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WOMEN AND LANGUAGE

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NOTE TO THE READER

In only 55 pages, this monograph in the "European Women" series devoted to "Women and Language" cannot attempt to be exhaustive, nor is that its objective.

Since the publication of the monographs on "Women and Music" and "Women and the French Revolution", the author has striven to interest readers in subjects already extensively discussed, to summarise these and, above all, to compile the broadest possible bibliography so that this tool, and other information, can give rise to discussions and further research.

It has therefore been her desire to provide a general overview of the subject known as "the language of women" or the "feminisation of language" and to mention those disciplines which have at various times tackled the subject and so turned it into a true scientific discipline: linguistics, psychology and even psychiatry, sociology, history, semantics, proxemics, ethnology and political science, to mention only the major ones because these are in addition to comparative studies in the various languages and in a range of socio-cultural behaviours.

I wanted to examine the successes up to 1993 of initiatives taken particularly in the Member States by those working for the feminisation of language, show where change was reluctant, identify real or imagined obstacles, highlight the difficulties in communication as soon as a woman minister seeks to have the feminine form of her title used, and unearth the history of attempts, some of them dating back a very long time, of women who sought the recognition of their right to be different.

Finally, in the actual drafting of the text itself, I have been at pains to give it a feminine dimension, adopting the new orthography recommended by the First International Symposium on Women's and Men's Language, held at Antwerp on 14 and 15 May 1993¹

While this paper is of course aimed at students, specialists and researchers, it is also particularly intended for people perplexed by the extreme complexity of an issue influenced by responses that are more emotive than rational.

Patricia Niedzwiecki

¹ Translator's note

The French text for example uses the word "auteure" [i.e. with an "e" at the end] to stress that the author referred to is a woman. This usage is much more common in Quebec than in France, for example.

Language represents the mass mind; it is affected by inventions and innovations but affected little and slowly

Benjamin Whorf (1940)

I. WOMEN AND LANGUAGE

I.1. Language and power: origins of language differences between women and men

The earliest cuneiform writing found in the "Temple of the Queen and Goddess of the Skies" dates back to the third millennium B.C. Goddesses were also believed to have invented language, the first alphabet having been the work of the Goddess Sarasvati. In the Sumerian civilisation, the goddess Nidaba was credited with inventing clay tablets and the art of writing. The first ideograms were undoubtedly drawn by women. In Ireland during the Celtic period, the goddess Brigit was the patron of language and at least a dozen women scribes are known. Women were therefore not excluded from the first written and verbal communication but it seems that in many cases their language was different from that of men.

Sanskrit (a very ancient language appearing between 2000 and 1000 BC in the northwest of India) already possessed a special form reserved for women, slaves and children: prācīta (a group of dialects which began to develop as soon as Sanskrit fell into disuse as a spoken language).

This is one possible explanation for the presence of Arawak words in the language of the women of Hispaniola (the island now split between Haiti and the Dominican Republic) at the beginning of this century, although their language is one of the Carib family. It is important to note that during the 16th century Hispaniola was conquered by a Carib tribe, the indigenous men were exterminated and the women forced to marry the conquerors. The women, however, apparently kept their original language, Arawak, alive, passing it on from mother to daughter. Now only a few isolated fragments remain (concerning certain parts of the body, the genital organs) in use alongside the vernacular language, Carib.

From my analyses of languages and behaviours of women and men¹ one of my conclusions was that in our western societies women primarily use "the language of the ever-present meander" (a circuitous language) and that they produce and manipulate a very wide range of sounds

¹ Patricia Niedzwiecki, Phénoménologie du langage des femmes. Université Paris, 7 April 1985

formed in the nose and throat (conversation "supports") which I have called "unformulated verbal supports". I was also able to note that when women speak they are virtually systematic in carefully specifying the gender (grammatical) and sex (biological) of the person they are talking about, something which is much less often found in spontaneous male language. By contrast, male speakers link both men and women with their own sex and gender. To do this, men use linguistic instruments loaded with meaning (nomine agentis², pronominalisation).³

As a result, in language as in the social environment, women are rendered transparent, non-existent, invisible and there is an indirect message that they should keep quiet. This is doubly so for the names of trades, titles or functions where women are described in terms purely and exclusively masculine, on the pretext that the feminine forms are not yet to be found in the dictionary, as if dictionaries were an objective fount of wisdom or the only true reflection of real language. (In this context, as recently as the start of the 93-94 school year, a French dictionary appeared with some completely trivial or "franglais" expressions such as "cool" but no feminine forms, not even the most obvious one: "Madame la Ministre").

Language is but one of the human spirit's modes of expression, using a system of internalised rules to support the entirety of our mental capacities. Language is a system of communication: we speak to influence others and to force ourselves to act. There is nothing in language which is not intended to be spoken or written. Choosing to apply one syntactic or semantic rule rather than another is inevitably a decision, whether conscious or unconscious, and is a reflection of a certain self image (sometimes inflated) as well as a perception of other people and of reality. But unconscious and unintentional language behaviour hinders communication.

Moreover, a large number of languages, if not all, have tended (during the modern period) to censure women's employment of language, either forcing them to be silent or criticising their alleged tendency to gossip. Thus, in a Latin treatise on marriage from 1667, "Barbaro" enjoins women to remain silent so as to avoid lighthearted comments, dishonour or impudence, and this is only one of many examples.

These languages also contain sayings, proverbs, maxims and expression which stigmatise women who speak: right from the Greek, where the ironic comment is made "silence is golden; the prerogative of women", to the Latin "*femina animal loquax*" and "*mulier taceat in ecclesia*", by way of the Dutch "*de vrouw draagt zelden haar schoonste sieraad, het zwijgen*" (a woman rarely wears her most magnificent jewel; silence), and "*eerder vergeet een nachtegaal het zingen dan*

² The ' mark refers to the bibliography at the end of the paper, or to the list of legislation preceding it.

³ For example; although a woman, Coco Chanel is referred to in French as "le grand couturier" rather than using the feminine form "la grande couturière"

een vrouw het praten" (a nightingale is more likely to forget how to sing than a woman how to talk).

It is not surprising, noted the Australian researcher Dale Spender in 1980, that in a society which devalues women the vocabulary referring to them has pejorative connotations (...) the meaning of which reduces women to the rank of non-men and perpetuates the depreciation of women. It is to some extent through this complex mechanism that the subordination of women is brought about and maintained. Nor can women assume that if they go along with a repressive system they will, one by one, "succeed" (Antoinette Fouque, *Alliance des femmes pour la démocratie*, Paris). And Margarethe Rendel, a professor at the University of London (1982, 111), when analysing the "subjugation of women" (a title inspired by John Stuart Mill's book) and women who ape men, explains the mechanisms whereby certain women are accepted and then, having become more or less "honorary males", find the situation so much to their liking that they block other women from achieving these positions (1982: 112) - perpetuating the system because of their limited numbers and thus peripheral influence.

I.2. Sexual differentiation, its psychological implications and feminine or masculine linguistic references

"Why can't a woman be more like a man?", asks Doctor Dolittle in *My Fair Lady*.

According to the French linguist Luce Irigaray, defining the feminine identity requires the existence of new cultural values and the reestablishment or invention of currently non-existent images, symbols and linguistic rules. Benoîte Groult is convinced that the contempt for women so clearly shown in language will not disappear as long as it exists in the vocabulary.

Along with other scientists, Luce Irigaray has shown how an androcentric reality is imposed upon the process of language acquisition during early childhood through the mechanism of the generic masculine. Even English, from which it was believed, or rather alleged, that the feminine form had disappeared, there is still a feminine loading in the case of "nurse, secretary, prostitute, virgin", and a masculine one in the case of "surgeon, pilot, taxi driver". Reconstituting even-handed forms of linguistic and symbolic exchanges requires long and patient work, not only on immediate communication links but also on linguistic forms - historical manifestations of relationships given a sex bias by language, notes Luce Irigaray.

Although women refer to themselves as subjects much less often than men do, and employ a strategy of self-effacement (i.e. acquired powerlessness and self-denigration of women and of a feminine reality), language must, according to the recommendations of the Council of Europe, treat women not as generic men but as human beings with their own specific identity still too

often ridiculed by the vocabulary used.

As they are currently used, languages still hide the "woman" dimension of contemporary society. This situation is comparable to the attitude of linguistic superiority sometimes adopted by some "majority" languages with regard to the (inevitably) "minority" languages. Through discussion, and the interplay of the highly complex mechanisms examined below (including cultural assumptions and social prejudices), language thus becomes a bastion of power.

In order not to reproduce these tired stereotypes assigning women to specific roles, we should show women working not as a nurse but as a doctor or as a surgeon, as a university lecturer or professor rather than as a kindergarten teacher, as a Queen's Counsel or a judge, a banker, etc⁴. There are a great many possible examples. This ghettoisation has the added drawback of condemning men to the horrors of the "masculine mystique", making them similar prisoners of their "masculinity" to which they too become a hostage.

Recommendations on avoiding sexism (in language), in countries ranging from the United States to Canada by way of Thailand, of course recommend abandoning clichés and commonplaces in terms of occupations as much as in any other field where women and men are depicted.

Nor are women shown exerting authority: the standard image of the woman at work is that of the full-time mother, a pretty inaccurate picture whatever the country. By contrast, men who cook and keep house, look after the children and wash the dishes seem non-existent; although on a daily basis things are changing in this regard, albeit slowly.

I.3. Names, key components of identity

On la nomme partout où notre système paraît concevoir qu'elle se trouve en toute légitimité.

Yvette Roudy

(She has a name wherever our system believes she is really entitled to it)

It is Chapter 2 (verses 18-21) of Genesis which sets out the basis of the origin of names, and of the physical identity they represent, because Adam is assigned the task of giving a name, and thus a right to exist, to every living thing. *And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man*

⁴ The occupation should be stressed, not the sex of the person: a "woman doctor" rather than "the doctor woman"

should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. And Adam gave names to all cattle, and to the fowl of the air, and to every beast of the field; but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him. (Genesis, Chapter 2 verses 18-21).

One of humanity's oldest texts reveals the human spirit and its unconscious side. A handful of sentences, admittedly perhaps badly translated (the concept of "God" is, for example, a verb and not a noun), bring together the major stereotypes of sexual differentiation, which, in the modern period, have structured society as we now know it.

Being unambiguously named in one's own right gives both women and men the right to exist. It is clearly necessary to influence linguistic usage and to adapt it to reflect new social and political realities in order to achieve the objective sought. This does not, however, mean that there will actually be equal numbers of women and men at all levels of society.

Adam showed that to name the world is to control it, to give shape to people, things, events and situations, *in order to fit them to our perceptions and to make them comply with our tastes*, notes J. Stanley°.

The Chinese philosopher Tsou en Tsen wrote that having a name also meant having a material content. A name is the dynamic personification of our personalities. It expresses realism and knowledge. Anthistene describes a name as "the beginning of all science", while Isidore de Séville goes so far as to say that the etymology of a name indicates the "essence of things". An indirect consequence of the concept of "nominal realism"⁵ is that symbols are seen as real objects. If indeed a name is the real essence of a thing, and vice-versa, one need only pronounce this name to conjure up the person bearing it. Thus by not naming women in the trades and professions that they practice, they are denied all existence. By invoking demons or the dead (whether bad spirits or not), one risks their sudden appearance. Ever since the beginning, the characteristics of the name and of the person named, i.e. the symbol and what is symbolised, have overlapped. Conferring a name is in essence divine. Only those themselves named can give a name; thus baptism, in the name of Christ, gives a name to all men. In this way, writes Yves Bessières, women passed on life yet never had the power to name.

The Egyptian civilisation believed that the world was created by chanting magic spells. The

⁵ Nominalism and realism are opposites, given that realism conceives of something as it is in reality while for nominalism general material concepts exist only as names or words and definitely not as reality.

word of Tōum gave birth to human beings and thus endowed them with life. Most peoples attribute the creation of the world to "λογος" (the word). Annamites do not pronounce the name of the tiger nor the Malays that of the crocodile. The Book of Leviticus prohibits saying the name of God. By the same token, invoking the name of a beneficial deity made it possible to take on its virtues and to profit from its generosity.

This brief review will have shown the evocative power of a name and of the socio-cultural forms it has taken - the names of trades and professions - themselves immeasurably evocative in psychological terms.

At the beginning of the century, the French feminist Hubertine Auclert considered that *"feminisation of names in our language is more significant than reforming orthography. There are at present no words to express the qualities given to women by the few rights they have won (...). The absence in the dictionary of feminine forms results in the legislative absence of rights for women"*, making clear the indirect link between language and society, between the "named" and the right to exist. It is obvious that action taken to change language can only encourage a change in attitudes.

The supremacy of the masculine over the feminine, despite the fact that it gives rise to uncertainty as to the identity of the people being referred to, cancelling them out by virtue of including them, constitutes both a cultural and social hindrance to achieving effective equality.

It has been shown that language plays a dominant role in forming the social and cultural identity of human beings; there is therefore a need to employ non-sexist language and to combat sexism and sexist stereotypes in attitudes, behaviour and language.

In the "situations vacant" columns women feature only as receptionists, beauticians or secretaries but never ever as gamekeepers, joiners, plumbers, train drivers or machine-tool operators.

Would a man accept being referred to by a generic feminine such as "charwoman" or "barmaid"? The question is so incongruous it would never even arise yet we do see it the other way round. In order to redress this situation, and as a positive step, a number of organisations deliberately word their advertisements to refer to both women and men.

These considerations lead naturally on to the place of women in society, in education and at work - and consequently to the problem of names; more particularly the names of occupations.

Timothy (2: 12-15) forbade women to teach or to have any authority over men, they were required to be silent *"for Adam was first formed, then Eve."*

The first European universities ("bastions of knowledge and science, open only to men" and by the same token closed to women) - the "studium generale" - were founded early in the 11th century as cities began to develop. It was at this time that the medical profession of midwife was suppressed and midwives were even burnt at the stake. The notorious "Malleus Maleficarum" (literally "hammering witches and wizards") written in 1484 (1486 according to other sources) by the two Dominican monks of the Inquisition, Kramer and Sprenger, the "beloved sons" of Pope Innocent VIII, includes the following warning: "when a woman thinks alone she thinks of evil."

In "*L'égalité des deux sexes*", written in the 17th century, Poullain de la Barre declared that women university lecturers would surprise him "*only by their novelty*". The revolutionaries of 1789, however, set the clock back by excluding women from education ... and in 1803 Sylvain Maréchal, a member of the French Parliament, even suggested making it illegal for women to educate themselves.

