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Gender and language politics in France

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1. Introduction

55 years after French women were conceded the right to vote in 1944 and 50 years after the publication of *Le deuxième Sexe* by Simone de Beauvoir the French Congress decided that parity between men and women was to be inscribed into the constitution. The first article of the respective *Loi constitutionnelle no 99-569 du 8 juillet 1999 relative à l'égalité entre les femmes et les hommes* says, in fact: "La loi favorise l'égal accès des femmes et des hommes aux mandats électoraux et fonctions électives." [The law favours equal access of women and men to electoral mandates and functions] (Congrès 1999).¹ Although this law represents the realisation of the goal the Jospin government set itself in its initial political declaration (Jospin 1997), it was not to be the last step with respect to the equal treatment of men and women. Instead, the Prime Minister announced a proposal of law which states that lists of candidates for elections can only be approved if the principle of parity is respected (Jospin 1999). In January 2000, the *Assemblée Nationale* voted in favour of this law (Assemblée Nationale 2000).

Language use has been an integral part in the battle for the equal treatment of women and men. In this respect the politically most influential step taken by women in the last few years was the demand to be addressed as *Madame la Ministre*² put forward by 6 of the 8 female ministers of the Jospin government after their nomination by the new Prime Minister.

While similar initiatives of former ministers in France had failed (cf. Houdebine 1987: 17, Houdebine-Gravaud 1998: 24, note 9, Schafroth 2001), these politicians now had their feminine titles printed on their official paper and had the signs at the doors of their offices changed accordingly (cf. Yaguello 1998: 119). This not only led to a passionate discussion in France and to a revolution in the language use of the French press (cf. Yaguello 1998: 122), but

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also to the publication of a circular in favour of feminisation (Jospin 1998a) and the inclusion of this question in the political program for parity (Ministère de l'Emploi et de la Solidarité 1999).

These facts are of great importance because change could only come from the very top of the hierarchy itself. In fact, reluctance to use feminine denominations has always been strongest with respect to high-level professions, functions, grades and titles traditionally reserved for men, and women who had themselves reached the top of the hierarchy were among its fiercest opponents.³ Not even the first circular in favour of feminisation published back in 1986 (Fabius 1986) was able to effect a real change as long as this hostile attitude towards feminisation prevailed above all among high-level women.

2. French language policy and gender-fair language

France was the first European country to adopt political measures in favour of a less gender-biased language use (cf. Burr 1999a, 1999b). The question was not raised, however, by a commission for the equal rights of men and women as in other countries, but by Yvette Roudy, the minister charged by François Mitterand in 1981 exclusively with the rights of women (*Le ministre délégué auprès du Premier ministre, Chargé des droits de la femme*). Notwithstanding this narrow definition of her office, her first action was to pass a law on behalf of the professional equality between men and women in 1983. As the ministry of public affairs, due to the lack of feminine terms in French, had difficulties applying those articles which proscribed sexual discrimination in job offers, it asked Yvette Roudy to suggest such designations (cf. Houdebine 1994: 330). Roudy's call to specialists to solve this problem led to the institution of a terminology commission by the Prime Minister Laurent Fabius in 1984. This commission, whose chairperson was the author Benoîte Groult, was entrusted with the investigation of the feminisation of titles and functions (cf. Remy 1985: 109).

According to the original plans of Yvette Roudy, in between the law of 1983 and the work of this commission there was to be a law against discrimination on the basis of sex (*Projet de loi du 15 mars 1983*). Language reform was thus to be the third component of a political programme aimed at assuring equality between women and men, at doing away with sexual discrimination, and at furthering the visibility of women (cf. Remy 1985: 110).

2.1. *The commission of 1984*

However, as the law against discrimination on the basis of sex had not been realised when the terminological commission was installed (cf. Rémy 1985: 110 and 113), the topic of sexism in language use or discourse did not become central to its work. Instead, as the name *Commission de terminologie relative au vocabulaire concernant les activités des femmes* [Terminological commission with respect to the vocabulary concerning the activities of women] indicates, the question of a bias-free language was reduced to filling terminological gaps with respect to the designation of women who had entered domains which for a long time had been reserved for men and of legitimating by such terms the social functions and professions now also occupied by women. The aim of the commission was thus not much different from that of the other 22 French terminology commissions in place at the same time (cf. Houdebine 1994: 330), which had the task to create French terms in response to the development of new technologies and by doing this to defend French against the influence of English (*défense de la langue française* 'defence of the French language').

