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The use of gender neutral pronouns in ELT
textbooks (from 1970s to 2010s)

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Introduction

Since the beginning of time, human beings have been able to distinguish themselves from animals through language. People have spoken first as a means of communicating their basic needs and later to be able to express themselves more thoroughly. Through spoken and written language they have also been able to make their ways of life and culture known to younger generations. As time went by, language has become more specific. We have words to express our needs, feelings and emotions and also to describe and refer to every single object. In each language words are constructed in a certain way. Simply by looking at the stem of a word, it is possible to know the origin of that given word without having previous knowledge of its meaning or language it comes from.

Some world languages, among others English, have been distinguished from the rest due to their geographical, economic and technological growth. Because of the British Empire's economic and political power since the 18th century onwards, English has become a *lingua franca* in many parts of the world. As a result, being crucial in our communication through science, business, television, radio, music, the internet and diplomacy to mention just a few, English has become a part and parcel of our everyday lives; printed and digital materials in English are available in many parts of the world. According to a recent survey, 350 million people speak English as their mother tongue and 1.2 to 1.5 billion people speak English as a second language.

As important as it is, English has undergone changes which were led by social and political movements. New vocabulary has been included in the language and old-fashioned words have been replaced in order to accommodate these changes. Each language reflects sociological changes. Before the 70s, studies were made mainly based on phonological, morphological or syntactic variations. In 1975, the women's movement affected not only society but also how these new social changes should be reflected in the language. At the very beginning, gender in the language was viewed as a sociolinguistic variable only. It was not until Lakoff's essay (1975) *Language and Woman's place* was published that science about language and gender was established.

Books and magazines have dealt with gender issues brought up by these changes in society. The use of gender marked pronouns and some lexical items which refer exclusively to men, not women, have been a subject of great debate as seen in Spender's *Man made Language* (1990) and Cameron's (1995) *Verbal Hygiene*. Books tend to reflect changes in society through their topics and lexical items and they can support certain movements or follow the more traditional approaches by simply not being inclusive.

This paper will deal with language forms related to gender and gender neutrality in intermediate textbooks from the two most representative publishing houses in Argentina: Oxford University Press (OUP) and Longman. In order to be able to appreciate the changes since the women's movement, we will analyse one textbook from each publisher and from each decade from the 1970s to 2010s. In other words, ten books will be analysed. Gender indicative or neutral forms in intermediate textbooks may vary according to the publishing house they belong to and the year of publishing.

The focus of the analysis will be the reading comprehension texts and the writing tasks presented in these books. The material will be divided into two parts according to the publishing house being analysed, apart from that there will be a short comparison of the pronominal frequency in both reading comprehension texts and writing tasks. The analysis will be done in order to provide the number of occurrences of pronominal forms and to illustrate if the publishing houses have opted for a more neutral language version of the forms or not. It would be expected to find more gender neutral language and forms in the later decades of publishing than in the 70s and perhaps early 80s.

The quantitative analysis of these books will comprise the occurrence of four pronominal variants, *he – she – they* and *he/she*, with three different types of antecedent. The antecedents which will be taken into account will be: indefinite articles, definite articles and quantifiers. Apart from that, there will be a brief examination of the different discursive resources applied to refer to women in both the domestic and working environment and the gender neutral forms, if any, used.

For this study, it is important to bear in mind some questions: first, the frequency of pronominal forms that will be found; second, if these pronominal choices vary according to the publisher; third, if the type of

task has any inference in the pronominal from chose; fourth, if these two different publishers, Longman and Oxford University Press, have changed their texts and instructions to more gender neutral language over time in order to remain current with social changes, that is to say, the feminist movement; and fifth, if these changes in language have any implications in language teaching and learning.

For the sake of clarity, this paper will be divided into four sections. The first one will be the theoretical background, which will give readers further understanding of the topics dealt with within these pages. The second section, data and methods, will provide a clear explanation as to what data was collected, where from and methods used to analyse it. The analysis, which will be the third section, will deal with the quantitative and qualitative study of all the data collected. Later on, in the fourth part of this paper, there will be a brief analysis of the implications these results might have on language teaching and learning. Finally, there will be a brief conclusion.

Theoretical background

Having received many different terms such as *androcentric* by Bodine (1975), and *masculist* by Roberts (1976), sexism and gender neutrality in the English language have been dealt with by many authors and even the British government in its Sex Discrimination Act. It is relevant to first define what is considered a sexist statement. Vetterling-Braggin (1981 as seen in Mills 1995: 63) presented a definition of a sexist statement as any statement which “contributes to, encourages or causes or results in the oppression of women”. She later modified this definition as she believed that it was only restricted to language about women. Her newest definition affirms that a statement can be considered as androcentric if “its use constitutes, promotes or exploits an unfair or irrelevant or impertinent distinction between the sexes”. In other words, if the distinction between the sexes is not important, it should not be a part of the statement. Many distinctions are not simply made by the use of different denotations in the language but by the use of different connotations.

As previously mentioned, not only authors were concerned with sexism in the language. It was thanks to the Women’s Liberation Movement (WLM) from the late 1970s onwards, which would have the greatest impact on the writing of women’s history, that the British government in The Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 also started making changes in language. The WLM refers to a series of campaigns for reforms on certain issues such as domestic violence and women’s equality among others. One of the principles of this movement is that society had been biased in favour of men and that this bias could be easily found in the language.

The Sex Discrimination Act of the Parliament of United Kingdom was passed 12th November 1975. This law was to ‘render unlawful certain kinds of sex discrimination and discrimination on the ground of marriage, and establish a Commission with the function of working towards the elimination of such discrimination and promoting equality of opportunity between men and women generally; and for related purposes.’ It was believed that the creation of this committee would be a turning point for women’s rights equality.

Among many interesting points, The Sex Discrimination Act laid emphasis on the importance of gender fair language. It was exemplified by Cameron (1995: 130) that certain terms such as *dustmen* had to be replaced by *refuse collectors* in order for it to be a more inclusive term due to the fact that male superiority had always been the norm, as Spender (1990: 3) also points out in her book.

“One semantic rule which we can see in operation in the language is that of the male-as-norm. At the outset it may appear to be a relatively innocuous rule for classifying the objects and events of the world, but closer examination exposes it as one of the most pervasive and pernicious rules that has been encoded. While this rule operates we are required to classify the world on the premise that the standard or normal human being is a male one and when there is but one standard, then those who are not of it are allocated to a category of deviation.”

Language has been male dominated and continued being so even after the Women’s Liberation Movement (1970s) had started. Schneider and Foss as seen in Spender (1990: 14) state that English favours males in syntax and semantics. Without going into details, semantics refers to the meaning within

the language and syntax to the sentence structure, that is to say, the form in which meaning is conveyed. In other words, a sentence can be sexist by how the sentence is formed and the words used in it.

Berger and Kachuk (1977 cited in Spender (1990:15) affirm that the English language is sexist as it downgrades women to a secondary and lesser position in society. Supporting this claim, Crawford (1995: 40) affirms that women's language and style functions are deviant while men speak "*the*" language. Thus, placing male language as the unmarked form, the norm, while women are regarded to be mere copycats. According to Lakoff (1975: 4) women are discriminated against through linguistics in two different ways: first, by how they are taught to use language, and second, by how language use refers to them. The first point of discrimination to which Lakoff (1975:11) refers is explained in her book. She points out that women and girls are expected to be "*little ladies*" in how they learn the language and later on, express themselves. Women are seen as weaker as they are not allowed to bellow in rage as men are. Men are allowed and even expected to express themselves via stronger and more forceful means while women are habituated to only fussing and complaining.

