24 Linguistic Sexism and Feminist Linguistic Activism

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1 Women and Men as Language Users and Regulators

The popular portrayal of women and men as language users has stressed their fundamental differences. A quick perusal of some writings about male and female speakers across languages (e.g. Baron 1986) leaves no doubt that men are perceived not only as powerful speakers but especially as authoritative language users. Women, on the other hand, are often seen as garrulous, frivolous, and illiterate language users. These popular stereotypes gained in stature when they were endorsed by or validated in the "academic" and "scientific" literature of the day (for an overview see e.g. Baron 1986; Kramarae 1981). This "scientific" validation in turn led to the desire for the codification and regulation of women's speech, and of women as speakers. Cameron (1995; this volume) as well as other scholars of language and gender have documented the many rules, codes, and guides that were developed to codify and control women's language behavior over the past centuries. Essentially this action cemented men's status as norm-makers, language regulators, and language planners. 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. The history of women as language regulators is very different. As stated above, women were subjected to linguistic regulation much more than men. However, women were given some authority in language regulation as norm enforcers: both as mothers and as school teachers (especially in elementary education) women were to ensure that children learned to use language according to the prescribed norms.

It was the linguistic activism associated with the women's movement start-ing in the 1970s that posed the first major female challenge to male dominance in language regulation and planning. Women of all walks of life started to expose the biased portrayal of the sexes in language use and demonstrated that this portrayal was particularly discriminatory and damaging to women. Furthermore, their activities targeted the uncovering of the gendered nature of many linguistic rules and norms. For example, Bodine's (1975) paper on "Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar" showed that sex-indefinite *he* gained its dominant status as generic pronoun as a result of male regulation. Baron's (1986) comprehensive analysis of grammar in relation to gender similarly ex-poses androcentric practices. Another powerful expression of language regu-lation is the dictionary. Scholars such as Kramarae (1992), Pusch (1984), and Yaguello (1978) revealed sexism in lexicographic practices, especially in older versions of dictionaries of English, German, and French: the works of the "best" male authors were a major source for dictionary definitions of words. Female authors or women-oriented publications (especially women's maga-zines) were seldom included in the source material. These exposures of bias cast women in the role of critical commentators on "men's rules." Some women reacted to the bias by becoming *norm-breakers* who subverted established norms and rules: examples include the use of *she* as sex-indefinite pronoun, and in German, the introduction of the word *Herrlein* (literally, little man) for a single man to match the existing *Fräulein* (literally, little woman – Miss).

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. This assumption is borne out by the often vehement reactions expressed by (male-dominated) language academies and other linguistic authorities against analyses of linguistic sexism and against proposals for non-sexist language use (for details see e.g. Blaubergs 1980; Hellinger 1990; Pauwels 1998). In many negative reactions to the guidelines the author tries to discard a proposed change by questioning the linguistic expertise of the feminist language plan-ner or linguistic activist. In other words, he or she expresses the belief that the female language planner does not have the knowledge or the expertise to propose new language norms.

In the following sections I will examine the language (planning) activities which were triggered by the newly gained female consciousness associated with women's movements across the Western world during the 1970s and 1980s. I will also examine the extent to which their attempts at becoming *norm-makers* have been successful.

2   Feminist Linguistic Activism – Non-sexist Language Reform

2.1   *Feminist non-sexist language campaigns as an instance of language planning*

It is important to acknowledge that the debates, actions, and initiatives around the (non-) sexist language issue are a form of language planning. The marginalization of feminist perspectives on gender and communication in the 1970s and early 1980s had a particularly strong effect on the recognition of feminist linguistic activism as a genuine case of language planning, in this instance a form of *corpus planning* (see Kloss 1969). In fact, "mainstream" literature on language planning either ignored or denied the existence of feminist language planning until Cooper's (1989) work on language planning and social change which includes the American non-sexist language campaign as one of its case-studies.

It will become clear from the description and discussion below that feminist campaigns to eliminate sexist bias from language have all the trademarks of language reform. In my previous work (e.g. Pauwels 1993, 1998) I have analyzed feminist language reform using a sociolinguistic approach to language planning (e.g. Fasold 1984). The sociolinguistic approach emphasizes the fact that reforms are directed at achieving social change, especially of the kind that enables greater equality, equity, and access. Within this framework the language planning process is divided into four main stages. The *fact-finding* stage is concerned with documenting the problematic issues and concerns. The *planning* stage focuses on the viability of change as well as on developing proposals for change. In the *implementation* stage the methods and avenues for promoting and implementing the changes are assessed and the preferred proposals are implemented. In the *evaluation/feedback* stage language planners seek to assess to what extent the planning and implementation processes have been successful in terms of achieving the goal of the language planning exercise. This involves examining whether the changes are being adopted by the speech community and how they are being used.

