

Gender Sensitivity in Specialized Communication: A preliminary corpus-based study of the LSP in Economics

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Abstract

Specialized communication tends to be described as impersonal, objective, ideologically neutral and emotionless. This claim, however, needs to be reanalyzed in terms of the often-described ideological component mainly associated with social meaning. This article continues a very recent tradition demanding that ideology should be unveiled in every particular text, including those typically associated with specialized communication. By studying two small subcorpora of economics texts, this article analyzes two basic aspects of the English gender system: one dealing with terminology; the other examining generic reference. The results obtained, although very preliminary, seem to suggest that the so-called gender bias can also be found in specialized texts, which prompt us to propose the development of a new perspective within LSP: gender sensitivity in specialized communication.

Key words: Gender, Economics English, terminology, Critical Discourse Analysis

Resumen

Suele afirmarse que en la comunicación especializada predomina el componente proposicional frente al resto de las funciones del lenguaje, lo que hace que podamos caracterizar a la comunicación especializada por su estilo objetivo, impersonal y desprovisto de ideología y emoción. Esta idea, sin embargo, está empezando a ser revisada, fundamentalmente en aquellos lenguajes de especialidad en los que el componente cultural es importante, como es el caso del lenguaje económico. En este artículo, en el que se analizan dos subcorpora de textos económicos, estudiamos dos componentes básicos del sistema de género inglés, el léxico y el sistema pronominal utilizado para indicar referencia genérica. Aunque los resultados son muy preliminares, parece deducirse que el sistema de género es un componente ideológico importante en los textos analizados, lo que nos anima a sugerir la necesidad de incorporar dicho concepto al análisis de la comunicación especializada.

Palabras clave: Género, Inglés Económico, terminología, Análisis Crítico del Discurso

Introduction

Hewings (2002) comments that the history of a discipline can be traced in the pages of the journals in which its teachers and researchers publish. An analysis, for example, of *English for Specific Purposes* will indicate that the teaching of ESP has been a lively and stimulating part of English Language Teaching (ELT). Throughout its history, ESP teaching has emphasized that it aims to develop procedures

appropriate to learners whose main objective is learning English for a purpose other than just learning the language system. That purpose may be educational, or may be professional, and ESP seeks its justification on how well it prepares learners to fulfill the purpose required of them. (Dudley-Evans, 2000: 3)

As a consequence of the above-mentioned relationship, ESP has not produced its own theory of learning; rather, it has concentrated on upgrading the quality of its teaching materials, and on evaluating its degree of success in terms of learning outcomes. No teaching methodology, however, can exist separate from a view of language and of how language learners learn a language. ESP is no exception; thus, it must be stressed that ESP cannot be seen as a separate enterprise, but “rather as embedded in and contributing to many traditions and developments in language teaching and applied linguistics” (McDonough, 1998: 106). For example, it has contributed to the development of *register analysis*, *needs analysis*, the *communicative approach*, and *text analysis*.

Although Communicative theory has had far reaching consequences for the whole of language teaching, Dudley-Evans (2000: 2) argues that attempts to define ESP through the communicative nature of its teaching have not produced very satisfactory results. In his view a much more promising approach to a theory of ESP should come from text analysis, particularly because ESP activity is mainly linked to genre analysis, a theoretical approach developed by, among others, Swales (1990) and Bhatia (1993, 2002).

Research on genre analysis has shown that discourse communities have expectations and conventions which should be taken into consideration to achieve the main goal of LSP communication: to disseminate ideas, set hypothesis, falsify statements or theories, etc. Contrary to Swales' (1990) initial CARS model, Dudley-Evans (2000) maintains that current research on genre analysis not only assumes the existence of variation within and among disciplines, but also concentrates on two research

directions: (i) the concept of discourse community and of actual discourse communities in practice; (ii) the analysis of specific features of language as used in particular genres in order to get a specific communicative goal. For example, the often-mentioned claim that the main purpose of professional communication is to present information in an objective and impersonal way (Swales, 1998; Palmer, 1999).

Proponents of this impersonal style maintain that this purpose is achieved, mainly, by a combination of different communication strategies. Some of them are purely grammatical –and tend to “deflect attention away from the people engaged in research activity and focus on its outcome” (Hewings & Hewings, 2002: 367). Others are pragmatics in nature and are used for persuading addressees of the validity of the position adopted by addressers. One of these devices is often referred to as *metadiscourse*, which is defined as any linguistic device by which readers are helped to organize, evaluate and interpret the propositional content of the message conveyed (Hyland, 1998b; 1999; Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Hewings & Hewings, 2002). What these researchers do is to consider different grammatical features under a new perspective: their (possible) predominantly metadiscoursal role. Hewings and Hewings (2002), for example, analyze ‘*it*-clauses’, ? these clauses have been found to be relatively frequent in academic writing (Biber et al., 1999) ? which function to “both express opinions and to comment on and evaluate propositions in a way that allows the writer to remain in the background” (Hewings & Hewings, 2002: 368). In other words, they have excluded from consideration clauses in which initial ‘*it*’ functions as pronoun, in cleft sentences (e.g. ‘It was on examination of the corpus that differences were observed’), as dummy or prop ‘*it*’ (e.g. ‘It’s raining’), and when ‘*it*’ anticipates a following object clause (e.g. “I put it to you that the argument is incorrect”). They justify the choice of ‘*it*-clauses’ over non-extraposed variants on both non-rhetorical and rhetorical motivations. The former assumes that longer subjects are more commonly located at the end of the clause. Rhetorical motivations are based on three reasons. First, as examples of comment clauses, ‘*it*-clauses’ (e.g. ‘It is said’) are used as hedging devices (Hyland, 1998a), i.e., as devices for distancing the writer from the propositional content expressed in the following ‘*that*-clause’. Second, ‘*it*-clauses’ with adjective complementation (e.g. ‘It is surprising’) allows the writer to encode an evaluation which influences the interpretation of the following ‘*that*-’, ‘*to*-infinitive’, or ‘*wh*-clause’. Third, the choice of ‘*it*-clauses’ over a construction with a personal pronoun allows the writer to despersonalize opinions (Hewings & Hewings, 2002).

