

Riikka Rinne

AN ACTOR IS A PERSON, AN ACTRESS IS A WOMAN

A Qualitative Dictionary Study of Sexism and Female
Gender Stereotypes in Male-Female Word-Pairs

ABSTRACT

Riikka Rinne: An Actor is a Person, an Actress is a Woman: A Qualitative Dictionary Study of Sexism and Female Gender Stereotypes in Male-Female Word-Pairs

Master's Thesis

Tampere University

Master's Programme in Languages: English Language and Literature

March 2024

This master's thesis investigates sexism and gender stereotypes in word-pairs consisting of 'male' and 'female' counterparts in the context of dictionaries. A set of word-pairs is investigated in different dictionaries and the entries are looked into for signs of sexist or stereotypical views and attitudes about women. The focus is on the definitions, examples, and labels and usage notes offered for the entries of these words. Under scrutiny are the genus terms and referents used in the definitions and examples, the overall inclusion of examples for the counterparts of the word-pairs, the general descriptions of men and women in these entries, as well as the contents of relevant labels and usage notes.

The data for this thesis consists of entries of six word-pairs from the current available versions of six monolingual English dictionaries, of which five are online and one is a paperback. With six word-pairs in six dictionaries, the final number of entries analysed amount to a total of seventy-two. The data was collected by conducting searches of each word in the dictionaries and central parts of the entries were copied onto a document. Relevance was used as the criterion for selecting which definitions, examples, and labels and usage notes to include. The data was then qualitatively analysed by looking into the aforementioned features more closely and focusing on signs of sexism or stereotypical views of women in these.

The study concluded that the definitions and examples of the 'male' and 'female' words are different from each other, and the biggest differences occur between counterparts of the same word pair. The 'male' words are generally treated more neutrally than the 'female' ones in their genus terms and referents, content of definitions and examples, and favoured over their 'female' equivalents in terms of the number of examples provided. The 'male' words are more likely to be defined and exemplified in neutral terms, while most of the 'female' words are explicitly marked as 'female' by the suffixes *-ess* and *-ette* or by referring to them as women and girls or with feminine pronouns.

The study also found that all of the selected dictionaries utilize labels and usage notes in some of their entries and, thus, provide additional information about the possibly sexist or otherwise problematic nature of these words. Without the labels and usage notes the dictionaries and their entries seem more old-fashioned and ignorant of the issues of sexism and gender. By including labels and usage notes the dictionaries show that they are aware of such issues. When dealing with words such as the ones investigated in this study, additional information in the form of labels and usage notes is crucial, as the type of words may carry negative connotations and it is good to be mindful of these when using such words.

Including 'neutral' referents mostly for 'male' words, while 'female' words are explicitly marked as 'female' could be taken as indicating that female is not the norm, but a deviation from it. This keeps the two gendered words separated and even though the 'male' word could or should be used when referring to any persons, it might still be that the 'male' or 'neutral' word is used to refer to men since the other word is explicitly 'female'.

Keywords: dictionary, sexism, gender stereotype, definition, example, label, usage note

The originality of this thesis has been checked using the Turnitin OriginalityCheck service.

TIIVISTELMÄ

Riikka Rinne: An Actor is a Person, an Actress is a Woman: A Qualitative Dictionary Study of Sexism and Female Gender Stereotypes in Male-Female Word-Pairs

Pro gradu -tutkielma

Tampereen yliopisto

Kielten maisteriohjelma: Englannin kieli ja kirjallisuus

Maaliskuu 2024

Tässä tutkielmassa tarkastellaan seksismiä ja sukupuolistereotypioita mies-naissanapareissa sanakirjojen kontekstissa. Kuuden sanaparin sanakirja-artikkeleita tutkitaan eri sanakirjoissa ja niistä etsitään merkkejä seksistisistä tai stereotyyppisistä näkemyksistä ja asenteista naisia kohtaan. Tutkielmassa keskitytään sanakirja-artikkeleissa annettuihin määritelmiin, esimerkkeihin sekä tarkenteisiin ja käyttöhuomautuksiin. Näissä tarkastelun kohteena ovat pronominit ja muut referentit, joihin sanan määritelmässä ja esimerkeissä viitataan, annettujen esimerkkien määrä, kuvaukset miehistä ja naisista sekä oleellisten tarkenteiden ja käyttöhuomautusten sisältö.

Tutkielman aineisto koostuu kuuden sanaparin sanojen sanakirja-artikkeleista, jotka kerättiin kuuden englanninkielisen sanakirjan aineistonkeruun aikaisista versioista. Analysoitujen artikkeleiden kokonaislukumäärä on seitsemänkymmentäkaksi. Aineisto kerättiin käsin etsimällä kaikkien sanojen artikkelit jokaisesta sanakirjasta ja kopioimalla näistä keskeiset osat erilliseen dokumenttiin. Kriteerinä aineiston valinnassa käytettiin oleellisuutta tutkielman aiheeseen. Aineisto analysoitiin tarkastelemalla yllä mainittuja asioita ja etsimällä niistä piirteitä, jotka viittaavat seksistisiin tai stereotyyppisiin näkemyksiin naisista.

Tutkimuksen tulokset osoittavat, että mies-naissanaparien sanojen määritelmät ja esimerkit ovat keskenään erilaisia, ja suurimmat erot esiintyvät yhden sanaparin osapuolten välillä. Miessanoja kohdellaan naissananoja neutraalimmin referenttien suhteen sekä määritelmässä ja esimerkeissä annetuissa kuvauksissa. Lisäksi miessanoille annetaan määrällisesti enemmän esimerkkejä, mitä voidaan pitää merkinä niiden etusijalle asettamisesta. Miessanat määritellään ja kuvataan paljon todennäköisemmin neutraalein termein, kuin naissanat, jotka useimmiten määritellään ja kuvataan eksplisiittisesti naissanoina käyttämällä liitteitä *-ess* ja *-ette* tai viittaamalla naiseen ja tyttöihin tai naispronomineihin.

Tutkimuksessa todettiin lisäksi, että kaikki kuusi sanakirjaa käyttävät tarkenteita ja käyttöhuomautuksia joissakin sanakirja-artikkeleissaan ja tarjoavat niiden avulla lisätietoa sanojen mahdollisesti seksistisestä tai muuten ongelmallisesta luonteesta. Ilman tarkenteita ja käyttöhuomautuksia tutkitut sanakirjat ja niiden artikkelit vaikuttavat vanhanaikaisemmilta ja tietämättömämmiltä seksismiin ja sukupuoleen liittyvistä ongelmista. Näiden sisällyttäminen kuitenkin osoittaa, että sanakirjat ovat tietoisia tällaisista ongelmista. Käyttöhuomaukset ja tarkenteet ovat tärkeitä, kun käsitellään sellaisia sanoja, kuin tässä tutkimuksessa, koska niihin saattaa liittyä negatiivisia konnotaatioita, jotka on hyvä osata huomioida.

Neutraaleihin referentteihin viittaaminen enimmäkseen miessanoissa ja samaan aikaan naissananoissa eksplisiittinen viittaaminen naisreferentteihin voidaan tulkita siten, että naissanano ja nainen ei ole normi, vaan poikkeus siitä. Tämä pitää mies- ja naissanat erillään, ja vaikka miessanaa voitaisiin tai pitäisi käyttää viitattaessa keneen tahansa henkilöön, voi silti olla, että mies- tai neutraalia sanaa käytetään useammin viittaamaan miehiin, koska toinen vaihtoehto on eksplisiittisesti naissanano.

Avainsanat: sanakirja, seksismi, sukupuolistereotypia, sanakirja-artikkeli, sanakirjaesimerkki, tarkenne, käyttöhuomautus

Tämän julkaisun alkuperäisyys on tarkistettu Turnitin OriginalityCheck -ohjelmalla

Table of Contents

1	Introduction	1
2	Theoretical Background	3
2.1	Lexicography	3
2.2	Dictionaries	4
2.2.1	Dictionary Types	5
2.2.2	Dictionary Definitions and Meaning	6
2.2.3	Labels and Usage Notes	7
2.2.4	Dictionary Examples	8
2.2.5	Prescribing Versus Describing Language	9
2.3	Sexism and Gender Stereotypes, Norms, and Roles	10
2.4	Practices for Avoiding Sexism and Stereotypes in Dictionaries	12
2.5	Prior Research	13
3	Dictionaries, Data, and Methods	16
3.1	Dictionaries	16
3.2	Data	17
3.3	Methods	17
4	Analysis	18
4.1	Definitions, Labels, and Usage Notes	19
4.1.1	Cobuild, OAAD, and WNWCD	19
4.1.2	CED, ODE, and AHD	32
4.2	Examples	43
4.2.1	Cobuild, OAAD, and WNWCD	44
4.2.2	CED, ODE, and AHD	52
5	Discussion	57
6	Conclusion	65
	Bibliography	69

1 Introduction

Dictionaries can be useful in many situations and for many users, from language learning to spelling checks and for native speakers or learners of many ages. Because dictionaries have social prestige, institutional authority, and they are resorted to for ‘correct’ usage, it is important to consider their role in language use. Language and society have a two-way connection, meaning that language shapes society and correspondingly society shapes language. This connection relates to dictionaries, sexism, and gender stereotypes because in addition to being a basic means of human communication, language can have its part in maintaining discriminatory views and attitudes. The patterns and phenomena in real life are reflected in language and thus may continue to be reproduced in everyday communication. While dictionaries’ most self-evident function is providing descriptions and explanations for words, they can also have a role in creating or maintaining discrimination and sexism.

This master’s thesis investigates sexism and female gender stereotypes in word-pairs with ‘male’ and ‘female’ counterparts in the context of dictionary entries. It examines the definitions, labels and usage notes, and examples of a selected set of six word-pairs in six monolingual English dictionaries. The data included is from the words’ entries as nouns referring to persons and only senses relevant to the present study have been selected. The content of the definitions and examples is looked into for signs of sexist or stereotypical views about women. In addition to the broader descriptions of men and women in the entries, aspects considered include the gender markedness of genus terms and referents in both definitions and examples, the overall offering of examples for both counterparts of a word-pair, and labels and usage notes included for the entries. In pairs with ‘male’ and ‘female’ words the former is usually claimed to be neutral and often refers to ‘someone’ and the latter is more often explicitly stated to be ‘female’. This can lead to language users’ tendency to apply the former word when referring to men, which makes the supposedly neutral word primarily ‘male’ (Hidalgo Tenorio 2000, 233). The common view of the ‘male’ words nowadays seems to be that they

can and should be used neutrally, regardless of the word being ‘male’. In reality, the ‘male’ words often remain as referring to men. The research questions that this masters’ thesis attempts to answer are the following:

- 1) What definitions and examples are given in the entries for the selected set of word-pairs, and are there differences between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words? What kinds of descriptions are created about men and women?
- 2) Are there signs of sexism or female gender stereotypes in the definitions, examples, or the descriptions created?
- 3) Are relevant labels and usage notes included and how do these comment on the possibly sexist or problematic nature of the words?

The data consists of the definitions and examples of six pairs of words with ‘male’ and ‘female’ counterparts, which include the ‘male’ word as the base and the ‘female’ word formed by adding either the suffix *-ess* or *-ette*. The word-pairs examined include *actor – actress*, *bachelor – bachelorette*, *governor – governess*, *host – hostess*, *master – mistress*, and *poet – poetess*. The words’ entries are analysed in six dictionaries: the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (9th ed.), the *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary* (9th ed.), the *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (5th ed.), the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (3rd ed.), the *Collins English Dictionary* (12th ed.), and the *American Heritage Dictionary* (5th ed.). The twelve words in these dictionaries amount to a total of seventy-two entries investigated. The data was collected manually from the current online versions of five dictionaries and the current paperback version of one dictionary, and the study conducted is qualitative in nature.

Dictionaries and sexism have been topics of a large amount of linguistic research and some previous studies on topics similar to this thesis are presented later in chapter 2. Because of the influential position of dictionaries and the connections between dictionaries and real life, it is important to pay attention to the issues investigated in this thesis. Since the thesis is a qualitative one

with a relatively small data set it is intended to be a review of the representation of these words in these dictionaries. Therefore, it does not aim at broad generalisations but rather its purpose is to shed some light onto the issues of sexism and gender stereotyping reflected by language and dictionaries. As a final note, this thesis considers traditional gender roles of women and men and does not take a stand on the issue of gender fluidness.

The second chapter of this thesis presents the theoretical background. The topics discussed include lexicography and central aspects of dictionaries, sexism and gender stereotypes, norms, and roles, and stereotypes as well as practices for reducing sexism and stereotypes in dictionaries. The second chapter concludes with a review of two previous studies conducted on similar topics. The third chapter gives more details on the dictionaries and data analysed for this study along with a description of the methods used. The fourth chapter of this thesis presents the analysis and results, which are further discussed in chapter five. The sixth and final chapter finishes the thesis by offering conclusions.

2 Theoretical Background

This chapter presents theoretical background relevant to the topic of this thesis. The chapter begins with a very brief introduction to lexicography. This is followed by a more detailed description about dictionaries, including dictionary types, definitions and meaning, labels and usage notes, and examples. The issue of prescribing or describing language is also discussed here. Next, some information about sexism and gender stereotypes, norms, and roles provided. After that, practices for reducing sexism and stereotyping in dictionaries are considered. Finally, this chapter presents some previous research that has been conducted on similar topics.

2.1 Lexicography

Hartmann and James (1998, 85) define lexicography as “the professional activity and academic field

concerned with dictionaries and other reference works.” Lexicography can be further divided into practical lexicography, which includes the process of making dictionaries and theoretical lexicography, which refers to the practices of doing dictionary research. According to Hartmann and James (ibid.), it is difficult to draw strict boundaries between the two, but the practical side of lexicography is often associated with commercial book publishing, while the theoretical branch is more connected to scholarly studies in fields such as linguistics (ibid.). Following this division, this master’s thesis falls under the category of theoretical lexicography. Lexicographers, the professionals carrying out the process of writing, editing, and assembling dictionaries, have a powerful position. They influence the material selected to be in the dictionary, the types of definitions, examples, and labels and it is their responsibility to describe a language as accurately as possible. At the same time, it is also up to the lexicographers to decide whether issues such as sexism need to be addressed or not.

2.2 Dictionaries

Dictionaries in general have a good image and they are perceived as having high social prestige (Carter 2012, 148). This can be seen in the fact that in many parts of the English-speaking world, people may refer to “the dictionary” as one piece of work, implying that there is one dictionary including possible definitions of every word in a language. This is, of course, not true nor possible. In reality, dictionaries are highly abstract. To present words and their meanings in a dictionary, the words must be taken away from their common surroundings and turned into separate entries without their original contexts. In addition, the entries are created by lexicographers and editors who, even with the help of technology and computational aids, cannot know the complete and fully accurate usage of most words included in a dictionary. Lexicographers may also have tendencies to overlook recent changes in language or society, or they may tend to prefer writing “elegant” definitions rather than simple and more accurate ones. They may also be accustomed to following conventions over

dynamic and changing principles (Yallop 2004, 24).

“The dictionary” is often talked about but all dictionaries are unique and reflective of their intended users and uses. A clear understanding of the target users helps to decide what material is put into the dictionary and how it should be structured. Despite the differences between dictionaries, most have two major parts: a-z entries, which is the core of the dictionary and all other material including forewords, acknowledgements, explanations of labels and abbreviations, and tables and numbers (Atkins & Rundell 2008, 176). As dictionary-makers need to pay attention to the users and their skills, it could also be beneficial for them to note possible hazards that some words may have attached to them.

2.2.1 Dictionary Types

Because there are different groups of dictionary-users, there need to be different types of dictionaries as well. To name a few, there are general-purpose dictionaries, learner’s dictionaries, historical dictionaries, and specialized dictionaries. Additionally, there are monolingual, bilingual and multilingual dictionaries. For the purposes of this thesis, only monolingual general-purpose and learner’s dictionaries will be described a bit further.

A general-purpose dictionary can be described as the prototype of a dictionary and the version of dictionaries that most people have (Béjoint 2016, 7). It gives a comprehensive description of a language and especially of the vocabulary of that language. A general-purpose dictionary can satisfy the various needs of different user groups, as it provides information about meaning, spelling and usage (Hartmann & James 1998, 61). A learner’s dictionary, then, is designed towards primarily non-native language learners at different levels of fluency (ibid., 82). Heuberger (2016, 25) explains that one of the most noticeable features of learner’s dictionaries is the use of simplified language for definitions. Dictionaries compiled for language learners also guide their users with grammar and usage and include several example sentences and collocations while excluding historical or

etymological information as unnecessary for learners (*ibid.*).

