Language and gender in Netherlands Dutch: Towards a more gender-fair usage

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1. Introduction: Sociolinguistic perspectives

Modern Standard Dutch is the official language of the Netherlands and one of the official languages of Belgium. In the two countries together, the number of speakers is approximately 20 million. The official name of the language is *Nederlands*. Afrikaans, the language of part of the white and mixed-race population of the Republic of South Africa is derived from 17th century Dutch, but is now regarded as a separate language. Dutch is also the official language of administration of Surinam and the Dutch Antilles, but it is not widely spoken there. Some Dutch is still spoken in Indonesia.

Dutch belongs to the West Germanic branch of the Germanic languages. Compared to the two other major West Germanic languages, English and German, Dutch is closer to German in fundamental aspects such as syntax. Like English, however, it has lost most of the original Germanic noun morphology. From the period of Middle Dutch (1100-1500) a considerable number of literary and non-literary texts have been preserved and edited. Most of these were written in the dialects of leading southern provinces, Flanders and Brabant. By the time that Modern Dutch developed, the language had already lost most of its case distinctions and flectional morphology.

Gender bias in varieties of Dutch as used in Surinam, Dutch Antilles and Indonesia is politically and linguistically so different from the situation in the Netherlands that I cannot deal with it here.

In Belgium Dutch competes with French and German and is often called *Flemish, Vlaams* in Dutch. In this article I will also not deal with the issue of gender bias in Dutch as it is used in Belgium. The reasons for this are that there are some differences in morphological structure between Belgian and

Netherlands Dutch that especially affect gender, that the Belgian point of view regarding gender bias is different from the Dutch one and that the Belgians have partly used other linguistic and political means to solve the problem.1

2. Selected structural properties of Dutch

In this section I will deal in greater detail with structural properties of Dutch that are important for gender distinctions. The data presented here can be found in: Donaldson (1983:58-62), Kooij (1987), ANS (1997).

2.1. *Grammatical gender*

Dutch holds an intermediate position between English and German regarding grammatical gender distinctions in nouns: it has more distinctions than English, but less than German (Kooij 1987:145). Nouns can be divided in two classes: nouns with common gender, which in the singular take the definite article *de* and nouns with neuter gender, which in the singular take the definite article *het*. Nouns belonging to the *de*-class are either masculine or feminine. For instance *de tafel* 'the table' is feminine and requires the feminine possessive pronouns *haar* ’h*er‘* and the feminine personal pronouns *zij* 'she' and *haar* 'her' (cf. 1a). *De stoel* 'the chair' is masculine and requires the masculine possesive pronouns *zijn* ’his‘ and the masculine personal pronouns *hij* 'he' and *hem* 'him' (cf. 1b). Nouns with neuter gender, for example *het bed* 'the bed', require the same possessive and personal pronouns as masculine nouns (cf. 1b and 1c). For nouns in the plural no gender distinctions are made: the article for all three genders is *de*, the possessive personal pronoun is *hun* ’their’ and the personal pronouns are *zij* ‘they‘ and *hen/hun/ze* ‘them‘ (cf. 1d). The factors that condition the variation between hen*/ze* and *hun* are too complex to deal with here and do not interfere with gender.

(1) a. *De tafel met haar poten. Zij is mooi. Ik zie haar.*
The table with its (her) legs. It (she) is beautiful. I see it (her).
b. *De stoel met zijn poten. Hij is mooi. Ik zie hem.*
The chair with its (his) legs. It (he) is beautiful. I see it (him).
c. *Het bed met zijn poten. Hij is mooi. Ik zie hem.*
The bed with its (his) legs. It (he) is beautiful. I see it (him).
d. De tafels met hun poten. Zij zijn mooi. Ik zie hen/ze/hun.
The tables with their legs. They are beautiful. I see them.

Table 1 summarizes the use of articles, possessive and personal nouns for masculine, feminine and neuter nouns in both plural and singular. It is clear that the distinction between genders is only shown in the singular. The difference between masculine and feminine nouns is expressed in possessive and personal pronouns (but see also 3.1) and the difference between neutral and masculine nouns is expressed in the use of the definite article.

Table 1 Grammatical gender distinctions in Dutch

Singular

	Def. articles	Poss. pronouns	Personal pronouns	
			Nom.	Accus./dat.
Masculine noun	de	zijn	hij	hem
Feminine noun	de	haar	zij	haar
Neuter noun	het	zijn	hij	hem

Plural

	Def. articles	Poss. pronouns	Personal pronouns	
			Nom.	Accus./dat.
Masculine noun	de	hun	zij	hen/ze/hun
Feminine noun	de	hun	zij	hen/ze/hun
Neuter noun	de	hun	zij	hen/ze/hun

The distinction between neuter gender on the one hand and masculine and feminine gender on the other is expressed in the singular in two other word classes: demonstratives and adjectives. *Dat* 'that´ and *dit* 'this' (*dat bed* 'that bed', *dit bed* 'this bed') refers to neutral gender and *die* 'that' and *deze* 'this' (*die stoel* 'that chair', *die tafel* 'that table', *deze stoel* 'this chair', *deze tafel* 'this table') refers to to masculine and feminine. The attributive adjective (i.e. before the noun) takes an –e ending in definite contexts before nouns of all genders, both singular and plural (*de nieuw**e** tafel/stoel/tafels/stoelen/bedden, '*the new table/chair/tables/chars/beds', *het nieuw**e** bed* 'the new bed'), and also before singular neuter gender nouns in indefinite contexts (*een nieuw**e** stoel/tafel* 'a new chair/table'). However, before singular neuter nouns in indefinite contexts the adjective is left uninflected: *een nieuw bed '*a new bed'.

Grammatical gender distinction is not expressed by other means in Dutch: neither in verb agreement like in a number of Romance languages, nor in case like in German. The difference between nominative case on the one hand and accusative and dative case on the other is not expressed in nouns in Dutch. The distinction is only expressed in personal pronouns (cf. Table 1) and in the nouns

of some archaic expressions. The Dutch case situation is just in between the English and the German situation. In the English language neither case nor gender is expressed (cf. 2a), while both case and gender are expressed (cf. 2b) in the German language. In Dutch the distinction between common gender and masculine/feminine gender is expressed in the article, but case is not (2c).

