In COCA's section of "Contexts" some examples of false and true positive together with the "others uses" can be found, as illustrated in examples (1) to (3)

(1) Dick-T ROSE: (Voiceover) **She** is also an **actor**, whose roles are often reflective of her own image (1990s).

In the section of the 1990s, we firstly encounter an example extracted from CBS program "60 minutes" about Madonna. As can be seen, here we have a case of a true positive, as the pronoun *she* refers to the word *actor*. (2) illustrates a false positive:

(2) including her long-time lover, who was at her side when **she** died, **actor Ryan O'Neal**. Tonight, we want to celebrate the life, the loves," (2000s).

In this case, the pronoun appears close to the noun, nevertheless, *actor* here refers to *Ryan O'Neal*, a male actor, and *she* makes reference to Farrah Fawcett, a female actor. Interestingly, if we go the amplified version of the contexts we can notice that, in the program where this citation has been extracted, they refer to her as an actress. Concerning other usages, in the las time period, we have an example of fiction:

(3) "there on the sofa in the evenings, exclaiming in surprise when **she** saw an **actor she** knew in a movie or a show, **she** would not fall asleep there" (2010s).

As can be observed, *she* is not referring to *actor*. If we go to check the amplified version of this small extract it can be verified that the gender of the actor is not disclosed at any point and there is no reference to anything that might signal their gender.

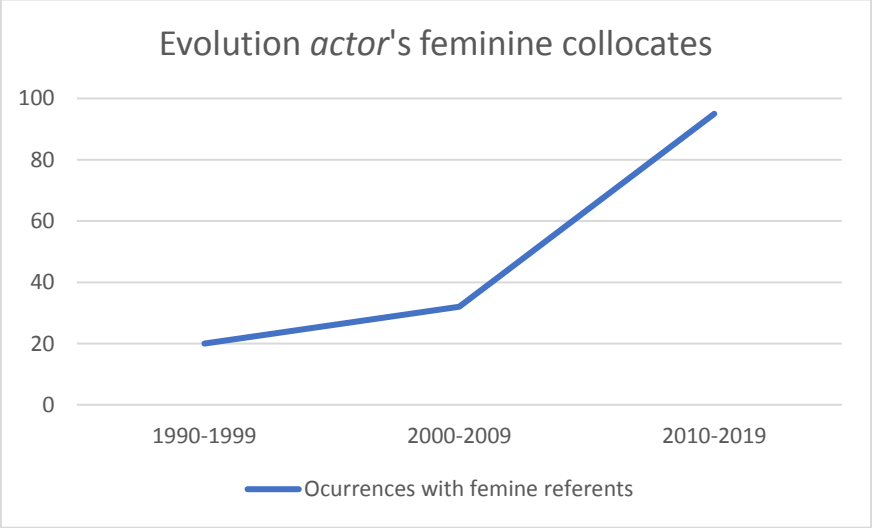


Figure 1. Evolution of *actor*'s feminine collocates

The growing frequency of female referents with the noun *actor* can be seen in Figure 1.

Altogether, the results we have gathered for the use of actor demonstrate that the reception of the term as gender-inclusive/genderless form has been tolerated. As the evolution graph (Figure 2) presents, the significant change in the use of *actor* to refer to women took place between 2010 and 2019. In this period the usage of actor with female referents increased by 63 more occurrences than the previous decade. What is more, the fact that the explanation about the use of *actor* for both males and females has reached the OED, further supports my claim and the COCA results. On another note, the success of the gender-inclusive use of *actor* could be attributable to the Internet and social media. The greatest increase of female actor coincides with the beginning of the fourth feminist wave which, as seen in section 2.1.5, finds its most important accomplice on the Internet. Further to this, actors have been great allies and open members of both the LGBTQ+ and feminist movements and their status as celebrities has facilitated the spread of their inclusive discourses.

5.2.2 Police officer

This compound word does not show anything of great interest regarding its definition in the OED other than the fact that it is defined in a gender-neutral way. However, something that might grab one's attention is the fact that while *policeman* has its own entry in the dictionary, *police-woman* and *police officer* do not. Both of these job titles can be found as compounds of the noun *police* in the dictionary. Furthermore, the word *police-woman* does not exhibit a definition *per se*, the OED only clarifies that it is a noun. Interestingly, the definition, of *policeman* reads as follows: "A member of a police force; a (male) **police officer**" (OED Online, 2022; emphasis mine).