In our opinion, the above claim should be reanalyzed in terms of the (possible) existence of an ideological component in languages. In line with the Whorfian tradition, different authors (Hymes, 1974) acknowledge the central role played by language in human activities and emphasize that language possesses both social and referential meanings. It seems interesting, then, to investigate if ideology is also a crucial component of specialized communication. To accomplish this endeavor, this article follows recent attempts in introducing the question of ‘gender sensitivity’ in specialized languages (Bowker, 2001). We begin by presenting the concept of ideology in language. Then we summarize the state of the art on gender research, comment some preliminary results obtained in a corpus of Economic texts, and present possible lines of research for the future.

Language and Ideology

The question of language and ideology is related to the term ‘discourse’ and the method of linguistic inquiry called ‘discourse analysis’. Both terms, however, have been used in various ways by different linguists. Chng (2002) summarizes some current uses of both terms:

- (i) For the Birmingham school, ‘discourse’ is associated only with *oral* linguistic exchanges, and is used in this context to designate a level of analysis that is higher in rank than the sentence. ‘Discourse analysis’ is hence the method of analysis which characterizes entire classroom exchanges into moves and acts (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975).
- (ii) For Halliday (1989), ‘discourse’ is both spoken and written. Attention is paid not just to classroom talk, but extends also to stretches of discourse as widely differing as literary genres and therapeutic discourse. In this framework, ‘discourse analysis’ is concerned with interpreting the social meaning of language in context. Hallidayan scholars are, therefore, engaged in detailing the paradigmatic potentials of the linguistic system and the social and political functions of syntagmatic realizations within the network of a semantic-grammar of discursive choices.
- (iii) For Sherzer (1990) ‘discourse’ stems from Hymes’ ‘ethnography of speaking’ in that ‘discourse’ is said to be a constitutive part of social interaction. Instead of being just another level of analysis, ‘discourse’ is, most importantly, the means which shapes communal life and defines experience and history, and is the medium in which cultural logic is expressed. This particular emphasis on

- the constitutive nature of discourse is extremely important because it locates discourse or language in the midst of culture and society, thus echoing the Sapir-Whorf view of the interpretation of language and worldview;
- (iv) For Foucault ‘discourse’ may be distinguished from all the above in that Foucauldian discourse is spoken of in relation to the much more abstract concept of “discursive formation” (Foucault, 1972) ‘Discourse’ is thus bound up in power relations and knowledge structures, a view that has been more recently expressed within linguistics by, for example, Fairclough (1992).

What emerges from the above discussion is that instead of a standard language ideology,¹ discursive practices should be viewed “not only in terms of *how* individuals interact or *what* is being conveyed, but also in terms of *why* individuals do what they do” (Chng, 2002: 7; her emphasis). This implies taking into account the purpose-driven nature of language use as situated within a specific local and/or global socio-cultural and ideological-political background. In other words, speakers and writers employ language as an instrument to construct some preferred version of ‘reality’ along the lines of linguistic and cultural categories that are to some extent already inscribed in the language that is used. The basic tenet of critical linguistics, then, is that language use is influenced by ideological motivations and that choices are made in the context of economic, political and ideological realities. In the words of van Dijk (1998: 6), if “we want to know what ideologies actually look like, how they work, and how they are created, changed and reproduced, we need to look closely at their discursive manifestations”. To uncover one of these categories, gender, we devote the rest of our article. In our view this intent on introducing the concept of ‘gender sensitivity’ in specialized languages is justified not only because language users intend to achieve the control of a particular version of ‘reality’ through discursive negotiations, but also because professional communities are no longer male havens. In Spain, for example, there are more female than male doctors.

Language and Gender

Although the analysis of the concept of ‘gender and language’ continues the tradition started in the 1960s, very different premises are being used in today’s research. Instead of the ‘difference’ and ‘dominance’ assumptions of the 1970s and 1980s (Thorne & Henley, 1975; Spender, 1980; Fuertes Olivera, 1992), recent approaches attempt to study the issue of ‘language and gender’ from two different views, one

more structural, and the other more functional (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001a). Both hypothesize that the different formal and functional manifestations of gender in some areas –for example in the area of human reference– follow general, and perhaps universal principles in the world’s languages.

With respect to the structural properties of individual languages, Hellinger and Bußmann (2001b) enumerate the aims and scope of the international research project ‘Gender across Languages’ centered in systematically investigating “the linguistic representation of women and men in 30 languages of very different structural and socio-cultural backgrounds”. These are:

- Does the language have grammatical gender, and –if so– what are the consequences for agreement, coordination, pronominalization and word-formation, and more specifically, for the linguistic representation of women and men?
- In the absence of grammatical gender, what are possible ways of expressing female-specific, male-specific or gender-indefinite personal reference?
- Can asymmetries be identified in the area of human reference which may be interpreted as the result of the choice of the masculine/male as the default gender?
- What is the empirical evidence for the claim that in neutral contexts masculine/male expressions are perceived as generic and bias-free?
- Does the language contain idiomatic expressions, metaphors, proverbs and the like which are indicative of gender-related socio-cultural hierarchies or stereotypes? (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001b: 2).

