"ONE IS A WOMAN, SO THAT'S ENCOURAGING TOO"
The representation of social gender in "powered by Oxford" online lexicography

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Abstract – Since any language cannot but mirror its speech community's ideology, lexicographers cannot but record how that ideology is reflected in language usage (Iamartino 2020, pp. 37-38). Particularly relevant in this sense are all those entries which belong to sensitive issues in a given society: political and social ideas, religion, ethnicity, sex, and gender (Iamartino 2020, p. 36). As regards the latter, as Pinnavaia remarks (2014, p. 219), while male gender does not seem to be an issue, female gender does. Indeed, since the beginnings of dictionary-making in early modern Europe and until quite recently, dictionaries have always been full of entries, words, definitions, examples, and comments that display the contemporary patronising and often derogatory attitude of the cultural and social male elite towards women (Iamartino 2010, p. 95). In this light, this paper investigates the representation of "social gender" (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001a, p. 11) in the definitions and usage examples of a group of occupational terms in the Oxford Dictionary of English, whose free online version is hosted on the "powered by Oxford" dictionary portal Lexico.com and licensed for use to technology giants like Google, Apple and Microsoft (Ferrett, Dollinger 2020). The rationale behind the present study lies in two recent online controversies which, blaming Oxford University Press for linguistic sexism, eventually prompted the publisher to revise thousands of entries (Flood 2016, 2020; Giovanardi 2019a; Oman-Reagan 2016; Saner 2019). Accordingly, this research aims to promote a debate about the current relationship between Internet lexicography, gender, and society, while highlighting the role online platforms may play in potential 'wars on words' as a new form of dictionary criticism.

Keywords: gender; sexism; occupational terms; online lexicography; dictionary criticism.

1. Introduction

In June 2019, Oxford University Press (OUP hereafter) was the target of an online controversy concerning women's representation. The publisher came under strong public criticism after the marketing manager Maria Beatrice Giovanardi launched a petition on the platform Change.org[1] to call on OUP to eliminate linguistic sexism from the entry for WOMAN in the Oxford Dictionary of English, whose free online version is hosted on the dictionary portal Lexico.com. The petition (Giovanardi 2019a) condemned the many usage sentences which not only recorded but also reinforced outdated sexist themes, as well as the many derogatory synonyms provided for WOMAN, including "bitch" (Giovanardi 2019a). Although the campaigner later examined several online dictionaries and observed similar results (Giovanardi 2019b), she decided to target OUP in her petition not only because they are an unquestionably reputable source, and yet, in her view, the most biased, but also because they have a remarkable market advantage. As Ferrett and

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[1] Change.org (online) is a website which offers users worldwide the ability to promote petitions to potential signers, in order to advance causes, mobilize new supporters and finally work with decision makers to drive solutions.

Dollinger explain (2020), OUP retains partnerships with technology giants like Google,[2] Yahoo and Bing, as regards search engines, and with dominant operating systems like Microsoft and Apple, whose preinstalled dictionaries are actually "powered by Oxford". As mentioned above, "powered by Oxford" is also Lexico.com, OUP's new domain[3] for their free online versions of the Oxford Dictionary of English and the Oxford Thesaurus of English (Connor-Martin 2019). Therefore, this content, which is free and almost ubiquitous, is so widespread that it cannot but influence the way women are talked about, according to Giovanardi (2019a). Nearly 35,000 people, gathering around the hashtags #IAmNotABitch and #SexistDictionary, have signed the petition so far, including influential linguists, academics, and women's rights activists.

In response, OUP published a blog post announcing an ongoing corpus-based revision (Connor-Martin 2019; Kolirin 2019). As the head of lexical content strategy for OUP Katherine Connor-Martin explains (Flood 2020, online), after "a very extensive project" examining "thousands and thousands of examples", OUP editors have reworked around 500 entries which "unnecessarily perpetuate[d] sexist stereotypes" and new editorial standards and practices have been established for the selection of examples.

The petition on Change.org, however, was not the first online attack against the public reputation of OUP. A few years earlier, OUP had been at the centre of a Twitter storm which called into question their gender representation. In January 2016, the anthropologist Michael Oman-Reagan publicly expressed his concerns after noticing that RABID, defined by his MacBook's dictionary as "Having or proceeding from an extreme or fanatical support of or belief in something", contained the primary example phrase "A rabid feminist" (Flood 2016, online). By searching further into his dictionary, whose content is "powered by Oxford", Oman-Reagan (2016, online) also criticised other, in his view, explicitly sexist usage examples for entries like SHRILL in "The rising shrill of women's voices", PSYCHE, in "I will never really fathom the female psyche", PROMISCUOUS in "She's a wild, promiscuous, good-time girl", and NAGGING in "A nagging wife".

More relevantly for the purposes of this paper, Oman-Reagan (2016, online) observed gendered examples related to occupations: while the sentence given for HOUSEWORK was "She still does all the housework", RESEARCH was illustrated with "He prefaces his study with a useful summary of his own researches" and the usage sentence for DOCTOR, as PhD title, read as "He was made a Doctor of Divinity". Online conversations using the hashtag #OxfordSexism exploded on social networks, and media outlets throughout the English-speaking world began to report the story. The issue went viral and promoted an intense debate which, as Cameron (2016) remarks, is not just about a few words, but rather about sexism in language and dictionary linguistic authority as perceived by users. Indeed, they seem to expect dictionaries to adopt a prescriptive approach to the treatment of sensitive language and ignore that most monolingual general-purpose dictionaries are instead descriptive which means that, unlike prescriptive dictionaries, they simply record the way language works as observed in actual examples of the language. Descriptive dictionaries reflect language as used by actual speakers and writers, definitions are based solely on usage, they do not dictate how words should be used or set forth rules of (political) correctness. Therefore, if people in one society use sexist language, a descriptive dictionary cannot but document that use, but clear

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[2] Google alone accounts for 92% of the search engine market share worldwide, as of January 2021 (Statcounter 2021, online).

