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DUTCH

## Towards a more gender-fair usage in Netherlands Dutch

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## 1. Introduction

Modern Standard Dutch (*Nederlands*) is the official language of the Netherlands and one of the official languages of Belgium (cf. Kooij 1987). In the Netherlands, the number of speakers of Dutch is approximately 15.4 million, while ca. 4.6 million use it in Belgium. Dutch is also the official language of Suriname and the Dutch Antilles. In addition, Dutch is spoken by smaller groups of speakers in Australia, Indonesia and elsewhere (cf. de Vries & Willemyns & Burger 1993). In the Republic of South Africa, a descendant from 17th century Dutch has developed into Afrikaans, which is now regarded as a separate language.

Dutch belongs to the West Germanic branch of the Germanic languages. Early written documents date from the period of Middle Dutch (1100–1500). Most of these were written in the dialects of the leading southern provinces, Flanders and Brabant. Modern Dutch developed from the dialects spoken in the western part of the Netherlands and the Brabantian area in Belgium. Compared to German (and similar to English), Modern Dutch has lost most of its case distinctions and inflectional morphology.<sup>1</sup>

Gender bias in the varieties of Dutch as used in Suriname, the Dutch Antilles and Indonesia is politically and linguistically so different from the situation in the Netherlands that it cannot be dealt with here. Nor can the issue of gender bias in Dutch as it is used in Belgium be discussed. In Belgium, Dutch competes with French and German and is often called *Flemish*, or *Vlaams* in Dutch. There are some differences in morphological structure between Belgian and Netherlands Dutch that especially affect gender, so that the Belgians have partly used other linguistic and political means to solve the problem of gender bias.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Selected structural properties of Dutch

### 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 fewer than German (Kooij 1987: 145).<sup>3</sup> Nouns can be divided into two classes: nouns which in the singular take the definite article *de*, and nouns which 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 personal pronouns *zij* 'she' and *haar* 'her', and the feminine possessive pronoun *haar* 'her' (cf. 1a). *De stoel* 'the chair' is masculine and requires the masculine personal pronouns *hij* 'he' and *hem* 'him', and the possessive pronoun *zijn* 'his' (cf. 1b). Nouns in the *het*-class are neuter, e.g., *het bed* 'the bed'; they require the same possessive pronoun as masculine nouns. They take two personal pronouns, either the masculine personal pronouns or *het* 'it' (cf. 1c). For nouns in the plural no gender distinctions are made: The article for all three genders is *de*, the possessive pronoun is *hun* 'their', and the personal pronouns are *zij* 'they' and *hen/hun/ze* 'them' (cf. 1d). The factors conditioning the variation between *hen/ze* and *hun* are complex, but not relevant to gender.

- (1) a. *De tafel* (f) *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* (m) *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* (n) *met zijn poten. Hij/het is mooi. Ik zie hem/het.*  
'The bed with its (his) legs. It (he/it) is beautiful. I see it (him/it).'  
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 summarises the use of articles, possessive and personal pronouns for masculine, feminine and neuter nouns in both singular and plural. It is clear that the distinction between the genders is only represented in the singular. The difference between masculine and feminine nouns is expressed in possessive and personal pronouns (but see also Section 3.2), and the difference between neuter and masculine nouns is expressed in the definite article.

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') are neuter gender, while *die* 'that' and *deze* 'this' (*die stoel* 'that chair', *die tafel* 'that table', *deze stoel* 'this chair', *deze tafel* 'this table') are masculine and feminine. The attributive adjective ends in *-e* before nouns of all genders, singular and plural. The only exception occurs with singular neuter nouns in indefinite contexts, where the adjective is uninflected (*een nieuw bed* 'a new bed').