The commission, which counted among its members linguists like Anne-Marie Houdebine, Edwige Khaznadar, and André Martinet, investigated dictionaries and grammars, language use in the media and in different professional domains, as well as the attitudes and the behaviour of speakers.⁴ The works of Canadian feminists and linguists had also been taken into account.⁵ The commission proposed to feminise all professional terms with the help of double gender nouns (table 1) or through the use of derivations which already exist or can easily be created (table 2) (cf. also Schafroth, this vol., Sections 3.1.1. and 3.2.).

Table 1.: Double gender nouns

	<u>Masculine</u>	<u>Feminine</u>	<u>Plural</u>
'journalist'	<i>le journaliste</i>	<i>la journaliste</i>	<i>les journalistes</i>
'professor'	<i>le professeur</i>	<i>la professeur</i>	<i>les professeur</i>
'boss'	<i>le chef</i>	<i>la chef</i>	<i>les chefs</i> ⁶

Table 2.: Derivations

	<u>masculine</u>	<u>feminine</u>	<u>plural</u>
'delegate'	<i>le délégué</i>	<i>la déléguée</i>	<i>les délégués / déléguées</i>
'mason'	<i>le maçon</i>	<i>la maçonne</i>	<i>les maçons / maçonnes</i>
'researcher'	<i>le chercheur</i>	<i>la chercheuse</i>	<i>les chercheurs / chercheuses</i>

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The results of the commission's work consisted, however, not only of proposals of feminine terms and rules for their formation. Instead, aiming at linguistic and ideological coherence the commission had also raised the question of professional terms which up to that moment existed exclusively in a feminine form like *dentellière, bonne, lingère, sage-femme, femme de ménage* [lace maker, housemaid, seamstress, midwife, cleaning lady] (cf. Bourgoin 1984: 59), and had elaborated procedures for their masculinisation (cf. Houdebine 1987: 34), according to which the masculine forms of the above mentioned terms would have been: *dentellier, domestique, linger, sage-homme, homme de ménage*.

2.2. The circular of 1986

Yet, as the name “*Circulaire du 11 mars 1986 relative à la féminisation des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre*” [Circular with respect to the feminisation of the names of professions, functions, grades or titles] suggests, the masculinisation of professional terms was not one of its issues. Instead, it was devoted exclusively to prescribing the usage of feminine terms in official documents and to providing the rules for the feminisation of professional terms or titles (cf. Fabius 1986).⁷ The following rules are published in the appendix:

1. With denominations of professions, functions, grades and titles [bitte so lassen] held by women, determiners such as articles and demonstrative pronouns are used in the feminine form (*une, la, cette*). With denominations which in their written form end with a 'silent e' (*e muet*) the masculine and feminine form are the same: *un (m) / une (f) architecte, un (m) / une (f) comptable*. The suffix *-esse* as in *poétesse* is no longer used.
2. If the written form of a masculine denomination does not end in an *e muet* but in some other vowel (*un chargé de mission, un délégué*), the feminine form ends in an *e* as in *une chargée de mission, une déléguée*.
3. Where masculine denominations end in a consonant such as, for example, *un médecin, un agent, un huissier, or un mécanicien*, the feminine form is either identical with the masculine, as in *une médecin* or takes an *e* as in *une agente*. In some cases affixing the denomination with *e* leads to an accent on the last vowel (*une huissière*) or to the doubling of the last consonant (*une mécanicienne*). Excepted from this rule are denominations on *-eur (professeur)* which have no verb at their basis; they have to be treated like the denominations in the first class (*un (m) / une (f) professeur*).⁸
4. With masculine denominations like *un acheteur* or *un animateur* derived from verbs by the suffix *-teur*, the feminine is either formed with the suffix

-teuse (*une acheteuse*) if the *t* is part of the basic verb (*acheter*) or with -trice (*une animatrice*) if the *t* is not part of the basic verb (*animer*).

2.2.1. *The circular and the feminist debate in France*

As can be seen, the circular reduces the question of the unequal treatment of men and women to a terminological and formal matter, thus reflecting not only the historical tendency in France to identify language with vocabulary but also the minimalistic approach taken by feminist members of the commission. This approach certainly does not reflect the state of the feminist discussion in France, where with Simone de Beauvoir's *Le deuxième Sexe* one of the most influential books of feminism appeared, where the concept of *L'écriture féminine* was constructed by Hélène Cixous and where the philosopher Luce Irigaray (1974) opened the discussion about *la différence sexuelle*. Nor does it mirror the research carried out with respect to gender in French and sexism in language use.⁹ It was nevertheless adopted, because feminists hoped that by showing respect for the two fundamental concepts of French linguistic culture, i.e. *l'usage est le maître* [usage is the master] and 'linguistic rules have to reflect *le génie de la langue* [the genius of the language],¹⁰ the opponents could be convinced of the rightfulness of the endeavour and success could be granted to feminisation.¹¹ When in 1986 the proposals of the commission were greeted with almost universal indifference, whereas the announcement of its installation in the spring of 1984 had caused a massive sexist and political uproar,¹² this was taken as evidence that the commission had indeed succeeded in convincing its opponents (cf. Houdebine 1987: 13).