[3] This domain was previously known as Oxforddictionaries.com.

indications concerning the derogatory nature of sexist words should be given to users, so that they can be fully aware of their meaning and, hopefully, contribute to make the use of those words outdated by avoiding them.[4]

As Russell states (2018, p. 14, original emphasis), a dictionary is generally regarded "as an immaculate arbiter of truth – timeless, authorless, faultless, sexless, certainly not *sexist*". Yet, as discussed above, in the past years 'sexist' has been precisely the accusation made against OUP by many online dictionary users who, thanks to the lobbying power of social networks and online petition platforms, have eventually contributed to dictionary revision (Flood 2020). This tension between online dictionary makers and users, which result from users' expectations about the role of dictionaries in society and which testifies to the status of gender as a very sensitive topic and also the increasing awareness regarding the language of gender in the present cultural moment, is the rationale behind the present study, whose objective is to investigate gender representation in the definitions and example sentences of a selected group of words related to occupations. After all, as Telve (2011) observes, women's emancipation expresses itself especially in the workplace, and names of professions are clear linguistic indicators of gender equality and non-discrimination in society. For this purpose, the Oxford Dictionary of English online (ODE online hereafter), which is the default dictionary on Lexico.com, has been selected as a case study to explore gendered associations, if any, in this semantic field.[5]

Section 2 explores the nature of gender in English, with special attention to the notion of "social gender" (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001a, p. 11) and illustrates the language of gender according to the ODE online. Section 3 briefly examines the relationship between gender and lexicography by drawing on the studies which have investigated dictionaries from a gender-critical perspective since the 1970s. Against this background, based on the working methodology described in Section 4, the analysis of the definitions and usage examples of forty-five occupational terms is presented in Section 5, in order to show the dictionary's representation of social gender and highlight, if any, gender-biased associations between professions and either men or women. Lastly, in Section 6 the results of the analysis are critically discussed and alternative gender-inclusive practices in the dictionary's selection of usage examples are put forward.

2. Gender and the English language

As Hazenberg (2021, p. 585) explains, "our social understanding of what we mean by 'gender' has changed considerably over the past few decades", evolving from a biologically determined category to a socially constructed schema. "Our linguistic approach to the study of language, gender, and sexuality has shifted in parallel" and "a systematic, grounded, and critical interrogation of the relationship between language and gender" has emerged (Hazenberg 2021, p. 586).

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[4] In this regard, Gheno (2021) interestingly describes the recent gender-critical controversy surrounding the online versions of the Treccani Dictionary and Thesaurus of the Italian language, which arose after Maria Beatrice Giovanardi wrote an open letter to Treccani lexicographers to challenge the entry for 'donna' (woman).

[5] Unless otherwise stated, all definitions and example sentences cited in this paper belong to the online version of the Oxford Dictionary of English (2021, online), hosted on the "powered by Oxford" dictionary portal Lexico.com and referred to as the ODE online or simply the dictionary.

According to the ODE online (2021), GENDER means "either of the two sexes (male and female), especially when considered with reference to social and cultural differences rather than biological ones".[6] The dictionary further explains that "the term is also used more broadly to denote a range of identities that do not correspond to established ideas of male and female" and which identify as non-binary (ODE online 2021). Nevertheless, although the notion of gender presently goes far beyond the binary opposition between male and female, in this paper, by drawing from Cameron (2006, p. 724), gender is used "primarily to refer to the social condition of being a man or a woman", specifically in terms of their representation in the dictionary's definitions and illustrative sentences. Before examining the relationship between gender and lexicography, however, it is useful to briefly outline the nature of gender in English and the dictionary's approach to the language of gender.

From a linguistic perspective, as Hellinger (2001, p. 107) argues, "gender in English is primarily a semantic category, with important social implications". As a natural gender language,[7] personal nouns in English tend to be gender-neutral and referential gender is expressed pronominally. Indeed, "the majority of English personal nouns […] are unspecified for gender, and can be used to refer to both female and male referents", e.g. person, engineer, babysitter, and "can be pronominalised by either *she* or *he* or – in neutral, non-specific contexts – by singular *they*"[8] (Hellinger 2001, p. 107, original emphasis). Conversely, very few personal nouns in English present lexical gender, based on their semantic specification, e.g. mother/father, aunt/uncle, queen/king, etc., and are pronominalised by either *she* or *he*, depending on their referential gender (Hellinger 2001, p. 107).

"However, though lacking lexical gender, the semantics of a large number of English personal nouns shows a clear gender-bias" (Hellinger 2001, p. 108). This is amply illustrated in the semantic field of occupational terms, which are inextricably linked to the notion of "social gender" (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001a, p. 10). This category refers to the "stereotypical assumptions about what are appropriate social roles for women and men, including expectations about who will be a typical member of" a professional class (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001a, p. 11).

> Many higher-status occupational terms such as *lawyer*, *surgeon*, or *scientist* will frequently be pronominalised by the male-specific pronoun *he* in contexts where referential gender is either

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[6] The distinction between gender and sex has been extensively discussed in modern feminist theory, whose review is beyond the scope of this paper. However, it seems important to highlight that, as opposed to biological sex, gender refers to a socially constructed category which is deeply rooted in culture and, thus, may vary in different societies and historical periods. The cultural traits and behaviours deemed appropriate for men, women, and other non-binary gender identities or, put it differently, what is considered to be typical or characteristic of a gender, may change across places and times. All these aspects of the worldview of a speech community are recorded by dictionaries which, as a mirror of society (Iamartino 2020), testify to the sociocultural beliefs and practices associated to gender(s) in different languages and cultures.

[7] McConnell-Ginet (2013, p. 3) criticises the concept of 'natural gender' and defines it a myth when classifying English, to finally suggest the 'notional gender' label as an alternative.

[8] In this regard, it is worth mentioning that 'they' was Merriam Webster's 2019 word of the year, representing a pronoun used to refer to one person whose gender identity is non-binary (Merriam Webster, online). This new sense was added to the Merriam-Webster.com dictionary in September 2019, in response to a 313% increase in lookups over the previous year. As usually happens, lookups are driven by events in the news, and the shifting use of 'they' was the subject of increasing study and commentary in recent years (Merriam Webster, online).