Grammatical gender is not expressed by other means in Dutch, neither in verb agreement as in a number of Romance languages, nor in case inflection as

Table 1. Grammatical gender distinctions in Dutch

	Def. article	Poss. pronoun	Pers. pronoun	
			Nom	Acc/Dat
<b>Singular</b>				
Masculine	<i>de</i>	<i>zijn</i>	<i>hij</i>	<i>hem</i>
Feminine	<i>de</i>	<i>haar</i>	<i>zij</i>	<i>haar</i>
Neuter	<i>het</i>	<i>zijn</i>	<i>hij</i>	<i>hem</i>
<b>Plural</b>				
Masculine				
Feminine	<i>de</i>	<i>hun</i>	<i>zij</i>	<i>hen/ze/hun</i>
Neuter				

in German. Nominative, dative and accusative case are not expressed in Dutch nouns. The distinction is only expressed in personal pronouns (cf. Table 1) and in some archaic expressions. Again, the Dutch situation is in between that of English and German. In the English language, neither case nor gender is expressed, while both case and gender are expressed in German (cf. 2a, b). In Dutch, the distinction between neuter gender and masculine/feminine gender is expressed in the article, but case is not:

- (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 Gender-specific vs. gender-indefinite personal nouns

Dutch has nouns with lexical gender, such as *vrouw* 'woman', *echtgenote* 'wife', *mevrouw* 'Mrs', *juffrouw* 'Miss', *wijf* 'bitch', *tante* 'aunt' or *nicht* 'niece, cousin' for females (which are feminine) and *man* 'man', *echtgenoot* 'husband', *meneer* 'sir', *oom* 'uncle' or *neef* 'nephew, cousin' for males (which are masculine). However, grammatical gender does not always coincide with lexical gender. Thus, *meisje* 'girl' and *jongetje* 'boy' are female and male, respectively, but grammatically neuter; of course, both are diminutives carrying the respective derivational suffix.

Not all professional titles in Dutch have a masculine and a feminine counterpart, which is different, e.g., from German. Dutch has two types of professional titles: terms that indicate the gender of the person who practises the profession and terms that do not.

We can distinguish two categories of professional terms that have a male and a female counterpart. First, there are terms that semantically differ only in the referential gender that is indicated:

(3)	Terms for women [Feminine]	Terms for men [Masculine]	Translation
	<i>lerares</i>	<i>leraar</i>	'teacher'
	<i>schrijfster</i>	<i>schrijver</i>	'author'
	<i>actrice</i>	<i>acteur</i>	'actress/actor'
	<i>componiste</i>	<i>componist</i>	'composer'
	<i>assistente</i>	<i>assistent</i>	'assistant'

Second, there are terms that not only indicate a difference in referential gender, but also include other semantic asymmetries:

(4)	Terms for women [Feminine]	Terms for men (or men/women) [Masculine]	Translation
	<i>secretaresse</i>	<i>secretaris</i>	'secretary'
	<i>masseuse</i>	<i>masseur</i>	'masseur'
	<i>directrice</i>	<i>directeur</i>	'director'
	<i>caissière</i>	<i>kassier</i>	'cashier'

In most cases the professional term indicating a woman refers to a job with a lower social status than the term 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 this function call themselves *administratief medewerker* 'white-collar worker'. Similarly, the term *masseuse* is associated with a whorehouse, but the term *masseur* with a physiotherapeutic centre. A *directrice* can be the head of a pre-school kindergarden, or 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.

Furthermore, Dutch has professional terms that either do not have any equivalents referring to men, as in (5a), or equivalents referring to women (5b), although the morphological equivalents could be built. In both cases, 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 [Feminine]	Terms for men [Masculine]	Translation
	<i>kleuterleidster</i>	* <i>kleuterleider</i>	'nursery school teacher'
	<i>vroedvrouw</i>	* <i>vroedman</i>	'midwife'
	<i>winkelmeisje</i>	* <i>winkeljongen</i>	'sales girl'
	<i>naaister</i>	* <i>naaier</i>	'dressmaker'
	<i>werkster</i>	* <i>werker</i>	'cleaning lady'
b.	* <i>melkboerin</i>	<i>melkboer</i>	'milkman'
	* <i>timmervrouw</i>	<i>timmerman</i>	'carpenter'

A fourth category are the so-called "gender-neutral" terms which are grammatically masculine:

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

These are terms to which a feminine suffix cannot easily be added. This is partly due to the fact that the addition of such suffixes would result in homonyms of existing (usually non-personal) terms, e.g., *informatica* 'information science', *fysica* 'physics', or in forms which are already in use for the wives of the men with the said profession, as in *domineese* 'clergyman's wife'.<sup>4</sup> In addition, it seems that female-specific suffixes cannot easily be added to these terms because they are loanwords.