2.2.2 Dictionary Definitions and Meaning

Dictionary definitions can be informative and helpful, and when they are well drafted, they provide explanations of word meanings, although the definitions do not necessarily contain an exhaustive meaning (Yallop 2004, 25). The purpose of a dictionary definition is to explain the meaning of a word in a particular sense, which is the central function of dictionaries (Atkins & Rundell 2008, 208). At the same time dictionary definitions are also one of the most quarrelsome aspects of lexicographers' work. Different dictionaries offer different ways of defining words and their meanings. These differences exist due to the fact that during the process of compiling a dictionary, the needs and expectations of its intended users need to be considered and the finished product is always adjusted to the users and their needs (*ibid.*, 405, 414). According to Atkins and Rundell (*ibid.*, 413, 420) a good definition should be intelligible, provide an appropriate amount of information for the user to understand a word in the context in which they have encountered it, as well as enable them to use that word correctly in a new context.

When discussing dictionary definitions, it is important to address meaning and different senses. Meaning can be seen in different ways, and this is also true in the context of dictionaries. Hartmann and James (1998, 92) define meaning as "the relationship between words or phrases and the objects or ideas which they designate." Although it is easy and tempting to perceive word meanings in dictionaries as authoritative and the only correct ones, according to Yallop (2004, 26), the view that words have a core meaning and secondary meanings should be approached with caution. Atkins and Rundell (2008, 311) explain that while most people would agree on words having multiple meanings, these meanings are not the same thing as the senses in a dictionary. Word meanings exist in interaction, whereas dictionary senses represent the lexicographers' way of establishing some clarity to the mass of available language data (*ibid.*).

In a dictionary, the ordering of senses or meanings might imply that the first sense is the most important and central one, but there are actually many different reasons for the ordering. One reason is dictionaries using corpora to establish the most frequent uses of a word and listing the different senses according to the frequency of their use. Some dictionaries follow historical order, where the oldest recorded senses are given first, regardless of whether or not they are now obsolete or unknown. Dictionaries may also present the meanings or senses in an order that makes the defining easier or more concise, which probably helps the dictionary user. Sometimes, listing certain meanings first seems to be mere convention with no further motivation (Yallop 2004, 26-27). The different senses are generalizations that aim at making distinctions between meanings explicit, and do not have, or claim to have, any special authority over language use. Their purpose is rather to allow dictionary users to connect “what they have encountered in a specific context with a particular meaning” (Atkins & Rundell, 2008, 311).

2.2.3 Labels and Usage Notes

Dictionaries employ labels and usage notes for providing the user with additional information that cannot be included in the definition and examples on their own. The labels and notes can include information about, for example, attitudes (*derogatory, offensive*), time (*dated, old-fashioned*), and levels of formality (*informal, formal*) (Atkins & Rundell 2008, 185-186). Derogatory and offensive are labels of negative attitude, but with slightly different meanings. Derogatory refers to intentional disapproval of the speaker or writer, and offensive implies a possible negative reaction of hearer or reader. (Norri 2000, 77).

Dictionary labels are usually single words as in the examples above or abbreviations like “colloq.” (colloquial) (Atkins & Rundell 2008, 403). Choosing the “right” labels might be affected by social change and the labels need to be appropriate for the targeted users as well as for current practices of using language. This means that as the society and language use changes, dictionaries

should follow along and adjust their labels to, for instance, give information about an offensive or dated word. Usage of words may also differ quite significantly across different areas and speech communities, and it is important to match labels to them (*ibid.*, 404). Longer usage notes can be utilized to tell the user more information about a word's use than can be given with label. These can include, for instance, context-related or historical information, among other things. Dictionaries aimed at learners often more readily assign usage notes and labels to potentially insulting words than dictionaries for larger user-groups (Norri 2019, 866).

2.2.4 Dictionary Examples

Examples in dictionaries combine most of the information that its users need to have about a word, because using a word in its natural environment brings out different grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic characteristics of that word (Laufer 2008, 213). The functions of examples in finished dictionaries are somewhat different following the type and level of the dictionary and since the materials of this thesis come from monolingual dictionaries, only the examples in those will be described here.

According to Atkins and Rundell (2008, 453) languages should be described based on objective evidence of their usage and, thus, the primary function of examples of usage is to act as a source from which the entries are constructed. Examples in monolingual dictionaries can serve the purpose of proving the existence of some word in a language. They can also illustrate cases where some word may have different senses or meanings and needs clarification. The definition and example of a word should ideally be sufficient by themselves, but often they are needed to complete each other (*ibid.*, 454). Finally, examples in monolingual dictionary entries can illustrate contextual features such as collocation and register. The contextual range of a word is especially important to provide in dictionaries designed for language learners, because even seemingly straightforward words may be difficult for learners to use appropriately (*ibid.*).

An example should illustrate a typical instance of a word's use and at the same time it often shows the word in a frequent collocational environment. Examples in dictionaries should be natural and typical to the word, meaning that they should show its most frequent environments and offer an appropriate amount of context. They should also aim to have a clear function and be informative by complementing the definition and helping the user understand it better. Finally, examples should be intelligible in that they are understandable and do not include unnecessarily difficult words or structures (ibid., 459-461). Most learners' dictionaries employ examples to offer full account of a word's context and collocations to show that word's natural settings (ibid., 455). Atkins and Rundell also note that there could be hundreds of examples of uses for a word in a corpus but not one that would be perfect. A sufficient example sentence should be short and in itself explain what the word means. In addition to not including words that may be more difficult to understand than the one that is being exemplified, it should not include names or foreign words (ibid., 328-330).

2.2.5 Prescribing Versus Describing Language

Dictionaries are trusted and turned to for information and guidance about correct usage of words in a language. This statement leads to the question of whether dictionaries should be prescriptive or descriptive. According to Yallop (2004, 36) and Atkins and Rundell (2008, 2) descriptive lexicography has been more popular than prescriptive lexicography since the twentieth century. Yallop (2004, 36) continues that linguists, like all scholars and researchers, are required to describe their findings, and must aim to describe only what is there, not what they would like to be there or what they think should be there.

Atkins and Rundell (2008, 2) agree on this, adding that for them "a dictionary is a description of the vocabulary used by members of a speech community". They also state that the job of a dictionary is to describe and explain the ways people commonly use words, not to attempt covering every possible language event. After all, a dictionary is only a representation of language, not the

entire vocabulary of it (*ibid.*). Dictionaries in the past were to a larger extent subject to the individual views of their compilers. In the modern day, however, lexicographers and editors generally try to avoid bringing personal views, attitudes or biases into dictionaries. Instead, these works aim to be reliable, useful and objective (Yallop 2004, 24).

Yallop (2004) says that the social nature of language imposes some normativity of its own, and therefore, being against regulation does not mean being against all normativity. He elaborates this point by illustrating the process of children learning linguistic conventions and patterns from interactions with people in their communities. Conforming to shared linguistic conventions and patterns can serve as a means to feel connected to one's community (*ibid.*, 40). The linguistic norms and conventions we use must also have a foundation in shared social agreement of issues that are important or meaningful to language users. For example, most people would probably agree on the need to remove racist words from language, or on the fact that it is beneficial for all to have a set of norms and standards for drafting written instructions. Most of us do, thus, conform to some level of prescription of language in the form of guidelines, style guides and other things. However, following this type of prescriptions of language does not justify ruling what ought to be based on individual perceptions or some regulation to 'fix' language (*ibid.*, 41).

2.3 Sexism and Gender Stereotypes, Norms, and Roles

Sexism refers to actions and attitudes discriminating against people based only on their gender and often reflects a belief that one gender is somehow superior to the other (EIGE 2016; Baker & Ellece 2011, 129). The superior gender is usually men and gender-biased attitudes lie on perceptions where women are thought of not being equal to men in rights, opportunities, or abilities (EIGE 2016). Gender discrimination is often based on generalisations, false beliefs, and attention to gender where it is irrelevant. Gender stereotypes are prejudiced ideas that assign specific roles and characteristics to women and men based on and limited by their gender. These stereotypes based on gender both

result from and cause deeply rooted attitudes which can be harmful in different ways (ibid.). Gender roles assigned to women and men are often based on what has traditionally been understood to be the responsibility of either gender. These roles also partly dictate what is considered socially appropriate for both (ibid.). Similarly, gender norms set expectations and standards for the ways women and men should act and people generally conform to these. Gender norms are usually internalized at a young age and they might enable a cycle of stereotyping and discrimination (ibid.).

Sexism can be noticed in language in derogative uses of words or phrases when referring to the gender of an individual or group of persons (Hartmann & James 1998, 126). Sexist or gender-biased undertones that words or phrases in language and society have might transfer from real-life into the dictionary and thus be available for dictionary users to adopt into their vocabularies and language practices. Prechter (1999, 52, 55) explains that sexism can be maintained in dictionaries via different means such as by including negative or trivializing references to women, maintaining stereotypical and gendered views of both women and men, and by having an unbalanced ratio of male and female referents.

Attention has been paid to dictionary entries of word-pairs with ‘male’ and ‘female’ forms for essentially the same thing, such as *poet* and *poetess*, which are also looked into in this thesis. In this type of word-pairs the first word, the ‘male’ one, is suggested to be neutral and often refers to “someone” and the second word is marked explicitly as ‘female’ by using the suffixes *-ess* or *-ette*, which in themselves can be offensive. This runs the risk of language users’ tendency to apply the latter word to women only, which then makes the seemingly neutral form refer to men for the most part (Hidalgo Tenorio 2000, 233).

The designation of ‘female’ in word pairs such as *actor* – *actress* or *poet* – *poetess* is considered to suggest that women are not the norm but rather an exception to it. Furthermore, it has been said that the suffix trivializes the feminine term, as the word becomes linguistically dependent on the male term (Norri 2019, 870). In addition to the suffixes *-ess* and *-ette* there is also, for example,

the suffix *-man*, which too is suggested as a neutral one. However, words with this suffix are often defined and exemplified in terms of men and thus they “convey more a male referent than the generic one dictionaries claim” (Hidalgo Tenorio 2000, 224). An observant note about sexism is made by Byron (1983, 305) who points out that sexism is still largely maintained in the language practices of individuals whose discourses are usually not scrutinized in the same way as those of dictionary compilers and other language professionals.

Avoiding discrimination based on gender starts with language because attitudes and understandings are formed and shaped in communication. If gender-biased terminology is used and discriminatory attitudes are expressed systematically, the reader or hearer of these could be influenced to adopt these into their own actions and linguistic practices. Hartmann and James (1998, 13) offer bias-free vocabulary as a resource to avoid using sexist or biased language. Bias-free vocabulary includes words and phrases which can be considered non-discriminatory and appropriate for use when talking about issues related to gender, for instance, as well as race, religion, or politics (*ibid.*). In both written and spoken language women and men should be treated and addressed as individuals with equal value and respect. Avoiding use of language that refers either explicitly or implicitly to only one gender and utilizing inclusive terms are strategies that can be employed in order to do this. Generally, using gender-neutral language that considers people without referring to women or men and is therefore not gender-specific is a good way to avoid gender-based discrimination in the context of language (EIGE 2016.).

2.4 Practices for Avoiding Sexism and Stereotypes in Dictionaries

Different practices for avoiding sexism and gender stereotyping in dictionaries have been suggested, and many have to do with making modifications and conscious choices about things like pronouns and references. Hidalgo Tenorio (2000, 217) and Whitcut (1983, 143) have described, for example, the following ways for avoiding implications of sexism or female stereotypes in dictionary entries.

The pronoun *he* can be replaced by, for instance, singular *they*, the phrases *he or she* or *she or he* or indefinite pronouns such as *someone* or *anyone*. It is also possible to change the structure of a sentence or a phrase to no longer conform to sexist or stereotypical views. One more way to avoid unnecessary gender implications is to omit the subject entirely or to change it into something more neutral like *professional* or *person*.

Additionally, drafting and selecting definitions and examples that include references to both women and men equally can work as a way of decreasing biases (Hidalgo Tenorio 2000, 214). Finally, techniques of reversing traditional roles by using phrases, comments or pictures, and including both women and men in entries where usually only one of them is present, can also be employed. Waksler (1995, 5) explains that when entries are non-sexist, non-biased and without gender markings, “the focus will be less on the significance (or insignificance) of the specific gender of the person that the term describes, and more on the other criteria required by the term’s meaning”.

2.5 Prior Research

This section introduces two earlier studies that have looked into different aspects of dictionaries with elements relating to sexism, gender-bias, and gender stereotypes. In a recent study, Norri (2019) compared the definitions of twenty-five words in all of the twentieth and twenty-first century editions of five learner’s dictionaries. Norri investigated the treatment of gender in the definitions of these words, and one of the main aims in his study was “to examine possible changes in gender indications from the first edition of the dictionary to the present day” (Norri 2019, 868). The reason for specifically focusing on learner’s dictionaries is the responsibility to convey things such as connotations of words, which are characteristically attached to this type of dictionaries (ibid., 867-868). The words selected for closer scrutiny in this study belonged to three different semantic fields: 1) professions and occupations, 2) personal characteristics and roles, and 3) clothes. Words for these categories include, for example, actor, midwife; bastard, redhead; and sombrero and swimsuit (ibid.,

868, 872).

The results from this study (Norri 2019, 884-885) show that there is variation in the indications of gender between different areas of vocabulary. The dictionaries studied were generally similar in their treatment of words for professions and occupations, which have been losing the gender indications attached to them (ibid.). With words for personal characteristics and roles the situation was different: there was no evident trend for shifting towards gender-neutral options. For instance, the words *lover* and *sex object* have lost the female or male specifications that were present in some of the editions, whereas *divorcee* and *looker* are more often associated with women in more recent editions than in earlier ones. Words for the third semantic field, clothes, locate at the other end of the scale. From the results of studying six clothing-related words it can be said that gender assignments in words denoting clothes have rather decreased than increased.

Norri (ibid., 885) offers possible reasons for these changes and the variation between the learner's dictionaries' editions. Firstly, he suggests that the drafting of dictionary definitions has been affected by changes in the world and by the breaking of gender boundaries in areas like work-life and sports. These changes have caused some gender indications to become outdated and therefore removed from dictionaries. Along with the changes in gender boundaries, Norri (ibid.) proposes that the trend for unisex fashion has led to a decrease in comments about gender in words denoting pieces of clothing. Secondly, conversations about biased and stereotyping language could be a contributing factor. In corpora, some words and phrases occur mainly in association with women or men and can be used in an offensive, sexist or stereotypical way. Here, it is a difficult but important responsibility for the lexicographer to decide whether these gender associations should be mentioned or omitted to avoid reinforcing sexism or stereotyping. Thirdly, there is considerable variation in the sizes of corpora utilized by lexicographers, which again probably explains some of the differences emerging in the gender descriptions (ibid.).

Hidalgo Tenorio (2000) has also conducted research related to sexism and stereotyping in

dictionaries. In her study, she looked into the way certain aspects of present-day English are recorded in the Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary (1987). Her aims in the study were to assess representation of women and men, the extent to which some of the definitions are inaccurate, biased or a result of ignoring changes happening in the society, and finally, possible stereotyping. Additionally, she addressed the dictionary's policy for preventing discrimination in language use, as well as its possible efforts to avoid conveying stereotyped views of women and men. In essence, Hidalgo Tenorio's starting point for this study was to look at how this dictionary structures reality and treats women and men (Hidalgo Tenorio 2000, 211, 216). She explains that the relevance for conducting this study comes from the observation that a brief review of a dictionary is enough to uncover "a full network of a potential discriminatory language based on the real discriminatory language use" (ibid.).

The set of words examined in her study were selected from the dictionary by going through the entries and guided by specific criteria for the words' properties. These included having links to areas that are traditionally considered to be masculine or feminine, sex or gender markedness, deviation from usual norms, inconsistency in the definitions, and description of the word giving no indication of the referent's sex or mentioning women and men as examples of dual gender (ibid., 216-217). The collected data was divided into different semantic categories or zones: work or labour, physical appearance, behavioural patterns, intelligence – lack of intelligence, social role modified, sexual role modified, soc-sex or sex in the public domain, social status, modes of address and finally, derogatory sense. These categories were utilized to see if the compilers had followed their own principles and understandings of language and gender, or if they had opted for representing the world by repeating traditional stereotypes (ibid., 217).

A general result from Hidalgo Tenorio's (ibid., 227-228) analysis is that to a large extent, the ways the examined words are used to refer to women and men were quite different. Words relating to physical appearance and words used in a derogatory way were more often used referring to women

than men. References to men were most evident with regard to their work, stereotypical physical appearances, and behaviours. Women, then, were referred to in relation to their appearances, feelings, and stereotypical concepts related to intelligence or folly. Finally, tendencies for using so-called reformed language were detected in almost thirty-five percent of the cases, and especially in the words related to work or status. Hidalgo Tenorio describes reformed language as a conscious means to apply “androgynous language” in order to overcome or eliminate discriminatory biases (ibid., 227-228).