> not known or irrelevant. On the other hand, low-status occupational titles such as *secretary*, *nurse*, or *schoolteacher* will often be followed by anaphoric *she*. (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001a, pp. 10-11, original emphasis).

Hellinger (2001, p. 108, original emphasis) further explains that the so-called "generic he", based on the principle 'male is norm' and, thus, female is exception,[9] is also used in neutral contexts for "general human nouns such as *pedestrian*, *patient* or *driver*, as well as for indefinite pronouns (somebody, anyone, no one, etc.)".[10]

Due to social gender, that is because of these gendered associations concerning occupational terms, overt formal markings are thus required to deviate from such stereotypes, for example, by adding gender-specific adjectives to neutral nouns, as in 'female surgeon' and 'male nurse'. In this sense, for the purposes of "gender-fair language"[11] (Sczesny *et al.* 2016), the word-formation processes of derivation and compounding have played a major role in creating female-gendered forms in the area of occupational terms, e.g. waiter/waitress, policeman/policewoman, etc. However, as regards English, it must be underlined that the few and hardly productive derivational patterns have often created feminine forms which are not semantically symmetric to their masculine counterparts, implying a "semantic derogation" (Schulz 1975), e.g. governor/governess and major/majorette. As regards this point, it is noteworthy that the ODE entry for the derivational suffix -ESS, defined as "forming nouns denoting female gender", offers users a usage note which explains 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 (consider the differences in meaning and use between manager and manageress or poet and poetess). 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 patronising (e.g. poetess, authoress, editress). The 'male' form is increasingly being used as the 'neutral' form, where the gender of the person concerned is simply unspecified. (Oxford Dictionary of English 2021, online)

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[9] As highlighted by Hellinger and Bußmann (2001a, p. 12), "female linguistic visibility is often a marked and loaded concept, and we find considerable variation concerning the status and productivity of feminine/female word-formation processes across languages". In this respect, the four volumes they edited offer a comprehensive overview of gender across a variety of languages (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001b, 2002, 2003; Hellinger, Motschenbacher 2015).

[10] In their diachronic analysis of changes in English syntax, Mair and Leech (2020, p. 265) briefly mention the development of the singular 'they' as an alternative to the so-called 'generic he' for both male and female reference. Based on data taken from corpora, they explain that, while the latter was well established in the 1960s, thanks to the women's movement of the 1970s and 1980s, the use of 'generic he' declined fast in the 1990s, as opposed to a rise in frequency of both singular they and coordinated pronouns (he or she, etc.). In contrast, Sendén *et al.* (2014) performed a large-scale content analysis of 800,000 Reuters news messages which were published in English between 1996 and 1997 and show that the masculine pronoun was not only more frequent but also appeared in more positive contexts. Worthy of mention is also the study on personal pronouns by Twenge *et al.* (2012) which examined about 1,2 million US books published between 1900 and 2008 and documented that the either high or low frequency of gendered pronouns was directly proportional to the either low or high status of women and men in terms of educational attainment, labour force participation, etc.

[11] This concept is borrowed here from psycholinguistics as a working definition to mean a tool aimed at the symmetric representation of women and men through language, and particularly the use of feminine forms to make female referents visible. The objective of gender-fair language is to reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination and to influence people's gendered perception of reality.

Similarly, the dictionary entry for the suffix -ETTE, which is also used to form nouns denoting female gender, provides a usage note clarifying that "in the modern context, where the tendency is to use words which are neutral in gender, the suffix -ette is not very productive and new words formed using it tend to be restricted to the deliberately flippant or humorous" context, e.g. ladette and punkette.

The prescriptive approach of the ODE online editors, exemplified in the usage notes mentioned above, is further illustrated in the section named "English Grammar" on Lexico.com, which contains an article titled "The language of gender" and labelled as "Top Writing Tips". The article directly addresses the reader and opens with a recommendation which motivates the following guidelines on gender-fair language.

> It's very important to make sure that you don't offend people by inadvertently using language that might be considered sexist. In recent decades, some previously established words and expressions have come to be seen as discriminating against women - either because they are based on male terminology (e.g. business*man*, post*man*) or because they appear to give women a status that is less important than the male equivalent (e.g. *actor/actress*; *steward/stewardess*). Here are some general guidelines to be aware of when you are thinking about which word to use. (Lexico.com 2021, online, original emphasis)

Recommendations include: the use of a gender-neutral form, e.g. headteacher, instead of a gender-specific one like headmaster/headmistress, unless gender is relevant to the context; the use of terms which were previously applied exclusively to men but are now used to refer to both men and women, due to the negative associations the female form has developed, e.g. actor, author, and poet should be preferred to actress, authoress and poetess; the use of more inclusive forms like humankind or humanity, instead of mankind.

The article further clarifies that "nowadays, it's often very important to use language which implicitly or explicitly includes both men and women, making no distinction between the two genders. This can be tricky when it comes to pronouns", since in English, "a person's gender is explicit in the third person singular pronouns" and "there are no personal pronouns that can refer to someone (as opposed to something) without identifying whether that person is male or female" (Lexico.com 2021, online). While "in the past, people unquestioningly used" masculine pronouns, "this approach is now seen as outdated and sexist" and gender-neutral solutions must be adopted: coordinated pronouns (*he or she*, *his or her*), plural forms instead of singular ones, and singular *they* and related adjectives and pronouns (Lexico.com 2021, online). As regards the latter, although "some people object to this use on the grounds that it's ungrammatical, […] the use of plural pronouns to refer back to a singular subject […] represents a revival of a practice dating from the 16th century" and now it is increasingly common in both writing and speech (Lexico.com 2021, online). Moreover, the article presents users with guidelines concerning "specific words or types of word which can cause offence because they are felt to be sexist" (Lexico.com 2021, online). These words include nouns ending in -ess, -ette, 'girl' as both single word and in compounds, 'man' meaning all human beings, and the suffix -man when referring to professions and roles (Lexico.com 2021, online).

