Linguistic sexism

A study of sexist language in a British online newspaper
Abstract

The aim of this study is to investigate the occurrence of sexist language-use in the British online newspaper *The Daily Mail*. The material consists of 162 articles that were analysed by using feminist stylistics. The scope of the study was limited to selected features from feminist stylistics at word- and discourse-level. The features of linguistic sexism analysed were the use of gendered generic words, naming of females and males and how female and male characters are described. The gender of the journalists was also analysed to examine if it affected the language-use in terms of sexism. The results show that linguistic sexism is expressed to some extent at both word-level and discourse-level. At word-level linguistic sexism is expressed in the generic use of some masculine words, the difference of how first name and surname are used to refer to women and men and in the use of titles. At the level of discourse linguistic sexism is expressed in the difference of how women and men are referred to in terms of their relationship to others and in terms of appearance. The gender of the journalist did not show any significance for the language-use in terms of sexism. Considering the limited material of the study, the results might not be suitable for generalisations. The results are nonetheless interesting and it can be concluded that the toolkit of feminist stylistic is relevant to this day and that linguistic sexism exists to some extent in the online version of *The Daily Mail*.

**Keywords:** describing characters, discourse level, feminist stylistics, generic words, newspaper language, sexism, *The Daily Mail*, titles, word level
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1. Introduction

The starting point for the study of language and gender is said to be with Robin Lakoff’s work on the subject in 1975. The relatively late start is due to the fact that throughout time men have been viewed as the norm (Coates 2004:4-5). Examples of earlier interests within the area exist, such as women in the beginning of the 1900s fighting for their right to keep their name after marriage (Pauwels 1998:18). However, Pauwels (1998:18) argues that the subject as a study arose during the 70s second wave of feminism. McConnell-Ginet (1989:198) emphasises that the study of gender and language has focused on the speech of women and men and how they are spoken of. Aspects analysed when considering the speech of women and men are those such as differences in voice and amount of talk in conversations. The second area, namely how women and men are characterised in language, covers the area of linguistic sexism (Weatherall 2002). This area is the topic of this thesis. There are different definitions of sexism in use, but one used within this study is Mary Vetterling-Braggin’s (1981 cited in Mills 1995:83): “a statement is sexist if its use constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes”.

Linguistic sexism, that is sexism conveyed within language, is found in many different languages and exists in many forms (Pauwels 1998:16). This kind of sexism is apparent in the English language, for example through the generic use of masculine words such as “spokesman” or “chairman” (Mills 1995:87). Another example of how language is used sexist is the asymmetrical method of describing female and male characters, for example by describing women by their appearance more often than men (Mills 1995:162). An illustration of this type of language-use from The Daily Mail is provided below:

(1) The brunette showed of her slender frame

Opinions regarding this subject differ, some believe that language only reflects the society we live in and others take on the perspective of linguistic determinism. Linguistic determinism is a theory suggesting that language controls our perception of the world (Mills 1995:84). If one agrees to some extent that language-use is related to and has an impact on reality, it is clear why the study of linguistic sexism is important in a world where gender equality still has not been reached.
Mills (1995:17) claims that gender is a present factor in texts and is of the opinion that it needs to be exposed and dealt with. Mills (1995) provides a feminist model for textual analysis with tools to identify gender representation in any text at the level of word, sentence and discourse. She argues that the exposure of linguistic sexism is one of the approaches necessary in order to change sexist structures in the society (Mills 2008:159).

The English language has been reformed and non-sexist language has been provided, but to what extent is it used today? The Daily Mail is a British daily middle-market tabloid newspaper. It is also the second most read newspaper in Britain (Hollander 2013). This study investigates if it is possible to detect linguistic sexism in this newspaper with the toolkit provided in feminist stylistic almost twenty years after it was provided.

1.1 Aim, scope & research questions

The aim of this study is to examine sexism in the language use of the British online newspaper The Daily Mail by using parts of feminist stylistic. The toolkit in feminist stylistic was provided almost twenty years ago and this study examines if it is still possible to detect linguistic sexism using this method. The scope is limited to the analysis of some of the features possible to analyse at the level of word and the level of discourse. The features of linguistic sexism analysed are the following: the use of gendered generic words, naming of women and men, the use of titles and how female and male characters are described. The role of the journalist’s gender is also examined.

To fulfil the aim of the study, the following research questions are addressed:

• How, if at all, is linguistic sexism expressed in the language-use of newspapers at the level of word?
• How, if at all, is linguistic sexism expressed in the language-use of newspapers at the level of discourse?
• How, if at all, is the language-use affected by the journalist’s gender in terms of sexism?
2. Theoretical background

This section provides a presentation of the theoretical background relevant for the study. First, a discussion of linguistic sexism is provided and thereafter Mills’ (1995) feminist stylistics and a discussion of the features chosen for the analysis is presented.