Things have changed since then, although as late as 1980 careers were just as "traditional". Moreover, a Dutch study (Bleich and De Vries, Vrouwenstudies aan de faculteit der sociale wetenschappen 1977:24) reveals that only 1.7% of professors, 4.2% of lecturers and 10.1% of the scientific staff were women. In 1991, among other surprising conclusions, the authors of Femmes dans les universités noted that in Belgian universities, women were "greatly under-represented" (only 20%: comprising 29.6% of the scientific staff and 6.3% of the teaching staff).

From 800 000 to 100 000 BC, it is supposed that nomadic peoples lived in large groups led by women. In primitive tribes they are credited with having been responsible for digging out edible roots, for crops and for the domestication and rearing of animals, as well as the mastery of fire, the invention of medicine and of textiles, the working of clay, and for pottery, art, architecture and engineering.

It is to female deities that we owe the art of writing, agriculture, medicine (originally in the form of medicinal plants), the leadership of troops in battle, justice and order. They were named Astarté, Innin, Nana, NutAnat, Anahita, Istar, Ishtar, Isis (a warrior goddess and inventor of agriculture), AuSet, Ishara, Asherah, Ashtart, Attoret, Attar, Hathors: from the upper palaeolithic (25 000 BC) onwards, there has been this divine ancestress with many different names. During the neolithic period (in the Near and Middle East), the central religious figure was the mother goddess, right down to the Greco-Roman period. It was only in 500 AD that the Christian Emperors of Rome and Byzantium ordered the closure of her last temples. About 2000-2300 BC we see the first invasions by Indo-European warrior peoples from the north, the beginning of a series of migratory waves lasting for more than 1000 years.

The difference in size observed today between men and women is incidentally not "natural" but evolutionary - the result of a series of genetic changes resulting from division of labour. After all, were not the skeletons of men and women identical during the Middle Ages?

You need in fact to find bones from the pelvis in order to be able to distinguish between men and women. At that time, women and men carried out more or less the same tasks, proving there may be a genetic element in human conditioning.

The Feminist Dictionary defines work as what women do and have always done. Next only to education, it is the key to women's independence (1985: 507). A good two pages of dictionaries are devoted to this term, the most important of existing human activities, and the fact is that women have doubtless always worked but more often in the "interior" sphere such as house, home (when not secluded away in the gynecium) or harem - places considered inferior (value judgement), while men had exclusive rights to working "outside" (the norm). This division can be found in the vocabulary of household work assigned to women: *ménagère*, *huisvrouw*, *Hausfrau*, *housewife* - such words are present in all languages and represent a virtually universal reality. Evelyn Sullerot has shown this custom was perhaps "responsible for a number of feminine traits by means of hereditary transfer of acquired characteristics", and we are probably faced in our own societies with the same kind of psychological blocks derived from generations of conditioning.

Women were legal minors in ancient Greece, permitted neither to own nor to inherit property and had the same rank as a slave in that they also belonged to the "*pater familias*". The Romans did the same, as did the Chinese, and women were similarly banned from all participation in public life by the Chinese, in India and under Islam and Judaism. In this distant past, the situation of women seemed more "equal" among the Germanic tribes, Scandinavians and the Gauls: these women left their faces uncovered, were entitled to inherit and to write books (see the *Germania* of Tacitus). The means of production were in the hands of women (these peoples did not practise slavery), and the sectors in which they were most active continue into the present day: textiles, agriculture, foodstuffs, water, viticulture. At the beginning of the modern period, women were moved indoors (household, gynecium, harem, serail, family), had no access to science or right to education, nor evidently to politics because they had no legal existence. Carrying on a prestige occupation was out of the question.

This division of labour - unpaid and within the home as against outside work - is what has made women disadvantaged in social and occupational terms, as well as being under-represented.

We must, however, temper our views of periods so long ago and wonder, for example, why there is such an abundance of feminine occupational terms to designate each of the innumerable decorative artists in ancient Rome, the ancestors of modern beauticians (a woman's field). One is impressed by the mass of specific terms and by the fact that, despite their precision, it has still

been suggested that women did not work at the time.

We are now going to examine the striking parallels between the social reality (female jobs) and its symbolic translation: feminine names of occupations.

In the ancient Greek theatre, where in principle women did not participate, certain occupations of women with characteristic names featured in the comedies written by Greek poets and authors. Works by Antiphanes, Appollodorus and Heroda featured women in the role of a doctor, a cloak merchant and an armourer respectively. The subtitle to the French translation of Aristophanes' "Women in Parliament" is "*Les Harangues*", which makes the women not so much the "orators" of the Latin translation but more "interminable prattlers". Translations are often guilty of reproducing the stereotypes of their authors and throughout history translation errors have had sometimes disastrous repercussions and given rise to a great deal of misunderstanding.

In the classical theatre of Italy and England, a number of plays feature a woman's occupation or, linked to the title, a function. There is a 1751 work by Goldoni which includes a woman soldier. Literature was to go on to impose on women's occupations affective and emotional connotations reflecting the social roles imposed on women. One of the oldest occupations attributed to women is spinning. A woman spinning, known as Penelope, appears in all the arts, including music, always softly sobbing a lovesick lament.

Textiles remains the field of activity where even today there are very large numbers of women. Of course, given that education and training has relegated several generations of women to the textile industry, it is not surprising to find them there *en masse*.

Up until the end of the 17th century, women were forbidden to join guilds and the view spread that a woman at work was an indecent, even scandalous, sight. Women did not stop working: no, their work was simply hidden from view and tucked away within the "home" (interior/exterior spheres). Women's work was therefore just as suspect as their studies, and its imagery, in other words the crystallisation of stereotypes imposed on women: their outward appearance, to use the words of Yves Bessières.

In France, however, a decree issued by the French Minister of Labour Ambroise Croizat on 30 July 1946 bans any distinction between the two sexes for recruitment to the civil service. 1946 was also the year in which the French Constitution guaranteed women equal rights to men in all fields. In reality, the principle of "equal pay for equal work" goes back to the end of the 19th century, the first women to benefit from its application in 1919 (the year in which the ILO [the International Labour Organisation] made it one of its objectives) were French schoolmistresses. The ILO convention on equality of opportunity and treatment was not adopted until 1951,

followed by the EEC directives in 1975.

Discrimination in education and in access to training, unequal division of labour between the sexes (with jobs traditionally or typically regarded as "male" or "female") and inequality of treatment are all factors which have hampered the social progress of women, limiting them to the less important and less rewarding jobs.

Occupations and professions carried out by women have not in effect developed as steadily as male occupations, giving rise to a real segregation between the prestige professions, in general monopolised by men, and the underpaid occupations. Women devote themselves to manual work, their "natural function" (to use the words of Plato and Aristotle) where, it should be repeated, feminine forms have always existed such as "spinster" and "washerwoman". This is despite the fact that in the Indo-European languages the word "Queen" is one of the oldest, older than the word "King". In English, for example, the term "Queen" has always meant not the wife of the monarch but a woman ruling in her own right.

The parallelism between the occupational reality of women and the occupational labelling assigned to them has now been proven. The majority of women are to be found at the bottom of the hierarchical and salary ladders, where there is also a plethora of words to describe them. The further one goes up the hierarchy - prestige increasing along with power and responsibility - the more it becomes cruelly apparent how few women there are, along with how few "words to describe" (Benoîte Grouit), resulting in a quasi "invisibility" at the top of the pyramid, in both the literal and figurative senses.

European legislation set out in the EC Directive of 9 February 1976 on the equality of treatment between women and men (in access to occupations, training and promotion) was in effect the start of an awareness of these issues. This was followed by Community action plans ("positive action"), the second Council Resolution of 24 July 1986 on the promotion of equality of opportunity for women, and the European Commission's Recommendation of 24 November 1987 on vocational training for women.

In Europe, Germany was one of the first countries to take steps to impose both feminine and masculine forms in all official documents. In 1984, Yvette Roudy established a terminology committee to provide feminine forms of names of occupations and positions. Women, she explains, are called cooks, housekeepers, nurses, receptionists or air hostesses (...) but there is no name for them at the top of the ladder, unless they are a Queen or a Princess, i.e. without power.

The same applies to other languages whether they are Indo-European or not. In Hungarian, a language without gender, the linguistic sign for women, "nö", can be added to any word except

those indicating prestige in some way or another. The sexual classification is therefore indicated in the most far-fetched and in the most unexpected ways: there is a feminine form for "doctor" in Hungarian but the words "surgeon" and "woodcutter" have no feminine form - because apparently "it is hard to imagine" a woman holding a scalpel or an axe. Thus even a language without gender produces the usual socio-cultural stereotypes of femininity and virility.

By not giving women - or any other person - a name, or by loading the meaning of the words referring to them, they are given a negative or pejorative value (that of non-man) and this social category, even when in a majority, will as a result be treated as a minority and with denigration or even contempt or ridicule, neutralised, individualised and marginalised. Then, being considered as deviating from the norm, women will suffer unequal treatment: rejection, exclusion, delayed social progress or deprivation of rights.

Nevertheless, there is feminisation of masculine occupations: in the mines at the end of the 19th century for example. Even in a rural setting, where men have traditionally held power, women have their own fiefs: the vegetable garden, house, poultry yard and market. Out in the fields, the women use the sickle and the men the scythe. The favoured area for women to congregate, even nowadays in the Mediterranean countries, remains however the public wash-house (washerwoman is a very ancient female occupation but one disappearing in many countries), as a parallel to such hypermasculine settings as the barn, cattle market, farrier's forge and the "local" (the pub in Britain; the café in France, etc.), site of well-deserved rest after work and one where women are *persona non grata*.

In reality, it is indeed "natural" and "normal" that men should use the masculine to describe other men, or at least it would be if that was where it stopped, whereas in fact it is incorrectly claimed that it also applies to women. Any expression put in the masculine by a man has less of a shock effect because there is an appropriateness linking the speaker and the name about which he is talking. Where this process involves women, it can only be justified by inertia, itself engendered by "force of habit" and thus always to be rejected.

In order to "construct our destiny" (Lacan), language must reflect these new realities and be equipped with "words to describe it" (Groult).

It is no longer sufficient to speak of "mankind", a term inaccurately supposed to "include" women, rather than using "human beings", "people" or "adults", to use the masculine on the pretext that it "takes in" the feminine, or to give priority to the masculine. Simply use the name of the person! A 1980 study of the Australian aborigines by Sansom Basil showed that words define reality in all societies, aborigine or not, and that language has an influence on the status and position of human beings. If one analyses such a sentence as "*ever since man has seen himself as man, he has always questioned where he came from, where he is going and why he*

is there" (title of a film aimed at children 10-15 years of age), or *"man is the product of his culture, identifies with the community in which he lives, forming part of it and internalising its norms, on pain of being marginalised"*, it is apparent that the human brain, irrespective of whether one is dealing with English, Hungarian, Dutch, German, Italian, Spanish or French, has identified only a masculine being. All that is needed to put everything right is to replace the word "man" by "individual", "person" or "human being".

This can be proved as follows. In the sentence "pregnant women gain an average of a dozen kilos during pregnancy"; it is absolutely impossible to replace the word "pregnant women" by the word "men" whether or not generic - perfect confirmation of experience in this field.

Thérèse Moreau, Swiss writer and Doctor of Literature, notes in her preface to the Swiss-French Dictionnaire féminin - masculin des professions, titres et fonctions électives° (a glossary of the masculine and feminine forms of occupations, titles and electoral offices) that Swiss women had to wait until 7 February 1971 before they were given the vote and that right up to that date the noun "Suisse" meant a person of the male sex with the Swiss nationality, a political reality from which the "Suisseuse" was excluded. In Switzerland, as elsewhere, the absence of feminine forms in the language encourages women to think there is nothing they can do in a world where they have no place, name, title, position or legal identity. It induces in the subconscious a blockage or immobility which prevents women from taking action or even imagining themselves in such a situation - thinking themselves into it - whereas a man's involvement will be explicitly invited.

Hubertine Auclert published in *Le Radical* of 18 April 1898 an article entitled "L'Académie et la langue": *"one should not disdain emancipation through language. Is it not by continued use of certain words that one finally accepts an expression which at first grated? Feminisation of the language is an urgent matter because there are at present no words to express the quality which women have obtained from the few rights they have won."*

The same trends - hiding feminine forms in the language - and identical arguments may be found in the various languages; together with the concept of "neuter", which is inaccurately considered to "include" the feminine (in reality, it is a disguised masculine). Irrespective of whether one is dealing with German, Polish, Hungarian, French or Dutch, the various languages do not give those exposed to it another view of the world, merely a change in category. In Chiquito, a woman is considered an inferior being on a par with animals and objects: in Polish, the same personal pronoun is used for things, animals and women.

The standardised language of the highest ranking class of a society becomes a means of domination; keeping women in a position of inferiority, preventing them from speaking and from being given a name, making them invisible. *"It is not enough (except for poets ...) to give a*

name in order conjure up reality. But it is nevertheless obvious that if social change always ends up being reflected in language, it can also be decisively boosted by it." (Alain Frantapié). Feminisation is made necessary by social change. Masculinisation applied to women is the sign of confused thinking, an anomaly and a visible symbol of women's transgression, permitting them to work as men provided they take on the appearance of men. It encapsulates this contempt for women and for the feminine which is to be found in the unconscious. Our sense of hearing is a highly adaptable one and will rapidly adjust to neologisms rendered commonplace by frequent use.

In the scientific field as well, masculine forms of language have until very recently represented the linguistic norm from which the language of women deviated and in which feminine forms were contemptuously "highlighted". It is, however, well known that language trails behind social reality and that *nature (...) has no meaning of its own beyond the meaning that the social group awards it by making it reflect the group* (Colette Capitan-Peter, CNRS).

I.4. Blockages

Over the past 20 years, under the impetus of research into psychology, sociology and linguistics, and thanks to European legislation to enhance equality of treatment between women and men, international organisations such as the European Community, the Council of Europe and the United Nations have become aware of social and structural inequalities between women and men and have begun to be concerned about language and its socio-cultural repercussions.

The neologism "sexism" dates from around 1965. It was created by analogy to "racism"⁶ to express attitudes discriminating against women (and more rarely men) in politics, economic and social welfare matters, education, culture and any other field, recognising that sexism, racism and stereotypes or norms disguise the real situation and misrepresent the group (rendered invisible) they are aimed at.