Gender-related usage notes are found throughout the ODE online, yet rather irregularly and sporadically, placed at the bottom of some relevant entries. For example, the usage information provided for ACTRESS suggests the user to "see actor", where 'actor' is a cross-reference to that entry. Indeed, the usage note for ACTOR explains that, although female performers have been called either actors or actresses since the 17th century, and although "there is still an awards category at the Oscars called Best Actress", today people tend to use the gender-neutral term 'actor' for both sexes (Lexico.com 2021, online).

3. Gender and lexicography

As Iamartino remarks (2020, pp. 37-38), "just as (or insofar as) every language reflects its speakers' worldview", that is "its speech community's ideology – its values and dominant attitudes, its stereotypes and taboos", lexicographers working on that language cannot but record that ideology as reflected in language usage. Particularly relevant in this sense are all those dictionary entries which belong to sensitive issues in a given culture and historical period: political and social ideas, religious faith, ethnicity, age, sex, and gender (Iamartino 2020, p. 36). As regards the latter, as Pinnavaia highlights (2014, p. 219), "while male gender does not seem to be an issue, female gender does".

> As a matter of fact, since the beginnings of dictionary-making in early modern Europe and until quite recently, dictionaries have always been full of entries, words, definitions, examples, and comments that display the contemporary attitude – at best patronising, at worst derogatory – of the cultural and social elite, of course a male one, towards women. (Iamartino 2010, p. 95)

In this view, as testified to by the ODE online (2021), SEXISM is a female-gendered concept, whose meaning, "prejudice, stereotyping, or discrimination, *typically* against women, on the basis of sex" (emphasis added), is consistently illustrated in "Sexism in language is an offensive reminder of the way the culture sees women". The cultural and social attitude towards women, as reflected in language use and recorded by lexicographers, has been indeed the main focus of scholars investigating the relationship between gender issues and lexicography so far.

As Russell recapitulates (2018, pp. 30-31), academic attention from a gender-critical perspective has been paid to dictionaries since the 1970s, when the women's rights movement prompted researchers to evidence lexicographical bias in the representation of men, women, and gender roles, which not only recorded but also endorsed or reinforced sex-role stereotypes prevalent in the English language in definitions and examples under neutral headwords. The works by Gershuny (1974, 1975, 1977, 1980) and Graham (1975) pioneered this research line and demonstrated a quantitative and qualitative bias in women's depiction: dictionary definitions and illustrative quotations featuring female persons were infrequent and almost always negative, as opposed to an overabundance of masculine nouns and pronouns exhibiting "the culturally desirable traits of assertiveness, competence, dominance, and strength" (Gershuny 1975, pp. 938-939). These findings were largely confirmed by the works published in the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s, which highlighted androcentric, sexist and discriminatory content in the gender stereotypes of many dictionary definitions and examples (Braun, Kitzinger 2001; Brewer 2009a, 2009b; Fournier, Russell 1992; Hidalgo-Tenorio 2000; Prechter 1999; Whitcut 1984).

Some studies also showed that dictionaries tended to underrepresent terminology with strong associations to femininity or feminism (Connor-Martin 2005; Mugglestone 2013; Steinmetz 1995) or to omit women speakers and writers from dictionary corpora (Baigent *et al.* 2005; Brewer 2009b, 2012a, 2012b; Cameron 1992, 2015).

In the age of social media technology, however, dictionary criticism goes beyond scholarly circles. Online platforms allow dictionary users to publicly express their concerns and directly interact with dictionary makers which, like other commercial enterprises, tend to be responsive to users' needs for the sake of their reputation,[12] yet

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[12] For an overview on the use of social networks by dictionary publishers, see Biesaga (2015, 2016).

within the confines of their descriptive evidence-based approach. In this sense, OUP is a case in point.

4. Methodology

As discussed in the Introduction, the analysis presented in the following sections investigates the representation of 'social gender' in the definitions and example sentences of some occupational terms in the online version of the Oxford Dictionary of English (2021) and, consequently, in the "powered by Oxford" free and pervasive online dictionary content. For this purpose, the following working methodology has been developed to identify and examine the entries under consideration.

In order to avoid bias in the selection of entries, instead of replicating similar studies (Norri 2019), relevant statistical data have been used to identify and interpret the headwords under scrutiny as representative of the British occupational breakdown by gender developed by Careersmart[13] and based on Working Futures 2020.[14] Drawing on these projections, Careersmart (2021b) provides a list of 320 professional areas, such as "carpenters and joiners" and "nursery nurses and assistants", each associated with, and ordered accordingly, the number of their male and female workforce, expressed in both units and percentages. Male-dominated occupations are displayed at the top of the list, while female-dominated ones come up at the bottom, so that data can be accessed from both perspectives depending on the reader's interest. From top to bottom, therefore, male workforce is decreasing while female workforce is increasing, and vice versa moving upwards from the bottom of the list. Moreover, each professional category is linked to a data sheet-like webpage presenting some features of the relevant occupational areas, including definition, average salary, average weekly hours, tasks, qualifications, regional employment data and, more importantly, a section which displays alternative and related job titles. In this respect, while some categories faithfully correspond to occupational terms and, especially, to dictionary entries, e.g. 'carpenter' and 'nursery nurse', other categories are broader and named after the more general professional field, e.g. "welding trades". In the latter case, the entry or entries identified to be representative of that category have been taken from the list of related terms, e.g. 'welder' for "welding trades". In case of partial overlapping between categories, e.g. "legal secretaries" and "medical secretaries", given the difficulty in finding exact dictionary entries, the noun, e.g. 'secretary', has been interpreted as representative of both categories. This working methodology has been applied to identify three groups, including fifteen names of male-dominated professions (Table 1), fifteen names of female-dominated professions (Table 2) and fifteen names of professions in which the workforce is 50% male and 50% female (Table 3). As concerns the latter group, a smaller number of occupational areas have been included in the analysis, in order to examine only the ones which present a gendered workforce ranging from 48% and 52%. In sum, based on the list compiled by Careersmart

[13] As described on the website homepage (Careersmart 2021a, online), "Careersmart is an independent and impartial careers website" which features "articles and podcasts on a range of subjects and the latest labour market data from official 'big data' sources".