The socio-cultural background is the concern of two related manifestations of the functional paradigm: (i) The Community of Practice; (ii) The Critical Discourse Analysis. The former hinges on sociological views which emphasize the dynamics of gender as a social construct interrelating with other different social aspects (for example, class, race, age, ethnic group), demanding also analysis of non-white, non-western populations interacting in a single or more than one language. Bucholtz (1999: 203), for example, claims that as an ethnographic, activity-based approach, the Community of Practice is compatible with current theories of identity and allows “identities to be explained as the result of positive and negative identity practices rather than as fixed social categories, as in the speech-community model” (Bucholtz, 1999: 203). In sum, they defend that whatever

generalizations about language and gender may ultimately be made, they will shift the focus – away from attributes, and toward actions, strategies, and values; away from properties that women and men might have, and toward their social practices and social relations, both same-sex and cross-sex. (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1999: 198)

The Critical Discourse Analysis follows Kress and Hodge (1979), Mey (1985), Fairclough (1989, 1992), and van Dijk (1993). It offers a broader perspective by relating communicative action to political economic considerations of power and social inequality. Proponents of this approach study the role played by ideology and hegemony in the construction of social and global inequality. They have demonstrated that powerful elites have special access to discourse, that they exert powerful decision-making and linguistic control via courts, law, police enforcement, media, etc., that the mass media impose image and constructions of behavior, and that politically correct discourse does not permeate a text, but stops at the surface of the argumentation (van Dijk, 1993; Johnson & Meinhof, 1997; Velasco Sacristán, 2003).

In our view the concept of ‘language and gender’ as previously explained can be adequately used for introducing a feminist perspective on specialized languages. As Pauwels (2001) says, there is no doubt that feminism has been and continues to be one of the main social movements of this century. The feminist movement strives, among other things, for the elimination of gender discrimination and for the greater recognition of women’s contributions to society as well as aims to change many cultural and social practices which perpetuate patriarchal value systems.

Gender in English

Among the languages which exhibit systems of nominal classification, classifier languages and noun class languages constitute the two major types (Corbett, 1991). The defining category of noun class languages is the existence of a number of classes which consistently structure the entire nominal lexicon. One of these classes is ‘gender’, typically linked to the sex of the referent or to socio-cultural assumptions. Thus, recent research on the issue of ‘gender and language’ analyses four categories of gender: *grammatical gender*, *lexical gender*, *referential gender*, and *social gender* (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001b: 6).

Grammatical gender is an inherent property of the noun which controls agreement “between the noun (the controller) and some (gender-variable) satellite element (the

target) which may be an article, adjective, pronoun, verb, numeral or preposition” (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001b: 7). *Lexical gender* refers to the existence of lexical units such as *mother*, *son*, etc. carrying the semantic property [female] or [male] respectively, which may in turn relate to the extra-linguistic category of referential gender (or “sex of referent”).² *Referential gender* relates linguistic expressions to the non-linguistic reality; more specifically, referential gender identifies a referent as “female”, “male” or “gender-indefinite”. Finally, *social gender* refers “to the socially imposed dichotomy of masculine and feminine roles and character traits” (Kramarae & Treichler, 1985: 173).

1. Lexical expressions of gender in English

English grammars (Quirk et al., 1985; Biber et al., 1999), indicate that there are lexical pairs with male v. female denotation, chiefly among words for family relationships (*mother* – *father*), social roles (*queen* – *king*), and animals (*cow* – *bull*). The masculine feminine distinction may be made explicit by formal markers (Biber et al., 1999: 312):

- (i) gender-specific premodification such as male nurse v. female doctor.
- (ii) compounding with a gender specific element such as chairman
- (iii) use of gender –specific derivational endings, such as actress.

With respect to the English language, some of the conclusions drawn merit a brief commentary:

- (i) Many of the instances of lexical gender in English constitute examples of social gender. It consists in the fact that many higher-status occupational terms such as *lawyer*, *surgeon*, or *scientist* will frequently be conceptualized as male, whereas low-status occupational titles such as *nurse*, *secretary*, or *schoolteacher* will often be identified as female. Social gender, then, has to do with stereotypical assumptions about what are appropriate social roles for women and men, including expectations about who will be a typical member of the class of, say, *surgeon* or *nurse*. Deviations from such assumptions will often require overt formal markings, as in English *female surgeon* or *male nurse*. In short, the underlying principle of social gender is ‘male as norm’. The above conclusion has been drawn from the analysis of different corpora. Biber et al. (1999: 312-313) comment that data from the LSWE Corpus3 confirm that English speakers and writers use far more words ending in *–man* than in *–woman*, and that “a similar distribution is found for words with gender-specific derivational endings, with most masculine forms being much more common than the