2.1 Linguistic sexism

Sexism is a widely debated area included in the subject of gender and language. As already stated, a definition used within this study is Vetterling-Braggins (1981 cited in Mills 1995:83): “a statement is sexist if it contributes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes”. Both genders are included in this definition. However, Cameron (1992:100) suggests that it is women who are suffering from sexist structures in language. Some linguistic sexism is evident, such as the use of “whore” or other words that describe women negatively. However, linguistic sexism also concerns language-use that in different ways diminishes women and make them invisible (Weatherall 2002:76). Feminists state that English is a language with sexist structures (Holmes 2008:318). The subject of sex and gender is in itself an interesting area that will only briefly be mentioned in this thesis. Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010) describes sex as the biological state of being either female or male and gender as the socially categorisation of females and males. The term gender will be used henceforth. Also worth pointing out briefly in connection to this type of study is that the system of categorising in two genders is problematic. Freed (2003:704) criticises the division of people into the categories of women and men, females and males. For example, transsexuals and intersexuals are to some extent excluded from these categorisations (Freed 2003:715). However, this will not be discussed more thoroughly and the traditional two-gender categorisation will be used.

The opinions about linguistic sexism vary between linguists, some believe that sexist language characterises a sexist society, and others believe that sexist language influences society to be more sexist (Weatherall 2002:4). Significant when discussing this is as mentioned the theory of linguistic determinism, which is a theory which believes that language determines the way the world is perceived by the language-user (Mills 1995:84). A supporter of the theory of linguistic determinism, Spender (1980:96) argues that sexist language enables sexist world-views. She also argues that those with power, in other words
men, have the ability to create language and consequently the reality (Spender 1980:97). Critics of linguistic determinism argue that if this would be the case, speakers of languages with very few words for colours would not be able to perceive different colours (Holmes 2008:336-337). However, it is vital to point out that two forms of the theory exist: the strong one that argues that language determines how we interpret the world and the weak one that argues that language is only one factor in how we construct the world (Pauwels 1998:83). According to Holmes (2008:350), most sociolinguists believe that language to some extent affects our world-view and consequently the way we view gender.

2.2 Feminist Stylistics

Feminist stylistics is a theory and method presented by Mills (1995) used for analysing texts by focusing on the way gender is represented. The concept of stylistics is described as a study of literary texts and its language (Mills 1995:4). The model borrows and builds on other linguistic approaches, for example the stylistic approaches presented by Leech and Short (1981 cited in Mills 1995:5) and critical linguistics such as Hodge and Kress (1988 cited in Mills 1995:10). However, Mills (1995:3) argues that other techniques do not focus on gender enough. Mills (1995:2) presents a toolkit with questions included in feminist stylistics that she argues could be used at any text to discover gender differences. The model also builds on work from other feminist linguists such as Cameron (1985 cited in Mills 1995:15) and Coates (1986 cited in Mills 1995:15).

According to Mills (1995:21) sexism could be analysed at three levels in a text: at word-level, sentence-level and at discourse-level. For this particular study, features at word-level and discourse-level have been chosen for the investigation. The following text in this section therefore focuses on features relevant for this study: gendered generic words, naming-practices and how female and male characters are described. As mentioned, Mills (1995:201-202) provides a number of questions which she argues could be directed to any text to discover sexism. Following questions from Mills (1995) toolkit are selected as significant for this study: “Are the words which are used gender-specific?” “Are generic nouns used to refer to males?” “Is the suffix ‘-man’ used to refer to males?” “How are males and females named in the text?” “Are male and female characters described in the same way?” (Mills 1995:201-202).
As earlier mentioned, one part of Mills (1995) feminist stylistics is the analysis at the level of word. Mills (1995:21) is of the opinion that words could only be sexist depending on the context. However, she argues for the importance of analysing texts at a word-level by stating that certain word-uses reflect gender differences. The tradition of viewing men as the norm in language is evident at word-level by the use of generic words. Generic words are often the same word that is used when describing the masculine variant (Pauwels 2003:553). Mills (1995:87-89) states that the most common examples are when “he” and “man” are used for referring to both women and men. The word “man” is also used as an affix in generic terms such as “policeman”, “postman” or “manpower” (Mills 1995:91). Pauwels (2003:553) argues that this kind of language-use makes women invisible. It is more common to visualise a male person when interpreting a word that includes “man” and this might lead to stereotypes of certain occupations (Mills 1995:95). Weatherall (2002:26) refers to studies (MacKay and Fulkerson, 1979; Moulton, Robinson and Elias 1978), which proves that when masculine words are used generically, they are interpreted as describing a man. It could also be argued that his type of word-use is unclear since it could be difficult to know when the word is used generically and when it is used as a masculine term (Doyle 1995:6:151). Feminist language reformists have provided and supported gender-neutral language. This type of language reforming where from the beginning a grassroots activity, but nowadays most institutions and organisations have guidelines for how they should avoid sexist language in their texts (Pauwels 2003:560-561). This also applies to newspapers, which show a lesser use of gendered generic terms (Holmes 2008:320). Examples of non-sexist language provided at word-level are to use “he” only when referring to men and instead use “she/he” when referring to someone generically. The affix “-person” is proposed as an alternative to the affix “-man” (Mills 1995:100-101). However, Ehrlich and King (1992:168) points out that “-person” is sometimes not used as a generic word. The affix is instead used as a replacement of “-woman” so that chairman is used for males and chairperson for females.

