

A Look at the Effect of Feminist Movements on the Evolution of Gender-Sensitive and Neutral Forms in OED

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Abstract: *The present study is an attempt at conducting a corpus-based analysis of the Oxford English Dictionary, in order, specifically, to examine the degree to which the feminist movement has had impacts on lexicographical changes in the successive volumes of the OED. In scope and reach, this study only concerned itself with the high-frequency suffix '-man', since going beyond and reaching for the effects of feminist movements on more genres merit separate studies. To this aim, 42 words with the suffix '-man' in 12 volumes of the OED from 1948 onward were scrutinized in order to examine and evaluate the impact of the feminist movement on changes in the dictionary. The results gathered from the data analysis and obtained on the basis of stacked line and paired t-test depict a significant increase in the creation and frequency of compound forms using '-woman' and also neutral forms from the second wave of feminism onward. The findings of this study have implications for researchers, teachers and writers.*

Keywords: *feminist movement, man-compounds, woman-compounds, neutral forms*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ginzburg et alsuggest that “it is a matter of common knowledge that the vocabulary of any language is never stable, never static, but is constantly changing, growing and decaying”. English lexicology and lexicography is that field in English language studies which examines English word-formation, the evolution of vocabulary and the composition of English dictionaries (Wikipedia).

1.1. Lexicology and Lexicography

Lexicology could be considered a branch of linguistics with its own objectives and approaches to analysis and research, its agenda involving a study and systematic description of vocabulary with regard to its genesis, development and current use. It is concerned with words, variable word-groups, phraseological units, and with morphemes comprising words. Lexicography is the practical study of the meaning, evolution, and function of the vocabulary units of a language for the purpose of compilation in book form – it is, in short, the process of dictionary making (<http://answers.encyclopedia.com/question/lexicography-159511.html>).

In more and more circles now, Lexicography is now believed to be an independent academic discipline, although it is, in fact, still a field subsumed under linguistics. Lexicography is thought by many to be manifested in two guises, although the two are related for the most part. Practical Lexicography has as its remit the act of writing or editing dictionaries. With Theoretical Lexicography, it is the analysis or description of the vocabulary of a particular language that constitutes the focus, as well as the meaning that connects given words to others in a dictionary. Theoretical Lexicography specially addresses itself to developing theories concerning the structural and semantic relationships among words in the dictionary. As it involves theoretical analysis of the lexicon, Theoretical Lexicography is also known as Meta-lexicography (<http://www.wisegeek.com/what-is-lexicography.htm>).

1.2. Dictionary

About Lexicography, Svensén has a handbook in whose opening chapter he points out that dictionaries are a cultural phenomenon. It is a rather commonsense statement that a dictionary is a product of the culture in which it has come into existence. It is, however, less obvious to argue that it plays an important role in the development of that culture. Dash came to believe that the

importance of the dictionary in modern life is undeniably huge. In some half-developed or underdeveloped countries where education overall is subject to oriented attempts at growth, the functional relevance of the dictionary goes up even further. With mass literacy in the new millennium receiving more attention, the referential value of the dictionary will proportionately increase among the newly literate people across the world.

From a rudimentary perspective, there are many reasons for which the dictionary is used. Typically, it is used to check the correct spelling of words, find their correct pronunciations, or look up their meanings. When it comes to advanced queries, we use a dictionary to look for synonyms, probe into the origin of words, or bring out patterns of their usage. To put it in a nutshell, a dictionary is perhaps the only resource that can provide us with the best and most comprehensive information about words. Dash mentions that it is a much-believed-in notion that information offered in a dictionary is accurate, authentic and reliable. In 2003, Popkema put in that dictionaries shed light on what lexical gaps remain or arise in a language. The filling of such gaps – part of language elaboration – will only be accommodated into public opinion, use and acceptance when, in turn, it is codified in a dictionary itself. Thus, in a sense, in a strong and overriding sense, it is the lexicographer who undertakes both responsibilities of both prime categories of language development – codification and elaboration.