[14] As defined by the Warwick Institute for Employment Research (2021, online), "Working Futures is a quantitative assessment of future employment prospects for UK" and "projects the future size and shape of the labour market by considering employment prospects by industry, occupation, qualification level, gender and employment status".

(2021b) and on the selection procedure described above, this paper examines the gender profile of the forty-five headwords illustrated in the tables below.

	Dictionary entry	Occupation category	Male workforce	Female workforce
1.	Mechanic	Vehicle technicians, mechanics, and electricians	99.19%	0.81%
2.	Electrician			
3.	Carpenter	Carpenters and joiners	99.08%	0.92%
4.	Joiner			
5.	Welder	Welding trades	98.65%	1.35%
6.	Plumber	Plumbers	98.1%	1.9%
7.	Metalworker	Metal working production and maintenance fitters	98.09%	1.91%
8.	Fitter			
9.	Machinist	Mobile machine drivers and operatives n.e.c.	97.93%	2.07%
10.	Trucker	Large goods vehicle drivers	97.61%	2.39%
11.	Bricklayer	Elementary construction occupations	97.11%	2.89%
12.	Glazier	Glaziers, window fabricators and fitters	96.68%	3.32%
13.	Builder	Construction and building trades n.e.c.	96.27%	3.73%
14.	Driver	Taxi and cab drivers and chauffeurs	95.71%	4.29%
		Train and tram drivers	95.69%	4.31%
15.	Painter	Painters and decorators	95.27%	4.73%

Table 1
Male-dominated occupations.

	Dictionary entry	Occupation category	Female workforce	Male workforce
1.	Nursery nurse	Nursery nurses and assistants	97.72%	2.28%
2.	Secretary	Legal secretaries	96.66%	3.34%
		Medical secretaries	95.83%	4.17%
3.	Personal assistant	Personal assistants and other secretaries	95.43%	4.57%
4.	Childminder	Childminders and related occupations	95.24%	4.76%
5.	Housekeeper	Housekeepers and related occupations	90.67%	9.33%
6.	Receptionist	Receptionists	90.48%	9.52%
7.	Dancer	Dancers and choreographers	90.05%	9.95%
8.	Choreographer			
9.	Dispensing chemist	Pharmacy and other dispensing assistants	89.29%	10.71%
10.	Therapist	Therapy professionals n.e.c.	89.22%	10.78%
11.	Psychologist	Psychologists	87.05%	12.95%
12.	Travel agent	Travel agents	86.07%	13.93%
13.	Nursery teacher	Nursery education teaching professionals	85.98%	14.02%
14.	Beautician	Beauticians and related occupations	85.02%	14.98%
15.	Podiatrist	Podiatrists	84.7%	15.3%

Table 2
Female-dominated occupations.

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	Dictionary entry	Occupation category	Male workforce	Female workforce
1.	Glassmaker	Glass and ceramics makers, decorators, and finishers	↑50.63%	↓49.37%
2.	Potter			
3.	Caterer	Catering and bar managers	↑50.55%	↓49.45%
4.	Steward			
5.	Art director	Advertising accounts managers and creative directors	↑50.38%	↓49.62%
6.	Lecturer	Further education teaching professionals	↓49.97%	↑50.03%
7.	Instructor			
8.	Teacher			
9.	Tutor			
10.	Professor			
11.	Trainer	Vocational and industrial trainers and instructors	↓49.06%	↑50.94%
12.	Coach			
13.	Moderator	Customer service managers and supervisors	↓48.45%	↑51.55%
14.	Shopkeeper	Shopkeepers and proprietors – wholesale and retail	↓48.27%	↑51.73%
15.	Proprietor			

Table 3
Fifty-fifty occupations.

Another important aspect of the working methodology used for this research concerns the analysis of the entries, aimed at outlining their gender profile and based on the multi-layered structure the ODE online presents users with as to data display. Indeed, as Figure 1 illustrates, under the headword shown in bold and larger font, the entry for SECRETARY, for example, displays the following information: (a) the clickable audio pronunciation and the phonetic transcription, (b) the clickable "See synonyms for secretary" sentence which directs the user to the Oxford Thesaurus of English, (c) the link to the translation into Spanish, based on the English-Spanish Oxford dictionary,[15] some grammatical information, in this case the word class 'noun' and the plural form 'secretaries' in brackets, and then the numbered list of senses and subsenses, each displayed on a new line.[16] More importantly, the dictionary offers a fixed primary example which appears immediately below the definition and a clickable 'more example sentences' bar which presents the user with about 20 extra examples taken from the Oxford English Corpus[17] and illustrating the usage of SECRETARY for each sense.

[15] Lexico.com is a dictionary portal which hosts the Oxford Dictionary of English, the Oxford Thesaurus of English, and English-Spanish bilingual dictionaries.

[16] As concerns senses, this study examines the first definition of each occupational term.

[17] The Oxford English Corpus, launched in 2006, and still growing, is the first lexicographic corpus of English sourced entirely from the Web (Atkins, Rundell 2008, p. 79).

Figure 1
SECRETARY in the ODE online.

"She was secretary to David Wilby MP" is the primary (gendered) example illustrating the first definition of SECRETARY, meaning "A person employed by an individual or in an office to assist with correspondence, make appointments, and carry out administrative tasks". As mentioned in the Introduction, because of OUP's partnerships with leading search engines and operating systems, each definition and each associated primary example are spread across all the platforms "powered by Oxford". For example, due to its partnership with Google, search operators like "define secretary" or "secretary definition" or "what does secretary mean" in Google's bar bring up and cite Oxford definition first, because Google's English dictionary is powered by Oxford (Oxford Languages, online), as illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2
Google's definition of SECRETARY.

