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The treatment of words with potential
gender stereotypes and implications in US
and UK dictionaries

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Abstract

This project is about a topic that has been the focus of a good deal of attention recently in society: gender-neutral language. Different societies are following different paths to gender neutral language. Dictionaries can be regarded as reflecting the societies in which they were made. The study compares the treatment of 15 words with potential gender stereotypes in dictionaries from the United States and the United Kingdom. It demonstrates that two dictionaries, one from each country, treat words with potential gender stereotypes differently. It is argued that that this difference may be a result of the differencing paths towards gender neutral language both countries have followed.

Key words

dictionary, gender, stereotype, definitions, society, culture

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1 Introduction

1.1 Dictionaries in the United Kingdom and the United States

Dictionaries are often described as an 'authority' that people invoke for guidance about the correct use of the language, seen as prescriptive texts which tell us how to use language (Atkins & Rundell 2008). This previous affirmation may not be true for everyone though: a different cultural background, different upbringing in terms of each family being different and receiving a different education. Dictionaries may have the same broad aim of providing information about language use but there are some differences depending on the place of creation. The place of creation has a big influence culturally speaking like in this case studied here in this paper. The cultures from the United States and the United Kingdom are different: the historical background, the economy, the surroundings, and how society is organised. Even though both countries speak English, there are enough differences that can lead to misunderstandings between both countries (Scotto Di Carlo, 2013).

Historically, American dictionaries have been characterised by innovation in terms of features (Illson, 1986). They were the first English dictionaries to include:

- Biographies of famous people
- Articles about famous places
- Essays about synonyms
- Essays about usage

America was also innovative in defining techniques which include replacing definitions with examples or grouping examples semantically rather than syntactically. In addition,

American dictionaries have created devices to engage children to use dictionaries and get used to using them in their life.

British dictionaries have been made using more innovative methods at a large scale; for example, using corpus linguistics. Corpus linguistics is a methodology which analyses language use based on texts stored in corpora, which often contain millions of examples of words in use. This method has shown that using intuition is not a reliable source on which to establish how language is used, because people tend to notice word uses that are less common rather than those that are more frequent (Varantola, 2003). Prejudice also plays a part in the sense that people tend to have preconceived ideas on how to use language, which are sometimes inaccurate. Before the corpus method, the lexicographers' intuitions did not catch the word's senses accurately. That was because they did not have the vast knowledge that corpus analysis offers. (Rees, 2022)

As for the respective degree of prescriptivism in British and American Dictionaries, in broad terms, most modern British general-purpose dictionaries have sought to describe language as it is actually used, while many American dictionaries have often sought to explain correct or incorrect use of language. An example is the "misuse" of the adverb *literally* as a marker of exaggeration in sentences. The Merriam-Webster, which is a corpus-based dictionary, has its first entry of the word as the "right" meaning and its second entry gives the exaggerated meaning, marking it as an exaggeration and frequently criticised as an illogical misuse. The corpus-driven COBUILD (Collins Birmingham University International Language Database) however, puts the exaggerated meaning first, as it would be the most used sense.

Other differences are as simple as the presentation of the dictionaries. Based on the dictionaries used in this paper for the comparison (both dictionaries used are their website versions), the first observation makes clear that the British dictionary, the Cambridge Dictionary, could be said to have a more appealing or innovative visual presentation than its American counterpart, the Merriam-Webster dictionary. Visual presentation refers to the way the dictionary entries are presented (the use of colours, structure, pictures, etc.) so they are appealing or user-friendly to the person searching, and also easy to read.

Here are two visual examples of the presentation. The word used for the example is *horse*.