Ginzburg et al demonstrated that there are two chief linguistic approaches to the study of language material, namely the synchronic (Gr. *syn* — ‘together, with’ and *chronos* — ‘time’) and the diachronic (Gr. *dia* — ‘through’) approach. The diachronic aspect in Special Lexicology deals with the changes and the development of vocabulary over time. It is special Historical Lexicology that is concerned with the evolution of the vocabulary units of a language as time goes by. An English Historical Lexicology would deal, therefore, with the origin of English vocabulary units, their change and development, the linguistic and extra linguistic factors modifying their structure, meaning and usage within the history of the English language.

1.3. Feminism

In the spirit of the above-mentioned, feminism can be considered one of the extra-linguistic factors that could play an important role in coining new words and terms within dictionaries; one guise such an effect could assume is in terms of gender biased language which would lead lexicographers to revise and edit dictionaries.

Women have been fighting for equality for well over 100 years now. The history of this struggle is often described in the context and form of ‘waves’, where this feminist movement has manifested itself in 3 such waves. To be clear about the features of this movement, we look at each wave in brief.

First Wave Feminists focused their struggles primarily on gaining legal rights such as the right to vote (women’s suffrage) and property rights. What is referred to as first wave feminism really began in earnest in the late 1800’s and early 1900’s. This wave of feminism ended when women made some legal gains in North America (rights to have a say with regard to their children, the right to own property and inherit property) and when some women won the right to vote between 1917 and 1920.

Second Wave Feminists focused on a broad range of issues in the 1960’s, 70’s and early 80’s including discrimination in workplaces and in the broader society. Some of the key struggles were around affirmative action, pay equity, rape, domestic violence, pornography and sexism in the media, and reproductive choice. The fight for reproductive choice included a fight to have information about, and access to, birth control (selling or promoting birth control was illegal in Canada until 1969) as well as the struggle to decriminalize abortion.

Third Wave Feminism emerged in the 1990’s in part as a response to the backlash from the gains the second wave feminists had made in the 1970’s and 80’s. While women made significant gains during the second wave of feminism, equality was still a distant dream. Race and Class became important issues for reflection and action within the movement – a movement that had been dominated by white, mostly middle-class, women. This wave of feminism is not galvanized around one or two key struggles, such as the right to vote or reproductive choice, as was the case in both the 1st and 2nd wave. Even the term ‘feminist’ is

not universally adopted but often rejected by new activists. While the movement seems less galvanized in this current wave, there is no doubt that the fight for women's equality is far from over.

According to Pauwels, men signaled their authority in language through their roles in the dictionary-making process, in the writing of normative grammars, in the establishment of language academies and other normative language institutions, and through their involvement in language planning activities.

There have been long-standing debates about the notion of gender-biased language. But the very notion of *gender* in language received renewed focus during the Second Wave of feminism (1960's-1990). In spite of the big gap between second and third waves of feminism, feminist linguists set out to take firm steps geared to changing the current situation. One motivation behind that notion was that feminists considered sexist language species of language that discriminates and downgrades women, rendering them invisible in the society. Feminists' first attempts with respect to discriminated views in society towards women began to change the ways in which language was said to be used in gendered-biased. From the feminists' point of view, dictionaries and grammars were the first sources of bias to be challenged, since grammars and dictionaries were the basic and reliable sources for all people and mostly second language learners to consult with. In this spirit, changes in the language of any society should start out and look at be these sources.

Lemar argued that most feminist linguists claimed that language change must precede social change. Feminists who considered language change as a starting point for social change followed the theoretical models based on the strong version of the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis:

Languages vary dramatically [...] and such variations encode dramatically different understandings of reality, so that people speaking different languages actually see the world in widely divergent ways. According to the Sapir-Whorf line of thinking, language structures our perceptions not only through word choice, but through metaphors and metaphor systems, with benefits, limitations, and concrete consequences. (Squier and Vedder, 2000: 307)

In the second wave of feminism (1960- 1990), feminists became completely aware of sexism. Feminist linguists defined Sexism as language that discriminates against women by representing them negatively. The aim of feminists, therefore, was to call attention to the way in which certain language items seemed to systematically discriminate against and cause offence to women, by compiling lists of such language items in dictionaries and to call for people and institutions to avoid using them.