### 2.3 The morphology of personal nouns

#### 2.3.1 Derivation

As indicated in Section 2.2, not all personal masculines have a feminine counterpart. In this respect Dutch differs substantially from German, where

almost all personal nouns referring to men can be transformed into feminine equivalents by adding the suffix *-in* (cf. Bußmann & Hellinger, vol. III). In Dutch, the number of suffixes that can be used to feminize personal nouns denoting men is much larger than in German. The following list of female-specific suffixes starts with the productive suffixes and ends with the unproductive suffixes. The data presented here are based on ANS (1997:668–672) and Brouwer (1985).

The 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)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
a.	<i>assistent</i>	<i>assistente</i>	'assistant'
	<i>spion</i>	<i>spionne</i>	'spy'
	<i>student</i>	<i>studente</i>	'student'
	<i>advocaat</i>	<i>advocate</i>	'lawyer'
b.	<i>leerling</i>	<i>leerlinge</i>	'pupil'
c.	<i>echtgenoot</i>	<i>echtgenote</i>	'spouse'
	<i>gast</i>	<i>gaste</i>	'guest'

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

(8)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
a.	<i>arbeider</i>	<i>arbeidster</i>	'worker'
	<i>voorzitter</i>	<i>voorzitster</i>	'chairperson'
b.	<i>bedelaar</i>	<i>bedelaarster</i>	'beggar'
	<i>tuinier</i>	<i>tuinierster</i>	'gardener'

The suffixes *-euse* and *-trice*. Masculine personal nouns ending in *-eur* or *-tor* can be transformed into feminine nouns by replacing *-eur* with *-euse* (9a) and *-tor* with *-trice* (9b). This process is productive; however, both masculine suffixes only occur in loanwords which are not frequently borrowed today.

(9)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
a.	<i>adviseur</i>	<i>adviseuse</i>	'advisor'
	<i>chauffeur</i>	<i>chauffeuse</i>	'chauffeur'
b.	<i>illustrator</i>	<i>illustratrice</i>	'illustrator'

The suffix *-a*. Masculine personal nouns ending in *-us* can be transformed into feminine nouns by changing *-us* to *-a*. This process is still productive, but the suffix *-us* only occurs in loanwords from Latin, and today not many Latin words enter the Dutch language.

(10)	Masculine term	Feminine term	Translation
	<i>historicus</i>	<i>historica</i>	'historian'

The suffixes *-es* and *-esse*. Feminine personal nouns may be derived from masculine nouns by adding the suffixes *-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*-variant is more prestigious than the *-es*-form.

(11)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
a.	<i>baron</i>	<i>barones, baronesse</i>	'baron, baroness'
	<i>prins</i>	<i>prinses</i>	'prince, princess'
b.	<i>archivaris</i>	<i>archivaresse</i>	'archivist'
	<i>jubilaris</i>	<i>jubilaresse</i>	'person celebrating a jubilee'

The suffix *-in*. Derivation by *-in* from masculine personal nouns is no longer productive.

(12)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
	<i>boer</i>	<i>boerin</i>	'farmer'
	<i>held</i>	<i>heldin</i>	'hero'

The suffix *-se*. Derivation by *-se* is no longer productive. Respective feminine personal nouns are archaic. Most of these words not only denote a female person, but have the additional meaning 'wife of', except for *kasteleïnse*, which has both meanings: 'female innkeeper' and 'wife of innkeeper'.

(13)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
	<i>dominee</i>	<i>domineese</i>	'wife of minister'
	<i>schipper</i>	<i>schipperse</i>	'wife of shipmaster'
	<i>kasteleïn</i>	<i>kasteleïnse</i>	'(wife of) innkeeper'

Since the Middle Ages, substantial 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 degree of 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 (cf. also the parallel development in Norwegian described by Bull & Swan, this vol.). The possibilities of deriving feminine nouns from masculine nouns in Dutch have generally decreased.

