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Feminising the French Language: A Political Debate.

Analysis of the feminisation of titles and higher professions debate in French Public Media

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Introduction

Relevance of the topic

The French language is built upon a two-gender system, in which the article “la/le” or “une/un” and word endings determine if the subject is feminine or masculine. In a country predicated on gender equality, it would seem natural that both genders appear in oral and written language, as without this variation discrimination seems inevitable.

However, an important grammar rule of the language seems to be in contradiction with the previous statement. In fact, in most cases, in the French language the masculine form prevails over the feminine. This rule is also valid for feminine professions words. However, it only applies to some specific positions. As a matter of fact, if in France, a woman can now be called “*une vendeuse*” (feminine form of the French word for “seller”) or “*une boulangère*” (baker), whether we should call her “*la Secrétaire d’Etat*” (the State secretary) or “*Madame la Ministre*” (Minister), remains unclear.

Moreover, if compared to some other countries which have already gone through the same debate, such as the UK¹, Germany, Spain, or Italy, it seems that the French language structure does not make it easy to decide on this issue. In fact, if we take the example of the Spanish language, we notice that in most cases, simply adding an “a” instead of an “o” at the end of nouns enables us to create feminine form of these words.² It seems also easier for a language like English, which has a neutral gender and may for instance, use the pronoun “they” instead of he or she³ to refer to both genders. The feminisation process however, seems more complicated for the French language, which uses various feminine endings.⁴

Indeed, in French, feminine profession nouns can have the following endings⁵:

Feminine endings	Masculine nouns	Feminine nouns
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¹ Raymond Hickey, “Language and Society.” (Essen: Duisburg Essen University). <https://www.uni-due.de/ELE/LanguageAndSociety.pdf>, accessed April 20th, 2017, 29.

² André Goosse and Marc Wilmet, “À propos de la féminisation,” Bruxelles, Académie royale de langue et de littérature françaises de Belgique, 1993, 49-50.

³ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*. (London: Penguin Books, 2000.)

⁴ Montserrat Planelles Iváñez. "L'influence De La Planification Linguistique Dans La Féminisation Des Titres En France Et Au Québec : Deux Résultats Différents En Ce Qui a Trait à L'usage." *Revue Québécoise De Linguistique* 24, no. 2 (1996): 71. doi:10.7202/603115ar, 71-72.

⁵ Elizabeth Dawes. “La Féminisation Des Titres Et Fonctions Dans La Francophonie.” *Ethnologies* 25, no. 2 (2003): 195. doi:10.7202/008054ar., 196.

Suffix <i>-e</i>	Un supérieur Un gardien Un boulanger Un sportif	Une supérieure Une gardienne Une boulangère Une sportive
Suffix <i>-euse</i>	Un joueur	Une joueuse
Suffix <i>-trice</i>	Une directeur	Une directrice
Suffix <i>-esse</i>	Un défenseur	Une défendresse

Nouns end in “*-trice*” when: the noun derived from a verb do not end with a “t” (for example: *animer/animatrice*); no verb corresponds to the noun (such as *institutrice*) and, when a correlated noun finishes with “*-torat*”, “*-ture*”, or “*-tion*” (for example: *tutorat/tutrice*, *viticulture/viticultrice*, *démonstration/démonstratrice*.). And nouns end in “*-euse*” when there is a semantic relationship between the noun and a verb (for example: *une chanteuse*.)⁶

Furthermore, in French, feminine endings usually carry negative connotations, especially for those ending with “*-esse*,” or “*-euse*.” Masculine endings, on the contrary, are usually thought of as more valuable.⁷

At the end of the 20th century, a debate has been opened to know whether these feminised forms could be accepted as the norm, or if, on the contrary, they should remain unacceptable. In fact, as women started to access higher positions in western societies, this debate became more heated in France.⁸ Giving feminine nouns to certain professions in which women were now active began to be seen as a way of making these new actors visible and, therefore, considered as citizens and professionals equal to men.

Consequently, some important initiatives, aiming to change this situation have been taken. In 1984, Yvette Roudy, Minister of Women’s Rights decided to set up a Commission to deal with this linguistic and gender issue.⁹ It was followed by a second similar initiative in 1997, undertaken by socialist Prime Minister Lionel Jospin. Together with their Commission members, they published a guide that aimed at making women appear on official documents. However, the French Academy, the independent institution in charge of “purifying” the language and since 1635 only one that determines the legitimacy of the French language,

⁶ Becquer A., et al. *Femme, j’écris ton nom... Guide d’aide à la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres, grades et fonctions*. (Paris: La documentation française, 1999), 24-25.

⁷ Planelles Iváñez. "Influence De La Planification Linguistique, 71-72.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Béatrice Fracchiolla. "Anthropologie De La Communication : La Question Du Féminin En Français." *Corela Corela*, no. 6-2 (2014)., accessed December 15th 2008. doi:10.4000/corela.286

rejected both governments proposals.¹⁰ Consequently, if some feminist authors are now writing “*une autaire*”, “*une Directrice Générale*”, etc, these terms remain unofficial, and according to the French Academy, are referring to individuals only and not to the group of women occupying the position.¹¹

With regards to the evolution of women’s position in France, it is essential to examine to what extent does the French language accept linguistic modifications which promote gender equality, and to consider if it is still hard for France to make women and men appear as equal in its official language. More precisely, this thesis focuses on the following questions: To what extent does France refuse to provide feminine nouns to higher positions occupied by women? Which actors are involved in this process, what are their main arguments and how did they evolve? To answer these questions, we will first try to understand if this issue results from an institutional rejection exclusively. To do so, we will present the root of the French Academy rejection and the role politicians have played so far to make this debate progress. Finally, through media reports, we will present the current arguments of the debate. In other words, this thesis examines if the visibility of women holding positions of responsibility is still difficult to be accepted and focuses on the vision of popular written French media on this matter.

Organisation and Methodology

This work will be based on a qualitative approach with different paradigms. In fact, the first and last part of this thesis will adopt a sociolinguistic approach. More precisely, a Critical Discourse Analysis seems to be the most appropriate method for this work. Indeed, this method considers discourses to be at the root of all social ideologies and especially of inequalities.¹² As underlined by the authors Jorgensen Marianne and Louise Phillips who mainly focus on Fairclough’s work, it is essential to analyse the discourse of each actor: their genre, the way they were produced (interdiscursivity and intertextuality), and their degree of influence on the other actors involved in the debate.

¹⁰ Robles Salazar, Edith. "Le Lexique En Français Du Québec Des Manuels Québécois." Master's thesis, Université Du Québec À Montréal, 2008. November 1, 2014, accessed October 16, 2016. <http://www.archipel.uqam.ca/1922/1/M10730.pdf>.

¹¹ Edwige Khaznadar, *Le sexisme ordinaire du langage*. (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2015.), accessed April 20th, 2017. [file:///C:/Users/valen/Desktop/Thèse/documents%20utiles/Edwige%20Khaznadar l'homme%20en%20général e xtrait.pdf](file:///C:/Users/valen/Desktop/Thèse/documents%20utiles/Edwige%20Khaznadar%20l'homme%20en%20général%20extrait.pdf), 11-12.

¹² Marianne Jorgensen and Louise Phillips. *Discourse Analysis as Theory and Method*. London: Sage Publications, 2002, accessed November 12, 2016. <http://www.rasaneh.org/Images/News/AttachFile/27-31391/FILE634754469767402343.pdf>, 63-64.

Then, as the analysis of discourses can never be taken out of their historical context, it is important to consider the impact of some specific events to better understand the issue. For this, an historical method will be employed. More specifically, this historical part is based on a literature review of the topic and some other documents relevant to each section. It focuses on political decisions that influenced the feminisation of higher positions denominations in France, and refers to the different publications of the two Commissions previously mentioned (*Groult Commission* of 1984 and the one of Lionel Jospin in 1997). It also focuses on the French Academy decision, with a presentation of its arguments against language feminisation and the possible root of its rejection. Finally, this section presents a short overview of the evolution of the question in three other French-speaking-regions that have French as their official language: Switzerland, Belgium and Quebec, and try to show if these regions have been taken as an example for France, or if it could be considered as such today.

Therefore, we will first explain the relevance of this linguistic debate, by examining the link between language and society. The second part focuses on the historical aspect of the problem. Finally, the analytical part of this work will consist of a critical discourse analysis of popular written French media. Here we will present the different actors and arguments of the debate, and underline how their representations differ in accordance with the different political lines the analysed newspapers are following and, finally how these media choose to present these arguments and positions and how they decide to make the different debate actors interact.

CHAPTER ONE: LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

Introduction of the chapter

To understand the importance of this debate and its impact on French society, it seems necessary to prove the link between language and society and, that such link is strong enough for us to consider that the absence of women in the language impacts on their social situation. Therefore, we will first present some key elements that define the concept of language.

In this chapter, we thus, aim at presenting the relevance of this debate. To do so, we will answer the following questions:

- What is the link between language and society?
- What is sociolinguistics? And why is it needed?
- What are the differences between women and men in languages?

1. What is a language?

The Oxford dictionary defines the term “language” as follows: “*The method of human communication, either spoken or written, consisting of the use of words in a structured and conventional way.*” and gives a second definition of it as “*A system of communication used by a particular country or community.*”¹³ In this second and very simple definition, we already find the notion of language as a cultural tool of communication.

1.1. Language, an element that varies according to its geographical location...

Language varies according to the geographic localisation of its speaking community. If Eskimos use twenty-two different words to describe snow and most European languages only one, it is because of the geographical environment Eskimos’ languages are evolving in.¹⁴

Moreover, these linguistic and geographical differences also come from and result in cultural differences. As a matter of fact, Downes defines languages as tools that enable us to understand the culture of a given group. Languages being the expression of our thoughts, different ways to express the same idea could then, differ from one place and one culture to another, even within

¹³ “Oxford Dictionaries: Definition of *language*”, accessed April 20th, 2017. <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/language>

¹⁴ Effect of Culture and Society on Language: Sociology of Language in India, accessed April 20th, 2017. [file:///C:/Users/valen/Downloads/Effect of culture and society on language.pdf](file:///C:/Users/valen/Downloads/Effect%20of%20culture%20and%20society%20on%20language.pdf), 1-2

the same language.¹⁵ That is for instance, the reason why Quebec's dictionary differs from the French one, even if both communities are sharing the same language. Moreover, language also reflects our perception of some common elements such as time. Indeed, if French, German and English use verb tenses, some other languages, such as Chinese or Hindi do only speak in the present tense.¹⁶

Hickey goes further in this analysis of language as a cultural tool, by explaining that even non-verbal language carries some cultural meaning. As a way of illustration, the way of saluting a woman differs to the one of saluting a man in most cultures, and in Arabic countries, touching a woman you do not know would not be socially accepted.¹⁷

1.2....and to its historical and social context.

This last example introduces the definition of language as a social concept. Indeed, to analyse a discourse, one should take the social context of words into account. In other words, a social background is needed to interpret speeches. It is hence, necessary to understand where and when (in which social and temporal context) and by whom the analysed words were pronounced.¹⁸

In fact, languages evolve with their social environment. Peter Trudgill, gives the example of words to describe family members in Russia, where, before the end of the nineteenth century, a specific word was used to describe the brothers' wives, as they were considered part of the family, and how it split into two distinct words after this time period, as families were reduced. The author shows here the existing link between language and historical events.¹⁹

Indeed, as already suggested by Saussure, the language being a social fact, it has therefore to be analysed in a larger context than the purely linguistic one. Therefore, the social and historical background of a targeted language should be considered.²⁰

¹⁵ William Downes, *Language and Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge Press University, 1998. Accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://assets.cambridge.org/97805214/50461/sample/9780521450461web.pdf>, 1.

¹⁶ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 14-18.

¹⁷ Raymond Hickey, "Language and Society", 31.

¹⁸ William Downes, *Language and Society*, 13.

¹⁹ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 1-5.

²⁰ Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*. (Paris: Editions Payot & Rivages, 1995.), accessed April 20th, 2017. https://monoskop.org/images/f/f1/Saussure_Ferdinand_de_Cours_de_linguistique_generale_Edition_critique_1997.pdf, 23-27.

2. A need to link linguistic to other disciplines

2.1. An evolution of thoughts

As we now understand language as a cultural and social fact, the need to relate linguistics, to other disciplines seems obvious. Therefore, a question emerged, which many scientists have already tried to answer: which are the most appropriate fields for this matter?

First, if the definition of language as a social fact we have just giving is now taken for granted, it was not always defined as such. Indeed, the language first carried some theological or biological meaning,²¹ and only started to be introduced as a social fact, or collective consensus²² by Durkheim, Saussure or Meillet by the end of the 19th century.²³

If authors all agree on this point, their definitions of the concept still diverge, which does not help finding the most appropriate discipline(s) to be connected to linguistics. For instance, Saussure explains why language cannot be defined as a strictly physical tool, but rather as the result of a social and collective choice. In fact, according to him, each sound has multiple ways of being analysed; as a sound, only, but more likely as an idea. In this respect, even if language is a natural skill, each language only exists because of a collective agreement on the ideas each sound carries. In other word, language is a social fact.²⁴ However, if Saussure sees each aspect of the language as psychological,²⁵ Durkheim, defines it as a social fact exclusively, a tool imposed by the society and hence, rejects its psychological aspect.²⁶

2.2. A need to include other disciplines in the analytical process

Relating linguistics to other disciplines seems, then, a complex question, that some authors have already tried to answer. In fact, as Saussure suggests, it is part of the linguist's role to relevantly link linguistics to other disciplines that would help them understand linguistic phenomena.²⁷

²¹ Unesco, "Interaction par le langage: Théorie et recherche sociolinguistiques: études de cas et applications." *Revue Internationale Des Sciences Sociales*. Vol. XXXVI, n° 1, 1984, accessed April 20th, 2017. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000606/060699fo.pdf>, 5.

²² Wald Paul, "“La langue est un fait social”. Rapports entre la linguistique et la sociologie avant Saussure." Paper presented at a conference of Tunis University, December 1999), *Langage et société*, 4/2012 (n° 142)), 103-118, accessed April 20th, 2017. <https://www.cairn.info/revue-langage-et-societe-2012-4-page-103.htm>

²³ Unesco, "Interaction par le langage", 9.