Naming is another important area within the subject of gender differences at word-level. Names in the English language reveal the unequal relationship between women and men. For example, there exist more offending terms for women than men in English. There are also pairs of words for women and men where the female variety has a negative meaning and the male one a positive, such as spinster-bachelor and mistress-mister (Cameron 1992:107-108). However, the issue of personal names is also an important part within the area of naming. As mentioned previously, women fought for their right to keep their name after marriage already
at the beginning of the 1900s (Pauwels 1998:18). The tradition of taking the name of the husband has been criticised by feminists (Pauwels 1998:59). Another feature of naming is the non-parallel usage of naming women and men themselves. Women are far more often addressed by their first name than men are. Men are instead more often addressed with their surname (Mills 1995:109). Weatherall (2002:77) refers to a study by Messner, Duncan and Jansen (1993) which showed that first name was for example more often used for female athletes in sports reporting. The tradition for women to change to their husband’s surname is arguably a reason why surnames are more linked to men (McConnell-Ginet 1989:81). The way names are used affects our perception of people and Mills (1995:109-110) argues that power-relationships are established by how names are used within the English language. The first name is often used to address someone you consider yourself to be on equal terms with. It is also used for the group with less power in an unequal power-relationship. A situation given as an example of this by Mills (1995:110) is in a British classroom where the teacher addresses her/his pupils by their first name while they use title and surname for the teacher. Furthermore within the area of naming practices is the use of titles and how they differ between genders. “Mr” is used for men in all cases, whereas for women three titles exist: “Mrs”, “Miss” and “Ms”. Traditionally, “Mrs” is used for married women, while the title “Miss” is used for unmarried women. This custom has been criticised by feminists since women are defined by their relationship (Pauwels 1998:59). The alternative form “Ms” was suggested in the 1970s. The title was intended as a neutral form at the same level as “Mr”, which meant that women would not have to reveal their marital status with their title (Mills 2008:64). Since the appearance of “Ms”, the usage has increased significantly (Pauwels 1998:218). However, the term is not always entirely used as it was intended to. Instead of using it as a parallel to “Mr”, that is instead of “Mrs” and “Miss”, it is used as a complement and a third option for women. Mills (2008:64) states that the term also adopted negative connotations, and is sometimes used for describing divorced women or, what some would label as extreme feminists.

Moving on to discourse-level, the term could be described as the way our language-use is influenced by the political attitudes and beliefs in society (Weatherall 2002:79). The procedure of describing characters is placed by Mills (1995:160) at discourse-level. A feature discussed by Mills (1995) at discourse-level, is how female and male characters are described in texts. Interesting within this topic is how women and men are described differently due to
the expectations that are held on the different genders. Mills (1995:160) emphasises the significance stereotypes have when characters are described. Stereotyping is a way of simplifying reality and categorising groups of people. Stereotypes are often used for people with less power which could be considered women in this case (Talbot 2003:471). Female characters are more likely to be described in terms of their attractiveness, while their male equivalent more often are described with the kind of personality they have (Mills 1995:162). Mills (1995:162) also argues that some words that are used to describe women’s appearance have sexual connotations, for example when describing women with parts of their body.

Another difference in how female and male characters are described is that women are more commonly described with their relationship to others. This can be compared to men who are more often described as individuals. Particularly newspaper is a medium where women often are described as wives or mothers (Mills 1995:163). A stereotype at use when defining female characters as mothers is the stereotype viewing women as the most responsible in taking care of children (Mills 2008:127). In an article concerning the effect stereotypes have on working mothers, Heilman (2012:705) states that women are often assigned attributes that are connected to relationships and caring.