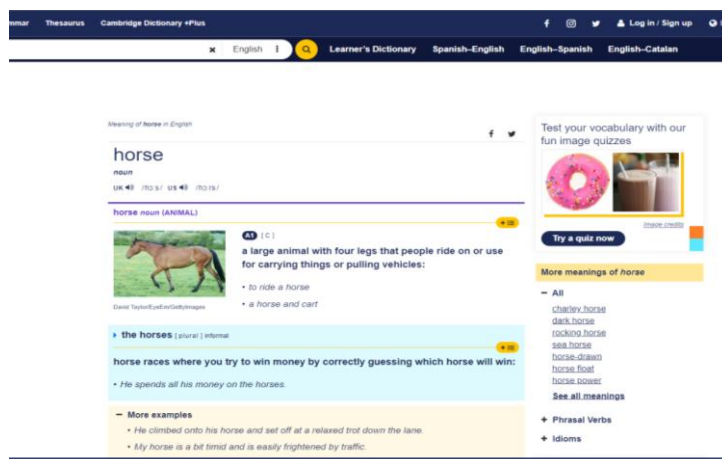


Figure 1 Cambridge Dictionary website

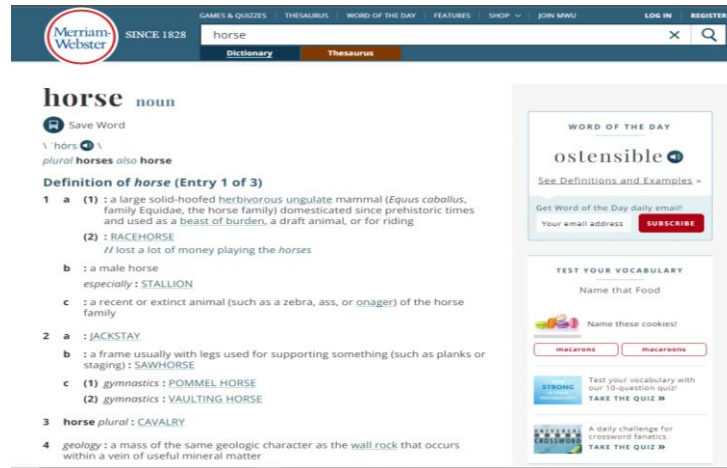


Figure 2 Merriam-Webster Dictionary website

Regarding the screenshots in Figures 1 and 2, it is clear at first sight that the Cambridge Dictionary offers more visual aids to the person who searches. Said visual aids include a picture of the concept searched and different colours to separate information. As for the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, it shows a more austere presentation. The different entries are not separated, they are only marked by numbers and letters, and the colours do not vary in any way.

The way Cambridge Dictionary puts its information helps the searcher to separate and identify the different parts of the entry in an easier way.

After some general differences, there is one topic which can be described as controversial today. Gender stereotypes have been present for centuries, but today people are increasingly aware of these stereotypes and the need to avoid them. Both US and UK cultures sure have a different conception of gender stereotypes and implications that tends to be reflected in the dictionaries. Although a dictionary may not represent how language is used by the speakers completely. Language is constantly evolving, and dictionaries

have or should evolve with it, so gender could be a factor to consider when analysing the evolution of dictionary in the United Kingdom and the United States of America.

1.2 Gender-inclusive language in the UK and USA

Gender-inclusive language seems quite widespread today. It is about writing and speaking without assuming genders. It is about respecting people. It may be a controversial topic to many, as not everyone may accept the changes to the language. There are people who deny the need for gender-inclusive language of many ages, races, cultural backgrounds.

In the US, the language changes have been advanced with the purpose of promoting women's rights and even making way to a transformation in language that helps the LGBTQIA+ community rights. Notable changes are being made in the justice sector in the US. Changes related to gender and sexual identity are a step to recognize the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community. Changing language is a small step but an important one. (Vapnek and Revell, 2020)

Vapnek and Revell (2020) talk about *Gender-neutral drafting* or *Gender-neutral Legislative Drafting*, a method that has “the objective of ensuring that legal language takes account of men and women equally.” (Vapnek and Revell 2020, p. 106)

Many jurisdictions in the US and Canada are adopting this drafting method, with that language change, there also were changes in some common words such as

- *Chairman* became *chairperson* or *chair*.
- *Fireman* became *firefighter*.
- *Policeman* became *police officer*.

Female job titles were also adjusted, such as *stewardess*, which became *flight attendant*.

As for the UK, going back to the seventh century, a daughter of an English king was described as *a beautiful man*. The reason was because Old English had a word to describe a human being: *man*. Eventually they used a term to distinguish both sexes, but *man* was still used to reference both sexes. By the time they reached the 18th century, the word *man* reached a narrower sense, probably as only referring to males. It was during this time where authors used language differently. For example, the author Edmund Burke used *men* as including men and women when writing about the French Revolution. British parliamentarian, economist and philosopher John Stuart Mill proposed the term *person* as a replacement for *men* in the Reform Bill of 1867, what would have been a big step in society. Lexicographers have realised how *man* has been shifting its meaning from a general perspective to a more specific one, and that English native speakers have internalised as a term for a general individual. (Miller and Swift, 1988)

Miller and Swift (1988) propose different ways of substituting the generic *man* for a term specific to no gender. A couple examples are

- If a man can drive 500 miles in ten hours... transformed into *If someone/ If one/ If it is possible*.
- No man would be safe from nuclear fallout if... transformed into *No one/ No human being*.