²⁴ Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 23-27.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 21-22.

²⁶ Wald Paul, "La langue un fait social."

²⁷ Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 21-22.

For example, Joseph Sumpf already tried to show the link between sociology and linguistics and therefore, to determine the need of relating both disciplines:

*“Sociology institutes a state of civilisation where the need of logical order and the one of scientific investigation are compatible with knowledge organisation, where pathology evolves into progress, where dynamic orderly leads to different states, where people finally gives its heart and scientists its positive spirit.”*²⁸

He then, underlines that in this case as well, the divergent approaches of the different authors create ambiguities and do not therefore, make it easy to define sociolinguistics²⁹. Here is however, one possible definition of the discipline: *“(It is) that part of linguistics which is concerned with language as a social and cultural phenomenon. It investigates the field of language and society and has close connections with the social sciences, especially social psychology, anthropology, human geography, and sociology.”*³⁰ In other words, sociolinguistics do not only focus on sociology and linguistics, but rather link the latter one to all social disciplines. Sociolinguistic analysis considers therefore, language, not only as a mirror of the society it is used in, but also as a tool enabling experts to visualise social changes and organisation of a given society.³¹

Consequently, the mission of specialists who know about this existing link between language and society, is to raise awareness among societies to facilitate social changes, and make others understand the importance of language adaptation to social evolutions, as well as the impact language may have on societies.³² Saussure supports this idea, adding that language being an important cultural factor in societies, has being neglected for too long.³³

3. Language modifications and social impact

3.1. Language evolves through time and follow social evolutions

²⁸ Translated by the author from the original text : *“La sociologie institue un état de civilisation où le besoin d'ordre logique et le besoin de l'investigation scientifique se concilient dans l'organisation du savoir, où la pathologie se transmue en progrès, où la dynamique fait se succéder en séries ordonnées les différents états, où le peuple enfin apporte son cœur et les savants l'esprit positif.”* Joseph Sumpf. “Linguistique et sociologie,” *Langages*, 3rd year, n°11, (1968):3-35, accessed April 20, 2017, DOI: 10.3406/lgge.1968.2899 www.persee.fr/doc/lgge_0458-726x_1968_num_3_11_2899, 7.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 12.

³⁰ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 21.

³¹ Joseph Sumpf. “Linguistique et sociologie,” 7.

³² Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 188-189.

³³ Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*.

This is what Peter Trudgill explains through the example of taboo words of some language, that evolve through time and according to the social and cultural context of the language. As a matter of fact, a word that was socially accepted in the 50s or 60s, such as “nigger”, is today considered unacceptable, according to the current social context.³⁴ In fact, languages evolve with their social environment. In his work, Peter Trudgill, gives the example of Russia, where a specific word was used to refer to the brothers’ wives, who before the end of the nineteenth century were considered part of the family, and shows how later on, the decline of family size made this reference split into two distinct words. The author shows here the existing link between language and historical events.³⁵

Moreover, Hickey explains that small modifications in a language are not different from big ones. He defines three phases for this process:

- “1) *origin* A period in which alternative variants for established variants begin to appear.
- 2) *propagation* The stage at which the new variants establish themselves to the detriment of the older ones which are sidelined.
- 3) *conclusion* The stages at which the remaining variants are (i) replaced completely by new variants or (ii) remain as a residue after the change has terminated.”³⁶

As a way of illustration, a huge change occurred in the French language when the language passed from Latin to Old French and, in the process, abandoned the three-gender-system the Latin language carries.³⁷

In this regard, and taking the language as a social and cultural matter, as women started to access higher positions in French society in the 80s, it would seem logical to see them appear in the language as well. It seems then relevant to try to understand why these changes have not occurred yet.

Moreover, if it is primordial for linguists and other experts aware of this phenomenon to inform populations about the importance of the link between language and social changes, it is because the population itself is usually at the root of these linguistic modifications. In this regard, all

³⁴ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 18-22.

³⁵ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 1-5.

³⁶ Raymond Hickey, “Language and Society,” 9-10.

³⁷ Maria Polinsky and Ezra Van Everbroeck. “Development of Gender Classifications: Modeling the Historical Change from Latin to French.” *Language*, Vol. 79, No. 2 (June 2003): pp. 356-390.

society members, from the lowest class to the most educated part of the population, possess the power to adapt the language to their cultural context and to express social realities through the language.³⁸ As a matter of fact, linguistic innovations happen when new words and expressions are commonly used. In other words, language use determines language standards³⁹. For this reason, language modifications happen only if people are willing to see these changes occur.⁴⁰

However, Saussure identifies two reasons for some words to remain unchanged for a very long time: either the word is completely isolated of any form of interpretation (for example, cities names), or there is a very strict oversight of these forms.⁴¹ Here, we may think about the French Academy as playing the role of overseeing the language and, at the same time stopping specific changes from occurring, such as the feminisation of higher positions nouns.

4. Language and identity

Another aspect of language that links it to social impact, is its link with individuals' identity. Indeed, people tend to speak the language of the community they belong to, or want to belong to, in other words, the language of their relatives and friends.⁴² Hickey defines these language variations as dialect, which vary according to political and social phenomena. He posits that the standard version of a language; such as the one imposed in French by the French Academy; usually seen as the correct version of the language, is also a dialect of this same language.⁴³

The same author also underlines the difference of language between men and women, representative of gender differences within a society. As a matter of fact, Hickey shows that languages contribute to define gender identity, the giving of our first name being our first experience of gender identity.⁴⁴ He also emphasises that western languages are reflecting society stereotypes. Our case of feminising higher professions nouns in the French language is here a very good example. This means, in fact, that if in France, "*le médecin*" (the doctor) has not officially been accepted with the feminine form "*la médecine*", it may be because a doctor is usually assumed to be a man. The argument often used to defend this case is a comparison with animals, where males are usually stronger than female. Logically however, this argument

³⁸ Joseph Sumpf. "Linguistique et sociologie," 7-8.

³⁹ Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 231-233.

⁴⁰ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 185-186.

⁴¹ Ferdinand Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, 237.

⁴² Ibid. 201.

⁴³ Raymond Hickey, "Language and Society", 1-5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 22-23.

should then, not be valid for intellectual positions, but for manual ones only.⁴⁵ Paradoxically then, if a woman cannot be “*une médecine*”, she can still be “*une menuisière*” (a carpenter).

But these gender differences are also to be found in men and women speeches. In fact, the powerlessness of women’s speeches has already been proven and reflects women’s social position. Hickey stresses the fact that, it is not the way they express themselves that must be changed, but rather the role the society gives them.⁴⁶

Therefore, to reinforce their speeches, women tend to use a higher language standard than men. A language dialect that corresponds to the one of the society elite.⁴⁷ Indeed, the value of a given community’s language, is usually compared with the ones dictated by the elite.⁴⁸ Trudgill adds that:

“Linguistically speaking, it cannot legitimately be considered better than other varieties. The scientific study of language has convinced scholars that all languages, and correspondingly all dialects, are equally “good” as linguistic systems. All varieties of a language are structured, complex, rule-governed systems which are wholly adequate for the needs of their speakers. It follows that value judgements concerning the correctness and purity of linguistic varieties are social rather than linguistic. There is nether at all inherent in nonstandard varieties which makes them inferior.”⁴⁹

Finally, even if, as seen previously linguistic changes mainly depends on people’s will to see them occur, the question of language feminisation can be a difficult one, as feminists, who are important actors in this process, tend to be discredited by other society members.⁵⁰ In France, as underlined by the sociolinguist Maria Candea, it seems hard for a women occupying a higher position; and hence, dealing with a majority of men; to, alone, take the initiative to give her professional status a feminine appellation. It is therefore, all society actors’ duty to revendicate this women’s right to appear in the language and consequently, in the society.⁵¹

⁴⁵ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 26.

⁴⁷ Joseph Sumpf. “Linguistique et sociologie,” 26.

⁴⁸ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 24-25.

⁴⁹ Peter Trudgill. *Sociolinguistics, introduction to language and society*, 8-9.

⁵⁰ Raymond Hickey, “Language and Society”, 25.

⁵¹ Maria Candea, “Cachons ce féminin que nous ne saurions voir au pouvoir : de la résistance des FrançaisEs à la féminisation des titres glorieux,” *L’obs*, December 25, 2013, accessed May 19, 2017. <http://feministesentousgenres.blogs.nouvelobs.com/archive/2013/12/12/cachez-moi-ce-feminin-que-je-ne-saurais-voir-de-la-resistanc-516025.html>

Conclusion of the chapter

In this chapter, we have shown the link between language and society. It seems therefore relevant to take this sociolinguistic and gender issue into account, especially since language also contributes to individual identity building. Consequently, refusing to make women appear as important actors of the society in the language, would mean making them invisible in society as well.⁵² Furthermore, as it has been underlined by some authors, this issue being political, social and cultural rather than exclusively linguistic, it seems relevant to have a look at the cultural and social French context to better understand this debate.

⁵² Elizabeth Dawes. "Féminisation Des Titres."

CHAPTER TWO: THE HISTORICAL ASPECT OF THE ISSUE

Introduction of the chapter

Because we have shown that this issue is rather a cultural and social issue than a purely linguistic one, it seems relevant to take the historical aspect of the question into account. We will here answer the following questions:

- Which are the historical events that affected women's visibility in the language?
- Which actors are involved in the process? And what are their arguments?

The aim of this section is to understand if:

- 1) The setup of the two Commissions previously mentioned (the *Commission Groult* of 1984 and the one of Lionel Jospin in 1998); and the creation of the French Academy in 1635, greatly influenced the debate;
- 2) Politicians and the French Academy are the main actors involved in the debate.

To answer these questions, we will first give a general overview of the contemporary debate, starting from the end of the 20th century, where it became more important in France and present the main actors of the debate. In addition, we will expose the different arguments of the debate since the end of the 20th century. We will then, present the situation of this gender question before the creation of the French Academy (in 1635), in order to understand if there was some reticence towards the feminisation of the French language before its institutionalisation. Finally, we will briefly compare the French case with some other French-speaking regions: Belgium, Switzerland and Quebec and try to understand how each of them chose to deal with the feminisation of title and functions in the French language.

1. General overview of the issue since the end of the 20th century

1.1 Pro-feminisation initiatives.

At the end of the 20th century, the debate concerning the feminisation of the French language gained more importance with, as previously mentioned, the access of women to higher positions, but also a feminist movement that revendicated gender equality at the work place. In

1983, this movement led for example, to a law that forbids sexual discrimination at the work place.⁵³

In this context, the first French initiative in favour of feminising some terms in the country's official language, was the *Commission Groult*, in 1984 under the government of François Mitterrand, head of the socialist party. In fact, Yvette Roudy, French Minister of women's rights at that time, set up a linguistic Commission that aimed at making women appear in the language.⁵⁴ In France, the government can, indeed, decide to create linguistic Commissions to adapt the language to its current context. These Commissions' modifications are then, either accepted by the French Academy, and become official (in other words, they enter in the French dictionary), or they are rejected and remain "unofficial".⁵⁵ The one of Yvette Roudy, was presided by the author Benoite Groult.⁵⁶

On March 18th, 1986, they published, in the *Journal Officiel de la République Française* (Official Journal of the French Republic) the "*Circulaire du 11 mars 1986 relative à la féminisation des noms de métiers, fonction, grade ou titre*", a newsletter addressed to the Ministers and State Secretaries. In this, the Commission suggested some possible ways of feminising positions nouns while taking the use of the language into account. For example, it is specified that "*we will note here that the suffixe "esse" is no longer used in modern French*".⁵⁷ In fact, *Trésor de la langue Française* supports that this ending has been mainly replaced by the one in "-euse." since the 16th century.⁵⁸ Furthermore, Groult Commission introduces its suggestion emphasising the fact that women are now accessing new positions and that this new social reality should appear in the language. Moreover, the newsletter also set out in which texts these new rules should be applied, and this is mainly in all types of official and public documents (teaching books, ministries instructions or newsletters, documents from public administrations, and any type of contract issued by the State.)⁵⁹

⁵³ Planelles Iváñez. "Influence De La Planification Linguistique", 73-74.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Fabienne Baider, et al. "Les enjeux de la parité linguistique." *Edito Vol. 26, N 3*, (2007), accessed May 3, 2017. https://www.unil.ch/files/live/sites/ceg/files/shared/NQF/26_3/Edito26_3.pdf, 7.

⁵⁶ Planelles Iváñez. "Influence De La Planification Linguistique," 73-74.

⁵⁷ Translation from the author, from the original text : "*On notera que le suffixe féminin "esse" n'est plus employé en français modern.*" Laurent Fabius. "Circulaire du 11 mars 1986 relative à la féminisation des noms de métiers, fonction, grade ou titre." *Journal Officiel de la République Française*. (March 18, 1986): pp. 4267. http://discriminationsegalite.cidem.org/documents/texte_de_loi_sur_la_feminisation_des_noms_de_metier.pdf

⁵⁸ "Le trésor de la langue française informatisé, un dictionnaire française: -esse, suffixe", accessed May 19th, 2017. <http://www.le-tresor-de-la-langue.fr/definition/-esse>

⁵⁹ Laurent Fabius. "Circulaire du 11 mars 1986."