- parallel feminine terms” (Biber et al., 1999: 313). They add that there are two factors associated with these patterns: (i) this skewed distribution reflects societal differences in the typical roles of men and women, where men still hold more positions of power and authority than women; (ii) the differences in language use reflect a linguistic bias, because masculine terms can often be used as duals, to refer to men and women, but not vice versa.
- (ii) English does not have true generics, not only because *man* tends to be perceived specific rather than generic but also because English speakers and writers use far more words ending in *-man* than in *-woman*: In the LSWE corpus, for example, Biber et al. (1999: 313) report that there are 620 nouns ending in *-man* per one million word, and only 38 ending in *-woman*. Similarly, Romaine (2001) shows that *chairman* and *spokesman* are still prevailing titles in the British National Corpus (BNC), and that the use of a supposedly generic form does not lead to generic reference: for example, looking at the first 50 examples of *chairperson* she found that only half the uses were generic; that is, they referred to the office rather than a particular person holding it. She, however, also adds that there is evidence of changing usage, and that reference to women exhibits the greatest variability in that only women can be referred to with all 5 titles: *chairman*, *chairwoman*, *chairperson*, *Madam chairman*, and *chairlady*.
- (iii) Gender in English is primarily a semantic category with different implications. One of these is the tendency to suffer semantic derogation experienced by many feminine words, such as *heroine*, *chorine*, *aviatrix*, *educatrix*, *usherette*, *majorette*, *actress*, *hostess*, *stewardess*, *waitress*, *governess*, *mistress*, and *majorette*. Hellinger (2001) and Romaine (2001) comment that although English has no productive word formation patterns for the expression of referential gender, words such as *spinster* are typical examples of what has been described as semantic derogation. Kramarae and Treichler (1985: 429) summarize the development of *spinster* indicating that it originally meant a person who tended the spinning wheel. Like most terms connected with women, it became an euphemism for *mistress* or *prostitute*. In her analysis of the BNC, Romaine (2001) examines the terms with which *spinster* collocates and concludes that the majority of the words collocating with *spinster* have negative connotations. These include: *gossipy*, *nervy*, *over-made up*, *ineffective*, *jealous*, *eccentric*, *love-/sex-starved*, *frustrated*, *whew-faced*, *dried-up old*, *repressed*, *lonely*, *prim*, *cold-hearted*, *plain Jane*, *atrocious*, *dreary old*, and *despised*. By comparison, the collocations of its male counterpart, *bachelor*, are largely descriptive or positive, with the exception of one occurrence of *bachelor*: *wimp*.

- (iv) There has been a language desire to change the patriarchal and sexist “nature” of language and therefore engaged in various types of linguistic reform or language planning. Pauwels (2001: 138-139) comments that although many feminist shared the belief that changing linguistic and discourse practices is an important element in women’s liberalization, this did not result in a uniform approach to linguistic reform. In English, for example, some reform initiatives primarily aim at exposing the sexist nature of “patriarchal” language by causing linguistic disruptions. Thus, feminists experimented with all parts of speech. For example, *herstory* is an example of linguistic disruption, i.e., a morphological boundary has been reconstituted on semantic grounds. Other reform initiatives strived for creating a women-centered language capable of expressing reality from a female perspective. Proposed changes range from the creation of new women-centered meanings and words, graphemic innovations, to developing women-focused discourse and even creating a new language. An example of this approach is *Ms*, a term of address which has been promoted as the non-sexist, feminist alternative to replace the traditional titles of *Miss* and *Mrs.* in English. Research on the use of *Ms* has pointed out that although this title is gaining ground in English, some users (for example 25% of the respondents to Pauwels’ survey), still associate this title to two specific types of women: those who are divorced, separated, living in a de facto relationship (i.e. not legally married), or possibly, living in a relationship with a woman; those who develop their own careers and tend to be considered feminists, and possibly lesbian (Fuertes Olivera, 1991; Pauwels, 1998). In short, the principle of symmetry envisaged by feminist reformers is not totally consolidated.
- (v) Examination of the terms with which female words collocate indicates the pervasiveness of some stereotypes, which emphasize traditional assumptions about the expected social roles of women and men in our society. The example of *spinster* aforementioned “shows how the connotations of words do not arise from words themselves but from how they are used in context” (Romaine 2001: 160). In other words, the meanings of words are constructed and maintained by patterns of collocation, many of whom transmit cultural meanings and stereotypes which have been built over time (Cowie, 1998; Fuertes-Olivera & Samaniego-Fernández, 1998; Montero-Martínez et al., 2002). In the *Oxford Collocations dictionary for students of English*,⁴ for example, the word *woman* collocates with words indicating her age (e.g. *young, elderly, old*, etc.), her marital status (e.g. *married, single, unmarried*), her working condition (e.g. *career, business, working*,

professional, etc.), and her physical appearance (e.g., *attractive*, *beautiful*, *good-looking*, *handsome*, etc.). In her analysis of the BNC, Romaine (2001) also shows that expressions such as *lady of the house* is not matched by its equivalent *gentleman of the house*, and that *man of the world* is much more common than *woman of the world*.

Since the lexical component is essential in any approach to specialized languages, we agree with Bowker's (2001) claim that the concept of gender sensitivity must be incorporated into the terminological work. She documents her proposal by examining the construction of gender in a specialized domain, that of 'infertility'. By analysing a corpus of 492,011 words,⁵ she found a male bias in the coining of terms for explaining infertility. For example, the presence of antibodies, a medical condition which can explain infertility, is described as *autoimmunity*, or *sperm antibodies* if men have antibodies, but as *hostility* if the presence of antibodies is found in women. Bowker argues that the deliberate and motivated choices of very different terms for describing these two similar conditions would seem to provide further evidence of male bias and an attempt at gender construction that seeks to portray men in a positive light and women in a negative one. (Bowker, 2001: 596)

She also claims that there is a gender bias in the use of scientific and lay terminology, and illustrates her claim with the terms *azoospermia* (the condition in which a man does not produce sperm), and *amenorrhoea* (the condition in which a woman does not menstruate). She found that the term for the male disorder appears in both semi-specialized and specialized texts whereas the term for the female disease is only found in specialized texts, and that in the semi-specialized literature "men are clearly perceived to be suffering from a serious medical condition with a seriously technical name; women, in contrast, are not perceived to be suffering from a medical condition but are simply at fault – they HAVE problems, ARE abnormal or FAIL in their tasks" (Bowker, 2001: 597; emphasis in the original). Finally, she also found a male bias in the daily usage of this medical condition, also described with collocations such as *incompetent cervix* and *retrograde ejaculation* to refer to the condition in women and men respectively. In her view, and with concordances taken from the BNC, Bowker concludes that the modifier *retrograde* is not as negative as that of *incompetent*.