With reference to the occurrences of the words *police officer*, *policeman* and *police-woman* per million words, COCA exhibits considerably different results for each noun. Regarding the male-gendered word, its use has steadily decreased over time from 17.72 to 6.56, as can be seen in Figure 2. Figure 3 shows the results for *police-woman* were one interesting aspect can be perceived: this word exhibits very low results all along the six periods. What is more, the use of *police-woman* displays a constant decrease from 1990 until 2004, but between 2005 and 2009 an increase of 0.16 points takes places. Nevertheless, this slight increase is followed by another steady decrease which ends in the lowest frequency of the word at 0.23. Finally, in Figure 4 we can see the result for the

gender-neutral term *police officer*. This compound exhibits pretty uniform results from 1990 until 2014 ranging from a maximum of 23.42 to a minimum of 19.62. Nonetheless, in the last five-year period the frequency greatly rises up to 42.89.

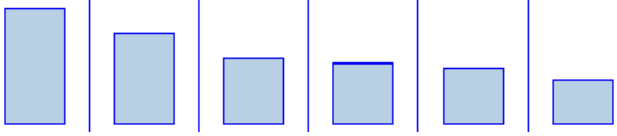
SECTION	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	2146	1763	1260	1150	1076	805
WORDS (M)	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	17.72	14.08	10.11	9.35	8.72	6.56
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE						

Figure 2. Frequency *policeman*

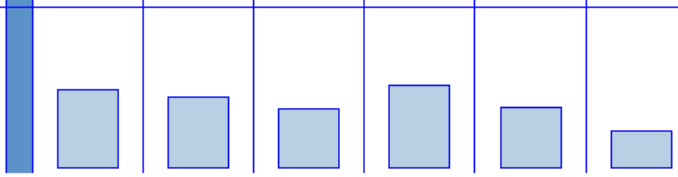
SECTION	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	62	57	47	66	48	28
WORDS (M)	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	0.51	0.46	0.38	0.54	0.39	0.23
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE						

Figure 3. Frequency *police-woman*

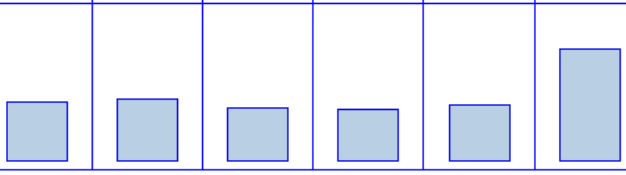
SECTION	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	2675	2932	2496	2414	2638	5265
WORDS (M)	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	22.09	23.42	20.03	19.62	21.39	42.89
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE						

Figure 4. Frequency *police officer*

On the subject of collocates, *police officer* presents way less results than *actor*, however in all periods the number of *he* collocates is way higher than the ones for *she*. As one can see in Table 2, *she*, from 1990 to 1999, exhibits a total of 42 results of which 15 are true positives. However, in contrast with *actor*, from 2000 to 2009, the table shows a decrease in the number of occurrences with the feminine pronoun, 30, but this is not the case with the masculine pronoun, 161. Regarding true positives in the same time period, as expected, the number also slightly drops to 12. Lastly, during the last decade, the

frequency digit goes up again staying at 82 and so do the true positives which altogether add a total of 25.

Years	Words	Frequency	False positives with *she*	True positives with *she*	Other uses
1990-1999	*He*	157			
	She	42	9	15	14
2000-2009	*He*	161			
	She	30	10	12	7
2010-2019	*He*	336			
	She	82	19	25	35

Table 2. Third person singular pronouns collocating with the noun *police officer*

Before continuing with the next section, I would like to draw attention to the numbers in the "Other use" column of this compound. This column, as I have already explained before, is made up of generic uses and those occurrences where the gender of the referent has not been disclosed or it is not clear. While the numbers of this category are not that relevant in the other gender-neutral words, *police officer* showcases a significant amount of these instances, especially between 2010 and 2019 (35).

In (1) to (3), examples of the *he/she* collocates with the word *police officer* can be found. (1) exhibits a case of a false positive:

(1) "voice-over) Lisa Michelle said that in 1991 **she** had been stalked by a **police officer**. **She** said **she** was able to keep **him** away from her until the night" (1990s).