However, as explained earlier, the French Academy, that only institution that has authority over the French language, rejected the *Commission Groult* propositions.⁶⁰ To explain the reason for its opposition, the French Academy published a brief declaration on its official website.⁶¹ Consequently, the Commission, which did not benefit from legal support, failed.⁶² Indeed, if the newsletter managed to be published, the rules it included had never been applied.⁶³

Consequently, the debate remained absent from the political stage for 11 years. It was only in 1997, under the government of Lion Jospin, French Prime Minister and member of the socialist party, that seven female Ministers asked to be called “*Madame la Ministre*” (with the feminine article then) instead of “*Madame le Ministre*”.⁶⁴ Thus, Prime Minister Jospin decided to set up a new terminological Commission. And in 1999, together with a team of researchers of the INALF (today Atilf)⁶⁵ (a laboratory that works on the analysis and the computerisation of the French language) they published a collective book “*femme, j’écris ton nom... Guide d’aide à la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres, grades et fonctions*”, which aimed at stressing the importance of the problem and providing all French language users with some possible feminised forms of titles, functions, professions and grades.⁶⁶

1.2. Anti-feminisation arguments

Nevertheless, the French Academy remained on its position and therefore, rejected this second Commission’s suggestions. In addition, in 2002, the Academy published a new declaration on its official website in which it reiterated that its rejection was based on the same reasons as the previous one, in 1986.⁶⁷ In fact, the arguments exposed by the French Academy, and more generally by those opposed to the feminisation of higher positions names are the following ones:

The masculine gender is seen, in the case of professions as the neutral gender. Professions denominations do thus, not need to be feminised. Giving women’s positions a feminine ending

⁶⁰ Daniel Elminger. “Féminisation de la langue française : une brève histoire des positions politiques et du positionnement linguistique,” in A. Duchêne & C. Moïse (dirs), *Langage, genre et sexualité* (pp. 71-89). Quebec: (Langue et pratiques discursives) <https://www.irdp.ch/institut/feminisation-langue-francaise-1153.html>, 74-75.

⁶¹ Dumézil, G. and Lévi-Strauss C. “Féminisation des titres et des fonctions”. Declaration from the French Academy. June 14, 1984. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/feminisation-des-titres-et-des-fonctions>

⁶² Planelles Iváñez. “Influence De La Planification Linguistique,” 106.

⁶³ Daniel Elminger. “Féminisation de la langue française,” 74-75.

⁶⁴ Elizabeth Dawes. “Féminisation Des Titre.”

⁶⁵ Atilf or TLFi: Trésor de la langue Française informatisé, <http://www.atilf.fr/tlfi>, ATILF - CNRS & Université de Lorraine.

⁶⁶ Becquer A., et al. *Femme, j’écris ton nom...*, 9.

⁶⁷ Académie Française. “Féminisation des noms de métiers, fonctions, grades et titres.”; Declaration of March 21, 2002. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/feminisation-des-noms-de-metiers-fonctions-grades-et-titres>

would then imply referring to the sex of a person and not to the gender of an entire group.⁶⁸ Paradoxically, the French Academy also published in the 8th and 9th editions of its dictionary some feminised profession words, that referred to lower positions only.

The second argument against the feminisation of higher professions names is that women carrying such appellations are understood as wives of men occupying the positions. If this was a reality before the 20th century, considering the current social context and its link with the language, this reference should no longer exist.⁶⁹

The other argument in defence of the masculine as the generic gender is that this debate is time consuming and in the end not necessary.⁷⁰

One other argument is that feminisation is incompatible with the structure of the language.⁷¹ In other words, new feminine forms are seen as unnatural or ugly. Different pro feminisation actors have argued that what is unusual at first needs time to be accepted, but, and as already developed earlier in this work, language evolutions always occurred and are inevitable.⁷²

It has also been argued that feminised terms can create confusions but also segregation because of the stereotypes that stick to some feminine endings.⁷³ However, some masculine terms can generate confusion as well, as there are homonyms and homophones for both masculine and feminine denominations. For instance, “*un financier*” is both a business person and a small cake.⁷⁴

One last argument is that feminine forms used for masculine functions do not ask to be changed. The French Academy, however created new masculine forms for these professions: for example, “*un maeuticien*” is now the masculine word for “*sage-femme*”.

Nevertheless, even if not legally supported either, the Commission of 1997 seems to have had more impact on the French society than the previous one set up thirteen years earlier.⁷⁵ In fact, Elminger argues that if the feminisation suggested by Lionel Jospin’s Commission has been used more than *Commission Groult’s* it is mainly for two reasons. First, the initiative of the

⁶⁸ Académie Française. “Féminisation des noms de métiers, fonctions, grades et titres- Mise au point de l’Académie Française.” Declaration from the French Academy, October 10, 2014, accessed May 19, 2017. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/la-feminisation-des-noms-de-metiers-fonctions-grades-ou-titres-mise-au-point-de-lacademie>

⁶⁹ Becquer A., et al. *Femme, j’écris ton nom...*, 11.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 32.

⁷¹ Elizabeth Dawes. “Féminisation Des Titres.”

⁷² André Goosse and Marc Wilmet, “À propos de la féminisation,”10-11.

⁷³ Edith Salazar Robles, “Le lexique en français du Québec des manuels québécois” (MA diss., University of Quebec, Montréal, 2009.)

⁷⁴ Elizabeth Dawes. “Féminisation Des Titres,” 201.

⁷⁵ Martin Plesko, *Les femmes, le français et la francophonie*. (Olomouc: Palacky University, 2015), 92.

second Commission came from the active mobilisation of female Ministers. This argument refers to the idea previously exposed: the necessity of social movement to emerge in order to adapt the language to its social context. (see chapter II). Second, the first Commission (*Commission Groult*) was supported by the government only, whereas the second one benefited from an important media coverage.⁷⁶ As a way of illustration: Itsuko Fujimura, who analysed the feminisation of titles and professional denominations in the French press between 1988 and 2001, observed a correlation between years and the occurrence of feminised words in the French press from 1998.⁷⁷

2. To understand where the issue comes from: the history of the issue

2.1. From the very beginning, a difference was made

To better understand why these Commissions did not manage to have their proposals made official, it seems relevant to explore the history of the issue. We may then, wonder where the debate of making women appear in the language first started and why? If this reluctance towards language feminisation always existed in France, and if not, when and why did it appear? Which role did women play in language modifications in the past? In other words, were they allowed to express themselves regarding this topic? Or were women that did so, as feminists are today, rejected by French society? Finally, did other French-speaking regions follow the French example of feminisation, or did they adopt another attitude towards this issue. If yes, could they potentially be a model for France?

The history of French language feminisation started with the need to see women appear as citizens of the French society. For this reason, Olympe de Gouge initiated the first feminist movement in France. In fact, in 1791, during the drafting of the French Constitution, after the 1789 *Déclaration des Droits de l'Homme et du Citoyen* (Declaration of Men's and Citizens' Rights⁷⁸), she tried to add "*La Déclaration des Droits de la Femme et de la Citoyenne*" (Declaration of Women's and Citizen's Rights).⁷⁹ As a matter of fact, men were the only one considered as citizens of France. This fact is not only visible in official documents, but also in

⁷⁶ Daniel Elminger. "Feminisation de la langue française," 81.

⁷⁷ Goosse and Wilmet, "À propos de la féminisation," 39-40.

⁷⁸ "Declaration of Human's and Citizen's Rights" would be a contemporary translation of the DDHC, which at the time of its publication would rather be translated as "Declaration of the Man's and Citizen's rights", as the argument stating that "Homme" (Man) should be understood as a generic word, in other words as a synonym of "Human" was not yet revindicated.

⁷⁹ Collectif Droits humains. "Remplaçons "droits de l'Homme" par "droits humains!" June 2015. <https://www.change.org/p/gouvernement-fran%C3%A7ais-rempla%C3%A7ons-droits-de-l-homme-par-droits-humains>, accessed January 20, 2017.

casual language, as for this reason, there is a distinction between “*Madame*” and “*Mademoiselle*”⁸⁰, that has only recently been contested in France. Elianne Viennot, active feminist engaged in the feminist cause we are currently dealing with, stresses this fact when she explains that women had to fight hard to acquire the rights stated in the DDHC; for instance, they only obtained the right to vote in 1944, and right to work without their husbands’ approval in 1965. This proved in fact, that the masculine form used in the French Constitution did not intend to be generic, but to exclude women from it.⁸¹ Indeed, as a consequence of her attempt to provide women with new rights, Olympe de Gouge was guillotined in 1793⁸², two years after the French Constitution’s official publication, where today still, only the masculine gender appears.

However, as underlined by many authors, before the 17th century, women could easily carry feminine denominations. This concerned women with manual and other low valued activities, but also from higher status professions. It would then not be rare, during the 13th century to find “*une physicienne*” (feminine word for “a physicist”) or later, during the 15th century “*une doctoresse*” (equivalent of today’s “professor”). Moreover, according to the authors of “*femme j’écris ton nom... Guide d’aide à la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres, grades et fonction*”, even if during the Middle Ages, women carrying such feminine appellations could be understood as wives of men occupying these higher positions, this was not necessarily the case. However, from the 17th century, these forms became less and less visible.⁸³ Indeed, at that time, some feminine form of professions, previously accepted, such as “*une autrice*” (an author) started to be contested.⁸⁴

In this regard, we may wonder what influenced this sudden reluctance to feminise women’s professions and hence, make them disappear from the language.

2.2. The creation of the French Academy: a turning point in the history of French language

The 17th century was marked by a need to unify the French society against the dominance of the English language. During this period, France thus, attempted to simplify the language and

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ “Les freins au changement de l’expression “droits de l’homme”: le mensonge et ses promoteurs” Eliane Viennot, accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.elianeviennot.fr/Langue/DHHT-21mai.html>

⁸² Hélène Carrère d’Encausse, “La langue française à l’âge de la globalisation.” Speech from the French Academy, Paris, December 4, 2014. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/feminisation-des-titres-et-des-fonctions>

⁸³ A. Becquer, et al. *Femme j’écris ton nom*, 13-16.

⁸⁴ Eliane Viennot, Eliane Viennot, *La France, les femmes et le pouvoir. Tome 2: Les résistances de la société (XVIIe-XVIIIe siècle)*, (Paris, Perrin, 2008), 78-84.

create a linguistic unity.⁸⁵ As a consequence, in 1635, Cardinal Richelieu, Foreign Secretary in France, create as the French Academy or “*Académie Française*”, an independent institution in charge of assuring French language purity and sustainability. Since then, the French Academy has the power to choose what is right or wrong in the French language and can, therefore decide whether an expression may be accepted as correct. In other words, and as seen previously in the present document, the French Academy has authority over the language, a power even the government does not have access to.⁸⁶ The French Academy considers French the “language of reason”, and revendicates its purity over other languages (notably English, in expansion at that time). This institutionalisation of the language aimed at giving it (the French language) a sense of rightness and hence, a greater importance.⁸⁷

However, language purification included a masculinisation process. Paradoxically, Vaugelas who then supported feminine linguistic references when these related to women, was also and above all a fervent defender of masculine supremacy. For instance, in 1647, he wrote about the French language that “*the masculine gender is the noblest one. Therefore, it should dominate each time both genders are put together*”⁸⁸ And Benaudeau in 1767: “*the masculine gender is considered more noble than the feminine because of male superiority*”.⁸⁹ These ideas went along with the social and historical context of that time. For instance, with the adoption of the law “*salique*”, enabling only male heirs to access the throne, or the publication of the Napoleonic civil code. In this ideological context, the French Academy then, decided upon new rules that would govern France’s official language. For instance, “e”, most common ending mark of the feminine gender in French, became mute and “é” or “è” mark of the masculine gender became then, dominant, because “*women were half what men were*”.⁹⁰ The distinction between “*Madame*” and “*Mademoiselle*”, previously introduced in this thesis also appeared during the 17th century, as well as the rule stating that the “*pronom attribut du sujet*”, which is the pronoun that refers to the subject in a sentence such as “*tu es malade et je la suis aussi*” (you are sick and so am I) longer varies according to the subject’s gender and becomes then “*tu*

⁸⁵ Helène Carrère d'Encausse, “La langue française...”

⁸⁶ Académie Française. “Féminisation des noms de métiers, fonctions, grades et titres.” Declaration from the French Academy, March 21, 2002, accessed May 19, 2017. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/actualites/feminisation-des-noms-de-metiers-fonctions-grades-et-titres>

⁸⁷ Fabienne Baider, et al. “Les enjeux de la parité linguistique.”

⁸⁸ Translated by the author from the original text: “*le genre masculin étant le plus noble, il doit prédominer chaque fois aue le masculine et le féminin se trouvent ensemble.*” Vaugelas, *Remarques sur la langue Française* (Paris, 1647), 27.

⁸⁹ Béatrice Fracchiolla. “Anthropologie De La Communication...”

⁹⁰ Eliane Viennot, *la France, les femmes et le pouvoir*, 78-84.

*es malade et je **le** suis aussi*” for both male and female subjects.⁹¹

Moreover, the Academy’s main mission was, from the very beginning, to “*constitute (...) a language that would not be the one of specialists, scholars or corporations, that would have the clarity and elegance of Latin, and that would not increase the gap between written and oral language and which strength lies in its attachment to both the language norm and use.*”⁹² As a matter of fact, Vaugelas defined the language use as the way the French Court was speaking. As this part of the French society no longer exists and taking today’s social context into account, it could then, be interpreted as the language of all French citizens. Indeed, the main idea Vaugelas attempted to emphasise here is that elite members should not be the ones deciding upon language evolution. He adds that this language norm changes on average every twenty to thirty years, as it adapts to its cultural and social context. (See chapter I.3.).

We have seen here that the creation of the French Academy marked a turning point in the history of the French language and more specifically in the history of the gender issue we are trying to understand better. The sexist contexts in which the Academy has been created could be one possible explanation of its reluctance to see women scripturally and orally appear in higher positions. It would then be an obstacle for their own mission: adapting the French language to its cultural and social context by following the use of the language and making it official. In this regard, we may also wonder if the second mission of unifying the language among the entire French-speaking-world, the institution emphasises, would be accomplished. Is this concept applicable for the issue we are currently dealing with? In other words, did all francophone regions react the same way towards women’s higher professions feminisation? To answer this question, we will take the example of three French-speaking regions: Switzerland, Belgium and Canada, and briefly compare their situation to the French case.

3. A brief comparison with other French-speaking regions

3.1. Quebec, first French region to react

In Quebec, as women started to access higher professions, the French-speaking region quickly saw a need to make this reality appear in the language.⁹³ The initiative to feminise titles of professions and functions appellations came from a feminist movement led by the group RAIF

⁹¹ Collectif Droits humains. “Remplaçons “droits de l’Homme...”