In its declaration of 16 November 1988, the Council of Europe condemned sexism in all its forms because it *"perpetuates the idea of superiority or inferiority of one sex in relation to another and justifies the pre-eminence or domination of one by the other, thus making it contrary*

⁶ Citing Ruth Römer's work *Sprachwissenschaft und Rassenideologie in Deutschland*, Dr Ingrid Guentherodt of the University of Trier emphasises the analogy between sexism and racism by listing those German linguists - all of them men - who in the years after 1933 spontaneously joined the Nazi cause: Leo Weisgerber, Friedrich Maurer, Walther Mitzka, Friedrich Kainz, Benno von Wiese, Heinz Kinderman, Fritz Martini....in GAL 1986.

*to human rights*⁷. " Sexism also leads to the reification of women because it refuses *"to take account of their changing role and this (sexist) use of language perpetuates, more or less consciously, a practical and/or psychological disparity between the sexes."* In its Resolution Number 356, the Council of Europe forestalls any possible doubts on the part of women and men by emphasising the importance of "positive action" capable, if accompanied by education and optimal information about equality, of eliminating misconceptions and prejudices by employing non-sexist wording in the various languages so as to take due regard of the presence, status and role of women in society.

It is recognised that the official languages of the UN render women invisible by not naming them and have unfairly legitimised the widespread use of the masculine (incorrectly described as neutral or even generic), whether in the form of pronominalisation, substantification or the names of occupations for all the key, decision-making posts; together with the use of the feminine for occupations at the bottom of the hierarchical and social pyramid - the so-called women's occupations: air hostess, secretary, nurse, kindergarten teacher, governess or waitress (for which feminine forms have always existed and been used without any problem, as we shall see later on). This attitude is seen as a slight on women expressed through vocabulary.

Claudette Apprill, secretary of the "European Committee for Equality of Men and Women" at the Council of Europe was one of the first to use the feminine in all circumstances and in her political discussions (for example she always referred to "madame la présidente, madame la ministre", etc.): *"By using the feminine form of Secretary of State or Minister, the woman holding that office will have acquired the final political right so far denied to her: that of existing as a woman in a world no longer refusing equality between the sexes."*

Jean Champ, vice president of the "Mouvement pour la Promotion de l'Image Professionnelle des Femmes" (Paris), believes that the masculine terms inappropriately used for women will have to be modified if there is to be any change in attitudes: *"far from being an insignificant request, this is an important step in promoting the interests of women."*

Language is also political, in reflecting thought and the "collective imagination", prescriptively so in the case at hand, to the extent that it modifies the prediction and perception of the universe and of the beings which it creates by naming them. Sexism is associated with stereotypes; stereotypes with norms. Let us make a short digression into paralinguistic elements, which have the advantage of explaining why women so easily assimilate the culture of men (and thus the masculine principle) and adapt to it, giving up their claims to belong to their own sex - their identity.

⁷ In its French texts, the Council of Europe does not use the common French term of "droits de l'homme", rejecting it as sex-biased and preferring "droits de la personne humaine".

Psychologically, stereotypes (and their masking function) allow reaction without reflection and even provide a reassuring justification.

In Les stéréotypes féminin et masculin dans la bande dessinée (feminine and masculine stereotypes in comic strips), Ms M C Eubben and Mr C Vanderhaegen have shown that in comic strips, as in the illustrations of books written for schools or young people, sexual differentiation is omnipresent, nothing less than an "ideology in pictures" reflecting conventional usage. Their conclusions about the roles and languages of women and men are very instructive. Masculine characters (adults and in groups) form a majority of those in military, detective and adventure comic strips; whereas the female characters, drawn as childlike and asexual, are to be found singly or in couples in comic strips dealing with families, spying or fantasy. The male characters are direct, dominating, aggressive, independent, active, authoritarian, decisive and extrovert, as well as doing most of the talking; the women are emotive, "decorative", softer-hearted, cunning, victims, introverted, strange, passive and non-assertive beings. This clearly shows the importance of imagery - the visual presentation of the language.

Scientifically proven to be firmly anchored in the subconscious, these stereotypes are in accordance with similar numbers of preconceptions of the roles and language of women and men. This was the subject of my two theses (1985 and 1991-92⁸) which highlighted the misinterpretation of certain myths, the pejorative and negative characteristics penalising female vocabulary, tainting it by a social and cultural conditioning whereas in reality it is the essence of a manner of speaking used by women alone.

As we see, a word carries with it a world of prejudices and preconceptions. With the added force of sense and context, words give a symbolic impact: concepts, notions, ideologies are loaded affectively and with mental associations, a psychological process giving rise to a negative representation of the being (or thing) and thus stigmatising it. The being, labelled "woman" or "man" (in other words, all of us) will therefore behave "as a woman" or "as a man" in response to the expectations of society.

Stereotyped thought is normative - freezing in time and space the roles assigned to women and men (a boy or man does not cry). It gives rise to social discrimination (women cannot think: they therefore cannot take responsibility and be given (highly) responsible posts and functions; all they are good for is to sit at typewriters like robots and to serve coffee, or quite simply just to serve, but they should be given this role because they are welcoming and gracious and in general very devoted to their boss).

⁸ Niedzwiecki Patricia, *Théatralité des langages et des comportements féminin & masculins*, Université Paris 7, Paris, January 1992,

The (Freudian) theory of the "castrated" woman has infiltrated all strata of society to the point where it seems normal and has even become the norm, expressed in language by the primacy of the masculine form and by its generic use, not to mention the tissue of inanities perpetrated in literature, for example La Bruyère stating that a woman's veins are filled not with blood but with water.

The norms themselves excessively simplify complex realities and determine what customs are acceptable and what activities are fitting in a society. They therefore allow interpretation of behaviour, attitudes and actions, and so justify the operation of a social system.

The Dutch socio-linguist Dédé Brouwer observed that women, who generally suffer from an insecure social and employment situation, seem often to more strictly observe the (language) prerequisites for obtaining a job and, especially, for keeping it. She also noted that they seem more often to attach greater importance to phrases reflecting status. In the same year, 1975, the American linguist Robin Lakoff found that in order to be more favourably judged and appreciated, women more frequently used so-called neutral terms which she regarded as belonging to the speech patterns (to the language?!) of those holding power (men) because it has always been the case that "the oppressed have to take the initiative in approaching the oppressor".

Our western societies are still bathed in a culture of male dominance, an imperialism expressed through the various Indo-European languages. This "phenomenon" is understandable from a historical point of view and "normal" if one realises that both spoken and written language build up as norms terms and turns of phrase which are described as generic or neutral but are in reality purely and exclusively masculine.

A typical example of the consistently twisted representation of women and language is: "doctors wishing to attend this summer course may bring their wives". Here a word can clearly comprise "a microcosm of human consciousness". (Vygotsky, 1962:153).

Throughout Europe and in the United States, Quebec and the rest of Canada, research on (and with) women (because a female research worker is, as a woman, automatically the subject of her own research into women; it would be hypocritical and intellectually dishonest to deny this) has therefore focused on their role and position, in terms of relationships between the sexes, and then gone on to take steps to improve the situation. The intellectual and scientific contribution of this research has brought to light the social mechanisms which have made women invisible and has laid bare the way force and power operates in marriage, institutions, employment, education, politics, the economy and decision-making bodies.

Thanks to this approach, it can be shown that even nowadays, in an age of apparent "equality", women still remain vassals. A discipline such as the social sciences (sociology, ethnology or anthropology), where relationships between the sexes are of key importance, has produced new ways of analysing the methods of production and reproduction and identified the almost omnipresent concept of sexism, with the aim of finding an identity going right back to the dawn of history when women were rejected and ignored by centuries of discrimination.

How difficult it proves when tackling history to track down women apparently missing from the record but only because there is no name or, very often, because their identity is masked by a pen name, a masculine pseudonym, the name of their husband or that of their father. In music and painting, whole periods are missing and in 1985 in Femmes et Musique ° we had no hesitation in subscribing to the views of the musicologist Yves Bessières: *authors and researchers who have looked for women in music have come up against this absence of history within history, either because women have been deliberately erased or removed from the record and rejected under the weight of misogyny down the ages, or because they have been forgotten in favour of a history about men written by men for men. Moreover, all contemporary writers complain of this absence of any trace of women due to the absence of their names.*

At what levels are sexism, stereotyping and linguistic and other patterns still to be found and what form do they take?

If one goes beyond the sexual dimension when thinking in terms of humanity, one finds a universe in which all individuals show a certain, very human, weakness as well as great physical or spiritual strength in the respect and dignity of the human being. After all, if some women are weak, distracted and delicate, there are as many men with the same faults and this *trompe-l'oeil* thinking has, when all is said and done, never helped anyone, of whatever sex.

Here, however, attitudes are also changing and there are quite a number of men, young men, keen to have a life that revolves around home and family and who no longer manifest such classically "male" behaviour: apparently unable to lift a finger to keep themselves alive, incapable of looking after themselves, ironing a shirt, or even putting it on without a helping female hand, unbearable when ill, entirely dependent on women as soon as they cross the threshold. Their linguistic behaviour is thus also changing in line with their attitudes. There is, however, a certain mind set which lumps together women and children as despised and weak minors. Children's books, comics, cartoons, counting and nursery rhymes and school books implant in children the feminine (doll) and masculine (truck and tin soldiers) principles by means of a zoomorphic process: mice, chickens and other domestic poultry, goats, kittens and cats are all feminine, as are animals either small in size (process of reduction) or which have connotations of fragility, weakness or sexuality. Bears, cockerels, ducks, tomcats (Jerry), and

the big cats are male (e.g. "Mr Tiger" by Judith Kerr, a woman).

Many European studies of school books have shown that they do not reflect the occupational reality of women and men - giving girls only a much restricted range of role models.

On 15 July 1985, in a circular sent to the "Vereniging van het Vlaamse Boekwezen" (the Flemish Book Association), the (since deceased) Flemish Minister of Education took positive measures to eliminate "discrimination and prejudice" in school books "involving language use or imagery in relation to occupations, spheres of interest and the roles assigned to women and men". This ruling applied not only to school books but to all kinds of academic works. After all, a good number of girls are interested in mathematics, mechanics and fencing and a number of boys in poetry, art, music, cooking, sewing and other children.

The French occupational guidance booklet *Que ferai-je plus tard?* (cited in *Sexism en éducation 1979/80:61*, Marylène Gartner and Corinne Labbouz) lists some 500 occupations, 30 of these (stewardess, receptionist, nurse, midwife) in the feminine preceded by the word "la" or using the pronoun "elle" (she). One of these is "secretary" but it is in contrast to the male article used when speaking of a mayoral or trade-union secretary. Otherwise, there is no difficulty whatever in finding a feminine form for these 30 "typically" female occupations. Incidentally, only 13% of the illustrations in the book clearly show women, as against 85% showing men: as the book notes on page 90, this is the *day-to-day sexism permeating our society*.

Through its one-sided and denigrating visual impact, this type of reading confirms and strengthens sexist stereotypes and the responses in childhood which young girls (and young boys) identify with and internalise. In 1975, Alma Graham published her study in the United States on the devastating impact of school dictionaries on children's awareness of masculine and feminine roles in society. Taken overall, American school books greatly favour men: seven times as many examples cite men as cite women. As far as language is concerned, this primacy can take the form of the generalised use, as always described as generic, of masculine pronouns and adjectives: "he, him, his".

Among other odd features, women are "farmer's wife", "politician's wife" or "diplomat's wife": should the boys grow up and become astronauts on a voyage to Mars, the girls will be just adorably, graciously decorative. As in so many cases, it is strange how great a gulf there is between reality and the linguistic content used to express it.

European research on dictionaries shows that these have the same handicaps as school books although one is dealing here not only with children, but also with adult women, whose role models are in just as short supply.

The authors of the Dutch study Bakerpraaties en vrouwenlogika , recognise that the dictionary of the Dutch language (the authoritative 1980 edition of the "big *Van Dale*", also presents a masculine society. "Good" women are either virgins or mothers (ideally, both at once). Bad women are either "masculine" (and all masculine characteristics become negative as soon as they are applied to women) or whores. Men whose behaviour is seen as inadequately virile are penalised in the same way. In the "big *Van Dale*", the few women present are passive, second-rate citizens lacking in logic or brains. These contradictory messages are hardly designed to eliminate ambiguities and only maintain or even strengthen confusion. The same conclusions have been reached for French dictionaries.

Reality is undeniably deformed and altered by (linguistic) sexism, stereotypes and normalism.

Obstacles to political participation by women - the decision-making niche where power is truly exercised - include the conservative attitudes of men, but also of women, the way men find it difficult to share power, and women's inadequate knowledge of the political mechanisms from which they are virtually absent. Finally, the few women who do gain power have less adequate logistic support. Research by the psychoanalyst Helene Deutsch has shown that women are not simply excluded from power but that they adopt a very effective avoidance strategy towards it. So much for the conditions governing women's access to power and their virtually non-existent familiarity with exercising it. Other paralinguistic factors help to reinforce the unconscious rejection of the feminine.

The "new woman", a "mutant", is the subject of the book The Cinderella Complex (1981) by the American author Colette Dowling, which also shows that women display considerable resistance to accepting themselves, that they often think and act well below their actual or potential (in the case of those receiving an inadequate education) capacities, which explains why women take a back seat and close themselves off in "traditional" roles: two thirds of women with a high, or even very high (up to 170) IQ are housewives or office workers; the majority of American women work 80 -100 hours a week (including household tasks); 80% of women carry out junior and underpaid tasks because they are very unconfident about their own skills - "acquired powerlessness" - whereas self-confidence is something that is acquired and is a prerequisite for independence.

With very few exceptions - women who have had a non-traditional education and whose parents, particularly their mothers, have urged them to study and to succeed - stereotypes have been absorbed by the age of five. For all of these reasons, too, women find it difficult to accept the authority of another woman or to have confidence in her because they have no confidence in themselves, to the extent that they haven't resolved the difficulties many women experience in getting on with their mothers.

They are led to believe that they are not the equal but rather the complement of men, generations of mothers having convinced their daughters that they are inferior to men, an opinion buttressed by society. The socialisation processes for women and men are also characterised by the same (ambiguous) dichotomy. At this stage, there is not even a token questioning of the masculinisation of society and language.

Research by the psychologist and ethnologist Monique Souchier-Bert has shown that in the western world only a limited space, that of the unconsciously rejected and censured, is allocated to the feminine, and this is surrounded by masculine symbolism, constraining accordingly the verbal consciousness of women (language being used in such a way as to reflect social inequalities and, in turn, contribute to their creation) so that women respond by refusing even access to power.

Women can thus make themselves heard only by denying themselves and are forced to use a language and words which are not their own, somewhat in the way that a people dominated by the power of another is also forced to use its language.