2.2   *Documenting sexist language practices*

Exposing and documenting sexist practices in language use and communication has been, and continues to be, a grassroots-based activity by feminists with an interest in language and the linguistic representation of the sexes. There is no denying that feminist activists in the USA were the trailblazers in both exposing sexist bias and proposing changes. Amongst a (linguistic) academic readership the works of Lakoff (1975) and Spender (1980) and the

collection of essays in Nilsen et al. (1977) became the main reference points for elaborate descriptions of linguistic sexism as it affected the English language. Other speech communities in which feminists took an early and active interest in exposing sexist linguistic practices included Norway (Blakar 1977), France (Yaguello 1978), Germany (e.g. Troemel-Ploetz 1978; Guentherodt 1979; Guentherodt et al. 1980; Hellinger and Schräpel 1983) as well as Spain (e.g. Garcia 1977). More recently the documentation of gender bias has spread to languages such as Chinese, Icelandic, Lithuanian, Italian, Japanese, Polish, and Thai (see Hellinger and Bussman 2001; Pauwels 1998).

Feminist explorations into the representation of women and men revealed commonalities across speech communities as well as across languages. A striking feature across many languages and speech communities is the *asymmetrical treatment* of women and men, of male/masculine and female/feminine concepts and principles. The practice of considering the man/the male as the prototype for human representation reduces the woman/female to the status of the "subsumed," the "invisible," or the "marked" one: women are invisible in language when they are subsumed in generic expressions using masculine forms. Generic reference in many languages occurs via the use of forms which are identical with the representation of maleness (e.g. *he* as generic and masculine pronoun, generic nouns coinciding with nouns referring to males). When women are made visible in language, they are "marked": their linguistic construction is often as a derivative of man/male through various grammatical (morphological) processes.

This asymmetry also affects the lexical make-up of many languages. The structure of the lexicon often reflects the "male as norm" principle through the phenomenon of lexical gaps, that is, the absence of words to denote women in a variety of roles, professions, and occupations (e.g. Baron 1986; Hellinger 1990; Sabatini 1985; Yaguello 1978). The bias against women in the matter of lexical gaps is particularly poignant when we consider the reverse, namely, the absence of male-specific nouns to denote men adopting roles or entering professions seen to be female-dominant. The male lexical gaps tend to be filled rather quickly, even to the extent that the new male form becomes the dominant one from which a new female form is derived. An example of this practice is found in German where the word *Hebamme* (midwife) is making way for the new word *Entbindungspfleger* (literally "birthing assistant") as a result of men taking up the role of midwife. Meanwhile a female midwife has been coined *Entbindungspflegerin*, a form derived from *Entbindungspfleger*.

The semantic asymmetry that characterizes the portrayal of women and men in language is of particular concern to feminist activists, as it is an expression of women's and men's perceived values and status in society. The core of this semantic asymmetry is that woman is a sexual being dependent on man, whereas man is simply defined as a human being whose existence does not need reference to woman. Schulz (1975) highlights the practice of semantic derogation which constantly reinforces the "generic man" and "sexual woman" portrayal. Schulz (1975: 64) finds that "a perfectly innocent term designating a

girl or a woman may begin with neutral or positive connotations, but that gradually it acquires negative implications, at first only slightly disparaging, but after a period of time becoming abusive and ending as a sexual slur." This practice has also been observed and examined for French (e.g. Sautermeister 1985), German (e.g. Kochskämper 1991), and Japanese (e.g. Cherry 1987).

Linguistic *stereotyping* of the sexes was also seen as problematic, especially for women as it reinforced women's subordinate status. Stereotyped language was particularly damaging to women in the context of the mass media and educational materials. It is therefore not surprising that both these spheres of language use were subjected to thorough examinations of sexism (see e.g. Nilsen et al. 1977).

Community reaction to these feminist analyses was predominantly negative: the existence of linguistic sexism was vigorously denied. Reasons for its denial varied according to the status and linguistic expertise of the commentator. Whereas non-experts rejected the claim on (folk) etymological assumptions, or because of an unquestioned acceptance of the wisdom of existing language authorities, linguistic experts refuted the claims by arguing that feminist analyses of the language system are fundamentally flawed as they rest on erroneous understandings of language and gender, particularly of grammatical gender. For example, the reaction of the Department of Linguistics at Harvard University to suggestions from students at the Divinity School to ban *Man, man*, and generic *he* as they are sexist, and the reaction by the German linguist Hartwig Kalverkämper (1979) to a similar observation for the German language by fellow linguist Senta Troemel-Ploetz (1978), stated that feminist analysts held a mistaken view about the relationship between grammatical gender and sex. These denials were in turn scrutinized and refuted by feminist linguistic commentators who exposed historical practices of grammatical gender reassignment (e.g. Baron 1986; Cameron 1985) or who presented evidence from experimental work on people's perceptions of gender and sex in language (e.g. Mackay 1980; Pauwels 1998).

2.3   *Changing language: How?*

Most feminist language activists were and are proponents of language change as a measure for achieving a more balanced representation of women and men in language. Taking linguistic action to improve the plight of women was seen as an integral part of women's liberation. Furthermore, many language activists subscribe to an interactionist view of language and reality which has its origins in a weaker version of the Sapir–Whorf hypothesis: language shapes and reflects social reality.