### 2.3.2 Compounding

Compounding is another process by which masculine personal nouns can be feminised. A noun that has the word *man* 'man' as a last part can be transformed into a noun denoting a woman by replacing *man* with *vrouw* 'woman' (cf. 14). However, it was indicated in Section 2.2 that not all masculine personal nouns ending in *-man* can be changed into a feminine personal noun.

(14)	Masculine terms	Feminine terms	Translation
	<i>bloemenman</i>	<i>bloemenvrouw</i>	'flower-seller'
	<i>cameraman</i>	<i>cameravrouw</i>	'cameraman, camerawoman'

Words such as *persoon* (m) 'person' are rarely used in the singular as a neutral alternative. However, in the plural *personen* or *mensen* 'people' are sometimes used as such: *ambtspersonen* 'officials', *zeemensen* 'sailors' (lit. sea-people).

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

### 3.1 Historical background

The fight for a less gender-biased Dutch language dates from the beginning of the second feminist movement, which 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*. Kool-Smit (1933–1981) showed that women were considered as secondary to men in nearly all sectors of life. Her passionate plea for equality centred around three main points:

- a. The fair division of "inside" and "outside" services (household and professional life);
- b. Redistribution of power between women and men;
- c. The removal of 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 joined forces in several feminist unions. The two

most important women's liberation movements were the *Dolle Mina's* 'Crazy Minas' 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 to 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-fair professional titles in Dutch.

However, during the first years of the second feminist movement gender-biased language was not an issue 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 usage of Dutch, reference to generic nouns with masculine pronouns and gender-specific terms for professions.

Most aspects of gender bias in Dutch to which Romein-Verschoor (1975) drew attention were discussed vehemently in the Netherlands in subsequent years. It is striking that she herself does not make any suggestions for change. She demonstrates that gender bias in Dutch was largely a symptom of the inequality in Dutch society, but she also emphasised that this society is changing and that the Dutch language lags behind the social developments. 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 find solutions, which, of course, 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 the 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 find solutions to the gender bias in Dutch as observed by Romein-Verschoor. A number of women – among others Agnes Verbiest, Dédé Brouwer and the

author of the present article – answered this call and set 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.

Below the major issues in the debate will be discussed: generic masculine nouns and pronominalisation, terms of address and family names, idiomatic expressions and stereotypical descriptions of women and men, and occupational terms.

### 3.2 Generic masculine nouns and pronominalisation

#### 3.2.1 *Problems in traditional usage*

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

- (15) a. *de weduwe en haar kinderen*  
'the widow and her children'  
b. *de weduwenaar en zijn kinderen*  
'the widower and his children'

However, for a large number of nouns, referential and grammatical gender do not correspond. There are gender-indefinite nouns that refer to both female and male beings: *persoon* (m) 'person', *kind* (n) 'child', *arts* (m) 'doctor', where the grammar of Dutch requires masculine personal/possessive pronouns when they are used generically, with the consequence that referential gender remains ambiguous. This also applies to indefinite pronouns such as *iedereen* 'everybody'. Due to the grammatical structure of Dutch and prescriptive attitudes (ANS 1997: 230–235, *Woordenlijst Nederlandse Taal* 1995: 41–43), women are not visible in these cases:

- (16) a. *de mens* (m) *en zijn kinderen*  
'man and his children'

- b. *Een arts (m) moet naar zijn patienten luisteren.*  
'A doctor must listen to his patients.'
- c. *Iedereen (m) wil graag begrijpen wat hij leest.*  
'Everybody wants to understand what he reads.'

### 3.2.2 *Tendencies of variation and change*

No solution has been found for the problem of masculine pronominal agreement with potentially generic antecedents in contexts in which the referents' gender is either not known or unimportant. Some have proposed using the word *zaar*, a mixture of feminine *haar* and masculine *zijn* in sentences such as (17). However, this alternative is not frequently used.

- (17) *de mens en zaar kinderen*  
'the human being and his/her children'

Instead of trying to introduce new gender-neutral pronouns, other solutions have been proposed (cf. Renkema 1995 and Van Gessel et al. 1992): the use of plurals, since plural pronouns have no gender distinction (cf. 18), the use of pronominal splitting (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.'