(2) a The woman gave the apple to the child
b Die Frau gab dem Kind den Apfel
c De vrouw gaf de appel aan het kind

2.2. Sex-specific vs. gender-neutral personal nouns

Dutch has nouns that are inherently specified for semantic/referential gender such as *vrouw* 'woman', e*chtgenote* 'wife', *mevrouw* 'mrs', *juffrouw* 'miss', *wijf* ' bitch', *tante* 'aunt', *nicht* 'niece'/'cousin', *meisje* 'girl' for females and *man* 'man', *echtgenoot* 'husband', *meneer* 'sir', *oom* 'uncle', *neef* 'nephew'/'cousin', *jongetje* 'boy' for males. Grammatical gender does not always coincide with natural gender though (cf. 3.1).

Not all professional titles in Dutch have a masculine and a feminine counterpart, which is contrary to, for example, the German language. Dutch has two types of professional titles: terms that indicate the natural gender of the person who practises a profession and terms that do not. In the following I will deal with these terms in sequence.

We can distinguish two categories in the professional names that have a male and a female counterpart. There are names that have the same meaning, apart from the biological sex that is indicated (3) and there are also names that do not only indicate a difference in biological sex, but also in meaning (4). In most cases the profession name indicating a woman refers to a job with a lower social status than the name indicating a man. A *secretaresse* earns far less than a *secretaris*. A *secretaris* very often has a *secretaresse*, who works for him/her but a *secretaresse* never has a *secretaris* who works for her. There is a clear difference in function and women who have the function of *secretaris* will never call themselves *secretaresse*. Examples of men who have the function of *secretaresse* hardly occur. As far as I know men with these functions call themselves *administratief medewerker* 'white-collar worker'. The term *masseuse* is associated with a whorehouse, but the term *masseur* with a physiotherapeutic centre. A *directrice* can be the director of a pre-school kindergarden, home for the elderly, but when a woman becomes the director of a grammar school or a large organisation she calls herself *directeur*. The *caissière* works in a store, the *kassier* in a bank.

(3)	Terms for women	Terms for men	Translation
	lerares	*leraar*	'teacher'
	schrijfster	*schrijver*	'author'
	actrice	*acteur*	'actress/actor'
	componist	*componiste*	'composer'
	assistent	*assistente*	'assistant'

(4)	Terms for women	Terms for men	Translation
	secretaresse	*secretaris*	'secretary'
	masseuse	*masseur*	'masseur'
	directrice	*directeur*	'director'
	caissière	*kassier*	'cashier'

Furthermore Dutch has names for professions that either do not have any equivalents referring to men (5a), or equivalents referring to women (5b), although the non-existent equivalents could exist from a morphological point of view (cf. 2.3.1). Completely new names are invented when men enter the jobs mentioned in 5a, for example *huishoudelijke hulp* (domestic help) for *werker*, and when women enter the jobs in 5b.

(5) a.	Terms for women	Terms for men	Translation
	kleuterleidster	**kleuterleider*	'nursery school teacher'
	vroedvrouw	**vroedman*	'midwife'
	winkelmeisje	**winkeljongen*	'sales girl'
	naaister	**naaier*	'dressmaker'
	werkster	**werker*	'cleaning lady'
b.	**melkboerin*	*melkboer*	'milkman'
	**timmervrouw*	*timmerman*	'carpenter'

A fourth category of names that are in use in Dutch are the so-called gender-neutral terms (6) which all have the grammatical masculine gender. These are names to which a suffix referring to women cannot easily be added (cf. 2.3.1). This is partly due to the fact that the addition of such suffixes would result in homonyms (for example *informatica* 'information science', *fysica* 'physics') or to names which are already in use for the wives of the men with the profession, as in *domineese* 'clergyman's wife'. Another reason why Dutch suffixes referring to women cannot easily be added to these names is that the names are often loan

words. The suffix *-ster* is for example hard to add to *professor* or *consul*: *professorster*, *consulster* can hardly be pronounced.

(6)	Terms for women and men	Translation
	dokter	'doctor'
	professor	'professor'
	psychiater	'psychiatrist'
	consul	'consul'
	bediende	'servant'
	beambte	'official'
	notaris	'notary'
	minister	'minister'
	informaticus	'information scientist'
	fysicus	'physicist'
	ingenieur	'engineer'
	dominee	'clergyman'

2.3. *The morphology of personal nouns*

2.3.1. *Derivation*

We have seen in (6) in 2.2. that not all personal nouns have a feminine counterpart. In this respect Dutch differs substantially from German. Whereas in German almost all personal nouns referring to men can be transformed into a personal noun referring to women by adding the suffix –in, in Dutch not all personal nouns can be transformed in this way. The number of suffixes that can be used to feminize personal nouns denoting men is much larger, though. Below I will give an overview of the Dutch suffixes that are in use. The list starts with the productive suffixes and ends with the unproductive suffixes. The data presented here can be found in ANS (1997: 668-672) and Brouwer (1985).

Suffix –e. Feminine personal nouns can be derived from masculine personal nouns by adding the suffix –e. This productive process especially occurs with loans (7a), nouns ending in –ing (7b) and some other nouns (7c).

(7)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
(7a)	*assistent*	*assistente*	’assistant’
	spion	*spionne*	’spy’
	student	*studente*	’student’
	advocaat	*advocate*	’lawyer’

(7b)	*leerling*	*leerlinge*	’pupil’
(7c)	*echtgenoot*	*echtgenote*	’husband’/’wife’
	gast	*gaste*	’guest’

Suffix –ster. Masculine personal nouns that are derived from verbs can be transformed into feminine personal nouns by changing the masculine suffix –er in –ster (8a). The suffix –ster is also used to transform masculine personal nouns ending in –aar or –ier in feminine personal nouns (8b). Both derivation processes with –ster are productive.

(8)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
(8a)	*arbeider*	*arbeidster*	’worker’
	voorzitter	*voorzitster*	’chairman’, ’chairwoman’
(8b)	*bedelaar*	*bedelaarster*	’beggar’
	tuinier	*tuinierster*	’gardener’

Suffixes -euse and –trice. Masculine personal nouns that end on –eur or –tor can be transformed in feminine personal nouns by replacing –eur by –euse (9a) and –tor by –trice (9b). This process is productive, but the –eur and –tor suffix only occurs in loans and words ending on –eur or -tor are nowadays not frequently borrowed.