Despite this consensus on the need for linguistic action there is considerable diversity in the activists' and planners' views on how to change sexist practices in language. Their views on strategies for achieving change are shaped by many factors, including their own motivation for change, their understanding and

view of language, and the nature and type of the language to be changed. Planners whose motivation to change is driven by a belief that language change lags behind social change will adopt different strategies from those activists whose main concern is to expose patriarchal bias in language. Whereas the former may consider linguistic amendments as a satisfactory strategy to achieve the linguistic reflection of social change, the latter activists would not be satisfied with mere amendments. Proposals for change are also shaped by one's understanding of the language system, of how meaning is created, and of how linguistic change occurs. For example, a linguist's suggestions for change may be heavily influenced by his or her training – training in recognizing the distinctive structural elements and properties of language such as phonemes, morphemes, and grammatical categories, and in recognizing how these elements contribute to creating meaning. Reformers without such training may focus their efforts for change mainly at the lexical level as this level is often considered the only one susceptible to change. The nature and type of language also influences proposals for change: languages that have grammatical gender pose different challenges from those that do not.

Among this multitude of opinions and views on the question of change, three main motivations for change can be discerned: (1) a desire to expose the sexist nature of the current language system; (2) a desire to create a language which can express reality from a woman's perspective; or (3) a desire to amend the present language system to achieve a symmetrical and equitable representation of women and men.

Causing *linguistic disruption* is a strategy favored by those wishing to expose the sexist nature of the present language system. Its advocates claim that this strategy helps people to become aware of the many subtle and not so subtle ways in which the woman and the female are discriminated against in language. This disruption is achieved through various forms of linguistic creativity including breaking morphological rules, as in *herstory* (based on *history*), or grammatical conventions, such as the generic use of the pronoun *she*; using alternative spellings, as in *wimmin*, *LeserInnen* (female readers); or inverting gender stereotypes, as in "Mr X, whose thick auburn hair was immaculately coiffed, cut a stunning figure when he took his seat in Parliament for the first time since his election." The revaluation and the reclaiming of words for women whose meaning had become trivialized or derogatory over time (e.g. *woman, girl, spinster*) is another form of linguistic disruption, as is the creation of new words (e.g. *male chauvinism*, *pornoglossia*) to highlight women's subordination and men's domination.

More radical proposals have come from those activists who do not believe that the present language system is capable of expressing a woman's point of view. They call for the creation of a new woman-centered language. Examples range from the experimental language used by Gert Brantenberg (1977) in her (Norwegian) novel *The Daughters of Egalia*, the creation of the Láádan language by the science fiction writer and linguist Suzette Haden Elgin "for the specific purpose of expressing the perceptions of women" (Elgin 1988: 1), to the

experiments in "writing the body" – *écriture féminine* – emerging from the postmodern feminist theories and approaches associated with Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray. To date these experiments in women-centered languages and discourses have remained largely the domain of creative writers.

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* strategy). *Gender-neutralization* and *gender-specification* are the main mechanisms to achieve this. Whereas gender-neutralization aims to do away with, "neutralize," or minimize the linguistic expression of gender and/or gender-marking in relation to human referents, the gender-specification (also called *feminization*) strategy promotes the opposite: the *explicit* and *symmetrical* marking of gender in human referents. An illustration of gender-neutralization is the elimination in English of female occupational nouns with suffixes such as *-ess*, *-ette*, *-trix* (e.g. *actress*, *usherette*, *aviatrix*). An example of gender-specification in English is the use of *he or she* to replace the generic use of *he*. The application of both mechanisms has been confined mainly to word level as there was a belief that changes at word level could have a positive effect on eliminating sexism at discourse level.

Given the prominence of the linguistic equality approach and the form replacement strategy it is worthwhile examining which factors influence the feminist language planners in opting for gender-neutralization or gender-specification.

2.4   Choosing non-sexist alternatives

Social and linguistic factors play a role in the selection of the strategies. Social factors revolve around questions of social effectiveness: the chosen strategy should achieve linguistic equality of the sexes by both *effecting* and *reflecting* social change relating to women and men in society. This is particularly relevant with regard to occupational nomenclature. Linguistic factors focus on the issue of *linguistic viability* as well as on matters of *language typology*. Proposed changes need to take account of the typological features and the structural properties of a language; for example, languages which mark gender through morphological processes may have different options from those that don't. Linguistic viability is also linked to linguistic prescriptivism: proposed alternatives which are seen to violate deeply ingrained prescriptive rules or norms could obstruct or slow down the process of adoption in the community.