Having looked at the previous information, it is clear that both countries have taken different paths regarding gender-neutral language. It could be argued that the US has focused on gender-neutral language included in legal documentation in order to support the LGTBQIA+ community and gender equality. The UK language evolution has been

focused primarily on the generic terms. The focus of the analysis is on the word *man*, which has evolved from a general perspective into an individual meaning. These different paths towards gender neutral language may be reflected in UK and US dictionaries respectively.

1.3 Gender and Dictionaries

A quite recent topic, which has been made aware in society these days is the movement for gender-neutral language. As for the cultures analysed in this paper, the US and the UK have taken different paths as to how to approach this movement. These paths can be seen in the contents of the dictionaries of both countries.

Gender in dictionaries has been a topic of research for many academics. For example, Norri (2019) compares five learner's dictionaries and their different editions to analyse gender in their definitions. The definitions are from editions of the 20th century and the 21st century. There are variations in gender descriptions, a sure change and evolution of the society. Those variations may be reflected in concepts that may have been assigned commonly to men or women, that evolve into gender-neutral definitions. Norri (2019) states that "definitions should similarly be free from any gender bias". (Norri 2019, p. 1)

As a conclusion, Norri says: "comments about gender should be non-biased, yet informative about the contexts where the word is typically found". (Norri 2019, p. 22) It may not be easy to do that, but those are barriers that must be overcome through time.

Atkins and Rundell's (2008) *Practical Guide to Lexicography* is a classic work that has some notes on gender in dictionaries Atkins and Rundell (2008) say that if a header (the descriptive information in a corpus) includes the author's gender, there is a chance to

compare how men and women use language. Furthermore, as “users may have different socio-cultural norms [...]” (Atkins & Rundell 2008, p. 425) dictionaries need to have a definition that proceeds with caution, so they can avoid misunderstandings and communication problems. Gender is one of many topics that should be approached with caution when speaking and writing, so a good definition can spare possible problems. The authors also give a list of other topics that are to proceed with caution, such as ethnic or racial origin, disability, sexual orientation, and age.

1.4 Aims and Research question

The aim of this project is to compare the treatment of words with potential gender stereotypes or implications in two dictionaries from societies with different histories of gender-inclusive language. The societies from the UK and the US have evolved differently from one another, and so has the point of view of gender-related matters.

Once the aims of the project are clear, the following research question can be formulated:

How are words with potential gender stereotypes and implications treated in US and UK dictionaries?

2 Methods

2.1 Sample of words

This section is about the sample of words that are going to be used in this paper. First, there is the whole sample, which is further analysed and explained below.

purse, handbag, crop top, skirt, host, adulterer, hero, butler, housekeeper, mistress, master, comedian, hunter, firefighter, flight attendant.

This sample is composed of 15 words. The number of words of the sample has been chosen according to the time available to develop this TFG and to fit the guidelines for this project. All the words have been selected based on the potential gender stereotypes of and implications they may have. This is an approach taken also by other researchers (see Norri, 2019). The potential gender stereotypes and implications would be, for example, if an item of clothing was said to be only for women or men, or if a job has a certain stereotype for women but none for men, and vice versa. Said potential stereotypes and implications are going to be shown in the Results and Analysis section below.

It must be noted that when selecting words for the clothing part for the sample, the word that was initially chosen instead of *crop top* was *knickers*. *Knickers* would be the UK equivalent for *panties* in the US, that way it could not be used for the sample due to differences in the word used for the piece of clothing in both countries.

Following Norri (2019), in this dissertation the sample is divided into categories, which are: professions, types of clothes, social statuses, and accessories. The aim is to see how the treatment of words with potential for gender stereotyping has been treated in dictionaries from the United States and the United Kingdom.