(9)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
(9a)	*adviseur*	*adviseuse*	’advisor’
	chauffeur	*chauffeuse*	’chauffeur’
(9b)	*illustrator*	*illustratrice*	’illustrator’

Suffix –a. Masculine personal nouns that end on us can be transformed in feminine personal nouns by changing –us into –a. This process is still productive, but the –us suffix only occurs in loans from Latin, however not many Latin words enter the Dutch language nowadays.

(10)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
	historicus	historica	’historian’

Suffix –es (-esse). Feminine personal nouns are derived from masculine personal nouns by adding the suffix –es or esse (11a) or by changing the suffix –is of masculine personal nouns into –esse (11b). Both processes are no longer productive in Dutch. For some feminine personal nouns two forms exist. In those cases the –esse form is more distinguished than the –es form.

(11)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
(11a)	*baron*	*barones*	’baron’, baroness’
		b*aronesse*	
	prins	*prinses*	’prince’, ’princess’
(11b)	*archivaris*	*archivaresse*	’archivist’
	jubilaris	*jubilaresse*	’person celebrating his jubilee’

Suffix –in. Derivation with –in from masculine personal nouns is not productive any more.

(12)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
	boer	*boerin*	’farmer’
	held	*heldin*	’hero’
	neger	*negerin*	’Negro’

Suffix –se. Derivation with -se is not productive anymore. Those feminine personal nouns are very archaic. Most of those derivations only have the meaning ’wife of’ except *kastelein*, which has both meanings: wife of the innkeeper and the innkeeper himself.

(13)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
	dominee	*domineese*	wife of minister
	schipper	*schipperse*	wife of shipmaster
	kastelein	*kasteleinse*	(wife of) inn keeper

Since the Midde Ages great changes have taken place in the derivation of feminine personal nouns from masculine personal nouns (cf. Brouwer 1980, 1985). Both the number of suffixes that can be used to this end - Middle Dutch had three other suffixes (-egge, -sche, -nede) - and the productivity have decreased: the currently unproductive suffixes –in and –es/-esse were productive in Middle Dutch and –ster was more productive than it is in current Dutch. The possibilities to derive feminine nouns from masculine nouns in Dutch have decreased from the Middle Ages onwards.

2.3.2. *Composition*

Composition is another process to femininize masculine personal nouns. Nouns that have the word man ’man’ or *boer* ’farmer’ as last part can be

transformed into a noun denoting a woman by replacing *man* by *vrouw* ’woman’ or *boer* by *boerin* ’female farmer’ (14). We have seen in 5b in 2.2 that not all masculine personal nouns ending on *man* or *boer* can be changed in a feminine personal noun.

(14)	Terms for men	Terms for women	Translation
	kaasboer	*kaasboerin*	’cheese farmer’
	bloemenman	*bloemenvrouw*	’flower-seller’
	cameraman	*cameravrouw*	’cameraman‘ /’camerawoman’

Words such as *persoon* ’person’ are rarely used in the singular as a neutral alternative. However, in the plural it is sometimes used as such, for example *mensen* ’people’: *ambtspersonen* ’officials’, *zeemensen* ’sea-men’.

3. Gender-biased usage in Dutch: Variation and tendencies of change

3.0 Historical background of the public debate for a more gender-free usage

The fight against a Dutch language that is less gender-biased dates from the beginning of the second feminist movement. The start of this period in the Netherlands is marked by the appearance of Kool-Smit (1967), an article - entitled *Het onbehagen bij de vrouw* 'The discontentment of women', published in the prestigious Dutch literary journal *De Gids.* Joke Kool-Smit (1933-1981) showed that women were considered as secondary after men in nearly all sectors of life. Her passionate plea for equality of the sexes centred around three main points:

- Fairly dividing of what she calls inside and outside services (household and professional life);
- Redistributing power between women and men;
- Removing the segmentation between women’s and men’s professions.

The impact of this article on Dutch women was enormous. Many appeared to have the same feelings and they joined forces in several feminist unions. The two most important women’s liberation movements were the *Dolle Mina’s* 'Crazy Mina’s' and *Man Vrouw Maatschappij* 'Men Women Society', which were founded by Kool-Smit. Whereas the former fought against inequality by means of happenings such as tying purple ribbons in pissoirs, *Man Vrouw Maatschappij*

used more serious means: their members exposed the inequality by analysing socio-economic policies and legislation of the Dutch government. It was also this movement that made suggestions for gender bias-free professional titles in Dutch (cf. 4.2)

During the first years of the second feminist movement gender-biased language was not an issue yet in the Netherlands. It was only in 1975 that Annie Romein-Verschoor (1895-1978), a historian and specialist in Dutch, published a comprehensive article about the second feminist movement in which she also paid attention to linguistic problems. She mentioned three different fields: gender bias in the way Dutch is used, referring to generic nouns with masculine pronouns and sex-specific terms for professions. Her article has been the cradle of the discussion of gender bias in Dutch and it gives an outline of almost all the examples of gender bias in Dutch.

Most aspects of gender bias in Dutch to which Romein-Verschoor (1975) drew attention have been discussed vehemently in the Netherlands in the subsequent years and I will also deal with them in this section. It is striking that she herself does not make any suggestions for change. As a linguist she understands very well that language is a reflection of society. She shows that gender bias in Dutch is largely a symptom of the inequality in Dutch society, but she also emphasises that this society is changing and that the Dutch language is behind the developments in society. She warns that the gender bias in Dutch might slow down the progress of women's liberation and states that it is therefore important to try to find solutions. As a linguist, she realises, though, that this is not easy to effectuate: "It is easy to protest, but to find solutions is difficult because language develops in its own way and is not determined by committees of linguists" (Romein-Verschoor 1977: 14).

Although Romein-Verschoor did not herself solve the problem of gender bias in Dutch, she was its prime mover. It was, however, not her comprehensive 1975 article in *De Gids*, which also dealt with many other problems of sexism, but a paper she had planned to deliver at the 1977 meeting of the *Vereniging voor Vrouwen met een Wetenschappelijke Opleiding* (VVAO) 'Society for Women with an Academic Education' (Romein-Verschoor 1977). Regarding gender bias in language the content of this paper was similar to that of Romein-Verschoor (1975). The executive committee of the VVAO considered the topics raised in this presentation so important that they placed a request in the feminist magazine *Opzij*, in which they asked linguists to form a committee to try to find solutions to the gender bias in Dutch as observed by Romein-Verschoor. A number of women - among others Agnes Verbiest, Dédé Brouwer and myself - answered to this call and started to work. Apart from this group, which was called Research Group Language Sexism of the VVAO, other people, both linguists and non-linguists,

also dealt with one or more of the three different aspects of gender bias in Dutch as raised by Romein-Verschoor. At the time the topic of language and sex, as it was called, was popular among students of linguistics. This was partly due to Lakoff (1975) and developments in sociolinguistics, which increasingly demonstrated that women and men differed in language use. Although this was a different topic than gender bias in language it raised the interest in sexism in language.