Most non-sexist language proposals generated for a range of languages contain explicit or implicit evidence that these social and linguistic factors have played a role in the choice of the principal strategy (gender-neutralization or gender-specification). However, feminist activists and language planners proposing changes for the same language may differ in the priority they assign to arguments of social effectiveness and of linguistic viability, or how

they interpret these concepts. This has led to debates about the preferred principal strategy. The Dutch and German feminist language debates are examples of the tensions about the choice of the main strategy for language change. Dutch and German are typologically closely related languages with a grammatical gender system. Languages with a grammatical gender system classify nouns into gender categories on the basis of morphological or phonological features (see Corbett 1991). Whilst many have claimed that a grammatical gender system which classifies nouns in the masculine, feminine, or neuter categories is a purely linguistic invention, and is not linked to the extralinguistic category of biological sex, Corbett (1991: 34) acknowledges that "there is no purely morphological system" and that such systems "always have a semantic core." This is particularly obvious in the gender assignment of human (agent) nouns, with most nouns referring to women being feminine, and those referring to male persons being masculine.

In the case of Dutch the grammatical gender system operates with a three-gender system: masculine, feminine, neuter. However, Dutch does not mark the distinction between masculine and feminine nouns in relation to a range of qualifiers and gender agreement markers, including definite articles, demonstrative pronouns, and attributive adjectives. For example, both masculine and feminine nouns attract the same definite article: *de*. This gender system is labeled *common gender*. In the case of human agent nouns grammatical gender largely coincides with biological sex. Dutch still has a large number of female human agent nouns (especially occupational nouns) which have been formed by means of a suffixation process involving suffixes such as *-a*, *-euse*, *-in*, *-e*, *-ster*. German also operates with a three-gender system: masculine, feminine, and neuter, but unlike Dutch is not of the common gender type. The grammatical gender assignment of human agent nouns similarly displays substantial overlap with biological sex. Although German also has a range of feminine suffixes including *-euse*, *-ess/eß*, *-ette*, the most frequently used one is *-in*. Furthermore, this suffix is still very productive in the formation of feminine occupational and other human agent nouns, for example *Pilotin* (female pilot), *Polizistin* (female police officer).

In the Dutch debates proponents of the gender-neutralization strategy are in favor of phasing out the use of feminine forms of occupational nouns and of not using them in the creation of new female nouns. They promote the use of a single form to denote a male, female, or generic human referent. Their choice for this new gender-neutral form is almost invariably the existing masculine/generic form, e.g. *de advokaat* (the lawyer). They consider this strategy socially effective as it detracts attention from the categories of sex and gender which in their view ultimately benefits women. De Caluwe (1996: 40) claims that "it is even questionable whether women would be served by the practice of mentioning gender in each and every case. As long as women are not represented equally strongly among all occupations/professions at all levels . . . the feminine forms threaten to be seen as marginalized or even stigmatized forms" (my translation). The advocates of gender-neutralization also see this strategy

as linguistically more viable for the following reasons: gender-neutralization is more in tune with current structural developments in the Dutch language, which is becoming more analytic and is moving away from the use of gender-marking suffixes (Brouwer 1991). Choosing gender-neutralization also reduces speaker insecurity with regard to the formation of new feminine forms: as Dutch has many feminine suffixes language users often face the sometimes difficult decision which suffix to use: "Is the female derivation of *arts/dokter* (physician/medical doctor) arts*e* or arts*in*/dokter*es* or dokter*in*?" (Brouwer 1991: 76). Furthermore, gender-neutralization supporters claim that there is a definite trend away from the use of feminine occupational nouns among language users.

For the advocates of the gender-specification/feminization strategy (e.g. Van Alphen 1983; Niedzwiecki 1995), making women visible in all occupations and professions through systematic use of feminine occupational forms is seen to achieve social effectiveness. In response to claims from the gender-neutralization camp that feminine suffixes have connotations of triviality, the feminization supporters respond that it is better to be named and to be visible in language, even if there are some connotations of triviality: Niedzwiecki (1995) believes that the latter will abate and eventually disappear when there is consistent and full use of feminine forms in all contexts. They are confident that this strategy is linguistically viable and do not believe that continued feminization is at odds with trends in the Dutch language. They rely on a study by Adriaens (1981) which recorded an increase in the number of feminized occupational nouns. However, judging by current trends in language use and by existing policy documents the gender-neutralization strategy is the one most likely to be adopted and implemented in Dutch-speaking communities (e.g. Pauwels 1997a).

In the German context the same social arguments are used by advocates of either strategy. The feminization supporters opine that their strategy is the more socially effective because it not only makes women visible and reveals that women are increasingly found in a variety of occupations and professions, but it also ensures that all occupations and professions are seen as accessible to men *and* women. Those opting for gender-neutralization in German claim that gender equality in language is best served by minimizing gender reference, especially in generic contexts. The linguistic proposals emerging from either side do include more radical suggestions than those found in the Dutch context. For example, the radical feminist linguist Luise Pusch (1990) proposes total or radical feminization by means of reversing the current practice of attributing generic status to the masculine form. In her proposal the feminine form becomes the appropriate (unmarked) form. Well aware of the radical nature of this proposal, Pusch defends it as an important transitional strategy to rectify the many centuries of androcentrism in language. She asserts, somewhat provocatively, that this strategy is socially effective as it gives men the chance to experience personally what it means to be subsumed under a feminine form and it gives women the opportunity to experience the feeling of being named explicitly in generic contexts. She also defends the linguistic

viability of her proposal by claiming that it is simple and does not involve the creation of any new forms.