Supporting these claims, Crawford (1995: 61, 62) explains that women's speech is often seen as non-assertive, deficient and problematical. According to the author, the stereotypical woman is considered dependent, easily influenced, passive, tactful and aware of others' needs. In contrast, male speech and behaviour denote positive aspects such as willing to take a stand, self-reliant, independent, and dominant. There is a dichotomy between assertion and non-assertion in the sexes.

Furthermore, Lakoff (1975:19, 20) explains that language refers to the word woman as if it were a derogatory term. This stands by her second claim of how women are discriminated against through language. The word woman and its euphemisms, mainly "*lady*" and even "*girls*", are usually used with negative connotations such as that of immaturity. Perfect examples for this could be the phrases "*A girl's night out*" or "*to hit like a lady*".

Apart from the euphemistic use of "*lady*", there are other euphemisms that can replace the primary role society sees for women which is that of "*housewife*" as that term seems derogatory. The position of housewife might have been considered as one of degradation and the only place for women in society. Many magazines create the illusion that a housewife will be improved if thought of and referred to by its euphemisms such as "*household executive*", "*household engineer*" or "*domestic engineer*". In fact, the idea that women had to be the ones taking care of the house was so strong that there was not an equivalent for men. Nowadays, some terms such as "*stay-at-home*" to refer to men and "*homemaker*" for both sexes have been accepted.

Moreover, Lakoff (1975: 31, 32) argues that women are seen in connection with the men they are related to, while men are seen as their own individuals. This is the reason why men are always called the same way, for instance, Mr. Alan Smith. On the other hand, an unmarried woman, once she gets married, takes her husband's name. Referring to the previous example, this woman would be called Mrs. Alan Smith. In this way they do not only lose their surname but also their names becoming invisible. In the same line, Lakoff states the importance of connotation. Although parallels in denotative meaning, "*bachelor*" and "*spinster*" have very different connotational meaning. That is to say, both refer to unmarried people, one masculine and the other feminine; however, spinster is often used pejoratively.

Apart from all female nouns that can be found in the English language as pejorative, there are also affixes that serve the same purpose. In her study, Mills (1995: 70), asserts that the female form is a marked deviation of the unmarked male form and that certain affixes among those the prefix "*lady*" and the suffixes "*-ess*", "*-ette*", "*-enne*" and "*-trix*" have connotations that the unmarked (male) forms do not have. These connotations are generally derogatory and trivializing. In fact, the author explains that according to the etymology of the suffix "*-ette*", it can mean "smaller or less than". These affixes give the person they are describing a sense of inexperience, as can be inferred from the example "*aviator*" and "*aviatrix*". The use of many of these affixes has fallen by being considered archaic but some exceptions remain such as "*dominatrix*".

Mills (1995: 82) also points out that the diminutives can also be seen in women's names as is the example of Suzette. Other female names, although very similar to male names, are also marked by the change of a letter; for example, Leslie and Lesley. Some other female names are derivatives from male

names such as Stephanie and Petra which come from the names Stephen and Peter. Although some theorists believe that terms with the aforementioned affixes should be avoided, some others consider that their avoidance is erasing women's presence in the language. In spite of them being marked terms, they at least demonstrate the presence of women.

On the one hand, some feminist reformers believe that the development of linguistic innovations which replaces sexist words with non-sexist words can eliminate androcentric talk, as seen in Speer (2005:3). On the other hand, Cameron (1995: 110) states that "we cannot simply change a word's meaning for the whole community by fiat". She believes that 'verbal hygiene' cannot be treated as a linguistic problem when context is not taken into account. It should also be thought of as a social and political issue as the meaning of words is not fixed but fluid. In addition to this, Pinker (1994: 118) explains that there is a difference in the acceptance of new vocabulary words depending on the function they have within the sentence. He states that "...function words form a closed club that resists new members. That is why all the attempts to introduce gender-neutral pronouns like hesh and thon have failed."

Additionally, it is important to point out that Lakoff (1975: 42) also believes that until a change in society is achieved and the marital or social position of women is as unimportant as that of men, it does not matter whether a woman is called Mrs., Miss, the marked Ms., or is referred to by a euphemism. Any attempts to change the language will be useless if they are not accompanied by that of society. Language needs to reflect society's changes because it might not be able to force society to change.

The differentiation between men and women can be seen not only in the language itself but also in the attitudes people have towards women using language. There is a long history to refer to when it comes to the general opinion about the way women should behave and speak. Even the philosopher Sophocles himself is believed to have said 'silence gives the proper grace to women', which gives the impression that to be a good woman, she has to be a silent one as seen in Kaplan (1976:28). By way of explanation, if a woman is to be quiet, then any woman who voices any concern or opinion can be accused of being talkative (Spender, 1990:9). A silent woman is considered an ideal which is embraced in the old English proverb: 'Silence is the best ornament of a woman'.

While women speak, Lakoff states, as cited in Schiffri, Tannen and Hamilton (2005: 549,550), their speech is weaker and they tend to trivialize adjectives. Although her explanations do not include how each individual woman produces the utterance, Lakoff's explanations have become the norm of how women are supposed to speak. Gender biased speech might be very controversial and there might be many different positions about it. However, gender in language can also be neutral.

It is important to define what non-sexist language is and what changes in society it can produce. According to the online Macmillan dictionary, gender neutral language does not refer specifically to males or females and so can be used when talking about either sex. Gender neutrality is a form of prescriptivism which aims at using language without making any assumption in the gender or biological sex of the people involved in the process of communication. While gender specific language marks male superiority and social inequality, as previously explained, gender neutrality avoids misunderstandings that different people in dissimilar situations can have.

Gender free language might be possible through a series of strategies that Mills (1995:72, 73) lists and explains. The first method of non-sexist language should be, according to the author, to use address terms which are generic unless the gender specific one is absolutely necessary. She further explains the need to use terms such as "chair" to refer to every chairperson and not only females. According to Mills, the form "Ms." should be available for use in every official document as the marital status of the woman should not be requested unless the information is needed for a specific purpose.

Furthermore, Mills encourages the use of different choices in order to avoid the use of the seemingly generic form "he" as can be seen in the examples provided.

- a- "When *the author* has finished his manuscript, *he* can send it to the publisher"
- b- "When *authors* have finished *their* manuscripts, *they* can send them to the publishers"
- c- "When *the author* has finished *his/her* manuscript, *s/he* can send it to the publishers"

d- "When manuscripts have been finished, they should be sent to the publisher"

e- "When *the author* has finished her manuscript, she can send it to the publisher"

f- "When *the author* has finished *his* manuscript, *she* can send it to his publisher"

As explained, the use of the form he in sentence a might be considered a generic one as that form "contains" the male and female form. Focusing on sentence b, it can be seen that it uses the plural pronoun, which can be considered as a simple option due to the fact that it allows to continue reference throughout the paragraphs or text. The example provided in sentence c can be considered a good option for isolated sentences and not paragraphs as repeated referencing can be cumbersome. As regards the fourth example, sentence d, it is a positive alternative for extended paragraphs such as sentence b. In fact, both can be used alternatively in order to avoid repetition. Very much like sentence a, the use of the form she in sentence e can be used as generic as it might also be considered to "contain" both the male and female forms. Although the use of alternative pronouns as demonstrated in sentence f is a valid possibility according to Mills, it carries a great disadvantage which is that of being potentially confusing.

The use of the pronoun "*their*" to reference everyone or anyone can be considered by many as an erroneous form and be frowned upon, however, its use has widely spread in spoken English and it continues to spread onto written texts as well.

In her work, Mills (1995: 73) compares the avoidance of racist terms with those which are derogatory for women. She clearly states that people should desist from using those terms together with forms which refer to a woman's sexual characteristics, body shape and gender when it is not relevant. She exemplifies her position with the example of the word "*actor*". If in an advertisement it is not important whether the actor is female or male, it should not be mentioned. However, should the need to be specific arise, the publication ought to read male actor or female actor without taking for granted that the word actor includes just men. Other examples can be: "*steward*", and "*writer*". Using only the masculine form as generic might make women feel left out.