3 Dictionaries, Data, and Methods

This chapter introduces the dictionaries, data, and methods in this study. First, there is a brief overlook of the dictionaries consulted, then, the data is described in more detail, and finally, the methods applied in the process of collecting and analysing the data are described.

3.1 Dictionaries

The dictionaries utilized in this study were selected based on ease of use and access as well as previous experience in using most of them. The six dictionaries consulted for this study and their abbreviations include the 9th edition of the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* (Cobuild), 9th edition of the *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary* (OAAD), 5th edition of the *Webster’s New World College Dictionary* (WNWCD), 3rd edition of the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (ODE), 12th edition of the *Collins English Dictionary* (CED), and 5th edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* (AHD). The first two are learner’s dictionaries, *Cobuild* a British one and *OAAD* an American one, and *WNWCD* is an American college dictionary. The remaining three dictionaries are general-purpose dictionaries, of which *ODE* and *CED* are British, *AHD* American. This assortment of dictionaries was selected to represent both learner’s and general-purpose dictionaries as well as both British and American dictionaries.

3.2 Data

The data for the analysis consists of the definitions, labels and usage notes, and examples in the dictionary entries for the selected six word-pairs with ‘male’ and ‘female’ forms in the six dictionaries. Only the senses relevant to the present study were selected and the data included is from the words’ entries as nouns referring to persons. Taking into account all six dictionaries consulted, a total of seventy-two dictionary entries were collected and analysed for this study.

The six word-pairs include two different forms of the same word where one denotes ‘male’ and the other ‘female’. Five of these pairs use the suffix *-ess* and one the suffix *-ette* to create two different forms of the word, where the one with a suffix denotes ‘female’, and the one without it denotes ‘male’. The word-pairs are *actor – actress*, *bachelor – bachelorette*, *governor – governess*, *host – hostess*, *master – mistress*, and *poet – poetess*. The suffixes *-ess* and *-ette* are used to form nouns denoting female gender by using ‘neutral’ or ‘male’ forms as a base like in the pairs included in this study, and additionally, *-ette* can also mean ‘small’ (CED 2014).

Even though the two forms are seemingly equivalents, they are often not when it comes to real life use and connotations. Feminine forms such as the ones investigated here have become more problematic in the past decades and can be seen as sexist, old-fashioned, and condescending (ODE, 2015). As was previously mentioned, effects of the suffix *-ess* have been described as trivialising because using this suffix makes the ‘female’ form linguistically dependent on the ‘male’ one (Norri 2019, 870). According to ODE (2015), the “‘male’ form is increasingly being used as the ‘neutral’ form, where the gender of the person concerned is simply unspecified”. The situation described in this quote is ideal but often both of the forms are still in use and the ‘male’ form is used mainly to refer to men.

3.3 Methods

The methodological approach taken in this study is qualitative in nature. Qualitative research is

conducted with methods involving non-numerical data collection or analysis. The data samples gathered for and analysed in qualitative research are usually smaller in size and often, for example, case studies (Baker & Ellece 2011, 108). Qualitative research aims at gaining a detailed in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of interest through interpretation and close scrutiny (Selvi 2020, 442). The relatively minimal quantitative aspect in the methods for this study is in the discussion of numbers of neutral, female, and male genus terms or referents in the definitions and the number of examples included in the entries.

For this study, the dictionary entries were scanned with relevance as the criterion for deciding which definitions, labels and usage notes, and examples under the entries would be included. For instance, all definitions and examples of *master* as someone who has a master's degree have been excluded here. The data of this study was manually collected by searching each of the selected words in the six dictionaries, five of which were an online version and one a paperback and copying the relevant parts of the entries into a document. Notes and markings were then added into the document as the initial analysis of the entries took place. During the more detailed analysis these definitions, labels and usage notes, and examples were closely examined. Features under scrutiny included the content of the definitions and examples, the descriptions they create about women and men, the genus terms or referents of the definitions and examples, the overall number of examples included under each entry, and relevant labels and usage notes included in the entries. Information about implications of gender within the entries of the analysed words have also been gathered together into tables 1 and 2, which are included in the discussion in chapter five. These tables present simplified information to demonstrate the findings from this study.

4 Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis and findings from the examination of the selected set of words in six different dictionaries. The chapter is divided into two sections. The first subsection presents the

analysis on the definitions and labels and usage notes of the selected words, and the second subsection looks into the examples of the word entries.

4.1 Definitions, Labels, and Usage Notes

The investigation and findings on the definitions of the twelve words are presented here. *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD* are addressed first, *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD* second. Labels and usage notes are also discussed in this section.

4.1.1 Cobuild, OAAD, and WNWCD

The definitions and genus terms of the twelve words are first analysed in the *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Cobuild), the *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary* (OAAD), and the *Webster's New World College Dictionary* (WNWCD). First, some example definitions from the entries demonstrating the types of definitions and their contents are looked at. The labels and usage notes included in the definitions are also examined here. Then, a look into the overall gendered nature of the genus terms in these dictionaries and their definitions is presented. The following are examples taken from the definitions for the set of six word-pairs in the three dictionaries. These example sentences illustrate the differences between 'male' and 'female' words in terms of their definitions. The genus terms have been bolded, labels and notes about usage are in italics, and some relevant words or phrases have been underlined.

- (1) The host at a party is the **person** who has invited the guests and provides the food, drink, or entertainment. (*Cobuild* s.v. *host*)
- (2) The hostess at a party is the **woman** who has invited the guests and provides the food, drink, or entertainment. (*Cobuild* s.v. *hostess*)
- (3) An actor is **someone** whose job is acting in plays or films. '*Actor*' in the singular usually refers to a man, but some women who act prefer to be called '*actors*' rather than '*actresses*'. (*Cobuild* s.v. *actor*)
- (4) An actress is a **woman** whose job is acting in plays or films. *Some women who act prefer to be called 'actors' rather than 'actresses'*. (*Cobuild* s.v. *actress*)

- (5) a **person** who performs on the stage, on television, or in movies, especially as a profession (*OAAD* s.v. *actor*)
- (6) a **woman** who performs on the stage, on television, or in movies, especially as a profession *Many women prefer to be called actors, although when the context is not clear, an actor is usually understood to refer to a man.* (*OAAD* s.v. *actress*)
- (7) 2. a **person**, often, specif., a man, who acts in plays, movies, etc. (*WNWCD* s.v. *actor*)
- (8) a **woman or girl** who acts in plays, movies, etc. [*see -ess*] (*WNWCD* s.v. *actress*)
- (9) a **person** who writes poems (*OAAD* s.v. *poet*)
- (10) a **woman** who writes poems (*old-fashioned*) (*OAAD* s.v. *poetess*)

These examples were chosen to highlight the type of definitions that are mostly or exactly the same for both counterparts except for the genus term. Here, according to *Cobuild* a *host* is a **person** hosting or entertaining, and a *hostess* is a **woman** hosting or entertaining. These two definitions are word for word the same, their only difference being in the genus terms. These definitions do not include labels or notes about their usage, so based only on the sentences and their genus terms, *host* seems to be more ‘neutral’ and *hostess* explicitly ‘female’ and separate from the former. Likewise, for *Cobuild*, an *actor* is someone and an *actress* is a woman, whose job is acting in plays or films. The defining sentences are again identical. These two definitions are accompanied by notes about their usage. It is stated that the word *actor* usually refers to a man, but some women prefer to be called *actors* as well instead of *actresses*. The notes offer additional information about using these words and makes *actor* seem more suitable as a neutral form to be used when referring to both men and women.

OAAD also defines *actor* and *actress* with the same sentence, only changing the genus term, which is a ‘neutral’ **person** for *actor* and a ‘female’ **woman** for *actress*. There is again a usage note included for *actress*, which tells the same information as the one in *Cobuild*: some women who act prefer to be called *actors*, but in unclear contexts, *actor* is usually understood to refer to a man. These usage notes are important and demonstrate the issue with these type of male-female word-pairs. Even though the word without the suffix *-ess* could, or perhaps should, be used neutrally, it is often in reality used more to refer to men.

Finally, *WNWCD* also defines *actor* and *actress* with the same sentence and different genus terms, ‘neutral’ **person** for *actor* and ‘female’ **woman** for *actress*. Here, *actor* is accompanied by a note on how an *actor* is *often specifically a man*, which makes the definition more ‘male’. *Actress* includes a request to see the entry for *-ess*, which offers a note on usage: “As applied to persons, now often avoided as patronizing or discriminatory”. This is also an important notion and perhaps gives *actor* back some of its neutrality as it is implied that in some cases, *actor* might be a better choice of word regardless of the gender of the person being referred to.

As with the previous examples here, for *OAAD* a *poet* is a **person** writing poems, a *poetess* a **woman** writing poems. *Poetess* has the label *old-fashioned* attached to it, which is a useful way of notifying the user of possible hazards with using this word. *Poet* here could be considered to be a ‘neutral’ someone, but *poetess* existing allows the possibility of *poet* to be used more when referring to men, similarly to the case described in the usage notes for *actor* and *actress* in *Cobuild* and *OAAD*.

Defining ‘male’ words in mostly ‘neutral’ terms and ‘female’ words in ‘female’ terms is a simple yet influential feature occurring in definitions like these, where changing the genus term can change the whole meaning into something with implications about gender. The definitions of *host*, *actor*, and *poet* with ‘neutral’ genus terms are good examples of avoiding sexism in dictionaries, which was discussed previously. Here, by including ‘neutral’ **person** or **someone** the definitions are not gendered, and the words are defined as ones that can be used to refer to any persons.

However, the existence and use of the explicitly ‘female’ counterparts of these words lessen the neutrality of the others. Without the usage notes and labels in these examples, the counterparts of the word-pairs would be much more differentiated, and the ‘female’ words would seem to be more deviated from the ‘male’ ones. Since the definitions for ‘male’ and ‘female’ words here are identical apart from the genus term, the content and of the definitions and the descriptions they create for both counterparts of the word-pairs are equal. These definitions are also very neutral and do not contain negative descriptions of either part of the word-pairs.

- (11) A poet is a **person** who writes poems. (*Cobuild* s.v. *poet*)
- (12) A poetess is a female **poet**. *Most female poets prefer to be called poets.* (*Cobuild* s.v. *poetess*)
- (13) 1. a **person** who writes poems or verses 2. a **person** who displays imaginative power and beauty of thought, language, etc. (*WNWCD* s.v. *poet*)
- (14) a **woman** or **girl** who writes poems or verses [*see -ess*] (*WNWCD* s.v. *poetess*)
- (15) 1. **One** who entertains guests either at home or elsewhere 2. A **person** who keeps an inn or a hotel; **innkeeper** (*WNWCD* s.v. *host*)
- (16) 1. A **woman** who entertains guests at home or elsewhere 2. A woman **innkeeper** or the **wife** of an innkeeper (*WNWCD* s.v. *hostess*)

These six examples are definitions offered for *poet* and *poetess* in *Cobuild* and *WNWCD*, and for *host* and *hostess* in *WNWCD*. Here the definitions of *poet* and *poetess* are somewhat different, but the same basic idea occurs: a *poet* is a **person** and a *poetess* is mostly a **woman** or a **girl**; one of its genus terms is **poet**, but it is modified by female, which makes it refer to female persons. *Poetess* in *Cobuild* includes a note about usage: “Most female poets prefer to be called poets.” This reminds of possible issues in using this word, as it could be considered offensive by the hearer or reader. It also encourages the use of *poet* neutrally when referring to both women and men.

Additionally, definitions like the one in (12) are not adequate: to discover the meaning of *poetess* the dictionary user will have to check the word *poet* as well in case it is also unfamiliar. As was previously mentioned, a dictionary definition should include an appropriate amount of information that allows the user to understand the meaning and use of a word (Atkins & Rundell 2008, 413). This definition offered for *poetess* in *Cobuild* does not provide enough information about the meaning or use of the word and thus is not an appropriate definition. Furthermore, stating that a *poetess* is a “female poet” draws unnecessary attention to gender and also undermines *poetess* as a profession or as an act of doing something, in comparison to a *poet*, which is treated neutrally.

WNWCD in example (13) implies that a *poet* can be a person with “imaginative power” and “beauty of thought and language”, whereas there is no mention of this under *poetess*, which is only defined as “a woman or girl who writes poems or verses.” This is problematic because definitions like these highlight the differences between the ‘male’ and ‘female’ words, that is, between men and

women. This definition could imply that women who write poems or verses do not necessarily possess the same powers as men who do the same thing. This suggests a stereotype of men being cleverer than women. *Poetess* does, however, include a note to “see -ess”, which presents the same notion about usage that was already previously quoted: “As applied to persons, now often avoided as patronizing or discriminatory”. As was the case with *actress* in *WNWCD*, the usage note is important to include here as the word *poetess* may indeed carry negative connotations with it and it is beneficial to be aware of these.

The definitions in (15) and (16) for *host* and *hostess* in *WNWCD*, then, are like the other ones here in their similarity apart from the genus terms. A *host* is **one** or a **person** and a *hostess* is either a **woman** or a **wife**. The first definitions for both are otherwise identical, the genus term being the only difference and marking the gender of *hostess* as explicitly ‘female’, while *host* is more ‘neutral’ as it does not include explicit gender implications. The second definitions differ a little more, but it is clear that the person described has the same role in both. The difference is again in the explicitness of *hostess* being ‘female’, as it is defined as either a woman **innkeeper** or a **wife** of an innkeeper. These definitions do not include labels or usage notes that would give more information on their use, and based only on the sentences themselves, it seems that a *host* is quite ‘neutral’ whereas a *hostess* is definitely a woman.

- (17) 1. In some systems of government, a governor is a **person** who is in charge of the political administration of a region or state. 2. A governor is a **member** of a committee which controls an organization such as a school or a hospital. 3. In some British institutions, the governor is the most senior **official**, who is in charge of the institution. (*Cobuild* s.v. *governor*)
- (18) *In the past*, a governess was a **woman** who was employed by a family to live with them and educate their children. (*Cobuild* s.v. *governess*)
- (19) 1. a **person** who is chosen to be in charge of the government of a state in the U.S. 2. a **person** who is the official head of a country or region that is governed by another country. (*OAAD* s.v. *governor*)
- (20) (*especially in the past*) a **woman** employed to teach the children of a rich family in their home and to live with them. (*OAAD* s.v. *governess*)

These four examples present the definitions given in *Cobuild* and *OAAD* for the words *governor* and *governess*. The suffix *-ess* is used to form nouns denoting ‘female gender’. Therefore, it could be presumed that *governess* and *governor* have similar definitions since the former is derived from the latter. In these entries, however, the definitions for the pair of words are quite different. For both *Cobuild* and *OAAD*, a *governor* is a ‘neutral’ **person, member** or **official** who is, for example, in charge or in control of political administration, organizations or institutions. For both dictionaries a *governess* is a **woman** who is employed to live with a (rich) family and teach their children. These imply that a *governor* is a person in a high position in fields like politics and administration, whereas a *governess* is a woman living with a family and educating children.

Clearly, these definitions create quite different impressions about *governors* and *governesses*. The descriptions of the former are more positive with references to power and control and of the latter they are quite monotone and trivial. Additionally, a *governor* is also offered several different definitions, whereas a *governess* is given only one definition with no mentions about positions and contexts similar to *governor*. Regardless of including only ‘neutral’ genus terms, *governor* can be taken as more strongly referring to men than women or both since the ‘female’ form exists and is defined in explicitly ‘female’ terms.

In both *Cobuild* and *OAAD* there is also a usage note included within the definition of *governess*: “in the past” (*Cobuild*) and “especially in the past” (*OAAD*), which offer some explanation for the definitions, but do not completely eliminate the differences here. The usage note in *Cobuild* implies that the word or its definition does not apply to more modern times somewhat more strongly than the one in *OAAD*, which states that it is an old-fashioned word *especially* in the past. The usage notes included under *governess* indicate that these definitions represent more old-fashioned or stereotypical views.

Even though women may still be the minority when it comes to leading positions in areas that have traditionally been male-dominant, the situation has changed toward a more equal one. Again,

including 'neutral' referents for the 'male' form only does not completely eliminate sexist or gender-biased implications. Here, the definitions for *governor* could be changed into more 'neutral', for instance, by adding 'female' genus terms. Also, perhaps, *governess* could include definitions similar to *governor* in addition to the ones exemplified here. On the other hand, the only definition for *governess* being the one presented here with the notes about its dated usage, might encourage the use of *governor* when referring to women as well as men.