However, if people feel that they cannot avoid masculine pronouns, they sometimes mention in a note that *hij* 'he', *hem* 'him' and *zijn* 'his' are supposed to include *zij* 'she' and *haar* 'her'; or, they use the feminine pronouns and state in a note that these also refer to males. Again, this occurs only rarely.

The nominal gender system of Dutch is not static, but in a process of change, and women are becoming more visible in the language. For many speakers in the western and northern parts of the Netherlands, the masculine/feminine distinction in nouns no longer exists, 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 referential gender may override grammatical gender. In written Dutch, the "correct" anaphoric pronouns are required.

However, practices of spoken language have recently led to important changes in Dutch dictionaries and grammars: Grammatical gender is gradually being replaced by a natural gender system (cf. Schutz 1998:294f). There are changes in both the assignment of a noun to a gender class and the use of pronouns. A number of personal nouns which in former editions of dictionaries only had one grammatical gender (masculine), such as *zieke* 'patient' and *blinde* 'blind person', are assigned two grammatical genders (masculine and feminine) in recent editions (cf. Koenen 1986). Since the last edition of the most authoritative dictionary of Dutch, Van Dale (1999), grammatical gender no longer overrides referential gender. A whole section of the grammatical description is devoted to the problem of incongruity of grammatical and referential 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 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), makes similar suggestions.

The change from grammatical to referential gender does not remove the problem of gender-bias from the Dutch pronominal system, but it indicates a development of the language in which women become more visible.

### 3.3 Terms of address and family names

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 social or professional status ('Mrs')  
*Juffrouw*: Term of address for unmarried women ('Miss')  
*Mijnheer*: Term of address for men, regardless of marital and social status ('Mr')
- (22) Family names  
*Mevrouw Kool-Smit, Mevrouw Romein-Verschoor*  
*Mevrouw Gerritsen, Mevrouw Jansen*  
*Mijnheer Kool, Mijnheer Romein, Mijnheer Gerritsen, Mijnheer Jansen*

Married women traditionally used their husband's family name (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:

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

### 3.3.1 Terms of address

Gender bias in terms 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, irrespective of marital and social status, are now *mevrouw*. The change began at the beginning of the seventies in Amsterdam and spread all over the Netherlands within a decade, starting in the towns of the western part and among the higher social classes. Although no legal steps were taken to change traditional practices of addressing, today 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 complained that the term *juffrouw* was no longer in use. She drew attention to the many questions she had to answer when she introduced herself as *mevrouw* to the people in the home for the elderly where she had been living for two years: When did your husband die? How many children do you have?

It is remarkable that the disappearance of *juffrouw* went very smoothly. The change had already taken place when the work groups on language sexism in Dutch were founded. 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 treatment of address terms in the dictionary by Van Dale. The edition of 1984 describes the correct ways of addressing 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 these, 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 was solved in the edition of 1992, which states that women have to be addressed with a form of *vrouwe* and men with a form of *heer*.

### 3.3.2 Family names

For women, there has been a change from the use of the husband's family name to only their own maiden name. Before 1975, most women used both names only in official documents, e.g., *Kool-Smit, Romein-Verschoor*. 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 continued to use 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 woman's 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 artist 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 take it again after having used their husband's name for some years. Some older women from the same group, but born before 1945, also discarded the name of their husband, and used only their own name; e.g., *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 1990s that 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 is not complete 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 work groups on language sexism. Nowadays, both possibilities are employed side by side and there is no discussion about it. By using her maiden name a woman can show that she is an emancipated woman. If she takes the name of her husband, she indicates an adherence to more traditional norms.

Related to the use of the maiden name is the children's family name. Until 1991, children received the father's family name if the father and mother were married. This was also the case when they were not married but the father had officially recognised the child. Children with an unmarried mother and not recognised by the father got the mother's family name. In 1998, the law regarding family names was changed and parents could choose between the mother's and the official father's family name. The only condition was that children from



the same parents should have the same family name. Unfortunately, there are no data yet about the choices made.<sup>5</sup>

### 3.4 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 of women and men: the invisibility of women in idiomatic expressions (cf. 24, 25), portrayal of women and men in stereotypical gender roles (cf. 26, 27) and differences between women and men in how they are described. In (28), Engeliën Jansen is a woman, and C. Jansen is a man.

