
Underlying principles of *Gentyll* English-Spanish non-sexist glossaries: A response to a need

Mercedes Bengoechea & María Rosa Cabellos

Keywords: *sexist lexicography, feminist guidelines, non-sexist occupational titles, Spanish sexed terms, neutral English, gender-aware glossaries.*

Abstract

Our research team¹ has elaborated a series of Spanish/English glossaries of specialized terms for man and woman in various subject fields which can be consulted online at <http://gentyll.uah.es/glossaries.html>. The glossaries aim to challenge traditional sexist practices in terminology and lexicography, and follow the recommendations for non-sexist usage issued by various institutions, agencies and scholars. It is a project still in progress which aims to be expanded into more subject fields and languages.

The aim of this paper is twofold: on the one hand, to highlight the necessity of gender aware alternatives to existing terminology databases and dictionaries, and, on the other, to facilitate an understanding of the principles that we have adopted in our glossaries –principles consistent with our criticism to existing lexicographical and terminological resources.

1. Sexism in women's occupational titles in current on-line resources

We are aware that we are not the first ones to denounce sexist and androcentric discourses in terminology banks/dictionaries. Original may not be, but our criticism is probably still valid, as, even when lexicographers and terminologists have shown themselves receptive to feminist claims, they have not always incorporated social and verbal changes to their products.

Our investigation shows that some English-Spanish terminology banks and dictionaries maintain a biased representation of women decades after extensive feminist criticism. Our concern here is specifically women's professional and specialized naming. We heavily criticize three facts:

1.1. *Asymmetry in the discourse of definitions in the representation of the sexes*

Some female and male (theoretically) dual terms appear in different entries in dictionaries/glossaries. In those cases the definition of the former as compared to the latter is often biased (Vargas et al 1998)²:

- (1) **sportsman**. 1. a man who takes part in sports, esp. of the outdoor type, 2. a person who exhibits qualities highly regarded in sport, such as fairness, generosity, observance of the rules, and good humour when losing.

sportswoman. a woman who takes part in sports, esp. of the outdoor type.

(<http://dictionary.reverso.net/>)

More importantly, when the female and the male terms appear in different entries, there is a tendency in lexicographical discourse to assign professional names, titles, positions and activities to men *per se*, and relegate women to a position outside the limits of the meaning of the profession. Women 'perform men's jobs' or 'hold men's positions' –seemingly, 'acting as', but not really belonging (Bengoechea 2008):

- (2) **steward.** 1. a person who administers the property, house, finances, etc., of another; 2. a person who manages the eating arrangements, staff, or service at a club, hotel, etc.; 3. a waiter on a ship or aircraft; 4. a mess attendant in a naval mess afloat or ashore; 5. a person who helps to supervise some event or proceedings in an official capacity

stewardess. A woman who performs a steward's job on an aircraft or ship.

(<http://dictionary.reverso.net/>)

- (3) **alcaldesa.** 1. f. Mujer que ejerce el cargo de alcalde. [**mayor-fem.** 1. fem. A woman holding the office of mayor-masc.]

alcalde. 1. m. Presidente del ayuntamiento de un pueblo o término municipal, encargado de ejecutar sus acuerdos, dictar bandos para el buen orden, salubridad y limpieza de la población, y cuidar de todo lo relativo a la Policía urbana. Es además, en su grado jerárquico, delegado del Gobierno en el orden administrativo. [**mayor-masc.** 1. masc. President-he of the town hall of a village or municipal territory, in charge of executing his agreements, dictating edicts for the order, salubriousness and cleanliness of the town, and taking care of matters related to the municipal police. He is also, hierarchically speaking, a delegate of the Government in the administrative order.]