- (21) 1. A servant's master is the **man** that he or she works for. 2. A dog's master is the **man** or **boy** who owns it. 3. If you say that **someone** is a master of a particular activity, you mean that they are extremely skilled at it. 5. If you are master of a situation, you have complete control over it. - - 8. A master is a male teacher. [*old-fashioned*] (*Cobuild* s.v. *master*)
- (22) 1. A married man's mistress is a **woman** who is not his wife and with whom he is having a sexual relationship. [*old-fashioned*] 2. A mistress is a female teacher. 3. A servant's mistress is the **woman** that he or she works for. [*old-fashioned*] 4. A dog's mistress is the **woman or girl** who owns it. 5. If a **woman** is mistress of a situation, she has complete control over it. 6. If you say that a **woman** is a mistress of a particular activity, you mean that she is very skilled at it. (*Cobuild* s.v. *mistress*)
- (23) 1. (*old-fashioned*) a **man** who has people working for him, often as servants in his home 2. master of something: a **person** who is able to control something 3. master (of something): a **person** who is skilled at something 4. the **owner** of a dog - - 8. 8 a famous **painter** who lived in the past (*OAAD* s.v. *master*)
- (24) 1. a man's (usually a married man's) mistress is a **woman** that he is having a regular sexual relationship with and who is not his wife 2. (*in the past*) the female head of a house, especially one who employed servants 3. (*formal*) (*old-fashioned*) the female owner of a dog or other animal 4. (*formal*) a **woman** who is in a position of authority or control, or who is highly skilled in something (*OAAD* s.v. *mistress*)
- (25) 1. a **person**, *esp. a man*, who rules others or has control, authority, or power over something 2. **someone** or something regarded as having control, power, etc. 3. a **person** very skilled and able in some work, profession, science, etc.; expert (*WNWCD* s.v. *master*)
- (26) 1. a **woman** who rules others or has control, authority, or power over something 2. a **woman** very skilled and able in some work, profession, science, art, etc. 4. a **woman** who is in a sexual relationship with, and typically is financially supported by, a man without being married to him (*WNWCD* s.v. *mistress*)

These examples demonstrate the variety of definitions in the relevant senses to this study for *master* and *mistress* in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD*. There are several definitions offered for these words in the dictionaries and only a portion of those are included here. The biggest difference again

can be seen in the genus terms of these defining phrases. The definitions of *master* include some ‘male’, but mostly ‘neutral’ genus terms and the definitions of *mistress* include mostly ‘female’ genus terms. The genus terms for *master* include, for instance, **man**, **someone**, **teacher**, **person**, and **painter**. The genus term **teacher** is modified by male, which makes it more ‘male’ than ‘neutral’, even though the term itself is not gendered. For *mistress*, most of the genus terms are the word **woman**, but they also include the terms **teacher**, **head**, and **owner**. However, as was the case with **teacher** as a genus term for *master*, the ‘neutral’ terms here are also modified with the word female, which makes all genus terms for *mistress* here ‘female’. When looking at these genus terms only, the definitions continue the pattern of defining ‘male’ words as more ‘neutral’ and ‘female’ words more explicitly ‘female’.

For definitions of *master*, the label *old-fashioned* is included in *Cobuild* for “a male teacher” and in *OAAD* for “a man who has people working for him, often as servants in his home”. *WNWCD* includes an additional note in the first definition of a *master* as “a person, *esp. a man*, who rules others or has control, authority, or power over something”. The label *old-fashioned* in *Cobuild* and *OAAD* could be taken to imply that only the definitions it is attached to in each dictionary are old-fashioned and the rest of the definitions are not. The note in *WNWCD*, however, does not comment on the topicality of the word’s meaning, but rather makes it more explicitly ‘male’. Overall, the definitions for *master* are not accompanied with very many labels or notes that would give more information about the word’s nature and use.

The definitions for *mistress* include labels in *Cobuild* and *OAAD*, and the latter also includes a note about usage in one of its definitions. In *Cobuild* the label *old-fashioned* is used in the first and third definitions for *mistress*, but the rest of the definitions do not include any specifying labels or notes. The first definition in *Cobuild* with this label is one where a *mistress* is defined as a woman in a sexual relationship with a married man, which is an existing meaning for the word, but the label here is beneficial because the use of this word might evoke negative reactions. The other definition

of *mistress* with this label in *Cobuild* is “A servant’s mistress is the woman that he or she works for.” The context of the definition seems old-fashioned and thus the label is accurate. It is interesting that the first definition of *master* in *Cobuild* does not include this label, even though it is the same exact one, except for the genus term, which for *master* is **man**.

OAAD includes either a label or usage note in all four of its definitions included here. The additional note usually a married man’s is included in the first definition of *mistress* as a woman who has a regular sexual relationship with a man that is not her husband. The note here does not comment on the nature of this word as old-fashioned, but rather only comments on how it is usually married men who have mistresses. The second and third definition are modified by *in the past*, *formal*, and *old-fashioned*, indicating that these meanings are not accurate anymore and that the word *mistress* should not be used for them. The fourth definition is labelled as *formal*, which does not really comment on the word’s gendered or time-related use, but it does imply that *mistress* in this sense is more often used in formal settings.

Finally, *WNWCD* does not include any labels or notes for its definitions of a *mistress*, which is an interesting comparison to make to the other two dictionaries’ definitions of *mistress*. Without any labels or usage notes, this word in *WNWCD* can be said to refer explicitly to women and not much can be said about its usage.

Regarding the content of the definitions here, the ones for *master* include a variety of different types. A *master* is defined as a person or a man who has people working for them, owns an animal, is greatly skilled at something, has control over something, or is a teacher. A *mistress* is defined quite similarly in many of the positions described for *master*. The obvious difference is the definition of a *mistress* as a woman in an extramarital relationship with a married man, which is not included in the definitions for *master*. Many of the definitions are almost or exactly the same for both counterparts, but they are differentiated with different genus terms, which for *mistresses* are basically explicitly ‘female’.

The definition of a *mistress* as a woman in an extramarital relationship is included in all three dictionaries, but it is interesting to note that it is the fourth definition in *WNWCD*, whereas in the other two dictionaries it is the first definition. Thus, although *WNWCD* does not employ labels or usage notes in its definitions of *mistress*, this ordering of definitions gives it some credit in neutrality. Of course, it is important to remember that the order of definitions may or may not be indicative of anything else than perhaps convenience. All three dictionaries also include definitions of a *mistress* as a woman that is in a position of authority or in control over something, or particularly skilled at something. These types of definitions are toward the end of the list for *Cobuild* and *OAAD*, whereas *WNWCD* offers these as the first two definitions. This further adds to *WNWCD*'s positive descriptions of *mistress*.

The overall inclusion of usage notes and labels in these definitions is important and add relevant information about the nature of these words and their use. Without the labels and notes the definitions seem much more differentiated, and the division into **persons** and **women** seems stronger than it actually is in these dictionaries. Regarding the descriptions that these definitions create about *masters* and *mistresses*, it seems that they are mostly described in similar ways and none of them are strictly negative, but mostly neutral or positive for both counterparts. The differing descriptions are, of course, those of *mistresses* as women in extramarital relationships, but they are not implied to be explicitly negative or positive in nature.

- (27) A bachelor is a **man** who has never married. (*Cobuild* s.v. *bachelor*)
- (28) A bachelorette is a **woman** who has never married. (*Cobuild* s.v. *bachelorette*)
- (29) 1. a **man** who has never been married (*OAAD* s.v. *bachelor*)
- (30) a young **woman** who is not married (*OAAD* s.v. *bachelorette*)
- (31) 2. a **man** who has not married (*WNWCD* s.v. *bachelor*)
- (32) [*Informal*] an unmarried, usually young **woman** (*WNWCD* s.v. *bachelorette*)

These six examples include the definitions of *bachelor* and *bachelorette* in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD*. All the definitions are short phrases and similar between the counterparts of the word-

pair in each dictionary. The most noticeable difference here is the genus terms, which are the explicitly ‘male’ **man** for *bachelorette*, and the explicitly ‘female’ **woman** for *bachelorette*. From this initial observation it seems that the words in this pair are thus far the most clearly gendered, and the ‘male’ word in this pair is explicitly ‘male’ with no ‘neutral’ genus terms.

The definitions in *Cobuild* are identical for both counterparts and the only difference is the genus term. There are also no labels or usage notes included in these. In *OAAD* the definitions are a little different: a *bachelor* has never been married, whereas a *bachelorette* is not married. This is only a minor difference, but it is interesting to pay attention to the fact that the tenses are not the same. Lastly, in *WNWCD* the definitions are somewhat differently worded, although the basic underlying meaning remains the same. A *bachelor* is a **man** who has not married and a *bachelorette* is an unmarried **woman**. *Bachelorette* is accompanied with the label *informal*, which raises the question of why *bachelorette* is informal, but presumably *bachelor* is not, since it does not include this label.

Additionally, *OAAD* and *WNWCD* include a mention of a *bachelorette* usually being a young woman that is not married, whereas age is not commented on in the definitions of *bachelor* in any of the three dictionaries here. This could indicate that *bachelor* applies to men of all ages, whereas a *bachelorette* is more often considered to be a younger woman. *OAAD* actually includes “compare spinster” within its definition of *bachelor*. A spinster, according to *OAAD* (2015), is “a woman who is not married, *especially an older woman who is not likely to marry*”. It is labelled as an old-fashioned and often disapproving word, and a usage note “This word should not now be used to mean simply a woman who is not married” is also included. It is interesting that this word is mentioned in connection to *bachelor*, which does not include any mentions of the age of a *bachelor* and is very brief and neutral in its definition.

Overall, the definitions of *bachelor* and *bachelorette* in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD* are very neutral and create almost identical descriptions of both. Of course, the descriptions are explicitly ‘male’ for *bachelor* and ‘female’ for *bachelorette*, and a difference is also in the inclusion of young

in two of the definitions of *bachelorette*. As was mentioned, these words and their definitions are different from the others in that the ‘male’ counterpart is defined in explicitly ‘male’ terms, which has thus far been the case only for ‘female’ counterparts.

Regarding labels and usage notes in the three dictionaries discussed here, *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD* each utilize these in half of their definitions presented here, but there are differences in the actual labels and usage notes included. *Cobuild* offers a full sentence usage note for *actor* and *actress* that comments on the gendered nature of these two words and their usage. There is also a shorter usage note on the gendered character of *poetess*, as well as another short note on the outdated usage of *governess*. Additionally, *Cobuild* uses the label *old-fashioned* with regard to one of the definitions of both *master* and *mistress*. Relevant definitions of *host*, *hostess*, *bachelor*, *bachelorette*, *governor*, and *poet* do not include labels or usage notes in *Cobuild*.

OAAD is somewhat similar in its use of labels and notes. Such information is included in one full sentence usage note about the gender and use of *actress*, and shorter notes like “in the past” are offered to comment on the dated use of *governess* and *mistress*. In addition, the label *old-fashioned* is applied to *poetess*, one definition of *master*, and one definition of *mistress*, which is also labelled as *formal* in two instances. *Actor*, *poet*, *governor*, *bachelor*, and *bachelorette* are not offered labels or usage notes.

WNWCD, then, also includes a label or usage note for five out of the ten definitions presented here. Short notes about *actor* and *master* often being specifically men are given, and the label *informal* is attached to *bachelorette*. The short notes give additional information about the gender of the two words. The label *informal* does not really comment on the gendered nature of *bachelorette* but does give some information about its contexts of use. Finally, the note “see -ess” is included for *actress* and *poetess*. The information under *-ess* states that these words are often avoided as patronizing or discriminatory when referring to persons. This note offers important information about the gendered character of these words and possible hazards in using them. *Poet*, *host*, *hostess*, *mistress*, and

bachelor do not include labels or usage notes in the relevant definitions.

The next point to be examined is the overall gendered nature of the genus terms and first, the focus is on the ‘male’ words in the data set. The ‘male’ items in the word-pairs include *actor*, *bachelor*, *governor*, *host*, *master*, and *poet*. These are treated very similarly in the two learner’s dictionaries, *Cobuild* and *OAAD*. The genus terms mentioned in the definitions are ‘neutral’ in four out of six words in both, including *actor*, *governor*, *host* and *poet*. The genus terms in both *Cobuild* and *OAAD* for these four are comprised of **someone**, **person**, **member**, and **official**. *Bachelor*, then, only has **man** as its genus term, which straightforwardly denotes ‘male’.

The remaining word, *master*, includes both ‘neutral’ and ‘male’ genus terms. In *Cobuild* these include **man**, **man or boy**, **someone**, **you**, male teacher, male painter, male religious teacher or leader, and **captain**, and in *OAAD* the genus terms are **man**, **person**, **owner**, **captain**, **painter**, and **religious teacher or leader**. Seven different definitions were analysed from both dictionaries for *master*, and *Cobuild* uses a more varying set of genus terms in its definitions and includes pronouns like **someone** and **you**. Regarding the gender implications of the genus words in the definitions of eight relevant senses of the word *master* in *Cobuild*, five were ‘male’, while the genus word was ‘male’ in only one corresponding definition out of six in *OAAD*. Based on these observations it seems that the ‘male’ forms of these word-pairs refer to ‘neutral’ genus terms more often than explicitly ‘male’ ones. Thus, the ‘male’ forms seem less gendered and more ‘neutral’ when looking at genus terms only.

WNWCD is similar to the learner’s dictionaries in its treatment of the ‘male’ words and including ‘neutral’ genus terms for three out of the six words. *WNWCD* gives these completely ‘neutral’ genus terms for the words *governor*, *host*, and *poet*. For *actor*, the genus term in *WNWCD* itself is ‘neutral’ but it is also noted that an *actor* is often specifically a man. *Bachelor*’s referent is ‘male’: the relevant definition of *bachelor* is simply “a **man** who has not married”. Genus terms for *master* are both ‘neutral’ and ‘male’ in *WNWCD*. These include, for instance, **man**, **employer**, **one**,

and **workman or craftsman**. The last two are interesting in that they are followed by “his or her...”, which is a neutral expression, but the words **workman** and **craftsman** include the suffix *-man*, which is ‘male’.

Actress, bachelorette, governess, hostess, mistress, and poetess, then, constitute the set of ‘female’ items in these word-pairs. *Cobuild, OAAD*, and *WNWCD* are identical in their treatment of gender with the genus terms in these definitions. The definitions of every word in all three include a ‘female’ genus term only. The genus terms in the three dictionaries include **woman, female X**, and **woman or girl**.

From this investigation into these two learner’s dictionaries and the college dictionary it seems that the ‘female’ words are usually explicitly stated to refer to women, while there is a greater likelihood of ‘neutral’ genus terms in the definitions of the ‘male’ words. Additionally, all three dictionaries give more possible genus terms to ‘male’ forms than their ‘female’ counterparts. The practice of offering more ‘neutral’ genus terms is one way of avoiding sexism and gender stereotypes. However, offering more ‘neutral’ genus terms for ‘male’ words but not for ‘female’ words in a way defeats the purpose of making the definitions less sexist or gendered. When the ‘male’ form includes mostly or only ‘neutral’ genus terms and the ‘female’ word is ‘female’ only, the issue of gendered definitions does not disappear.

4.1.2 CED, ODE, and AHD

Next, the definitions of this set of six word-pairs are examined in the general-purpose dictionaries, the *Collins English Dictionary* (CED), the *Oxford Dictionary of English* (ODE), and the *American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language* (AHD). As was with the previous section, some example definitions from the entries and labels and usage notes are looked at first, the overall gendered nature of the genus terms second. The following are examples selected from definitions under the entries for these twelve words in *CED, ODE*, and *AHD*. These again shed light onto the

differences in these definitions. The genus terms have been bolded, labels and usage notes have been italicised, and relevant pieces of the definitions have been underlined.

- (33) 1. a **person** who acts in a play, film, broadcast, etc. 2. *informal* a **person** who puts on a false manner in order to deceive others *USAGE The term actor is now almost universally used to refer to people of any gender who act (CED s.v. actor)*
- (33) 1. a **woman** who acts in a play, film, broadcast, etc. 2. *informal* a **woman** who puts on a false manner in order to deceive others *USAGE Use of the word actress to refer to a female person who acts is old-fashioned. The modern gender-neutral form is actor (CED s.v. actress)*
- (34) 1. a **person** whose profession is acting on the stage, in films, or on television; a **person** who behaves in a way that is not genuine (*ODE s.v. actor*)
- (35) a **woman** whose profession is acting on stage, in films, or on television; a **woman** who behaves in a way that is not genuine *usage: see at actor (ODE s.v. actress)*
- (36) 1. A **person** who behaves in the manner of a character, usually by reciting scripted dialogue, in order to entertain an audience, especially in a play, movie, or television show. (*AHD s.v. actor*)
- (37) A **woman** who is an actor. *See Usage Note at -ess. (AHD s.v. actress)*

These example definitions are from the entries for *actor* and *actress* in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD*.