- (24) *Geen man over boord.*  
lit. no man over board  
'This is not a very big problem.'
- (25) *Een man een man, een woord een woord.*  
lit. a man a man, a word a word  
'You have to do what you say.'
- (26) *Zij heeft de boot gemist.*  
lit. she missed the boat  
'She did not marry.'
- (27) *Hij is de dans ontsprongen.*  
lit. he had a lucky escape  
'He did not marry.'
- (28) *Engeliën Jansen, moeder van drie kinderen, en dr. C. Jansen zijn alle twee hoogleraar.*  
'Engeliën 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 a more gender-fair usage has been rather 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 context and situation. A woman who wants to express that she intends to keep a promise may use the expression 'a woman a woman, a word a word' instead of (25). It is difficult to investigate whether this advice has been successful, but it seems that the majority of the Dutch handle these expressions in a bias-free

manner or at least try to do so.<sup>6</sup> I have often observed that expressions such as (24) and (25) slip out and are corrected immediately.

Regarding gender bias in the description of women and men, people with a positive attitude towards a more gender-fair Dutch have demonstrated how this sort of gender bias can be identified: Usually there is none if one can replace male forms by female forms and vice versa. These suggestions have aroused a keen interest and are discussed in prominent Dutch composition books. In addition, differences in descriptions of women and men have been investigated systematically in a number of genres: dictionaries, schoolbooks, television, advertising, and newspapers (Brouwer 1991; Verbiest 1997, 1999). An indication of the change towards a more gender-fair usage is the fact that in the prestigious dictionary of Van Dale, many sexist descriptions of words have disappeared since the 10th printing (1976):

- (29) 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 summarise, overt gender bias in Dutch has mostly disappeared since 1975. Recent investigations of texts show that gender bias still occurs, although it is far less noticeable.

### 3.5 Occupational terms: A case of Dutch language politics

#### 3.5.1 Problems in traditional usage

As mentioned earlier, the beginning of the second feminist movement in the Netherlands is marked by the appearance of Kool-Smit (1967), where it was argued that the segregation between women's and men's professions had to be removed. This required two major changes: First, it had to be made possible for women to practise so-called men's professions (e.g. carpenter) and for men to

practise so-called women's professions (e.g. midwife), and second, since some names for professions only referred to men and others only to women, new professional titles had to be created.

Romein-Verschoor (1975) observed a tendency in Dutch towards gender-specification of occupational titles; e.g., a female psychologist is called *psychologe* and a male *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'. In addition, she shows that when a presumably 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 gained momentum 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 chaotic practices in the use of names for professions, e.g., in job advertisements. Numerous solutions were suggested, some organisations only added *v/m*, i.e. the abbreviation of *vrouw* 'woman'/*man* 'man', to the professional term. This sometimes resulted in amusing constructions such as (30), in which a term with a component that clearly indicates a woman (*-vrouw* and *-esse*) got an addition that indicated that men could also apply. By contrast, in (31) the names of the professions include *-man* and *-is*, with additions that show that women could also apply:

- |      |                           |                          |
|------|---------------------------|--------------------------|
| (30) | <i>vroedvrouw</i> (m/v)   | 'midwife (m/f)'          |
|      | <i>secretaresse</i> (m/v) | 'female secretary (m/f)' |
| (31) | <i>timmerman</i> (m/v)    | 'male carpenter (m/f)'   |
|      | <i>secretaris</i> (m/v)   | 'male secretary (m/f)'   |

Others tried to solve the problem through constructions such as (32), 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':

- |      |                        |                            |
|------|------------------------|----------------------------|
| (32) | <i>directeur/trice</i> | 'male/female director'     |
|      | <i>psycholo(o)g/e</i>  | 'male/female psychologist' |

The Ministry for Social Affairs felt the need to intervene and set up a committee called "Work Group Modification of Names for Professions" that was to write

guidelines for the use of occupational terms which would address both women and men. The work group consisted of members of the feminist movement *Man Vrouw Maatschappij* and officials from the Ministry of Social Affairs. They analysed the problem and published their directions in the brochure *Gevraagd* which appeared in 1982 (Werkgroep 1982).