Using this verbal hygiene practice, gender neutral language makes women feel more included and less discriminated against. According to Cameron (1999: 134) on the guidelines issued by the Programme of Opportunities for Women Committee, sexist language may set female students apart and gender neutral language may make all people addressed feel included. Following Aitchinson (1996 cited in Parini 2003: 79) inclusion can also be shown in the explanation that the use of both pronouns "*he*" and "*she*" in an advert attracted more female applicants than the advert using only the pronoun "*he*".

Gender free language is a choice which is made by the speakers to make sure those who are receiving the message can know that the world is not male dominated as it sometimes appears to be. Both writers and speakers can show their acceptance of women's roles and contributions by solely using they for "*he/she*" in statements. Citing Mills (1995: 72) "The use of he/she does not simply give information; rather it signals a certain orientation and attitude which is critical of stereotypical views of the roles of the sexes." This leads us to believe that gender neutral language is a choice made by the speaker or writer who is adapting their language to new social beliefs.

By using gender neutral language also in books, people, especially children, would be taught to be more open-minded and not to make previous judgement of a person, by not taking into account neither their sexual orientation nor their gender. According to Byrnes (1995: 3) "children begin developing attitudes about various groups in society as early as ages three or four. Initially such attitudes are quite flexible. However, as children grow older, those attitudes are more difficult to change." It is then important to expose young children to a gender neutral language and also to reinforce this kind of language when they are older in order for society to hold less prejudice against differences.

In keeping with Mills (1995:72) there are three possible effects to the use of sexist language:

- 1- It might alienate female interlocutors and make them feel ostracized.
- 2- It might cause women to feel and see themselves as inferior and in a stereotypical way, which later on may affect the long term expectations that both men and women have on women's performances.

- 3- It may cause confusion to listeners as they might not know whether the generic pronoun is being used or a gender specific one.

There are many ways of making language neutral. Although some of them might have been mocked, such as the use of the suffix person instead of the morpheme *-man*, as was seen in *The Times* (1975 cited in Cameron 1995: 131), that and other neutral forms such as neutral job titles and the use of singular *“they”* are currently being more implemented. Considering Parini’s study on the use of the epicene (2012: 171,172) we can see that singular *“they”* is more widely used in newspapers while it is less used in the Social Sciences which still have a preference for the pronoun *he*. The difference in use of these pronouns could also be attributed to whether the pronoun was preceded by a quantifier, or a definite or indefinite antecedent.

Other studies have shown that non-sexist language is not only important for women’s inclusion but also for improving their performance. The content of a reading comprehension text may affect the results obtained, depending on the gender of the reader, as Sotoudehnama and Asadian (2011: 173) argue:

“It can be concluded that passage content is for sure of paramount importance in reading comprehension and is truly related to the background knowledge of the readers (as was seen in this study, females and males performed better on the topics related to their own gender)”.

Before changes in the educational curricula, women were viewed, in line with Paechter (1998: 11) as *“Others”* as regards education. The *Othering* of women in education has affected their academic development and has also been reflected in how women’s education has been approached.

As an example of this, the author makes reference, first, to the schooling of females which has been considered until recently of secondary importance to that of males, and has been developed imitating a feminized mirror to a masculine centred education system. This is emulated even in the language used: in the US people referred to female students in co-educational institutions as ‘co-eds’, which might imply that the courses are primarily designed for males. Second, education for girls has been developed in gender specific ways. In many cases this kind of education was not favourable for women as they were excluded from particular forms of knowledge, despite perhaps learning other forms which might have been less empowering. Third, attitudes to female education were related to ideas of female embodiment, so that, education was seen as incompatible with the physical well-being of that body.

As can be seen in Holmes and Meyerhoff (2003: 632) language issues were part of many equal opportunities initiatives developed in the 1980s. These were often at local levels, that is to say, local schools and local education authorities. However, with the support of national institutions such as HMI (Her Majesty’s Inspectorate) from the late 1980s onwards, together with, for example, the advent of the Education Reform Act in 1988; control of several aspects of education has become more centralized. The development of a national curriculum has been associated with the marginalization of gender issues, or equal opportunities initiatives in language, as in other aspects of school and classroom life.

As well as the United Kingdom government, its American counterpart made changes in education. Following Bank (2007: 818) in 1974, the Women’s Educational Equity Act (WEEA) was passed and it was and it still is the only education programme that has as purpose the promotion of equality for women and girls in education. WEEA funding also supported the development of new educational materials to eliminate sex bias across the curriculum.

Notwithstanding, as already mentioned, Cameron and other feminists and sociolinguists believe that meanings are not fixed. They are fluid and socially construed and they are subjected to constant negotiation and modification in interaction. Due to this, the notion that non-sexist language can be legislated into existence by changing sexist words by non-sexist, government approved ones, should be put into question as is explained by Speer (2005:4). What is more, apparently benevolent and non-sexist language can be used and constructed in such a way that it expresses inequality and sexism nonetheless. An example of this might be the phrase proposed by Speer (2005: 4): “women should not play rugby because they might get injured”.

Changes in the language were argued by more conservative parties who claimed that feminists and for that matter non-sexist language was absurd and trivial. That is the case of Slovenko (2007: 96), who, disregarding all the empirical evidence available, is still against gender neutral language claiming that it is absurd and it only causes distractions from real social problems. He even refers to the idea of non-sexist language as a “loony idea promoted by ideologically deranged women”. Following the same line, Kreeft (2005: 36) assures that it would be linguistically insane to turn to gender neutral forms.

Although there is vast evidence of the benefits of gender fair language, it is also important to point out that some gender neutral alternatives which are often employed might be more misleading than the sexist use of male terms of reference, as argued in Moller Okin (1987: 9). As Ackerman (in Moller Okin (1987: 11) explains, the use of *person* instead of woman when talking about pregnancy would be blatantly ignoring or defying the existence of sex roles and biology. This overuse of apparently gender neutral language might lead to false or nonsensical language neutrality.

It should be also noted that the terminological responses to feminist challenges, in spite of giving a superficial impression of tolerance and inclusiveness, often strain credulity and generally result in nonsense, thus creating nonsensical feminism as is explained in Moller Okin (1987: 11). This is often done by either ignoring the biological differences between the sexes or by ignoring their different assigned social roles.

As Mills (1995: 73) states, generic nouns should be used appropriately. When it is necessary to make a gender specific reference, generics ought not to be used; that is to say that when referring to males only, the generic “*people*” should not be used. In that case, men should be the correct form.

Data and Methodology

As previously mentioned, this paper will deal with gender biased and neutral forms in ELT textbooks from different decades and two publishing houses: Oxford University Press and Longman. All of the books selected for analysis are of intermediate level. These ten textbooks belong to decades ranging from 1970s to 2010s. For the avoidance of doubt, the books and their respective authors and year of publication will be presented in the following chart:

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS	LONGMAN
<u><i>Turning Point</i></u> (1976) by Michael Coles and Basil Lord	<u><i>Kernel Lessons</i></u> (1977) by Robert O’Neil, Roy Kingsbury and Tony Yeadon.
<u><i>Streamline</i></u> (1983) by Bernard Hartley and Peter Viney	<u><i>Blueprint</i></u> (1989) by Brian Abbs and Ingrid Freebairn
<u><i>Headway</i></u> (1991) by John and Liz Soars	<u><i>Cutting Edge</i></u> (1998) by Sarah Cunningham and Peter Moor
<u><i>New Headway</i></u> (2003) by Liz and John Soars	<u><i>Language to Go</i></u> (2002) by Araminta Carce and Robin Wileman
<u><i>English Plus 4</i></u> (2011) by Ben Weltz and Diana Pye	<u><i>Choices</i></u> (2012) by Michael Harris and Anna Sikorzynska

It is worth mentioning that the data collected will correspond to the reading comprehension texts, and the writing tasks together with any writing sample that may have been included to help solve the task. Any other source, such as listening comprehension activities, will not be taken into account due to the fact that many of the audios are not currently available and the information in them could be pertinent as context for the analysis.