It can be noticed that an *actor* is referred to as a **person** in all three dictionaries, meaning that its genus terms are ‘neutral’. An *actress*, then, is referred to with the explicitly ‘female’ genus term **woman** in all three.

CED defines an *actor* and *actress* with two identical phrases, and the only difference is in the genus terms. Both words also include a usage note about their gendered nature. The wording of these notes is somewhat different, but they both present the same information: *actor* is the modern gender-neutral form and using *actress* is considered old-fashioned. These usage notes neatly present the information that is relevant about the use of these words in the modern day. Overall, these definitions of the word-pair in *CED* create very similar impressions about *actors* and *actresses*. The difference in referring to **person** or **woman** in these definitions would seem sexist and more gendered without the usage notes about this issue. Additionally, the words are also similar in that they both include the label *informal* in the second definitions of the word. This label does not comment on the

issues of sexism and gender stereotypes.

Again, with *ODE*, the definitions given for *actor* and *actress* are identical apart from the genus terms. The descriptions created are thus also identical, and the first definition of both is a neutral description, the second somewhat more negative, as it refers to not being genuine. These do not include labels, but a usage note is included under the definitions of *actor*. This usage note provides information about Shakespearean plays and the gender of those playing the characters, but it also redirects to the usage note under *-ess*. This usage note is more relevant and states that “Despite the apparent equivalence between the male and female pairs of forms, they are rarely equivalent in terms of actual use and connotation in modern English. In the late 20th century, as the role of women in society changed, some of these feminine forms became problematic and were seen as old-fashioned, sexist, and patronizing.” This note is very informative in its descriptions about the use of this word in more modern times. It calls attention to possible problematic nature of words of this type and to the issue that has been described in this thesis as well: in actual use and connotations, the ‘male’ and ‘female’ forms are often not equivalents. *Actress* also includes the note “usage: see at actor”, which is a very interesting choice. Why would the usage note be included under the ‘male’ word that is not described as old-fashioned, sexist, or patronizing, and not under the ‘female’ word that is described as all three? It would seem to make more sense to include this note under the word of the two that is more possibly hazardous.

Finally, *AHD* offers very different definitions for *actor* and *actress*. An *actor* is defined in a long, descriptive sentence, which is almost peculiar in its detail. An *actress* is defined as “A woman who is an actor”, which, in addition to being much less descriptive, is actually not an adequate definition since it does not really give a meaning to the word. The definition for *actor* does not include labels or usage notes, but the one for *actress* includes a request to “see usage note at *-ess*”. In this usage note, it is stated, for example, that “- - the feminine form may be taken to imply that the task somehow differs when performed by a woman, or that it is by default the realm of men. - - With

others - - the feminine form may be taken to suggest the occupation is characteristically feminine.” This is important information about the possible problems with using words such as *actress* and draws attention to issues of sexism and negative stereotypes. In the case of *actress*, the accurate description would probably be that the feminine form might imply that the task is different when performed by women than men, or that is in the realm of men, rather than both.

Without the usage notes included here the definitions of *actor* and *actress* in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD* seem much more gendered and differentiated from each other. However, the information offered in the usage notes is central and changes the interpretation of the definitions. Their comments about gender also explain, at least partly, the inclusion of ‘neutral’ genus terms only for the definitions of *actor*, since, according to them, the ‘male’ form is “the modern gender-neutral form”.

- (38) 1.a. an unmarried **man** *USAGE Gender-neutral form: single person (CED s.v. bachelor)*
- (39) 1. *humorous* a young unmarried professional **woman** (*CED s.v. bachelorette*)
- (40) 1. a **man** who is not and has never been married (*ODE s.v. bachelor*)
- (41) 1. a young unmarried **woman** (*ODE s.v. bachelorette*)
- (42) 1.a A **man** who is not married. b. A **man** who has never been married. (*AHD s.v. bachelor*)
- (43) *Informal* An unmarried **woman**. (*AHD s.v. bachelorette*)

These examples present relevant definitions for *bachelor* and *bachelorette* in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD*. The main difference here is the genus term, which is **man** for all definitions of *bachelor* and **woman** for all definitions of *bachelorette*. As was with *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD*, *bachelor* and *bachelorette* are both explicitly gendered in their definitions in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD*. This sets them apart as the only word-pair where this occurs. Most often the ‘male’ words are defined in either ‘male’ or ‘neutral’ terms. The explicitness of *bachelorette* as ‘female’ is not that surprising, since it has been a clear pattern during this thesis.

There are some slight differences in the wordings of these phrases, but the overall definitions are quite similar for *bachelor* and *bachelorette*. A *bachelor* is stated to be a man that is not married and has never been, and a *bachelorette* is defined as a woman that is not married. The notion of

bachelor as a man who “has never been married” is mentioned in two dictionaries and in none for *bachelorette*. A *bachelorette* is also said to be a young woman in the definitions in *CED* and *ODE*. Age is not commented on in any of the three dictionaries in the definitions of a *bachelorette*. This is similar to the previously demonstrated definitions of *bachelor* and *bachelorette* in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD*. Again, it could be interpreted as indication of *bachelor* applying to men of all ages and *bachelorette* more strongly to younger women. Additionally, *CED* includes a description of a *bachelorette* as a professional woman, which differs from the other two definitions for *bachelorette* as well as from the definitions of *bachelor*.

The usage notes and labels here are worth paying attention to. *Bachelorette* in *CED* includes a usage note “Gender-neutral form: single person”, which offers a gender-neutral alternative to use instead of the gendered *bachelor*. It is interesting, however, that this note is not included in the definition of *bachelorette* as well, since it is an explicitly ‘female’ word with the suffix *-ette*. It would seem equal to include such a usage note in both words’ definitions. The other two definitions for *bachelor* in *ODE* and *AHD* do not include usage notes or labels. The definitions for *bachelorette* in *CED* and *AHD* do include labels: *humorous* in *CED* and *informal* in *AHD*. The choice of *humorous* is interesting, as it can be asked why the use of this word is humorous but its ‘male’ counterpart is not, especially when there are no other specifications for this label. The *informal* in *AHD* is interesting for the same reason, as it is also not further explained.

The defining phrases are all short and fairly similar, and thus the descriptions they create are not very different between the counterparts of this word-pair. Both are described as unmarried persons, but a difference does occur in the description of *bachelorette* as a professional or a young woman. The nature of these descriptions is very neutral and no negative attitudes are implied in these definitions.

- (44) 1. a **man** in a position of authority, ownership, or control, such as the head of a household
 2. a **person** with exceptional skill at a certain thing 3. a great **artist**, esp an anonymous but influential artist - - 5. a. a **workman** or **craftsman** fully qualified to practise a trade and to train others in it - - 8. the **principal** of some colleges - - 13. a male **teacher** - - (*CED* s.v. *master*)
- (45) 1. a **woman** in a position of authority, ownership, or control, such as the head of a household - - 3. a **woman** who has a continuing extramarital sexual relationship with a man (*CED* s.v. *mistress*)
- (46) *chiefly historical* 1. a **man** who has people working for him, especially servants or slaves: a **person** who has complete control of something; the **owner** of a dog, horse, or other domesticated animal - - 2. a **man** in charge of an organization or group, in particular: a male **schoolteacher**; the **head** of a college or school - - 3. a skilled **practitioner** of a particular art or activity - - (*ODE* s.v. *master*)
- (47) 1. a **woman** in a position of authority or control: a female **schoolteacher** who teaches a particular subject; a **woman** who is skilled in a particular subject or activity; the female **owner** of a dog, cat, or other domesticated animal; *archaic* a female **head** of a household; (*especially formerly*) a female **employer** of domestic staff 2. a **woman** (other than the man's wife) having a sexual relationship with a married man (*ODE* s.v. *mistress*)
- (48) 1. **One** that has control over another person, a group of persons, or a thing, especially: a. The **owner** or keeper of an animal - - d. An **employer**. e. The **man** who serves as the head of a household. - - 4. A male **teacher**, **schoolmaster**, or **tutor**. - - 8. An **expert** - - (*AHD* s.v. *master*)
- (49) 1. A **woman** who has a continuing sexual relationship with a man who is married to someone else. 2. A **woman** in a position of authority, control, or ownership, as the head of a household 3. a. A **woman** who owns or keeps an animal b. A **woman** who owns a slave. 4. A **woman** with ultimate control over something - -6. A **woman** who has mastered a skill or branch of learning (*AHD* s.v. *mistress*)

The data includes a large number of definitions for *master* and *mistress*, and only some were selected here to exemplify them. *CED* presents *mistress* with the ‘female’ genus term **woman** only. *ODE*’s genus terms seem to be more ‘neutral’ than ‘female’ at first glance, as they include **woman**, **schoolteacher**, **owner**, **head**, and **employer**. However, the four latter genus terms are modified by female, which makes them ‘female’ and thus, in reality, all genus terms for *mistress* in *ODE* are ‘female’. For *AHD*, then, all definitions include one and the same ‘female’ genus term **woman**.

The obvious difference emerging here is the inclusion of *mistress* as “a woman who has a continuing extramarital sexual relationship with a man” (*CED*), “a woman (other than the man's wife)

having a sexual relationship with a married man” (*ODE*), and “A woman who has a continuing sexual relationship with a man who is married to someone else” (*AHD*). It stands out because *master* does not include such a definition even though it is the ‘male’ equivalent of the word. Again, these definitions would seem to illustrate more old-fashioned views. Since it is one use of the word, it is logical to include it. It is interesting, though, that *AHD* offers this definition for *mistress* as the first one, which is then followed by other definitions similar to those under *master*. However, as was previously mentioned, the ordering of senses or meanings in a dictionary may be in an order of frequency of use, a historical order, an order that makes their defining easier, or a mere convention (Yallop 2004, 26-27). Thus, the order of these definitions cannot be taken as a clear sign of sexist views.

When compared to the definitions of *master*, these definitions of *mistress* deepen the gap between the two counterparts of this word-pair and distances women from powerful “master” positions. The action of referring to a master as either ‘neutral’ **someone** or a **man** distances women from the equation and assigns them to the category of mistresses who are explicitly women, either in positions of power or as having extramarital relationships.

CED and *ODE* offer both ‘neutral’ and ‘male’ options for *master* quite equally but their first definitions, however, are explicitly ‘male’. *AHD*, then, has the ‘neutral’ **one** as its first genus term, which is followed by more ‘neutral’ referents. ‘Male’ genus terms are presented soon though, including, for instance, “the **man** who serves as the head of a household” and “a male **teacher**”. Again, the same problem arises as did from previous findings: the inclusion of both ‘neutral’ and ‘male’ but no ‘female’ genus terms under *master* and almost only ‘female’ referents under *mistress* maintains the difference between the two. A *master* might be a person or a man, but never a woman, who is “in a position of authority, ownership, or control”, “[an] owner of a dog, horse, or other domesticated animal “, or has “exceptional skill at a certain thing”. A *mistress*, then, is almost explicitly always a woman, who, in addition to the characteristics of *master*, has a sexual relationship

with a married man. These impressions of *master* and *mistress* created in these definitions are thus quite different. Both do include references to authority, power, and control, but *mistress* also includes the references to extramarital relations.

AHD offering a ‘neutral’ genus term as its first definition for *master* makes an interesting point for comparison to *mistress*’s first definition of “A **woman** who has a continuing sexual relationship with a man who is married to someone else.” Yet again, however, it must be remembered that the ordering of definitions may or may not be an implication of something. Another interesting feature can be noticed when comparing the definitions for *master* and *mistress* within the same dictionary. According to *ODE* a *master* is “the **owner** of a dog, horse, or other domesticated animal” whereas a *mistress* is “a female **owner** of a dog, cat, or other domesticated animal”. This makes an explicit difference between owner and female owner, man, and woman, “neutral” and the “deviation”.

Finally, usage labels and notes are used sparingly in these definitions, and *ODE* is the only one that offers any in its definitions. The labels are included in the first definition of a *master* as “a man who has people working for him, especially servants or slaves”, which is labelled as *chiefly historical*. *Mistress*’s definition as “a female employer of domestic staff” is noted to be used *especially formerly*. These two labels are in place here, as the context of these two definitions suggest that it is indeed a dated situation that is described. Additionally, *ODE* includes another label in its definition of a *mistress* as “a female head of a household”, which is labelled as *archaic*. This also indicated that this use of the word is an outdated one. No labels or usage notes are provided by the other two dictionaries or for the other definitions. This is an interesting choice, especially from the point of view of the definitions of *mistress* in an extramarital relationship, which might evoke negative reactions or be deemed as a dated use.

These labels and notes about the words’ usage offer valuable information to the reader and also change the definitions a little bit. The labels and usage notes comment on the dated nature of these meanings, but not directly on the gendered or possibly sexist or otherwise negative nature of

these words.

- (50) 1. a **person** who writes or performs poetry 2. a **person** with great imagination and creativity (*CED* s.v. *poet*)
- (51) *Archaic* a female **writer** of poems (*CED* s.v. *poetess*)
- (52) a **person** who writes poems; a **person** possessing special powers of imagination or expression (*ODE* s.v. *poet*)
- (53) a female **poet**. (*ODE* s.v. *poetess*)
- (54) 1. A **writer** of poems. 2. **One** who is especially gifted in the perception and expression of the beautiful or lyrical. (*AHD* s.v. *poet*)
- (55) *Derogatory* A **woman** who is a writer of poems. *See Usage Note at -ess.* * (*AHD* s.v. *poetess*)

These examples demonstrate the definitions of *poet* and *poetess* in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD*.

The definitions for *poet* include ‘neutral’ genus terms only, since they refer to a **person**, **writer**, or **one**. The genus terms for *poetess* seem to include both ‘neutral’ and ‘female’ ones: **writer**, **poet**, and **woman**. However, **writer** and **poet** are both modified by female, which makes them ‘female’ and in turn makes the genus terms for *poetess* in all three dictionaries explicitly ‘female’. Based on the genus terms, these dictionaries describe *poets* as persons or men and *poetesses* as women.

The descriptions these definitions create about *poets* and *poetesses* are quite different. A *poet* seems to be someone with “great imagination and creativity”, “special powers of imagination or expression”, and is “especially gifted in the perception and expression of the beautiful or lyrical”. Conversely, a *poetess* is “a female writer of poems”, a female poet”, or “a woman who is a writer of poems”. Additionally, *ODE* defines a *poetess* as “a female poet”, which is not an adequate definition since it does not really give a meaning for the word.

The definitions of *poetess* in *CED* and *AHD* include labels and usage notes. According to *CED* it is an *archaic* and *literary* word, and *AHD* labels it as a *derogatory* word and encourages the reader again to see a usage note under *-ess*. As was already quoted under the examination of *actor* and *actress*, this usage note says that “- - the feminine form may be taken to imply that the task somehow differs when performed by a woman, or that it is by default the realm of men. - - With others - - the feminine form may be taken to suggest the occupation is characteristically feminine.”

The information offered by the labels *archaic* and *derogatory*, and the usage note is very important and gives the reader a good deal of instructions on the possible negative results of using such words. For *poetess* here, the case of the occupation being characteristically feminine does not seem to be the most accurate one. Rather it seems that *poetess* would fall under the two other options described in the usage note. Again, without considering the usage note and labels here, the differences between *poet* and *poetess* seem more serious, but with the note and labels it is clear that at least *CED* and *AHD* pay attention to issues of sexism and negative attitudes.

CED, *ODE*, and *AHD* are quite similar in their inclusion of labels and usage notes. *CED* includes full sentence usage notes for *actor* and *actress* that comment on the words' gendered character and use, and state that *actor* is the modern gender-neutral form that is used to refer to people of any gender, and that using *actress* to refer to women who act is old-fashioned. *Bachelor* is also accompanied with a usage note informing that a gender-neutral form to use would be "a single person". This pays attention to the gendered nature of the word and offers a solution for a gender-neutral alternative. *Bachelorette* has the label *humorous* attached to it, which does not comment on issues of gender and is an interesting choice compared to the usage note included for its counterpart. Additionally, the label *archaic* is used to describe *poetess* and this offers details on the outdated use of this word. *Master*, *mistress*, and *poet* are not given labels or usage notes in relevant instances.

ODE includes the label (*chiefly*) *historical* for one definition of *master* and the label *archaic* and usage note *especially formerly* for two definitions of *mistress*. These provide information on the outdated nature of some of these words' definitions and uses. A long usage note is included under *actor*, which discusses the gender of the actors in Shakespearean plays, and also redirects to see the note under *-ess*. This note about *-ess* offers a good deal of important information about the gendered nature of words with 'male' and 'female' word-pairs and their use and connotations, as well as comments on the problematic nature of feminine forms. *Actress* also includes a usage note, but a very short one: *usage: see at actor*. Thus, these issues are commented on under the entry of *actor* and not

actress, which is the word of the two that these description apply to. *Bachelor*, *bachelorette*, *poet*, and *poetess* are not offered labels or usage notes.