Except from analysing texts at different levels, Mills (1995:31-43) argues for a feminist model of text that includes the context of production and the context of reception in the analysis. She mentions several factors that should be taken into account when analysing any text, such as how literary conventions and socio-historical factors affect the production of the text or how important the intended audience and the actual audience are for the reception of the text. However, relevant for this study of newspaper-articles is the author of the text. Mills (1995:31) places the author as a central factor at the context of production. The author has an important role for the choice of language used within a text (Mills 1995:33). In this particular study, it is the individual journalist who could influence if sexist language is used or not. There are also several features of the individual journalist that would be interesting to investigate in relation to the type of language-use they select. The feature available for investigation through the name of the journalists is gender.

Language reforms have been suggested and also accomplished to some extent. Pauwels (1998:8) refer to this as feminist language reforms. The main focus for feminist language reformists has been to expose and change sexist language-use. This work has naturally encountered resistance. The critic of the opponents consists of both trivialisations of the
subject and denial of the sexist meaning (Pauwels 1998:170). A term used as critic to those very concerned of using non-sexist language is “political correctness”. This term suggests an obsessive concern of using non-offensive language and those using it as negative term argue that there are more important problems that need to be challenged (Mills 2008:100-123). However, as stated in the beginning, most public organisations and institutions today are aware of and try to avoid sexist language (Mills 2008:133). Because of the attention feminist language reformists have put on sexist language, the language has changed. The changed status of women in society is also a reason for the reforms in the English language. As also stated previously, language reflects the structures in society. However, Mills (2008:20-21) argues that women are still not treated equally and that sexism within the language still exists. She also divides linguistic sexism in the categories overt and indirect sexism. The linguistic sexism described in this study is what Mills (2008) refers to as overt sexism. Indirect sexism is instead sexism expressed for example with humour or by presuppositions (Mills 2008:140-145). She claims that linguistic sexism today is often indirect, but also points out that overt sexism still are at use and needs to be approached (Mills 2008:133). Providing non-sexist language reforms does not automatically remove sexist language use. As Ehrlich and King (1992:165) point out, even if non-sexist language is provided these terms could still acquire sexist meaning. The example given earlier of the title “Ms” being used as a third term for females instead of being used as a neutral term is one example of this (Ehrlich and King 1992:167). Language reforms are therefore not solely the solution for changing sexist structures in society. However, as Mills (2008:159) argues it is one necessary component. Changing sexist language is also a constant process that according to Cameron (1998:89) will remain a process for a while.

3. Material and method

This section provides an explanation of the material used for the study and a description of the method used for the analysis. The problems and limitations of the study are also discussed.

3.1 Material

The material used in this study was collected from the British online newspaper The Daily Mail. Over a period of time from the 23rd of April 2014 to the 12th of May 2014, a number of 162 articles were chosen. The selected articles were news reportage with mixed topic areas.
Of these articles, 67 were written by women, 68 by men and 15 by both women and men. In the 12 remaining articles were either the name of the journalist not included or was it not possible to detect the gender of the journalist by the name. The articles contained a total number of 192 761 words. *The Daily Mail* is a British daily middle-market tabloid newspaper. This means that it contains a combination of entertainment and news. According to Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary (2010) this type of newspaper is viewed as less serious than other newspapers. The newspaper was selected because of its rating as the second most read newspaper in Britain (Hollander 2013). The most read newspaper in Britain required a membership to access the articles online, which was why it was not selected. The articles were collected from the front page of the online version, since these articles are the first ones viewed when visiting the webpage and therefore arguably the most read ones. The articles that were chosen were those that contained narratives of people, since that made them possible to investigate with the selected features. The articles that contained narratives of people were randomly selected. Quotes in the articles are not included in the analysis, because they contain lexical choices by the person quoted and not the language of the journalist.

### 3.2 Method

This study uses a quantitative method with qualitative elements. By counting different lexical choices the frequency of different lexical items could be discovered. The qualitative elements of the study are investigations of how certain lexical items are used. The data collected was analysed with selected features from the toolkit of feminist stylistics. This toolkit is provided by Mills and it can be directed at any text to discover the way gender is represented. Only a few features were selected from feminist stylistics because of the limited size of the study.

The features that have been analysed in the newspaper articles are gendered generic words, the naming of women and men and how female and male characters were described. A counting of the words man, he and words with the affix –man, identified the use of gendered generic words in the articles. Thereafter, a qualitative method was applied to detect if the words were used generically. To detect linguistic sexism in the naming of women and men, the names were categorised in different categories and counted depending on if it was a first name, surname, title + surname or first name + surname. Since people are often referred to in more than one way within an article, the name that occurred most frequently for that specific person was chosen. If a person was referred to in two ways the same amount of times, the
categorisation was made twice. Thereafter were the titles in the articles counted and a
qualitative analysis of the articles containing these titles was performed to discover in which
context the titles were used. To find out how female and male characters were described in
the articles the number of times women and men were referred to by their relationship to
others and by their appearance were counted.