2. Gender reference in English

In English gender is also reflected in the existence of co-occurrence patterns affecting the selection of reference pronouns: *wh-*, personal, and reflexive. The *wh-* items *who* and

which differentiate between personal and non-personal, i.e., they indicate the personal v. neuter distinctions. The personal and reflexive pronouns relate to male and female sex. They differentiate between personal/human and non-personal/neuter. The former distinguishes between masculine (i.e., *he*), feminine (i.e., *she*), and dual (i.e., *her, she*). Since the majority of English personal nouns are unspecified for gender (i.e., they can be used to refer to both female and male referents), many analyses have been devoted to pinpoint actual usage in order to understand why the gender bias described since the early 1970s occurs. Some of the conclusions drawn merit a brief comment:

- (i) The choice of anaphoric pronouns may be determined by “psychological gender”, i.e. affective attitudes of the speaker, which accounts for variation as in *baby – she* vs. *baby – it* (Hellinger, 2001). This line of research has been explored in, say, the analysis of the personifications used in discourses such as ‘advertising’, a typical example of ‘covert communication’ (Forceville, 1996; Fuertes-Olivera et al., 2001; Velasco Sacristán (2003) has shown that advertisers tend to use metaphoric gender to personify the goods or services promoted (sometimes a metonymic metaphor if the product is ‘assigned’ a sex).
- (ii) The so-called ‘male generics’⁶ is an example of social gender. The prescription of male generics has been at the center of debates about linguistic sexism in English. Although traditionally masculine pronouns have been used as the normal or ‘unmarked’ case, empirical studies have shown that addressees tend to perceive the referent to be male (Romaine, 2001). As a result the invisibility of female expressions reflects “an underlying gender belief system, which in turn creates expectations about appropriate female and male behaviour” (Hellinger & Bußmann, 2001b: 10). In the words of Hellinger (2001: 108), the underlying male generics resemble the ideology of MAN (man as norm), which considers the male/masculine as the higher, more prestigious category and the female/feminine as secondary and subordinate (Spender, 1980; Baron, 1986; Curzan, 2000). To avoid this gender bias, two major grammatical devices have been proposed (Pauwels, 1998)⁷: (i) use of coordinated pronoun forms (e.g. *he or she; she or he*); (ii) use of plural rather than singular forms (e.g. everybody remembers where *they* were when the American-led forces attacked Iraq). As a consequence three main developments may be highlighted:
 - The use of a male pronoun (i.e. ‘male generic’), a coordinated form, or a plural *they* seems to be dependent on sociolinguistic factors such as ‘age of the user’, text-type, genre, etc. For example, ‘male generics’ are more frequent in formal styles, whereas coordination is typically reserved for

academic prose, and plural *they* tend to be associated with informal English (Biber et al., 1999; Newman, 1998; Holmes, 2001). Newman (1998), for example, has found that in informal English speakers use the plural forms *they/them* 60% of the time to refer to singular antecedents of indeterminate gender like *person, everyone, anyone*, etc. He has also found that the use of the male pronominal forms *he/him* was more frequent than their female counterparts, and that they were heavily dependent on social gender, confirming a trend which other investigators have found: women are not often the subject of discourse.

- The use of ‘false generics’ has declined as can be observed by comparing the rough numbers in the Brown Corpus and the BNC. In a simple search for the words *he/she* in the Brown corpus, for example, Romaine (2001) found that *he* occurred 9,543 times while *she* stood at 2,859 times. (i.e., *he* occurs more than 3 times more than *she*). Similarly a search in a subcorpus of the BNC *he* yielded 652,547 occurrences against 352,239 for *she* (i.e., *he* occurs twice as often as *she*). Similar evidence of a lessening gap (men are referred to only twice as much rather than three times as much as women) emerged from Cooper’s (1984) survey of American English usage between 1971 and 1979: the frequency of reference to *he* and *man* fell from around 12 occurrences per 5,000 words to about 4 (cited in Romaine, 2001: 162).
- Contrary to early assumptions, this decline in the use of ‘false generics’ has only superficially lessened the gender bias observed in the English language. In an interesting analysis of Birth Congratulation Cards, Willer (2001: 21) argues that although greetings cards may be no longer using generics, they continue sending intentional and unintentional messages about gender roles, that the gender stereotypes transmitted are similar to those previously described in the 1970s and 1980s, that messages of appropriate behavior for each of the sexes are communicated, and that gender differences and stereotypes are also communicated non-verbally (via toys, animals pictured, objects, and scenes).

Data and Methodology

1. Research Question

As previously stated, this preliminary research aims at gaining insight on an intriguing question: Does the gender system also permeate specialized discourse, a discourse

which is typically described as impersonal, objective, ideologically neutral, and emotionless? As Bowker (2001) acknowledges, the subject of gender sensitivity has not been explored in any great detail in the context of specialized languages. She adds that although there are numerous guidelines available for term formation, the issue of gender sensitivity is not typically addressed in these guidelines. Thus, this preliminary research aims at filling this gap.

2. Data

All our data are taken from a parallel bilingual specialized corpora. For this preliminary research, we have concentrated on two sets of data:

- (i) around 25,000 words distributed into 529 paragraphs of economic texts extracted from 3 English manuals: Samuelson and Nordhaus (1985); Blanchard (1997), and Mankiw (1998);
- (ii) two legal texts produced by the United Nations Commission on International Trade Law (UNCITRAL): the *United Nations Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Sea* ('Hamburg Rules'), done "at Hamburg, this thirty-first day of March, one thousand nine hundred and seventy eight, in a single original, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic"; the *United Nations Convention on Independent Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit* ('Stand-by Letters of Credit') done "at New York, this eleventh day of December one thousand nine hundred and ninety-five, in a single original, of which the Arabic, Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish texts are equally authentic".