Lastly, *AHD* includes a short note “see usage note at -ess” for *actress* and *poetess*. The usage note at -*ess* is long and provides information about the gendered character and usage of word with the suffix -*ess* attached to them. *Poetess* also includes the label *derogatory*, which is the only instance of this label within the relevant entries analysed in this study. Finally, *bachelorette* is labelled as *informal*, which again does not comment on the gender implications of this word further than offering some notion about its contexts of use. *Actor*, *bachelor*, *master*, *mistress*, and *poet* do not include labels or usage notes.

Next, the overall gendered nature of the genus terms in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD* is looked into. The three dictionaries are very similar in their ‘neutral’- ‘male’-both ratio of genus terms when it comes to the ‘male’ forms: *actor*, *bachelor*, *governor*, *host*, *master*, and *poet*. All three dictionaries introduce four out of six words with ‘neutral’ genus terms. These are *actor*, *governor*, *host*, and *poet*. Among several different genus terms for these four words are, for instance, **person**, **one**, **ruler**, **representative**, **manager** and **administrator**. *Bachelor* in all three dictionaries includes the ‘male’ genus term **man** only. Finally, *master* includes both ‘male’ and ‘neutral’ genus terms, such as **man**, **person**, **one**, **owner**, **artist**, male teacher, and **principal**.

Regarding these words’ ‘female’ counterparts, *CED*, *ODE* and *AHD* are all equal in their lack of definitions with ‘neutral’ genus terms only; the number of these in relevant definitions in all three is zero. All six words in these three dictionaries are defined in explicitly ‘female’ terms. There are cases where the genus term itself is ‘neutral’, such as **employer**, but these are all modified with female, which makes them denote ‘female’. The ‘female’ words’ genus terms in all three dictionaries are most often the word **woman**.

The three general-purpose dictionaries show a tendency of referring to ‘female’ words with explicitly ‘female’ terms, whereas ‘male’ words are more likely to be defined in ‘neutral’ terms. The

three dictionaries also provide more varied genus terms for the ‘male’ words, while the ‘female’ word mostly refer to the ‘female’ term **woman**, and a couple others that are modified by female, as was mentioned above. Again, the inclusion of references to ‘neutral’ terms is a practice that can advance gender-neutral language and decrease sexism and gender stereotypes. Doing this mostly for the ‘male’ forms while ‘female’ forms remain explicitly gendered, however, does not remove the issues of gendered definitions.

Some practices for avoiding gender implications and sexism in dictionaries were presented in section 2.4. Those included, for instance, replacing pronouns he or she with something gender-neutral such as they, anyone, or someone, and changing the subject to something neutral like person or professional. Especially including neutral pronouns and subjects like *someone* and *person* can be detected in the definitions and specifically the definitions for ‘male’ words. As was seen, the ‘female’ words are mostly defined in ‘female’ terms but the ‘male’ ones are more often defined with neutral expressions.

The ‘male’ word with a ‘neutral’ genus term emphasizes the difference between that and the ‘female’ word and maintains the role of ‘female’ words as the others. This may create a division where the ‘neutral’, that is, ‘male’ word is the default one and the ‘female’ word is a deviation from it. In other words, men are the default, and women are the deviation. The differences in the definitions of ‘male’ and ‘female’ words in general paint different pictures of men and women, who are assigned to different roles which may be harmful. The roles given to women in these definitions are mostly less powerful and more trivial than those given to men.

4.2 Examples

In this section the example phrases in the entries for the word-pairs are looked into. The examples are mostly presented in accordance with the word-pairs in this study, for instance, examples for *actor* and *actress* are addressed together. This section also follows the same order as the previous one: examples

from *Cobuild*, *OAAD* and *WNWCD* are looked at first, examples from *CED*, *ODE* and *AHD* second. In the analysis of the examples, the overall inclusion of examples in the dictionaries as well as the number of examples presented for the words is looked into first, and after that the exemplifying phrases are more closely examined. Comparisons are made regarding gender asymmetry between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words and the occurrence of examples in their entries, as well as between dictionaries. The word “example” will be used to refer to both the examples in the entries of the dictionaries as well as to the examples included here.

4.2.1 Cobuild, OAAD, and WNWCD

Firstly, *Cobuild* offers one or more examples for eight out of the twelve words: *actor*, *actress*, *governor*, *host*, *hostess*, *master*, *mistress*, and *poet*. Out of the remaining four words, three are ‘female’ and one is ‘male’: *bachelor*, *bachelorette*, *governess*, and *poetess*. From these two lists it can be noticed that *bachelor* - *bachelorette* is the only word-pair that is equally left without examples, whereas the other two without examples are ‘female’ words. For example, a noticeable difference can be seen in the words *governor* and *governess* as the former is accompanied by five example phrases and the latter by zero. In *Cobuild* an imbalance between the number of examples for ‘male’ and ‘female’ words can be seen in most word-pairs, where the ‘male’ words are accompanied by more examples than the ‘female’ words.

Secondly, *OAAD* is more reserved in its use of examples, as only half of the words include examples. These include *bachelor*, *governor*, *host*, *hostess*, *master*, and *mistress*. *Actor*, *actress*, *bachelorette*, *governess*, *poet* and *poetess* constitute the other half without examples. Differences in the number of examples between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words are smaller here as the overall number of examples is smaller. Based on these lists, *OAAD* could be viewed as more equal in its distribution of examples, as four out of six pairs include the same number of examples for both ‘male’ and ‘female’ words, whether that be zero or more. In the two word-pairs where only one counterpart has

examples, it is the ‘male’ one, and, for instance, the difference between *governor* – *governess* is quite large: the former has five examples and the latter zero.

Thirdly, *WNWCD* includes a very small number of examples in the entries for all of these twelve words: only two, *governor* and *master* include examples in the definitions relevant to this thesis. The obvious observation here is that this dictionary, compared to the two previous dictionaries, employs examples a lot less. Regarding the equality of these examples, it is difficult to make inferences of *WNWCD* based on only these twelve words. On the basis of the two words with examples both being ‘male’ there is a small indication to the same trend that is present in *Cobuild* and *OAAD* as well, where ‘male’ words are more likely to include examples.

From this brief overview of the distribution of examples in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD*, it seems that a trend of favouring the ‘male’ words over the ‘female’ words when it comes to the offering of examples within the entries is taking place. In addition to differences between words in one dictionary there are also differences between the three dictionaries. The differences occur in the overall number of examples included in the entries in as well as in the equality or inequality of distributing these to one or both counterparts of the word-pairs.

Next, a more detailed investigation of the examples in the entries in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, and *WNWCD* is presented. The following examples are selected to represent the examples in the entries of the twelve words. The examples discussed are intended to be a set of demonstrative data selected from the dictionary entries. The referent words and pronouns in the phrases have been bolded and interesting parts of the examples have been underlined. Examples are looked at in the three dictionaries one by one. The following examples are from *Cobuild*, which has examples for nine out of twelve words.

- (56) His **father** was an actor in the Cantonese Opera Company. / **You** have to be a very good actor to play that part. (*Cobuild* s.v. *actor*)
- (57) **She's** a very great dramatic actress. (*Cobuild* s.v. *actress*)

(56) and (57) present the examples that are offered for *actor* and *actress* in *Cobuild*. An *actor* according to these two example sentences can either be a man or a ‘neutral’ someone as it is exemplified with word **father** and the pronoun **you**. Here, to make this more gender neutral, it would have been possible to include an illustrating example of *actor* where the phrase would have made it evident that the actor was a woman. An *actress*, then, is explicitly ‘female’ when looking at the pronoun **she** in this example. This continues the pattern that has become familiar during the course of this thesis. ‘Male’ words that are seemingly ‘neutral’ due to ‘neutral’ referents are in reality still used to refer for the most part to men and women being referred to with a word that is explicitly marked ‘female’. Otherwise, the content of these examples and the descriptions they create about *actors* and *actresses* are neutral, positive, and quite similar to each other. They do not give negative impressions of either but rather describe both as good at the profession.

(58) Apart from my **host**, I didn't know a single person there. / **Tommy** was always the perfect host. / **I** am host of a live radio programme. (*Cobuild* s.v. *host*)

(59) The **hostess** introduced them. / **She** was a superb hostess to us all. (*Cobuild* s.v. *hostess*)

Number (58) and (59) present examples included in the entries for *host* and *hostess* in *Cobuild*. According to these examples, a *host* could be a ‘neutral’ someone or a man as the sentences refer to the word **host**, which has no gender specifications, the ‘neutral’ pronoun **I**, and **Tommy**, which is usually considered to be a man’s name. The example sentences for *hostess* include references to the word **hostess** itself and the feminine pronoun **she**. These two cases indicate that a *hostess* is mainly a woman, as the pronoun denotes ‘female’ and the word *hostess* includes the suffix *-ess*, meaning ‘female’ as well. The lack of reference to ‘female’ terms in *host* and to ‘male’ terms in *hostess* they are still differentiated as the former referring mostly to ‘male’ and the latter to ‘female’ persons. As with the previous examples of *actor* and *actress*, the content and descriptions created in these examples are either neutral or positive in nature, and neither creates strong images.

- (60) The dog yelped excitedly when his **master** opened a desk drawer and produced his leash. / **She** was a master of the English language. / **He** is a master at blocking progress. / **They** appear masters in the art of making regulations work their way. (*Cobuild* s.v. *master*)
- (61) **She** was his mistress for three years. / He has a wife and a **mistress**. / My history **mistress** was extremely helpful. / **She** had always been mistress of her own destiny. (*Cobuild* s.v. *mistress*)

Examples (60) and (61) both include four example sentences selected from the entries for *master* and *mistress* in *Cobuild*. The four examples for *master* have been included here from a total of eleven examples under the entry that could be considered relevant as none were, for instance, uses of *master* as a verb. These four were selected to demonstrate the variety of different referents within the examples. Out of the aforementioned eleven examples six have such a referent that can be considered ‘neutral’, four ‘male’, and one ‘female’. The ‘female’ example is included here in the demonstrative examples as the second sentence in number (60) with the antecedent pronoun **she**. The other three examples include the antecedent pronouns **he** and **they**, and the word **master** itself. Out of these three, **master** and **they** are ‘neutral’ as they do not include references to gender, and **he** is a masculine pronoun denoting ‘male’. So, two out of the four sentences here are exemplified with ‘neutral’ references, one sentence with ‘female’ reference, and one with ‘male’ references. Based on these numbers, the examples for *master* can be considered ‘neutral’, since they include both women and men in the sentences.

In *Cobuild*, all eight example phrases of *mistress* are gendered and refer more strongly to women than men or both. The eight sentences refer to either the pronoun **she** or the word **mistress** itself. Thus, there is much less variety in the referents for *mistress* in comparison to those for *master*. Nevertheless, four examples are included here for *mistress* out of the eight relevant ones. The examples presented demonstrate the ‘female’ reference in the sentences with the antecedent pronoun **she** and the word **mistress** itself, which denotes ‘female’ with the suffix *-ess*. These examples for *mistress* include a few words that have been underlined, his, he, and wife. These words are raised to

attention here because they emphasize a traditional dynamic where a man is in a heterosexual marital relationship with a woman and has a relationship with another woman as well. The last example phrase for *mistress* differs a little from the others, as it can be taken as an empowering description of a woman who takes matters into their own hands and has power to do that. The types of examples here, however, emphasize the difference between *master* and *mistress* even though they are supposed to be different versions of the same word or thing.

Within the examples included here, the descriptions and images created differ between *masters* and *mistresses*. The former are described as being a master at something, being great at something, or having power over something or someone. For the latter the descriptions include the positive views about a history mistress and a mistress of her own destiny, but also the less positive, at least in connotations, the mention of mistresses in another sense.

Next some examples from *OAAD* are presented with more detailed observations about them. As was mentioned earlier in the overview on the number of examples in these dictionaries, *OAAD* provides one or more example for six out of the twelve words. There are fewer examples to discuss here than in the previous paragraphs, but nevertheless the following six examples come from *OAAD* and are followed by some commentary.

- (62) **James**, our host, introduced us to the other guests. / a TV game show **host** (*OAAD* s.v. *host*)
- (63) **Mary** was always the perfect hostess. / Many thanks to our **host and hostess** for such a wonderful evening. (*OAAD* s.v. *hostess*)

These two cases display the examples included in the entries for *host* and *hostess* in *OAAD*. Here again a *host* is referred to as either a man or a ‘neutral’ person with the referent **James**, which is a male name, while the second instance of the word **host** does not indicate gender. Similarly, a *hostess* is referred to as either a woman or ‘neutral’ person. The referents for *hostess* include **Mary**, a woman’s name, while the phrase **host and hostess** includes both the ‘male’ and ‘female’

counterparts of this word-pair. Both words' examples are quite similar in their gender representations, but in both cases the first example offered is gender specific with the names **James** and **Mary** and the 'neutral' cases are given second. This strengthens the difference between the words and the genders they are appointed to. As was mentioned in section 2.4 including references to both women and men in definitions and examples can be a useful practice in making the entries more neutral and this practice has been employed in the second phrase in example (63). The content of these examples and their descriptions are neutral and positive for both parties of this word-pair, and in that sense, the words are quite equal.

- (64) They lived in fear of their **master**. / **She** was no longer master of her own future. / The dog saved its **master's** life. / an exhibition of work by the French master **Monet**. (*OAAD* s.v. *master*)
- (65) the **mistress** of the house / Lizzie, fetch your **mistress** her shawl. / **She** wants to be mistress of her own affairs. / **She** is the mistress of plain speech. (*OAAD* s.v. *mistress*)

These examples from *OAAD* demonstrate the use of *master* and *mistress*. The selected four examples for *master* include two 'neutral' cases and one 'female', which is somewhat surprising in light of the results thus far. The 'neutral' ones are the first and third instances in (64), with **master** having no specifications of gender. The fourth example here is not so obviously gendered, because the master referred to is Monet, who might not be familiar with everyone. It is, however, a French *male* painter, which makes this example phrase 'male'. The second selected example includes the pronoun **she** as the antecedent pronoun. This is one way to avoid unequal examples and to be inclusive of women and men. Here *master* could be considered to be exemplified in a 'neutral'/equal way, since there are two mostly or completely 'neutral', one 'male', and one 'female' term.

A *mistress* in *OAAD* is referred to with the word **mistress** itself and the pronoun **she** in the four example phrases presented here, and these four examples are all that were included in the relevant definitions. All the examples are explicitly 'female', because of the feminine pronoun **she** and the word *mistress* including the suffix *-ess*, denoting 'female'. Additionally, the two cases of **mistress**

are followed by her, which strengthens their femininity. Thus, *mistress* is marked as explicitly ‘female’ and correspondingly the seemingly ‘neutral’ *master* seems to refer more to men or someone neutral than women. Similarly to the examples of *mistress* in *Cobuild*, the third phrase implies that a *mistress* is a powerful figure who can take care of their own affairs. These examples are different from others for this word-pair in having the ‘female’ reference for *master* and for the descriptions provided, especially for *mistress*. The examples selected here do not include mentions of a *mistress* as someone having an extramarital relationship, but rather the descriptions are either very neutral or put *mistresses* in a positive light as in the last two examples. Overall, the descriptions these examples create about *mistresses* are actually somewhat more positive than those of *master*, since the former is described neutrally in the first two phrases and in a positive light in the other two phrases with contexts of control and being good at something. *Master* is presented in a more negative context in its first two phrases with references to fear and not being in control, and neutrally in the other two.

- (66) an eligible **bachelor** (= one that many people want to marry, especially because he is rich) / a confirmed **bachelor** (= a person who does not intend to marry; often used in newspapers to refer to a homosexual man) (*OAAD* s.v. *bachelor*)
- (67) the **governor** of Arizona / **Governor** Arnold Schwarzenegger / the former **governor** of the colony / a provincial **governor** (*OAAD* s.v. *governor*)

Finally, (66) and (67) present examples offered for *bachelor* and *governor* in *OAAD*. These are commented on together as they are two words in *OAAD* where only one counterpart of a word-pair is exemplified. The two example phrases for *bachelor* are very short, but the underlined parts of the two examples offer a bit more information on the uses of the word. Neither of the example phrases have nothing in themselves that indicate gender. The specifications in parenthesis, however, change things a bit. An eligible *bachelor* is a “he” and a confirmed *bachelor* is a “person” but mostly refers to men. This additional information in parenthesis in these examples assign a ‘male’ gender to *bachelor*, which would not be explicitly gendered without them. The descriptions these two phrases create of bachelors are quite positive, as they refer to *bachelors* as people who are desirable and have

made their own decisions about the matter of marriage.