2.2.2. *The circular, occupational titles and sexism in discourse*

Yet, as results from research carried out into the more or less persistent tendency towards designating women with masculine denominations, the circular did not have much effect. Instead, a few years after its publication resistance to the feminisation of professional terms and titles in France is found to be still quite absolute (cf. Yaguello 1989: 32). Especially with regard to prestigious positions, there seems to prevail what Schafroth (1993: 65) calls a 'barrier to feminisation'.¹³ Even the fact that France from 1991 to 1992 was governed for the first time by a female Prime Minister had no real impact: Édith Cresson was usually referred to with the masculine forms *le premier ministre* (m) 'the Prime Minister' and *le chef* (m) *du gouvernement* 'the head of government' in newspapers and journals (cf. Brick / Wilks 1994: 236).

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That this continued usage of the masculine form in certain domains is of an ideological nature is shown by Muller (1994: 103 and 107-109). Taking a closer look at the lists of candidates presented in the occasion of the European elections 1994 he finds, in fact, that while the masculine used with respect to women who hold prestigious positions or jobs is generally on its way out and the feminine form, despite the resistance against the feminisation of titles and dignities of the state, is readily used with names of public functions formed on the basis of an adjective (*attaché*) or a participle (*présidente*), there is also evidence that the ultimate choice between feminine or masculine denominations varies considerably in accord with the *couleur* of the political parties.

In this and other research the usage of feminine or masculine denominations is, however, no longer conceived as a mere terminological question. Instead, in the years following the publication of the circular of 1986 there has also been a growing feeling that the discussion within the terminological commission was not far-reaching enough and that not only the problem of denominations but above all that of sexism in language use or discourse had to be approached as well (cf. Houdebine 1989, 1994). Sexism and the transportation of stereotypical implications are, in fact, found to be at the very basis of the seemingly chaotic and incoherent usage of masculine and feminine denominations in newspaper reports about women in politics (Brick / Wilks 1994) and Charles Muller, who is certainly not a feminist linguist, has to acknowledge that only male chauvinism can be the reason why masculine denominations were used in certain lists of candidates presented at the European elections (cf. Muller 1994: 103).

Particularly interesting in this respect is the study by Edwige Khaznadar (1993) of how women are designated in an extensive collection of phrases referring to professional and political women, put together in the years after the publication of the circular of 1986. The aim of this study is to consider

[les] dénominations féminines pour ce qu'elles sont dans la réalité du discours, des données linguistiques, au contraire du raisonnement grammatical traditionnel qui pose le féminin non comme une donnée mais comme un processus, une 'formation'. On verra non pas comment 'se forme' le féminin mais par quels moyens linguistiques est effectivement dénommée et identifiée une femme. (Khaznadar 1993: 144).¹⁴

feminine denominations for what they are in real discourse, i.e. linguistic facts, in opposition to the traditional grammatical reasoning which sees the feminine not as a fact but as a process, a 'formation'. We will not ask how the feminine 'is formed' but by which linguistic means a woman is factually denominated and identified.

By taking into account not just the lexical means used to identify women, like most other studies did before, but semantic and syntactic aspects as well, Khaznadar arrives at the following picture of a complex conceptual relationship of referential, grammatical and social gender¹⁵ which is reflected in the language used in the French press:

1. The sex of a person is either identified by means of a personal noun as in *la mort d'une policière*, by prefixing a term with *Mme* or *M* as in *Mme le professeur*, by using the first name, for example *Édith Cresson*, because the surname on its own would be perceived as referring to a male person, by the feminine form of determiners or adjectives as in *Nasrin Rasooli, exécutée*, where the foreign origin of the first name *Nasrin* does not allow to identify the sex of the person, or by pronominal substitution as in *l'ancien premier ministre* (m) *explique qu'elle* (f).

2. The identity of women is split into a male and a female half, which correspond themselves to a certain order and are revealed alternatively: if women are denominated with terms that are syntactically (*le ministre*) or morphologically (*gardien, policier*) marked as masculine, it is always their profession or their prestigious or authoritative position which is at stake, whereas the female part of their identity is normally indicated by *Édith, mère, femme* or *madame*, i.e. by indications of their civil status, which express their female gender.