Classification of the sample of words

| CATEGORIES | WORDS |
|------------------|---|
| Accessories | <i>purse, handbag</i> |
| Types of clothes | <i>crop top, skirt</i> |
| Social statuses | <i>host, adulterer, hero</i> |
| Professions | <i>butler, housekeeper, mistress, master, comedian, hunter, firefighter, flight attendant</i> |

Table 1: composition of the sample

For the professions category, the words selected have the potential to show how the male assigned professions can differ from the female assigned professions in terms of their definition. For example, the same profession for a man or a woman has a different word used for the same profession depending on the gender of the person.

As for the types of clothes, the two words chosen are clothing items that have been commonly assigned to women. However, it could be argued that there is no reason why this should be the case.

The social status category refers to words that people get called for having done something. The three words selected have been commonly applied to men but there is no reason why they could not be applied to women.

The two accessories selected are items that have traditionally been assigned to women's wear by society and are barely seen as a men's accessory, but again, there is no intrinsic reason why this should be the case.

2.2 Materials

For this dissertation, the two dictionaries selected are the Cambridge Dictionary portal website (Cambridge, 2022) representing British dictionaries and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary website (Merriam-Webster, 2022) representing Dictionaries from the United States.

Cambridge University Press is a renowned institution with a history going back to the 16th century. It is the oldest publishing house, with publications of different matters such as academic texts, poetry, schoolbooks, prayer books and Bibles. They also published historical works such as Newton's *Philosophiæ Naturalis Principia Mathematica* and Noam Chomsky's *Language and Mind*. In 1999, they launched the Cambridge Dictionary Online, which is the one used for the research in this paper (Cambridge, 2022).

Merriam-Webster was founded in 1831 by the brother George and Charles Merriam. Merriam-Webster's website says that the Merriam-Webster dictionary can be considered

the lexicographical heir of Noah Webster, as the company proceeded to earn the rights to Noah Webster's magnum opus, *An American Dictionary of the English Language, Corrected and Enlarged*. The company continued the work of Noah Webster, creating one of the most popular dictionaries. Thus, the company changed the name to Merriam-Webster. With this act, they have been issuing dictionaries since 1847 (Merriam-Webster, 2022).

After a brief introduction to both dictionaries, something to be considered is the relevance of the dictionaries. As technology develops and evolves, so does society. This section will be dedicated to analysing the popularity of both dictionaries in their respective web format, as online dictionaries may be more accessible from any part at any moment, rather than physical ones. To do so, the popularity of the two dictionaries is going to be compared via a webpage that provides information about the ranking of the webpages, *similarweb.com*. All these stats correspond to the month of April of 2022.

First, Figure 3 shows the stats for the Cambridge Dictionary page:



Figure 3 Stats from the Cambridge online Dictionary 22-05-22

Lastly, Figure 4 shows stats for the Merriam-Webster page:



Figure 4 Stats from the Merriam-Webster online dictionary 22-05-22

In terms of worldwide popularity, by the numbers given Cambridge dictionary ranks in 851st position, whereas Merriam-Webster ranks in 1,111th, 260 positions lower than the Cambridge dictionary. However, it is important to remark the importance of both websites, considering that there are billions of websites around the world and these dictionaries rank between the first 2,000 websites.

Although Cambridge Dictionary is higher up in the worldwide ranking, the total of visits the pages receive gives a victory to the Merriam-Webster dictionary. The Merriam-Webster dictionary (57,9M) received approximately 2,5 Million more visits than its British counterpart (55,4M).

Regarding the category rank, the system shows the highest stat of the webpage in its category (in this case, Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias). The Merriam-Webster ranks #8 in its home-country, whereas the Cambridge Dictionary ranks #2, but not in the UK, in Vietnam.

Lastly, another interesting fact is the average visit duration, which shows how much time viewers spend on the webpages. The Merriam-Webster dictionary has an average of one minute and 57 seconds, whereas the Cambridge dictionary has an average of five minutes and 28 seconds. As exposed previously in this paper, a possible reason may be the presentation of the entries, meaning the structure of the page. The colourful page, full of different explanations and different terms

related to the one searched may attract the visitor to stay longer on the page and search for more information. Another reason may be that users find the information quicker in the Merriam-Webster dictionary rather than in the Cambridge Dictionary.

Broadly speaking, the stats are more favourable to Cambridge Dictionary rather for Merriam-Webster dictionary. However, it is still relevant to reiterate the popularity of both dictionaries worldwide.