⁹² Translated by the author from the original text : “(...) constituer (...) une langue qui ne fût pas celle des spécialistes, des érudits, ni celle des corporations, qui eût la clarté et l’élégance qu’on accorde au latin, où ne fût pas accentué l’écart entre langue écrite et langue parlée, qui tint enfin sa force de son double attachement à l’usage et à la norme.” “L’Histoire,” Académie Française, accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.academie-francaise.fr/linstitution/lhistoire>

⁹³ Béatrice Fracchiolla. “Anthropologie De La Communication...”, 2-3.

(*Réseau d'action et d'information pour les femmes*). In fact, in 1977 already, Louise Cuerrier, female Minister of Quebec asks not only (as would it be the case in France two years later) to be called "*Madame la Ministre*", but to see all titles carried by women in the National Assembly feminised. Her request has been easily accepted.⁹⁴ Consequently a first publication suggesting feminine terms to name women's higher positions appeared two years later, in 1979 and was followed by three others in 1985, 1986 and a last one in 1991. All these three publications have been released by the OLF (*Office de la Langue Française*), the language institution of the Canadian region.⁹⁵ Unlike the French Academy this institution, is not independent from the government, but, rather works very closely with all parts of the society. The OFL aims at enriching the language and to do so, invites different society actors to take part in the process: Administration, companies, independent groups of people, or even individual are therefore, welcome to send the OFL their language suggestions and corrections in order to adapt the language to its social and cultural context.⁹⁶ Planelles Ivanez suggests that the Office does not impose any feminised term, but aims at informing Quebec society about the ones most commonly used. There is hence, more than only one possible feminised version for the same profession.

3.2.Switzerland

Switzerland follows the same lines as Quebec, in the sense that the country accepted language modification in general more easily than France. However, its feminisation process started later than France. This was mainly because Switzerland counts three other national languages and thus, the decisions taken at a national level did not work, as the four linguistic entities that coexist on the country's territory are too different to follow the same rules. For instance Switzerland notably published "*La formulation non sexists des actes législatifs et administratifs*" in 1991, "*Formulation non sexiste des textes législatifs*" in 1992, and "*Formulation non sexiste des textes de l'administration fédérale*" in 1993. These documents released at the federal level targeted all State's official languages and did not have an important impact on French, Italian and Romansh. It is then only in 2000, that the French canton published "*Guide de formulation non sexiste des textes administratifs et législatifs de la Confédération*", which concerned the feminisation of French texts only.⁹⁷ Pierrette Vauchon-L'Heureux also

⁹⁴ Katerina Sucha. "La féminisation du français canadien – des voies littéraires et linguistiques." (BA diss, University of Masarykova, Brno, 2008).

⁹⁵ Planelles Iváñez. "L'influence De La Planification Linguistique," 77-79.

⁹⁶ Office québécois de la langue française: "Mission et rôle," accessed May 3, 2017. <http://www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/office/mission.html>

⁹⁷ Martin Plesko, *Les femmes, le français et la francophonie*, 97-98.

noticed a difference in the way Switzerland feminised compared to France. The region uses for example more feminine forms ending in “-esse” than its French neighbour.⁹⁸

3.3. Belgium

Belgium is the last French-speaking-region to consider with regard to the question of language feminisation. In fact, it first published in 1993 “*Décret du 21 juin 1993 relatif à la féminisation des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre*” which targeted texts coming from the different institutions funded by the *Conseil de la Communauté française de Belgique*. This document was followed by another that exposes feminisation rule very similar to the French ones. And one year later “*Mettre au féminin*” that targeted the whole population, was released. However, as in France, Belgium’s initiatives were criticised. The main argument here was that Belgium had no authority over the French language, as this belonged to the French Academy only.⁹⁹

To conclude, Quebec and Switzerland are the two most advanced regions of the French-speaking-world on the question. Both regions seem to have accepted feminisation of women’s higher professions and are now trying to degenderise the language. Indeed, they are now one step further than other French-speaking-regions, as they attempt to create a neutral gender by using gender-neutral terms in official documents (for instance, “*les humains*” (human beings) instead of “*les hommes et les femmes*” (men and women)) and to find solutions to make women appear in both written and oral language (notably by trying to find alternative words to those ending in “e”)

In contrast, France and Belgium seem to be the less advanced French-speaking regions. Moreover, according to Anne Dister, Belgium, which started its feminisation process later than France seems now to be even more advanced in the process than its French neighbour. For example, the author noted that during the last European elections of 2004, more feminine forms of titles and higher professions were to be found in documents produced by Belgian political parties than in those produced by French ones.¹⁰⁰

There is, then, no clear unification of all French-speaking-regions on the matter of higher positions feminisation. However, the French Academy does not value any of these regions’

⁹⁸ Pierrette Vauchon-L’Heureux, “Féminisation des titres et des textes,” *Correspondance Vol. 10, n. 2* (2004), accessed May 3, 2017. <http://correspo.ccdmd.qc.ca/index.php/document/reformes-et-continuites/feminisation-des-titres-et-des-textes/>

⁹⁹ Martin Plesko, *Les femmes, le français et la francophonie.*, 90-92.

¹⁰⁰ Anne Dister, “Tell me how you feminize, I’ll tell you who you vote for. Appellations of Candidates in the European Elections of 1989 and 2004 in Belgium and France.” *Langage et Société*, n. 115. 2006. Doi: IO. 3917/l5.115.0005

dialects and would not take Quebec or Switzerland as an example, but would rather mock their “excessive” feminisation. As a way of illustration, in 2006, Maurice Duron, secretary of the French Academy rejected the “*absurd feminisation*” of the “*picturesque*” Quebec language.¹⁰¹

Conclusion of the chapter

In this chapter, we have seen that the creation of the French Academy was of a great importance in this debate. The first Commission (*Commission Groult*) did not have a significant impact on the question, but the one set up later by Lionel Jospin did. This was mainly due to the active mobilisation of its Ministers. Moreover, one actor that greatly supported this second Commission and enabled an impact on the society, even if the French Academy remained against it, is the media. In fact, their role is to share the ideas of different actors with the population, and therefore have an important influence on their thoughts, on the social aspect of the debate.

¹⁰¹ “Maurice Druon écorche le parler Québécois,” *Le Devoir*, January 16, 2006, accessed May 4, 2017. <http://www.ledevoir.com/culture/actualites-culturelles/99811/maurice-druon-ecorche-le-parler-quebecois>

CHAPTER THREE: CRITICAL DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF FRENCH MEDIA

Introduction of the Chapter

To better understand if France is still reluctant to provide women occupying higher functions with feminine appellations, we first looked at the historical evolution of the debate in this French-speaking-region. This has revealed the different actors who have been taking part in the debate since the end of the 20th century, their main arguments, and the possible reasons for their positions. In addition, we have shown that there seem mainly to be an institutional division between the French Academy and the State. However, while looking at the two linguistic Commissions set up by the French government in 1984 and 1997, we noticed two important elements that will guide our analysis:

- 1) There seems to be a political division in France between right and left parties, as the two Commissions previously introduced have only been set up by left-wing governments.
- 2) The media seems to be a key actor of the debate, as the second Commission, set up by Lionel Jospin in 1997, had a more significant impact on the French society than the first one set up by Minister Roudy. Both received no legal support from the French Academy. The difference in terms of impact between the two initiatives seems then, to lie in media support and coverage.

In fact, the events that took place during the end of the 20th century have already shown that socialists were more engaged into seeing new feminised words appear in the language. The French Academy, as previously demonstrated, remains a conservative institution. Therefore, due to the conservative character of right-wing parties and their lack of investment in making the language evolve towards gender equality, one hypothesis could be that right-wing parties share the French Academy's ideas (or at least some of them) on this matter. As proof, in her study comparing France and Belgium's language feminisation during the two European elections of 1989 and 2004, Anne Dister has shown a clear division between right and left-wing political parties, in France especially. This division goes from extreme left parties that cautiously feminise women's positions, to extreme right parties that categorically refuse to provide women occupying higher positions with feminine denominations. Centrist parties are usually divided on the question: they do not systematically feminise profession words. In her analysis, the researcher also mentioned that this gap between right and left seems to have

increased after Lionel Jospin's Commission publication. In fact, she noted an increase in the use of feminised nouns on the left side and a decrease of the feminisation practice on the right between the first European election of 1989 and the second one in 2004.¹⁰²

Moreover, a recent event has demonstrated the exactitude of this hypothesis. In January 2014, during a meeting at the French National Assembly, deputy Julien Aubert, member of the UMP (French right-wing party) refused to name Sandrine Mazetier, deputy of the PS (left-wing party), "*Madame LA députée*" (with the feminised form then,) and kept on calling her "*Madame LE député*". The president of the National Assembly called M. Aubert to order. Indeed, article 70 of the National Assembly regulation prohibits all form of provocative and insulting attitude towards the president or any other Assembly member.¹⁰³ Some months later, in October 2014, the same conflict occurred with the same actors. This time, the president decided to sanction Julien Aubert. He received a fine of 1.378euros (one quarter of his monthly salary). As a response to this scandal, the French Academy published, October 10, 2014 a "*Mise au point*", an article that appeared on its official website and aimed at clarifying the distinction that it decided to make between higher positions, that must carry masculine ending; and lower professions, that designate the person itself and not the function.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, voices were raised on the UMP side. In fact, all together, they decided to support M. Aubert. First, by trying to lift the sanction, notably through a letter written by the party's president and addressed to the president of the National Assembly. Then, because this attempt failed, each of them (139 deputies in total) decided to give Julien Aubert an equal part of their salary to cover his loss. This last reaction is a good illustration of the right-wing position in this debate. Moreover, this example reinforces the idea that the feminisation of titles and higher positions nouns is not only a linguistic but also, and especially, a political issue.

Method of the analysis

Our work consists of a critical discourse analysis of online public French media. Furthermore, regarding the political aspect of the debate, the analytical part of our work will be based on six different online and written French public media, divided into three categories:

¹⁰² Anne Dister, "Tell me how you feminize."

¹⁰³ Règlement de l'Assemblée Nationale. *Chapitre XVI : Discipline, immunité et déontologie. Article 70.* (Paris, 2015), accessed May 3, 2017. http://www.assemblee-nationale.fr/connaissance/reglement_2015_01.pdf, 49.

¹⁰⁴ Académie Française, "Mise au point de l'Académie Française."

- Right-wing-oriented media, including far-right wing media: *Le Figaro* (right-wing), and *Valeurs Nationales* (far-right-wing)
- A centre-oriented media, even if it could be sometimes classified as “centre-right-wing” or “centre-left-wing” oriented media: *La Croix*.
- Left-wing-oriented media, including a communist one: *Libération* (left-wing), and *l'Humanité* (far-left-wing).

Considering the previously introduced increase in political division regarding the feminisation of title and higher positions denominations in the French language, as well as the importance of the media's role in the debate, it seems relevant to:

- 1) Observe whether this division is still observable in France and could then be considered as one major element of French reluctance towards language feminisation; and
- 2) Analyse how French public media express their opinion on the questions and how they, hence, contribute to the debate.

For this analysis, we will concentrate on the recent debate previously introduced: the 2014 scandal that opposed right-wing deputy Julien Aubert, against left-wing deputy Sandrine Mazetier. We will here analyse how each of the nine newspapers, from three different political orientations present the debate, their actors and arguments, and how they answer each other. In other words, we will see how these media are involved in and to which extent they influence the politico-linguistic debate we are currently dealing with.

To do so, we will focus on the ideas presented by each newspaper, and the way they present them. We also aim at answering the following question: which discourses dominate the debate? Our hypothesis here, is that left-wing media tend to adopt a feminist discourse, whereas right-wing-oriented media rather refer to the one of the French Academy. For centre oriented media, we could imagine that some articles would follow the French Academy discourse and others the feminist one. This choice would therefore, rather depend on the author of the article. Then, we will analyse the intertextuality of the debate: to whom do journalists refer in their article? And how are the ideas of the different actors present in the debate introduced? (through direct quote? In which order? Etc.) We will then, see which linguistic tools and techniques the author adopts to reinforce their position. This part aims at confirming the author's opinion and presenting their degree of engagement. Finally, we will see whether there is a direct dialogue between these different online media.

1. Right-wing-oriented Media

1.1. Le Figaro (right-wing media)

When the scandal that opposed Sandrine Mazetier to Julien Aubert occurred, *Le Figaro*, had been very responsive and demonstrated a real interest in expressing its opinion. Indeed, between October 7th and 15th 2014, five articles were published. Among them, one text relating the facts only, three opinion columns¹⁰⁵; a letter written by François Fillon and Henri Guaino, member of the UMP, and addressed to the president of the National Assembly to lift Julien Aubert's sanction¹⁰⁶; and a last article presenting the "*Mise au point*" published on the French Academy website¹⁰⁷.

We will here take one of the opinion columns *Le Figaro* published as an example of its engagement and position in the debate.

Article 1: "Madame LE president": Quand le ridicule tue le féminisme.

What is the dominant discourse of the article?

The author of this opinion column is Lydia Guirous, "*funder of the club "Future, au féminin" and National Secretary of the Radical Party in charge of fighting against gender discrimination and of Women's Rights.*" *The Figaro* chose here, to make its article more influential by giving voice to an expert in feminist questions. However, the dominant discourse of the text is not the typical feminist discourse of the debate, that stands for language feminisation. On the contrary, Lydia Guirous adopts an anti-left-feminism discourse.

How does the author construct her argumentation?

The author first presents the debate that opposed the two deputies as a simple exchange, that she does not develop much and makes it therefore, contrast with the important sanction that resulted from it. The decision of the National Assembly President seems therefore disproportionate and makes Julien Aubert appear to be a victim of injustice.

¹⁰⁵ Jean-Marie Cotteret, "'Madame le Président': faut-il dissoudre l'Académie Française," *Le Figaro*, October 14th, 2014; Ivan Valerio, "'Madame le président': Julien Aubert s'estime victime d'une novlangue 'idéologisée,'" *Le Figaro*, October 7th, 2014; and Lyda Guirous, "'Madame LE president': quand le ridicule tue le féminisme," *Le Figaro*, October 7th, 2014.