Given the influence of the Internet on dictionary consulting, since most users tend to 'google' their language issues in this digital age (Béjoint 2016; Jackson 2017), OUP has an overwhelming default advantage over other dictionary publishers (Ferrett, Dollinger 2020). This inevitably makes them more prone to public criticism as far as sensitive issues are concerned, which, regarding gender in particular, is testified to by the online controversies described in the Introduction. In this sense, the "powered by Oxford" dictionary content users can learn on Lexico.com and also on a variety of online platforms,

is a good case in point to investigate the relationship between gender, Internet lexicography and society.

5. Social gender in "powered by Oxford" dictionary content

In line with the objectives of this research, based on the notion of "social gender" explored in Section 2, the following paragraphs examine the representation of men and women, that is the gender profile of forty-five occupational terms in the definitions and the example sentences[18] of the free online version of the ODE online.

5.1. Defining the gender of occupational terms

The three groups of occupational terms examined in this paper present a high level of agreement as concerns definitions, where the gender-neutral 'person' appears in almost all descriptions (78%). Exceptions to the use of 'person' are only ten out of 45 (22%) and include other gender-neutral personal nouns serving as superordinate and/or synonymous terms, as in 'lorry driver' for TRUCKER, 'private teacher' for TUTOR, 'teacher' for NURSERY TEACHER, 'university academic' for PROFESSOR, 'owner' for SHOPKEEPER and PROPRIETOR of either a shop or business respectively.

A remarkable level of agreement can be also observed in the phrasing of definitions, always in terms of postmodification: a relative clause follows the gender-neutral noun in most cases (64%), as in "A person who installs and maintains electrical equipment" for ELECTRICIAN, or "A person whose job is to build walls, houses, and other structures with bricks" for BRICKLAYER, where 'job' can be substituted with 'trade' or 'profession'. Postmodification also comprises some adjectival clauses (18%) like 'responsible for', 'trained to', 'employed to', 'qualified to' or 'skilled in', as in "The person responsible for overseeing the artistic aspects of a film, publication, or other media production" for ART DIRECTOR, "A person employed to manage a household" for HOUSEKEEPER, "A person trained to look after young children and babies in a nursery or crèche" for NURSERY NURSE. These remarkable symmetries affect all definitions except two cases, which deviate from the general phrasing made of a gender-neutral noun postmodified by a clause. Indeed, the entries for GLASSMAKER and METALWORKER contain a cross-reference, that is a link within the dictionary software which directs the user to the entries GLASSMAKING and METALWORK respectively, in turn defined "The manufacture of glass" and "The skill of making things from metal".

5.2. Exemplifying the gender of occupational terms

As regards the analysis of example sentences, the dictionary's representation of gender, i.e. the presence of gender-marked nouns and pronouns, or other gender-related information, exhibits greater variation.

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[18] The analysis of usage sentences includes both primary and extra examples. As discussed in Section 4, in the ODE online, primary examples are fixed, they appear immediately below the definition and above the clickable 'more example sentences' bar. Moreover, primary examples are spread across all "powered by Oxford" platforms, i.e. Google, Yahoo, Bing, and Microsoft and Apple preinstalled dictionaries. Extra examples are the about 20 illustrative sentences for each word sense revealed by the dictionary if the user clicks on the 'more example sentences' bar.

The large majority of primary examples lack explicit gender reference: 84% of instances are gender-neutral, as in phrases like "A car mechanic" for MECHANIC, "A professional choreographer" for CHOREOGRAPHER, and "A senior lecturer in surgery at Leeds University" for LECTURER. Neutrality is also often expressed by plural forms (16 examples out of 45, 36%), as in "Bricklayers and joiners are needed to convert derelict properties" for BRICKLAYER or "It is increasingly common to engage professional caterers" for CATERER. Despite this general tendency, however, seven entries (16%) present an openly gendered referent in primary examples, of which four (9%) are male (CARPENTER, WELDER, PLUMBER, and DANCER) and three (7%) are female (SECRETARY, DISPENSING CHEMIST, and COACH), as in examples (1) - (7).

(1) *Tom Searles* worked as a **carpenter** repairing the inside of the wooden mills […].
(2) *He* worked as a **welder** in a steel factory.
(3) When the **plumber** fitted the new central heating/water system *he* fitted a manual shower mixer tap for us.
(4) She thought *he* would become a ballet **dancer**.
(5) *She* was **secretary** to David Wilby MP.
(6) In 1917, aged 24, *she* qualified as a **dispensing chemist**, […].
(7) His *wife*, *Kelly*, keeps busy as an English teacher and **coach** at Oakdale High School.

With respect to the list of occupational areas developed by Careersmart (2021b) in terms of real male and female workforce, while 'carpenter', 'welder' and 'plumber' are male-dominated professions, 'dancer' is a female-dominated job in reality, as are 'secretary' and 'dispensing chemist', but not 'coach', which is instead an evenly gendered-balanced career. As regards 'dancer', it must be highlighted that, although the primary usage example in (4) might seem ambiguous and lead the dictionary user to think that 'he' eventually did not become a ballet dancer and, thus, as it is in reality, that dancer is a female-dominated profession, in extra examples dancers are actually more male than female, as will be discussed below.

In fact, going back to the analysis, most gendered associations between the occupational terms above and either men or women are confirmed by the study of the extra examples provided in their entries. In other words, although most of the sentences illustrating the usage of these job names are neutral, if referential gender is mentioned, these professions are carried out by either men or women. Specifically, male are plumbers (19%), dancers (19%), carpenters (35%), and welders (50%) as in examples (8) - (11).

(8) […] there should no longer be a shortage of traditional *tradesmen* such as **plumbers** and electricians.
(9) […] *He* toured the halls as a professional **dancer**, excelling at the tango.
(10) *He* worked for many years with wood, both as a **carpenter** and doing fine wood-working.
(11) After watching a welder at work, *he* took to the craft *himself* and became a **welder** by trade.

Conversely, female are coaches (20%) and secretaries (24%), as in examples (12) and (13). The only exception is DISPENSING CHEMIST: this profession, labelled as British and defined "A person qualified to make up, advise on, and dispense medicine", presents a total of eight illustrative sentences of which, as already mentioned, one is the female-gendered primary example, as in (6), and one is a male-gendered extra example, as in (14),

Lingue e Linguaggi

whereas neutral forms are in the majority (76%) and also include one instance of coordinated pronouns, as in (15).