### 3.2.2 The recommendations and the public debate

On the basis of an analysis of Dutch professional titles, the "Work Group Modification of Names for Professions" recommended the use of so-called neutral terms as listed in (6) above. For stereotypically female (or male) terms as in (5) they suggested new neutralising 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) the group stated that it was in principle unimportant to know the gender of a person who practises a profession.

On a social level, gender 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 tendency to think only of a man when perceiving the occupational term would disappear.

On a linguistic level, if separate professional titles were introduced for women and men, it was likely that a functional differentiation would occur soon, the terms referring to women gaining lower social prestige than the terms referring to men.

When no neutral term was available, the term for men was chosen because that was the more prestigious term.

When neutral terms were used or masculine terms were already being used for both men and women, it was not necessary to introduce new variants such as *hoogleerkracht* 'professor', *schrijffpersoon* 'author'.

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.

The brochure *Gevraagd* (cf. Werkgroep 1982) and the guidelines resulted in an avalanche of reactions in the media as well as in linguistic circles. The discussion centred around three issues:

a. New formations such as *timmer* were considered ridiculous. Both laypersons and linguists were convinced that they would never gain a firm foothold in Dutch.

b. Some linguists argued that the new terms were not neutral at all, but only referred to men. Since not many women had practised professions such as *consul*, *dominee*, *minister*, *notaris*, people would not immediately understand that the respective job advertisements were also addressed to women. This group, including van Alphen (1983) and Huisman (1985), advocated gender-specific names for professions. Every name for a profession should have a morphological equivalent for women. If such a name was not present in Dutch, it had to be created, as in (33):

(33)	Terms for women	Terms for men	Translation
	<i>hooglerares</i>	<i>hoogleraar</i>	'professor'
	<i>loodgiester</i>	<i>loodgieter</i>	'plumber'

c. According to Adriaens (1982) there was indeed a decrease in the number of productive suffixes referring to women in Dutch, but some suffixes (*-e*, *-euse*, *-trice*) were used more frequently. Besides, he observed a tendency to introduce the gender distinction also in the plural terms, which 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 being used. Based on an analysis of job advertisements in Dutch-speaking Belgium and in the Netherlands he believes that two conflicting tendencies can be observed: a tendency to use gender-specific terms for professions and at the same time, a tendency to use so-called neutral ones.

The "Work Group Language Sexism" of the VVAO largely supported the advice of the "Work Group Modification of Names for Professions". Regarding pairs such as *secretaresse* and *secretaris*, they suggested using the terms as indicators of different functions regardless of whether the person who practised the function was male or female. They disapproved of forms like *timmer*, but did not suggest any alternatives.

In the end, neither the guidelines of the "Work Group Modification of Names for Professions" and the Ministry of Social Affairs, nor the proposals by the group headed by Ingrid van Alphen and Joke Huisman, nor those of the "Work Group Language Sexism" have become official guidelines. The discussions in the first half of the 1980s were so controversial that no decisions could be made.

*v.v.a.* The manual for professional terms of the Dutch Language Union (2000) In 1992, the Belgian Ministry of Employment and Labour, which also includes the Department of the Emancipation of Society, commissioned the linguist Patricia Niedzwiecki to develop guidelines for the feminisation of professional terms in the three languages spoken in Belgium: French, Dutch and German. Niedzwiecki recommended a long list of female-specific names for professions, which was adopted by the government of the French-speaking part of Belgium. It even issued a decree that gender-specific names for professions must be used in official documents. However, the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium protested. The linguist Willy van Langendonck argued that the proposal of Niedzwiecki would lead to unwanted new formations such as *ministerinne* 'female minister', and modification of words that had already been in use for a long time, e.g., *lerarenopleiding* 'secondary teacher training course' for which the variant *leraresopleiding* would be unwelcome. 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". The Ministry also involved the linguist Johan de Caluwe, who warned against the use of gender-specific terms for professions. Thus, no solution was found in the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium.