¹⁰⁶ François Fillon, and Henri Guaino, "'Madame le président': l'ultimatum de 140 députés de l'opposition à Claude Bartolone," *Le Figaro*, October 10th, 2014.

¹⁰⁷ Mohammed Aissaoui, "Féminisation des noms: la mise au point de l'Académie française," *Le Figaro*, October 15th, 2014.

Throughout the text, Lydia Guirous seems to consider that there are two different types of feminism in France: a right and a left feminism, the second being here defined as the wrong one. Indeed, she first targets left-wing parties' members before asking several times "*what kind of feminism*"¹⁰⁸ they pretend to defend. Moreover, she clearly emphasises this separation between both camps by describing feminist movements such as the one that supports language feminisation, as "*leftist or alter-globalisation feminist movements.*"¹⁰⁹

Then, the author's argumentation is mainly based on the absurdity and inefficiency of the debate. In fact, she accuses left-feminists of focusing on issues of lower importance, when there are many more important ones they should rather concentrate on. For instance, they refuse to let women be called "*Mademoiselle*" in official forms, but accepts them wearing the veil¹¹⁰, in the same way as they do not punish politicians accused of financial corruptions, such as Cahuzac and Thevenoud, but sanction Julien Aubert for expressing his thoughts.¹¹¹ Moreover, with the same argument, she emphasises that this debate is costly and time consuming, when she says that socialist feminists use public funds to solve issues that are not real ones.¹¹² She then, accuses socialists of trying to turn French society into an "*androgynous*" and "*asexual*"¹¹³ one. If we apply this argument to the more particular case of language feminisation, one interpretation here is that the author does not believe that feminising functions and higher positions appellations first aims at making women more visible in the society. On the contrary, it seems to the author that it would make both genders disappear.

Finally, in her very last paragraph, Lydia Guirous clearly exposes her opinion by using the first pronoun, to once more, qualify socialist practices of "*ridiculous*" and even "*dangerous*", that could affect French society's individual liberties. The reference to moral values such as "*justice*", "*equality*" or "*liberty*" also aims at strengthening her argument.

Linguistic strategy

Furthermore, to better understand to which extent the newspaper is engaged, and what strategy it uses to affirm its point of view and then debate with other actors, it is important to emphasise the linguistic tools used in the article to communicate its message. In other words, what is the

¹⁰⁸ "*Que lest donc ce féminisme (...)?*" line 22.

¹⁰⁹ "*Les mouvements féministes de gauche ou altermondialistes,*" line 45.

¹¹⁰ Lines 22-25. The author refers here to the French Scandale that in 2014 forbade Muslim women to wear full-face veil for identity reasons. A decision to which left parties were opposed.

¹¹¹ Lines 18-19.

¹¹² Lines 31-32.

¹¹³ "*Vive la société asexuée et androgyne ?!*" lines 15-17.

tone of this article? Which are the linguistic elements that underlines the author position and give power to its argumentation?

The linguistic tools the author uses give us a clue as to her engagement in the debate. Moreover, we assume that *Le Figaro*, which published this article, does then, share the author's ideas and degree of engagement.

The tone of the text is very satirical. As a matter of fact, the author uses irony in most of the text, and stresses this point by using metaphors. She then, describes socialists' feminism as "*supermarket feminism*"¹¹⁴, and uses expressions such as "*it is funny*"¹¹⁵, or "*the mas-
caraed*"¹¹⁶ to describe their actions. She also mocks them while directly asking the reader if the disappearing of the appellation "*Mademoiselle*", that occurred some years ago, and resulted from the same feminist movement, had not greatly affected their lives. This tone strengthens the derision of the debate, argument on which her opinion seems to be built. Indeed, socialists' feminists described as "*dreamers*" that believe in "*miracles*"¹¹⁷ can therefore, not be taken seriously.

However, if this text's arguments clearly target socialist feminism, the author is here not trying to influence left-wing-parties' members, but seems rather to address her article to all French citizens. Indeed, she asks several direct questions to all French women; for example, in the one mentioned above, she even calls them "*Mesdames, don't you remember?*"¹¹⁸; and, as in a political discourse, speaks in the name of French society's interests when she asks if "*this is what French people are wanting from our representatives and opinion leaders*". The use of the first-person plural reinforces this idea. She finally stresses the purpose of her argumentation, when she asks if socialists "*did think we were stupid.*"¹¹⁹ Indeed, this article seem to aim at warning the reader about the unimportance of the feminist issues socialists are trying to deal with. After this last sentence, the following paragraph adopts a more serious tone. Lydia Guirous exposes several failures faced by the process of increasing gender equality in France and contrasts them with the "useless" points "leftist feminism" has focused on, including language feminisation.

¹¹⁴ "*Féminisme de supermarché,*" line 20.

¹¹⁵ "*C'est marrant,*" line 18.

¹¹⁶ "*La mascarade,*" line 23.

¹¹⁷ Line 48.

¹¹⁸ "*Mesdames, vous ne vous souvenez plus?*" lines 25-26.

¹¹⁹ "*[les socialistes] nous ont-il pris pour des imbéciles (...) ?*" line 33.

In this same paragraph, she underlines the importance for French citizens in getting involved in the debate, and to no more laugh at this situation but to feel “*outraged*”¹²⁰ by it.¹²¹

Finally, throughout the text, the author personifies socialist feminism. In fact, it is a “*political police force*”, that arbitrarily and severely sanctions. It is for instance, a force that “*cut heads off*”¹²² for expressing thoughts, and Sandrine Mazetier is here one partisan of this organisation when she is described as a “*good Bolshevik of parity*”¹²³. This “*police force*” also “*moralises*”, “*oblige*” and above all “*controls*” people’s thoughts and liberties.¹²⁴ This semantic field reinforces her argument based on moral values.

To conclude, *Le Figaro* defends an anti-language-feminisation discourse and makes a specialist in feminist questions give her opinion. The position defended in this article does indeed correspond to the one right-wing partisans have been defending so far. We will now see if this opinion is also the one defended by far-right-wing media.

1.2. Valeurs Actuelles (far-right-wing media)

Valeurs Actuelles is a far-right-wing oriented media. On October 7th, 2014, the newspaper published a first article in response to the event previously presented. In this one, *Valeurs Actuelles* did not only relate the facts but also exposed its opinion while presenting Sandrine Mazetier as a “*sensitive*” person, and defending the French Academy’s opinion on feminisation of higher professions and functions when asking the socialist deputy to “*respect the French Academy*”.

For this analysis, we will concentrate however, on the text published October 8th, 2014, a second article released only one day after the scandal, and which shows the interests of the media in taking part in the debate and defend its position.

Article 2: “*Marion Maréchal- Le Pen: “Je me fais appeler Madame LE Député*”

While looking at the title of the text, we could already think that the aim of publishing a second article on the topic only one day after the first one, was to reinforce the first article’s argumentation by giving a concrete example of it. In fact, the present text refers to Marion Maréchal-Le Pen. She is an active member of the *Front National*, far-right-wing political party

¹²⁰ “*s’indigner*,” lines 44 and 53.

¹²¹ Lines 36-44.

¹²² Line 16.

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Lines 53-56.

in France, and a relative of Marine Le Pen, current party leader. Moreover, the article does not specify the author's name. *Valeurs Actuelles* speaks therefore, in the name of this political figure. As this media mainly targets a public sharing far-right ideas, the use of an important *Front National* figure aims at giving the text more power.

How does the author construct his/her argumentation?

The article starts with a summary of the scandal, in which the author already expresses her/his opinion. Indeed, the text begins with the word “*ideology*”¹²⁵, which summarises a first argument: the feminisation of the French language is not a universalist vision, but comes from a political ideology and can hence, not be imposed. This idea has already been underlined in the previous article published by *Le Figaro*. Here as well, the author stresses the fact that left feminists attempt to impose their ideas by punishing their opponents. For this reason, Julien Aubert has been “*called to order*”¹²⁶ before being “*deprived from one quarter of his allowance*”.¹²⁷ Furthermore, the author emphasises this first argument by presenting the scandal as a personal affair in which socialists' opinion is absent. In fact, the author only keeps Sandrine Mazetier's point of view, who alone decided that “*she did not like to be called “Madame le president”*”.¹²⁸ Language feminisation is therefore a personal question and cannot be treated as a societal one.

The last paragraph of this short article presents Marion Maréchal-Le Pen's reaction and opinion. Here as well (as in the previously analysed article from *Le Figaro*), the idea of a disproportioned sanction appears, which shocks and “*stupefies*”¹²⁹ the *Front National* partisan. Moreover, the right-left opposition of the debate finally appears in this last passage, as Sandrine Mazetier is here described as a “*PS deputy*” (deputy of the socialist party). She then opposes Julien Aubert, which benefits from the *Front National* supports since he is described as Marion Maréchal-Le Pen's “*UMP colleague*”. This last point emphasises even more the right-left political division of the debate, and shows that for far-right-wing politicians, there are only two camps in this “*ideological debate*”.

Finally, the last discourse of the text is the one of the French Academy. Indeed, the author directly quotes Marion Maréchal-Le Pen's words, who defends the French Academy's authority

¹²⁵ Line 1.

¹²⁶ “*rappeler à l'ordre*” Line 1 ; and “*rappel à l'ordre,*” line 12.

¹²⁷ “*privation d'un quart de son indemnité parlementaire,*” lines 12-13.

¹²⁸ “*Sandrine Mazetier n'aime pas qu'on l'appelle “Madame LE president,*” line 12.

¹²⁹ “*sidérée,*” line 19.

over the French language. In this case, she takes herself as a good example that Sandrine Mazetier and other socialist feminists, who do not “*respect French grammar*” should follow. Indeed, she explains that she calls herself “*Madame le député*” to respect French grammar”, and in other words, the French Academy’s rules. She follows then, by briefly developing one of the French Academy’s arguments when she explains that she tries “*to avoid confusions between the function and the person*”.¹³⁰

Linguistic strategy

Even if the arguments presented in this article are not fully developed, the author uses linguistic tools to stress her/his opinion.

As a matter of fact, the author bases his/her argumentation on moral and social values, especially while referring to the French Academy. For example, when Julien Aubert “*respects the French Academy*”¹³¹, or with the “*French grammar*” that according to *Valeurs Actuelles*, Sandrine Mazetier “*does not like*”¹³² and that Marion Maréchal-Le Pen, “*respects*”¹³³. Regarding the conservative values defended by this media, one possible interpretation of this emphasis would be that the disobedience to legitimate institutions such as the French Academy could endanger the stability of French institutions. Another possible interpretation is that the author focuses on a judicial value. Indeed, the reference to this institution as the one setting language rules, reinforces the feeling that M. Aubert is here a victim of unfair treatment. He has been punished for being the only one (between him and Sandrine Mazetier) who followed the rules and respected the official French language institution. Furthermore, the moral value of respect is obviously used as a tool to strengthen the author’s political engagement in the debate. In fact, Sandrine Mazetier, also described as a socialist deputy is disrespectful, as she does not ignore the rules but does rather “*not like them*”.

Then, as previously shown, the article ends with a final attack on all left partisans, which masks one last argument: this debate is absurd and useless. To emphasise this idea, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen uses a metaphor which presents left partisans as warriors fighting for a ridiculous cause. They use in fact, the feminisation of higher positions and functions denominations as a “*banner*” for their “*so called-struggle against sexism*” and to further stress the ridiculousness

¹³⁰ “*Je me fais appeler “Madame le president” pour respecter la grammaire et parce qu’il faut éviter la confusion entre la personne et la fonction,*” lines 21-22.

¹³¹ “*respecter l’Académie Française,*” line 15.

¹³² “*Elle n’aime pas non plus la grammaire française,*” line 9-10.

¹³³ “*Pour respecter la grammaire,*” line 21.

of this fight, finishes on an ironical note while saying that “*there is no little resistance*”. This tone had in fact, already been adopted by the author while describing Sandrine Mazetier’s tastes: “[she] does not like to be called “*Madame LE president*” and “*neither does she like French grammar*”. This last point seems not only to emphasise the ridiculousness of the debate, but also its ideological character.

Finally, the reference to a “*left-feminism*” already present in the picture description, underlines the author’s position. However, contrary to *Le Figaro*, the far-right media does not give its readers a definition of this concept. We could then, think that *Valeurs Actuelles* takes this difference between right and left feminism for granted. In addition, at the very end of the text, the word “*gauchistes*”, which defines all left partisans and carries a negative connotation, gives us a clue about the real target of this article. As a matter of fact, the word sounds like an insult, and does not even refer to left feminism and their idea of linguistic reform, but rather to all left ideas, and, to come back to the beginning of the text, “*ideologies*”.

2. Left-oriented Media

2.1. Libération (left media)

Article 3 : “Mme le Président: l’Académie persiste et signe...mollement”

Author: Eliane Viennot

This article has been published on October 23rd, 2014, sixteen days after the event. It also follows a first article published October 9th, 2014, by AFP (*Agence France Press*) ““*Madame le président*”: Julien Aubert soutenu par 139 députés.” This first article adopted a rather neutral tone. In fact, it only presented the article of *Le Figaro* in which the letter of François Fillon and Henri Guaino had been published, and mainly used direct quotes to refer the right-wing politicians’ arguments, without commenting them.

However, in the analysed article ““*Madame le Président*”: *l’Académie persiste et signe...mollement*”, *Libération* refers to an expert in the field. In fact, this article is an opinion column written by Eliane Viennot, feminist and specialist in the question of language feminisation in France. She is the author of several publications dealing with this topic, and published notably two books: “*Non, le masculin ne l’emporte pas sur le féminin! Petites résistances de la langue française*” and “*L’Académie contre la langue française*”, which clearly introduces her position in the debate. A short sentence at the beginning of the article present her as the “*cofounder of the international society for the studies of old regime women (Siefar)*”. And a last paragraph presents the works we just mentioned, as well as an article she already published in *Libération*. This gives an idea of how close the media could be from her ideas.

What is the dominant discourse of the article?