Since time immemorial, young girls have been encouraged to form their personality on the basis of the talents of other people, rather than to develop their own, and to subordinate their self-image to the love and approval of others, i.e. not to take control of their own lives and instead to conform, as men do also to some extent, because socialisation requires conformity with the requirements of society on pain of exclusion and ostracism. By the same token, our attitudes in turn influence the behaviour of others and there is a constant process of mutual adaptation.

One's self assessment, whether positive or negative, is here a key feature and given that individuals conform to a greater or lesser degree to social considerations depending on whether or not their self image is positive, it is apparent that women suffer from rather a poor self image because of the way they have been educated; an impression very often strengthened by the cultural, social and occupational experience not only of themselves but also of other women who, exceptionally, hold positions of power or decision-making (Member of Parliament, juror, company director, etc).

The way women and men are socialised is therefore characterised by a dichotomy which gives rise to ambiguity and confusion. It is only on reaching adulthood, and not always then, that this is realised. Without this understanding, there can be no change in behaviour or attitudes.

Martina Horner, another psychologist, this time from the English-speaking world, notes that the more gifted women are, the more they suffer from anxiety based on a fear of success because they are unaccustomed to "social success". Because they expect the worst, their behaviour unconsciously favours the failure that they encourage by their negative attitudes. Once this

conditioning has been internalised, the more a woman is unable to imagine success, the more she will be limited in her role models and all the more so in her power and desire for change.

If we want to see women (re)gaining a positive view of other women, and men of women, we can no longer afford such a devalued and depreciated view of women.

The factors described here underline the importance of the paralinguistic aspects of the feminine in language and the extent to which they shape not only the verbal behaviour of people when they speak but also the language itself.

II. The feminisation of language

The first research into the question of sexism in written language, primarily by anglophone (American, Canadian) and francophone (Quebec) feminists, appeared more than twenty years ago. During the 1970s, the Equal Opportunities Commission in Great Britain and the Equal Opportunities Commission for Northern Ireland (Advertising Handbook)^o issued guidelines on the use of non-sexist language in job vacancy advertisements.

These followed a century of perceptive warnings ranging from the French feminist Hubertine Auclert to the late Alma Sabbatini, an Italian pioneer of feminisation killed in an accident in 1989, by way of the French grammarian Albert Dauzat or his Belgian colleague Joseph Hanse: *certain feminine forms are rejected by women themselves. (...) On the contrary, they shouldn't hesitate to use, and to have used of themselves, terms such as "manageress" or "chairwoman". (...) There should be no hesitation in using names of the same form in the masculine and feminine [i.e. here in the case of French differing only in having a masculine or a feminine article] (...) things would change much faster if women would only seek or even accept the use of such names!*

Despite great similarity from one country to another in the trends observed and their respective cultural sensitivities, there is no escaping the fact that there has been significant backtracking, taking all languages as a whole, on the feminisation of language.

This linguistic regression would seem to be linked on the one hand with underrepresentation of women in "key" posts (head of state or government, attorney general, head of department, judge, magistrate), in line with the assumption that "feminine means inferior", and, on the other, with their continued invisibility in the language. The latter is due to the fact that throughout Europe the written language has been fossilised in the grammatical systems of the 16th and 17th centuries. We will come back to this.

The (in)equality of linguistic treatment between women and men therefore involves many psychological, social, sociological or political factors rather than simply issues of linguistics or language use.

My colleagues agree on this point: there is no major and insurmountable obstacle to the feminisation of language use in Europe and this was also the conclusion reached by participants at the First International Symposium on Women's and Men's Language, held at Antwerp on 14 and 15 May 1993 (see annex page 43).

Since the beginning of the 1980s, some Member States have already adopted antidiscriminatory linguistic measures (United Kingdom, Ireland, Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands), not to mention Austria, the very active Switzerland and other non-EC countries, including the United States and Canada, particularly Quebec as noted above.

These measures, however, sometimes prove to be contradictory. Some favour the so-called "neutralisation" solution (in reality very often the more widespread use of the masculine, rebaptised "generic"⁶): more rarely, the preferred solution is sexual differentiation (using both feminine and masculine forms), or there may be a mixture of the two approaches.

Moreover, taking a decision in no way guarantees it will be carried out, and there is evidence of a masculinisation which runs totally counter to these provisions. This was the case in France in 1986 where a decree regulating linguistic feminisation[°] was the result of work by the first terminology committee for feminisation in Europe, which was established by Yvette Roudy, then Minister for Womens' Rights. Its chairwoman was the writer Benoît Grout. When Edith Cresson was appointed in 1991, however, she was not given the title of "première ministre française". Instead, the masculine form "premier ministre" (prime minister) was used.

By way of example, let us study the efforts made by Quebec over the past two decades to reduce linguistic discrimination against women. After a start in 1976, in 1979 the terminology committee of the "Office de la langue française" (Office for the French language) issued its first recommendation (Titres et fonctions au féminin, essai et orientation de l'usage[°], setting out four basic principles which recommend not the American practice of "desexing" or "neutralising" the language (chairperson rather than chairman or chairwoman) - a process that would be impossible in French with its two genders to carry the meaning - but instead:

- a) using feminine forms wherever possible for occupations, geographical origin, etc.;
- b) using "unisex" forms but qualifying them by the masculine or feminine article;

⁶ A conventional term in linguistic terminology, along with "neutralisation", "marked and unmarked genders", and the word "gender" itself.

c) creating feminine forms, of course in compliance with morphological models: *députée*, *chirurgienne*, *plombière* (MP, surgeon, plumber) to parallel the male forms *député*, *chirurgien*, *plombier*.

The fourth principle was subsequently abandoned as illogical. This comprised the adding (usually it proved tautological and therefore superfluous) of the term "*femme*" ("*magistrat femme*" rather than adding an "e" to make the feminine form "*magistrate*" out of the usually masculine "*magistrat*").

A second set of recommendations in 1981, dealing with drafting problems, was designed to ensure high-quality writing free of incomprehensible forms but taking the trouble to explicitly list feminine forms. Then, in 1982, as a follow up to a programme for equality in employment, a general list of occupational names was published: e.g. the feminine form "*grammairienne*" for a university grammarian.

These measures are nothing more nor less than a questioning of the "generic and unmarked value of the masculine".

Variations in usage exist across a single language area - which may be very extensive and comprise a number of communities (there are no fewer than 40 French-speaking countries and there is a similar variety among English and Spanish-speaking countries). In Quebec French, for example, preference is given to feminine forms ending "*eure*" and there are other usages again in Switzerland and Belgium.

These particularities arise from dialects that are often less sexist than the official and national language. For example, the French language goes back a good 1 000 years. Censors, usually men but sometimes women, have attempted unsuccessfully to "pasteurise" regional accents, local terms and neologisms in order to "keep the language pure".

Jacques Cellard of France, in an interview published in "*Le Monde*", even went so far as to describe the current teaching of French as archaic and sepulchral. Dialects, however, retain forms regarded by the establishment as unacceptable. There are a number of feminine forms, for example, in the Walloon or Languedoc dialects.

The other countries are all more or less receptive to this issue in the light of the principle of equality of treatment between women and men: in Spain, for example, there is the "*Plan para la igualdad de las mujeres (1988/1990)*". Propuestas para evitar el sexismo en el lenguaje° (1989), a joint publication of the Ministry of Social Affairs and the Instituto de la Mujer (Institute for Women's Issues), suggests abandoning the generic masculine so as to replace "*el hombre*" (man) by "*los hombres y las mujeres*" (men and women) or by "*la humanidad*" (human

beings). It also bans any lack of balance in names and titles, suggesting that "Thatcher" or "Mitterand" should not be preceded by articles. Similarly, parity is ensured in the names of occupations, professions and posts: the expression "*los médicos y las enfermeras*" (doctors and nurses) should be replaced by "*los medicos y las médicas, los enfermeros y las enfermeras*" (giving both masculine and feminine forms for both doctors and nurses); the mining engineer Maria Ruiz is described as "*ingeniera de Minas*" and no longer by the masculine term "*ingeniero de Minas*".

In Italy, the publication Recomandazioni per un uso non sessiste della lingua italiana emphasises that the prevalence of the masculine gender in the Italian language reflects the predominance of the masculine in society and is consequently a key factor in the supremacy of the masculine in language. The unmarked use of the generic masculine in Italian, as in other languages, is condemned because it masks the female dimension of work, as it does in other aspects of society and culture.

This tendency gives rise to a habit of describing women as a separate, deviant category: *Operai, disoccupati, pensionati e donne sfilavano nel corteo di proteste* (workers, unemployed people, pensioners and women took part in the demonstration) - as if there were no women in the preceding categories.

These recommendations also condemn the inappropriate use by men of women's first names: "Indira, Golda, Maggie", whereas men are referred to primarily by their surname: "Moravia, Modigliani". The familiar term is used towards women because of the vital need to temper female authority, power and force, and also to underline the exceptional nature of their presence in these male bastions.

As in so many other languages, the title "*signorina*" ("Miss", rather than "*signora*" meaning "Mrs"), which has the precise semantic value of indicating whether or not a woman is married, qualifies women merely in terms of their dependent relationship to a man. This one-sided situation is accompanied by the loss of the women's maiden name on taking that of her husband; a loss of identity which may bring with it the disappearance of all trace of women in history and even in daily life: "*Quante volte non siamo riuscite a ritrovare vecchie compagne di scuola che si erano sposate e il cui nome non figurava più nell'elenco telefonico*" (how often it proved impossible to locate former classmates who had got married and whose name was no longer in the phone book). Women are now entitled to keep their maiden name alongside that of their husband but the imbalance remains in that the same is not true of the husband, and, above all, because the name passed on to the children is generally that of the husband and not that of the wife.

This is a very widespread phenomenon, including in Greece. In the past, a woman in rural

Greece lost on marriage not only her maiden surname but also her own first name, writes M Maraponiarh-Nanopoulou (Terminology & Traduction °). Right up to the present day, married women take as their first name the first name, or sometimes the occupation, of their husband, with the addition of a feminine ending: *Giorgos* (a masculine first name) yields *Georgina* (feminine first name); *Fournaris* (baker) giving rise to the female form *Fournarisse*.

The Italian Senate tackled this point in 1980, ruling that both women and men should be referred to by their surnames. In 1982, it became Italian policy, following the German example, to use only "*signora*" in legal texts and to dispense entirely with "*signorina*". It has been accepted practice in Germany (Bundesrepublik) since 1972 to use "*Frau*" in legislative texts.

As a euphemism, the word "lady" is inappropriately used in English to mean "woman" - frequently masking a much less pleasant reality, given that the word "lady" can have the subtly deprecatory effect of suggesting a certain lack of seriousness or frivolity. The authors of Sex Differences and Communication°, Eakins and Eakins, (1978:133), suggest using the word "woman" instead of "lady" in sentences such as: "a lady I met is exhibiting her paintings", since "lady" inaccurately suggests dilettantism. While on the surface appearing positive, this term cannot survive a deeper analysis of the concepts it evokes and the way it trivialises the woman referred to in a manner not found with the word "gentleman".

Most European languages still have two female titles, "Mrs" and "Miss", although they have long since abandoned the parallel masculine unmarried form ("Master" in English, "*damoiseau*" in French or "*jonkheer*" in Dutch), these having fallen into disuse because they tended to belittle the person concerned. Titles inform society about our quality and status. "Miss" indicates celibacy; "Mrs" the status of a married woman. Much more widespread than "the Colonel's wife" in English, many European cultures frequently employ terms such as "*Madame la Facteur*" (Mrs Postman).

On marriage, women often give up their "maiden name", thus changing their identity and "disappearing into the crowd" - and we have seen how difficult it is for historians to track them down as they disappear into the mists of time or are quite simply mistaken for men.

Marcelino Oreja, Secretary General at the Council of Europe, declared in Strasbourg on 4 March 1986 that recognition of one's identity was the basic prerequisite for personal development.

A woman is also entitled to respect of her identity and private life. Irrespective of whether or not a man is married, there is no change in the way we address him. We refer to him as "monsieur", "Sir" or "señor". The same is not true of women, who are addressed as "Mrs" or "Miss", "señora" or "señorita". Could we not abolish this distinction and apply the same principle to women as to men? After all, can there be a more personal attribute than one's

name? It is the basic mark of identity. Everyone finds it quite normal for a man to be able to retain his name throughout his life and to pass it on to his descendants. In many countries, this essential right is not granted to women. Is this not a shocking tradition and symbolic of an archaic society?

Similarly, the use of terms such as "the widow Morgan" is wounding, discriminatory and just as intrusive into private life as the coloured circles on the forehead of a Hindu woman indicating whether she is unmarried, married or widowed.

Given the task of eliminating sexist meanings from *The American Heritage School Dictionary*, Alma Graham and Peter Davies decided to supplement it with neologisms such as the non-sexist abbreviation "Ms" (written with or without a full-stop and derived from Mrs and Miss as a replacement for both of them). Alma Graham refers to this in her article The Making of a Non-Sexist Dictionary. The earliest use of Ms can be traced to 1767, the date of an inscription on the tombstone of "Ms. Sarah Spooner" at Plymouth, Massachusetts. Whether the inscription was deliberate we will never know.

In all cases, it is better to use the word "women" rather than "ladies", "young ladies", or, even worse, talking of the "weaker sex", or of housewives, or using any other expression which trivialises women as a social group or gives them a pejorative definition based on position: "old maid".

When women become the rule rather than the exception - no longer ignored, their achievements in history and literature no longer mocked - young people will be able to identify with other role models.

Obviously, a letter to a person not personally known to you, and who may therefore be either a woman or a man, should be addressed "Dear Madam/Dear Sir" and the body of the text should be written in such a way as to apply equally well to either sex. Not to do so is to treat that person as less than a complete individual.

By contrast, it is obvious and understandable that where the sex of the person writing to you is apparent from the signatory's title or description [in many languages, from the gender of the article], it will be natural to reply accordingly with "Dear Sir" or "Dear Madam".

Idiomatic expressions in European languages also ignore women: as do all kinds of official forms, which should refer to women as members of society in their own right and not as the wife or widow of a particular man. Newspapers, questionnaires and small advertisements require the same treatment. No text can be left unexamined: constant vigilance is needed to avoid giving into laziness or inertia.

It is certainly true that a woman is too often regarded as an appendage to a man, including in some expressions which generalise inappropriately. For example, the children of Americans in the higher socio-economic bracket were once described as being more likely to go to university and less likely to get divorced, having a longer life expectancy and better teeth and running less risk of living with an overweight woman (this example is quoted by Miller and Swift in Words and Women). The same could be said of French, Italian or German men but certainly not of their female counterparts!