Each of these two texts comprise around 10,000 words, and were chosen because they may show if this language has changed as a consequence of the last 20 year movement of politically correct language, affirmative action, and the like; a period dominated by language reform (Miller & Swift, 1980; Pauwels, 1998).

3. Procedure

From a quantitative point of view, the data considered are scarce and meager. Hence, they cannot be used for drawing far-reaching conclusions. As a preliminary research, however, they can cast light on the possible existence of a gender bias in specialized language, something which will put into question the idea that defends the

impersonality and lack of ideology of specialized communication. For that, we have embarked on a qualitative analysis. First, we scanned the texts in order to detect possible features which might be interpreted as proof of some gender bias in the texts analyzed. Second, the features found were analyzed in order to identify the ways in which the structural/linguistic prerequisites interact with the respective social, cultural and political conditions that determine the relationships between women and men in a community. Finally, the results were assessed taking into consideration not only if some of the features found may indicate lack of gender sensitivity, but also if the language reform promoted since the 1980s have also taken its toll in specialized languages.

Results

1. *man, master, paymaster and seigniorage*

In line with Bowker's (2001) findings, we have also found a male bias in the use of 3 terms: *man*, *master*, and *seigniorage*. The term '*man*' used in the *United Nations Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Sea* refers to 'provide with men or male sailors', an expression excluding women from being sailors, something which does no longer hold since even warships admit female sailors. In shipping terminology, '*master*' refers to the captain who controls and commands vessels. The same denotation of power carries its compound '*paymaster*', found in the text *United Nations Convention on Independent Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit*. This term is associated with 'money' and 'power' in its technical and non-technical denotations. This term seems to be also connected to medieval times designing king's envoys in charge of paying mercenaries their corresponding salaries. In its technical sense, the *Longman Dictionary of Business English* comments that it refers to the official responsible for paying government employees their salaries, wages and pensions. In the same vein, its general use refers to "any person or organization that pays and therefore controls another person or organization" (*Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*). Examples:

- [1] According to their provisions, the carrier is liable for loss or damage resulting from his failure to exercise due diligence to make the ship seaworthy, to properly *man*,⁹ equip and supply the ship or to make its storage areas fit and safe for the carriage of goods. (*United Nations Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Sea*. Explanatory Note. The Hague Rules 5)
- [2] The bill of lading may be signed by a person *having authority from the carrier*. *A bill of lading signed by the master of the ship* carrying the goods is deemed to have been signed on behalf of the carrier. (*United Nations Convention on the Carriage of Goods by Sea* 14,2)

- [3] That is in line with the notion that the role of the guarantor/issuer in the case of independent undertakings is one of *paymaster* rather than investigator. (*United Nations Convention on Independence Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit*. Scope of Application of “independence”).

Finally, a more detailed comment is given to the term *seigniorage* found in Blanchard’s (1998) chapter on ‘*budget deficits and money creation*’. In this text we are informed that public deficits are usually financed through borrowing or through money creation, and that the revenues from money creation is called *seigniorage* or *seignorage*, a revealing term since it derives from the right to issue money conferred to the ‘signeurs’ (i.e., feudal lords) of the past. In other words, this term rests on stereotypes associating money and power to men. Example:

- [4] The revenues from money creation. AM/P, are called *seigniorage*. The word is revealing: The right to issue money was indeed a precious source of revenues for the “seigneurs” of the past. Equation (21.1) says that the government must create enough money so that seignorage is enough to finance the real deficit. (Blanchard, 1997: 430)

Interestingly, this term is associated not only with money creation (i.e., debt monetization), but also with political power and independence, as example 6 shows:

- [5] The central bank must make a credible commitment that it will no longer automatically monetize the government debt. This credibility may be achieved in a number of ways. The central bank can be prohibited, by decree, from buying any government debt, so that no monetization of the debt is possible. Or the central bank can peg the exchange rate to the currency of a country with low inflation. An even more drastic step is to adopt dollarization officially, to make a foreign currency the country’s official currency. *This step is drastic because it implies giving up seignorage altogether, and is often perceived as a decrease in the country’s independence. An Israeli finance minister was fired in the 1980s for proposing such a measure as part of a stabilization program.* (Blanchard, 1997: 432)

What these examples show is the important role played by gender stereotypes in the construction of gender ideology. Chng (2002) has shown that lexical choices can, on most occasions, betray the views, values and ideology of the speaker and writer. She comments that by “studying what individual linguistic items signify or index, and by examining word collocations and co-occurrences in the same text, interested information may be gathered not just about textual meanings but also about authorial ideological perspectives” (Chng, 2002: 42). In sum, the assumptions and

presuppositions that lurk behind particular lexical choices should be examined, for it is in the silences of each unstated assumptions and presuppositions that particular ideologies are articulated. Examples [6], [7], [8], [9], and [10] indicate how the gendered ideology is constructed, usually in a very subtle way.