Mills (1995) presents a feminist model of text. The feature selected to analyse from this
model was the gender of the author. At word-level, the gender of the journalist was
investigated in the articles using gendered terms generically and the articles using gender-
neutral terms. At this level, the journalist’s gender was also investigated in the articles using
the titles “Mrs” and “Miss” for women and the articles using “Ms”. At discourse-level, the
gender of the journalist was investigated in the articles describing females in terms of their
appearance.

3.3 Problems and limitations

The toolkit of feminist stylistics proved to be suitable for analysing sexism in The Daily Mail.
A quantitative method with qualitative elements suits this study since the method enables a
measuring of frequency of certain lexical items and the examination of how they are used.

A problem with using Mills (1995) feminist stylistic was encountered at the level of
discourse. The features analysed at this level are individual lexical items and could therefore
be argued as belonging to the word-level analysis. However, the decision was made to use
Mills (1995) division and therefore place the analysis at discourse-level.

The decision to only select a few features from feminist stylistics also limits the study. An
analysis of all features included in feminist stylistics at both word-, sentence- and discourse-
level had given a broader picture of linguistic sexism in The Daily Mail. However, this was
not possible due to the limited size of the study.

A limitation of the study is the small amount of data analysed compared to the amount of
articles appearing daily in the newspaper. This limits a generalisation of how linguistic sexism
is expressed in The Daily Mail. To be able to generalise the results a larger amount of material
over a wider time span would have been necessary. What could be viewed as problematic is
that the 162 articles used for the study were not written by the same author. The individual journalist has a major impact on the language being used. This study investigates the significance of the journalist’s gender, however a larger study could investigate other features of the journalists such as age.

Another limitation of the material is that only one type of newspaper is covered. If another newspaper had been used, for example a broadsheet paper that contains more serious news instead of the more sensational type that occurs in The Daily Mail, the results might have been different.

4. Results and discussion

This section provides the results together with a discussion of the results. First, the word-level analysis is presented and discussed and thereafter the discourse-level analysis. The word-level analysis consists of the features gendered generic words and the naming of females and males. At discourse-level the results of how female and male characters are described are presented and discussed. Discussions about the impact of the journalist’s gender are presented last in the relevant subsections.

4.1 Word-level analysis

4.1.1 Gendered generic words

The 162 news articles analysed showed no extensive use of gendered generic words. The words “he” and “man” were not used when referring to both women and men. However, the generic use of words with the affix “-man” was found in the analysis. Of these words, “spokesman” was the most used. The gendered word “spokeswoman” and the neutral “spokesperson” were also used and the frequencies are presented in Figure 1 below.
Figure 1. Use of gendered generic words.

The masculine word “spokesman” was used 29 times in the material. In four cases, the text revealed that the people addressed with the word were men as illustrated in Example (2). In one case the text revealed that the person addressed with the word was a woman, which is illustrated in Example (3). In the remaining 24 cases, the text did not reveal the gender of the people addressed.

(2) *Spokesman Jakub Sobik*, speaking inside their Stockwell headquarters

(3) A hospital *spokesman* said *she* could not comment for legal reasons

The gendered word “spokeswoman” was used five times in the material and in four of these cases the context revealed that the person referred to was a woman as illustrated in Example (4) below. In one case it was not apparent by the text if the person referred to was a woman or a man.

(4) A *spokeswoman* for BA told MailOnline […] *She* added

As can be seen from Figure 1, the gender-neutral word “spokesperson” was used five times. In none of these cases was the gender of the person possible to distinguish by analysing the text. It is therefore not possible to determine if the word was used as a true gender-neutral term or if it was used when describing females as suggested by Ehrlich and King (1992:168) in Section 2.2. In terms of sexist usage, the gendered masculine word “spokesman” was used at least once to address a woman and could therefore be classified as linguistic sexism.
according to the theories suggested in Section 2.2. Considering the frequency of the use of “spokesman”, the word was possibly used for women more than once. However this cannot be proven by the results. A reasonable explanation could also be that there exist more men within the profession and that the language being used reflects an unequal society. A couple of other words with the affix “-man” were found in the material. The word “chairman” was used five times and in four of these cases the text revealed that the term was used to address men as illustrated in Example (5). In one article the term was used to address a woman as shown in Example (6).