In this example it can be seen that the feminine pronoun refers to *Lisa Michelle* and not to *police officer*. As a matter of fact, in the next phrase we have the third person singular masculine pronoun *him* which is used to refer back to *police officer* clarifying the gender of the person. Then, in the next time period, we have this example of a true positive:

(2) “Berkeley campus of the University of California handing out religious literature. A campus **police officer** became suspicious when **she** saw the two young girls with him. She checked his” (2000s).

In this case, it is clear that the feminine pronoun alludes to *police officer*. Lastly, a case of other usages would be:

(3) “Chief Rick Lewis. McKee was interviewing Rosen about the conduct of another Springfield **police officer** when **she** brought up Halttunen's behavior, which **she** characterized as stalking. #” (2010s).

In this example, it can be observed that the pronoun is making reference to *Rosen* and not to the *Springfield police officer*. Additionally, if we check the amplified version of the context at any point is the gender of such officer mentioned.

5.2.2.1 Ngram Viewer

The graph below illustrates the evolution of the use of *policeman* (red line) and *police officer* (blue line) from the 1960 until 2019. As the graph shows in 1980 the path of both words collides as the use of *policeman* decreases and *police officer* increases. From that point until 2005, the latter term’s use stays above the former with *police officer* reaching its peak around the year 2000. Subsequently, *policeman*’s use keeps growing surpassing the gender-inclusive form around 2004 and, from that moment on, the gendered form seems to stay above the gender-inclusive term.

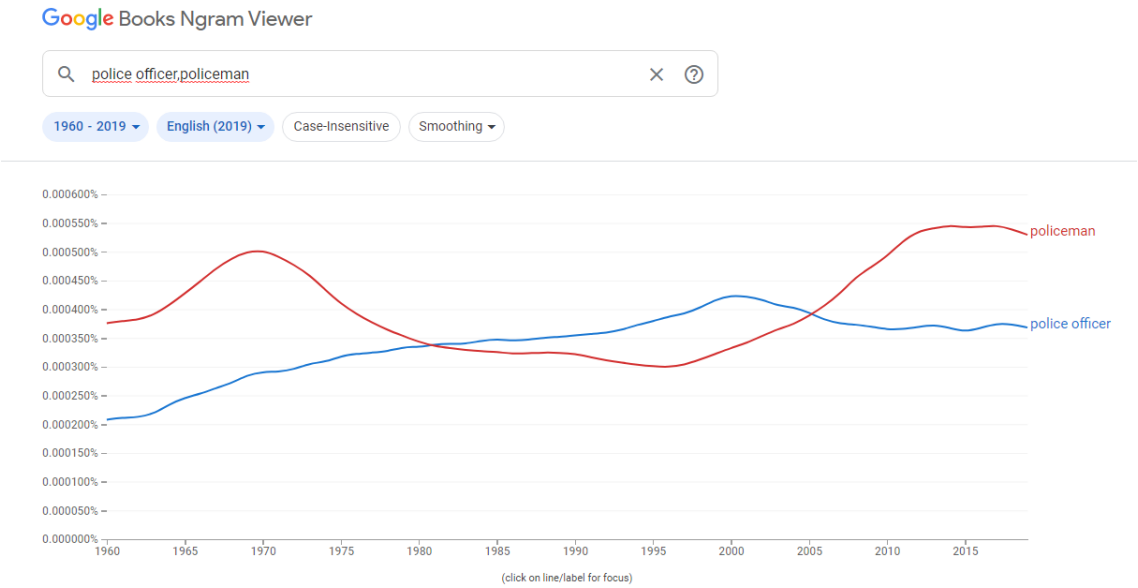


Figure 5. Evolution graph *policeman* vs. *police officer*.

On view of this results, it can be seen that are very revealing due to the fact that the COCA chart shows contrary results to the Ngram Viewer. While the latter demonstrates that in recent years the use of *policeman* has thrived and that during the 2000s *police officer* was more widely used than *policeman*, the former showcases the contrary. The data from COCA show not only that *police officer* is overall more widely applied, but that its use increases over time and that *policeman/women*'s usage declines. This discrepancy can be attributed to the fact that the Ngram viewer shows the frequency of the words on books, while the results of COCA are more general. In addition, this claim is supported by the data from COCA which, as Figures 6 and 7 show, demonstrate that *policeman* is way more popular term in fiction than *police officer*.