Another interesting point occurs in the Italian recommendations: the constant and repeated use of adjectives such as "delicate, passive, sweet ..." for women produces a debilitating picture of them in the same way that the use of a diminutive also treats women as children.

Moreover, different values are attributed to the same adjective depending on whether it is applied to a man or to a woman. A "nice boy" has a slightly different connotation from a "nice girl". Nobody talks of a "delicate man". The same is true of innumerable inequalities in language - a comparison with a woman is insulting to men yet there is a certain tinge of admiration in the term "tomboy". In French, the grammarians Damourette and Pichon coined the expression "sexuiseblance" for certain verbs which possessed differing semantic fields depending on the sex of the person concerned. In the case of women, examples included laying the table, cleaning, doing the washing: male equivalents were working, reading, studying.

To come back to the Greek language, in 1953 this country saw the election of its first woman member of Parliament. Despite her qualifications and learning, and in keeping with the adage that the function is lowered by the feminine, she was dubbed a "vouleftina", it being the speaker's intention to diminish the value of the "function" of "vouleftis". The source of this incorrect interpretation is to be found at the time of the first tentative appearance of women in high-ranking positions. Irrespective of the field, the closer one comes to parity (and this is the only really effective way of re-establishing equilibrium), the less one encounters deliberate pejorative loading on the feminine.

There are now innumerable antisexist publications of all types appearing in English in Europe (trade unions, journalism, publishing companies, EOC, reference works, studies, research, surveys). As with "HOMME" in French, the word "MAN" in English poses a problem as soon as it is used to represent half of creation: "Man is the only primate to commit rape", or "Man, being a mammal, breastfeeds his young". It is clear from a number of studies that the way language is used in all kinds of academic books inculcates a masculine view of the world, and indeed such a strong one that it prevails even in expressions, regarded as neutral, such as "people" or "humans".

From a child's viewpoint, the word "man" in expressions such as "early man", "the common

man", "the man in the street", "mankind", "Cro-Magnon man", "man invented the wheel" or "man made" never personifies a woman. Even growing up doesn't improve the situation, so strongly is this (quite inaccurate) convention anchored in the brain. The French expression "droits de l'homme" (rights of man) leaves out more than half the population. Nowadays, the English term tends to be "human rights" and this is paralleled in French by more innovative terms such as "droits de la personne humaine" or "droits humains" (human rights). This conceptual shift marks a step towards a change in attitudes and towards formal and real equality between women and men.

There are other striking examples: "We are all brothers", the sisters not counting for anything. In German, this led the feminist Luise D. Pusch to title one of her works on language Alle Menschen werden Schwestern (All human beings will be sisters) a humorous parody of Friedrich von Schiller's *Ode to Joy*.

Names of occupations in English are also not immune to this inequality in language: mailman or postman, congressman, salesman, foreman... .

As is the case for other languages, there are no fewer than 200 epithets in English to designate a woman whose morals are regarded as doubtful, whereas there are only 20 similar terms for men. The French terms for male and female courtiers had originally the same meaning, but while the male term includes no moral judgement, the feminine form "courtisane" has become a synonym of prostitute*. This is characteristic of feminine forms in language, which are often given a sexual connotation. There are more than 500 synonyms in English for the word prostitute, while words originally free of any sexual connotation have acquired this "accent" of sexuality: nymph, venus, bird, skirt, chick. In other languages, even the word "woman" receives the same treatment - in German and Dutch there are "Weib" and "wif"; while in the latter language you can hear the cry "Zij is maar een vrouw!" (she is just a woman!) - meaning that she is weak and unreliable.

Publishing houses and libraries, along with professional and religious organisations are taking measures to bring about linguistic change. This began in 1973 in America with the general synod of the Unified Church of Christ and in 1974 the Journal of Ecumenical Studies (Volume XI, No 2) devoted an editorial to "sexism in language". In 1975, the "Gates of Prayer" (Jewish Book of Prayer) replaced "God of our fathers" by "God of all generations" and added expressions previously non-existent such as "God of our mother Sarah, Rebekah, Leah" rather than of Abraham, Isaac or Jacob. In Great Britain, 1983 saw the publication of the revised edition of the Methodist hymn book, which omits some overtly sexist hymns. "Rise up, O men of God!"

* Translator's note: the same is true in English - although ironically the French male spelling "courtisan" was borrowed to refer to the woman in English.

thus disappeared and was replaced by "O God our help in ages past". The first line "Time, like an everrolling stream" is now followed not by "Bears all its sons away" but by "Bears mortal flesh away", in order to avoid any male personification. A South African religious university recently also decided to adopt such reforms. Male imagery, however, continues to dominate in those hymns which refer to God as father, king, shepherd or lord. Reductionist translation played a great role in this because female imagery was in fact present in the original Hebrew writings.

From a woman's point of view, as Pat Darter explains in her article English as she is written (Terminology & Traduction °), there are still two major problems in English: the names of occupations and descriptions of certain qualities when referring to human beings (page 74): "gentleman's agreement; girlish, man-sized; women's page; act like a lady and think like a man...".

In Feminism According to W.O.E. (Women's Organisation for Equality) or How full Stops Make All the Difference °, which refers to American writings from the early 1970s, I would highlight, among its recommendations for eliminating sexism in language and sexist stereotypes, those phrases which stress the physical aspect of women in a context where this is totally irrelevant: "Galileo was the astronomer who discovered the moons of Jupiter. Marie Sklodowska was the beautiful chemist who discovered radium." Similarly, "scatterbrained female, delicate flower, catty gossip, frustrated spinster" and their male counterparts should be just as much banned because they denigrate the human individual, whatever their sex.

Watch your language °, a guide on non-sexist language produced for its members by the British trade union NALGO, very perceptively takes account of the fact that language reinforces prejudices against women and pays particular attention to notorious sexist jokes, to illustrations and photographs. The brochure concludes by urging: THINK! before writing or speaking. Are women excluded, mocked, treated as inferior, ridiculed or stereotyped by the words you use?

Writing in Profissoes no masculino e no feminino em Portugal °, Eugénia Malheiros cites a basic truth which it is important to (re)state: *E natural que certas designações profissionais nos pareçam ainda pouco comuns, em especial aquelas que se referem a profissoes em que homens ou mulheres estão subrepresentados.* (It is quite natural that some names of occupations will still strike us as unfamiliar, especially where they concern occupations in which men or women are underrepresented.) The fact is that their very rarity may give rise to a smile when encountering expressions such as "árbitras de futebol, campinas, limpa-chaminès, pegadoras de touros, vaqueiras" in the case of women (women who are football referees, agricultural workers, chimney sweeps, bullfighters, stockhands, respectively) and "bordadores à mão, homens a dias, lavadeiros, manicuros, rendilheiros de bilros" in the case of men (lacemaker, charman, washerman, manicurist and a man using lace-making bobbins).

Let us move on to the German language. Since the early 1970s, consciousness-raising among women researchers in Germany has led them to investigate language inequalities - *sprachliche Ungleichbehandlung* - affecting women at work and in their daily lives. The Richtlinien zur Vermeidung sexistischen Sprachgebrauchs⁹ give their definition of sexism: *Sprache ist sexistisch wenn sie Frauen und ihre Leistungen ignoriert, wenn sie Frauen nur in Abhängigkeit von und Unterordnung zu Männern beschreibt* (Language is sexist when it ignores women and their achievements, when it describe women only in terms of their dependence on, and subordination to, men).

It is worth spending some time on German as an example, not only because of its specific structure as a Germanic language but also because it reflects in its approach to feminisation opinions now to be found in other languages.

As with the majority of Indo-European languages, it presents virtually all the psycho-sociological problems arising from feminisation, more particularly where it is a matter of naming and putting forward an identity (fields in which women are glaringly invisible and victims of virtual total denial), prestige or status (the hierarchy classifying women and reducing them to "second-class individuals") or the inappropriate use of a generalised, so-called generic masculine, which obliterates and annihilates women by making them "men *honoris causa*" ("Männer *honoris causa*" a term coined by Luise F. Pusch).

At the present time, there tends to be two parallel strategies in German:

- 1) feminising language use: "*die Sichtbarmachung von Frauen durch Geschlechtsspezifikation*" (making women visible by specifically stating their gender), and
- 2) use of a true neutral "*Geschlechtsabstraktion*" (where the gender is not mentioned) which applies only to a very limited number of names of occupations.

In reality, however, there is a third alternative: "*Totalfeminisierung*" (total feminisation), "*Neudeutsch*" (new German)⁹, where a now generic feminine would include a marked masculine: all German "*Bürger*" (male citizens) would of course participate in this linguistic process henceforth being an integral part of "*Bürgerinnen*" (female citizens).

An example of this total feminisation is to be found in the feminist Norwegian science fiction

⁹ *Die hier vorgeschlagene Umstrukturierung tut dem deutschen Sprachsystem nicht mehr Gewalt an als dieses System uns Frauen antut* (This proposed restructuring is no greater an assault on the German language system than it itself practices on us as women), Luise F. Pusch.

novel "The Daughters of Egalia" (1977) in the which the good "househusband" Ödeschär has to content himself with using the title of his wife. This "househusband" is therefore "Mr Chief Frogwoman Ödeschär". In the same way, the author of the book Baby and Child (Leach, 1977) used in the work a neological "she" transformed for the occasion into a neuter or "generic feminine".

In Egalia there are no longer any names ending in "*son*" (son of) - an old Germanic custom (cf Mendelsohn). They end in *-datter* (daughter of); with "Lizadatter" being either the daughter or son of Liza.

Nor is it any surprise to find expressions such as "Oh my Goddess!", "liberty, equality, sisterhood", "woman is born to laugh" or "prima inter pares".

Beginning in 1981, four linguists from the German-speaking countries of Switzerland and Germany put forward a series of rules to combat language sexism in the media (radio, television, press), advertising, school books, training manuals, encyclopaedias and job-vacancy notices. These rules presuppose, a particular language use being tantamount to a social act, that certain groups of the population - Jews, blacks, prostitutes, the intellectually-disabled and homosexuals - are exposed to discrimination through (sexist) language. These rules make it possible to recognise such discrimination and propose non-discriminatory alternatives, or even "positive discrimination", in order to ensure that language reflects the social change which the presence of women comprises.

Sexist language:

- 1- ignores women and their experience;
- 2 - defines them as an (inferior) appendage to man: "Adam's rib";
- 3 - presents women in a stereotyped fashion and only in typical or traditional roles;
- 4 - provides a humiliating, subordinate and ridiculous image of them.

Raccomandezioni per un uso non sessiste della lingua italiana° points out that sexist usages are present throughout language and at all levels of verbal communication. Indeed, these recommendations reflect with the greatest precision the "*concezione*" of women and sex-based discrimination perpetrated by peoples for centuries.

Since the masculine, as a standard and the norm, is omnipresent in language and at all socio-cultural levels, the feminine dimension becomes suffocated and increasingly fragmentary. Women "disappear" in German through not being named and being made merely "part of the whole" (*mitgemeint*) in expressions which leave out women such as: *sehr geehrte Herren* or *meine Herrschaft* (Gentlemen), *liebe Kollegen* (dear colleagues), *an die Familie Peter Dörsch* (Peter Dörsch and family), *Beruf des Vaters?* (father's occupation), *Kaufmann gesucht*

(vacancy for a salesman), *wir suchen einen Fachmann* (we have an opening for a specialist), *Bürger* (citizens), *Liebe Zuschauer* (dear viewers), *der Deutsche* (the Germans), *jeder* (everyone).

The non-sexist alternatives for these are as follows:

- *sehr geehrte Damen und Herren* (Ladies and gentlemen);
- *liebe Kolleginnen und Kollegen* (explicitly listing both female and male colleagues);
- *an (Frau) Eva Dörsch und (Herrn) Peter Dörsch mit Kinder* (Mrs) Eva and (Mr) Peter Dörsch and children);
- *Beruf der Mutter und des Vaters?* (mother's and father's occupations);
- *Kauffrau oder Kaufmann gesucht* (vacancy for saleswoman or salesman);
- *wir suchen eine Fachkraft* (gender-neutral form of "specialist");
- *Bürgerinnen und Bürger* (citizens but explicitly listing both the feminine and masculine forms);
- *Zuschauerinnen und Zuschauer* (explicitly listing both female and male viewers);
- *die Deutschen, deutsche Frauen und Männer, deutsche Staatsangehörige* (Germans, German women and men, people with German nationality);
- *jede einzelne / jeder einzelne, die einzelnen, jede Frau and jeder Mann, Frauen sowie Männer* (listing both genders separately or both at once).

There are also the words "*niemand*" (no-one) and "*jemand*" (someone) where the "total feminisation" approach replaces "MAN" with "FRAU" to give "*nieFRAUd*" and "*jeFRAUd*".

Non-sexist language is devoid of any one-sided use of titles and forms of address, as well as of any arbitrary order where the masculine precedes the feminine. One should either alternate feminine-masculine and masculine-feminine or simply quote in alphabetical order.

For example:

- *An Frau Dörsch und Herrn Dörsch* (Mrs and Mr Dörsch) instead of *An Herrn und Frau Dörsch* (Mr and Mrs Dörsch)
- *Frau und Mann* (woman and man) rather than *Mann und Frau* (man and woman)
- *sie und er* (she and he) alternating with *er und sie* (he and she).

The sexist system stops women into "pigeonhole" behaviours that are seen as typically feminine ("the eternal feminine"); a set of characteristics which impose passivity on women and action on men and which, if ignored or abandoned, bring down anathema on the person who dares to discard them, since that person has become an exception, "abnormal" (unfeminine) and thus deviant.

Sexist expressions repeatedly stressing the external appearance of women should be banned and replaced by wording which respects individuals by according them an appropriate place:

- *Frauen* (women) and not "*das schwache Geschlecht*" (the weaker sex);
- "*berufstätige*" or "*erfolgreiche*" or "*kompetente Frauen*" (professional women), and not "*Karrierefrauen*" (career women), which is excessively discriminatory. The authors conclude by noting that such measures make women more visible by explicitly naming them.

Similarly, the expression "*Kein gesunder Mensch kann drei oder sechs Wochen ohne Frau auskommen*" (no healthy male can do without a women for three or six weeks) should be banned so that women no longer have to put up with this kind of deprecatory language and so that it can be replaced, over the more or less long term, by a new, non-sexist consciousness.