A less radical version of the feminization strategy involves the explicit and consistent use of the feminine forms in gender-specific as well as generic contexts. In generic contexts preference goes to the use of gender-paired formulations (often labelled *gender splitting*) such as *der/die Lehrer/in* (the male/female teacher) or *der Lehrer und die Lehrerin* or the graphemically innovative *der/die LehrerIn*. This proposal is seen as a linguistically viable option since the German language system is suited for continued formation of feminine occupational and human agent nouns through gender suffixation. Unlike Dutch, German has a dominant feminine suffix which continues to be productive: the *-in* suffix. There is minimal speaker uncertainty in creating new feminine forms as speakers are not faced with making a selection from a wide variety of options. Concerns about the semantic ambiguity of *-in* are downplayed, as the meaning "wife of a male incumbent of an occupation" rather than "female incumbent of" is disappearing fast.

Whilst some gender-neutralization supporters follow the same path as their Dutch counterparts and accord the current (masculine) generic form the status of gender-neutral form, others make much more radical proposals. In response to a request from the Institute of German Language regarding eliminating gender bias from occupational nomenclature, Pusch (1984) proposed to change gender assignment in human agent nouns (mainly occupational nouns). This would entail the elimination of all feminine forms derived by suffixation and a gender reassignment for the noun in generic contexts. The neuter gender is to be used for generic reference, leading to the following pattern: **das** *Professor* for generic reference, **die** *Professor* (instead of *die Professorin*) for female-specific reference, and **der** *Professor* for male-specific reference. Pusch argues that the use of the neuter gender in generic contexts is socially the most effective in conveying gender-neutrality. However, she is aware that a drastic overhaul of part of the German gender system may make this proposal less linguistically viable than others. Judging on policy initiatives in Germany, Austria, and German-speaking Switzerland it is the feminization strategy which is promoted more heavily.

Similar debates and discussions about the most effective and desirable strategies have occurred in relation to the French and Spanish languages, where regional linguistic differences (e.g. Canada versus France) have also affected discussion (see Pauwels 1998). In the case of English there has been little if any debate about gender-neutralization being the principal strategy in promoting linguistic equality. Discussions have been more about selecting alternative forms within the gender-neutralization strategy: for example, should the word *chairman* be replaced by an existing, semantically related noun, such as *president*, *chair*, or should a new form be created, for example, *chairperson*? Replacing generic *he* by pronouns such as singular *they*, by a new pronoun, or by generic *she*, *it*, or *one* is another example of this (e.g. Bodine 1975; Mackay 1980; Baron 1986; Henley 1987).

2.5   *Implementing changes – guidelines for non-sexist language use*

A crucial component in language planning is the implementation of the proposed changes. Language planners need to identify pathways and mechanisms to implement their proposals so that these can reach and spread through the speech community. In many forms of corpus planning (e.g. orthographic reform) implementation is top-down with language academies and other authoritative language bodies leading, and educational authorities facilitating the implementation process. However, in the case of feminist language planning these language authorities were and are often strongly opposed and resistant to the proposed changes. Being principally a grassroots-driven phenomenon, feminist language planning had limited (if any) access to, and cooperation from, the main channels for the implementation of language change. These include the education system, the media, legislative measures, and linguistic authorities. Instead their main mechanisms for spreading change were, and remain, promotion through personal use, the use of role models, and pressure on key agencies to adopt guidelines for non-sexist language use.

The promotion of linguistic disruption and of a newly created woman-centered language was primarily achieved through personal language patterns, often in speech but mainly in writing. Prominent feminist activists who practiced forms of linguistic disruption became role models for and of feminist linguistic change. Mary Daly's (1978) linguistic practices in *Gyn/ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* are a typical illustration of this. Feminist publications – both academic and general – became vehicles for spreading feminist linguistic practices throughout the feminist community. For example, in its early publication days the German feminist magazine *Emma* played an important role in familiarizing German feminists with, and promoting, feminist language change. The magazine practiced gender splitting, used the new indefinite pronoun *frau* (instead of *man*, meaning "one"), and created many new compounds with *-frau* (-woman) to make women more visible in language. The creative work of feminist novelists and poets such as Monique Wittig, Audre Lorde, Adrienne Rich, Gert Brantenberg, Verena Stefan, and others who experiment with new forms of language use is a further illustration of this.

Exerting pressure on key agencies in language spread became a prominent mechanism for the promotion of change emanating from the linguistic equality approach. Feminist individuals and women's action groups not only developed guidelines and policies on non-sexist language use but also acted to convince professional organizations and key agencies to adopt the policies. These language-oriented actions were often part of general initiatives by women's groups to eliminate gender-biased practices from society. Early targets for feminist linguistic activism were publishers of educational material, the print media, education, and legislative writing. These agencies were targeted because of their key role in shaping the representation of women and men and because

of their potential to facilitate and spread change through a community. Feminist language activists also used the introduction of Sex Discrimination, Equal (Employment) Opportunity and Human Rights Acts, and other legislative measures to demand linguistic changes. A case in point is the need to amend professional and occupational nomenclature to comply with Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) Acts. Terminology commissions, education ministries, employment councils, language academies, and other public agencies charged with making amendments to official (occupational) nomenclature and terminology called upon feminist language planners to assist them in this task. This in turn triggered requests for non-sexist language guidelines and policies to be developed for other public and private agencies covered under EEO and anti-discrimination legislation. To date non-sexist language policies are in place in most public sector and in many large private sector organizations in English-language countries. They are also increasingly found in European countries and in supranational organizations such as UNESCO (see Pauwels 1998; Hellinger and Bussman 2001).