In this section I will deal with the issues of gender bias in Dutch discussed during and after the second feminist movement, the fight against those gender biases and the results of these fights. I will deal in sequence with generic masculine nouns and pronominalization (3.1), terms of address and family names (3.2), idiomatic expressions and stereotypical descriptions of women and men (3.3) and occupational terms (3.4). Each section starts with a discussion of the problems in the traditional usage followed by a sketch of the changes that are proposed and have occurred. In the section on occupational terms (3.4) an empirical quantitative study on the use of occupational titles in advertising is presented.

3.1. *Generic masculine nouns and pronominalization*

Problems in traditional usage

For nouns denoting animate entities, semantic/referential gender and grammatical gender sometimes coincide: *vrouw* 'woman', *weduwe* 'widow' are feminine, and *man* 'man', *weduwnaar* 'widower' are masculine. The choice of anaphoric pronouns presents no problems in these cases (cf. 2.1):

(15) a. *De weduwe en haar kinderen*
The widow and her children
b. *De weduwnaar en zijn kinderen*
The widower and his children

However, for a large number of nouns 'natural' and grammatical gender do not correspond. There are neuter nouns that refer to both female and male beings: *persoon* 'person', *kind* 'child', *arts* 'doctor'. The grammar of Dutch requires that a person refers to those nouns with masculine personal/possessive pronouns, with the consequence that the referential/semantic gender remains ambiguous. Due to the grammatical structure of Dutch and prescriptive attitudes of grammatical descriptions (ANS 1997:230-235, Woordenlijst Nederlandse Taal 1995:41-43), women are not visible in these cases:

(16) a. *De mens en zijn kinderen*
Man and his children
b. *Iedereen wil graag begrijpen wat hij leest.*
Everybody wants to understand what he reads.
c. *Een arts moet naar zijn patienten luisteren.*
A doctor must listen to his patients

Tendencies of variation and change

No solution has been found for the fact that the grammatical structure of Dutch requires that one has to refer to generic nouns with masculine pronouns when the 'natural' or referential gender of the noun is not known or unimportant in the context. Some have proposed to use the word *zaar*, a mixture of feminine *haar* and masculine *zijn* in sentences such as (17). This alternative is, however, not frequently used.

(17) *De mens en zaar kinderen*
People and their children

Instead of trying to introduce new gender-neutral pronouns, those who advocate a Dutch that is free of gender-bias gave suggestions to avoid sexisms as in (16). For example: the use of plurals (18), since plural pronouns do not have a gender distinction, the use of *hij or zij* (19), or the use of a paraphrase (20):

(18) *De mensen en hun kinderen*
Humankind and their children

(19) *Iedereen wil graag begrijpen wat hij of zij leest.*
Everybody wants to understand what he or she reads

(20) *Wie leest, wil ook begrijpen.*
Who reads wants to understand.

Prominent Dutch composition books such as Renkema (1995) and Van Gessel et al. (1992) mention these possibilities to avoid gender bias in the use of pronouns and their advice is often followed. If people feel that they cannot avoid this type of gender bias, they sometimes mention in a note that *hij* 'he', *hem* 'him' and *zijn 'his'* are supposed to include *zij* 'she' and *haar* 'her'. Some people do it the other

way round: they use the feminine pronouns and state in a note that they also refer to male human beings. This, however, occurs only seldom.

So far we have described the gender system of Dutch nouns as static, but in fact it is changing, and due to these ongoing changes women become more visible in language. For many speakers of Dutch in the western and northern part of the Netherlands, the masculine/feminine distinction in nouns does not exist anymore, contrary to Dutch as spoken in Belgium where the distinction is fully alive (ANS 1997:161). In spoken Dutch the "wrong" anaphoric pronouns are often used and natural gender overrides grammatical gender. In written Dutch the correct anaphoric pronouns are required. If people do not know the grammatical gender of a *de*-word and they have to refer to it with pronouns, they check the gender of the noun in a dictionary.

The practice in spoken language has recently led to important changes in Dutch dictionaries and grammars: grammatical gender is gradually going to be replaced by natural gender (cf. Schutz 1998: 294f). There are changes in both the assignment of a noun to a gender class and the use of personal pronouns. A number of the nouns referring to human beings which in former editions of dictionaries only had one grammatical gender (masculine), as for example *zieke* 'patient' and *blinde* 'blind person', have two grammatical genders (masculine and feminine) in recent editions (e.g., Wolters-Koenen 1986). Since the last edition of the most authoritative dictionary of Dutch, Van Dale (1999), grammatical gender does not override natural gender anymore. A whole section of the grammatical description is devoted to the problem of incongruity of grammatical and natural gender, and the solution suggested is that "designations for persons such as *arts* (doctor), *deskundige* (expert) have a grammatical gender, but the natural gender of the referent determines which personal pronouns have to be used" (Van Dale 1999:xviii). When the natural gender of the referent is unclear, however, the masculine pronouns *hij*, *hem* and *zijn* are used. The most authoritative grammar of the Netherlands, ANS (1997:161), gives similar suggestions to avoid gender bias.

The change from grammatical to natural gender of Dutch nouns does not remove the gender-bias problem of the Dutch pronominal system, but it indicates a development of the language in which women become more visible. Nouns which until recently only had masculine gender (*m*. in the dictionaries), now have both masculine and feminine (*m*. and *f*. in the dictionaries). The reader will therefore be aware more easily that the persons referred to can be either male or female.