(5) Ukip deputy chairman Neil Hamilton

(6) Susan Bedack is chairman of appeals

Since the masculine term chairman was used generically when referring to a woman, this is also an example of linguistic sexism. Other terms with the affix “-man” used were for example “policeman” and “weatherman”. However, these terms were only used to refer to men and thus not used generically as illustrated in Example (7). This usage could therefore not be considered as sexist language-use. A few gendered female terms were also found, such as “midwife” and “housewife”. Similarly, these were only used to refer to women, as shown in Example (8), and the usage is therefore not considered sexist.

(7) Niece of TV weatherman Bill Giles killed herself after campaign of harassment

(8) The midwife, from Ashford, Kent, said staff made her feel ‘embarrassed’

Also important to consider is the context of production in what Mills (1995:31) refers to as a feminist model of text. Relevant for this study is, as mentioned in Section 2.2, the role of the author. It is the individual journalist who to some extent decides which type of language that is used in the articles. The author of a text is in her/his turn affected by factors such as literary conventions and trends and publishing factors (Mills 1995:31). However, no language-guidelines have been found for The Daily Mail. The results of the investigation of gendered generic words provide two determined examples of linguistic sexism; that is using the terms “spokesman” and “chairman” when referring to women. Both the article using “spokesman” when referring to a woman and the article using “chairman” when referring to a woman were
written by female journalists. The sexist language-use was in this case provided by female journalists. The neutral word “spokesperson” was used in five articles. One of these articles was written by a female journalist, three by a male journalist and the remaining article was written by both female and male journalists.

4.1.2 Naming females and males

The analysis of how females and males are named in the material is divided into two subsections. First, the usage of first name and surname are presented and thereafter the use of titles together with a discussion of the impact of the journalist’s gender.

4.1.2.1 First name and surname

To detect linguistic sexism in the naming practices for women and men, names were categorised in four different categorises: First name, Surname, Title + Surname and First name + Surname. Since people often are referred to in more than one way within an article, the name that occurred most frequently for that specific person was chosen as already stated in Section 3.2. The results of this categorisation are presented in Figure 2 below. There were 694 women named in the articles, 739 men named and 4 unknown.

As Figure 2 shows, there is a significant difference in how females and males are named in The Daily Mail. The categories Titles + Surname and First name + Surname show no
extensive difference. In contrast, the categories First name and Surname show a substantial difference between genders. Females are more often referred to by their first name than males. Below is an example of how a woman is referred to by her first name and a man by his surname:

   (9) And Ruth revealed she and other friends were by Shand’s side at Bellevue Hospital yesterday

The frequencies also show that surnames are far more often used when referring to males. As presented in Section 2, Mills (1995:109-110) suggests that using names asymmetrically is a way of establishing power-relationships and first names are used for those with less power. The results showing that females are more often addressed with their first name could therefore be interpreted as an example of linguistic sexism (Mills 1995:109-110). An interesting finding in the use of surname in the articles was also that when a couple was described with Title + Surname, the man was sometimes referred to in the text with their shared surname. This is illustrated in the following example and suggests that the man is the owner of the shared surname:

   (10) Samantha Charlton woke to find her husband trying to strangle her with a scarf […] Charlton, 43, was jailed for two years and eight months

The articles analysed were collected during nine different days and each day except from one showed the same naming pattern. However, this deviation could be explained by the fact that the number of women named in the articles collected that day was half as many as the number of men. Since the pattern was repeated regularly it is possible to draw the conclusion that women are addressed by first name more often than men in The Daily Mail and this could be interpreted as a sexist usage of language.

4.1.2.2 Titles

Another relevant feature when discussing naming of women and men from a perspective of linguistic sexism is the use of titles. As stated in Section 2.2, feminist linguists have considered the use of titles in English sexist. This is because the male term “Mr” is neutral, while the two terms traditionally used for women are not. The terms “Mrs” and “Miss” reveal
whether the woman addressed is married or not and therefore the term “Ms” was suggested as a neutral term by feminists (Pauwels 1998:59). Of the 162 articles used for the investigation, 103 articles used titles when naming people. Of these, 75 articles used titles when referring to females and the division is displayed in Figure 3 below.

![Figure 3. The use of titles.](image)

From results presented in Figure 3 it can be concluded that the neutral title “Ms” is used relatively often in the material. However, when performing a qualitative analysis of the material containing titles, additional results became visible. Figures 4-6 show how the titles “Mrs”, “Miss” and “Ms” were used in the material. That is, if they were used to refer to married or unmarried women.