In 1995, *De Nederlandse Taalunie* (Dutch Language Union) entered the discussion (cf. Duynstee & Polak 1995). This is an official body of the government of the Netherlands and the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium that prepares and implements Dutch language and culture policy, with the objective to advance the integration of the language and culture of the Netherlands and Dutch-speaking Belgium. *De Taalunie* came to the conclusion that the choice between the two alternatives, i.e. feminisation vs. neutralisation, was so charged politically that no advice could be given at the time. 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 and to suggest possible solutions. It commissioned two linguists, the Dutch Ariane van Santen and the Belgian Johan de Caluwe, to write a book entitled *Gezocht: Functiebenamingen (m/v). Wegwijzer voor vorming en gebruik van Nederlandse functiebenamingen* 'Requested: Professional titles (m/v). Manual for the formation and use of Dutch names for professions' (2001), which presents information about the social and linguistic background of the issue and the various possibilities of avoiding linguistic sexism. The handbook is merely meant to help people make their own choice and to describe the political and linguistic implications of alternatives.

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

The question remains, then, of how professional titles are actually used. Adriaens (1982) stated that only the future would show whether the tendency to use neutralising terms or the tendency to use gender-specific terms would win. In order to find an answer to this question, I analysed professional titles in personnel advertisements in some of the 1999 issues of the same journals that Snijders (1989) had examined in 1989, i.e. *de Telegraaf* and *Intermediair*. Snijders only studied advertisements for professions for which a middle or high education was required. She found 225 advertisements for such professions in one issue of *Intermediair* and two of *de Telegraaf*. In 1999, I found 573 of such advertisements in one issue of *Intermediair* and one of *de Telegraaf*. The overall numerical 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 occurrence of four types of occupational titles in headings of personnel advertisements in 1989 and 1999:

- use of masculine terms only (e.g. *medewerker* 'co-worker') in cases where a feminine counterpart exists (*medewerkster*)
- use of "neutral" terms which refer to both women and men, e.g. *arts* (m) 'doctor'
- use of feminine terms which only refer to women, e.g. *secretaresse* 'female secretary'
- use of mixed forms such as *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
Masculine terms Type: <i>medewerker</i>	104 46%	243 42%
"Neutral" terms Type: <i>arts</i> (m)	117 52%	323 56%
Feminine terms Type: <i>secretaresse</i>	0 0%	6 1%
Mixed forms Type: <i>medewerk(st)er</i>	4 1,7%	1 0,2%

Table 2 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 neutralising names will be the preferred strategy. We even see an increase in the use of neutral names, but this change is not yet statistically significant.

In Table 3, a distinction was made between the two types of neutral terms for professions that were found in the data: Dutch terms and English terms. I regarded terms as English if the word did not occur in Dutch. Terms 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 [masculine terms] <i>hoofd</i> 'head', <i>arts</i> 'doctor'	47 40%	63 19%
English <i>engineer</i> , <i>director</i>	70 60%	260 81%

Table 3 shows a clear decrease in the use of Dutch neutral terms between 1989 and 1999 and an increase in the use of English terms. Not only were English terms used more frequently in 1999, but also many new ones were borrowed. In addition to the terms found by Snijders in 1989, we also found: *designer*, *developer*, *director*, *employee*, *floor broker*, *market maker*, *marketeer*, *officer*, *professional*, *researcher*, *technician*, *telemarketeer*, *trader*. It seems that the use of English terms is one way of achieving gender-neutral expressions in Dutch. This tendency is in line with the Anglicisation of Dutch society: English is used in an increasing number of domains, e.g., in business, science, school (cf. Nickerson 2000), and Dutch words are increasingly ousted by English words, for example *stomerij* by *dry cleaning*, *uitverkoop* by *sale* (cf. Gerritsen & Korzilius & Van Meurs & Gijsbers 2000).

The frequent occurrence of masculine and neutral professional titles in the headings in advertisements indicates that neutralisation is increasingly used. 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