3.2. *Terms of address and family names*

Problems in traditional usage

In the area of address terms and family names, traditional practice is illustrated by the following examples:

(21) Terms of address
Mevrouw: Term of address for married women and unmarried women with a very high status, for example because they received a PhD
Juffrouw: Term of address for unmarried women
Mijnheer: Term of address for men, regardless whether they are married or not or have a high status

(22) Family names
Mevrouw Kool-Smit, Mevrouw Romein-Verschoor
Mevrouw Gerritsen, Mevrouw Jansen
Mijnheer Kool, Mijnheer Romein, Mijnheer Gerritsen, Mijnheer Jansen

Married women used the family name of their husband (e.g., *Kool*, *Romein*) together with their own family name (e.g., *Smit*, *Verschoor*) or they only used the family name of their husband (e.g., *Gerritsen*, *Jansen*). Married men only used their own family name: *Mijnheer Kool* 'Mr. Kool', *Mijnheer Romein, Mijnheer Gerritsen.*

Children received the family name of their father:

(24) *Frank Jansen*, child of Mr. Jansen and Mrs. Jansen-Bezema

Tendencies of variation and change

Terms of address
Gender bias in forms of address has changed dramatically since 1975. There has been an adaptation to the forms of address that were used for men. The difference between a married and an unmarried woman – *mevrouw* versus *juffrouw*- has disappeared completely. All women, married or not, with or without a high status, are now *mevrouw*. The change started in the beginning of the seventies in Amsterdam and spread all over the Netherlands within 10 years, starting in the towns of the western part and among the higher social classes. Nowadays, there are no official forms any more in which the address form *juffrouw* occurs. In 1993 a letter appeared in the feminist magazine *Opzij* in which an unmarried woman of 80 regrets that the term juffrouw is no longer in use. She sketches the many questions that she had to answer when she introduced herself as *mevrouw*

to the people in the home for the elderly where she was living now for two years: When did your husband die? How many children do you have?

It is remarkable that the disappearance of *juffrouw* took place very smoothly. The change had already taken place when the working groups on Language Sexism in Dutch were founded (cf. 3.0). The groups did not have to struggle in order to terminate its use.

Another example of the decrease of gender biased language use is the description of forms of address in the most authoritative dictionary of Dutch: Van Dale. The edition of 1984 describes how to address the queen, a widow of noble birth, a princess, a baroness, a countess, a nun, a sister, a lady, and eight other women with a title. For them an address form with *vrouwe* 'madam' is advised. All other 67 (male) persons with a title should be addressed with a form of *heer* 'sir'. This was all the more surprising since there were professions that even in 1984 were practised by women: lawyer, official, pharmacist, student, dentist. The gender bias is solved in the edition of 1992 that states that women have to be addressed with a form of *vrouwe* and men with a form of *heer.*

Family names

There has been a change from the use of the family name of the husband to only the maiden name. Before 1975 most women only used both names - *Kool-Smit, Romein-Verschoor* - in official documents. Some women did it in more situations in order to express their own roots or facilitate the change to re-using their maiden name. Most married women only used the family name of their husband in everyday situations: *mevrouw Gerritsen* 'Mrs Gerritsen'. The change from using the husband's name to the use of the maiden name can only be described tentatively, since it has never been investigated systematically. It has been conditioned by regional, social and age factors. The change started just after World War II in Amsterdam among married women in artistic circles and spread to other groups during the sixties. At the end of the seventies nearly all women from the higher social classes who were born after 1945 and lived in towns in the western part of the Netherlands kept their maiden name or were going to use it again after having used the name of their husband for some years. Some older women from the same group, but born before 1945, also did not use the name of their husband anymore, but used their own name, for example, Joke Kool-Smit became Joke Smit. In many cases the re-use of the maiden name was related to divorce. Women born before 1930 kept the name of their husband, even if they were divorced. It was not until the beginning of the nineties before married women could use their maiden name in official forms. The change from using the family name of the husband to using the maiden name has not been completed

yet: especially not among the lower social classes, people living in rural areas and in the eastern part of the Netherlands.

As was the case with the change from *juffrouw* to *mevrouw*, the change in the use of family names proceeded rather smoothly. It was hardly an issue for the working groups on Language Sexism (cf. 3.0). Nowadays, both possibilities are used side by side and there is no discussion about it. By using the maiden name a woman can show that she is an emancipated woman independent of her husband. If she would use the name of her husband, she would indicate an adherence to more traditional norms.

Related to the use of the maiden name is the family name of children. Until 1994 children received the family name of the father when the father and mother were married. This was also the case when they were not married but when the father had officially recognised the child. Children with an unmarried mother and not recognised by the father got the family name of the mother. In 1998 the law regarding family names was changed and parents could choose between the family name of the mother and the family name of the official father. The only condition is that children from the same parents have the same family name. Unfortunately, there are no data yet about the choices that are made.2

3.3. *Idiomatic expressions and stereotypical descriptions of women and men*

The way Dutch was used before the second feminist movement resulted in an unequal linguistic treatment between women and men: the invisibility of women in idiomatic expressions (25, 26), stereotypical gender-roles in how women and men are portrayed - compare 27 and 28 - and differences between women and men in how they are described. In the example of 29 Prof. dr. C. Jansen is a man and Engelien Jansen is a woman.

(25) *Geen man over boord.*
(No man over board)
This is not a very big problem.

(26) *Een man een man, een woord een woord.*
(A man a man, a word a word)
You have to do what you say.

(27) *Zij heeft de boot gemist.*
(She missed the boat)

She did not marry.

(28) *Hij is de dans ontsprongen.*
(He had a lucky escape)
He did not marry.

(29) *Engelien Jansen, moeder van drie kinderen, en dr. C. Jansen zijn alle twee hoogleraar*.
Engelien Jansen, mother of three children and Dr. C.. Jansen are both professors.

Regarding idiomatic expressions in which women are either invisible or portrayed in stereotypical gender-roles, the attitude of those people who advocated less gender bias in Dutch has been very pragmatic. They advised not to use such expressions or to use them also with the word *vrouw* 'woman' instead of *man*, or with 'he' instead of ‘she’ or ‘she’ instead of 'he' if required by the context and situation. A woman who wants to express that she will do what she promises will for example say ‘a woman a woman, a word a word‘ instead of (26). It is difficult to investigate whether this advice has been successful, but I have the idea that the majority of the Dutch handle these expressions in a gender bias-free way or at least try to do so. 3 I have often observed that expressions such as (25) and (26) slip out and are corrected immediately.

Regarding gender bias in the description of women and men, people struggling for a Dutch language that is free of gender bias have tried to ban this by showing how people can detect gender bias in descriptions: there is usually no gender bias if one can replace male forms by female forms and vice versa. These suggestions to detect gender bias have aroused a keen interest and are mentioned in prominent Dutch composition books. Nowadays we can still find gender bias in descriptions, however it has largely disappeared. Not in the least since differences in descriptions of women and men have been investigated systematically in a number of genres: dictionaries, schoolbooks, television, advertising, newspapers (Brouwer 1991, Verbiest 1997, 1999). A sign of the success of the fight against gender bias in descriptions is that in the most authoritative dictionary of the Netherlands, Van Dale, many sexist descriptions of words have disappeared since the 10th print (1976):

(30) a. Van Dale 1976
Zij is aan de afwas.
She is washing the dishes.