2.3 Procedure

The analysis process will be conducted on a category-by-category basis, by searching for each word in the respective dictionaries. The next step will be to analyse the definitions and examples to see how gender is presented in each case. In each sample word analysis, the first dictionary entry analysed will be from the Cambridge Dictionary, while the second one will be from the Merriam-Webster Dictionary.

In order to make the explanations concise, the Cambridge Dictionary will be referred to as CD and thus the Merriam-Webster Dictionary as MWD. This is common practice in lexicographic research.

3 Results and analysis

This section is dedicated to analysing the words from the sample. Each category of words is divided into a subsection and subsequently analysed.

3.1 Accessories

The first word of this category is *purse*. A purse is an accessory used mainly as a bag to carry money, documents, and cards around.

The definition given by the CD relies on the common concept for a purse, as an item worn by a woman. The definition goes as the following:

“a small container for money, **usually used** by a woman”

Here it is seen how the CD emphasizes that this is an accessory that tends to be used by a woman, in contrast to leaving the definition gender-neutral, as the MWD does:

“a small bag for money”/ “a receptacle (such as a pocketbook) for carrying money and often other small objects.”

The MWD leaves gender out of its definition, and so a purse becomes an accessory for everyone to wear.

The second word is *handbag*. Like purse, this is an accessory that has been attributed to women's wear.

As for the CD, in this case the definition does not use the expression ‘usually used’, but rather defines a handbag as an exclusive item for women.

“a bag **carried by a woman** with her money, keys, etc inside”

Once again, the MWD describes a handbag as an object that has no specific gender:

“a bag held in the hand or hung from a shoulder strap and used for carrying small personal articles and money”

From this previous analysis we can conclude that for this category of accessories that the entries in the CD have more gender specifications than the MWD.

3.2 Types of clothes

The first word is *skirt*. A *skirt* would be a piece of clothing that is tight around the hips or waist and contains both legs in a single hole.

The CD's definition makes clear that a skirt is a piece of clothing for women and girls, it goes as following:

“a piece of clothing **for women and girls** that hangs from the waist and does not have legs”

In the case of MWD, the two senses referring to the piece of clothing are different. The dictionary gives one gendered definition and one gender neutral. They read as following:

- a) “a free-hanging part of an outer garment or undergarment extending from the waist down”
- b) “a separate free-hanging outer garment or undergarment **usually worn by women** and girls covering some or all of the body from the waist down”

In this case, both dictionaries give a gendered definition, although MWD does include a gender-neutral definition.

A feature that could be considered in terms of skirts, is the existence of the Scottish *kilts*. Below this text is an example of a Scottish kilt. They are traditional from Scotland and are traditionally worn by men. They are not skirts but do share some features such as the shape.



Figure Example of Scottish kilt from kilts-4-u.com

The second piece of clothing is *crop top*. A crop top is a piece of clothing worn as a t-shirt in loose or tight way but that is shorter or half the length of a regular t-shirt.

The CD in this case attributes a crop top to women's wear exclusively. The definition goes as following:

“a piece of clothing for a woman's top half that does not cover her stomach”

In contrast, the MWD defines crop top as a piece of clothing that could be worn by anyone, it follows:

“a short upper-body garment that does not cover the midriff (mid region of the human torso)”

Once again, the MWD does free the term of any gender stereotype and so a crop top can be a piece of clothing for everyone.

Crop tops have been worn by men or women for quite some time now. An example of an influential male personality seen wearing a crop top is Will Smith. Will Smith appeared wearing a crop top on the TV series *The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air*, aired during the 90's.



Figure 3 Will Smith in the Fresh Prince of Bel-Air

3.3 Social Statuses

This category is dedicated to social statuses, meaning titles that could be applied to people.

The first word in the category is *host*. A *host* is someone who may be the organiser of a party, the owner of the place where an event is set.

First, the CD describes a *host* as *someone*, so it could be interpreted as either a man or a woman having guests. The definition goes as following.

“Someone who has guests.”

But the CD includes a note that reads “female also *hostess*”. In this case *hostess* has two definitions.

“**A woman** who has guests”

“**A woman** who entertains customers, **especially men**, at a nightclub”

The first definition would be obsolete, as *host* would be already a gender-neutral word, (by the point of view of the dictionary). The second definition seems to have a clear gender stereotype, where it appears that women are the ones that are supposed to accompany and please men.