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	22146	1618	2108	1509	6380	1110	1513	6952	956
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	22.30	12.58	16.97	11.78	50.58	9.38	12.00	57.10	7.98
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE									

Figure 6. Use of *police officer* in fiction (6th column)

SECTION	ALL	BLOG	WEB	TV/M	SPOK	FIC	MAG	NEWS	ACAD
FREQ	9447	506	741	1202	1739	2757	790	1183	529
WORDS (M)	993	128.6	124.3	128.1	126.1	118.3	126.1	121.7	119.8
PER MIL	9.51	3.93	5.96	9.39	13.79	23.30	6.27	9.72	4.42
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE									

Figure 7. Use of *policeman* in fiction (6th column)

After commenting on this discrepancy in the material, I can continue with the discussion of the results. The reduction on the use of *policeman,* presented by the COCA charts, coincides with the start of the feminist movement's fight for the use of inclusive gender. Concerning the use of *policewoman*, the number of frequencies is so low that there is nothing worth noting. On the contrary, *police officer*'s sudden increase between 2015 and 2019 is very interesting. It could the due to the fact that, during those years, cases of police brutality, especially against Afro-American citizens in the US, became

prominent in the news. This suggestion cannot be fully funded, but if one searches in COCA the evolution of the frequency of *police officer* in news, it can be seen that, in that same period of time, the frequency of the word in this sector exponentially increased (see Figure 8). Therefore, the growth on the use of this word might not be linked to the influence of the feminist and LGBTQ+ community.

SECTION	ALL	NEWS	ACAD		1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	6951	6951	0		840	841	819	780	927	2744
WORDS (M)	993	19.9	19.6		22.9	24.2	24.0	23.7	23.8	23.7
PER MIL	7.00	347.13	0.00		36.73	34.60	33.97	32.72	38.80	115.26
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE										

Figure 8. Use of *police officer* in the news.

On another note, Table 2 also exhibits an increase in the use of *police officer* with female referents. But, as I have already highlighted in the previous section, the most striking number is shown in the "Other uses" category. This could mean that rather than being used with female/male referents in a good number of its occurrences, *police officer* might be widely used in contexts in which the gender of the referent is not relevant or does not want to be disclosed. Thus, the idea that *police officer* has gained ground as a completely gender-neutral term could be proposed.

Respecting the search results of the OED, it can be claimed that the fact that *police officer* and *police-woman* do not have their own entry is, to say the least, symbolic. Specially owing to the fact that, as we have already seen, *police officer* is more commonly used than *policeman*, who does have an entry. Nevertheless, it is true that the former is a compound that still is graphically written as two separate words in which case such words are usually located under the definition of the head of the compound.

5.2.3 Firefighter

In the case of this word, the definitions of *fireman* and *firefighter* are pretty similar with small differences like the specification that *fireman* is generally used in reference to a man. Moreover, the definition of *fireman* features a link that sends the reader to the definition of the word *firewoman*. However, two things should be noted; firstly, the female-gendered term does not have its own entry in the dictionary, whilst *fireman* and *firefighter* do; secondly, while the gender-neutral and male-gendered forms have pretty

similar definitions, *firewoman* is only defined as "a female firefighter" (OED Online, 2022).

For *firefighter*, *fireman* and *firewoman* the frequency charts present compelling results. With regard to the female-gendered form, as shown in Figure 9, the instances in which this word appears are very minimal throughout the decades reaching its peak during the 2000 to 2004 lustrum at 0.02. The next figure provides the results on the frequency of *fireman* whose numbers display a considerable contrast in regard to the amount of results with those of *firewoman. Fireman*'s results stay constant in the first two periods, nevertheless between 2000 and 2004 its use increases almost 2 points setting at 6.40. Yet, in the next lustrum, occurrences remarkably decrease to 3.80 and, from then on, the fall is continuous. The results shown in Figure 11 correspond to *firefighter* whose frequency is overall higher than *fireman*, but it exhibits a striking increase during the third lustrum, 2000-2004, of over 12 points. This sets the frequency per million at 18.81. This growth is followed by another noteworthy decline of over 7 points and from that point onwards the occurrences of *firefighter* remain constant with a slight increase between 2015 and 2019.