Even if the text is an answer to the debate between two deputies from two opposed political parties, Eliane Viennot here mainly refers to the French Academy. In fact, the author, and then *Libération* as well, which approved and published the article, believe that, this debate is still related to the now old opposition between feminist linguists and politics, and the French Academy. In fact, the institution provides arguments for those opposed to the French language feminisation. This statement has been proved on October 7th, 2014, as Julien Aubert and other UMP members, who gave him their support, had for only argument that the feminisation of certain functions such as “*Madame la présidente*” had being rejected by the French Academy. Therefore, they consider such expressions as not correct, and which cannot be used. The dominant discourse of this article, is then the left-feminist one (as the difference between right

and left feminism has been underlined in right-oriented media), and more specifically here, an anti-French Academy discourse.

How does the author construct her argumentation?

In the first paragraph of the article, Eliane Viennot refers to Julien Aubert and the 140 UMP members that signed a petition to support him, and explains that they must have been “*disappointed*” to read the “*Mise au point*” published October 10th, 2014 by the French Academy, as this one weakened, the only argument UMP deputies discourse was based on. She then, no longer refers to the scandal, but rather explains why right-wing politicians are wrong to follow the French Academy and why French society in general is wrong to accept this institution as the only legitimate one in charge of the language.

To do so, she dismantles one by one, the French Academy arguments. She bases the major party of her argumentation on historical facts, such as the ones we presented in the first part of this work. She for instance refers to the sexist character of the French Academy that, from its creation aimed at masculinising the language.¹³⁴ Moreover, the institution counts very few female members, and only accepted the first one very late (Marguerite Yourcenar in 1980).¹³⁵ Then, she questions several times the French Academy legitimacy, since she judges its members incompetent. She for example, explains that Goerges Dumzémil and Claude Lévi-Strauss 1984 declaration, often used as a reference for those opposed to language feminisation, had been written by talented writers. However, their written style does not make their arguments stronger.

Throughout the text, the author aims at informing all readers, but especially right-wing politicians, about the wrongness of the arguments they are defending. In some other passages, it also seems that the text is a response to right-wing-oriented media’s discourse. For example, this could be one possible interpretation of the following sentence “*(...) for a long time, we tried to make us believe that the masculinity of national representation was not a big deal, that deputies were representative of the entire nation.*”¹³⁶ She certainly refers to the right-left linguistic scandal, but also to the absurdity and unimportance to feminise higher professions words, underlined several times in right-wing-oriented media, such as *Le Figaro* or *Valeurs Actuelles*. After having dismantled the French Academy’s arguments, Eliane Viennot comes back to the 2014 situation and tries to provide an answer to the debate by giving “*la vraie règle*”

¹³⁴ Lines 50-70 and lines 80-86.

¹³⁵ Lines 13-21.

¹³⁶ “*(...) on a longtemps essayé de nous faire croire que la masculinité de la représentation nationale n’était pas grave, que les députés représentaient la nation entière,*”

(“the right rule”). In other words, should we say “*Madame le*” or “*Madame la*”? She adds that the French Academy, institution defended by right-wing politicians, is uncappable of providing them with a correct answer to this question. That is why she insists on the fact that “*functions nouns would be neutral, and, because the French language does not have a neutral gender, masculine,*”¹³⁷ is an invalid argument. After this last point, she seems to directly target the French Academy. In fact, because the institution does not seem to be able to provide French society with an acceptable solution, she looks back in History to find the “right rule” of 1607. Indeed, at the end of her article, the author makes clear that she only sees this political scandal as an example of the real debate that opposes feminists to the French Academy. As a way of illustration, she takes a very ironical tone to indirectly ask the French Academy’s members if they knew that “*if we have to say “Mme la Présidente” to Sandrine Mazetier*” then, we would also have to say “*Mme le roi*” to the Queen of England. The very last paragraph makes this point even clearer, when she warns the French Academy that times have changed, and that this sociolinguistic evolution is inevitable. She then, comes back to the historical argument that has supported the major part of her argumentation, when she asks the reader if we “*(...) will have to wait one or two more centuries for the French Academy to consider it as normal?*” And she continues: “*And to politicians that pounce on this polemic, as if they did not have better to do.*” Here, she finally comes back to the current political debate that opposed Julien Aubert to Sandrine Mazetier and asks right-wing politicians the question that has, directly or indirectly been addressed to left-wing politics (notably in right-wing-oriented media). The only difference here is that, if right-wing partisans have suggested left partisans to abandon a useless debate, *Libération* suggests to simply accept to name women occupying higher positions with a female denomination to avoid a useless conflict.

As a summary, Eliane Viennot goes from the broadest debate (the feminisation of the French language in general), to a most specific point (the feminisation of higher positions). She holds the French Academy liable for the 2014 political scandal, which, in this text, is only presented as an example of the current and important French debate of language feminisation. The media *Libération*, that has chosen to publish this article, expresses here its point of view in favour of language feminisation which coincide with the feminist and left-wing politician discourse in France.

Linguistic strategy

¹³⁷ “*les noms de fonctions seraient neutres et comme le français n’a pas de neutre, masculine,*” lines 105-107.

First, the title, “*Madame le Président*”: *The French Academy persists and signs... weakly*” already suggests two main ideas the author emphasised throughout the text:

1) The French Academy replaces here UMP members that persist to call Susanne Mazetier with the masculine denomination and that sign the petition for Julien Aubert. In other words, politicians only follow the French Academy’s opinion, it is then, irrelevant for the author to target them; and,

2) The arguments the French Academy defends are not strong enough to be considered valid.

Through all the text, Eliane Viennot personifies the French Academy. This strategy emphasises the fact that the decisions it took have been taken by concrete people, and can therefore, be wrong, but also modified. In fact, if the institution is first a hero coming to rescue UMP members¹³⁸, she is rapidly replaced by a young child, very self-confident, that “*is proud*”¹³⁹ of correctly completing her mission, that “*congratulates herself*”¹⁴⁰ but that in the end, did not learn her lesson correctly, and to whose mission has always to be reminded. In fact, the author explains that she (the French Academy) is “*incapable of doing her work*”¹⁴¹ and gives her a history lesson. Moreover, as this debate is a social one, the author tries to involve readers in the debate by asking them questions, such as “*can the masculine genre be neutral?*”¹⁴². She also aims at warning them about the artifice the French Academy uses to make them believe its arguments. The French Academy becomes then a playful child, whose arguments are only “*jokes*”¹⁴³. Only in the end, does the author change her tone, when she affirms that “*we are ready and waiting for them.*”¹⁴⁴ It seems here that Eliane Viennot is now fed up with this child who does not want to understand and accept a lesson as easy as language feminisation.

Generally, the author adopts an ironical tone. Through all the text, she is very engaged for the French language feminisation, that she considers as normal. This article serves as an illustration of left-wing oriented newspapers position. We could then conclude that *Libération* follows the left line of the debate and demonstrates the link between left wing parties and feminist discourses.

¹³⁸ Line 1.

¹³⁹ “(...) remplit correctement sa mission dont elle est si fière,” line 26.

¹⁴⁰ “elle se félicite,” line 32.

¹⁴¹ “incapable de faire son travail,” line 51.

¹⁴² “Le masculin peut-il être neutre ?” line 50.

¹⁴³ “la plaisanterie,” line 51.

¹⁴⁴ “on les attends de pieds ferme, line 142.

We may now wonder if this link is also, or even more, noticeable in far-left-wing newspapers.

2.2. L'Humanité (far-left media)

Article 4 : Faut-il féminiser la langue française?

This article is an interview with two women occupying higher positions: Nathalie Heinich, sociologist and director of the CNRS (important research centre in France) and Danielle Bousquet, president of the *Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes* (Higher Council for Equality between women and men). The article does not answer the debate between the two deputies. In fact, *L'Humanité*, has not expressed its point of view on the matter in October 2014. However, it does show a personal motivation to update the debate, as this article has been released January 22nd, 2016. This initiative could then, already be interpreted as a proof of the media's implication in the debate, and certainly its will to see things evolve, as it does not need to wait for a specific event to refer to the issue.

What is the dominant discourse of the article?

Surprisingly, this text presents the two major discourses of the debate: the one of the French Academy, defended by Nathalie Heinich, and the feminist discourse presented by Danielle Bousquet. Moreover, both discourses occupy the same space (about forty lines each), as each interviewed has been asked the same questions and has given two answers in two different paragraphs.

What are the author's main arguments, and how does she/he construct the argumentation?

Nevertheless, the structure chosen by the author reveals his/her position. As a matter of fact, the author chose to first expose the sociologist's point of view, against language feminisation, before presenting the arguments of Danielle Bousquet, fervent defender of the feminisation of the French language. This way, Danielle Bousquet answers Nathalie Heinich's arguments, which gives the left-feminist's ideas more importance.

In fact, the CNRS director answers the first question (*"What do we mean with "language feminisation"? Which motivations does it lay on, which resistances and difficulties (mainly practical) does it face?"*) with two main arguments, both already developed by the French Academy. She first defends "the masculine as the neutral gender for higher positions and functions" argument, before précising that this debate is rather linguistic than political. Indeed,

according to her, “*the French language does not permit to say*”¹⁴⁵ certain words. In other words, feminised words would destroy language purity and still sound too “ugly” to be accepted. While developing her first argument she argues however, that she is not an antisexist person, but explains that feminism should give us an “*universalistic*” view, and not a “*differential*” one. She is therefore, convinced to adopt the feminist discourse. Nevertheless, she develops her first argument the same way the French Academy did, by *précising* then, that the feminised version of higher functions denominations would refer to the person only and not to the function itself. And because she considers the masculine gender as the neutral one, women occupying higher functions should hence, carry a masculine appellation. Moreover, she concludes her first paragraph by saying once more, that her argumentation is based on linguistics, but also political “*common sense*”.¹⁴⁶ For the second question, (“*where are we in this process? Do we have to impose this change or to leave it to our discretion?*”) the sociologist refers to the “*absurdity and contra-productivity*” of the debate. This argument has already been underlined by many opponent to language feminisation in France. She, then, once more explains that language feminisation defenders should not imposed their ideas to others. This last argument is very short, which can give the reader the impression that Mrs. Heinich could not, or simply did not want to develop it further, which weakened her argumentation.

Danielle Bousquet, that answers the same questions as Nathalie Heinich, also directly answers her arguments. Indeed, she starts by responding to her first point with an historical reference, which is one common and founded pro-feminisation argument of the debate. She then, explains that the masculine as neutral gender for the French language is not a linguistic heritage, but rather a political one. Indeed, it results from the masculinisation process run by the French Academy during the 17th century.¹⁴⁷ She then, clearly answers Mrs Heinich’s linguistic argument, when she says that “*language is a political matter*”¹⁴⁸ and also indirectly tells her that her vision is no more universalistic, since the “neutral masculine gender” does not “*represent the entire population*”¹⁴⁹ Mrs Bousquet continues by presenting two other feminist arguments to answer the sociologist’s discourse: the absence of women in the language make them invisible in the society, and if accepting to feminise lower professions nouns is possible, why would it not be the case for higher positions? At the end of her first answer, Danielle

¹⁴⁵ “(...) *la langue française ne permet pas de dire “un personne,”* lines 8-9.

¹⁴⁶ “(...) *bon sens linguistique et (...) un certain bon sens politique,*” lines 33-34.

¹⁴⁷ Lines 39-45.

¹⁴⁸ “*le langage est politique,*” lines 47-48.

¹⁴⁹ “*L’illusion que le « neutre » représenterait l’ensemble de la population,*” line 49.

Bousquet also explains that *“those who do resist to make women visible in the language are usually those who have difficulties giving them an equal place in the society.”*¹⁵⁰ In contrast with Nathalie Heinich second answer, Danielle Bousquet develops her last arguments. In fact, she develops an argumentation that answers the last argument exposed by the sociologist. She first corrects Nathalie Heinich when she says that the idea is not to impose it, *“to act as a police force of the language”*¹⁵¹, but on the contrary, to educate the French population to gender equality. She also says that public money is not wasted here, as it is not spent on a *“sexist communication”*¹⁵², which contrast with Nathalie Heinich’s idea of feminisation as a *“contra-productive”*, and then costly practice. Finally, while explaining the benefits of a anti sexist linguistic guideline she already dismantles the argument stating that language feminisation is absurd and ridiculous. *“The polemic and railleries it provoked”*¹⁵³ does therefore, no longer make sense.

Linguistic strategy

In this interview, even if the author’s point of view is not directly expressed, some linguistic tools could betray her/his position. For instance, the choice of the questions asked to the two interviewed actors, as well as their formulation, give us a clue of the position of this almost invisible actor. Indeed, the second part of the first question is already very engaged as the author asks which are *“the resistances and difficulties (...) [language feminisation] has to confront”*¹⁵⁴. The words chosen here express that the author considers these resistances as enemies that must be faced. The second question also betrays his/her position in favour of language feminisation when she/he asks if *“this change HAS TO BE imposed by force or if we should rather leave it to our own judgement”*.¹⁵⁵ In fact, the author does not give the interviewed person the possibility to answer that the language feminisation process should stop.

Moreover, the two interviews selected here present some linguistic characteristics that betray the media position on the question (as it is the one that chose to make them appear this way). If we have a first look at Nathalie Heinich’s speech, we can notice her direct presence in her argumentation, with the use of the first-person pronoun (five times in total) and a vocabulary

¹⁵⁰ *“Ceux qui résistent à rendre les femmes visibles dans la langue sont bien souvent ceux qui ont du mal à leur faire une place à égalité dans la société,”* lines 58-60.

¹⁵¹ *“il ne s’agit pas de jouer un rôle de police du langage,”* line 83.

¹⁵² *“Communication sexist,e”* line 75.

¹⁵³ *“avoir suscité polémiques et railleries,”* lines 81-82.

¹⁵⁴ *“quelles résistances et difficultés (...) [la féminisation de la langue] doit-elle affronter?”* line 1.