2.6   Assessing feminist language planning

The success of feminist language activism needs to be judged ultimately against the goals it set out to achieve. These include raising awareness of the gender bias in language and getting the speech community to adopt the proposed changes in a manner that promotes gender equality. The relatively recent nature of feminist language planning activities (from the mid-1970s at the earliest) and the scant number of investigations (Fasold 1987; Fasold et al. 1990) to date which have charted non-sexist language changes make a comprehensive assessment of success or failure as yet impossible. Nevertheless some comments can be made with regard to evidence of a greater community awareness of gender bias in language. Furthermore, the findings of recent and current research projects (admittedly small-scale) can shed some light on the adoption patterns of some non-sexist proposed changes in the community.

2.7   Increased awareness of gender bias

There is no doubt that in English-language communities and in some other speech communities (mainly European) the awareness of gender bias in language has been raised markedly as a result of feminist linguistic activism. Although many people still disagree with the claim that there is a gender bias in language, or refuse to adopt non-sexist language changes, they have nevertheless been made aware of the problematic nature of language in this respect. A growing number of people display metalinguistic behavior which points toward a greater awareness of sexist language. This includes apologizing for the use of generic *he* – some authors now feel compelled to justify the use of

generic *he* in textbooks, or for using *-man* compounds in a generic context. Others self-correct generic *he* constructions or comment about title use and gender stereotypes. Whilst many such comments continue to be made in a deprecatory manner they nevertheless show awareness of the problem. The community's awareness is also evident in surveys on issues such as gender stereotyping, masculine generic *he* use, linguistic asymmetries in occupational nouns, and terms of address and naming practices (for an overview, see Pauwels 1998). For example, in 1986, 13 per cent of 250 female respondents were not familiar with *Ms* as an alternative title for women; by 1996 this had decreased to 4 per cent of 300 women (Pauwels 2001a). It is not possible at this stage to discern whether this awareness has been raised more through contact with linguistic disruption strategies or through language guidelines striving for linguistic equality.

2.8   *Adopting feminist language change*

Investigating the adoption of feminist language change is a much more complex issue. It involves exploring which types of feminist language change are being adopted: change resulting from linguistic disruption strategies, women-centered language developments, or form replacement proposals. It also requires investigating the process by which these changes spread through a speech community. Does change spread from public forms of written discourse to public speech? Which sector of the community leads the change and how does it spread from this group to other groups in the community? Furthermore, there is the fundamental question of whether the adoption and spread of non-sexist language through a community occurs in such a way that it promotes gender equality and eliminates the bias against women in language.

To date many of these questions have not yet been addressed and present an opportunity for further research, especially in communities which have witnessed feminist linguistic activism for a number of years. To my knowledge there have not yet been any systematic investigations into community adoption of changes linked to the strategies of linguistic disruption or women-centered language developments. In fact the linguistic disruption strategy was not intended to be adopted by the community at large; rather, it was used by linguistic activists to raise the community's awareness, sometimes in a more provocative manner. There is certainly evidence that some feminist publications in English, German, Dutch, French, and Spanish continue to use linguistic disruption as a way of keeping readers aware of gender bias in language. Developing women-centered languages has remained a preoccupation of poets and creative writers.

The adoption of proposals emerging from the linguistic equality approach and involving form replacements has received more attention. To date most such explorations have focused on the adoption and spread of non-sexist alternatives

for generically used nouns and pronouns and on symmetrical naming practices or title use. The reduction or avoidance of gender-stereotyped language has also been examined. Although these investigations are relatively small-scale and mainly involve English, they nevertheless allow an insight into the issue of the adoption and spread of feminist language planning.

