

(Non-)neutral role nouns in Dutch newspapers

In the Dutch newspaper *De Volkskrant* gendered role nouns, i.e. feminine nouns such as *journaliste* are to be avoided since 2016, when the newspaper changed its language policy in an attempt at a gender-fair usage of language. Instead of gender-marked nouns, the “neutral” counterpart is to be used, so as to include all genders in one language form. The term “neutral” in this context, however, is the subject of some debate in linguistics and beyond, because what is meant here are actually neutrally used masculine role nouns like *journalist*. The question then arises as to which extent masculine role nouns can act as actual neutrals (cf. Misersky et al. 2018; Misersky et al. 2019; Redl 2020). For German there is a wide consensus concerning masculines not being suitable forms for gender-neutral or gender-fair language. Part of the argument is the notion of gender being deeply rooted in German grammar, which retains its masculine-feminine distinction on the whole of the NP (cf. *ein toller Journalist* vs. *eine tolle Journalistin*, ‘a nice journalist’). (Standard) Dutch does not possess this grammatical feature anymore. Dutch merely enables a gendered suffix on the noun itself (most prominent are *-e*, *-es(se)*, *-ster*, *-in*), without further gender features on the rest of the NP (cf. *een fijne journalist* vs. *een fijne journaliste*). Note that this is a characteristic of Northern Dutch, and less so in Belgian-Dutch varieties. Furthermore, in spite of the existence of such suffixes, they are excluded from certain role nouns such as *minister* or *arts*. It is no coincidence that these are traditionally male, highly regarded roles, professions, and social functions. Dutch, then, reveals a relatively inconsistent and complex nominal gender system; at least less consistent than the German one, which permits and actively makes use of the gendering of nearly every role noun. Mostly, however, it behaves in ways much like the English nominal gender system, i.e., with no apparent gendering necessity and with little to no grammatical gender features. In our presentation we discuss the use of non-neutral, gendered role nouns in Dutch newspapers. We will show that certain role nouns do not allow for a neutral reading (e.g. *koning*; *vriend*), and compare the use of gendered role nouns after 2016 to that before 2016. A comparison with Flemish newspapers reveals a higher-frequency use of gendered role nouns in Belgian Dutch, perhaps (partly) related to its still-intact masculine-feminine grammatical distinction.

Literature

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