As for the MWD, the definition is also gender neutral and does not include a note for a female word:

“A person who receives or entertains guests socially, commercially, or officially.”

But when doing a search of *hostess*, there are also a couple gender-stereotyped definitions:

“**A female** employee on a public conveyance (such as an airplane) who manages the provisioning of food and attends passengers.”

“**A woman** who acts as a partner or companion to **male patrons** in a dance hall or bar.”

The first definition will be approached later the next subsection, but the second one is similar to the CD one, women act again as entertainers of men.

From this example, it is clear that *host* is a gender-neutral word in both CD and MWD, but the female version has a gender stereotype, as the term is only applied to women but there is no reference vice versa.

The next word for the category is *adulterer*. The word is used for someone that cheats to their significant other with another person.

The CD defines the term as gender neutral. But once again it has a note redirecting the reader to *adulteress*.

“A married person who has sex with someone who is not their wife or husband.”

By a married person, it can be understood that it can be either a woman or a man. However, the examples of the word, which in this case is only one sentence, applies the term to one gender.

“Her **husband** was a compulsive adulterer.”

And then there is the issue with *adulteress*. The definition reads exactly the same as *adulterer*, but changes *person* to *woman*.

As for the MWD, the definition deviates from gender neutral to a stereotyped definition.

“a person who commits adultery
especially: **a man** who commits adultery”

Here the CD goes for a gender-neutral definition, although it shows *adulteress* in the same page. However, the only example given for the word is related to a man. The MWD ends up also taking the approach of a stereotype, thus making it almost a man-only thing.

The next word in the category is *hero*. A *hero* can be considered someone that is admired by many for his actions.

The CD describes the term as it could be either a man or a woman, but once again adds a note with the female term *heroine*.

“A person who is admired for having done something very brave or having achieved something great.”

Despite this, the examples given for the word are exclusively male. Also, the entry for *heroine* is the same as *hero*, but changing *person* for *woman*.

The MWD has a gender-neutral definition, same as the CD.

“A person admired for achievements and noble qualities.”

Here both dictionaries use a gender-neutral definition, but still the CD includes the female term in its main entry.

3.4 Professions

This category is dedicated to words related to professions or occupations of people.

The first two words are related, both tend to be professions typically found in households. *Butler* and *housekeeper*.

Starting with *butler*. A *butler* is someone that manages the workers of a household and maintains it.

The CD gives a gender-specific definition, making the profession of a *butler* only for males.

“The most important **male** servant in a house, usually responsible for organizing the other servants.”

The MWD also gives a male-only definition for the profession.

“The chief **male** servant of a household who has charge of other employees, receives guests, directs the serving of meals, and performs various personal services”

Now going into the word *housekeeper*. A *housekeeper* is someone that takes care of the household and its workers.

The definition given by the CD has quite a big stereotype that is very controversial these days.

“A person, especially a **woman**, whose job is to organize another person's house and deal with cooking, cleaning, etc.

It is quite one of the biggest stereotypes given to women. Society from past centuries succeeded making clear that women's only commitment was to make their husband happy, keep the household duties (most related to the stereotype are cooking and cleaning) and have kids and raise them. That is something today's society is trying to change, a battle to reach equality.

Fortunately, the MWD uses a gender-neutral definition for *housekeeper*.

“One employed to manage the domestic duties involved in maintaining a house.”

“A member of a household who manages the domestic duties of the household.”

This is a start to help the change in language to a more gender-neutral language.

The next words are also related. *Master* and *mistress* may be used to call someone an owner of something or prodigious.

The difference here are the gender implications. Master in the CD is described as a person who controls something or someone (employees).

Examples of the definitions of the different meanings:

“The person who owns, cares for, and controls an animal.”

“A person who is very skilled in a particular job or activity.”

The word *master* to designate an animal owner may be a bit old-fashioned, it is not quite commonly used, at least by non-native English speakers.

The MWD also gives gender neutral definitions for *master*, though it does include the word as referring to a male teacher, which the CD marks as an old-fashioned term.

Examples of the definitions are:

“One having authority over another.”

“One having control.”

“An owner especially of an animal.”

One can conclude that the word *master* is used to denote control over something.