The four phrases presented in (67) include all examples of *governor* from the definitions relevant to this study. The examples are short phrases, but they do not have any additional information attached to them as those of *bachelor* did. They all include the word **governor**, which in itself does not indicate gender. The second exemplifying phrase, however, refers to Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, who is a man. Thus, this one phrase out of the four phrases is more ‘male’ than ‘neutral’. The other three phrases are ‘neutral’, since there is no content that would indicate reference to specific gender. There is not much to comment on in the descriptions or impressions these phrases give about *governors*, as they are so short. The descriptions are neutral and the only gendered feature here is the second phrase with explicit reference to a male governor.

Lastly, *WNWCD* only offers examples for two of the twelve words: *governor* and *master* and these examples are only short phrases that do not demonstrate the use of these words very well. The two following display these example phrases.

(68) the board of **governors** of a hospital (*WNWCD* s.v. *governor*)

(69) chess **master**, golf **master** / **master** of the situation (*WNWCD* s.v. *master*)

These two present the examples given for relevant senses. Examples (68) and (69) are ‘neutral’ as the phrases alone do not indicate gender. The examples do not give information on the use of the words or about their gendered nature. The use of these kind of phrases is a practice that can be used in order to make examples or definitions ‘neutral’. Since there are no examples included for the ‘female’ counterparts of these words, it is impossible to make comparisons to those and thus difficult to make conclusions about the equality of examples in this dictionary or on whether or not the inclusion of neutral genus terms would also apply to the ‘female’ words. Regarding the whole content of the examples, both could be used to refer to women and men, and the impressions given about *governors* and *masters* are either neutral or positive.

4.2.2 CED, ODE, and AHD

Again, before moving on to the more detailed analysis of the examples offered with these twelve words in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD* some remarks are made about the general inclusion of examples in these dictionaries. As was with the three previous dictionaries, these remarks have to do with gender asymmetry between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words as well as with differences between dictionaries.

Firstly, *CED* includes examples for only two out of the twelve words: *master* and *mistress*. Relevant definitions of the remaining ten words do not include any examples in this dictionary. As was the case with *WNWCD* it is difficult to make conclusions about the equality of the number of examples offered in this dictionary based only on this small set of twelve words. From what can be seen in the data at hand though, it seems that in general this dictionary uses few examples. Additionally, based on the two words with examples being a word-pair, there is some equality in the ratio of ‘male’ – ‘female’ exemplified words as well since the two words with examples represent women and men.

ODE employs examples much more than *CED* and includes examples for ten out of the twelve words in total. The words with one or more examples are *actor*, *actress*, *bachelor*, *bachelorette*, *governor*, *host*, *hostess*, *master*, *mistress*, and *poet*. The remaining two words without examples are *governess*, and *poetess*. It can be seen here that six out of the ten words with exemplifying phrases or sentences are ‘male’ and four are ‘female’. Within the six word-pairs there are four where *ODE* offers examples for both the ‘male’ and the ‘female’ word. The other two pairs include an example for the ‘male’ word but not for the ‘female’ one. This shows some inequality between these words because the ‘male’ one seems to be preferred over the ‘female’ one, at least in the inclusion of examples in their entries. Regarding the actual number of examples in the entries of the word-pairs where both counterparts are accompanied by examples, there are no large differences.

Lastly, *AHD* is very close to *CED* in its overall number of examples included, which is three out of twelve. The words with examples include *master*, *mistress*, and *poet*, and without examples

are *actor*, *actress*, *bachelor*, *bachelorette*, *governor*, *governess*, *host*, *hostess*, and *poetess*. From these two lists it is again difficult to make any broader conclusions about the equality of the numbers of examples in the entries in this dictionary. It can, however, be noticed that the word-pairs are equal in their number of examples in the sense that there are four pairs where neither counterpart has an example. In addition to these there is one pair where both words have examples: *master* and *mistress*, which have the same number of relevant examples. The sixth pair of words is *poet* – *poetess*, in which *poet* has one example, *poetess* has none. This is a pair that could be considered unequal in the way of the trend, which has been the preference of ‘male’ words over ‘female’ ones. However, the overall inclusion of examples in this dictionary seems quite equal, as in five out of the six word-pairs both counterparts either do or do not include examples.

As was with the previous three dictionaries, some instances and a more detailed analysis of the twelve words and their examples in *CED*, *ODE*, and *AHD* is presented here. Again, the point of the highlighted instances here is to demonstrate the types and contents of examples in these dictionaries, not to present an all-inclusive record of them. Referents of the exemplified words have been bolded and interesting parts of the examples underlined for comments. First, the following examples come from *CED*, which is very scarce in its use of examples: only two out of twelve words include examples.

(70) a **master** of the violin (*CED* s.v. *master*)

(71) **she** was a mistress of her own destiny (*CED* s.v. *mistress*)

These two demonstrate the only examples given for the set of twelve words in their senses relevant to this study. A *master* is exemplified in (70) without gender implied. *Mistress* is accompanied with an example where the pronoun **she** is the antecedent pronoun and makes the example sentence refer explicitly to women. These two examples demonstrate what has been said earlier in this thesis: even if the ‘male’ word is defined or exemplified in ‘neutral’ terms, the fact that there still is a ‘female’ word that is exemplified in ‘female’ terms only, it could be that the seemingly

‘neutral’ word is used to refer to men and the explicitly ‘female’ one to women. This supports a dichotomy where the ‘male’ version is the default and the ‘female’ one a deviance from it. The content of these two example phrases does not have much to comment on. Though different, both are positive in nature and again, the impression of a *mistress* as a capable and powerful person can be made from its example phrase here.

Next a closer analysis of the entries and their examples in *ODE* is presented along with comments. *ODE* is clearly the most active in its use of examples out of the three dictionaries under investigation here and offers an example for ten out of the twelve words.

- (72) in war **one** must be good actor / **employers** are key actors within industrial relations
(*ODE* s.v. *actor*)
- (73) **she** is one of the great actresses of her generation / **I** became a very good actress and they nearly always believed me (*ODE* s.v. *actress*)

These two present the relevant examples under the entries for *actor* and *actress* in *ODE*. An *actor* here is exemplified as a ‘neutral’ someone as the referring expressions in the two example phrases are **one** and **employers** and there are no implications or references to gender. Thus, examples for *actor* are ‘neutral’ and do not exclude women from being referred to with this word since there are no gender-indicating expressions in the phrases. The choice of examples in general is interesting, as one could assume that the most common sense of *actor* would have to do with the profession of acting, as is the case for the examples of an *actress*.

According to the examples an *actress* may be a woman with the antecedent pronouns **she** and also a ‘neutral’ person with the antecedent pronoun **I**. This pronoun, however, cannot really be taken to be ‘neutral’ because the phrase is “I became a very good *actress*...”, where the word *actress* itself makes the phrase ‘female’ due to the feminine suffix *-ess*. The content of these examples creates positive impressions about both *actors* and *actresses* as persons who are good or great at something they do.

- (74) a dinner-party **host** / your host is **Stuart Macmillan** (*ODE* s.v. *host*)
 (75) the perfect dinner-party **hostess** / a game-show **hostess** (*ODE* s.v. *hostess*)

These four phrases display the examples for *host* and *hostess*, two phrases for each. *Host* is exemplified with a reference to both a ‘neutral’ **host** and a ‘male’ **Stuart Macmillan**, assuming that **Stuart** is a man’s name. Thus, *host* has a ‘neutral’ and a ‘male’ example, which means that there are no references to women in this entry. The example phrases for *hostess* refer to the word **hostess** itself and, therefore, the two phrases are ‘female’, as gender is implied in the suffix *-ess*, meaning ‘female’. *Host* seems to refer more to men than women and vice versa with *hostess*, due to the word **hostess** itself. The descriptions about *hosts* and *hostesses* these examples create are again either neutral or positive and also quite similar to each other, and very short phrases with no additional information.

- (76) **he** was master of the situation / the **master** of the house / in many ways dogs reflect the styles of their **masters** / **I**’m a master of disguise. / follow in the footsteps of the masters and paint in locations made famous by **their** work. (*ODE* s.v. *master*)
 (77) **she** is always mistress of the situation, coolly self-possessed. / a mistress of the sound bite, **she** is famed for the acidity of her tongue. / he asked for the **mistress** of the house. / Elsie knew her husband had a **mistress** tucked away somewhere. (*ODE* s.v. *mistress*)

This collection comes from the examples for *master* and *mistress* in *ODE*. Overall, there are nine examples for *master*, of which one is ‘male’ and the remaining eight are ‘neutral’. The ‘male’ example is included here as the first phrase in (76) and the other four in this list represent the ‘neutral’ examples in *ODE* for this word. Based on the number of ‘neutral’ examples it seems that *master* is a fairly ‘neutral’ word, though there are still zero examples with a ‘female’ reference. *Mistress* is accompanied by seven examples in total, and four of those are included here. All seven examples are explicitly ‘female’ with reference to either the word **mistress** with the ‘female’ denoting suffix *-ess* or **she**. The first two phrases included here are the ones with **she** and the other two illustrate the examples with **mistress**.

The fourth phrase in (77) includes an underlined part with the words “Elsie knew her husband

had a mistress”. It is not possible to make definite inferences from this phrase alone, but it does, however, imply that a woman has a heterosexual marriage with a man who has a mistress that is, presumably, also a woman. Interpreted this way, the underlined phrase strengthens the fourth phrase as explicitly ‘female’ and represents traditional views of marriage. The lack of the opposite gender in both excludes women from *master* and men from *mistress*. *Master* and *mistress* in this dictionary seem to be quite similarly exemplified when it comes to the content of the examples. Both include references to persons in charge or a leading role, or very good at something one does. Exceptions are the dog example for *master* and the husband’s extramarital relationship example for *mistress*, both of which do not occur in their counterpart’s examples. These examples give either neutral or positive impressions about both and no explicitly negative descriptions are made. Though, the wording in the last phrase for *mistress* could imply a negative context.

Lastly, the following instances demonstrate the examples in *AHD*, which includes them for only three out of the twelve words: *master*, *mistress*, and *poet*. *Master* and *mistress* are commented on first, *poet* after that.

- (78) The dog ran towards its **master** / the **master** of a large tea plantation / I had to admit that I had met my **master** and so conceded the game / a **master** of three languages (*AHD* s.v. *master*)
- (79) Thirteen years had seen her **mistress** of Kellynch Hall (Jane Austen) / a cat sitting in its **mistress’s** lap / the **mistress** of her own mind / a **mistress** of the culinary art (*AHD* s.v. *mistress*)

The phrases and sentences in (78) and (79) present the examples offered for *master* and *mistress* in *AHD*. The four example phrases for both here are all the relevant ones included in the study. The words are very similar in referents, as it is the word itself for both in all four example phrases. So, the referents in all four examples of *master* here are **master**, and for *mistress* they are **mistress**. The gender implications based on these are ‘neutral’ for *master*, since **master** itself does not contain specific gender references, and ‘female’ for *mistress*, with the word suffix *-ess*, again,

denoting ‘female’. The examples of *master* include references to a dog owner, a ruler of a plantation, and to persons who are *masters* at something such as a game or languages. For *mistress*, the example phrases are quite alike, as they also include a reference to a pet owner, a person who is the head of a household, and someone who is great at something, in this case culinary arts. The remaining example is “the *mistress* of her own mind”, which is like other earlier examples where *mistresses* are described as persons in control of their own affairs. It differs a little from the examples offered for *master*, which do not include such phrases. Overall, though, the nature and content of these examples for both *masters* and *mistresses* are positive and the descriptions they create are very similar between the ‘female’ and ‘male’ words.

- (80) “[**He**] was the bard of the bird feeder, the poet of the small and honey” (Bill McKibben)
(*AHD* s.v. *poet*)

In (80) is the example phrase offered for *poet* in *AHD*. In this instance, the *poet* is coreferential with the pronoun **he**. Other than this, there are no gender implications in the phrase, but the pronoun on its own is enough to make this phrase explicitly ‘male’. The word *poet* itself is also included in this example phrase, which makes the connection stronger. This example of a *poet* is not very informative on the meaning or use of the word as it is a quote that uses poetic language. It is also not a very intelligible example, as the language used is likely more difficult to understand than the word *poet* itself would be. Otherwise, this example phrase does not have much to comment on, aside from creating quite a decorative description of a *poet*.

5 Discussion

Through summarising and discussing the analysis and results of this study the following research questions are answered:

- 1) What definitions and examples are given in the entries for the selected set of word-pairs, and are there differences between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words? What kinds of descriptions are created about men and women?
- 2) Are there signs of sexism or female gender stereotypes in the definitions, examples, or the descriptions created?
- 3) Are relevant labels and usage notes included and how do these comment on the possibly sexist or problematic nature of the words?

From the analysis and findings presented in the fourth chapter it can be noticed that the definitions and examples of the twelve words seem to follow a pattern. The ‘male’ words are often treated more neutrally with regard to genus terms and referents relating to the words in the definitions and the examples illustrating the use of the words, as well as in their content and descriptions created. They are often also favoured in the overall offering of examples and in the numbers of examples included.

The ‘male’ words included in the analysis have either ‘neutral’ or ‘male’ genus terms and referents in their definitions and the majority of these are ‘neutral’. The ‘neutral’ terms for the ‘male’ words include words like *someone* or *person*, as well as the word itself. Conversely all of the ‘female’ words in the analysis include mostly ‘female’ genus terms and referents, and only a couple of ‘neutral’ ones. However, the ‘neutral’ genus terms are all modified by *female*, which makes them explicitly gendered and refer to women only. The gender-markedness of the definitions is demonstrated in the following table. It shows whether or not gender was implicated in the definitions with *N*, *M*, *F* denoting ‘neutral’, ‘male’ and ‘female’. It is easy to notice that the ‘male’ forms are much more likely to be defined in ‘neutral’ terms whereas the ‘female’ forms are often defined in explicitly ‘female’ terms. Regarding the overall ratio of ‘male’, ‘neutral’, and ‘female’ genus terms in the definitions in all six dictionaries that were consulted, it can be stated that there is a clear difference between the ‘male’ and ‘female’ words.

Table 1: Gender in the definitions

WORD	COBUILD	OAAD	WNWCD	CED	ODE	AHD
actor	N	N	N	N	N	N
actress	F	F	F	F	F	F
bachelor	M	M	M	M	M	M
bachelorette	F	F	F	F	F	F
governor	N	N	N	N	N	N
governess	F	F	F	F	F	F
host	N	N	N	N	N	N
hostess	F	F	F	F	F	F
master	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M	N/M
mistress	F	F	F	F	F	F
poet	N	N	N	N	N	N
poetess	F	F	F	F	F	F

For example, *Cobuild* and *OAAD* offer definitions that are exactly the same except for the genus term, which for the ‘male’ word is ‘neutral’ and for the ‘female’ one it is ‘female’. This was demonstrated with definitions such as *host* – *hostess* in *Cobuild* and for *actor* – *actress* in *OAAD*, which were presented in full form previously in examples (1-4). Clearly the ‘male’ forms become ‘neutral’ via the ‘neutral’ genus term, but *hostess* and *actress* are by no means obsolete or even rare in everyday communication. Thus the ‘female’ forms may easily continue to be the choice of word when referring to women.

One observation is that many ‘female’ words are described as somehow lesser than the ‘male’ ones and might include more old-fashioned and patronizing aspects. For example, the difference between the definitions for *poet* as a person with “beauty of thought and language” and *poetess* as “a woman or a girl who writes poems or verses” in *WNWCD* (examples (9) and (10)) creates quite a different description of both.

Similarly, some definitions make a clear distinction between women and men with regard to positions of power as is demonstrated in the analysis by the definitions for *master* and *mistress* in

CED, *ODE*, and *AHD* (examples (44-49)). Sometimes the definition of a ‘female’ word is along the lines of “female X” as is the case for the definition of *poetess* in *Cobuild* which is simply “A poetess is a female poet.” (*Cobuild* s.v. *poetess*). This is obviously not an adequate definition since there is no actual definition of what a *poetess* is. In order to acquire the meaning of *poetess* the dictionary user has to look up *poet* as well in the case that it is also an unfamiliar word.

A good example of old-fashioned views about women is the difference between *governor* and *governess* in *Cobuild* and *OAAD* (examples (17-20)). The definitions represent old-fashioned understandings about the roles that women should be in and describe *governors* in fields of politics and administration and *governesses* as living in families’ homes and teaching their children. These two dictionaries do notify the user about the old-fashioned nature of the word itself and the definitions by including usage notes “in the past” and “especially in the past” within the entries.