The data obtained, on the one hand, will be divided into the number of occurrences four pronominal variants (*he, she, they, he/she*) have in concordance with three different antecedents: the definite article, in definite articles and quantifiers. On the other hand, the information acquired will be studied in order to see any changes in affixes from gender biased ones to neutral ones and also to identify any sexist language used in reference to women.

Another point to bear in mind is that because of the size of the corpus, a statistical analysis is not possible. Correspondingly, this study will be mainly exploratory and does not intend to generalise the results. However, the main objective would be to be able to address the following:

- What is the frequency of use of the different pronominal forms?
- Does the use of pronominal forms vary according to the publisher?
- Can this use be related to the type of task presented in the textbooks (i.e. reading comprehension texts and writing tasks)?
- Have OUP and Longman publishing houses changed their texts and writing instructions to more gender neutral language in order to remain current with the women's liberation movement's demands?
- If they have, do these changes have any implication for language teaching and learning?

Analysis

As mentioned in the introductory and data and methodology sections of this paper, the reading comprehension texts and writing tasks of intermediate textbooks from 1970s to 2010s will be analysed. This will be done in order to corroborate whether the two publishing houses, OUP and Longman, have modified the language used in their books to adapt to social changes, in this case feminism and the implications those changes might have in language teaching and learning.

For the sake of clarity and organisation, the results of the analysis of each publishing house will be presented separately. After the presentation and comments on each corpus, there will be a brief comparison of both.

a. *OUP publishing house.*

From a total number of 46 tokens found in books ranging from the year 1976 to the year 2011, the pronoun *he* was used a total of 24 times, which represents 52% of the total, followed by the use of *he/she* with 12 tokens (26%) an equal number of *she* and *they*, used 5 times each (11%)

As can be clearly seen in Figure 1, the use of the pronoun *he* is largely preferred to any other pronominal form. It might be said that OUP publishing house has a tendency to the use of the masculine pronoun if all the tokens found are taken into account without discriminating the year of publishing as will be done later on.

Figure 1: Frequencies of the pronouns in OUP books from the 1970s to the 2010s

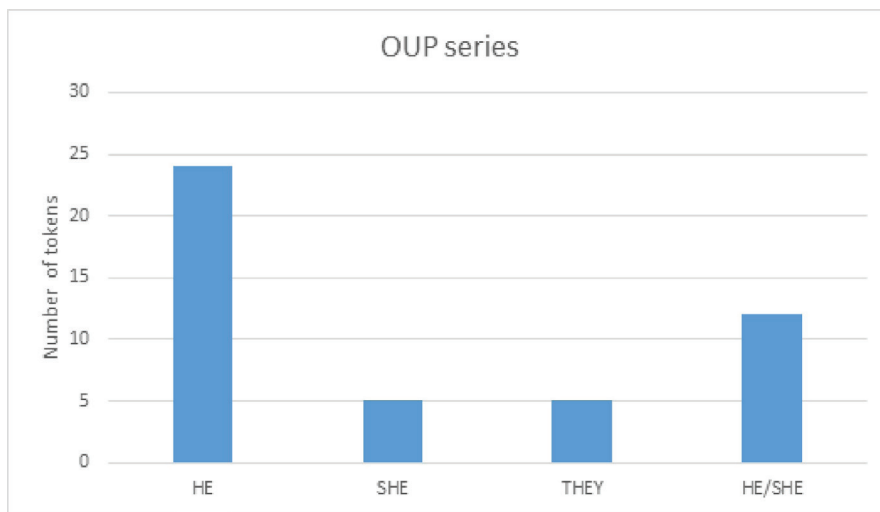
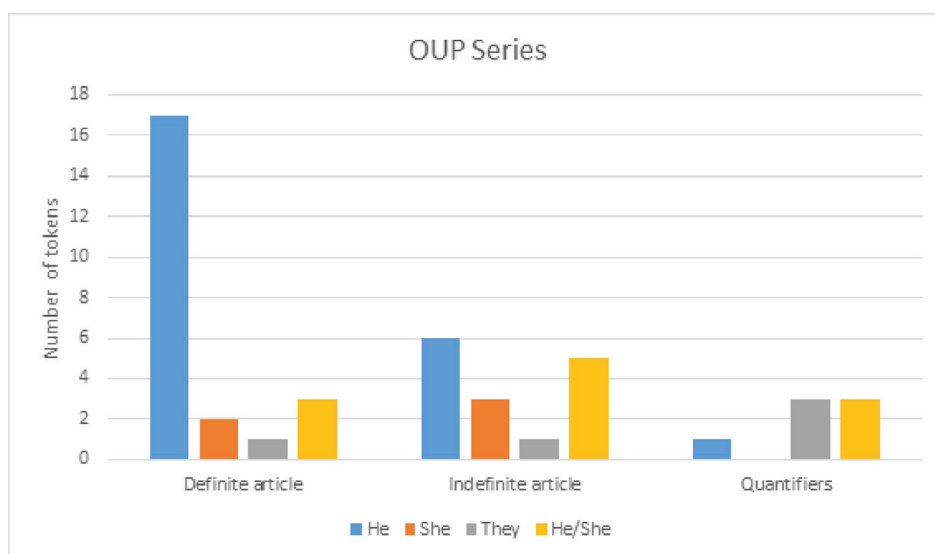


Figure 2 shows the frequency of use of the four types of pronouns studied depending on the antecedent they have. The use of the pronoun *he* ranges from 70.8 % when preceded by a definite article, 25% when preceded by an indefinite article and only 4.2% after a quantifier such as everybody, somebody, etc. *She* shows almost the same value when it follows a definite and indefinite article (40% and 60% respectively) but it is non-existent after quantifiers. Although a similar phenomenon can be said of *they* when preceded by the definite and indefinite articles, presenting 20% of occurrence in each case; the use of *they* after quantifiers increases to a 60%. The pronouns *he/she* raise from 27.3% after definite articles to a 45.4% after indefinite articles and later on drops again to 27.3% when following quantifiers.

Although the use of *he* after definite articles is undoubtedly preferred, there is a very small difference between *he* and *he/she* when used after an indefinite article. That difference increases exponentially in the pronouns chosen after quantifiers where *they* and *she/he* have the same frequency. These results might adhere to the idea of the use of singular *they* as the correct pronominal form after quantifiers.

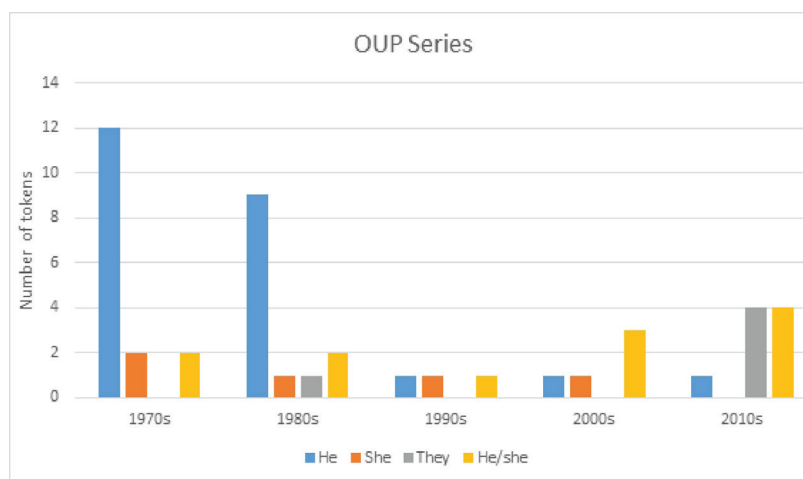
Figure 2: Distribution of the epicene variants by their antecedent.