3. When a woman is referred to with a masculine denomination there are numerous cases of syntactic incoherence (*ataxie*) which show that there is a conflict between syntax and semantics as in *mais le premier ministre* (m) *n'est pas vraiment inquiète* (f).

4. Journalists try to solve the problem of *ataxie* by either avoiding prestigious titles next to linguistic elements whose form varies according to gender, or by making frequent use of indications of civil status.

5. Because this procedure entails a loss of information journalists, despite the strong opposition to feminisation and the social pressure in favour of promoting the masculine to the form which stands for seriousness, solidity, strength and decision, are led quite frequently to feminise professional denominations by either using determiners in the feminine form (*sa fidèle* (f) *ministre*)¹⁶ or by prefixing the term with the gender-specific *Madame* or by turning to the regular alternation *policier / policière* (cf. Khaznadar 1993: 147-158).

This state of affairs can be summarised by the following example: [es gibt nur ein Beispiel, deshalb following]

Une (f) *femme* (f)-*policier* (m), *shériff adjoint* (m) [...] *vient d'être*
A female police officer, deputy sheriff [...] has been
renvoyée (f). *Le* (m) *policier* (m), *dont l'identité n'a pas été révélée*,

suspended. The police officer whose identity has not been revealed *aurait porté la main aux parties génitales de deux* is supposed to have put the hand on the genitals of two *collègues masculins (m)*. *Un (m) autre shériff-adjoint (m), de* male colleagues. Another deputy sheriff, *of* *sexe masculin, a été mis (m) à pied avec le (m) policier (m) sanctionnée (f)*. male sex, has been suspended along with the sanctioned police-officer. *Les (m / f, or m & f) deux policiers (m) sont accusés (m) d'attouchement* The two police officers have been accused of touching *commis pendant le service.* when on duty.

A female police officer, deputy sheriff [...] has been suspended. The police officer whose identity has not been revealed is supposed to have put her hand on the genitals of two male colleagues. Another deputy sheriff, of male sex, has been suspended along with the sanctioned police-officer. The two police officers have been accused of touching when on duty ...

Khaznadar's conclusion is that there is altogether great uncertainty and uneasiness among journalists because they find themselves in the middle of a conflict between the male social norm they have interiorised and the regular functioning of the language. According to her, this conflict turns writing about women for journalists into a hazardous journey teeming with ambushes which they try to circumvent acrobatically without being able to avoid them entirely. They try to obey what they take to be a linguistic norm, but which, on the contrary is a social constraint conflicting with the linguistic rule that a woman has to be designated with a feminine term and a man with a masculine one (cf. Khaznadar 1993: 158).

2.3. *The so-called generic masculine*

Although it is exactly the interpretation of the masculine as a generic which expresses this male social norm and which is responsible for the effacement of women in discourse (cf. Houdebine 1994: 347-348), the genericity of the masculine has never been really central to the discussion among feminist linguists in France. It plays, however, an important role in the argumentation of the opposition. [bitte so lassen] In accord with traditional grammars they regard, in fact, the masculine as the proper means of neutralisation in cases where the sex of a person is said to be irrelevant: *un professeur a le devoir d'enseigner*. It is further understood, that masculine terms in the plural can not only refer to a group of male beings but also to a group composed of women and men: *les*

Français *aiment leur langue*.¹⁷ The usage of the masculine is also prescribed whenever there is a question of agreement between determiners, pronouns, adjectives or participles and a series of nouns of different grammatical gender: *Un policier (m) et une policière (f) sont accusés (m)* (not *accusées (f)*) *d'attouchement qu'ils (m)* (not *elles (f)*) *auraient commis pendant le service* (for a more extensive treatment cf. Schafroth, this vol., Sections 2.5. and 3.3.2.).

According to Khaznadar, however, these rules are themselves the product of a certain kind of linguistic theory and language description, their realisation in discourse is due to the way gender is taught in schools¹⁸ and the supposedly generic character of masculine nouns derives from the fact that women are not referred to in accordance with their sex. Points in favour of her viewpoint are:

1. The presence of a feminine personal noun renders the masculine term specific, i.e. *bacheliers* in *les bacheliers (m) et les bachelières (f)* can only refer to male "A-level" students. Thus, were the usage of feminine terms for women to become the norm, the number of apparently generic masculine terms would decrease considerably.

2. We can only be sure that *les bacheliers* refers to boys and girls at the same time if this is made explicit by the context, because in former times "A-level" courses could, after all, only be taken by boys.

3. Neutralisation with respect to people can never mean 'neither masculine nor feminine'; individual people are always either male or female and groups of people are composed of male and female persons (cf. Khaznadar 1993: 145-146).