As far as the German language is concerned, it is apparent that the more active women are in a particular occupation or profession, the more easily and rapidly the feminine version of a job title becomes accepted, without the least opposition, as an aspect of "social change" ("*der gesellschaftliche Wandel*").

Proof of this can be found in the many job-vacancy notices in the trade press for *Assistentinnen, Sachgebietsleiterinnen, Oberärztinnen, Professorinnen, Dipl.-Ingenieurinnen, Museumleiterinnen* (assistants, businesswomen, and women hospital consultants, professors, engineers, museum curators). It should be noted that these titles are also listed first, before those of their male counterparts.

As Luis F. Pusch (69/1980:65) exclaims, this doesn't mean that it is not equally falaciously claimed in German that the use of feminine job titles diminishes or lowers women, people favouring instead the use of the generic masculine - despite the fact that it is an absurd and longwinded approach.

She confirms that historically the male half of humanity, as the centre of interest of all human activity, has comprised the norm for centuries, whereas the other half was not only dependent on men but even seen as such¹⁰.

Only in societies where women are oppressed would it be possible to see the emergence of lopsided semantic creations of the type "*Jungfrau - Junggeselle*" (virgin - bachelor), while in male-dominated societies women feel complemented when they are compared to men - *sie stellt ihren Mann* (she stands up for herself) - a process which on the contrary can only be

¹⁰ *Weil Eva aus Adam, des Mannes, Rippe geformt wurde, deshalb soll sie "Männin" heissen, belehrt uns die Bibel mit bemerkenswerter linguistischer Klarsichtigkeit.* (With remarkable linguistic clairvoyance, the Bible teaches us that because Eve was created from Adam's, i.e. the man's, rib, "she shall be called woman") op cit. p. 65.

denigrating for men: *Peter benimmt sich wie ein Mädchen* (Peter behaves like a girl).

The German language has three genders:

- the feminine "die, eine, keine" (the, one, none): *die Frau* (the woman);
- masculine "der, ein, kein" (the, one, none): *der Mann* (the man);
- the neuter "das, ein, kein": *das Kind* (the child)

With the exception of the neuter words "*Mädchen*", "*Weib*" and "*Fräulein*", the names of occupations are all feminine where they refer to women, which Luis F. Pusch describes as "*redundante Geschlechtsspezifikation*" (redundant gender specification), in German as in the Romance languages, when compared to English and the Scandinavian languages. The gender brings with it grammatical agreement in conformity with specific rules. As in Dutch (*het meisje* = young girl), neuter nouns may also refer to women: "*das Mädchen*" (young girl), or even to men: '*das*' *Mannequin* (which may be a male or female model). As a general rule, however, as we have seen in German also (and in any other language), the grammatical gender corresponds to the biological sex in the case of living persons: e.g. *die Professorin*.

The suffix "-in" is used to create a virtually infinite variety of feminine nouns, to the virtual exclusion of all other forms: *Arbeiterin, Ärztin, Beamtin, Doktorin, Linguistin, Malerin, Ministerialrätin, Programmierin, Staatssekretärin, Tankwartin, Taxifahrerin* (women who are, respectively, a worker, doctor, farmer, official, doctor, linguist, artist, senior civil servant, Prime Minister, programmer, Secretary of State, petrol-station attendant and taxi driver). In the past (and at least up until the end of the 19th century) even surnames ended in "in": e.g. *Luise Millerin*.

In her book *Berufsbezeichnungen im heutigen Deutsch*° (names of occupations in modern German) 1976:85) Els Oksaar confirms that the suffix "-in" serves *als grammatischer Indikator, der es ermöglicht, Aussagen über die berufliche Integration der Frau und die gesellschaftliche Entwicklung im Problem Mann und Frau in der Berufswelt zu machen* (as a grammatical indicator providing information about the occupational integration of women and social trends in the relationship between men and women in the working world). Thanks to this ultra-feminine suffix, an infinite number of feminine terms can be created.

Meanwhile, Luise F. Pusch no longer suggests anything short of *totale Feminisierung* (total feminisation) and also considers that it would in no way be possible to abolish the "-in" suffix, which, in German, distinguishes women from (non-living) "things". After all, an "*Automat*" remains an automat whether its masculine or feminine, whereas words such as "*Diplomatin*", "*Dentistin*" or "*Direktorin*" can apply only to women - making the "in" ending an absolutely indispensable significant.

In order to break with the use of "man"¹¹, regarded as too sexist (because of the euphonic and homonymic link with "Mann" (= man in English), some people have begun to replace it with "frau" (the word for "woman" but without the initial capital which the word would have required if it were a noun) in the same pronominal sense and thus applied to both women and men. Example: "*Hier singt man*" (people sing here) is thus replaced by "*Hier singt frau*".

Moreover, in Austria the form "*Frau*" began to be employed as early as 1970 in all official documents (a new anti-discrimination policy recommended as far back as 1928). During the 1950s, some women's organisations expressed the view that "*Fräulein*" (the discriminatory "Miss") condemned women to eternal youth (at least linguistically) and to the status of legal minors - and should therefore be replaced by "*Frau*": "*Frau Oberärztin*", *Frau Staatssekretärin*, *Frau Präsidentin* (to address a woman occupying the post of consultant doctor, Secretary of State or President). In German, as well, "*Fraulein*" stands for celibate status, and is therefore denigrating in that it implies that only married women can be worthy representatives of their sex.

Words are increasingly often being formed by the addition of the suffix "-frau", initially to provide a feminine form of words ending in "-man" (*Kauffrau* or *Kaufmann*, *Obfrau* or *Obmann*), but also to form a number of neologisms which have now proved indispensable:

Unifrau, *Medienfrau*, *Armeefrau*, *Architekturfrau*, *Technikfrau*, *Parteifrau*, *Filmfrau*, *Musikfrau*, *Kunstfrau*... to the point that Luise Pusch noted in this context: *Neben dem Motionssuffix -in is -frau heutzutage vermutlich das produktivste Morphem überhaupt* (with the exception of the inflexive "-in" suffix, the addition -frau is probably the most highly productive morpheme of all). This gives rise, for example, to a second occupational neologism "*Arztfrau*" alongside the term "*Ärztin*".

This renaissance and renewal is so fecund that feminine terms have even been the basis for the creation, by analogy or back-formation, of new masculine words: "*Medienmänner*" (media men) was derived from "*Medienfrauen*" (media woman) - indeed, words for "businesswoman" or "camerawoman" have become established in the German language.

As early as 1795, the Saxon Joachim Heinrich Campe suggested that where both sexes were being referred to at once, the masculine forms "*mancher*" or "*jeder*" should be replaced by the neuter (and neutral) "*manches*" or "*jedes*". In Das Deutsche als Männersprache -

¹¹ "One" or "people" in English, "men" in Dutch and "on" in French - from the Latin "hominen", the accusative form of "man". There is some confusion here because this accusative (direct object) cannot be confused with the nominative (subject case), as it would need to be were "on" to mean "man" in English.

Diagnose und Therapievorschlage^o, Luise F. Pusch also asks in astonishment why one should not use the neuter systematically in German, given that it most certainly exists in that language.

In the case of other asymmetrical feminine forms where in principle there can be no masculine equivalent, other than the epicene forms such as *Manikure* (chiroprapist) or *Hebamme* (midwife), it is indeed suggested that one should create, and then use, replacement terms in German: instead of Stewardess (although the word steward is also used), one should use *Flugbegleiter* and *Flugbegleiterin*; instead of *Manikure* one should adopt *Fusspfleger* and *Fusspflegerin*. *Hebamme* should be replaced by *Entbindungspfleger*, giving rise in turn to the feminine "neologism" *Entbindungspflegerin*. This process can be found in other west European languages ("*vroedvrouw*" in Dutch and "*sage-femme*" in French, with its alternative forms of *aide-accoucheur* or *aide-accoucheuse* (sometimes *maieuticien*).

To draw attention to the fact that both women and men are being addressed, a capital I can be used in German in the middle of words: "*Gesucht: Volljurist- I -nnen*" (vacancy for a fully-qualified female or male lawyer). There is also the (highly desirable) technique of "Splitting" to list both genders: *Leserinnen und Leser* (female and male readers respectively).

Diplomas should use the feminine form where appropriate: "*Diplom-Bibliothekarin*" (qualified librarian). It is thus possible to go either "*zum Arzt*" (to a male doctor) or "*zur rztin*" (to a woman doctor). Both forms (feminine and masculine) must appear on official forms, preferably in alphabetical order.

In both Germany and Austria (1 March 1986), the legislation on surnames has been modified to make the man's name no longer automatically the couple's surname and leaving the choice up to them. Moreover, the husband is fully entitled to adopt his wife's name and the wife's name may also be passed onto the children (as in Italy).

There is of course more than one way of naming and referring to people, listing all their characteristics, including their sex, in order to ensure unambiguous identification. A man would also be annoyed to hear the sentence: "*Wir haben eine neue Putzfrau, Herrn M*" (we have a new charwoman, Mr M) because he would find this upsetting and ridiculous.

All German nouns have a gender and the article indicates whether a word is feminine, masculine or neuter. The gender of living beings therefore concords with their biological sex, despite certain exceptions for historical reason, as is the case in all languages. There is also a link between gender and sex in the case of the names of occupations, although in the modern period (since the middle ages) occupations and professions (whether or not prestige ones)

were primarily carried out by men. For "traditionally female" occupations (*Hebamme, Krankenschwester, Putzfrau*), the feminine form has long been favoured.

Although the titles "*Frau Doktorin, Frau Professorin*" (women doctors and professors) are not yet widely used, in linguistic terms there is no reason to exclude such forms and some of them have already become quite accepted.

The German language resembles other languages in causing confusion and ambiguity where the generic masculine is improperly employed:

- *Mein Professor ist mir sympatisch* (I like my professor): is a woman or a man being referred to?

- *Lehrer sind bessere Väter*. Are "*Lehrerinnen*" also "*bessere Väter*"? (teachers make the best fathers. Are women teachers also the "best fathers"?). Feminine terms are, however, also sometimes epicene and can therefore refer to men: "*Die Waise Peter K. wurde in ein Kinderheim überstellt*". (The orphan Peter K. was sent to an orphanage).

The tired old argument that masculine terms are "more attractive" than feminine ones can, as in any other language, be based in the case of German only on chauvinism, racism or self-satisfaction.

In order to avoid any ambiguity, it is sufficient in German to use feminine forms for women: "*Beide Geschlechter benennen - nicht nur das männliche!*" (give both genders, not only the masculine!). As they are used, the ear will become used to these neologisms, a universal and irreversible phenomenon.

The context will make it clear whether one is referring to a woman or to a man and it has been said that this is the only way to rid the language of "*die Perversion einer frauenfeindlichen deutschen Sprache*" (the perversion of a misogynist German language).

As we have seen, the German language contains all the aspects which arise in relation to the feminisation of language in other European languages: the same trends, psychological and sociological conditions and, in consequence, the same limitations and obstacles.

Aspects, referred to above, which disrupt and disturb include: sexism, stereotyping, normative reification, the pseudo-neutrality of the masculine gender made compulsory and generalised (the so-called generic masculine transformed by the same wave of the magic wand into a "non-marked" gender (the reference gender or norm)), denial and denial of self (with its corollary of an inferiority which, while imposed, is nonetheless internalised), non-existence and invisibility.

The parameters which determine the position of women (and of men) in language and in society are:

- 1) "naming" : name and identity;
- 2) status (education and training, profession, post and grade are all descriptions of the person, indicating position and rank in society and at the same time providing social recognition;
- 3) prestige.

III. Gender

Although the exact origin of genders is not known, it is believed that they arose from pronominalisation, which in turn caused a series of changes to ensure agreements. In the Indo-European language (spoken in the third millennium BC by the plains-dwelling peoples of what is now southern European Russia), there were at first three genders, later reduced to two: the animate and the inanimate, a dichotomy which finally led to the distinction: animate = masculine; inanimate = feminine/neuter.

Gender as such - a system of language classification - is a characteristic shared by many, but not all, languages. Depending on the language concerned, classifying nouns by gender gives rise to pronominal reference, to agreement with the adjective within and outside the nominal group and, in certain cases, to agreement with the verb. The gender is described as being either "natural" or "grammatical", to the extent that biological sex is often the criterion, as well as the distinction between inanimate and animate beings. In a large number of languages, the derivation of a word is reflected in feminine and masculine forms. Gender, a cultural phenomenon, represents physiological membership of the female or male sex. Neuter, the third possible category, developed to describe concepts which would not fit in one of the other two categories. Value differences are inherent in gender but gender does not exist in all languages (for example, not in languages such as Finnish and Hungarian).

Although gender (which is not derived from any universal feature applying to all living or dead languages, at least in this form) does not follow any totally coherent logic in the case of inanimate objects, it reflects the biological sex in the case of human beings. Over the course of time, there have been occasional stumbles transforming a feminine into a masculine or vice versa. These slips are due to errors, misconceptions, misunderstandings, errors in the way language is used, conformism, imitation or borrowing - in other words, an infinite number of psychological, social or cultural causes.

III.1 Marked and non-marked genders

A "marked" form bears a particular characteristic. This concept is based on the presence (positive) or absence (negative) of a particular morphological element.

This was only a step - and one eagerly taken - from the new convention of taking as the norm the concept of a "non-marked masculine gender", with its corollary that the feminine was thus "marked" and, in consequence, "deviating from the norm".

Obviously, the group establishing the norm concerned will be the "non-marked" group. For the linguist Janice Moulton, "non-marked" has an implicit "added value", in contrast to the "marked" gender, which is linked with inferiority.

The "non-marked" status derives from the greater value accorded to the masculine, which itself is the result of a subjective and incorrect interpretation. The marked, and in consequence deviant, group then finds itself constantly forced to prove its very existence. As the Dutch linguist Dédé Brouwer (1981:9) commented, this approach has the unfortunate effect of masking the presence of women, or their absence, in a large number of spheres of daily life, so as to give a completely truncated view of social reality.

In the scientific field, too, up until very recently masculine meanings represented the linguistic norm from which women's meanings - the "marked" feminine (a mark of contempt) - deviated.

Here, their "otherness" (different sex) puts women outside the masculine universe, to use the words of the linguist Verena Aebischer^o. By a process of merging, the feminine universe becomes a minority group.

It is thus apparent that while the gender of nouns is not systematically sex-based in the case of objects, it is so for people.

The human mind consequently forms a symbolic representation when hearing or pronouncing a name, conjuring up an archetype of the object, concept or person concerned. This is the meaning of the term "sexuiseemblance" coined by the French grammarians Damourette and Pichon. Death, which is feminine in the Romance languages, is masculine in Germanic ones - and the picture formed matches the gender of the noun in the language concerned.