SECTION	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	0	1	2	0	0	1
WORDS (M)	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	0.00	0.01	0.02	0.00	0.00	0.01
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE						

Figure 9. Frequency *firewoman*

SECTION	1990-94	1995-99	2000-04	2005-09	2010-14	2015-19
FREQ	538	553	798	468	379	314
WORDS (M)	121.1	125.2	124.6	123.1	123.3	122.8
PER MIL	4.44	4.42	6.40	3.80	3.07	2.56
SEE ALL SUB-SECTIONS AT ONCE						

Figure 10. Frequency *fireman*

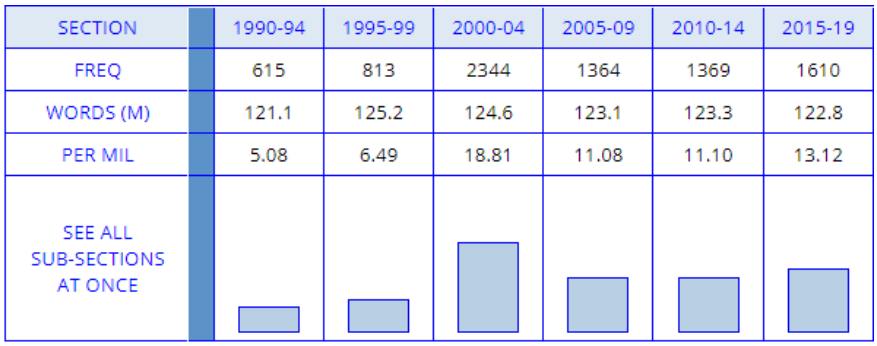


Figure 11. Frequency *firefighter*

The results on the collocates of *firefighter* are set out in Table 3. The table shows that the frequency of the word with the male pronoun is also substantially higher than with the female pronoun. Unexpectedly, the first decade does not present any true positives or "Other uses", all four occurrences are false positives. This changes completely in the following decade which showcases 8 true positives and 2 "Other uses" of the 14 total occurrences. From 2010 to 2019, the frequency lightly drops by 3 less instances of which 5 are false positives and 6 are true positives.

Years	**Words**	**Frequency**	**False positives with *she***	**True positives with *she***	**Other uses**
1990-1999	*He*	28			
	She	4	4	0	0
2000-2009	*He*	78			
	She	14	2	8	2
2010-2019	*He*	94			
	She	11	5	6	0

Table 3. Third person singular pronouns collocating with the noun *firefighter*

Concerning the word *firefighter*, examples (1) to (3) showcase examples of the three categories displayed in Table 3. One of the four examples of false positives of the first interval reads:

(1) “journalist in the sitcom Kelly Kelly (WB, spring). After **she** meets **firefighter Doug Kelly** (Robert Hays), she marries him and becomes stepmom to his” (1990s).

In this example, *firefighter* in referring to the character of the sitcom *Doug Kelly* who can be identified as man due to the fact that later the pronoun *him* is used. Regarding *she* it can be seen that it refers to the “journalist in the sitcom”, whose name, if the wider context is checked, is Kelly Novak, a female name. Then, we have, between 2000 to 2009, the following quotation:

(2) “says **she** grew up on an organic farm in California and wanted to be a **firefighter**. All she'll add about her home life is it was unstable, and” (2000s).

Here the feminine pronoun *she* is attributable to *firefighter* making this example a true positive. Finally, we have the “other usage” example:

(3) “kill me.' " # She met up with a fire captain and a **firefighter** whom **she** credits with saving her life. As the first building collapsed, they” (2000s).

Clearly *firefighter* is not the referent of *she* in this short extract and, even when the larger quotation is inspected, there is no gendered pronoun that refers to this *firefighter*.

5.2.3.1 Ngram Viewer

It can be seen from the data in Figure 9 that both words faced very different trajectories until 1994. *Fireman*’s usage decreased continually, whilst the occurrence of *firefighter* grew exponentially until 2001. As a matter of fact, he graphic shows that the use of *firefighter* was higher between 1994 to 2014, nevertheless from that point onwards both words have been used with almost even frequencies.