Pauwels mentioned that perhaps most threatening to men's role as norm-makers were the attempts women made at becoming norm-makers themselves through the formulation of proposals and guidelines for non-sexist language use. Developing women's own norms and implementing them across a speech community is clearly the strongest challenge, if not threat, to male authority in language regulation.

According to Le Lamer, a crucial aspect of gender-fair language reforms to consider is whether occupational terms should be made generic or whether they should be feminized. According to Pauwels, more familiar to the general speech community are feminist attempts at achieving linguistic equality of the sexes by proposing amendments to existing forms, rules, and uses of language (sometimes labeled form replacement strategies). Gender-neutralization and gender-specification are the main mechanisms to achieve this.

Blaubergs and Pauwels add that Gender-neutralization, or change via circumvention consists in eliminating any morphosyntactic and lexical features marking human agent nouns and pronouns (or other parts of speech) as masculine or feminine.

Lamer pointed out that the strategy of gender-specification, or feminization, consists, on the contrary, in making gender visible as often as possible, in order to stress the roles and achievements of women in society. This strategy also includes the attempt to reclaim certain gender-marked feminine forms which have acquired pejorative connotations.

Taking all the above mentioned into consideration, the aim of the present study is to assess and discuss the degree of influence feminist movements have had on the changes that have occurred in OED from 1946 to 2014. Since it is beyond the scope of this work to investigate all changes to do with gender-biased language, this study has its focus only a specific feature, i.e. the items with the suffix *-man* and the alternatives proposed by feminists. Corpus-based data for this research, in turn, is collected from Oxford English Dictionaries.

2. REVIEW OF SOME PREVIOUS LITERATURE

In each period of time, language is the arena of change and modification: phonetic, syntactic, lexical, discourse. Recently, as Cameron puts it, ‘change’ has come to embrace such phenomena as the ‘feminization’ of public discourse in Western societies, and language shift in bilingual speech communities. In spite of the fact that change usually takes into account the way language is used, it also embraces folk-linguistic views of and prescriptions about how it should be used.

Most language change occurs in ways that are unplanned and about which there is very little public or conscious awareness – and most studies of change are not concerned with conscious intervention, as Labov would put it. But change may be consciously sought, encoded and/or institutionalized. Interventionist change ranges from the encodings of the early grammarians to the non-sexist language items proposed and implemented in the 1970s and 1980s. Both come under the heading of what Cameron describes as ‘verbal hygiene’.

Both Labov and Trudgill inform that there has been a long-running debate on gender and language change. A question often asked is whether innovation is the province mainly of women or men. Labov, who has written on this at greatest length, concludes that women are leaders of most changes but in different ways. This is voiced on several occasions by Labov too. Whether or not innovation is valued, however, will vary with time, place and community – as well as, perhaps, with who does the innovating.

The question of whether a language can be inherently sexist, or whether only usage can be sexist, was at the heart of the debate on feminist language planning in the 1970s-1980s. Some linguists reject the idea that language can be sexist; only parole can be. Thus, as Black and Coward say, a sentence cannot be sexist, but an utterance can be.

Despite internal theoretical disputes and obstacles typically encountered in both language planning and feminist campaigns, feminist language planners have managed to raise awareness about the fact that women are treated differently in language. Pauwels says that the face of vehement criticism, they have succeeded in downgrading certain language practices to the status of ‘disapproved’ or ‘discouraged’. Eggert draws examples such as the generic use of ‘man’ and ‘he’, as in “Man is a multi-sensorial being. Occasionally he verbalizes”.

Second Wave feminists considered sexism to reside in words and morphemes. The reference to maleness as the norm is considered one of the main sexist aspects of language. According to Le Lamer, Second Wave feminists argue that this is rendered through the use of pseudo masculine generics, such as ‘he’, ‘man’ and the suffix ‘-man’, or the compounding of a word supposed to act as a generic with a collocate marking the feminine gender.

Black and Coward maintain that Spender’s model differs from most Second Wave theories, in that she claims that the problem lies not in the words but in the semantic rule which governs their positive or negative connotations. According to Spender, men have “formulated a semantic rule which posits them as central and positive as the norm, and they have classified the world from that standpoint”.