As an educational aside, etymology - the family tree of words - has a great deal to teach us. Back in the beginning - the various theories seem to compete to prove this - the Cananite, Anatolian and Arab tribes worshipped the "queen of the skies", the "sun goddess",

symbolised by a woman. Among the Eskimos, the Nippons and the Khasis of India, this sun goddess was accompanied by her brothers, lower-ranking figures representing the moon.

Could this distant origin explain why in the Germanic languages, in German for example, the sun remains feminine (*die Sonne*) and the moon masculine (*der Mond*), whereas in French it is the other way round? The Franco-Hungarian researcher Georges Kassaï reminds of a poem by Heinrich Heine in which the spruce (*die Fichte*, feminine, in German) can fully express love for the graceful Mediterranean palm tree (*die Palme*, also feminine, in German) only after having undergone a deft linguistic "sex-change operation" to change the gender and thus the sex. "*Die Fichte*" becomes the masculine and virile spruce tree ("*der Fichtenbaum*"). What miraculous changes in gender and sex can be brought about by just a few letters! Throughout the history of languages, a number of nouns have undergone similar natural metamorphosis, resulting eventually in a change in gender: the masculine Latin word "*murus*" (wall), for example, gave rise in German to "*die Mauer*", which is feminine.

The same type of distortion is not the exclusive preserve of German or French. In 1795, turning reality on its head and introducing an incorrect conceptual view of the universe, the English grammarian L. Murray stamped his own symbolic view on the world: *The sun is always masculine and the moon, being the receptacle (sic) of the sun's light, is feminine. In general, the earth is feminine, as are ships, countries and cities, in their capacity as receptacles or containers (sic). Time is always masculine because of its powerful effectiveness. Virtue is feminine because of its beauty and because it is an object of love. Fortune and the church are generally feminine.*

There is nothing really grammatical about this analysis, which canonises personal opinions as basic truths.

This was often the case as grammatical rules were being laid down in Europe, and the result has been a large number of incorrect and Manichaeistic philosophies, together with a total confusion between personal ideas and the real world.

As with other instruments that are extensions of being, language use, which is a reflection of past and present social reality, has moulded societies. Societies have an influence on the content of language (the vocabulary) - giving rise to a continuous and inevitable exchange between language and society whereby each takes from the other.

Let us now move on to the confusion in concepts which is the result of a succession of arbitrary conventions and unscientific theories now challenged by recent analyses.

The concept of "neuter" is exactly that: neither masculine nor feminine. Truly neutral forms

in respect of people, forms which indeed represent both sexes, are to be found only in those languages which do have a neuter gender.

Apart from a few gender fluctuations, sex and gender therefore seem to overlap, to correspond, for human beings and for a whole range of animals. We then come to inanimate objects, which are attributed a non-grammatical gender often unrelated to their sex.

Given that one attributes them a sex in their symbolic representation, this accordingly proves that making something feminine or masculine is by no means unimportant as a process. Within ourselves, a mind picture or image emerges on hearing a word. Five-year olds hearing the words "cobbler" or "farrier" see a picture that is always and irretrievably masculine, and this is all the more true of adults. These are the "mental pictures" painted by language.

For all the above reasons, it is clear that "neuter" cannot ever reasonably qualify a human being - by definition either a woman or a man. Even in languages where the neuter "gender" exists - German or Dutch for example - the neuter may be used once but the speaker returns, as soon as the language's structure permits, to the gender of the person in question: *das Mädchen* (young girl, where *das* is the neuter article) becomes *sie* (feminine personal pronoun) in a colloquial sentence such as "*Ja, ich kenne das Mädchen; sie ist meine Nichte*" (Yes, I do know the girl; she's my niece).

After two decades of this approach in a number of European countries, it must be admitted that artificially imposed neutralisation has not worked, even in English, where, by using neuter determinants (the article "the" or the pronoun "one", for example, which do not agree in either gender or number), there had been "neutralisation" of agent names, including those with a feminine marker; "actress", for example, being replaced by "female actor".

In the United States, the "Department of Labor" had, on the same misjudged grounds and with the highly laudable aim of eliminating the exclusion of women by giving them a name and a title, sought to "neutralise" as many as 3 500 names of occupations. However, the well-known term "chairperson" was never used except to refer to a woman - "Madam Chairperson" as an alternative to "Chairwoman", the direct feminine form. We are therefore now witnessing a return to feminine forms to designate women. The same problem is appearing in Great Britain, where this forced neutralisation has made women even more socially, culturally and professionally invisible: *"a woman can seek the same rights as a man only by asking for her own neutralisation. (...) Renouncing her sexual identity is the greatest possible submission to masculine culture. (...) Culture is not neutral and (...) in French culture the patriarchal tradition informs and marks the systems of language representation, communication and exchange, which means that women cannot participate in this culture as*

subjects without changing the way it is organised and its symbolic systems. Their failure to do this gives rise to a process of alienation and a loss of identity. (Luce Irigaray).

The only effect of this use has been to hide women because the simultaneous ambiguous and confusing generic use of the masculine merely reinforced masculine forms and excluded the feminine dimension.

The false concept of "neuter" in language comes from the erroneous belief that it is the same as the masculine, even in certain impersonal forms, and these mechanisms will have to be identified.

A number of feminist researchers and writers feel that the use of the masculine by women when referring to themselves emphasises their scarcity, thus giving them a certain unacknowledged pride. In French, for example, one does indeed rarely hear the female titles *préfète, rectrice, présidente de la république* (prefect of a French department, vice-chancellor or head of state). Colette Audry goes even further: *"career women ... give no thought at all to their solidarity with all other women ... those women have been taken over by the system; they regard the values of the female sex as inferior, acquiescing to male superiority because they identify the masculine with the positive concept of prestige.*

And the pronominal use? In her article English as she is written °, Pat Darter refers to the British legislation (the 1889 Interpretation Act) which imposed the masculine gender and the inclusion within it of the feminine: *Words importing the masculine gender shall include females*, confirmed a century later by the "1978 Interpretation Act".

In English, for example ¹², the 16th century was the period in which the use of the generic masculine became grammatically compulsory. This was the period in which the "tumour" of masculine grammar began to spread through the languages of Europe¹³. The establishment of this convention was accompanied by a series of prescriptive grammatical rules (the masculine personal pronoun "he" being baptised "neutral" for the occasion), together with a mass of instructions on its use - replacing feminine forms and those that were truly neutral, i.e. actually covering both sexes: "they" "their"¹⁴ and "them". In 1850 this process became definitive and the feminine was inhumed: a binding measure, an Act of Parliament, formally prescribed the generic use of the masculine gender. Identical measures, tacit or binding, affected Dutch, French and many other languages.

However, research into the generic use of masculine pronouns ("he") ¹⁵ in English in 1978 and 1989 can serve as an example here to show that the feminine pronoun "she" was also used generically, for example in speaking of (a group of) women. Speakers showed a tendency, very pronounced among women, either to specify the sex of the person referred to ("he or she") ¹⁶ or to use the plural pronoun "they". The written form "s/he" is becoming more widely used (Dutch: z/h/ij), as is the order of nouns and pronouns: "she and he", "women and men", "mother and father" - where the order has been reversed as a consciousness-raising measure.

Thwarting this spontaneous use, by imposing an automatic and obligatory use of the masculine in language, gives rise among women to denial of self. As early as 1950, Lynn White, the President of Mills College in the United States, was interested in the way this "twisted" and truncated language was used and its effects on the thinking of young girls. Other women writing on this subject included Mary Orován: Humanizing English, Varda One: Manglish and Alma Graham. In Dutch, women regard only such truly epicene words as *volwassene* (adult) and *parlements lid* (Member of Parliament) as words referring to either sex. This means that it is quite natural, for example, to use feminine job titles for women and masculine ones for men, for the good reason that "*sekseneutraliteit bestaat nauwelijks*:"

¹² In Dutch, the grammarian Killiaen was responsible.

¹³ There were not too many women grammarians around.

¹⁴ e.g. "Everyone must to their best" (Bodine, 1975)

¹⁵ The fact that "he" is no more "neutral" than "she", and refers to men alone, was shown in 1978 by a number of researchers including Martys, Moulton, Robinson, Elias and Martyna.

¹⁶ A feature also noted in Phénoménologie du langage des femmes, Niedzwiecki, Université Paris 7, 1985

een term is OF mannelijk OF vrouwelijk" (1987:70) (Sexual neutrality is virtually non-existent: a term is EITHER masculine OR feminine). In the case of individuals, there is no such thing as "neuter" in language.

It is also apparent from Phénoménologie du "language des femmes" ° that men - much more often than women, who are very obviously reluctant to do so - spontaneously and excessively masculinise the language. In discussing fashion, for example, men will use the masculine to refer to the designer Coco Chanel, a women, and go on to buttress this choice with all manner of personal pronouns, adjectives and other masculine forms. This is a consistent phenomenon, the result of men being accustomed to finding themselves in the majority at all levels of society, thus reinforcing their image of themselves and their own solely masculine image - inherited habits reflected in recent history. How can they be blamed for this if women themselves persist, out of fear of ridicule or of being devalued, in masculinising their titles and positions?

This clearly shows the importance of the conventions, customs, laws, edicts and rules of social change which result in imposing the iniquity of certain judgements based on the social situation of another period. Where these run counter to prejudices and to established norms, they are rejected, sometimes in outrage. By contrast, where they consolidate established ideology, they become a universal panacea and are held up as the "correct use" of language.

In reality, it is indeed natural and normal that men should prefer the masculine to describe themselves or other men. Any expression put in the masculine by a man has less of a shock effect because there is an appropriateness linking the speaker and the person or subject about which he is talking. There could be no objection to this practice if that was where it stopped, whereas in fact its use is extended by incorrectly claiming that it also applies to women. Where this process involves women, it can only be justified by inertia, itself engendered by "force of habit" and thus always to be rejected because it hinders communication.

The inappropriate generalised use of the masculine, described as generic or neutral, therefore wipes out women, making them once more "men *honoris causa*". Evidence that it cannot apply to human beings of the female sex can be found in an analysis of the "generic feminine" practised as part of "total feminisation" (were one to take the equally fallacious view that it included the masculine - rendered by the same process the muted and marked gender). This can be proved as follows: in the sentence "Pregnant women gain an average of a dozen kilos during pregnancy", is there any way in which "(pregnant) women" can be replaced by the word "men"? Were the rights of "man" included in the "Déclaration des Droits de la Femme" (declaration of the rights of Woman), dedicated to Marie Antoinette in 1791 by the dramatist Olympe de Gouges? Men will make the greatest haste they can to masculinise any feminine term referring to them. In this context, A. Paquot (Laval

University, Quebec) and H. Dupuis (Office de la langue française, Quebec) note that dictionaries are the only place where "man" means "man and woman".

These concepts and conventions of the pseudo-neuter, marked or non-marked gender and the generic masculine must be abandoned where they are incorrect, and redefined or modified where appropriate, if we are to eliminate ambiguity, confusion, uncertainty and error. *Our persistence in speaking of sex in terms of repression is no doubt based on a form of address which blends thirst for knowledge, the desire to change the law and the expectation of a garden of delights.....* to quote Michel Foucault's 1976 Histoire de la sexualité (I, 14).

It thus becomes quite meaningless to equate "masculine/neuter/generic + marked/non-marked = the norm".

The presence of taboos - two of these are the generic use of the masculine and the use of a generic neuter/masculine - is indicative of the fears and superstitions underpinning a society. Often this takes the form of favourite euphemisms, for example saying that a woman is the (passive) object of actions.

The sexual connotation which affects certain feminine forms of language is another example. This is what makes some people regard the feminine as devaluing and so encourages them to avoid using feminine forms of occupational titles. In French, for example, a racing cyclist is a "*coureur*" but while a woman cyclist should be "*coureuse*", this word carries the connotation of a woman with many lovers. By contrast, the expression "*coureur de jupons*" (woman chaser) has a approbatory glow of virility about it.

IV. Names of occupations, titles, ranks and positions

One thing is certain: as long as power rests to all intents and purposes in the hands of men, leaving aside a few "token" women, the psychological imagery aroused by the names of occupations will automatically remain masculine and women will continue to occupy (one might almost say "usurp") men's positions designed for men - and in consequence be required to use a man's name.

As soon as women become established in an occupation, historical, social and family constraints make it appear non-essential. Occupations now predominantly female, such as teaching, change to become "unimportant". This downgrading is associated with a consequent reduction in wages. This vicious circle has also been noted in Russia where, as soon as the majority of doctors were women, this originally prestigious profession went into free fall.

A few pioneering women have already launched a campaign for the reapportionment of household duties but the struggle is a difficult one: a number of men, convinced that the principle of equality is a just one, have confided to me *You know, no-one is going to just give up the long-standing privileges which we, as men, have enjoyed for so long...*

More fundamentally, there is a need for literature to abandon the old stereotypes, whether or not they still to some extent represent reality, so that young women can identify with other female role models: university vice-chancellor, banker, doctor, gamekeeper, crane driver.

In general, some 45-60% of terms in dictionaries are masculine, 5-10% feminine and nouns with no gender-specification are increasing rapidly. In consequence, they can be applied to both genders, whereas previously dictionaries would have simply gone ahead and made them masculine.

Depending on the extent to which women are active in a particular field, the percentage of women may be 5% (an average of all fields) or only 2% (in the army), figures which are in line with reality (these observations being based on a number of surveys).

Between 80 and 100% of people questioned during the surveys found that a masculine image was evoked by the masculine title of the occupations "doctor", "theatre director", "engineer", "officer" or "notary".

Some 40% would, however, give them a feminine form, for example because there are a large number of women in education, or because of the use of certain expressions such as "*la juge*" (where the noun is preceded by the feminine article).

The text of the majority of official forms (of all kinds): questionnaires, documents, press releases, the omnipresent computer printouts - no text is immune - also leave out the "female dimension".

IV.1. Symbolism of occupational names

When the name of an occupation is used, this has far more than simply empirical significance: it is a word established by use, by concordance or semantic rules, and one that reflects a tautological desire to establish a hierarchy - equipping the individual referred to with a physical, logical, psychological and moral dimension on which language is fundamentally based. The name of an occupation is, as we have seen, the result of complex words and of the historically, linguistically, socially, culturally and psychologically-based associations which generate their symbolic character.

The physical order reflects the material perception and the nature of the occupation.