2.9   Non-sexist generic nouns and pronouns in writing

The studies by Cooper (1984), Markovitz (1984), Ehrlich and King (1994), and Pauwels (1997b, 2000), among others, concern the adoption of non-sexist generic nouns and pronouns in English. All report a decrease in use of masculine generic nouns and pronouns in favor of non-sexist alternatives both in forms of written discourse and in public speech. Cooper's (1984) corpus of 500,000 words taken from American newspapers and magazines covering the period 1971 to 1979 noted a dramatic decline in the use of masculine generic nouns (including -*man* compounds) and some decline in the use of generic *he*. Markovitz (1984) and Ehrlich and King's (1994) work focuses on university documents and reveals that the use of non-sexist alternatives for masculine generic nouns and generic *he* had increased markedly. Pauwels' (1997b) survey of non-sexist generic nouns and pronouns in 2,000 job advertisements in Australian newspapers found a very high degree of use of such forms. Only 5.4 per cent of all generic nouns (i.e. 128 different occupational and human agent nouns) used in the advertisements could be considered sex-exclusive terms: there were a few instances of -*man* compounds and of -*ess* words. With the exception of *chairman* and *handyman*, all -*man* compounds occurred less than their gender-inclusive counterparts. There were many instances of -*man* compounds having been replaced by -*person* compounds such as *chairperson*, *draftsperson*, *foreperson*, *groundsperson*, *handyperson*, even *waitperson*. The investigation also showed that the (already) few female-exclusive terms had been abandoned in favor of gender-neutral ones. For example, there were no *air hostesses*, only *flight attendants*; no *salesgirls*, *saleswomen*, or *salesladies*, only *salesperson(s)* or *salespeople*. The study also revealed zero use of generic *he*. In job advertisements generic *he* was replaced mainly by the practice of repeating the generic noun, although there were some instances of *He/She*.

In more recent work I have started to investigate the use of non-sexist alternatives to masculine generic nouns and pronouns in public, non-scripted speech (Pauwels 2000, 2001b). A comparison of (non-scripted) speech derived from radio programs and parliamentary debates recorded in Australia between the 1960s and 1970s and in the 1990s showed a steep decline in the use of generic *he* from the pre-feminist reform period (i.e. between the 1960s and 1970s) to the post-feminist reform period (in the 1990s). In the pre-reform period approximately 95 per cent of all generic pronouns were generic *he*. Singular *they* recorded less than 1 (0.4) per cent, and *he or she* only 2.25 per cent. The post-reform period revealed a significant turnaround for singular *they*, which had

Table 24.1   Generic pronoun use by academics and teachers

Pronouns	Number (2,189)	%
Singular *they*	763	34.85
He or she	1,105	50.47
Generic *he*	258	11.78
Generic *she*	60	2.74
It	3	0.13

become the most frequently used generic pronoun recording a 75 per cent usage rate. Generic *he* had dropped from 95 to 18 per cent, whereas *he or she* had increased only slightly to 4.5 per cent. The users of these pronouns were mainly educated speakers including health professionals, journalists, lawyers, judges, members of the clergy, academics, teachers, and athletes. Changes in the patterns of generic noun use could not be investigated as there were very few examples of morphologically marked masculine generic nouns in the pre- and post-reform database.

Another recent study (Pauwels 2000) explored generic pronoun use by Australian academics and educators when they were lecturing or giving papers at conferences, or in workshops or symposia. This study revealed that generic *he* has become the exception rather than the norm in generic pronoun use, as can be gleaned from table 24.1.

These investigations also reveal some difference in the choice of pronoun which is most likely linked either to type of speaker, or to type of speech genre, or both. Educators and academics display a greater use of *he or she* than other educated speakers, whose preference is for the gender-neutral alternative singular *they*. The observed difference may also reflect the type of speech genre: the first study (Pauwels 2001b) consisted mainly of parliamentary debates and one-on-one interviews on radio programs, whereas the second study (Pauwels 2000) focused on lectures in university or other educational settings.

The academic pronoun study (Pauwels 2000) also provided an opportunity to investigate which type of speaker leads the adoption of non-sexist pronouns. The study comprised 165 women and 187 men, which facilitated the examination of gender patterns as presented in table 24.2. Seven different patterns emerged from the data: (1) prevalent use of generic *he* by an individual, (2) prevalent use of generic *she*, (3) prevalent use of *he or she*, (4) prevalent use of singular *they*, (5) variable use of *he or she* and singular *they*, (6) variable use of generic *he* and singular *they*, (7) variable use of *he* and *he or she*. There were a small number of speakers (9 women and 10 men) whose pronoun use did not reveal any discernible patterns. Although both women and men use non-sexist alternatives more than generic *he*, it is women, not surprisingly, who lead the adoption. Their combined use of non-sexist alternatives (i.e. patterns 3, 4, 5) is 82.34 per cent whereas that of men is 62.02 per cent. Another indicator

Table 24.2   Women's and men's use of generic pronouns

Pronouns used	Women (n = 165) (%)	Men (n = 187) (%)	Total use (%)
Generic *he*	0.6	10.16	5.68
Generic *she*	3.63	1.6	2.55
He or she	44.24	29.41	36.36
Singular *they*	17.5	16.57	17.04
He or she/singular *they*	20.6	16.04	18.18
He/singular *they*	4.24	8.5	6.53
He/he or she	3.63	12.29	8.23
No discernible pronoun pattern	5.45	5.34	5.39

of women leading this change is the almost complete absence of generic *he* among female speakers, whereas men still record 10.16 per cent use of this form.