Examples [6] and [7] rely on the gender stereotype ‘man as provider’, ‘woman as dependent’, i.e., man getting a salary and trading in money, whereas woman staying at home engaged in the household duties of a typical housewife, particularly taking care of elderly and/or infants:

- [6] Because of institutional responses to inflation, some old myths are no longer applicable. *Widows* and *orphans* receive *pensions* under Social Security that are “indexed” to the CPI – they are insulated from inflation because benefits automatically increase as the CPI increases. (...). (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 1985: 236)
- [7] The shoe leather costs of inflation may seem trivial. And, in fact, they are in the U.S. economy, which has had only moderate inflation in recent years. But this cost is magnified in countries experiencing hyperinflation. Here is a description of one person’s experience in Bolivia during its hyperinflation. When *Edgar Miranda gets his monthly teacher’s pay of 25 million pesos, he hasn’t a moment to lose. Every hour, pesos drop in value. So, while his wife rushes to market to lay in a month’s supply of rice and noodles, he is off with the rest of the pesos to change them into black market dollars.* (Mankiw, 1998: 616)

Example [8] rests on the assumption ‘man as professional or would-be professional’, woman as ‘silence’. The former is engaged in university training for tomorrow’s professional activities, whereas the latter is ignored, although the total number of female university students is increasing year after year:

- [8] Consider an example. Suppose that *Sam Student* takes out a \$20,000 at a 7 percent interest rate from Bigbank to attend *college*. (...) (Mankiw, 1998: 617)

Examples [9] and [10] reinforces the stereotype ‘woman as frail’, a creature who, at the same time, demands protection but is difficult to understand, not only due to her typical change of humors, but also because she seems to live in a kind of limbo without an adequate understanding of what is going on around her: By making an allegory between ‘Dorothy’ and the ‘monetary policy’, the author of the text is implying not only that monetary policy cannot be left astray (i.e., it cannot always cope with the perils of an open economy), but also that it needs care and protection, qualities which are difficult to pinpoint in every occasion (i.e., contrary to

expectations, central bankers and the like do not always know how to set a particular monetary policy, thus implying that it has its own behavior, as if it were a supernatural creature with magical powers):

[9] As a child, you probably saw the movie *The Wizard of Oz*, based on a children’s book written in 1900. The movie and book tell the story of a *young girl, Dorothy, who finds herself lost in a strange land far from home*. You probably did not know, however, that the story is actually an allegory about U.S. monetary policy in the late nineteenth century. (Mankiw, 1998: 617)

[10] In the end of Baum’s story, *Dorothy finds her way home, but it is not by just following the yellow brick road. After a long a perilous journey, she learns that the wizard is incapable of helping her or her friends. Instead, Dorothy finally discovers the magical power of her silver slippers.*¹⁰ (Mankiw, 1998: 618)

Future research might concentrate on proposing alternatives to replace asymmetric terms (for example, the revision carried out by the Department of Labor in which almost 3,500 jobs were modified so that they are unmarked for gender), and on how the proposal catch on in a particular society. Thus, *steward* and *stewardess* are officially “out” and *flight attendant* is in. Similarly, the *New York Times* stopped using titles like *Mrs.* and *Miss* with the names of women. At first, it resisted the adoption of the new title *Ms*, but eventually the editor acknowledged that it was part of the language. The London *Times*, however, still uses androcentric forms such as *spokesman* and the titles *Mrs.* and *Miss*, unless a woman has asked to be referred to as *Ms*. The *Washington Post* uses last names alone on second reference to a person, e.g. *Ellen Smith, named to a new position on the Board of Directors of Exxon Corporation, will join the company next week. Smith* (Romaine, 2001:166).

2. Generics

Our analysis also highlights some interesting preliminary results, which should be confirmed in future research carried out with larger and more diverse corpora (Table 1)

	Economics Manuals	Hamburg Rules	Stand-by Letters of Credit
Generic ‘he’	3	79	
Generic ‘she’	5		
Generic ‘it’			17
Generic ‘they’	70	7	1

Table 1. Number of Generics in the Specialized Discourse under Analysis.

- (i) As the data of Table 1 shows, specialized writers are not consistent when referring to nouns of dual gender: 4 different grammatical means are used for generic reference: ‘generic he’, ‘generic she’, ‘generic it’ and ‘generic they’. Two of them, ‘generic he’ and ‘generic they’, have been commonly used in English, the former due to the influence of prescriptive grammars and the other following English traditions.¹¹ Examples:

[11] Article 4. For the purpose of paragraph 1 of this article, the *carrier* is deemed to be in charge of the goods from the time *he* has taken over ...
(*Hamburg Rules*. Part II. Article 4,2)

[12] Without food stamps and unemployment insurance, *parents and children* alike would offer *their* labor for a speck of silver – working from dark to dark for a crust, walking miles a day to earn a pittance. (Samuelson & Nordhaus, 1985: 235)

- (ii) Since the use of ‘generic he’ is mostly found in the *Hamburg Rules*, a text written in 1978, we may assume that language planning had not influenced specialized communication at that time. In the words of Jernudd (1973), language planning is deliberate language change, usually changes in the systems of language code or speaking or both that are planned by organizations that are established for such purposes. After Lakoff’s (1975) seminal work, the so-called language reform movement developed so many outstanding results on the gender bias that different proposals were concocted. That of Miller and Swift (1980) gained acceptance and was incorporated by many (if not all) national and international agencies. As a result, the gender bias started to be eliminated from official texts. Thus, we do not have a single ‘generic he’ in the *United Nations Convention on Independent Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit*, a text written in 1997. The above comparison indicates that it may be interesting to investigate when and how the different feminist language reforms influenced specialized texts. For example, in the *United Nations Convention on Independent Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit*, authors use ‘generic it’, not only to eliminate the gender bias but also to indicate that the referent may be a person or an institution (example 13). The use of non-personal reference “overcomes any problems of ignorance or irrelevance of the sex of the living that is referred to” (Biber et al., 1999: 317). Similarly, in the Economics Manuals we come across an interesting way of eliminating the gender bias: an alternation between ‘generic he’, and ‘generic she’ (example 14):