Spoken and written corpora have afforded particularly interesting research into nonsexist language use. Janet Holmes and Robert Sigley looked at ‘girl’ and ‘girls’, and found ‘girl’ to be used in the workplace of females of subordinate status regardless of age – but not ‘boy’ of equivalent males. Both ‘girls’ and ‘boys’ are, however, used of groups of adults in various professions, perhaps marking in-group solidarity.

Sunderland adds in this connection that although the non-sexist language campaign may have been theoretically naïve, flawed and limited in its achievements, one of its achievements has, at least, been to prompt people to talk about non-sexist language.

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According to Frank and Treichler, Feminists admit that “nonsexist writing may not come naturally” and that making conscious efforts to change one’s speaking and writing habits is a necessary step towards a gender-fair use of language.

Both Blaubeurgs and Pauwels hypothesize that Gender-neutralization, or change via circumvention consists in eliminating “any morphosyntactic and lexical features marking human agent nouns and pronouns (or other parts of speech) as masculine or feminine”.

Sunderland asserts that it is one thing to formally implement non-sexist language change, that is, to recommend, encode and document new or alternative linguistic items, for example, in dictionaries or codes of practice. Questions of actual usage of non-sexist language and new progressive forms are something else entirely.

Mills argues that In order to make the public aware of the male bias present in the English language, feminists have attempted to debunk the myth of lexicographic objectivity. According to Romaine, dictionaries are, indeed, treated as absolutes and are used to settle disagreements. A close inspection, however, reveals that these dictionaries are not bias-free.

Some facts on the ground, only the tip of the gender bias iceberg, are that more space is given to male items, sex-stereotypes are used to illustrate sentences, the masculine is presented first in a sequence where the feminine is also present, more insulting terms are included for women than men, prejudiced comments are included and there are more drawings of men and male animals.

Feminist linguists have considered it a matter of principle to counter the hegemony of mainstream dictionaries and the exclusion of women from the dictionary-making process. As a result, they have published their own, feminist dictionaries (See, for instance, Kramarae and Treichler’s *A Feminist Dictionary* and J.Mills’s *Womanwords*). This issue is of particular importance in the United States, because dictionaries tend to assume the role of “semiofficial language authority” in countries without language academies.

The first none-sexist dictionary that came into being and shape is worth a word or two here. It was Alma Graham who created the first non-sexist dictionary. The project began in 1969, at the exact outset of the ‘second wave’ of the Women’s (Liberation) Movement. Alma Graham’s 1975 article, ‘The making of a non-sexist dictionary’, first appeared in Ms. magazine in 1973, a time when questions of linguistic sexism were being newly and hotly debated and fought over. Graham’s article falls into three parts: a description of the diversity of masculine bias in the reading material encountered by schoolchildren, an exemplification of sexism in English, and a description of the new, non-sexist American Heritage School Dictionary, for which the reading material data provided guidelines. Le Lamer reminds that coining new words that reflect women’s perspectives and experiences more accurately has been, and continues to be, an effective way to fight sexism. The creation of neologisms is an important aspect of anti-sexist campaigns, as it enables women to put words on “a problem that has no name” (expression coined by Betty Friedan in 1963), or, as Ehrlich puts it, something that was “just called life”.

To wrap up, it is worth nothing that, in their agenda, feminists did not restrict themselves to the issues and areas mentioned above. Feminist complaints about the English language were almost immediately echoed by those who controlled the older Protestant seminaries. In a 1975 editorial published in the journal of Princeton Theological Seminary, *Theology Today*, the editors advised their contributors:

A literary consideration of increasing importance for us these days relates to the avoidance of exclusive in favor of inclusive sexist language. In the last several issues, we have been quietly transposing sex-specific language. We don’t want to be legalistic about this, and quotations, biblical and otherwise, will mostly stand as originally written.... We believe that Christian faith is more interested in persons than in restrictive traditions (cf. Mark 7:9). If some feel dehumanized because conventional language (even little pronouns) exclude them or offend their self-awareness, then we want to change our syntax and not expect them to change their identities.