2.10   Naming practices and titles

Another prominent aspect of feminist linguistic reform concerned naming practices and terms of address for women (e.g. Kramer 1975; Stannard 1977; Spender 1980; Cherry 1987). Symmetrical use of titles and terms of address for women and the elimination of derogatory and discriminatory naming practices were the goals of feminist linguistic activism. There is some evidence of change in this arena of language use as well: an increasing number of women adopt naming practices which assert their linguistic independence from men. Women are more likely to keep their pre-marital name after marriage; there is a growing tendency for the mother's surname to be chosen as the family surname upon the birth of children; naming practices which render women invisible (e.g. Mrs John Man) are starting to disappear.

Investigations to date have focused on the introduction and spread of the new title *Ms* as a term of address for women, replacing *Miss* and *Mrs* (for a discussion of the viability of *Ms* as a new title for women, see Pauwels 1998). Evidence from English-language countries (especially the USA, Canada, and Australia) shows that women are increasingly adopting the new title, with estimates for the USA ranging between 30 and 45 per cent (Atkinson 1987; Pauwels 1987). For Australia I examined the use of *Ms* among women in 1986 and again in 1996 (Pauwels 1987, 2001a). In 1986 approximately 20 per cent of 250 women used *Ms*. This percentage had almost doubled by 1996: 37 per cent. The 1996 study also collected socio-demographic information on the *Ms* users, revealing that women with a tertiary education and between the ages of 25 and 65 (i.e. the working population) lead the adoption of *Ms*. Education was the most significant factor in determining title use. Age was also significant

but because of the large age groupings it was not possible to pinpoint the most significant age group for *Ms* use. Correlations between marital status and title use showed that *Ms* is being adopted first by those who fall "outside" the traditional categories of "married" and "single/unmarried," but *Ms* use is increasingly found among the latter groups. Although these studies reveal an increase in the use of *Ms* there is not yet strong evidence that *Ms* is in fact replacing the titles *Mrs* or *Miss*. At this stage *Ms* has been added as a new option besides *Mrs* and *Miss* with the latter titles unlikely to become obsolescent in the near future. As to men's use of *Ms* to address women, preliminary evidence from Australia suggests that few attempts are made by men to use *Ms*, even where a woman's preference for this form is known.

3   Are the Changes Effective?

Investigating the effectiveness of the changes is the most important form of evaluation of the success or failure of (social) linguistic reform. Non-sexist language reform can be considered truly successful if there is not only evidence of the adoption of non-sexist alternatives but also evidence that these alternatives are being used in a manner promoting linguistic equality of the sexes. The investigation of the social effectiveness of non-sexist language reform is still in its infancy. The basis for most comments on the effectiveness of this reform is anecdotal evidence. For example, there is some evidence that the newly created *-person* compounds are not used generically but simply replace *-woman* compounds (Ehrlich and King 1994; Pauwels 2001a). Another observation is that some feminist linguistic creations are not used in their intended manner, leading to a depoliticization of these innovations: Ehrlich and King (1994: 65) comment that "while feminist linguistic innovations (such as *feminism*, *sexism*, *sexual harassment*, and *date rape*) pervade our culture, it is not clear that their use is consistent with their intended, feminist-influenced, meanings." To what extent the current usage patterns of *Ms* are an indication of potential failure is less clear cut: it is certainly true that the feminist intention of *Ms* being a replacement for *Miss* and *Mrs* has not yet been achieved and may not be achieved for a long time. In fact at the moment it is being used as an additional option to the existing titles of *Mrs* and *Miss*, leading to even greater asymmetry than before. However, my research into the use of *Ms* does show that women who use *Ms* do so with its intended meaning. The effectiveness of non-sexist alternatives to generic *he*, especially *he or she* and singular *they*, has also received mixed feedback: studies into the mental imagery associated with masculine generic nouns and pronouns had shown that the use of more gender-inclusive or gender-neutral forms reduced the maleness of the mental imagery (e.g. Moulton et al. 1978; Hamilton 1988; Wilson and Ng 1988). Khosroshahi's (1989) study, however, revealed no real difference in the mental imagery associated with masculine generic and gender-inclusive or gender-

neutral generic forms, except in the case of women who had reformed their language. She concludes that the adoption of gender-inclusive/gender-neutral forms will only be effective if there is a personal awareness of the discriminatory nature of the other forms and there is a personal commitment to change. This view concurs with Cameron's (1985: 90) comment that "in the mouths of sexists, language can always be sexist." However, I do not believe that this observation is cause for a pessimistic assessment of the effectiveness of non-sexist language reform: there is evidence that feminist linguistic activism has raised the community's awareness of gender bias in language. There is also proof that those who adopt the changes do so because they are aware of the bias and have a personal commitment to change. Of course, ultimately meanings are not fixed and will change over time and according to context. This applies as much to feminist meanings as to any other meanings.

4   Concluding Remarks

In this chapter I have discussed feminist linguistic activism as a genuine form of language reform, showing women in the new roles of critical linguistic commentators, norm-breakers, and norm-makers. Even if the ultimate goals of feminist language reform may not be achieved these linguistic initiatives and actions, many of which have been undertaken at the grassroots level, have made a major contribution to exposing the ideologization of linguistic meanings to the speech community at large and to challenging the hegemony of the meanings promoted and authorized by the dominant group or culture, in this case men.

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