The discussion of gender-fair language has, however, not (yet) considered the problem of masculine generics as outlined by Khaznadar,¹⁹ nor has it taken up her request to change the teaching in schools in such a way that the rejection of the feminine gender is done away with (cf. Khaznadar 1993: 158). Instead, the discussion revolves nearly exclusively around the use of feminine terms in specific reference to women and around feminisation. [bitte so lassen]

2.4. *The Circular of 1998*

Still, precisely the question of feminisation has turned France into the European country where most discussion about language and gender is taking place at the moment. Those who are responsible for this situation are the six female ministers of the Jospin government, who not only asked to be addressed as *Madame la ministre*, but who also took the necessary steps to get what they had asked for. This seems, at least in part, to explain why this time the request did not remain unheard. Instead, at the end of the meeting of the *Conseil des ministres* of the 17th December 1997, the decision was taken that women in future would be addressed with feminine titles. That this decision was directly put into practice,

can be seen in the press declaration distributed after the end of the meeting (Conseil des ministres 1997), where the four women nominated for important posts during the meeting appear as *directrice* and not *directeur* as would have been the case before. This official recognition led to a fierce protest from the *Académie française*, which even appealed to the French President Jacques Chirac not to allow ministers to change French grammar and usage (cf. AFP - January 9, 1998).

This protest notwithstanding, the denomination of women with feminine terms was legalised by the Prime Minister in March 1998 with the *Circulaire du 6 mars 1998 relative à la féminisation des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre* (Jospin 1998a). This circular in itself is not a revolutionary step, as it merely resurrects the circular published in 1986. What is new, however, is the determination with which Jospin declares the action of the six women to be a turning point in the process towards the addressing of women with feminine denominations becoming the norm. In the same circular he announces, furthermore, that he has already asked the general commission of terminology and neologisms to carry out a study on the present situation, taking into account also the usage in other French-speaking countries and that the *Institut National de la Langue Française* will elaborate a guide where the feminine forms most suitable in France will be recommended.

That Jospin really intended to make language change part of his policy for parity is shown by various facts, such as the publication of the circular in the *Journal Officiel* of the French Republic precisely the following International Women's Day, in his annual speech dedicated to this occasion where he declares explicitly that gender-biased language use has nothing to do with the *génie de la langue* but with society, and by the fact that all through this speech he refers to women with feminine titles.

2.4.1. *The report of the general commission of terminology and neologisms*

The study which the Prime Minister had requested from the *Commission générale de terminologie et de néologie* was concluded in October 1998 with the presentation of the voluminous (54-page) *Rapport sur la Féminisation des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre*.²⁰ In this report the commission tries not to further excite public opinion but to calm down the passionate debates about feminisation by a careful consideration of the various aspects of the question. A closer analysis than is possible here would, however, reveal that the report is full of contradictions and that it is really trying to save what can be saved of the authority of the masculine gender.

The commission introduces, in fact, a fundamental distinction between *espace public* [public sphere] and *espace privé* [private sphere], between *la personne* [person] and *l'individu* [individual] and between public and private activities. As professions belong to the private sphere and thus are part of the individual's identity (CGTN 1998: 38-39), the commission, in principle, accepts the legislation on the feminisation of professional terms. Although the government can, as it states, only take measures with respect to the public sector, it sees no obstacles to feminisation of professional terms in the private sector either, as feminisation in this field is already part of current usage. For legal and practical reasons the commission firmly opposes, however, any reformulation of public norms which govern certain professions of the public sector (*professions réglementées*) like civil servants, for example (CGTN 1998: 40-42). Functions, titles and grades, on the contrary, are said to belong to the public sphere which is indifferent to individual differences. Thus, the commission argues, the 'unmarked' masculine gender has to be used a) on the legal level because the 'subject' of the law is indifferent to sex and b) on the institutional and political level because the sexual individuals have to be distinguished from their functions and from the exercise of this function (CGTN 1998: 42-44). The commission proposes, therefore, that:

1. the form of address in the sphere of private relations, conversations, or personal correspondence can be adapted to the wish of the addressee, i.e. it can be either feminised or left in the generic masculine; the same applies when an official text is signed,
2. in statutory texts the generic masculine is to be used because splitting would not only make the texts heavy but would also imply that all texts would have to be rewritten. Apart from this, feminisation of such texts would be in contradiction with the republican idea of institutions belonging to the public sphere,²¹
3. when a function is in question, as at the moment of nomination to the position, the female holder of the function has to be designated with the statutory masculine term; if, however, reference is to a specific individual as such, it is normal to feminise the denomination,
4. in regulations which make reference to functions the generic masculine should be used (cf. CGTN 1998: 44-49).