As previously mentioned, it is important for this research to divide the use of pronominal forms depending on the decade the books were published in order to be able to distinguish if the frequency of occurrence turned to a more gender neutral choice the further away from the beginning of women’s revolution.

Although the use of the pronominal form *he* dropped from 12 tokens in the 1970's to 9 in the 1980's, its use plummeted to 1 token during the other decades. The use of *she* remained almost the same with a slight decline from 2 tokens to 1 in the first two decades to, later on, plateau. On the other hand, the use of the form *they* went suddenly up from 0 to 4 tokens in the decade of 2010 after raising to 1 and dropping to 0 once again in the 80's. In the case of the pronouns *he/she*, after keeping the same number of frequency of tokens (2) during the first two decades, it lowered 1 token in the 1990s to continue growing to first 3 and then 4 in the 2000's and 2010's. For an illustration of this behaviour, please see Figure 3.

Figure 3: Distribution of the epicene variants by the decade.



It is important to notice that the use of the pronominal form *he* appears more frequently specially when in reference to jobs and actions stereotypically linked to men as is shown in the following examples:

- If a student wants to study Management, Accounting or Librarianship, for example he would be more likely to go to one of these institutions. (1976: 27) *Turning Point*
- She called the doctor and asked him to call at the flat. (1976: 58) *Turning Point*
- The director is checking the preparations with his assistant. (1983: 2) *Streamline*

As can be seen, men were linked to positions of power such as that of the director of a company, students of university careers and, thus, professionals. In the 70's and 80's, women were just relegated to other charges and positions such as that of a secretary, as perceived in the subsequent example:

- A good secretary must be able not only to type and take shorthand but she must be able to look after her boss in a number of other ways. (1976: 16) *Turning Point*

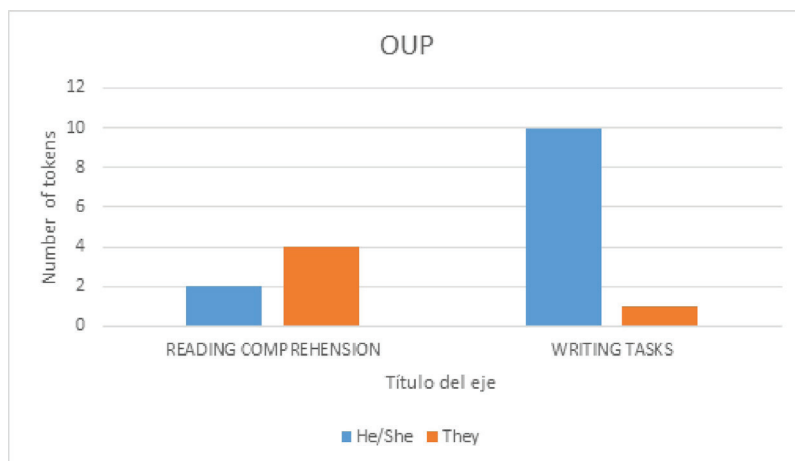
In the earlier decades comprised in this study, there were many more tokens that correspond to similar kinds of examples where the pronominal form *he* is preferred and linked to stereotypical forms. Later on, however, the number of times the pronoun *he* was used after either one of the articles and quantifiers diminished significantly and the use of either *he* or *she* was not linked to stereotypical situations as can be appreciated in the following cases:

- An American computer expert was approached recently by a British magazine asking her to track down details. (1991: 74) *Headway*
- One day a company worker was asked what the letters US stood for and he didn't know. (2003: 91) *New Headway*

One other interesting fact is that the use of *he/she* was found 83.3% of the times in written tasks where students are asked to write a letter, for example to "a friend or a partner", while the use of *they* is more widely used, with an 80% of occurrence, in reading comprehension texts. This difference can be appreciated in Figure 4 and the following examples.

- Write an e-mail to a friend. Give your news and invite him/her to a music festival or another event. (2011: 25) *English Plus 4*
- Everyone admitted that they had been dishonest at some times of their lives. (2011: 80) *English Plus 4*

Figure 4: Frequencies of the pronouns they and he/she in reading comprehension texts and written tasks.



Apart from the use of different pronominal choices after articles and quantifiers, there are many examples of how women and men were regarded throughout the years through language. As mentioned before, a stereotypical woman was supposed to be solicitous and obliging and her place was at home, taking care of the house, husband and children if they had any. The following examples illustrate the aforementioned points.

- She must be pleasant in manner and appearance (1976: 16) *Turning Point*
- It's time I got my husband's dinner ready. (1976: 9) *Turning Point*

Once a woman married, she lost part of her identity as she became someone's wife. This can be appreciated in the change a woman's name suffered. She lost her maiden name by taking her husband's surname and sometimes also his first name. An instance of this follows:

- These are Richard and Cathy Steele. (1976: 6) *Turning Point*

Earlier on, the word *girl* carried a different meaning too. It was not only used to describe a female child but to diminish women and put them down. The following example can be used to demonstrate this:

- Some bosses do not enjoy knowing that the girl who is typing a letter for him today will probably not be working for him tomorrow. (1976: 15) *Turning Point*

The preferences for suffixes has also changed over time. Whereas the use of the suffix *man* was favoured in the earlier decades, it was later on changed to non-sexist forms such as *person*, *officer*, *member*, etc. in order to be more inclusive of women in working fields. Other suffixes such as *-ess* which are now frowned upon, could also be found in older dating books.

- Industry needs salesmen to sell them. (1976: 154) *Turning Point*
- The hostess started serving dinner (1983: 19) *Streamline*
- The other two crewmembers died in spite of the rescue team's efforts (1983: 60) *Streamline*
- Unfortunately a police officer stopped him (2011: 78) *English Plus 4*

An important change in women's working position can be clearly shown in this exchange taken from the book *Streamline*. In this example, it might be understood through the surprise of the speaker at how women were still regarded in the 80s:

- Good morning, Miss. I'd like to speak to the manager.
- I am the manager, sir. How could I help you?
- Oh, really. You are?

(1980: 27) *Streamline*

It is worth noting that another possible reason, apart from the women's liberation movement, for the change in the number of non-sexist instances can be the diversity of topics dealt with. In later decades, the topics have been more varied than before. In the past, books dealt with a single pair of characters put through different situations while newer books have a wide variety of topics ranging from people, to animals and technology. This diversity allows the writers to avoid the use of pronouns such as *he* or *she* and other forms of gender biased or not biased language.

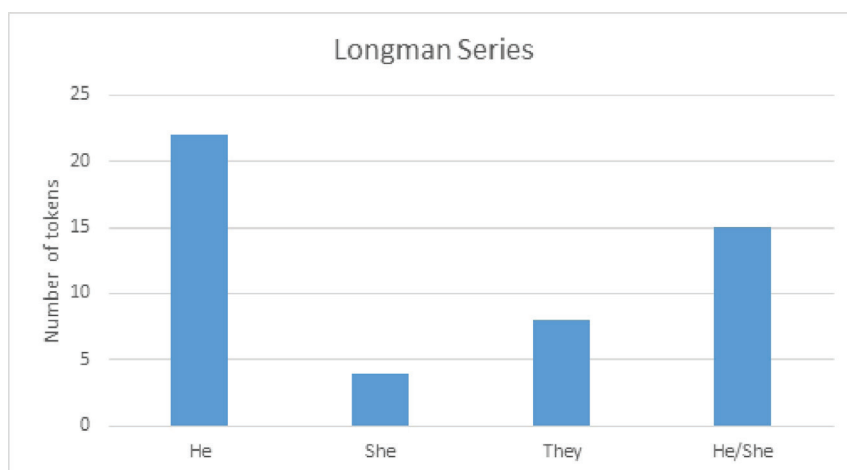
Another resource noticed to avoid the use of singular forms was that of pluralisation and generalization. Consequently instead of talking, for example, about the duties of a student and be faced with four choices in pronouns, the writers preferred to talk about the duties of students and narrow their choice of pronouns to the only one available: *they*.

b. Longman publishing house

In the analysis of books from 1970s to 2010s from Longman publishing house, 49 tokens were found. From the total number, 22 tokens belonged to the use of the pronoun *he*, representing 45% of the total. In number of frequencies, *he/she* followed with 15 tokens (31%). From the remaining 24%, *they* was presented 8 times (16%) and *she* only 4 times (8%).