De meid heeft de afwas weer laten staan.
The maid has again not washed the dishes.

b. Van Dale 1984
Hij is aan de afwas.
He is washing the dishes

c. Van Dale 1992
Hij heeft de afwas weer laten staan.
He has again not washed the dishes.

To summarize, the aspects of overt gender bias in the way Dutch is used have mostly disappeared since 1975. Recent investigations of texts show, however, that gender bias still occurs, although it is far less noticeable than those aspects of gender bias mentioned in this section (Verbiest 1997, 1999). For example, Verbiest (1997) quotes (31). According to her, this is an example of gender bias in language use, since such a statement could hardly be made about a man:

(31) *Het valt mij op dat zij bijzonder redelijk argumenteert.*
It is striking that her argumentation is well.

3.4. Occupational terms: A case of Dutch language politics

3.4.1 Problems in traditional usage

We have seen in 3.0 that the start of the second feminist period in the Netherlands is marked by the appearance of Kool-Smit (1967). In this article she argued that the segmentation between women's and men's professions had to be removed. Her article had an enormous impact on Dutch women and they tried to achieve this. The first – and of course most important - thing that had to be changed in Dutch society was that it had to be made possible for women to practise so-called men's professions (carpenter) and for men to practise so-called women's professions (midwife). A second aspect that had to be changed was a change in names for professions. Since some names for professions only referred to men and others only to women new names for professions had to be created.

Romein-Verschoor (1975) observes a tendency in Dutch to indicate the biological sex of somebody who practices a profession in names for professions: a female psychologist is for example called a *psychologe* and a male a *psycholoog*. Furthermore, she shows that for some professions only female-

specific terms exist, e.g., *verpleegster* 'nurse', or *vroedvrouw* 'midwife', while only male-specific terms exist for other professions, e.g., *timmerman* 'carpenter'. Romein-Verschoor wonders why it is so important to express the biological sex of the person who practices a profession in the name of a profession. Is that more important than other aspects such as age, experience? On the other hand she shows that when a neutral term such as *arts* 'doctor' is used, people only have a male person in mind.

The discussion about the problem of gender bias in professional names in Dutch was accelerated when the law of Gelijke behandeling van mannen en vrouwen bij de arbeid 'Equal treatment for men and women regarding labour' was established in 1980. In this law it was laid down that advertisements for the recruitment of personnel had to be formulated in such a way that it was clear that both women and men could apply. Advertisements that did not state this clearly were legally forbidden. This law led to an enormous chaos in names for professions in personnel advertisements. Numerous solutions were created, some organisations only added v/m, which is the abbreviation of *vrouw* 'woman'/*man* 'man' to the profession name. This resulted in amusing constructions such as (32), in which a name with a component that clearly indicates a woman, -*vrouw* and -*esse* got an addition that indicated that men could also apply. (33) is an opposite example: the names of the professions include the words -*man* and –*is*, with additions that show that women could also apply:

(32)	*vroedvrouw* (m/v)	'midwife (m/f)'
	secretaresse (m/v)	'female secretary (m/f)'
(33)	*timmerman* (m/v)	'male carpenter (m/f)'
	secretaris (m/v)	'male secretary (m/f)'

Others tried to solve the problem through constructions such as in (34), which is a combination of the male/masculine suffix, -*eur* and the female/feminine suffix –*ice*, or a complicated combination of *psycholoog* 'psychologist' and *psychologe* 'female psychologist'.

(34)	*directeur/trice*	'male director', 'female director'
	psycholo(o)g/e	'male and female psychologist'

The Ministry for Social Affairs felt the need to intervene in this chaos and set up a committee called *Working Group Modification Names for Professions* that had to write guidelines for the use of occupational terms. The members were ordered to develop such terms that both men and women would feel addressed. The

working group consisted of members of the feminist movement *Man Vrouw Maatschappij* (cf. 3.0) and officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs. They analysed the problem and published their directions in the brochure "Gevraagd" which appeared in 1982.

3.4.2. Tendencies of variation and change: recommendations and a public debate

On the basis of an analysis of Dutch professional titles, which was very similar to the analysis presented in 2.2, the *Working Group Modification Names for Professions* recommended to use so-called neutral terms, names that could be used for both women and men. They considered the terms in (6) in 2.2 neutral and advised to use the terms for both men and women that were in use then for men in (3,4). For the terms in (5) they suggested new neutral forms, for example *timmer* for *timmerman*, *huishoudelijke hulp* for *werkster* or formations with neutral suffixes such as -*kracht* and -*wacht*. The choice of the neutral names was motivated as follows:
- In line with Romein-Verschoor (1975) they stated that it was not important to know the biological sex of a person who practises a profession.
- In the long run, sex differentiation in professions would not be present any more and many women would practise professions that were hitherto mainly performed by men. As a consequence the problem of only thinking of a man when perceiving the neutral term would disappear.
- If other professional titles would be introduced for women than for men, it was very likely that a differentiation in function would occur soon: the names referring to women having a lower social status than the names referring to men. We have seen that this had already occurred (cf. 4 in 2.2).
- When no neutral term was available, the term for men was chosen because that was the most prestigious term.
- When neutral terms were used or terms were in use for men at that moment (4) in a neutral way, it was not necessary to introduce important new – sometimes difficult to pronounce – variants such as *hoogleerkracht* 'professor', *schrijfpersoon* 'author' in the Dutch language.
- The choice of neutral terms is in line with the change in the Dutch language, which shows a decrease in number of productive suffixes referring to women (for example -*in*, -*es* have disappeared) from the Middle Ages on (cf. 2.3.1).

The brochure *Gevraagd* (cf. Werkgroep 1982) and these guidelines resulted in an avalanche of reactions in newspapers, radio and television and also from linguists. The discussion centred around three issues:

1. New formations such as *timmer* were considered to be ridiculous. Both laypersons and linguists were convinced that they would never gain a firm

foothold in Dutch. The criticism in newspapers, columns and so on mostly dealt with this problem: how to find neutral alternatives for the terms in (35).