During the late 1970’s the liberal mainline seminaries generally adopted these new rules of usage. The feminists in these seminaries were not satisfied, however, with the gender-neutral language as

applied only to persons, and insisted upon gender-neutral language in reference to God also; and so during the 1980's gender-neutral language in reference to God became normal and even prescribed by codes of speech. Today it is not permissible for students in many schools to use the pronoun "he" in reference to God, and even such usages as "God Godself" (instead of "God himself") have gained currency in these places. The feminists have insisted upon the use of such language as a very important moral duty.

3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS STUDY

In 2012, another work related to language and gender written by Le Lamber (Every Chairman for Himself?) explores the effects of feminist language planning on written media language, by examining the influence of feminist guidelines on newspaper style manuals and on the work of journalists. In this study, specifically, due to certain limitations to do with scope and space, the focus is placed on one of the features repeatedly hailed as gender-biased by feminists, namely the use of the suffix '-man' in occupational titles, such as chairman.

Previous studies on the subject of the promotion of feminist form-replacement strategies and the adherence of newspapers to their own guidelines are either synchronic (Ehrlich and King; Romaine), or based on small data sets (Fasold; Fasold et al; Rubin et al; Holmes; Holmes et al). They also usually look at '-man' compounds among other features of gender-biased language. The researchers could not find a study which focused only on these compounds, from a diachronic perspective, using just one relatively large corpus.

4. METHODS

4.1. Research Questions

As mentioned in the introduction section, the main goal of this study is to assess and discuss the degree of influence feminist movements have had on the changes that have occurred in OED along the dimension of time by asking the following research questions:

- Has the relative frequency of compounds using 'woman' increased over the period of 1960-2014?
- Has the relative frequency of neutral forms increased over the period of 1960-2014?
- Are the feminists successful in the creation of gender-neutral and gender-specific compounds? If yes, to what degree?

There are numerous reasons behind choosing OED for this investigation. First of all, OED is a living document that has been growing and changing for 140 years. The OED is an irreplaceable part of English culture. Not only has it presented an important record of the evolution of English language but also documented continuing changes of the society. The second reason for choosing OED is ease of access to the old versions of this dictionary.

4.2. Corpus Data

The data for this study has been compiled from the Oxford English dictionaries from 1946 onward. 42 words with suffix '-man', which are popular in everyday usage, were looked up carefully and studied in these dictionaries for the analysis of the times of occurrence of equivalent words with the suffix '-woman' and gender neutral forms. The obtained data have been recorded in Table4.1.

	1948	1963	1974	1976	1982	1995	2000	2003	2005	2009	2013	2014
Airman	x	x	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Alderman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B
anchorman	x	x	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
assemblyman	x	x	x	M	M	x	x	x	M	B	B	B
businessman	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B/N	B/N
cameraman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B/N	B/N
Chairman	M	M	M	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Churchman	x	x	x	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Clergyman	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B
congressman	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
councilman	x	x	x	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B

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Craftsman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Deskman	x	x	N	M	M	M/N	M/N	N	N	N	N	N
Dutchman	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Fireman	M	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N
Fisherman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B
Foreman	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Gentleman	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Horseman	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Kinsman	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
land man	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B
Lawman	x	x	x	M	M/N	x	x	x	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N
Layman	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Madman	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Mailman	x	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N
Marksman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B
Newsman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M/N	M/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Nobleman	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Policeman	M/N	M/N	M/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Postman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B
Salesman	B	B	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
serviceman	x	x	x	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
spokesman	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B/N	B/N
Sportsman	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Statesman	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N
Stuntman	x	x	M	M	M	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
Superman	x	x	M	M	M	M	N	B	B	B	B	B
Tradesman	M	x	x	x	M	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N	M/N
Tribesman	M	M	M	M	M	B	B	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
weatherman	x	x	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	M	B	B
wise man	x	x	M	B	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N	B/N
Workman	M	M	M	B	B	B	M	M	M	M/N	M/N	M/N

Table 4.1 list of 42 man compounds and their woman compounds and neutral form

4.3. Instruments

12 volumes of the Oxford English Dictionary published from 1948 to 2014 were chosen for the present study. 42 high-frequency words with the suffix ‘-man’ which are popular in the English language and which have been affected by the feminist movement were selected among 160 words with the suffix ‘-man’. The researchers scrutinized these words one by one in each volume and recorded the early occurrence of each compounds with the suffix ‘-woman’ or gender-neutral forms.