(<http://buscon.rae.es/draeI/>)

Some other times, the male term is provided as universal, leaving aside the female term as subordinate:

- (4) **mayor.** The most important elected official in a town or city

mayoress. A woman mayor

(<http://www.macmillandictionary.com/>)

1.2. *Male as representative of human activities*

In bilingual dictionaries/terminology banks, this androcentric approach reveals itself in occupational titles in two ways:

1.2.1. *For Spanish, women's naming is not normally provided.* Bilingual, trilingual or multilingual terminology banks available for translation into Spanish (or into other languages, such as French) tend to subsume women to men by providing the masculine term for person denomination:

- (5) (EN) managerial employee / (ES) empleado de gestión / (FR) cadre

(<http://wtoterm.wto.org/>)

- (6) (EN) border worker / (ES) trabajador fronterizo

(<http://www.imf.org/external/np/term/esl/pdf/glossarys.pdf>)

Androcentric orientation can be found even in English for compound nouns with *-man/-woman*:

- (7) (EN) bondsman / (ES) aval, avalista

(<http://www.spanish-translator-services.com>)

Given the sociolinguistic complexity of gender formation in Spanish (Harris 1991), it may be not transparent or automatic for translators to produce the feminine term.

1.2.2. *When women's term is provided, often it is not accurate or it is flawed.* In the following example, from sport terminology, note the sexist inaccuracy of the French and Spanish terms: e.g. they are not 'árbitras'/'arbitres' ['referee-fem'], in the feminine, both standard terms, but 'árbitros femeninos'/'arbitres féminins' ['feminine-masc referee-masc'], in the masculine. It follows that all articles and participles should agree in the masculine too, something grammatically unacceptable:

- (8) (EN) female referees / (ES) árbitros femeninos / arbitres féminins
(EN) referee / (ES) árbitro / (FR) arbitre
(Ordoño Muñoz 2004, Vol. 1 [English-Spanish-French], 16.Karate)

1.3. *Failure in updating*

Languages have undergone a deep transformation in gender representation. Feminist proposals together with changes in social mores and gender relations have resulted in relatively successful language reforms, both in English (Cooper 1989; Pauwels 1997) and Spanish (Nissen 2002; Velasco, Vázquez and Ibáñez 2009). However, the new trends and the new social values have been either ignored in resources available for translators, or not sufficiently covered. Users do not find information on gender matters which might help translators to decide on which term to choose. Our claim is that this information is always desirable, often a must.

The policy of non-sexist English has been directed at banning job titles marked with feminine suffixes (e.g. 'hostess', 'usherette') and advocating terms which are neutral or unmarked for sex ('chair', 'usher'). But rarely do English dictionaries/terminology banks provide a note stating the changes that female terms with 'special' suffixes have undergone: Nouns with *-ess* endings are seen by many (i.e. all guidelines for academic writing in most universities in English speaking countries) as 'non-standard'; with *-ette* endings as 'a female imitation of the real thing' (Miller and Swift 1995: 135-9). It is our claim that a gender aware note, similar to existing notes on obsolescence, formality, literary style or dialectal variation, would be welcome, but it is not to be found in resources for English:

- (9) **actor**, (fem) **actress**. A person who acts in a play, film, broadcast, etc.
(<http://dictionary.reverso.net/>)

- (10) **acomodador,-ora** *m,f (hombre)* usher; (*mujer*) usherette
(<http://www.wordreference.com/>)

- (11) **usherette**. A female usher. (ES) *acomodadora*.
acomodadora. (EN) *usherette*
(<http://www.wordmagicsoft.com/>)

As for Spanish, since double-gendered nouns referring to human beings reflect the male-female distinction, non-sexist Spanish has attempted to feminize all occupation titles for women and make sex-specific female terms which are not always included in the standard Spanish dictionary.

Failure in updating terminological banks and dictionaries surely has an impact on translation, which will likely be more biased and conservative than it would be, should dictionaries provide information differently.