2. Some linguists argued that the terms that were advised were not neutral at all, but only referred to men. Since not many women had practised professions yet such as *consul*, *dominee*, *minister*, *notaris*, people would only have a male person in mind when reading the personnel advertisements. They would not understand that the advertisements were also addressed to women. This group, including Ingrid van Alphen (1983) and Joke Huisman (1985) advocated sex-specific names for professions. Every name for a profession should have an equivalent for women. If such a name was not present in Dutch, it had to be created. Examples are given in (35). Their solution was highly inspired by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis: the structure of a language influences how the language user categorises the world around him or her. By using names for professions that clearly referred to a woman it would be clear for language users that women are also able to practise that profession.

(35)	Terms for women	Terms for men	Translation
	hooglerares	*hoogleraar*	'professor'
	loodgietster	*loodgieter*	'plumber'

3. According to Adriaens (1982) there was indeed a decrease in number of productive suffixes referring to women in Dutch, but some others (*-e*, *-euse*, *-trice*) were used more frequently. Besides, he observed a tendency to also introduce the gender distinction in the plural terms that until now did not have such a distinction: *assistent* and *assistente* both have the plural *assistenten*, but a special plural for women *assistentes* was increasingly used. On the basis of analyses of personnel advertisements in Dutch speaking Belgium and in the Netherlands he believes that two tendencies are present: a tendency to use sex-specific terms for professions and a tendency to use so-called sex-neutral ones. He does not dare to say which one will win in the long run.

The working group "Language Sexism" of the VVAO largely supported the advice of the "Working Group Modification Names for Professions". It only had problems with introducing neutral terms for types of names mentioned in (4) and (5) in 2.2. Regarding pairs such as *secretaresse* and *secretaris* they suggested to use the terms as indicators for functions regardless of the biological sex of the person who practised the function. For terms either only referring to men or to women they disapproved of forms like *timmer*, but they did not come up with better solutions.

In the end neither the guidelines of the Working Group Modification Names for Professions of *Man Vrouw Maatschappij* and the Ministry of Social Affairs

nor the proposals of the group headed by Ingrid van Alphen and Joke Huisman, nor those of the Working Group Language Sexism of the VVAO have become official guidelines. The discussions in the first half of the eighties were so vehement that no decisions could be taken.

3.4.3 Manual for formation and use of Dutch names for professions of the Dutch Language Union (2000)

In the second half of the eighties and the first of the nineties gender bias in names for professions was not subject of discussion anymore in the Netherlands and no new viewpoints were brought forward. It was not until 1995 that this issue came up for discussion again. *De Nederlandse Taalunie* (Dutch Language Union) also entered the discussion (Duynstee and Polak 1995). This is an official organ of the government of the Netherlands and the Dutch speaking part of Belgium that prepares and implements Dutch language and culture policy. The objective of the Nederlandse Taalunie is to advance the integration of the language and culture of the Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Belgium.

The Belgian Minister of Employment and Labour, which also includes the Department of Emancipation of the Society, Miet Smet, commissioned the linguist Patricia Niedzwiecki in 1991 to make guidelines for feminisation of profession names in the three languages spoken in Belgium: French, Dutch and German. Niedzwiecki made a guideline and a long list of sex-specific names for professions. The government of the French speaking part of Belgium adopted the list. It even issued a decree that sex-specific names for professions have to be used in official documents. However, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium protested. Willy van Langendonck, a professor in linguistics, showed that the proposal of Niedzwiecki would lead to superfluous new formations (*ministerinne* 'female minister') and adjustment to words that had already been used for a long time (*lerarenopleiding* had to get the variant *leraressenopleiding*). Besides, in his opinion the proposal would end in confusion: the best *docente* 'female teacher' of the year is not necessarily the same person as the best *docent* 'male teacher' of the year. In order to examine the question in greater detail, Miet Smet asked the linguist Johan de Caluwe to write a report in which he discussed the pros and cons of Niedzwiecki's proposal. Following the arguments of van Langendonck he advised not to use sex-specific terms for professions and introduce neutral terms. All in all no solution was found in the Dutch speaking part of Belgium.

In 1995 the Belgian government asked de Nederlandse Taalunie to also enter the discussion. *De Taalunie* arranged meetings with all persons who had written about this issue in Belgium and the Netherlands. Its conclusion is that it cannot give advise to use neutral or sex specific names for professions. The

choice between the two is politically so charged that it is better to give no advice at all. The solution of the Taalunie is - in line with its aim to develop a common knowledge and use of Dutch - to make people aware of the problems, to give the possibilities to solve them and show the linguistic and societal implications of the solutions. It commissioned two linguists, the Dutch Ariane van Santen and the Belgian Johan de Caluwe, to write a book entitled "Wegwijzer voor vorming en gebruik van Nederlandstalige functiebenamingen" (Manual for formation and use of Dutch names for professions). This book will give information about the social and linguistic background of the issue, the various possibilities to avoid language sexism's (for example, through making plurals) and the possibilities to make sex-neutral or sex-specific terms for professions. *De Nederlandse Taalunie* stated explicitly that no rules would be given. It are not the Dutch and Belgian government who own the Dutch language, but the speakers of Dutch themselves. They have to make their own choice. The handbook is only meant to help people choose and show the political and linguistic implications of their choice.

3.4.4. The use of occupational titles in advertising: An empirical study

The discussion about sex-specific or neutral terms for professions has been going on now for over 20 years and no solution has been found. The viewpoint of the official organ of the Dutch and Belgian government, the *Nederlandse Taalunie*, is even that no solution can be given. However, the advertisements for the recruitment of personnel have not disappeared. How do organisations nowadays solve the problem? Adriaens (1982) stated that the future would show whether the tendency to use neutral terms or the tendency to use sex-specific terms would win. In order to try to get an answer to this question I analysed professional titles in personnel ads in some of the 1999 issues of the same journals that Snijders (1989) had analysed in 1989: *de Telegraaf* and *Intermediair*. Snijders only studied advertisements for professions with a middle and high classification. I did the same in order to be able to compare her results with ours. She found 225 advertisements for professions with a middle and high classification in one issue of *Intermediair* and two of *de Telegraaf*. Ten years later I found 573 of such advertisements in one issue of *Intermediair* and one of *de Telegraaf*. The difference between 1989 and 1999 is the result of an increasing labour shortage during the last decade. It is difficult for companies to find employees.