As is easily observed in Figure 5, *he* is the preferred pronominal form. Once again, irrespective of the decades of the books analysed, it can be said that Longman has a tendency to use the masculine pronoun with more frequency than other pronominal forms. However, it is necessary to examine the changes in preference that the publisher has had over time.

Figure 5: Frequencies of the pronouns in Longman books from the 1970s to the 2010s



Depending on whether the antecedent is a definite article, an indefinite article, or a quantifier, the four kinds of pronouns varied their frequency. As shown in Figure 6, the pronominal form *he* has the more frequency when it is following a definite article with a 68.2% of occurrence. While it drops to almost half the frequency with a 31.8% after indefinite articles to, later on, plummet to 0% when following quantifiers.

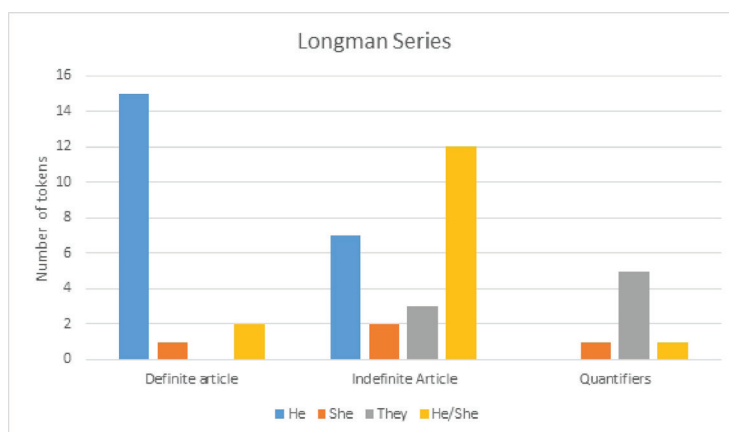
The pronoun *she* has the same frequency when preceded by either the definite article or quantifiers presenting 25%, that is to say, only one token in each case. When the form *she* is anteceded by an indefinite article, the percentage of occurrence rises to 50.

As regards the pronoun *they*, the lack of occurrence is easily seen with definite articles as antecedents but it increases its numbers to 37.5% when following an indefinite article and climbs to 62.5% after quantifiers such as *somebody* and *everybody* as can be seen in the following examples.

- Everybody is going to rush out as they always do. (1977: 75) *Kernel Lessons*
- If someone says at table: "Could you pass the milk?" they will be surprised if you answer, "Yes, I could." (1989: 45) *Blueprint*

After the indefinite article, the frequency of occurrence of the pronominal form *he/she* is the highest with an 80%. It presents only a 13.3% occurrence after the definite article and 6.3% after quantifiers.

Figure 6: Distribution of the epicene variants by their antecedent.

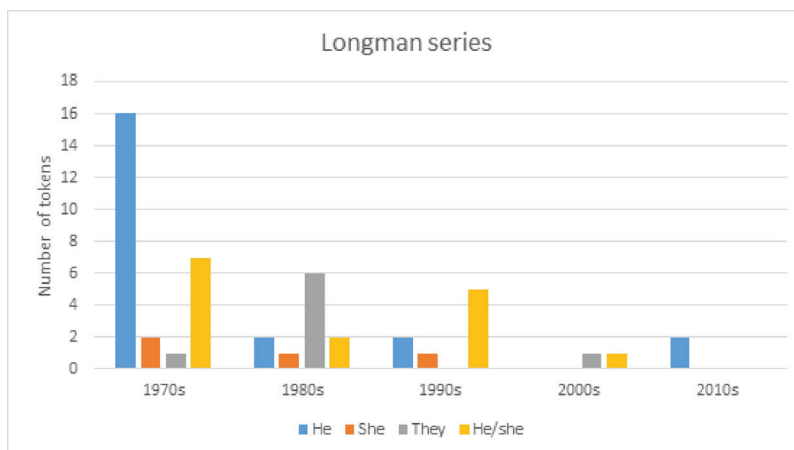


In order to be able to appreciate the progress Longman publisher has had concerning gender neutral language over time it is important to examine the frequency of occurrence of the pronouns according to the decades concerned in this study.

As can be appreciated in Figure 7, the use of the pronoun *he* nosedived from 16 tokens in the 70s to only 2 in the 80s to remain unchanged for another decade. In the 2000s, its frequency fell once more reaching 0 only to rise to 2 once more in the 2010s.

Even though a preference for the masculine pronoun was favoured in the early decade, we can assume that Longman publishing house searched for more gender neutral forms in order to keep current after the women's revolution started in the middle of that decade. Following that same line of thought and differences aside, the use of the feminine pronoun *she* suffered a similar fate by registering some frequency during the first decade to drop from 2 to 1 in the 80s and remain unchanged during the following two decades. It finally registered no frequency at all in the last two decades.

The singular form of *they* had a raise from 1 token in the 70s to 6 tokens in the 80s when it peaked. The only other incidence presented by this pronoun was in the 2000s with 1 occurrence. Finally, the form *he/she* had its fluctuations. Falling from 7 occurrences in the 70s to only 2 in the 80s in order to climb to 5 tokens in the 90s and descend to just 1 in the 2000s and keep dropping to 0 in the 2010s.

Figure 7: Distribution of the epicene variants by the decade.

A contributing factor to the lack of tokens during the latest decades can be that fact that the publishing house used more reading texts of a variety of topics and there was pluralisation in order to avoid the use of singular pronouns.

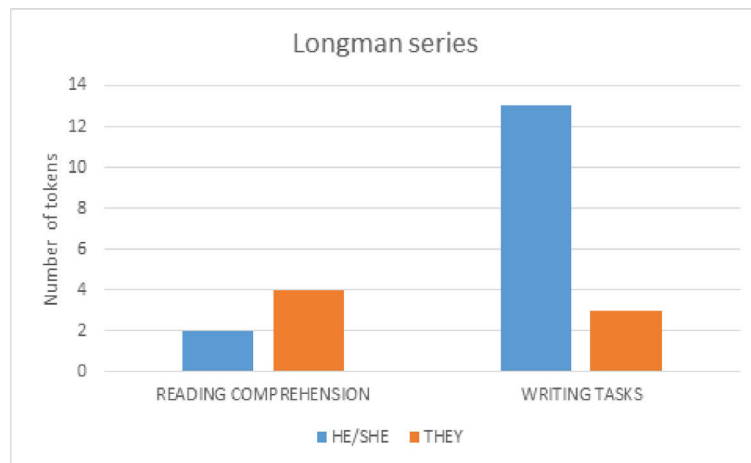
As was the case in OUP books, the use of the pronoun *he* might be attributed to the stereotypical representation of men during the earlier decades. That is to say that men were placed in a position of power, such as managerial and/ or law enforcement positions while women were seen in a position of servitude as they were supposed to be kind and docile. The following examples illustrate these cases:

- The factory manager is standing in front of his office. (1977: 75) *Kernel Lessons*
- A young detective is standing in the office of his chief at Scotland Yard. (1977: 11) *Kernel Lessons*
- The secretary is asking one of the typists about her boss. (1977: 93) *Kernel Lessons*
- You're in a shop and you ask an assistant if she's got a particular record or cassette. (1989: 13) *Blueprint*

As can be appreciated in Figure 8, while the use of *he/she* was mostly found in written tasks with an 86.6% of occurrence, only the 13.3% was found in reading comprehension texts. In opposition, the singular pronoun *they* was used a 62.5% of the times in reading comprehension texts and only a 37.5% in writing tasks. Similar differences and values can be seen in the OUP series (Figure 4). It might be inferred that the use of the singular form of *they* is more widely used in reading comprehension texts as it might help with the fluency of the text. In addition, the use of *he/she* in written tasks may well allow the writers to have a clearer understanding of the possibilities presented to them as to who could be the recipient of a letter or a subject of a description as seen in the following examples:

- Choose one of the problems and write a short letter to a friend giving him/her advice on that problem. (2002: 33) *Language to Go*
- Write a brief description of a person you really admire. Include: Your impression of what kind of person he/she seems to be and why you particularly admire him/her. (1998: 43) *Cutting Edge*.