As for *mistress*, there word has some gender stereotypes. The CD has the same definitions for someone that is in control or something or owns an animal, but there are other implications in the word. The gender stereotype is related to a woman being unfaithful to her significant other.

“**A woman** who has a sexual relationship over a long period of time with a man who is not her husband”

“**A woman** who is having a sexual relationship with a married man.”

The MWD has included the gender-stereotyped definition but does include more definitions that denote women with power and ability, notable.

“**A woman** who possesses, owns, or controls something.”

“**A woman** who has achieved mastery in some field.”

“**A woman** other than his wife with whom a married man has a continuing sexual relationship.”

After this analysis, once again the female version of a word has a gender stereotype, for which males do not have an equivalent known, it may be necessary to use another word such as one mentioned before, *adulterer*. After the analysis, the word *master*, which may have been related to men in the past, is evolving into a gender-neutral term, but there is much to do still with *mistress*, starting with its gender stereotype.

The next word in the category is *comedian*. A *comedian* is someone that makes a living out of comedy or has a talent for comedy.

The CD here goes with a gender-neutral definition, with and only example also being gender-neutral.

“*A person* whose job is to make people laugh by telling jokes and funny stories or by copying the behaviour or speech of famous people.”

Interestingly, the CD has a note for the female *comediienne* but does not have an entry on the dictionary to support it.

The MWD also has a gender-neutral definition but does have an entry for *comediienne*.

“A professional entertainer who uses any of various physical or verbal means to be amusing.”

All in all, *comedian* can be considered a word for both sexes, although *comediienne* is still in use but strangely does not have an entry in the CD.

Next word is *hunter*. A *hunter* is someone that hunts prey or is looking for something lost. The CD keeps the definition gender neutral but if we search for what would be the female term, *huntress*, it does not have an entry.

“A person or an animal that hunts animals for food or for sport.”

As for the MWD, the definition is still gender-neutral and has an entry for *huntress* if you search for it.

“A person who hunts game.”

“One that searches for something.”

After the analysis seems that *hunter* is a widespread word. In this case the CD did not have an entry for the female term *huntress* unlike the MWD.

The next word in the category is *firefighter*. A *firefighter* is someone that extinguishes fires and rescues people.

Firefighter is relatively a new word. The word to describe someone that extinguishes fires used to be *fireman* or *tender* or *fireman*. This is an example of language evolution. For

example, the CD defines the term *firefighter* as a gender-neutral term but it does include a note that redirects the reader to *fireman* below the definition, being that almost identical to *firefighter* but designated to men.

“A person whose job is to stop fires from burning.”

“A **man** whose job is to stop unwanted fires from burning.”

But the case of the MWD is special, when you search for *firefighter*, it gives you a gender-neutral definition and also redirects you to *fireman*. When you go to *fireman*, it gives more senses of the word keeping it gender-neutral also.

“A person who fights fires.”

“A member of a fire department.”

Concluding the analysis, it seems like the word *firefighter* is more widespread. However, the CD keeps the definition of a *fireman* as being a profession for men.

Next word on the category is *flight attendant*. A *flight attendant* is someone that works on a plane helping the passengers get to their seats provide them for food and assist them during the flight. *Flight attendant* is the language evolution of *steward* and *stewardess*, which has been the terms used to name the workers on a plane.

In this case the CD gives a gender-neutral definition for *flight attendant* but has a note that redirects the reader to the word *steward*.

“Someone who serves passengers on an aircraft.”

Whereas the definition for *steward* is gender neutral, and the one for *stewardess* is marked as old fashioned.

“A steward on an aircraft, ship, or train is someone who helps and serves passengers.”

“**A woman** flight attendant”

For the MWD, the definition of *flight attendant* and *steward* are gender-neutral but the definition of *stewardess* is referred as the one performing the duties of a *steward* by a woman.

“A person who attends passengers on an airplane.”

“An employee on a ship, airplane, bus, or train who manages the provisioning of food and attends passengers.”

“A woman who performs the duties of a steward especially: one who attends passengers (as on an airplane).”

4 Discussion

4.1 Results and interesting points

For this sample of words CD has more gender stereotyped examples. From this we could possibly extrapolate that UK monolingual English dictionaries exhibit more gender stereotyped words than US ones. This is possibly due to the differences in the evolution of the movement for gender neutral language in both countries. The CD still highlights the female word, a factor that may not let the gender-neutral word be the representative for both genders and non-binary people.