As the commission saw its task to be the analysis of the problem in general and of the implications feminisation would have in particular situations, it does not propose specific designations nor rules for their formation. Its aim, instead, is making recommendations which conform to the *génie de la langue* and to the specificity of the French law. The task of filling lexical gaps is said to be left to the

Institut National de la Langue Française (cf. CGTN 1998: 3) charged by the circular to elaborate a guide.

2.4.2. *The guidelines of the Institut National de la Langue Française*

The *Institut National de la Langue Française* has completed this task in 1999 with the publication of *Femme, j'écris ton nom... Guide d'aide à la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres, grades et fonctions* (CNR / INaLF 1999),²² which seems to have two functions: a) to handle the morphological side of feminisation and to fill the lacunae in the lexicon with concrete designations, and b) to position the question of feminine designations historically as well as ideologically and to describe gender and the genericity of the masculine in less political terms than the general commission.

The chapter devoted to morphology, apart from being further integrated with rules for abbreviations (*une extra*), loan words (*une clown, une jockey*), the handling of special cases like *un confrère / une consœur, un homme-grenouille / une femme-grenouille* or complex denominations like *une chef adjointe, une directrice financière* (cf. CNR / INaLF 1999: 26-27), follows by and large the rules given in the appendix to the circular of 1986.

The guide differs, nevertheless, significantly from the first circular as far as the attitude to the norm is concerned. The INaLF takes into account, in fact, the propositions made in Switzerland, Québec and Belgium, even if they differ from those published in the first circular. In the case of masculine nouns on *-eur* which are not derived from verbs or where the semantics of the verbal base is not directly related to the meaning of the noun, the guide allows, for example, a choice between the Belgian solution, which consists of treating such a noun as a double gender noun indicating referential gender by the determiner alone, as in *une ingénieur*, and the Canadian and Swiss solution of treating it as a masculine noun and forming the feminine by appending an *-e*, as in *une ingénieure* (cf. CNR / INaLF 1999: 24), thus allowing the feminine to remain visible also in the plural. The same goes for nouns like *auteur* or *docteur* for which the feminine form on *-trice* is not available today. The guide allows, in fact, to choose between *une auteur* or *une auteure* (cf. CNR / INaLF 1999: 25) and proposes, thus, forms which had been proscribed by the commission created in 1984 due to the minimalistic and normative approach then adopted.

As regards the completion of the lexicon, an extensive alphabetical list of masculine and feminine terms for professions, titles, grades and functions is given at the end of the book (CNR / INaLF 1999: 61-123). It is followed by a short appendix concerning the masculinisation of feminine terms (CNR / INaLF 1999: 124). The guide proposes, for example, to masculinise *bonne* with

domestique, jardinière d'enfants with *jardinier d'enfants* and *sagefemme* either by using the term *maïeuticien* created artificially by the *Académie française* but not really used or by *sagehomme* (cf. CNR / INaLF 1999: 124). The guide thus differs also in this respect from the circular published in 1986 where the proposals made by the commission with respect to masculinisation were not adopted.

The ideological and historical aspects of the question are treated right at the beginning of the book: The guide contains extensive information on the use of feminine denominations in the history of the French language, it discusses the arguments put forward against the use of feminine personal nouns and draws attention to the correspondence of grammatical gender and referential gender in designations for human beings. For what concerns the question of the generic usage of the masculine gender the guide follows generally the line of the general commission of terminology and neologisms and thus does not accept the usage in other French-speaking countries, where functions are named in accord with the sex of the function holder: *Recrutement d'un (m) ou une (f) attaché(e) (m / f) parlementaire* (CNR / INaLF 1999: 38) [noch mehr gekürzt, um Gewichtung des guide zu repräsentieren].

3. Future perspectives - does it matter?

As we have seen, with respect to personal nouns, times are generally ripe for change, even in a country like France with its normative approach to language. Whether female-specific nouns are used depends, however, on the value women attribute to themselves. If they see themselves as autonomous persons and express their individuality self-confidently they can provoke change. It naturally helps if they are women who have arrived at the top and thus have the power to promote change. This means at the same time that high-level women are in part responsible if there is no change.

That the way women are addressed or talked about does matter in French society can already be seen by the fact that every time the question of feminine personal nouns arises there is loud protest from men, from patriarchal institutions like the French Academy, and from women who either accept the structures and values men have created or who are afraid of losing their face, being ridiculed or attacked.