Figure 8: Frequencies of the pronouns *they* and *he/she* in reading comprehension texts and written tasks.



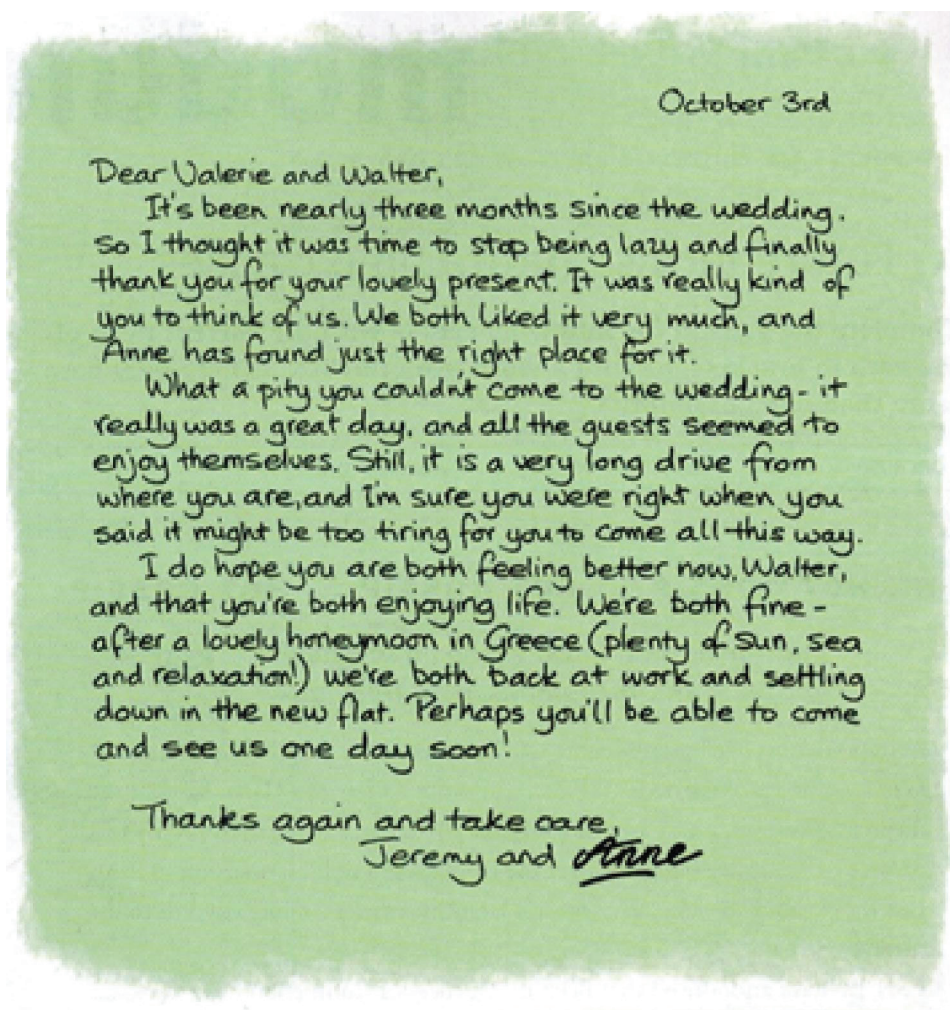
The following is an example to highlight as it leads to interesting analysis of the language used:

- Read the letter opposite and tick the things above that the writer does and put a cross to those he does not. (1998: 87) *Cutting Edge*.

At first glance, the example can lead to the thought that the pronoun *he* is preceded by the definite article which without any reference, would not be gender neutral. The writer of any letter could be either a man or a woman and hence it would not be a correct assumption in this case to believe that the publishing house was not gender biased. However, it is important to bear in mind that the book is providing a sample letter for the students to read and work on which would clear the readers of any doubt as regards the gender of the writer.

Nevertheless, it can be appreciated in Figure 9 below that the letter is signed by Jeremy, a man, and Anne, a woman, which would mean that the example provided was using a masculine pronoun to refer to both a man and a woman alike. One can argue that the writer of the letter was in fact a man, as Jeremy's handwriting was in all the letter and Anne's just in her signature. That would lead to the belief that if the writers had chosen the use of *they*, they would be using the plural form *they* to refer to only one man and not two people. In this particular case, the use of the chosen pronouns is in too much of a grey area and this could lead to an over-zealousness to using gender neutral language which would also be sexist.

Figure 9: Jeremy and Anne's Letter



(1998: 87) *Cutting Edge*

In this corpus, there were many other examples of the way women were thought of with the passing of time. Apart from the variety of the pronominal choices already analysed, there were other language instances scattered throughout the pages.

Similarly to the cases found in the OUP corpus, in Longman books women were seen as weak while men were considered more assertive and sure of themselves. In fact, the description provided in the following example illustrates the difference between how a woman and man should have behaved.

- If I were a man, I'd probably be more aggressive about selling. (1989: 76) *Blueprint*

In the books analysed from this publisher, the use of suffixes also changed from those which were not neutral (-ess, -man, etc) to neutral suffixes such as *-person* or other gender unbiased options such as the elimination of the suffix altogether. An example of this can be found in the book *Blueprint* (1989: 111, 116) where the writer chose the words *Head* to refer to the principal of the school, as a consequence eliminating the non-gender neutral *headmaster* or *headmistress* and also in the use of the form *flight attendant* instead of the previously commonly used *stewardess*.

It should be stressed that the even in the year 2012, the book *Choices* had an instance of the use of word *girl* as derogatory. In this particular case, the acquisition of knowledge is seen as unproductive, weak and even "uncool" in the eyes of men who think studying is for girls.

- Among the boys studying is considered a girly thing. (2012: 71)

c. *OUP and Longman comparison:*

After analysing the results of both corpora separately, it is necessary to make a brief examination contrasting the results obtained in each one. In order to illustrate this comparison, a new figure (Figure 10) will be added.