4.4. Data Analysis

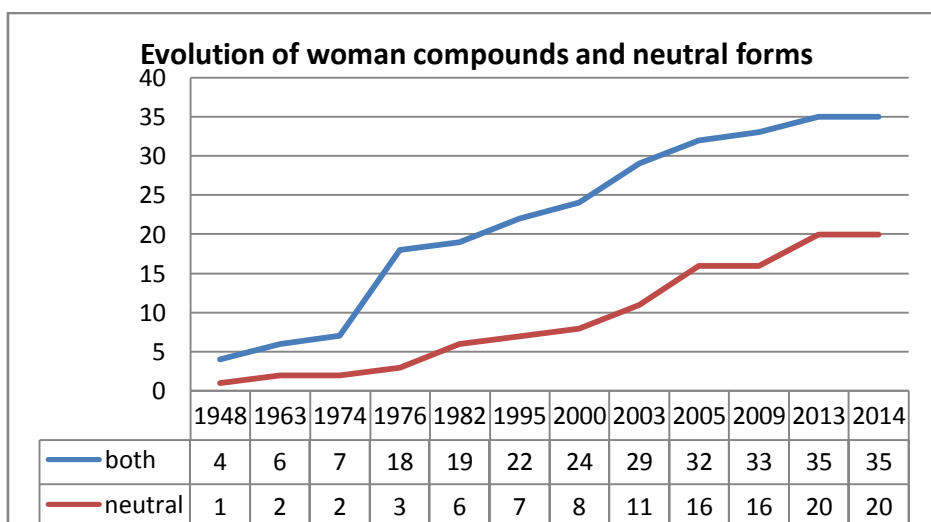
There are lots of ‘-man’ compound nouns that underwent changes as effects of different waves of feminism with the result of ‘-woman’ compound nouns coming into existence.

Results from table 4.1 points to the fact that the creation of ‘-woman’ compound nouns was not substantial highlight in 1948, 1963 and 1974, which correspond to the first and the outset of the second wave of feminism. However, corresponding to the second wave of feminism, in 1976, ‘-woman’ compound nouns saw a pronounced change, with almost half of the items in the selected corpora finding their way into dictionaries with ‘-woman’ compound nouns which could be considered a leap in the creation of such compound nouns.

Encountering the anti-backlash movement which started in the 90s with the third wave of feminism, the rather speedy trend of the creation of ‘-woman’ compounds somehow slowed. In spite of this anti-feminist movement, the creation of ‘-woman’ compound nouns revived by 2003. The pinnacle of feminist movement was attained in 2013 and 2014; nearly 83 percent of the selected corpora within this current time have their ‘-woman’ compound entry in the dictionaries.

Neutral forms could be considered, to a lesser extent, as a moderate version of neologism. Until the beginning of the third wave of feminism, there wasn't a considerable change in the creation of neutral entities (about 15 percent of ‘-man’ compound nouns went through changes). However, neutral entities experienced significant change through 2003 to 2014 (approximately 48 percent of

corpora). It could be argued that this increase in the amount of neutral forms was due to the anti-feminist movement that started in the 90s in order to tone down the creation and entrance of ‘-woman’ compound nouns. But this anti-backlash was somehow unsuccessful in its trends because not only did they not manage to lessen the creation of ‘-woman’ compound nouns, but the amount of ‘-woman’ compound nouns saw itself placed onto an ascending trend.



5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As discussed, two major strategies for the elimination or alleviation of gender biased language have manifested themselves as some sort of recourse to ‘-woman’ compounds and neutral forms. The former can be described under the title of ‘gender specification’ and the latter as ‘gender neutralization’. A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the effects of three waves of feminism on the creation of ‘-woman’ compounds and neutral forms in dictionaries. There was a significant difference in the scores for the creation of ‘-woman’ compounds (M=22, SD=1.144949) and neutral forms (M=9.3333, SD=7.10100) (t=8.152, p=0.00). To put it in concise terms, these suggest that the effect of different waves of feminism on the creation of ‘-woman’ compounds is more considerable than in the case of neutral forms.