2. *Gentyll* glossaries principles

We hope to have revealed the need for gender aware glossaries and dictionaries. As a by-product of our criticism, and as a way to counterbalance some of the existing resources criticized above, we undertook the compilation of new glossaries (*Gentyll*) following a set of postulates which are consistent with our criticism. Namely:

- Making sexual difference visible in the data bases. This entails specific female representation, not only male, so as to challenge androcentric bias ruling that men stand for human species.
- Treating the sexes in a symmetrical way, even graphically –occupying similar space, in parallel columns, not as merely an inflectional morpheme (e.g. *-ta*).
- Following anti-sexist policies in both languages. For English this means that identical terms for men and for women are offered as a first choice, except in terms with *-man/-woman*, *-boy/-girl* suffixes, in which case, these are parallel, with a note stating that the masculine does not represent both. If records show that neutral forms have been developed to substitute gender specific ones, these are offered too. If terms considered sexist are still in use (e.g. ‘actress’, ‘waitress’, ‘mistress’), they are offered with a note stating it. In general, a note about what is considered sexist naming in the 2010s accompanies the term when applicable.
- Always providing the feminine term in Spanish, even if the Spanish Academy has not shown their preferences yet or if the term has not been recorded to have been used³. Users will find an indication of what is considered sexist, and what is still of common use in spite of feminist proposals (e.g. ‘la fiscal’, ‘la juez’). For terms the Spanish Academy has had their say about, normative options are marked as preferable, but feminist proposals are also offered when they do not coincide with the Spanish Academy’s recommendations.

We are well aware that these glossaries offer only temporary proposals for some entries. Our languages and societies are currently immersed in a process of profound changes and terms for women which were accepted years ago have not lived long (e.g. ‘la presidente’, ‘the chairman’). And vice versa, terms the normative authorities feminized some time ago have not found social acceptance (e.g. ‘fiscala’ [‘attorney-fem’]). Therefore our glossaries must be regularly checked and updated.

Notes

¹ Project funded by the Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación (FEM2009-10976). We also thank the mobility grant awarded by Caja Madrid.

² All quotes from on-line resources were consulted in November 2011. The examples have been collected from some of the most frequently consulted. Not all of them are characterized by all the features we denounce, but most resources share most features discussed here.

³ Methodology for collecting data and criteria for incorporating neologisms will be presented shortly.

References

- Bengoechea, M. 2008.** ‘Textualización de una identidad genérica femenina homogeneizada: Rasgos esencialistas en el Diccionario de la RAE.’ In A. Davies, P. Kumaraswami and C. Williams (eds.), *Making Waves*. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholar Publishing, 71–91.
- Cooper, R. L. 1989.** *Language Planning and Social Change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Harris, J. W. 1991.** ‘The exponence of gender in Spanish.’ *Linguistic Inquiry* 22.1: 27–62.
- Miller, C. and K. Swift 1995.** *The Handbook of Non-Sexist Writing*. (3rd edition.) London: The Women’s Press.
- Nissen, U. K. 2002.** “Gender in Spanish. Tradition and innovation”. In M. Hellinger and H. Bußmann (eds.), *Gender across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, vol. 2. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 251–280.
- Ordoño Muñoz, A. 2004.** *32 léxicos trilingües de deportes y medios de comunicación para los Juegos Olímpicos y Mediterráneos*, 3 vols. Almería: Asociación de Prensa de Almería and TCI.
- Pauwels, A. 1997.** ‘Of “Mses”, “Chairmen” and “Retromen”: Linguistic change in the media and the community.’ *Australian Language Matters* April/May/June: 3.
- Vargas, A., E. Lledó Cunill, M. Bengoechea, M. Mediavilla, I. Rubio, A. Marco and C. Alario 1998.** *Lo femenino y lo masculino en el Diccionario de la Real Academia Española*. Madrid: Ministerio de Trabajo y Asuntos Sociales. Instituto de la Mujer.
- Velasco, M. L., D. Vázquez and M. Ibáñez 2009.** *El cambio lingüístico en la educación en los últimos años en España*. Madrid: Instituto de la Mujer.