- [13] For the purpose of this Convention, an undertaking is an independent commitment, known in international practice as an independent guarantee or as a stand-by letter of credit, given by a bank or other institution or person (“guarantor/issuer”) to pay to the beneficiary a certain or determinable amount upon simple demand or upon demand accompanied by other documents, in conformity with the terms and any documentary conditions of the undertaking, indicating, or from which it is to be inferred, that payment is due because of a default in the performance of an obligation, or because of another contingency, or for money borrowed or advanced, or on account of any mature indebtedness undertaken by the principal/applicant or another person. The undertaking may be given (...) on behalf of the guarantor/issuer *itself*. (*United Nations Convention on Independent Guarantees and Stand-by Letters of Credit*. Article 2,1)
- [14] If you ask the typical person why inflation is bad, *he* will tell you that the answer is obvious. Inflation robs *him* of the purchasing power of *his* hard-earned dollars. (...) A worker who receives an annual raise of 10 percent tends to view that raise as a reward for *her* own talent and effort. (Mankiw, 1998: 616)

Conclusion

Throughout its history ESP has emphasized that it aims to both develop procedures appropriate to learners whose main objective is learning English for a purpose other than learning the language system and to uncover the communicative mechanisms of specialized communication. For achieving them, Dudley-Evans (2000) claims that ESP has concentrated on two research directions: (i) the concept of discourse community and of actual discourse community in practice; (ii) the analysis of specific features of language as used in particular genres in order to get a specific communicative goal. This article incorporates a new perspective to the above research: it investigates if ideology is also a central component of specialized communication. To accomplish this endeavor, it follows recent attempts in introducing the question of ‘gender sensitivity’ in specialized languages (Bowker, 2001).

The analysis of language and ideology assumes that instead of a standard language ideology, discursive practices should be viewed in terms of three related aspects: how individuals interact, what is being conveyed, and why individuals do what they do. Thus, it seems adequate to investigate if even discursive practices considered to be exemplars of objective and impersonal messages (for example, laboratory reports) may be influenced by

ideological, political and economic motivations. A basic component of ideologies is ‘gender’, a social construct used to refer to the state of being male or female in a particular social and cultural environment. In our opinion this concept can be adequately used for introducing a feminist perspective in, say, the analysis of specialized texts.

Texts extracted from 3 ‘Economics manuals’ and 2 ‘United Nations Conventions’ have been analyzed in order to provide answers to our research question: Does the gender system also permeates specialized discourse, a discourse which is typically described as impersonal, objective, ideologically neutral, and emotionless? In particular we have examined two basic components of the English gender system: the lexical and the grammatical. The former has shed light on the lack of ‘gender sensitivity’ in the coinage of terms, not only because the terms analyzed –i.e., *man*, *master*, *paymaster*, and *seigniorage* or *seignorage*– showed male denotations, but also because the contexts where they were used and explained indicated male connotations reinforcing gender stereotypes, such as ‘man as provider’, ‘woman as dependent’, ‘man as professional or would-be professional’, ‘woman as silence’, and ‘woman as frail’. The latter showed that gender reference in English is in a state of flux: different grammatical devices are used for giving generic reference: ‘generic he’, ‘generic she’, ‘generic it’, and ‘generic they’. In our view, these different grammatical devices indicate that language planning has gained acceptance, at least in very institutionalized texts, such as the United Nations Conventions: in the 1978 text, only ‘generic he’ were used, whereas in the 1975 text not a single ‘generic he’ was found.

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Notes

1. This concept refers to the view that defends the existence of an abstracted, idealized, and homogeneous language which takes as its model the written language (Fairclough, 1989).
2. In any language, lexical gender is an important parameter in the structure of kinship terminologies, address terms, and a number of basic, i.e. frequently used personal nouns (Hellinger, 2001).
3. LSWE Corpus corresponds to the Longman Spoken and Written English Corpus.
4. This dictionary was mainly compiled with data from the British National Corpus.
5. of which 343,567 are taken from the *New Scientists* (i.e., semi-specialized texts aimed at interested and educated laypersons), and 148,444 are taken from the Medicine CD-ROM (i.e., highly specialized texts aimed at medical experts).

6. There is a terminological distinction between 'generic masculines' and 'male generics'. The former refers to languages with 'grammatical gender' (for example, Spanish), whereas the latter represent languages without grammatical gender (for example, English).
7. The total number of strategies proposed to fight against the use of male generics amounts to more than one hundred (Baron, 1986; Pauwels, 1998).
8. This convention is usually referred to as the *Hamburg Rules*.
9. Emphasis added. Italics in the examples have been added to illustrate the point under discussion.
10. The author comments that when The Wizard of Oz was made into a movie in 1939, Dorothy's slippers were changed from silver into rubi. He explains this change arguing that Hollywood filmmakers may have not been aware that they were telling a story about nineteenth-century monetary policy. In this context, Hollywood's decision was totally wrong since they did not understand the metaphorical meaning of silver. At that time different populist politicians advocated for the US to adopt both a gold and silver standard. In the view of these politicians the solutions to the western American farmers' problems, caused by a fall of 23 percent in the price level, were the free coinage of silver to be used as 'money'.
11. The use of 'generic they' may be connected with stylistic variation (Biber, 1989; Fuertes-Olivera, 1999; 2001). Thus, it seems that this usage may add weight to the claim that Manuals of Economics tend to use many linguistic devices typically associated with the oral-colloquial dimension. In other words, future research might try to unravel a possible correlation between genre and style in Economics Manuals and Handbooks.

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