Furthermore, by carefully retracing the feminist linguist’s activities, one can come up with certain speculations on a number of reasons for the significant increase in the frequency of nouns with the suffix ‘-woman’ in dictionaries. All through history, linguist feminists have put in extensive and strenuous efforts to fight the well-entrenched ideology which commonly considered the generic use of "man" as gender neutral or the default, ‘fair’ form. For instance, Janice Moulton persuasively argues in “The Myth of the Neutral Man” that "he" and "man" used generically are really not gender-neutral terms at all. As evidence, Moulton offers many examples of statements in which "man" unambiguously refers to all humanity rather than the male species alone. For instance, “some men are female” is odd while “Some human beings are female” is fine. As a consequence, coining new words that reflect women’s perspectives and experiences more accurately has been, and continues to be, an effective way of fighting sexism in language. Following the end of the nineteenth century, feminist scholars started to bring women to the visible fore in the society, or else bring out the roles and achievements of them as often as possible by adopting the strategy of gender-specification, or feminization. This strategy attempts to commit to use the gender-marked feminine forms, which is expected to bestow a more visible façade to women and remove gender discrimination in language. A frequently quoted example of such efforts was to strongly establish the use of ‘chairwoman’ instead of, or alongside, ‘chairman’.

Finally, on top of the abovementioned reasons, the more commonsense motivating factor that had feminist linguists struggling for the creation of nominals with the suffix ‘-woman’ is that, in general principle, the use of the word "man" generically triggers strong connotations of male dominance, with the listener/reader’s first and foremost inference being to think of the male gender and associated ideas therein, rather than female ones. Miller and Swift has a similar reading.

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Paired Samples Test									
		Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
		Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
					Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	Woman Compounds – Neutral Forms	12.66667	5.38235	1.55375	9.24688	16.08645	8.152	11	.000

All in all, gender specification trends seem, indeed, to have come to a head, to have attained some measure of conventional maturity, and public scholastic acknowledgement, but they are still some way to go. Relative success in gender specification motivated feminists to insist on neutral forms since ‘-woman’ compounds are seen to leave some species of a stain, to use a lay expression. That is, feminine compounds/suffixes will always be conceived of as being juxtaposed against masculine ones; feminist scholars believe this circumstance, if sustained, could have the hidden danger of assigning second-class status to feminine compounds. Still, some others argue for the converse being a likely scenario; masculine compounds driving masculine gender altogether into a corner because of excessive lexicographical, social and textual juxtaposition.

An illustration of gender-neutralization would be the elimination in English of female occupational nouns with suffixes such as ‘-ess’, ‘-ette’, ‘-trix’ (e.g. actress, usherette, and aviatrix).

6. CONCLUSION

In general, it is an undeniable fact that feminism has been and continues to be one of the important social and political movements of our history. Its effect is apparent in many societies all around the world and in all walks of life. The feminist movements struggle, as well as all other things, for the elimination of gender discrimination and for women’s visibility and contribution in society. Language was and is seen by many feminists as a powerful means of discrimination, in which spirit language and discourse have been the substance of the feminist’s scrutiny from the early stages of feminism. With language an unmanageably vast area and the tremendous impact feminists left on the face of the English language, this study undertook a very small-scale look into the changes that occurred in the OED volumes under the influence of this movement. When one comes to terms with the interesting facets of this sociolinguistic web of interacting factors, it is easy to think of many interesting grounds for further research which can seek to study other morpho-syntactic segments such as prefixes, proverbs, stereotypes, and so on, and their evolution in terms of other sociolinguistic factors than just gender bias and discrimination. This study limited itself to the OED for a number of reasons mentioned above in the introduction. Follow-up research can very well shift their focus on the lexicographical dimensions of other dictionaries and try to bring out evolutionary changes triggered by socio-historical trends, only one instance of which is feminism.

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