The question why it matters how women are named should answer itself if we accept that the way people talk to each other and about each other determines the way they recognise and value each other, how they form their relationships with each other and whether they confirm each other's identities. Entities,

however, which are not named can neither be recognised nor valued (cf. Lalouschek / Wodak 1997: 89). At the same time, the lack of a name indicates clearly that the respective entity is currently of no particular value for the linguistic community (cf. Houdebine 1987: 17). Thus, if a function has only a masculine designation one thinks automatically that the function belongs to men (cf. Agacinsky-Jospin 1998). If, however, as Houdebine-Gravaud expresses it in the following citation, instead of hiding women behind masculine denominations they are named using feminine professional terms, then women appear as entire social beings and young women (as well as grown up women) have the chance to dream of new professions when they hear these names in everyday discourse:

Au lieu de les masquer sous le masculin, la féminisation des noms de métiers fait apparaître les femmes comme êtres sociaux à part entière, et permet aux petites filles (comme aux grandes) de rêver à de nouvelles professions en entendant ces noms dans les paroles quotidiennes. (Houdebine-Gravaud 1998: 15)

As regards the specific linguistic means, they are certainly, as Monique Rémy says, secondary in nature in comparison with the fundamental question of the social function of change. In fact, as long as the feminine term *directrice d'école* [school director (f)] is accepted whereas *directrice d'une entreprise* [director of an enterprise (f)] or *directrice générale d'une société* [general director of a company (f)] is *not*, women who hold these positions are either still seen or see themselves as having climbed too high up in the hierarchy for them to remain women and to carry a feminine title (cf. Rémy 1985: 112). On another level this question is, however, not secondary at all. As in French only specifically feminine forms like *directrice* remain clearly feminine also in the plural (*directrices*), whereas expressions like *la / ma / cette docteur*, where gender is expressed by the determiner alone, lose this specificity in the plural, because there is no gender-differentiation in the plural form of the determiner, only the first type of forms will make the intentions of the speaker clear. With *les / mes / ces docteurs* we will never know, instead, whether it is supposed to refer to male or to female doctors or to a mixed group of doctors. Only expressions like *les / mes / ces docteurs (f)* or *docteurs (m) et docteurs (f)* would allow us to know what is really intended. It is true that the final *-e* in these cases is not pronounced, yet in a literate society speaking and writing are not at all autonomous entities; rather, the written form is conceptually present when we speak. Thus, if the written form is *docteure* we are much more likely to have a feminine form in our mind and infinitely more likely to use agreement on related words accordingly than if masculine and feminine denominations are written alike and social gender is allowed to play a role in disambiguation. [bitte, letzten Satz so lassen]

Neutral terms like *personne* (f), *individu* (m) etc. are valid means for substituting the traditionally masculine terms in laws or regulations and for attaining a less patriarchal conception of institutions. The rector of a university, after all, does not take decisions alone but together with her or his colleagues. It would be more honest and precise, therefore, to talk about *le rectorat* instead of arguing that *le recteur* in this case does not mean an individual but a function.

More has to change, however. Even today the idea of the predominance of the masculine over the feminine gender is part of our grammatical culture and underlies traditional theories of gender (cf. Baron 1986). In order to change, the idea of genericity has to be questioned thoroughly. Research has to be carried out into the historical origin, meaning and applicability of this idea and into the consequences the usage of the so-called generic masculine has for our understanding of the world.

The idea of the masculine gender being nobler than the feminine is also the foundation for the traditional description of nouns which name the actor-subject (*nomina agentis*) and their presentation in dictionaries and school books. In fact, even feminist linguists not only use the term *féminisation* but describe feminine forms as derived from the masculine ones even in the case of the determiner (cf. for example Houdebine 1987: 32). This means that *la / une / cette / ma* are understood as derivations of *le / un / ce / mon* and feminine terms like *directrice* (f) as being derived from *directeur* (m).

This type of description strongly recalls traditional ideas such as 'only women are sexual beings' and 'since their creation women are secondary to men'. Nouns like *directrice* or *achteuse* are, in fact, not derived from *directeur* or *achteur*, instead both, masculine and feminine form, are derived, individually, from the same genderless stem by means of affixation: *direc-trice / direc-teur, acht-eur / acht-euse*.²³ In order to do away with the above mentioned ideas, the concept of derivation will have to be defined in more precise terms and the feminine has to become a positive term. This can only be achieved if we stop a) describing feminine personal nouns as derivations or even deviations from masculine terms and b) fostering the concept that the masculine is primary, unmarked and generic whereas the feminine is secondary, marked and specific

Notes

¹ This text has since become the 5th paragraph of Art. 3 of the constitution.

² This expression has acquired over the years the status of a symbol in the battle for the usage of feminine professional names with respect to women.