(12)   In later years *she* was a **coach** and teacher, […].

(13)   *She* was then working as a **secretary** to Tambimuttu […].

(14)   After *he* qualified the couple moved to Swindon and *he* worked as a **dispensing chemist** in Old Town […].

(15)   A chemist may not provide repeat dispensing services unless *he* or *she* is a repeat **dispensing chemist**.

As regards SECRETARY, it is relevant to mention that out of a total of 21 examples, in eight instances (38%) this occupational term co-occurs with 'his' in "his secretary" and other masculine subject nouns and pronouns, as in (16), which suggest the stereotypical image of a male boss with a female secretary. This interpretation of gender roles also concerns four instances (out of five) where the referent of 'secretary' is openly female, as in (17). As to the only one example which refers to a female secretary without mentioning a male head, this conveys a very negative picture of women's work condition, as in (18).

(16)   Since it was written in shorthand, *he* had to ask *his* **secretary** to interpret it.

(17)   *She* started in a law firm as the boss's **secretary** typing *his* letters and papers.

(18)   *She* is reportedly the lowest paid **secretary** in the department.

With respect to the remaining occupational terms, although they do not make any reference to either men or women in the primary examples, the gender profile of these headwords presents some gendered associations. In particular, it seems worth exploring in more detail those entries which, to different degrees, make openly gendered references in the three groups examined, as described in Section 4.

In male-dominated professions (Table 1), the majority of illustrative sentences lack explicit reference to either men or women: gender-neutral referents abound in almost all the entries, with percentages ranging from 100% (ELECTRICIAN, METALWORKER, GLAZIER, BUILDER and DRIVER) to 48% (MECHANIC) and even 43% (JOINER). As to 'mechanic', indeed, 48% of examples relate to men, as in (19), but one instance (4%) presents a female referent, yet associated to very stereotypical conceptions of skills, as in (20). Indeed, this usage example might be controversial due to its implicit sexism, since the dictionary user might question the reasons why a female mechanic is represented by a woman who lacks conventionally female skills like cooking. JOINER, which is labelled British and means "A person who constructs the wooden components of a building, such as stairs, doors, and door and window frames", presents 57% of overtly male referents, as in (21). Moreover, an interesting case is MACHINIST, whose examples are mostly neutral (75%) but, if referential gender is marked, machinists are slightly more female (15%) than male (10%) even though women in this profession are always the wives of men, as in (22). Concerning the remaining occupational terms in this group, men represent 50% of welders, 29% of painters, 20% of bricklayers, 19% of plumbers, etc., with no instances of female referents. The only exception is found in CARPENTER where 35% of examples refer to men and 5% to women (one instance), as in (23), which also represents a female joiner.

(19)   Since *his father* was a **mechanic**, he kept plenty of tools in the garage.

(20)   But while *her* skills in the kitchen could be improved, *she* recently revealed *she* is a skilled car **mechanic**.

(21)   After leaving school, *he* did a seven-year stint as a **joiner**, […].
(22)   After his demob, Mr Harris worked as a plumber and *his wife* as a **machinist**.
(23)   […] A far cry from *her* days as a **carpenter** and joiner.

In the second group, the one of female-dominated professions (Table 2), most usage examples are gender-neutral, with percentages ranging from 100% (TRAVEL AGENT and PODIATRIST) or 95% (CHILDMINDER and BEAUTICIAN) to 20% (NURSERY NURSE). It is indeed 'nursery nurse' the entry which presents the highest number of gender-specific referents, of which 75% are women and 5% are men, as in (24) and (25). If referential gender is mentioned, female-only occupations are NURSERY TEACHER (25%), RECEPTIONIST (15%), BEAUTICIAN (5%) and CHILDMINDER (5%), meaning that masculine nouns or pronouns never occur in the examples provided for these entries, whereas mainly female are the people whose job is HOUSEKEEPER (20% vs 5% male) and PSYCHOLOGIST (10% vs 5% male). As concerns the remaining entries in this group, while PERSONAL ASSISTANT and THERAPIST present even percentages for both genders, the referents for DANCER are more male than female (19% vs 5%), which is in line with the male-gendered, yet ambiguous, primary example illustrated in (4), and those for CHOREOGRAPHER are men only (36%).

Apart from quantitative data, however, it is worth highlighting that some examples of the entries associated to women record long-standing gender stereotypes, which regard housekeeping and childcare in particular, as in (26) and (27), and, more significantly, female health, casting more women than men as patients of therapists and psychologists, as in (28) - (30). In this respect, it is useful to specify that for this research THERAPIST was examined in the sense "A person skilled in a particular kind of therapy". Concerning female psyche and mental health, this association confirms Oman-Reagan's criticism (2016) against women's representation in "powered by Oxford" dictionary content.

(24)   *She* was a beautiful, caring person who loved children and who loved *her* job as a **nursery nurse** […].
(25)   *He* is doing a three-year course at York College which will qualify *him* to work as a **nursery nurse**, […].
(26)   Similarly, *women* in domestic service as **housekeepers** or parlour maids had to make a choice between work and marriage.
(27)   Critics from both the right and the left accuse middle-class *women* of neglecting their children and exploiting the immigrant *women* they employ as nannies and **housekeepers**.
(28)   When I was little I too dreamed I would grow up to be a *princess*, but my Dad sent me to a load of **therapists**.
(29)   *She* only started eating again when *her* **therapist** threatened to admit *her* to hospital and have *her* force-fed.
(30)   Jungian **psychologists** have helped us to understand the bi-polar nature of *women*.

In the group of "fifty-fifty" professions (Table 3), that is those which present an evenly gender-balanced workforce according to Careersmart (2021b), in line with the general tendency towards neutrality observed in the analysis of the other two groups, the greater part of examples do not contain gender-marked forms, ranging from 100% (ART DIRECTOR, CATERER, MODERATOR) to 50% (STEWARD).