¹⁵⁵ *“Faut-il imposer ce changement par la contrainte ou le laisser à notre libre appréciation?”* line 2.

that marks her stubbornness. For example: “*resolutely*”, “*I keep on*”, “*convinced*”, “*does not allow*”¹⁵⁶. She also uses a vocabulary related to war such as “*lutter*” (struggle), “*resister*” (resist), “*faire violence*” (force), “*le bon combat*” (the right fight). All these elements contribute to make her speech sound more aggressive and present her as an attacker in this debate. Furthermore, if for her first answer, she begins with the first-person pronoun, she then, speaks about “*our reticence*”. This last point emphasises the fact that she wants to speak in the name of all actors opposed to French language feminisation.

Danielle Bousquet, on the other hand, uses more generic terms and seems to speak in the name of all, when she refers to “*commonly employed*” expressions, to “*our History*” or to women of the society, “*women that cannot feel concerned*” by higher positions and “*little girls*” incapable of imagining a professional career when these professions nouns are exclusively masculine. This attitude does not only contrast with the first pronoun use of Nathalie Heinich, but also with the sociologist’s argument stating that language feminisation is going against a universalistic principle. Furthermore, the vocabulary she uses reflects the patience feminists must show to make the debate evolve and to educate French society to language feminisation. In fact, this process requires “*a lot of pedagogy*”, “*recommendations*”, “*public communication*”, “*to offer advices*”, “*to explain*”, as language feminisation is presented as “*having difficulties to give women an equal space in the society*”. Here as well, the tone contrasted with the determinant one of Nathalie Heinich. Finally, through Danielle Bousquet’s discourse which targets the one of the French Academy, *L’Humanité* presents the different arguments and possible answers in favour of language feminisation.

3. Centre-oriented Media

3.1. La Croix

La Croix is usually categorised as a centre-left oriented media. This article is an opinion column published October 18th, 2014. The author is Geneviève Jurgensen, French journalist and writer.

Dominant discourse

In this article, the author is standing against the feminisation of higher professions and functions denominations. However, her discourse is rather moderate in comparison with the one exposed in right-wing media, even if sharing the same position. In fact, she does not adopt the French Academy’s discourse, and presents her arguments in an atypical way.

¹⁵⁶ “*résolument*”, “*je m’entête*”, “*persuadé*”, “*ne permet pas,*” lines 8; 15; 16; 28.

How does the author construct her argumentation?

Surprisingly, the author begins her article with a quote of Marie Donzel's blog, feminist in favour of language feminisation. We may then, assume that *La Croix* is supporting this activist's ideas. However, after having presented the scandal opposing the two deputies (Julien Aubert and Sandrine Mazetier), she expresses her surprise, as did right-wing-oriented media previously do (*Le Figaro* and *Valeurs Actuelles*). According to Mrs. Jurgensen, Julien Aubert did not "insult" or "disrespect" Sandrine Mazetier. To support her idea, she adds that this kind of situation frequently happen at the National Assembly, but does usually not lead to any sanction.

Therefore, her first argument is that the feminisation of higher positions and functions nouns is a political debate, and she takes the scandal that involved Sandrine Mazetier and Julien Aubert as an example to illustrate her idea. In fact, she considers that the UMP deputy had not been punished for his behaviour, but rather for his thoughts. To reinforce her statement, she takes the example of a similar provocative situation that happened a year earlier, but did not involve any ideological disagreement and therefore, no sanction.

Then, it seems that Geneviève Jurgensen wrote this article to warn the reader about the possible consequences of such a reform. As a matter of fact, she explains that imposing a linguistic reform such a language feminisation would involve a reform of thoughts. This way, she affirms her position as an opponent to feminisation of higher functions nouns she also stresses the link between language and society and how they impact on each other, an argument usually used by language feminisation supporters. However, she uses this argument to denounce the danger of seeing some thoughts imposed to the French society, when she asks: "*can we accept to see [this reform] occur by ordonnance?*"¹⁵⁷

The author continues by answering the argument which stresses the advancement of the same debate in another French-speaking-region, and particularly Quebec. This argument has usually been used by language feminisation partisans, and aims at taking Quebec as a model of success France should follow. Nevertheless, as a response to this idea, Geneviève Jurgensen does not refer to the French Academy as only legitimate institution for the French language, which we have previously mentioned in this thesis (see Chapter TWO, 3.), and has been presented by language feminisation opponents in other French-speaking-regions. In fact, at no moment does the author refer to the institution in her article. She rather emphasises that Quebec and France

¹⁵⁷ "*Peut-on admettre que cela se fasse par ordonnance?*" lines 29-30.

are different regions, both free “*to do what they want*”¹⁵⁸ and even take Quebec as an example France should follow, not in terms of language feminisation, but rather as a region in which “*feminisation of titles and higher positions is not an obligation*”. In other words, her main point is that this practice should not be imposed by anyone.

Her following argument is supported by the quote she refers to at the very beginning of her article. However, her previous argument already gives the reader a clue of her disagreement with Marie Donzel. It also gives her more material to strengthen her point that then, makes it appear as more important than her previous arguments. She explains that what seemed curious to her in this quote is that “*when a fight seems ridiculous, we should simply abandon it.*” Out of context, this last sentence could have been interpreted as a pro-feminisation argument, which would answer the frequent anti-feminisation argument which qualifies the language feminisation debate and practice of ridiculous and time consuming. However, Geneviève Jurgensen explains that, on the contrary, pro-feminisation supporters, such as Marie Donzel, tend to consider the abandon of anti-feminisation defenders’ cause as the easiest and most correct way to close the debate. In fact, this is also an indirect answer to *Eliane Viennot*, who in *Libération*, defended the very same point presented on Marie Donzel’s blog. This is indeed, one pro-feminisation frequent argument.

By doing so, the author answers the possible pro-feminist response to her last argument which questions the efficiency of language feminisation, when she explains that “*nothing has yet proved its impact on the society*”.¹⁵⁹ In other words, her first comment on Marie Donzel’s quote already aimed at giving this last argument more weight.

Furthermore, if *Le Figaro* stressed the importance of gender inequalities France is still facing to make it contrast with the unimportance of language feminisation issue, *La Croix* adopts the opposite strategy to support the same point. In fact, Geneviève Jurgensen stresses the “*considerable progresses*” France has “*accomplished*”¹⁶⁰ in terms of gender equality and chooses to compare them with other regions of the world to accentuate the contrast. While doing so, she however, also underlines the absence of women in French politics, when she takes the example of the female president India has had; to whom she refers as “*président de la République*” (with the masculine form then); which is something that never occurred in France. She emphasises

¹⁵⁸ “*avant tout parce que les Québécois font ce qu’ils veulent(...)*,” line 30.

¹⁵⁹ “*rien n’indique l’efficacité concrète de la féminisation du vocabulaire sur la promotion des femmes (...)*,” lines 44-45.

¹⁶⁰ “*(...) les progrès accomplis sont considérables,*” lines 47-48.

her will to see women more visible on the French political landscape. This point illustrates her position in favour of social, but not linguistic changes, and proves that she clearly distinguishes both concepts.

To conclude, the author comes back to the specific point of the debate opposing Sandrine Mazetier to Julien Aubert in which, as in *Valeurs Actuelles*, she refers to the respect of rules, which contrast with the chaos the French National Assembly is dealing with in her text. By doing so, she underlines that feminisation defenders were, in the end at the root of this disorder.

Linguistic strategy

The title of the article already gives us a clue about the author's point of view. In fact "*Libre donc réglo*" (free and hence, legitimate) already emphasises Geneviève Jurgensen's main idea, which is that linguistic feminisation should be free, but not compulsory. The second part of this title ("*donc réglo*") could be understood as a reference to the debate opposing Sandrine Mazetier to Julien Aubert. She would here give Julien Aubert the right to use the masculine appellation to call all National Assembly members. Indeed, according to her, M. Aubert is "*free*", his reaction is therefore, "*legitimate*".

Then, to accentuate the surprise that follows the UMP deputy's sanction, the author describes the scandal as an "*incident*"¹⁶¹ and makes it contrast with the sanction, "*heavy and that led to a petition signed by a large number of colleagues from the opposition.*"¹⁶² Moreover, she qualifies Julien Aubert's behaviour as provocative (she uses the word "*provocation*" three times in one paragraph)¹⁶³ to better stress the difference between "*provocation*" and insult¹⁶⁴, that according to her, the president of the National Assemblée did not make.

Furthermore, she underlines the description of the debate as purely political and ideological by defining several times, right-wing members as members of the "*opposition*". For instance, in the first paragraph of her text, she even underlines this idea with the word "*évidemment*"¹⁶⁵ (obviously), which strengthen the fact that the use of a masculine term to call a woman could not have happened with a member of the left-wing. Furthermore, in this case, she takes the

¹⁶¹ Line 9.

¹⁶² "*La sanction (...) lourde et déclenchant une pétition signée de nombreux collègues de l'opposition,*" lines 13-14.

¹⁶³ Lines 15 and 17.

¹⁶⁴ "*on ne peut pas dire que [la provocation] était insultante,*" line 18.

¹⁶⁵ Line 10.

quote of Marie Donzel as a reference through all the text. Indeed, she always refers to the “*opposition*” without mentioning neither of the political parties. By doing so, Geneviève Jurgensen certainly considers that feminists in favour of language feminisation are sharing left-wing parties’ ideas. She also assumes that this statement is clear enough for the reader and hence, does not need any explanation.

Then, to underline the ridiculousness of the situation, the author presents National Assembly members as children, and its president as a “*wise*” actor who plays the role of a school teacher, making sure that the Assembly “*does not become a playground,*”¹⁶⁶ by keeping his students quiet. She keeps the same tone when she explains that “*reforming the language must remain a sensitive topic (...)*”¹⁶⁷. In this passage, the use of an imperative sentence gives us the impression that she dictates a rule the reader should learn. More specifically, she targets left-wing members and all pro language feminisation partisans. She continues in this sense while referring to the general debate as a “*story*”¹⁶⁸ and to Marie Donzel’s, and other pro-feminisation ideas as a “*whim*”¹⁶⁹, which here as well, makes pro-feminisation defenders appear as children, whose discourse can therefore not be taken seriously. In addition, if she supports Quebec as a model of linguistic liberty, she does however, mock their feminisation practices. In fact, she describes the Quebec website of the “*Banque de dépannage linguistique*” (banc for linguistic troubleshooting) as “*funny*”¹⁷⁰. She shows therefore, that she only defends the idea of liberty previously mentioned, but still believes that the idea of feminising higher professions words is ridiculous.

Finally, this linguistic strategy gives the text a very light tone. A tone that suddenly becomes very serious when Geneviève Jurgensen finally stops to answer the pro-feminist argument Marie Donzel’s quote carries. She refers indeed, to serious ideas such as “*rape*”, “*catastrophic situation*” and then, to politics.

¹⁶⁶ “*Le président Bartolone demanda (...) à ce que l’hémicycle ne se transforme pas en cour de récréation,*” lines 22-24.

¹⁶⁷ “*Réformer le langage doit rester un thème sensible (...),*” line 27.

¹⁶⁸ “*cette histoire,*” line 37

¹⁶⁹ “*son caprice,*” line 42

¹⁷⁰ “*comme on peut le lire sur le site rigolo de la Banque de dépannage linguistique,*” lines 34-35

Conclusion

In the first part of this thesis, we have shown that the debate of language feminisation is not only a linguistic, but rather a social and political issue. We have then, confirmed this idea while presenting the different arguments and initiatives that have been taken since the end of the 20th century. In fact, this issue seems to have faced an institutional division. The French Academy is indeed, the main opponent to language feminisation in France, which also influences other French-speaking regions, such as Belgium, and rejects more advanced regions models, such as Quebec or Switzerland. So far, initiatives in favour of language feminisation have therefore come from the governmental side only. Moreover, this debate is also facing a political division. In fact, only left side governments intended to feminise higher professions words in France.

The analytical and last part of our work has confirmed this last statement. Indeed, through the analysis of media from different political horizons, we have shown that the already existent right-left division of this feminisation debate is still observable. The French Academy, which was the main actor providing anti-feminisation defenders with arguments that support their position, still seem to carry this role. In fact, we have seen that, to defend their point of view, both right-wing and far-right-wing oriented media are mainly referring to the French Academy's authority and to the respect of French grammar rules. In addition, in the scandal that opposed Sandrine Mazetier and Julien Aubert in October 2014, the five media we analysed have presented the UMP deputy behaviour as resulting from a right-wing adherence to the French Academy's ideas. Therefore, anti-feminisation defenders remain the same as before, and so do pro-feminisation supporters. In fact, left-wing politicians and media are still defending this opinion, as well as scientists and feminist activists, such as Eliane Viennot. However, the media *l'Humanité* has clearly shown that there is still a division between pro- and anti-feminisation defenders on the scientific side.

Then, in right-wing media, we mainly found the French Academy's arguments. Nevertheless, the one that seems to be underlined the most in both right-wing media and *La Croix*, which is centre-oriented but does position itself against language feminisation, is the ridiculousness of the debate itself. This argument is not one that has clearly been underlined by the French Academy; even if, as we have seen it in this thesis, the institution has mocked and rejected other French speaking regions' feminisation practices; it has so far, rather emphasised the uselessness of feminising professions words, as it considers masculine as the neutral gender of

the French language. Another idea that was to be found in anti-feminisation discourses is the concept of a “left-feminism”. This distinction between right and left-feminism has two main objectives. First, it supports that anti-language-feminisation defenders are non-sexist or anti-feminist people. In fact, some of these actors are still revendicating a feminist point of view and hence, stress the distinction between right feminism, to which they only refer as “feminism”, and left feminism. Secondly, this distinction also aims at showing the unimportance of this language issue. In fact, left feminism approaches are described as an inefficient way of dealing with feminist issues. According to *Le Figaro*, *Valeurs Actuelles*, and *La Croix*, we have seen that “left feminists” do not deal with critical gender issues, but rather concentrate on trivial ones to avoid facing reality. The French feminisation debate is then, taken as an illustration of this idea. This argument reinforces the first one, which presents language feminisation debate as ridiculous, useless and time consuming. Moreover, most right-wing media accompany this idea with moralistic arguments. In fact, not only would left feminism endanger French language, but also the society’s values. This echoes right-wing conservatism and highlights once more, the political division of the debate. Finally, one important argument that has been underlined by language feminisation opponents in French popular media, is that feminising higher positions nouns should not be imposed by anyone, but this practice should rather be free. This argument is usually illustrated by the sanction deputy Julien Aubert received for having used a masculine term to call a female deputy.