³ See Durand (1936), Yaguello (1978 / 1987), Malinowski (1980), Bourgoïn (1984), Groult (1984), Houdebine (1984a), Hartmann-Brockhaus (1986), Spence (1986), Schaffroth (1992, 1993), Houdebine (1994).

⁴ See for example Bourgoïn (1983) and Houdebine (1984b).

⁵ Under the influence of developments in North America, the question of feminisation had been discussed much earlier in French-speaking Canada than in France.

⁶ In French-speaking Canada, however, some of these denominations such as *syndic*, *professeur* and *ingénieur* are not considered to be generics but masculine forms to which correspond specific feminine terms, i.e. *syndique*, *professeure* and *ingénieure*. This has the advantage that the feminine remains visible also in the plural (cf. Biron 1991: 27-32).

⁷ This reduction of the question of gender fair language to 'feminisation' constitutes the biggest difference between France and other countries. See for example the Italian "Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana" (Sabatini (1987 / 1993) or the Spanish *Recomendaciones para el uso no sexista de la lengua* (Ministerio de Educación y Ciencia 1988), where sexist language usage is even part of the title.

⁸ The commission to the great regret of certain of its members had not proposed the Canadian forms in *-eure* (*une professeure*, *une recteure*) because the rule of 'simplicity' had been adopted (cf. Houdebine 1987: 33, 1994: 345).

⁹ Cf. the works of Benoîte Groult (1984), Michèle Bourgoïn (1984), Claire-Antonella Forel (1979, 1983), Anne-Marie Houdebine (1984a) and Marina Yaguello (1978 / 1987) and the thorough study of sexism in scientific discourse by Claire Michard-Marchal and Claudine Ribery (1982). For a more extensive presentation see Bierbach / Ellrich (1990).

¹⁰ These two concepts are in point of fact used by the *Académie française* and others whenever they try to stop language change.

¹¹ Cf. Bourgoïn 1984: 57; Groult 1984: 24-25, Houdebine 1984a: 17 and 1984b.

¹² A threatening article published in *Le Figaro* by members of the French Academy opened a denigrating campaign sustained by men, women and the media of all political 'couleurs', and lead even to an appeal to the *Assemblée Nationale* (cf. Houdebine 1987).

¹³ See also Houdebine (1994: 347) for a critical evaluation of the commission's initial hopes in the light of her own findings concerning the usage of feminine denominations with respect to prestigious jobs.

¹⁴ Khaznadar seems to be the only linguist who accepts neither the idea of 'formation' nor that of 'derivation' and talks of 'alternation', instead.

¹⁵ See Hellinger (1990: 61) for the introduction of this term.

¹⁶ This procedure is applied above all with denominations like *ministre* which can be understood as double gender nouns.

¹⁷ Women, however, had been excluded from the right to vote until 1944 not least because this right was granted by law to *les Français* (m) and not to *les Françaises* (f), too (see Introduction to Yaguello 1994 by Suzette Triton). Since the times of Charles De Gaulle, furthermore, *les Français* is not considered to refer to women as well. Instead, politicians always address the French people with *Françaises* (f)! *Français* (m)! (cf. Houdebine 1987: 19).

¹⁸ See for example the rule *le masculin l'emporte sur le féminin*, which can be traced back to the verdict of Favre de Vaugelas who in 1697 declared that the masculine gender had preponderance over the feminine gender because it is *plus noble* (the nobler gender). For a more extensive delineation of the presence of this idea and its development in early grammars of Romance languages see Burr (1997a and 1997b).

¹⁹ In fact, most feminists in France do not even question the genericity of masculine forms in the plural.

²⁰ The report can be downloaded from the Internet at <<http://www.culture.gouv.fr/culture/dglf/coeter/feminisation/sommaire.html>> (27.07.2002).

²¹ According to the commission the French Republic is different from Anglo-Saxon democracies because it does not understand society as a juxtaposition of individuals or communities but as a juxtaposition of *espace public* and *espace privé*, *personne* and *individu*. Institutions belong to the *espace public* and thus are concerned with *personne* and not with a differential treatment of individuals.

²² On the 17th of March 2000 the *Institut National de la Langue Française* made available an Internet site called *Du Féminin* where the lexicon and the rules published in the guide can be searched online (cf. CNR / INaLF 2000).

²³ The same goes for German where, although the so-called *Motion* is very important (*Lehrer - Lehrerin*), derivation cannot be said to be the only way for the creation of feminine titles, see for example *Kund-in / Kund-e*, *Beam~~t~~-e / Beam~~t~~-er*, *Angeklagt-e / Angeklagt-er* or *Bäck-er / Bäck-in* in former times (cf. also Bußmann / Hellinger, this vol.).

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