![Figure 4. How the title “Mrs” is used.](image)

As visible in Figure 4, the context of the term “Mrs” most often revealed that the woman addressed was married. Examples (11) - (13) illustrates how this was visible:
(11) Mrs McAndrew decided to get off the bus early and called for her husband to pick her up

(12) Mr and Mrs Young celebrated their wedding

(13) Mrs Charlton was asleep in bed when her husband returned home drunk

![Figure 5. How the title “Miss” is used.](image)

Similarly, in most cases where the title “Miss” was used the context revealed that the woman addressed was not married. This is illustrated in Example (14) - (16):

(14) Ian Gough charged with assaulting his ex girlfriend

(15) Adele will wed 41-year-old app designer

(16) Miss Gerakaris suffered no lasting damage but she ended the relationship
Interesting in terms of linguistic sexism is the results presented in Figure 6. The results show that in most cases when “Ms” was used in the material, the text either did not reveal the marital status of the women addressed or it was evident that she was not married. This is illustrated in Examples (17) and (18). Only in 3 cases was “Ms” used when it was possible to interpret from the text that the woman addressed was married as illustrated in Example (19).

(17) Mr Hollande separated from Ms Trierweiler

(18) Ms Bartlett explained that since the girl’s father, a police officer, left them the child has been unmanageable. The single mother added that […]

(19) Ms Falla said. […] Samara Falla, 27, with husband Curtis Falla, 28

The articles using “Ms” for married women are examples of how the title was intended to be used, as a neutral term at the same level as “Mr”. “Ms” was used as the only title for women in 16 articles, however, the context did either reveal that the female person was unmarried or did not reveal the marital status of the person. Because of this, it is not possible to identify if the writer of the article used “Ms” as a neutral title or as a title for unmarried/divorced women or when the journalist did not know whether the women were married or not. By interpreting Figure 6 it could be argued that the title “Ms” is not solely used as a neutral title in The Daily Mail at the same level as “Mr”. This supports what previous studies suggest about the term being used as a third alternative to the traditional titles (Pauwells 1998:218).
Of the articles using “Ms” when referring to married women, one was written by a male journalist, one by both male and female journalist together and one article did not include the name of the journalist. As mentioned, 75 articles contained female titles. The use of “Mrs” and “Miss” is as previously theories provided example of sexist language (Pauwels 1998:59). 22 of the articles using “Mrs” and “Miss” were written by female journalists, 26 by male journalists, 6 by both female and male journalist and in 5 articles the name of the journalist were not exposed. The gender of the journalist did not seem to affect the use of sexist language in this case. Of the 16 articles which only used “Ms” as female title, 8 were written by female journalists, 3 by male journalists, one by both female and male journalists and 4 by unknown journalists. These numbers indicates that there were somewhat more female journalists choosing to use “Ms”. However, the difference is too small to make any assumptions. As also already mentioned, it was not possible to detect from the text if the title was in fact used as a neutral title or if it was used as a third alternative.

4.2 Discourse-level analysis

Moving on to discourse-level, features analysed are included in how female and male characters are described. As previously mentioned in Section 3.3, features analysed at this level could be argued as belonging to word-level. However, it is Mills (1995) division that is used and they are therefore placed at discourse-level.

4.2.1 Describing female and male characters by relationship to others

As Mills (1995:160) argues, stereotypical beliefs are often visible in the description of female and male characters. Defining women by their relationship to others is an example of how stereotypes are reflected in texts. Relevant when analysing how female and male characters are described in The Daily Mail is therefore how often they are referred to with their relationship to others. The categories chosen for this analysis are: mother/father, wife/husband, daughter/son, girlfriend/boyfriend, sister/brother and others. To begin with, Figure 7 below shows how often female and male characters are referred to by their relationship to others. Thereafter, Figure 8 provides the frequencies of the different categorisations.
Figure 7. How often females and males are referred to by their relationship to others.

Figure 8. How females and males are referred to by their relationship to others.

Mills (1995:162-163) argues that female characters are more often referred to by their relationship to others and especially as mothers and wives. Figure 7 clearly indicates that this is the case in *The Daily Mail*. It can also be concluded from Figure 8 that it is in terms of mothers, wives and daughters women are most often described as. Examples (20), (21) and (22) illustrate this:

(20) *Mother of* seven, 29, *dies of blood poisoning*

(21) *Clegg’s wife* shows who really wears the trousers
(22) [...] was a Panamanian businessman’s well-healed daughter

These results are consistent with previously mentioned theories suggesting that women stereotypically are seen as more connected with relationships (Heilman 2012:705). The frequency of women being referred to as mothers also indicates that parenthood is more often assigned to women than men (Mills 2008:127). This particular method of describing female characters could be interpreted as linguistic sexism, seen in the context where male characters are more often described as individuals and not by their relationship to others.

4.2.2 Describing female and male characters by appearance

Also within the area of describing female and male characters is the practice of describing women by their appearance. Mills (1995:162) argues that female characters tend to be described by their appearance while men more often are described by their personality.