The six dictionaries all utilize labels and usage notes in some of their relevant entries for the set of twelve words. The dictionaries are very similar in the labels and types of usage notes included. The labels for the ‘female’ words comprise of *old-fashioned*, *formal* and *informal*, *humorous*, *archaic*, and *derogatory* in all six dictionaries. Additionally, the labels *old-fashioned* and *historical* are included in two instances of a ‘male’ word. This shows that there is not much variety in the actual labels used, but the ones used are appropriate and informative. Most labels notify about either the old-fashioned or somehow derogatory use of these words, as well as give information about the contexts of the words’ use with *formal* and *informal*. The label *humorous* stands out from the list as not very relevant in comparison to the other ones.

There are also short notes on usage that offer additional information, such as “in the past”, “especially in the past”, which are included in the definitions of *governess* in *Cobuild* and *OAAD*. *Actor* is also presented with “often specif. a man” in one instance. Most dictionaries also use longer usage notes either right under the word or by redirecting to see another entry with a usage note. The usage notes comment on the gendered nature of these words and provide information about their

usage. There are, for instance, statements such as “Usage: Gender-neutral form: single person” included in one instance of *bachelor* and “Most female poets prefer to be called poets” included for a definition of a *poetess*. Some instances also include a request to “see -ess” or “see usage note under -ess”, which redirect to an entry with a longer usage note about the uses and gender characteristics about the word. For example, “As applied to persons, now often avoided as patronizing or discriminatory” is included under *-ess* in *WNWCD*, to which the entry for *actress* guides to.

The pair *actor* and *actress* receive most attention in the form of longer usage notes in all of the six dictionaries, and in four of these, both counterparts include a usage note of some kind. For instance, *CED* includes usage notes for *actor* and *actress* stating that the gender-neutral form is *actor* and the use of *actress* when referring to women who act is considered old-fashioned, and that *actor* is now used to referring to actors of any gender. *Cobuild* adds that “actor in the singular usually refers to a man, but some women who act prefer to be called actors rather than actresses”, and the second part of this phrase is also included as a usage note for *actress*. These usage notes agree with one of the findings in this thesis about the ‘neutral’ use of ‘male’ words.

Five out of the six dictionaries include more labels or usage notes for the ‘female’ words, which emphasizes their gendered nature and shows that the dictionaries pay attention to gender issues and possible hazards in using words that explicitly denote the female gender. Including labels and usage notes such as the ones presented in this study is a useful way to include important information in dictionary entries that is not possible to include within the definitions or examples themselves. When looking at words such as the ones investigated in this thesis, labels and usage notes are of crucial importance, because the type of words here may carry negative connotations or evoke negative reactions, and one needs to be mindful of this when using the words. Sexism and gender stereotypes as topics that are related to dictionary entries sometimes almost demand additional information in the form of labels and usage notes. In this study, the dictionaries and their entries would seem much more

oblivious to the issues of sexism if they did not include labels and notes about the usage of these words.

For the examples then, the pattern is similar as there are usually ‘neutral’ and ‘male’ referents in the examples for ‘male’ words and only ‘female’ referents for the ‘female’ words. The examples differ from the definitions in that, in addition to neutral terms, many of the ‘male’ words have explicit cues on gender with cases where gender-specific pronouns are used. From the data analysed there are two entries’ examples that stand out. These are the ones for *master* in *Cobuild* and *OAAD* (examples (60) and (64)), for both of which *she* is used coreferentially to the noun *master*. These two are the only instances within the data where the definition or example of a word predominantly characterized as being used of ‘male’ persons also allows female referents. The following table demonstrates the gender of the words’ example phrases as well as the overall inclusion of examples for the twelve words in all six dictionaries. Again, it shows whether or not there are gender implications in the examples with *N*, *M*, *F* denoting ‘neutral’, ‘male’ and ‘female’

Table 2: Gender in the examples

WORD	COBUILD	OAAD	WNWCD	CED	ODE	AHD
actor	N/M	X	X	X	N	X
actress	F	X	X	X	F	X
bachelor	X	N	X	X	N	X
bachelorette	X	X	X	X	F	X
governor	N/M	N/M	N	X	N	X
governess	X	X	X	X	X	X
host	N/M	N/M	X	X	N/M	X
hostess	F	N/F	X	X	F	X
master	N/M/F	N/M/F	N	N	N/M	N
mistress	F	F	X	F	F	F
poet	M	X	X	X	M	M
poetess	X	X	X	X	X	X

Within the analysis of these the overall presence and number of examples for each word in all six of the dictionaries was looked at in addition to the broader content of the examples. In the number of examples within the six dictionaries a general finding seems to go along with the pattern of favouring the ‘male’ words over the ‘female’ ones. In five out of the six dictionaries consulted, the majority of the words presented with examples are ‘male’. The only differing dictionary is *CED*, which includes one example phrase for both parties of the word-pair *master-mistress*. From this look at the overall inclusion of examples for the ‘male’ and ‘female’ words it can be seen that ‘male’ words are more often accompanied by examples than ‘female’ words.

There are differences in the numbers of examples included for each word and in the equality between the number of examples for counterparts of the word-pairs. In addition to ‘male’ words being offered examples more often than ‘female’ words in general, the ‘male’ words are also almost exclusively the counterparts of word-pairs with the higher number of examples. Of course, it is more difficult to make broader conclusions based on only a small set of data, but it is nevertheless interesting to look into the details of these examples. Some instances in the analysis include the same number of examples for both parties of a word-pair when there are examples for both. Often the case is that only one word of a pair is exemplified and most of the time this is the ‘male’ word. An example of a noticeable difference is between *governor* with five example phrases and *governess* with zero in both *Cobuild* and *OAAD*.

The examples looked into offer less loaded content than the definitions described above. This refers to the fact that in many of the example phrases the gender of the person is not implied, and often the other content of the phrases is also very neutral. Thus, in many examples the gender-markedness is not very strong, especially in the case of the ‘male’ words. For instance, the majority of the example phrases do not propose old-fashioned views about women and most phrases are quite similar between the ‘male’ and ‘female’ words.

The examples for *mistress* in *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, *CED*, and *AHD* are different in a positive way because all four dictionaries include one phrase under this word with a description of a *mistress* as a capable, powerful, and independent person. These phrases include “She had always been a mistress of her own destiny” (*Cobuild*, example (61)), “She wants to be mistress of her own affairs” (*OAAD*, example (65)), “she is always mistress of the situation, coolly self-possessed” (*ODE*, example (77)), and “the mistress of her own mind” (*AHD*, example (79)). These phrases stand out because many examples (and definitions) describe *mistresses* through men and in terms of extramarital relationships. *Cobuild* and *ODE* themselves are, however, guilty of treating the word this way in their other example phrases apart from the ones quoted here.

The ongoing trend seems to be favouring of the ‘male’ counterpart of these six word-pairs regarding both the definitions and examples of their entries. The issue arising from this phenomenon was already described within the analysis but since it is a central finding, it is restated here. The inclusion of ‘neutral’ genus terms such as *someone* or *person* in the definitions of the entries is in principle a good practice for avoiding possible sexist or gender-biased implications or attitudes. However, in the case that these ‘neutral’ genus terms are mostly included under the entries for ‘male’ words while the ‘female’ ones are still in use and accompanied by mostly ‘female’ genus terms, the entries remain unequal and differentiated. The desirable result would perhaps be that the ‘male’ word becomes completely ‘neutral’ and is used when referring to both men and women equally. This would also decrease the use of words denoting ‘female’ with the endings in *-ess*, *-ette*, and others that can be used in sexist or condescending ways.

The analysis conducted in this thesis, however, implies that the reality in the case of dictionaries is not quite so straightforward. It seems that including more ‘neutral’ genus terms under the ‘male’ words but not the ‘female’ ones maintains the gap between them, keeps the ‘female’ word in use, and does not remove the negative connotations it bears. Further, the differences in the definitions and examples of ‘male’ and ‘female’ words describe men and women differently and often

men in a better light than women. These differences and descriptions reflect societies and language use and conversely are also recreated and maintained through language in communication. Definitions and examples that paint different pictures of men and women and especially those that depict women in old-fashioned, sexist, or somehow lesser ways in comparison to men can contribute to maintaining sexist or stereotyped views about women in real life.

6 Conclusion

This study examined dictionary entries of word-pairs with ‘male’ and ‘female’ counterparts to find out what definitions and examples were given for them, whether there were differences between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words, and what kinds of descriptions were created about men and women. Further, it was investigated whether these included signs of sexism or female gender stereotypes, and finally, the inclusion of labels and usage notes and those commenting on possibly sexist or stereotypical nature of these words were examined. The aim of the thesis was to answer these research questions and shed light into the phenomenon of language both reflecting and creating meanings and attitudes, as well as to draw attention to the issues of sexism and stereotypes that are reflected in language. The data for this study came from six monolingual English dictionaries: *Cobuild*, *OAAD*, *WNWCD*, *ODE*, *CED*, and *AHD*. The methodology applied in this study was qualitative and the entries for the data were manually collected from the dictionaries.

The study conducted for this thesis found that the definitions and examples presented for the ‘male’ and ‘female’ words in the six dictionaries consulted were quite different from each other. The biggest differences occurred between counterparts of the same word-pair. For the majority of the data, the ‘male’ words were treated more neutrally with regard to genus terms and other content in the definitions, the indications of gender in the example phrases, or they were in some way favoured over the ‘female’ words, as was seen in the overall numbers of examples offered for these words. The ‘male’ words were much more likely to be both defined and exemplified in ‘neutral’ terms, whereas the ‘female’ words were more often explicitly ‘female’, usually marked by the suffixes *-ess* and *-ette*,

by defining them as *women* or *girls*, or by referring to feminine pronouns. More strict differences occurred in the definitions than in the examples.

Differences between ‘male’ and ‘female’ words can be seen within the definitions in that some were exactly the same except for the genus term, which was ‘neutral’ for the ‘male’ word and ‘female’ for the ‘female’ word. There was also a definition in which the explanation for the word was “female X”, which is an inadequate definition and requires more work in order to find out the meaning. ‘Female’ words were also sometimes described as somehow lesser than ‘male’, for instance, with regard to positions of power. Additionally, some definitions of ‘female’ words expressed old-fashioned, negative views of women.

The labels and usage note employed by all six dictionaries in some of their entries of these words provided additional information about their usage and possible negative gendered characteristics. Without the labels and usage notes, the dictionaries and their entries seemed less aware of the sexist and gendered characteristics of these words. By including these, the dictionaries showed that they were aware of these issues and wanted to notify the user about possible problems by including labels and notes in some of their entries. The dictionaries used labels such as *old-fashioned*, *informal*, and *derogatory*, which offer brief notifications about things such as the words’ contexts of use or dated characteristics. Additionally, the dictionary utilized both short phrases and longer sentences and paragraphs as usage notes. The notes also presented descriptions about the gendered nature of the words and included more elaborate information and explanations than the labels. The inclusion of labels and usage notes is very important when dealing with words such as the ones examined in this study, as there are possible hazards with using them and it is good to be aware of those.

As quoted by Norri (2000, 77), *sexist* as a label is defined in the 1995 edition of the *Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* as words that “express an unfair or patronizing attitude towards a person of the opposite sex. They are usually used by men about women. (OALD, p. i)”. The label

was removed afterwards, and “compilers in general shy away” from it (Norri 2019, 867). In the context of today’s society and awareness of the problems of sexism and gendered language it can be asked why this label is not used more. Although here, a question of limits arise: what words – if any – can be objectively marked with such labels? More extensive labelling of offensive, derogatory, or sexist words might in any case be valuable.

Within the examples, the biggest differences can be seen in the overall number of examples offered, where the ‘male’ words were given example phrases more often than ‘female’ ones, and in the cases where only one counterpart of a word-pair had examples at all, it was usually the ‘male’ one. The examples in general were less loaded in terms of sexist or gendered implications, and much more neutral and mostly positive in their content.

These definitions, examples, and the differences between them might contribute to keeping up sexist and stereotypical views about women, as well as have an effect on the language and society in a broader sense because of their reciprocal relationship. As was described earlier, practices like including ‘neutral’ genus terms or referents and modifying phrases to no longer include gender implications are good ways to achieve non-biased language. However, problems arise when these practices are only or mostly applied in the ‘male’ words and the ‘female’ words remain explicitly ‘female’. This keeps the two separated, and even though the ‘male’ word changing into more ‘neutral’ in itself might be a good thing, it does not remove the fact that the ‘female’ words are still in use and described almost exclusively in ‘female’ terms and therefore, remain as deviations from the ‘male’ words. When it comes to these issues, sexism, and gender stereotypes, the problem is partly in the very existence of gender-specific words, and labels and usage notes informing about the problematic nature of such words’ use is one solution.

Even though the dictionaries selected are only somewhat new, they are the versions that were offered at the time of data collection for this thesis. Of course, compiling and editing new versions of dictionaries is a lot of work and online dictionaries are updated frequently. It is interesting, however,

to pay attention to this while wondering about dictionaries' topicality and accuracy. The editions that are currently offered are the ones that a user will look at and from which they will take information. If these offered editions and entries include instances of offensive, sexist, or stereotypical use of words, it is not impossible for their reader to start to incorporate these uses into their own language, especially in the case of language learners.

Sexism and gender stereotypes in dictionaries are topics that could be further investigated from different points of view and with different materials. For instance, the study conducted in this thesis could be extended to include a larger set of word-pairs or different types of words or word-groups. Also, different types of dictionaries could be consulted or comparisons could be made between editions of the same dictionary.

Bibliography

Dictionaries:

- AHD*. (2011). *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*. 5th ed. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. <https://www.ahdictionary.com/>. Retrieved March 2023.
- Cobuild*. (2018). *Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's Dictionary*. 9th ed. Glasgow: HarperCollins. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>. Retrieved March 2023.
- CED*. (2014). *Collins English Dictionary*. 12th ed. Glasgow: Collins. <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/>. Retrieved March 2023.
- OAD*. (2015). *Oxford Advanced American Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/. Retrieved March 2023.
- ODE*. (2015). *Oxford Dictionary of English*. 3rd ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199571123.001.0001/acref-9780199571123>. Retrieved March 2023.
- WNWCD*. (2014). *Webster's New World College Dictionary*. 5th ed. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.

Secondary sources

- Atkins, B.T. S., & Rundell, M. (2008). *The Oxford Guide to Practical Lexicography*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Baker, P., & Ellece, S. (2011). *Key Terms in Discourse Analysis*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing Plc.
- Béjoint, H. (2016). Dictionaries for General Users: History and Development; Current Issues. In P. Durkin (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography* (pp. 7-24). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Byron, Janet. (1983). Review Essay: Language and Sexism in English. *Language Problems and Language Planning* 7(3), 303-309.
- Carter, R. (2012). *Vocabulary: Applied Linguistic Approaches*. London and New York: Routledge.
- European Institute for Gender Equality/EIGE. (2016). *Glossary and thesaurus*. <https://eige.europa.eu/publications-resources/thesaurus>.

- Hartmann, R. R. K., & James, G. (1998). *Dictionary of Lexicography*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Heuberger, R. (2016). Learner's Dictionaries: History and Development; Current Issues. In P. Durkin (Ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Lexicography* (pp. 25-43). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Hidalgo Tenorio, E. (2000). Gender, Sex and Stereotyping in the Collins COBUILD English Language Dictionary. *Australian Journal of Linguistics* 20(2), 211-230.
- Laufer, B. (2008). Corpus-based versus Lexicographer Examples in Comprehension and Production of New Words. In T. Fontenelle (Ed.) *Practical Lexicography: A Reader* (pp. 213-218). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Norri, J. (2000). Labelling of Derogatory Words in Some British and American Dictionaries. *International Journal of Lexicography* 13(2), 71-106.
- Norri, J. (2019). Gender in Dictionary Definitions: A Comparison of Five Learner's Dictionaries and Their Different Editions. *English Studies* 100(7), 866-890.
- Prechter, S. (1999). Women's Rights – Children's Games: Sexism in Learner's Dictionaries of English. *Multilingua* 18(1), 47-68.
- Selvi, A. F. (2020). Qualitative content analysis. In J. McKinley & H. Rose (Eds.) *The Routledge Handbook of Research Methods in Applied Linguistics* (pp. 440-452). London: Routledge.
- Waksler, R. (1995). She's a mensch and he's a bitch: neutralizing gender in the 90s. *English Today* 11(2), 3-6.
- Whitcut, J. (1983). Sexism in Dictionaries. In R. R. K. Hartmann (Ed.) *LEXeter '83: proceedings* (pp. 141-144). Niemeyer.
- Yallop, C. (2004). Words and meaning. In M. A. K. Halliday, W. Teubert, C. Yallop & A. Čermáková (Eds.), *Lexicology and Corpus Linguistics: An Introduction* (pp. 23-72). London and New York: Continuum.