Table 2 shows the prevalence of four types of occupational titles in headings of personnel advertisements in 1989 and 1999:

- Masculine terms that have a feminine counterpart: *medewerker* vs. *medewerkster* 'co-operator'
- Neutral terms: *arts* 'doctor' (female and male)

- Feminine terms: *secretaresse* 'female secretary'
- Mixed forms: *medewerk(st)er* '(fe)male co-operator'

Table 2: Occupational titles in personnel advertisements in 1989 and 1999

	1989 N = 225 advertisements	1999 N = 573 advertisements
Male terms *Medewerker/medewerkster*	104 46%	243 42%
Neutral terms *Arts*	117 52%	323 56%
Female terms *Secretaresse*	0 0%	6 1%
Mixed forms *Medewerk(st)er*	4 1,7%	1 0,2%

Table 2 clearly shows that masculine and neutral forms predominate in the headings of most advertisements, while feminine and mixed forms occur only rarely. This is a strong indication that the tendency to use neutral names is going to win. We even see an increase in the use of neutral names, but this change is not statistically significant.

A closer inspection of the neutral terms gives us insight in how speakers of Dutch realise this tendency towards neutralisation. In Table 3 I have made a distinction between the two types of neutral names for professions that we found in our data: Dutch names and English names. I regarded names as English names if the word did not occur in Dutch. Names that could be both English and Dutch, for example *accountant* or *supervisor,* were considered Dutch, except when they occurred together with an English word, for example *people supervisor*.

Table 3: Dutch and English neutral terms for professions

	1989 N=117 terms	1999 N=323 terms
Dutch *hoofd* 'head, *arts* 'doctor'	47 40%	63 19%
English *Engineer*, *director*	70 60%	260 81%

Table 3 shows an enormous decrease in the use of Dutch neutral terms between 1989 and 1999 and an increase in the use of English names (X2=19.56, df=1, p=.000). English terms were not only used more frequently in 1999, but also many new English names were borrowed. Apart from the terms found by Snijders in 1989, we also found: *designer, developer, director, employee, floor broker, market maker, marketeer, officer, professional, researcher, technician, telemarketeer, telesales, trader*. In order to be able to use neutral profession names the Dutch take resort to English. This tendency is in line with the Anglicization of Dutch society that is observed by many linguists and laymen. English is used in an increasing number of domains (business, science, school) (Nickerson 2000) and Dutch words are increasingly ousted by English words (for example *stomerij* by *dry cleaning*, *uitverkoop* by *sale*) (Gerritsen, Korzilius, Van Meurs en Gijsbers, in press).

The very frequent occurrence of masculine and neutral professional titles in the headings in advertisements indicates that the neutralisation tendency is taking place. The question is whether the people who wrote these advertisements considered the terms to be neutral, referring to both men and women, or whether they indicated this in another manner. In our data we found four different ways to express that an advertisement was meant for both women and men:

- Adding *M/V* (meaning *Man/Vrouw* 'man/woman') after the term
- Using the pronouns *hij/zij* 'he/she' or *zijn/haar* 'his/her' as anaphoric pronouns in the text of the advertisement
- Adding a female-specific term: *kandidate* 'female candidate'
- Explicitly asking women to apply.

Table 4 shows how often these ways of indicating that women are meant occur in advertisements with masculine and neutral headings:

Table 4

	1989 Male Terms	1989 Neutral Terms	1989 Total	1999 Male terms	1999 Neutral terms	1999 Total
Addition of *m/v*	80 77%	36 74%	116 75%	109 45%	23 36%	131 41%
hij/zij or	No	No data	No data	26	56	82

zijn/haar	data			11%	17%	14%
Adition of female-specific	No data	No data	No data	1 0,4%	-	1 0.2%
Explicit Mention	No data	No data	No data	21 9%	9 3%	30 5%

Table 3 shows an enormous decrease in the use of the addition of *M/V* between 1989 and 1999 (X2=48.86, df=1, p=.000). In 1999 only 41% of the masculine and neutral terms had an addition *M/V*, whereas this was 75% in 1989. This is an indication that the masculine and the neutral terms are increasingly considered to refer to both women and men. With regard to the other ways that can be used to express that an advertisement with a masculine or neutral name is also meant for women, we only have data for 1999. The data of Snijders from 1989 could unfortunately not be analysed in a similar way. Our 1999 data show that the anaphoric pronouns *hij/zij* occur relatively frequently, that is to say, in 14% of the cases, but it is not very often that it is stated in the description of the candidate that a woman is meant. Moreover, women are neither often asked to apply explicitly. In 52 % of all advertisements with a masculine or neutral heading (N=566) of the 1999 corpus we did not find any of the four strategies to indicate that the advertisement is also meant for women. On the one hand this can be interpreted as a sign that the masculine and neutral terms are considered to be neutral. The changes from grammatical to natural gender in nouns such as *arts* 'doctor', or *blinde* 'blind person' supports this line of thought. On the other hand we doubt whether this is indeed the case. Psycholinguistic studies in the line of Braun (1998; and this volume) are needed to discover whether masculine professional titles such as *medewerker* 'co-operator' and neutral titles such as *arts* 'doctor' are considered to refer to both women and men indeed.

4. Concluding remarks

Quite obviously, here has been a decrease in the use of gender-biased language in the Netherlands since 1975. From a language-political point of view it is amazing that so many changes have taken place in such a short time. First of all, it shows that if changes in society require changes in language, those changes can be effectuated quickly, even on a grammatical level such as the change from

grammatical to natural gender of nouns. Secondly, the history of the decrease of gender-biased language in the Netherlands shows that the introduction of official laws, such as the law in which it was legally forbidden to publish advertisements for the recruitment of personnel in which it was unclear whether both women and men were meant, may have an enormous impact on language use and language change. Last but not least, the changes in the Dutch language show that it is worth the effort to fight against biased language use. In this article I have shown that committees of linguists can change language and language use within a relatively short time when the time is ripe. I hope that this will encourage women and men in other countries to fight against gender bias and other types of discriminatory language.

Notes

1. Whereas the gender system of Dutch does not make a distinction between masculine and feminine nouns, the Flemish system does. With regard to names for professions, the Dutch mainly use the same names for professions for both women and men, but the Flemish use different terms (cf. 3.4.3).

2. Officials of the registration of birth office told us in the summer of 1999 that the family name of the mother is seldom chosen.

3. I do, of course, not know whether people do so only when I am present – they know that I am a supporter of Dutch that is free of gender bias – or that they usually correct their sexist language use.

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