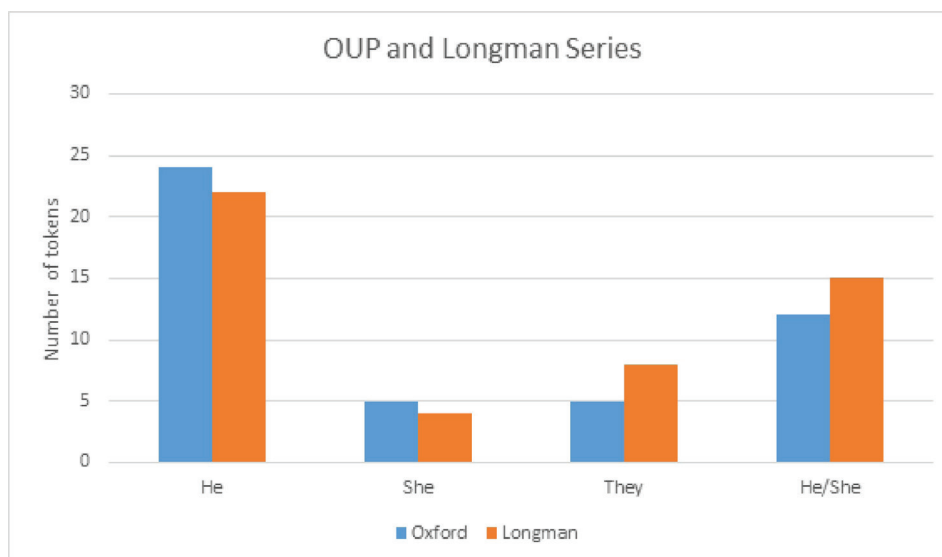
At first sight, both corpora have similar preferences as regards the choice of pronouns. The masculine pronoun constitutes the largest group in both publishing houses, followed by the use of *he/she* and in third place the singular form of *they*. Also in books from both publishers, the choice of *she* comprises the smallest group.

From a total of 95 tokens, Longman books presented more frequency in pronominal forms either followed by articles or quantifiers with 49 occurrences which represent a 51,6% leaving OUP with 46 occurrences representing 48.4%. Both publishers had a preference for the use of *he*, which signified almost half (48.4%) of the value obtained adding all the pronominal forms. From those 46 appearances the pronoun *he* had, 24 (52.2%) belonged to the OUP corpus and 22 (47.8%) to Longman's.

From the 9 (9.5%) times the feminine pronoun *she* was found, it belonged 5 times (55.6%) to OUP and 4 times (44.4%) to Longman. While the singular form of *they* had 13 (13.7%) occurrences in total, 5 (38.5%) of them correspond to OUP whereas 8 (61.5%) of them correspond to Longman.

The pronoun form of *he/she* was found a total of 27 times (28.4%). The total number of occurrence of this pronoun demonstrates a certain preference for this gender neutral form as it has the second highest frequency taking into account the four pronominal options. OUP used this choice of pronoun only 12 times (44.4%). On the other hand, Longman used it 15 times (55.6)

Figure 10: Comparison between OUP and Longman publishing houses.



Further analysis can be made if the pronominal forms are divided into gender biased forms (*he* or *she*) and gender neutral ones (singular *they* and *he/she*). From a total of 55 instances of gender biased forms OUP publisher has 29 tokens which denote the 52.7% of the total while Longman has only 26 tokens which mean a 47.3%.

On the subject of gender neutral pronouns, both publishers presented a total of 40 occurrences. The majority of those belonged to Longman which presented a total of 23 cases (57.5%). That is to say that OUP was responsible for 17 instances (40.5%)

Through these results, it could be inferred that even though the number of gender neutral tokens was fewer than those of gender biased ones, Longman has more preference for non-sexist language than OUP.

Implications for Language Teaching and Learning

The change from sexist to neutral language in ELT books might have been due to a need to reflect the social changes faced since the Women's Liberation movement in the 70s. However, these changes in language might lead to further modifications in how the English language is taught and learnt.

There are four key aspects that gender neutral language could change in an ELT classroom and any other classroom as well. Non-biased language makes women feel less discriminated against, hence, they might feel more included. Women's inclusion in the teaching space might lead to making the classroom more comfortable for all the sexes and the lessons might gain more variety of experiences, which would enrich the learning process.

Furthermore, not only students but teachers as well might become more open-minded towards women's position in society. Learning a language has always been helpful to know about the culture of the target language. However, this should come hand in hand with learning flexible and respectful attitudes not only towards other peoples but also towards different genders and sexual orientations. In other words, gender neutrality in ESL books might help accomplish a feeling of belonging.

Another important point is that gender neutral language might help women improve their performance. If results of reading comprehension texts activities or examinations vary according to the gender of the reader and the content, as Asadian (2011:173) explains, providing students with non-sexist language in texts might help balance the scales for both men and women.

Last but not least significant, the approach of how the English language is taught might have also been influenced by Women's Liberation and in consequence by the use of more neutral language. Thanks to governments supporting the creation of non-biased teaching materials, women have had the chance of seeing themselves less marginalised which has led to a feeling of empowerment.

All in all, social changes reflected in books might have important repercussions in the classroom. At the same time, the more included all genders feel, the more comfortable they will feel at the moment of attending classes, studying and progressing, which in consequence might lead to more social changes.

Conclusion

This paper offers evidence that the intermediate texts books studied have kept current with social changes. Although the majority of tokens found in both corpora is the pronoun *he*, if the years of publication are taken into account, a clear tendency to drop the use of that pronoun after articles and quantifiers was found.

Due to the decline in use of the masculine pronoun, other forms began to show more predominance. In more current decades, the use of the pronoun *he/she* has gained terrain, especially in written tasks while *they* has become a close second having more occurrence in reading comprehension texts.

An important point is that the antecedent will also affect the pronoun used. During this research, it was found out that even though the pronoun *he* has the highest frequency, it is more unlikely to present itself after quantifiers, where *they* is the preferred pronominal choice.

Apart from that, the choice of pronouns can vary depending on the interpretation given to some non-referential nouns. Certain nouns have a stereotypical value attached and they could be interpreted as either male or female. That was the case of the nouns such as *doctor* and *secretary*. The former was and

might still be considered to be more of a male profession and in consequence the pronoun *he* had more frequency. On the other hand, the position of a secretary might be thought to be more of a woman's job, and as such, it was mainly preceded by the pronoun *she*.

In other epicene instances, such as *friend* or *partner*, the selection was that of pronouns which make reference to both genders at the same time, as is the case of the singular form of *they* and *he/she*. In many cases both the pronoun *he* and *she* were chosen after such nouns if those nouns were used in connection to other male or female characters, especially in reading comprehension texts.

In spite of the fact that the use of the gender biased pronoun *he* declined in more recent decades, it should be remembered that the changes in the way of teaching English have modified the way books present information. In more modern times, textbooks were not solely based on a small group of characters going through different predicaments but on a variety of topics which allowed the avoidance of gender biased pronouns.

This decrease in frequency could also respond to the fact that textbooks nowadays tend to use more plural forms and to the introduction of the name of a character in the titles of the reading comprehension texts which permit the use of a gender specific pronoun in reference to that name.

As regards other language forms, for example suffixes, there has been a clear avoidance to use what is considered sexist language. The suffix *-man* has been substituted by more inclusive forms being *-person* and *-officer* the most used as replacement. Other suffixes to refer to women which were considered pejorative, for instance *-ess*, have been replaced by either more gender neutral language (*stewardess -flight attendant*) and/or the avoidance of suffixes altogether (*headmistress - head*).

Taking into consideration all the results presented above, one might assume that the publishing houses studied in this research have tried to keep current with social changes which demanded a more gender neutral language approach. However, while there were almost no occurrences of gender biased pronouns, regardless of the antecedent, in recent decades, some examples of non-inclusive language could still be found. This might lead to the belief that although gender neutrality has taken an important role in English textbooks, in the future, new and more non-sexist forms could be encountered.

Apart from this, the inclusion of women in an equal capacity, as regards language, in textbooks might lead to changes in the ways of teaching and learning English. These changes might be seen as inclusive, open minded, empowering and less intolerant, allowing female students to attend lessons comfortably.

It should be noted that even though ten books have been studied, this research only dealt with one book of each decade and merely focusing on two different publishers. Moreover, only the written aspects of those books were taken into consideration for the analysis. It would be wise to examine a larger corpus including various numbers of books from each decade and enlarge the field of research to include also the listening parts of these books. In this way, with a more thorough and specific research, the conclusions could be more accurate.

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