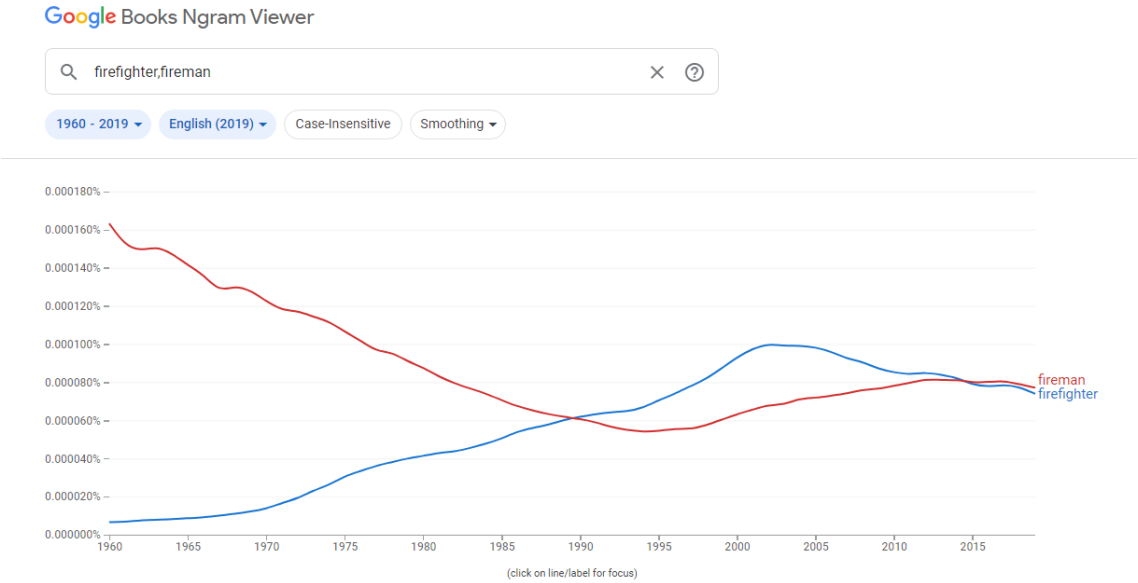


Figure 12. Evolution graph *firefighter* vs. *fireman*

Concerning the OED search results of the words *firefighter* and its feminine and masculine counterparts not much can be said. It can be claimed that there seems to be a gender bias given that *firewoman* does not have its own entry and the definition is somewhat weak in comparison to the other two terms. What is more, in contrast with *police officer*, *firefighter* does have its own entry, nevertheless it is a compound that is graphically written as one unified word.

In regard to the frequency of the words, the occurrences of *firewoman* are very low all throughout the decades which demonstrates the little success the feminisation of this job title has had. As for *fireman* and *firefighter*, both show, in COCA and Ngram Viewer, an increase in the same time period, 2000-2004. This coincidence could be due to external causes, as we have just seen in the case of *police officer*, given that both rapid growths are followed by drastic declines. Nevertheless, as COCA shows *firefighter*'s increase is way more notable and it might be linked to the 1990s feminist language revolution. Additionally, during the same time-period, we also have the incorporation of queer studies which changed the society's view of gender and joined the language reform. Although these circumstances happened the preceding decade, probably their consequences did not materialise until the arrival of the new century. Thus, the steady decline on the use of *fireman* and the slow growth of *firefighter* might also back this claim up. Lastly, in the book realm, as Ngram Viewer shows both terms seem to be used in the same rate nowadays.

On the topic of collocates, *firefighter* only displays one significant result: the evolution from 0 to 8 in the number of occurrences with the feminine pronoun. This result shows its application to female referents has most likely been successful. However, another point worth commenting is the little success it seems to have had as generic term in comparison to *police officer*. Yet, this last comment might be debunked if the occurrences with the *he* collocates are analysed too.

5.2.4 Overall discussion of the results

Overall, these results showcase that the feminist and LGBTQ+ language reforms have been to some extent successful. However, the way this success is displayed varies from one form to the other. Whilst words like *firefighter* and *actor* have shown, one more than the other, a palpable grow in its use with female referents, *police officer* seems to have thrived in the genderless realm. However, it cannot be ignored that the numbers of the male referents with the gender-neutral terms are still way higher than the female ones. In the case of *police officer* and *firefighter* this result could be a consequence of them still being male-dominant fields. Nevertheless, this only goes to show that there still is a long way to go. The language reform is not the only necessary tool to get rid of sexism and transphobia, there also needs to be a reform in society and its beliefs.

Lastly, I would like to comment on the fact that this small corpus study has only been able to analyse the results on inclusive gender language pertaining women's visibility. I have not checked whether some contexts could be referring to transgender individuals, nonetheless, I believe that the huge differences in numbers between feminised and gender-neutral job titles is also remarkable. Besides, the fact that masculine collocates were not examined could have prevented us from discovering more relevant results. Therefore, this could be a great subject of research for any further investigation.