In terms of gender-specification, entries present different associations: POTTER, INSTRUCTOR, PROFESSOR and GLASSMAKER do not contain any reference to women and are all associated with the male gender, yet differing in degree. Men are 5% of potters, 14% of instructors, 20% of professors and 40% of glassmakers. On the contrary, no reference to

men is made in the examples illustrating the usage of TEACHER and COACH, which are associated to the female gender in 10% and 20% of instances respectively. Moreover, when specification affects both genders, masculine forms are more numerous than feminine counterparts: TRAINER is more male (9%) than female (4%), as are SHOPKEEPER (15% vs 5%) and PROPRIETOR (14% vs 10%). The largest differences concern two occupational terms which belong to the same category (Table 3), namely LECTURER and TUTOR, where male and female referents represent 38% and 5% as to 'lecturer', and 35% and 9% as to 'tutor'. A female 'lecturer' is found in one single example out of 21, as in (31), which mirrors the predominantly male-gendered profile of this entry.

Lastly, as regards COACH, it is interesting to mention one example related to the representation of women and, particularly, of those in power, as in (32), since it relates to the stereotypical image of women's high-pitched and annoying voices, which was sharply criticised by Oman-Reagan (2016) in his Twitter campaign.

(31)   One of the **lecturers** in the department is a *woman*, so that's encouraging too.

(32)   Margaret Thatcher covered her status as a woman when she trained with a voice **coach** to lower the timbre of her voice.

6. Conclusions

As Norri (2019, p. 866) contends, gender issues present an increasing challenge to lexicographers. The definitions and illustrative sentences of many 'neutral' headwords have been often criticised by scholars for showing gender bias and reinforcing stereotyped images of men and women (Russell 2018, pp. 30-31).

In the age of social networks and online petition platforms, gender-related dictionary criticism is no longer only voiced in scholarly circles, since users can publicly express their concerns and target online dictionary makers, which, like other commercial enterprises, tend to be responsive to users' needs for the sake of their reputation, yet within the confines of their descriptive evidence-based approach. In this sense, the revision of the "powered by Oxford" dictionary content undertaken by OUP editors is exemplary, since it embodies an initiative aimed to address these issues in lexicographical practice by acknowledging the present-day emphasis on awareness and sensitivity towards gender equality in society.

Indeed, as findings show, in the Oxford Dictionary of English online, as hosted on Lexico.com and, therefore, in the "powered by Oxford" content, which is spread across a variety of platforms (Google, Yahoo, Bing, Microsoft and Apple), a clear tendency towards gender neutrality can be observed, which supports and testifies to the gender-fair approach of OUP editors towards the use of language described in the dictionary's usage notes and writing tips, as illustrated in Section 2.

As regards definitions, out of 45 instances, no reference to either men or women is made: the gender-neutral 'person' appears in almost all descriptions (78%), with only ten exceptions (22%) which include other gender-neutral personal nouns.

As concerns primary examples, which deserve special attention due to OUP's partnerships with the technology giants mentioned above, out of 45 illustrative sentences, the large majority (84%) lack explicit gender reference, of which 36% include plural forms. Despite this general tendency, however, seven entries (16%) present an openly gendered referent in primary examples, of which four (9%) are male and three (7%) are female. The result is that most online users, those who 'google' their language issues and

do not consult extra examples on Lexico.com, are presented with gendered associations casting carpenters, welders, plumbers and dancers as typically male, while secretaries, dispensing chemists and coaches as typically female, and gender issues might arise in terms of stereotypical representations.

The analysis of the extra examples, which stand at 735 usage sentences in total, confirms a strong tendency towards the use of neutral forms (578, 79%), most of which are plural (371, 50%). Therefore, plural forms prove to be very useful to be inclusive, as the recommendations for gender-fair language on Lexico.com (2021, online) suggest. In relation to gender specification, the study of the whole number of extra examples shows the prevalence of men in the professions examined, referred to in 14% of instances as opposed to 7% of female referents.

In more detail, neutral referents represent the large majority of usage sentences in all the three groups: 79% in male-dominated professions, 77% in female-dominated professions, and 79% in 'fifty-fifty' professions. When it comes to gender specification, the first group of occupational terms confirms itself as mainly male-dominated, presenting 19% of masculine referents as opposed to only 2% of female counterparts. Similarly, the second group manifests the predominantly female gender of the people who work in these occupational fields, with women being referred to in 17% of instances as opposed to 6% of male referents. As regards the third group, including evenly gender-balanced professions according to Careersmart (2021b), gender representation in usage examples clearly favours men over women, respectively referred to in 15% and 6% of instances. Moreover, by focussing on those entries which do not present any examples with gender-specific referents for one of the two genders, findings clearly show a difference still favouring men over women: out of 45 entries, no reference to female workers is made in 20 instances, as opposed to 14 instances as concerns men, and out of those 20 entries, only nine are totally neutral, meaning that a large number of entries commonly mention at least one male referent in the examples taken from the Oxford English Corpus and selected by the dictionary's editors for their users.

Based on these findings, despite the great majority of neutral forms in both definitions and illustrative sentences, the representation of women and men in the ODE online indicates that "social gender" (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001a, p. 10), meant as more or less stereotypical assumptions and expectations about what are appropriate social and professional roles for women and men, exists in English culture, manifests itself in the English language and cannot but be recorded by descriptive English dictionaries, which mirror the society's worldview concerning men's and women's position in the world of work and, accordingly, more or less gendered-biased associations between occupational areas and either male or female workers.

In conclusion, if, as Telve (2011) explains, names of professions are linguistic indicators of gender equality and non-discrimination in a given society, even if plural forms are a suitable inclusive solution in English, the selection of illustrative sentences presenting, if any, both masculine and feminine forms to illustrate the usage of occupational terms might contribute to symmetrically represent women and men through language in the profession, to reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination, and to influence people's gendered perception of reality.

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"One is a woman, so that's encouraging too". The representation of social gender in "powered by Oxford" online lexicography

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