In this analysis there are interesting gender stereotypes and implications. Examples from the sample are the pair *butler* and *housekeeper*, and the female for *host*, *hostess*.

The pair *butler* and *housekeeper*, despite being words which represent the same profession for men and women, are different in meaning. They both refer to someone that manages a household, including the personnel and house duties. The CD uses one of the most common stereotypes/implications for women: that they are responsible for cooking and cleaning. Despite being the same profession, the CD still feeds this stereotype/implication which has been in society for a long time. This definition does not help the fight for gender equality and the eradication of stereotypes imposed by narrow-minded past societies. The second interesting implication is for the female *hostess*. They describe a *hostess* as a woman who accompanies men in nightclubs. Both dictionaries give importance to such and implication for a word, an implication which does not apply vice versa. It certainly puts an implication on women who work in nightlife, when men and women can work in nightlife.

Something to discuss is whether dictionaries should mark the typical use of the word or the possible uses of a word. Language does not stop evolving since society marks the pacing of language evolution. An example is the gender-neutral language movement, which starts from the streets and reaches up to the authorities. From the sample of words, we have the example of a *crop top*. It is a piece of clothing that could be considered as 'commonly worn by women', but reflecting on society these days, it can be worn by everyone. There is still the problem of implications that can be put on men who wear *crop tops*. Disrespectful people would make fun of a man for simply wearing what makes them comfortable and happy, because they cannot bear the idea that there can be no gender when it comes to clothing.

This all relates to the aims of my project and my research question. Following the results from the words of the sample, the objective has been achieved. It is clear that the CD

tends to use gender-stereotyped definitions rather than gender-neutral, and the MWD keeps on the gender-neutral side.

4.2 Limitations

4.2.1 Limitations related to time and resources

Before carrying out the research many factors had to be considered. The time and the resources to develop this project were two of the main factors to have in mind. Once the structure of this project was figured, which follows the model of Norri (2019), the sample of the words could not be very large. Having in mind the time available to complete the project, 15 different words were selected based on their potential to exhibit gender stereotypes. It is not a relatively large sample of words but not a small one either. It is also suitable for this project due to the maximum of pages required. As the sample could not be very large, the materials used could not be either. Having in mind the space and time available, only two dictionaries were used, which were selected by their popularity.

The fact that the analysis is only based in two dictionaries limits the results that could be obtained and their generalisability. Similarly, because the editions of dictionaries used in this project are the latest ones issued in the online dictionaries, a comparison of definitions through time from previous editions, comparing the evolution of the words was not possible. However, these limitations could be rectified in the future as this project is one of many that have been conducted and those that are to come.

4.2.2 Limitations related to prior knowledge

Now this project has been finished, it is safe to say that it has been influenced by many factors. This project falls in the field of lexicography, which could be summarised as the study of language used to put together, critique and edit dictionaries. This was a new field of study for the researcher. Although it caught her uninformed, it was fairly straightforward to get to know the basic notions of lexicography. Similarly, the topic of gender is also a new field of interest for the researcher. In both fields, using the right vocabulary has been a significant concern, as vocabulary for both fields is very specific. However, thanks to many articles and publications of different authors, and the help of the tutor, this research project has been completed.

Another possible drawback for this project is the outsider perspective, the fact of observing another culture from a totally different social environment. Future studies may be able to include natives from the UK and the US, as a way of complimenting the studies with real-time insight from the community. However, it is worth noting that the outsider perspective could be treated as a way to be objective during the analysis. Surely there will be studies that will analyse this topic further and thus complementing the ones already existing.

4.3 Conclusions

General purpose, non-historical, dictionaries should reflect how language is used in society. In this changing world, dictionaries should reflect the different uses of a word, for example marking the most common use. The entries should include the different uses and examples that make the context of the word clear. A dictionary should reflect the

different ways a word can be used, for those in search of meaning and different words to speak or write without offending anyone.

This research proves that it is important to consider which words or definitions should be used. It is also important to take a glimpse of how perhaps thanks to their cultural background, the UK and the US treat gender in dictionaries. The gender-neutral movement is something that started with the people in the street and shall climb to the highest spheres to spread it even wider. Society is changing and it can not be stopped.

In my opinion, we should all evolve with society. Adapt to the new ways of thinking and try to find balance in this world.

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