![Figure 9. How often females and males are described by their appearance.](image)

The results presented in Figure 9 show that female characters in the material were more often described in terms of their appearance than men. The following examples illustrate this:

(23) *The blonde* dated Bachelor star Jake Pavelka

(24) *While the shade of Pippa’s dress flatters her sun kissed skin to perfection, we’re sad to say that the shape just isn’t doing her figure any favours*

(25) *The bride looked thin ... and crispy!*
The curry house owner who falsely claimed £41,000 benefits so his *burkha-wearing wife* could by designer clothes.

These findings are presumably affected by the type of newspaper analysed. As stated in Section 3.3, *The Daily Mail* is a paper containing news of the sensational type and therefore news describing how women for example dress is probably more likely to be found.

Altogether, 13 articles contained descriptions of female characters by their appearance. A few of those were articles covering for example social events and these types of articles typically contain description of women’s looks. This fact explains why relatively few articles contain a relatively high number of descriptions of women by their appearance. Worth pointing out in relation to this is that in these sorts of articles, the female part in a couple is far more often described by their appearance than men. This is illustrated in Example (18) below:

(27) *Beyonce looked amazing in her low-cut frock and veiled headpiece and was joined by her husband Jay Z*

Of the 13 articles, 8 were written by female journalists, 3 by male journalists, one by both female and male journalists and one by an unknown journalist. Once again, this numbers are to limited for generalisations even though there is a higher number of female journalists describing women with references to their appearance. A probable reason for this could be that female journalist might be assigned to write about those types of events more often than male journalists.

5. Conclusion

The aim of this essay was to examine sexism in the language use of the British newspaper *The Daily Mail* by using feminist stylistic. A number of 162 articles from the online newspaper were collected and analysed using selected features from the toolkit provided in feminist stylistics. The analysis was performed at the level of word and at the level of discourse by analysing the following features: gendered generic words, naming of females and males and how female and male characters are described. The gender of the journalist was also examined to discover the impact of the language-use in terms of sexism. Due to the limited
amount of material, the results are not suitable for generalisations of the existence of linguistic sexism in The Daily Mail. The results are nonetheless interesting. At the word level, the results showed no greater use of masculine generic words, except the use of the words “spokesman” and “chairman”. In at least two cases, the results showed that the masculine words were used generically. Considering the number of times the word “spokesman” was used, it could be assumed that the word was used generically more than once, however this cannot be proven by the results. As also discussed, an explanation for this could be that there exist more men within this profession. The word-use then reflects an unequal society. In terms of naming some linguistic sexism could be detected. The results showed that women were more often addressed by their first name and men more often by their surname. According to feminist linguistic theory this could be considered sexist since it might be perceived as establishing unequal relationships between women and men. Titles were also analysed in terms of naming and presented theory suggests that there is an asymmetric relationship in how titles are used for women and men. The term “Mr” is used for men in all occasions, while the titles “Mrs” and “Miss” historically have been used for women depending on their marital status. The neutral “Ms” was introduced decades ago, but the results of this study agree to some extent with earlier investigations, which show that the term is used with another purpose than the original, namely as a third alternative for women and not as a counterpart to “Mr”. The analysis at discourse level suggests that women were referred to by their relationship to others more often than men and that the major difference between the genders were in the categories “mother” and “father”. Considering the context where men seem to be referred to more often as individuals, describing female characters by their relationship to others could be interpreted as linguistic sexism. The results also show that women are more often described by their appearance. Finally, the examination of the journalist did not suggest that the gender had a major impact on the language-use in terms of sexism. However, female journalists tended to be the author of articles using “Ms” and articles describing women in terms of their appearance.

A conclusion that could be drawn from the results is that Mills feminist stylistics is still a relevant method for detecting sexism in texts twenty years after it was introduced and that linguistic sexism seems to exist in The Daily Mail to some extent. Recommendations for further studies would be to perform an extended study on the subject using a larger amount of data to find results more suitable for generalisation. Worth studying further would also be the difference between individual articles to discover the importance of the journalists in terms of
other features than gender, such as age. Since only one newspaper was investigated it would be interesting to analyse an additional newspaper to compare the results, such as a broadsheet paper. Further research within the category of indirect sexism provided by Mills (2008) would also be interesting for this type of studies. Since the occupational terms including the affix – man were suggested by Mills (1995) these were selected, however an investigation of other occupational terms would have been interesting in order to discover if they are used in a sexist manner. To sum up, it could be stated that it is important to continuing approaching sexism in language in order to change it. This is important because, as Mills (2008:159) argues, it is one of the methods necessary for changing a sexist society.
References


The Daily Mail (online version). Available at: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/home/index.html>