6 Conclusion

The initial aim of this dissertation was to explore the relationship of the LGBTQ+ and feminist movements and the expansion of the use, in English, of gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language. In addition, it was considered fitting to carry out a study on the connection between language and gender and its repercussions on women and non-binary individuals together with a discussion on society's possible need for gender-neutral language. Lastly, for the purpose of verifying the influence of both movements on the utilisation of gender-neutral language in English, a corpus work on the use of three gender-inclusive terms was executed.

The research on the aforementioned topics has proved to be of great value to deepen the understanding on the origins and need for gender-inclusive language. The first chapter of this dissertation provided us with an overview of the origins and goals of the LGBTQ+ community and the feminist movement. This outline also presented the predicaments both communities faced and their relationship with society's beliefs on gender. This led us to the explanation of the difference between sex and gender which highlighted the fact that gender is a performance and not something innate linked to one's sex. Overall, this initial segment contributed to the reinforcement of our general understanding of the basic concepts of the dissertation.

The relation between gender and language dealt with in chapter 3 demonstrated that gender is heavily entrenched in our view and understanding of our social world. In addition, language is a tool that helps humans describe and create their reality (Neser, 2018) and, as social beings, humans use language to communicate, construct and get involved in the social world. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that the gender construct is also profoundly assimilated in language. Consequently, this section of the chapter also showcased how gender can be conveyed at different linguistic levels. The next section presented an explanation of the notion of gender binarism and an overview of those gender identities that do not ascribe to it. This served as a great ground for the next segment on the consequences of gendering. The investigation on this matter confirmed that language can be very damaging not only for women, but also for transgender people, serving as support to the feminist and transgender claim that language is harmful and can prompt the erasure of certain groups of society.

After this compilation of relevant information, Chapter 4 approaches the main subject of this dissertation: gender-neutral language and its relationship with the LGBTQ+ and

feminist movements. It starts by giving a summary on the history of gender-inclusive language which unquestionably situates its origins during the third wave of the feminist movement and the arousal of queer studies. After taking a view to the past, research on the current state of gender-neutral language demonstrated that in the last decade different significant organisations, like the European Union or Harvard University, have been making active efforts to foment its use. The objective behind this encouragement seems to be that these organisations seek a more inclusive work environment. Thus, this evidences that the efforts of the aforesaid movements have been prosperous. In spite of everything, it is known that some people are still cautious about the use of gender-neutral language. For this reason, in this chapter a discussion on the necessity for its use was given. Such discussion, with support of a number of investigations, proved that gender-neutral language is a necessary and helpful tool that avoids many situations were gendering could be detrimental. In spite of this, it should taken into consideration that gender-inclusive language can still rouse some challenges for women's visibility.

Lastly, the empirical study in chapter 5 corroborated that the usage of gender-neutral language has increase and its expansion has reached many sectors of society. Moreover, the growth on the frequency of gender-neutral terms coincides with the start of the feminist and transgender language reform. Thus, it could be stated, although to a small degree owing to the size of the search, that the feminist and LGBTQ+ community have had an active influence on the English language with the introduction of gender-inclusive language.

To sum up, this thorough research has attested that the origins of gender-neutral language go back to the feminist and LGBTQ+ community and that both movements have successfully promoted its utilisation. Furthermore, it has served as a confirmation that gender-inclusive language can be beneficial not only to oppressed genders, but also as society as a whole.

Further research on this topic should aim to further explore the LGBTQ+ realm by trying to delve into how gendering can affect transgender individuals and whether the use of gender-neutral language has been of assistance for their situation. Moreover, a larger research needs to be realised on the active use speakers do in their quotidian life of gender-neutral expressions. This would be of great value as it would show if the efforts being made by the aforesaid movements are reaching the popular domain. Furthermore, more investigations need to be conducted on whether the use of gender-neutral language is

beneficial for everyone and how it comes to be favourable. Finally, I would like to point out a big obstacle which I encountered while investigating for this dissertation. There seems to be a great void on the research and linguistic theories on transgender individuals. Most of the linguistic information I was able to gather focused solely on women or started with both women and transgender people and finished forgetting completely about the second group. This has made it very difficult to fully grasp how necessary or unnecessary gender-neutral language is for them and how linguistic gendering can affect them.

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