The logical order expresses the axiomatic in terms of symbols and numbers; the psychological order in terms of behavioural and differential perception. The moral order, meanwhile, is reflected in ethics and deontology - in other words; the professional code.

It is apparent from listing these four orders, intrinsic components of the significans, that the name for an occupation conjures up far more than just a word in terms of the way an occupation is carried out: the clothes worn, tools and equipment used, working conditions, social position, duties and ethics, specific terminology for an occupation, salary scale and management in terms of assigning responsibilities and duties to specific social and professional groups. These are all signs which determine psychological behaviour with respect to the "perceived", as well as influencing receptive attitudes.

Going beyond this indication, it is possible that referring to an occupation might weave in the brain an emotive mental tapestry of the forbidden, the tolerated, and the secrets, rituals, taboos, status and prestige that it represents, and which have stamped themselves on the words and on the indications over the course of time: the proverbially feared policemen, for example.

In our modern societies, with their immense psychological and historical heritage, the name of the occupation in very large measure defines the individual's personality, position (even *raison d'être*), and identity. Indeed, as soon as we encounter a professional woman or man, we immediately try to assess their position in the social hierarchy, their actual role, attributes and power, their income (in broad terms), the history of their profession and the ethical constraints to which they are subject, all of these being indications which underpin, and mould, our own behaviour in turn.

At various times, moreover, the names of occupations have carried with them a desire to ennoble that occupation or to rid it of its pejorative or unpleasant connotations. In France, for example, the occupation of abattoir worker has undergone a series of changes, depending on the region and various psycho-religious influences, whereby the "*tueur*" (killer) of the animal became the "*égorgeur*" (slaughterman), "*écorcheur*" (flayer), "*assommeur*" (stunner) or "*équarisseur*" (knacker), and the verb "to kill" disappeared under the weight of all these terms. Similarly, and again in France, the "*bourreau*" (headsman/torturer) was described more as a public benefactor ("*exécuteur des hautes œuvres*") and given the title of "*Monsieur de Paris*" - reflecting a permanent need to enhance the prestige of an activity. This process is comparable to the rabid desire to masculinise occupational vocabularies.

The same motivation is to be found among the ferocious supporters and defenders of the

generic masculine as they assert that feminisation has a deprecatory effect.

Undoubtedly, these women are afraid that the occupations they fought so hard to conquer might be devalued, considers Ann-Marie Corbisier-Hagon, the President of the Council of the French-speaking community of Belgium. Henri Simons, who initiated the decree on feminisation adopted in June 1993, has a similar opinion: *if it is true that the feminine is denigrating, this is all the more reason to do things differently. Why should it make any difference to the status of a primary teacher if we call this professional "institutrice" [feminine] or "instituteur" [masculine]? To ensure that this effect does not occur, it should be turned on its head and everything which can be feminised should be feminised as soon as possible: starting with the names of occupations, titles and, in a nutshell, language use in general.* Professor Marc Wilmet (Brussels Free University) goes on: *I am struck by the lack of awareness of women, some of whom prove de facto to be the greatest defenders of the continued use of masculine titles, sometimes on the pretext that feminine equivalents do not exist.* Damourette and Pichon commented ironically *"this means they are describing themselves as unnatural* and so are helping to maintain social inequality. We rarely see a feminine form for the titles "Director-General" or "Editor-in-Chief" because these positions had never been occupied by women. It should be said that there is every reason to understand their anxiety and fear of ridicule. Ever since the British suffragettes, there have been systematic efforts to ridicule women and feminist movements, along with any real attempt to achieve change - seen as subversive.

Is it really "ugly", or more "cumbersome", to give the feminine form whenever necessary? Nothing could be further from the truth, as noted by Boileau: *sound thinking can be clearly expressed and the necessary words will come easily - if it is displeasing to the ear, this is above all because it affronts the spirit.* In practice, helped along by laziness and a desire for brevity, we too often resort to shortcuts, an approach which is dangerous in the long term and leads inevitably to the fatal impoverishment of language, whatever the language concerned.

This was unfortunately the case in the period following the Middle Ages, as can be seen from the Livre des Métiers (the Book of Occupations) drawn up in Paris at the beginning of the 13th century by Etienne Boileau, who published it in 1254. It is in fact a vast list of occupations, either exclusively for women or mixed. In any case, women were not excluded from any occupation. This enormous range of feminine occupational names has disappeared and by the Renaissance men had taken over virtually all the fields in which women had been active.

There is really much more at stake than a verbal struggle for words - to obtain a name: it is a matter of human beings being able, by means of a name or title of an occupation, to take

their rightful place in the psychological, symbolic, social and professional world.

The fact that women show less interest in prestige positions is a function of masculine linguistic norms which impose silence on them by not encouraging women to act or to see themselves in a position traditionally occupied by men, far less apply for such a post.

The masculine name of a occupation is a contradiction as soon as it is applied to women. Overriding all others, this denigratory message will be absorbed at both the subconscious and conscious levels.

The feminine name of an occupation, and that alone, must therefore be employed when referring to women in these occupations. It is worth noting in this context two initiatives in a number of European countries, including the Netherlands: the compilation by Attie Gooszen of an alphabet of women's names, from Anna to Yvonne, and the decision to rename squares, parks, streets and lanes to commemorate well-known and lesser-known women and to erect statues to them.

This is summarised by Thérèse Moreau in her introduction to a Swiss list of feminine occupational titles: *it is (...) legitimate for a society in which women are finally achieving equality to take the trouble to ensure that this concept operates within the language. Accepting women as human beings in their own right also means removing from the language its masculinistic and misogynistic aspects. It is because women were second-class citizens that the feminine came to be seen as contemptible and was despised.*

By way of conclusion: the indispensable feminine

A language can only be enriched by change: change can never, ever block its development.

Undoubtedly, it is to some extent pioneer work we are engaged in but non-sexist use of language must be seen within the overall framework of the linguistic function as a form of social action designed to achieve a general enhancement of awareness. Resistance to the principle of equality in language, perpetuating a stereotyped and outdated perception of human beings, hampers any change in attitudes and behaviour.

In its recommendation No 5 (1990,4) the Council of Europe urged that at least the public sector should adopt the new form of language use, so as to create the most favourable socio-cultural conditions for the achievement of equality in all the relevant fields: radio and television, the press, education, legal texts, publishing, terminology and the spoken word - providing feminine or masculine forms of the names of occupations, positions, ranks or titles

in every case involving both women and men.

A survey commissioned by the "European Committee for Equality between women and men" has shown that in all the 13 countries analysed (Austria, Germany, Liechtenstein, Switzerland, Cyprus, Ireland, Malta, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain and Sweden) language use is sexist (although the nature of the sexism varies) and discriminates against women because of the presence, and combination, of certain parameters: among those mentioned were the loss by married women of their maiden name and the generic use of the masculine to refer to people, social groups and the names of occupations, professions, positions, titles and ranks.

Portuguese, for example, is so highly flexible a language that it is very easy to form feminine occupational and other names and in Portuguese the title "*Senhora*" does not indicate whether or not a woman is married. Almost all the above countries are attempting to eliminate all language sexism by means of Parliamentary, government, administrative, trade-union and private-sector action, this taking the form of decrees, legislation, directives, ministerial circulars, research reports and recommendations on policies to be followed.

Belgium could be regarded as a forerunner in going so far, in 1988, as to recommend coining new words if necessary.

One Portuguese initiative was to replace the expression "rights of man" by "rights of the (human) person". Another made it possible for married women to keep their maiden name; in Italy and Switzerland it has become possible to add it to that of the husband, and in France parents can pass on to their children the name of both mother and father.

This dynamic and deliberate linguistic approach is far in advance of current or even future social reality and shows a feminisation that is effective, coherent and pertinent - after all, the resurrection of modern Hebrew is a model of how completely successful such a deliberate initiative can be (Marina Yaguello). Post-revolutionary Russia instituted a financial reward for the inventor of an effective neologism.

Throughout history, it has always been a minority - on behalf of the majority - which has taken the initiative in language or society. Little by little, we will even come to regard certain terms, particularly masculine ones, as obsolete. Repeated use of words, whether or not they are feminine, has always resulted in their taking hold eventually. We would go along with Michèle Cotta, former head of the radio and television authority in France and former director of programmes for the French television channel TF1, in her estimation that *a language incapable of describing modern reality and without terms to describe new technologies is a dead (or at least mutilated) language.*

In a society populated by robots, we would be able to make a distinction between beings and their occupational name, but this is not true in our own societies, where we will always be dealing professionally with women or men and will welcome this information.

Deliberately using the feminine forms of occupational names can bring about a permanent change in attitudes and in the collective subconscious, this then spreading to society itself. As has been noted, no sooner does one begin to study language sexism than one hears and sees it everywhere, so strongly does the masculine principle still dominate society and language.

It is important to be aware that during the initial period of surprise, irony and mockery will be used to discourage feminisation. The same was true when women won the vote.

But it is up to women to "dare" to bring about change. Language is a living thing, capable of including new social realities and making good its own shortcomings - clarifying usage by eliminating language's alienation of women.

Given certain anarchic tendencies, it would better to adopt, where appropriate, a new approach based on a "positive-action policy", rather than to insist on resurrecting certain words long since abandoned or using references that are not only negative or pejorative but also frequently reflect only a partial reality.

Social change is in full swing and not a day passes without a woman in the headlines for her work or other achievements. On 16 May 1991, Edith Cresson became Frances "première ministre", yet her title remained the masculine "premier ministre". This example combines several of the symptoms described above and shows that the key role here is played not by the word alone but by the concept, in its psychological, sociological and cultural dimensions - and this is true of a large number of Indo-European languages with a similar socio-cultural content and form.

It can accordingly be made a basic tenet of feminisation that a word must be of the same gender as the person or thing it stands for, in the vocabulary of communication, if we are to engender female images for women and masculine ones for men, so as to avoid any unhealthy and perverse confusion, any "cacophony", to use Benoît Groult's expression. Semantic and linguistic rules are not natural ones, they are the result of social and cultural action. These translate into language the denial of women and, as at the conscious level, the unconscious is fully capable of absorbing this message.

Feminisation of language is nothing more nor less than the right to exist as a woman in a world which no longer ignores sexual equality. Far from being a superficial, futile or insignificant demand, this is a giant step towards the emancipation of women.

After all, Dumarsais noted prophetically (in terms of what we are now discussing) in Les Tropes¹⁷ in 1729: *there are no synonyms in any language (...) a language will be truly a rich one if it has terms to distinguish not only the key ideas but also their differences and nuances, the variations in power, extent, precision, simplicity and structure.*

Interpretation, and an application which may sometimes differ considerably from the conventional use of the language, gives rise to feminisation which is both simple and varied.

Moreover, feminisation of language makes it possible to avoid any pejorative connotations and to redefine concepts which have become time-worn, outmoded or deformed, through a process of trimming or cleaning up terms which have unfortunate connotations. This would mean, for example, that a woman visiting an official building in France would in future be issued with a badge marked "visiteuse" and not "visiteur"; while on her way there the leaflet "information for travellers" would have correctly referred to her as "voyageuse", rather than lumping her in with "voyageurs": just two out of many thousands of possible examples. There is no doubt that the feminine closely parallels the spontaneous feeling of language, adopting feminine forms, and that these will be reflected, without any pejorative loading whatsoever, in the newspapers: "*L'Université s'est dotée d'une rectrice*" (Woman vice-chancellor for the university).

Is it necessary to indicate the sex of the profession, if sex and gender should no longer be of importance?

One should not lose sight of the fact that key issues are at stake in feminisation, such as the impoverishment of language: if feminine forms continue to disappear in such large numbers, language will become increasingly masculinised. However powerful the socio-cultural restraints, changes have always been incorporated into language use, speakers using the feminine forms which come automatically to mind.

Femmes & Langage has sought to develop arguments to demonstrate the vital need for feminine forms and that, in linguistic terms, there is no reason not to use them. We would wager that in a century or two, with women clearly present at all levels of society, a new Etienne Boileau will arise to write, a thousand years on, a new "Handbook of Occupations" in Europe, listing not only all manner of women fighter pilots, doctors, heads of state and surgeons, but also male forms of occupations such as midwife!

To conclude, let us summarise the chief considerations applying to usage that is sometimes

¹⁷ Issued in a new edition by Fontanier in 1818, in Sexes et genres à travers les langues, in Luce Irigaray, 1990, 211.

uncertain and is in the midst of change and adaptation, although language has never been devoid of feminine forms and has always been quick to create them. In extremely difficult situations, and as a final resort, we always have the option of paraphrasing or otherwise getting round the problem without actually solving it.

Depending on the language concerned:

I. All forms of sexism are to be avoided or eliminated. A useful way of tackling this is to pose the question: would I have formulated things in the same way if I had been referring to a man?

II.(a) The feminine form of a professional name should be given priority over any other:

e.g. "camerawoman".

To take an example in French: *Cette chirurgienne mondialement connue avait dû opérer toute la matinée* (this world-famous surgeon [feminine form] had to operate all morning).

Back-formation may if necessary be used to form the masculine from the feminine form, or vice-à-versa.

II.(b) Ranks, titles, positions, occupations and professions should also be given the feminine form wherever the language concerned offers this option.

II.(c) In job-vacancy notices, official forms and anywhere else in which the feminine and masculine forms are both applied, it is best to phrase these in such a way as to include both forms rather than using slashes or brackets.

III. In languages which require an agreement (pronouns, adjectives, determinants, etc.), these are to be put in the feminine if referring to a woman.

IV. The feminine dimension should also be apparent in the case of plurals (agent names, pronouns, etc.)

Example: *Les sculpteurs européens et sculptrices européennes* (specifically listing both sculptors and sculptresses).

V. Order: the feminine and masculine should alternate in taking precedence. It is also

quite reasonable to use alphabetical order in lists and in any other type of document.

- VI In some rare cases it may be necessary to put the word "woman/women" (or "male") in apposition.

Example: Women painters now have their own world-wide association.

- IX. Avoiding all other discrimination, care should be taken not to mention the marital status or family situation of a person (wife and mother of x children) or their age.
- X. Both the first name AND surname of people should be given, to avoid the annoying tendency to refer to women only by their first name and to omit their surname.
- XI. Diminutives should not be used of women and should be replaced by a different, non-discriminatory and non-pejorative form.

Finally, let us never forget that the ramparts of national academies, often hostile to the feminisation of language, will eventually, like the walls of Jericho, tumble before the power of the spoken language in society: the language of women and of men. This is a blessing, without which our languages would follow many of their predecessors in, if not disappearing, at least crumbling because of the absence of their feminine dimension.

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