Left media, on the contrary, present pro-feminisation arguments. Along with their liberal views, these actors express the need to make the French society evolve and to adapt its official language to its reality (in this case, the access of women to higher positions). Their main idea is then, that people rejecting this necessary evolution need to understand the importance and relevance of feminising higher functions and professions terms. Through the presentation of historical facts, that prove the sexism of the French Academy, main actor against language feminisation, but also that feminised version of higher positions words already existed and would hence, not be too difficult to reintroduce, pro-feminisation defenders support their position. Indeed, as feminisation opponents tend to find their main arguments in the one of the language institution, dismantling their arguments and proving its inefficiency, would prevent other actors from following its ideas. As a matter of fact, pro-feminisation defenders, seem to consider this language issue as a less political and ideological (which is rather a right-wing idea) than an institutional one.

Moreover, the analysis of the different media has enabled us to reveal a continues dialogue between both camps (pro- and anti- language feminisation supporters). All actors of the debate are taking past events and argumentations into consideration, but are also updating the debate arguments and adapting them to today's situation. In fact, most articles we analysed are opinion columns, which leave actors engaged in the question of language feminisation, free to expose their point of view and answer each other. If after Jospin's Commission, popular media reinforced the government discourse, and therefore spoke in favour of it (mainly by using new feminine forms while referring to women occupying higher functions), they now seem, to play a mediator role. Indeed, the fact that most of them do not ask their own journalists to present their opinion on the question highlights this idea. In addition, it seems that all actors engaged in this debate are trying to prove there is only one truth and their opinion is the only right one. In other words, all of them are clearly engaged in the debate. Surprisingly, even *La Croix*, centre-oriented media does not present a moderate opinion but clearly expresses its disagreement with the feminisation of higher professions words. Only the way it presents its arguments remain moderate. As a matter of fact, the analysis of the linguistic strategy used in the different media has confirmed this idea. Most actors are playing a "teacher-students" game, which aim is to educate defenders of the opposite opinion. On the one hand, the French Academy is qualified by pro-feminisation supporters as incompetent and sexist, and on the other hand, left politicians and feminists are accused by anti-feminisation defenders of creating disorder, being incapable of following rules, and inventing new issues that are not of high importance.

In any case, it seems that the scandal we analysed, that opposed Julien Aubert and Sandrine Mazetier was taken as an example for both camps, to criticise each other's opinion. For right-partisans more particularly, it serves as an illustration to denounce an ideological debate. In other words, they consider the debate as political only, and do not take its social aspect into account. Consequently, the use of language modification to positively impact on French society is then, hardly imaginable as it is incompatible with their thoughts. As a matter of fact, we have seen that right-wing- and centre-oriented media position themselves against the feminisation of higher positions terms and hence, in favour of the French Academy's opinion. Therefore, it seems that language feminisation is still hard to be accepted in France. In fact, as at the beginning of the 20th century, does the French Academy still has authority over France official language, and has not changed its opinion towards this linguistic debate. Moreover, we have shown that now, only do left-wing media support this language evolution. However, this

analysis also proved that even if the debate seems to stagnate, it is still alive, as most popular French media seem to be willing to take part in it. Furthermore, the degree of engagement of both camps today, in comparison with the absence of reaction the debate generated 30 years ago (with *Commission Groult*), demonstrates the increase of importance the issue has faced.

Finally, our results are still facing some limits, mainly due to space restriction. In fact, to better evaluate the opinion of centre-oriented media, it would be relevant to analyse some other articles from different centre popular media. Moreover, to understand if it is still hard for France to accept language modifications in favour of gender equality, we could analyse the impact of these media discourses on the French society. Indeed, this could be done through interviews with the general public, or an analysis of social media. Another idea, to underline the progress of this sociolinguistic debate, would be to carry the same analysis as the one we did in this thesis, with articles which have been released after Jospin's Commission and to compare them to the present analysis.

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Annex 1

Le Figaro : «Madame LE président» : quand le ridicule tue le féminisme¹⁷¹

- Par Lydia Guirous
- Publié le 07/10/2014 à 18:19



FIGAROVOX/TRIBUNE - Le député UMP Julien Aubert a été sanctionné financièrement après avoir appelé la présidente de séance à l'Assemblée nationale «Madame le président». Pour Lydia Guirous, cette affaire discrédite une nouvelle fois le féminisme de gauche.

Lydia Guirous est la fondatrice du club «Future, au féminin» et Secrétaire Nationale du Parti Radical en charge de la lutte contre les discriminations et les Droits des Femmes.

¹⁷¹Lydia Guirous, ““Madame LE president” : quand le ridicule tue le féminisme,” *Le Figaro*, October 7th, 2014, accessed May 14th, 2017. <http://www.valeursactuelles.com/politique/sandrine-mazetier-ne-supporte-pas-quon-lappelle-madame-le-president-et-sanctionne-un>

Le député UMP [Julien Aubert](#) s'est fait rappeler à l'ordre lundi 4 octobre à l'Assemblée pour s'obstiner à appeler la présidente de séance Madame LE président lors des débats sur le projet de loi sur la transition énergétique. La socialiste [Sandrine Mazetier](#), Présidente de séance lui demandait de respecter la présidence et le règlement de l'Assemblée en l'appelant «Madame LA présidente», Aubert répondait qu'il ne faisait que suivre «l'Académie française» en disant «Madame le président».

Résultats des courses: rappel à l'ordre avec inscription au PV qui entraînera la privation d'un quart de son indemnité pendant un mois, en application du Règlement de l'Assemblée!

Mme Mazetier n'en fait-elle pas un peu trop ? On retrouve bien là les socialistes et leur tolérance !

On croit rêver... Certes les députés doivent montrer l'exemple...certes les députés doivent appliquer les lois qu'ils votent...certes. Mais quand même, Mme Mazetier n'en fait-elle pas un peu trop? On retrouve bien là les socialistes et leur tolérance! Quelque chose déplaît au sein de la pensée unique de l'égalitarisme et hop...on sanctionne. La police politique tranche les têtes et Mme Mazetier en bon petit bolchevik de la parité exécute le turbulent Julien Aubert...sans doute pour se faire bien voir de son mentor féministe [Najat Vallaud Belkacem](#). C'est marrant cet empressement!... Les socialistes ont mis plus de temps pour aller taper au portefeuille de Cahuzac et Thevenoud...

Mais quel est donc ce féminisme de supermarché que la gauche fait bouillir dans sa marmite depuis des années avec la complicité d'associations comme Osez le féminisme? Quel est donc ce féministe qui trouve normal le port du voile, qui est pourtant le marqueur le plus visible de l'inégalité homme-femme? Rappelez-vous la mascarade autour de la suppression de la case mademoiselle des formulaires administratifs prise par Mme Bachelot sous la pression des associations féministes de gauche...Mesdames, vous ne vous souvenez plus? Cela n'a pas changé radicalement votre vie? Les fameux Madame la Procureure, la professeure, la cheffe de cabinet, n'ont pas eu un impact sur votre vie professionnelle et sociale? Curieux...

Certes il est plus facile de communiquer sur ce genre de sujets stériles. Il est aussi plus facile d'apporter des solutions à des sujets qui ne posent pas de problèmes... Mais tout de même, est-ce cela l'engagement politique et associatif, enfoncer des portes ouvertes avec des fonds publics? Est-ce cela que les Français et les Françaises attendent de nos leaders d'opinion et de nos représentants? Nous ont-ils pris pour des imbéciles en nous faisant croire que la féminisation du champ lexical des métiers faisait d'eux les nouveaux croisés de la parité?

L'heure du bilan a sonné: la parité en politique a échoué, les inégalités salariales ont diminué mais demeurent réelles et les violences faites aux femmes subsistent et même augmentent. Les Français et les Françaises ne sont plus dupes et ne se laissent plus charmer par les coups de communication de rue comme la «Marche des salopes», le «mademoiselle», ou «Osez le clito!». Bien sûr, il faut corriger les inégalités homme-femme, les inégalités salariales, la question de la parité en politique, les violences faites aux femmes. Personne ne peut nier ces évidences et tout le monde doit s'engager dans ces combats. En revanche, il faut s'indigner de cette moralisation, à pas feutrés, de notre société

Les mouvements féministes de gauche ou altermondialistes rêvent d'une société lissée, asexuée, aseptisée. Le message est le suivant: les hommes ne doivent pas être trop virils et les femmes ne doivent pas être trop féminines. Vive la société asexuée et androgyne! Et pour réaliser un tel miracle, elles appellent les pouvoirs publics à intervenir dans la vie privée et dans le goût des personnes.

Bien sûr, il faut corriger les inégalités homme-femme, les inégalités salariales, la question de la parité en politique, les violences faites aux femmes. Personne ne peut nier ces évidences et tout le monde doit s'engager dans ces combats, les hommes comme les femmes. En revanche, il faut s'indigner rapidement de cette moralisation, à pas feutrés, de notre société: obligation de nier les différences de genre, contrôle du contenu des programmes scolaires, contrôle de l'humour,

contrôle des pratiques sexuelles (campagne «Osez le clito!»...), contrôle de la répartition des tâches domestiques au sein du couple, contrôle et sanction des écarts de langage relatifs à la féminisation des fonctions à l'Assemblée...

Pour moi, le lissage des différences de genre, de culture et l'émergence du fantasme d'une «communauté lisse de ses différences» est stupide et dangereux, car il masque une idéologie puissante et moralisatrice qui a pour ambition d'encadrer la liberté individuelle. Le féminisme ne doit pas être un bras armé de cette idéologie moralisatrice de la société. Il doit rester une idéologie de proposition, d'action, de construction d'une société plus juste et plus équitable.

Valeurs Actuelles

Marion Maréchal-Le Pen : "Je me fais appeler Madame LE Député"¹⁷²

Mercredi 8 octobre 2014 à 16:50



Decription: *Marion Maréchal Le-Pen invite les féministes de gauche à respecter la grammaire française. Photo © AFP*

Idéologie. *Le député UMP Julien Aubert s'est fait rappeler à l'ordre lundi 4 octobre au soir à l'Assemblée nationale, lors des débats sur la loi de transition énergétique. Son tort ? Avoir appelé le président de séance Sandrine Mazetier «madame LE président» au lieu de «madame LA présidente», comme elle l'aurait souhaité. Dans l'ordre d'arrivée du comité central du*

¹⁷² "Marion-Maréchal-Le Pen: "Je me fais appeler Madame LE Député,"" *Valeurs Actuelles*, October 8th, 2014, accessed May 14th, 2017. <http://www.valeursactuelles.com/politique/marion-marechal-le-pen-je-me-fais-appeler-madame-le-depute>

FN, Marion Maréchal-Le Pen est entête, suivi de Louis Alliot, Steeve Briois, Florian Filippot, Bruo Gollnish, Walleyrand de Saint-Just et de Stéphane Ravier.

Sandrine Mazetier n'aime pas qu'on l'appelle "madame LE président". Elle n'aime pas non plus la grammaire française. Le député UMP Julien Aubert en a fait les frais: il va se voir enlever une partie de son enveloppe parlementaire.

Ce rappel à l'ordre avec inscription au procès-verbal entraîne la privation d'un quart de son indemnité parlementaire pendant un mois pour le député du Vaucluse, soit environ 1400€ en moins.

Julien Aubert s'est défendu en expliquant respecter l'Académie française en disant «*Madame le président*». Avec ce rappel à l'ordre, le député n'a plus dit «*madame le président*» mais a continué à dire «*madame le ministre*» en parlant de Ségolène Royal.

Marion Maréchal Le-Pen "*sidérée*"

Marion Maréchal-Le Pen a été « *sidérée* » par la sanction infligée à son collègue UMP (et opposant local) Julien Aubert, pour avoir appelé « *madame le président* » la députée PS Sandrine Mazetier. « *Je me fais appeler "madame le député" pour respecter la grammaire et parce qu'il faut éviter la confusion entre la personne et la fonction, explique-t-elle. Les gauchistes en ont fait un étendard de leur pseudo-lutte contre le sexisme, et il n'y a pas de petite résistance !* »

TRIBUNE

Libération

« Mme le Président » : l'Académie persiste et signe... mollement¹⁷³

Par Eliane Viennot, Historienne, cofondatrice de la Société internationale pour l'étude des femmes de l'Ancien Régime (Siefar) — 23 octobre 2014 à 19:06

- «Mme le Président» : l'Académie persiste et signe... mollement

Qu'ils aient ou non appelé l'Académie française à leur secours, le député Julien Aubert (1) et les 140 signataires de la pétition soutenant ses incivilités ont dû être bien déçus à la lecture de la « mise au point » publiée le 10 octobre par les Quarante. Celle-ci commence, en effet, par une déclaration de bienveillance envers les nouveaux termes féminins, et elle se termine par une absolution générale : que chacun-e fasse à sa guise, respecte l'autre et aille en paix. Entre les deux, pourtant, l'Académie réaffirme ses dogmes - et redonne vie à des arguments aujourd'hui connus pour n'avoir aucun fondement. Cette affaire et la collection de perles qu'elle nous vaut, depuis quelques semaines, appellent quelques commentaires.

L'assemblée aime à rappeler les « missions » qui lui ont été confiées en 1634, à l'initiative de Richelieu : « *Donner des règles certaines à notre langue [...] la rendre pure, éloquente et capable de traiter les arts et les sciences.* » Précisons que le cardinal ministre cédait alors à la demande d'un groupe de lettrés réfléchissant depuis plusieurs décennies à la langue française. Et ajoutons qu'il y avait parmi eux une femme : Marie de Gournay, autrice (entre autres) de traités sur la langue, évidemment écartée lors de la fondation de l'Académie. On sait qu'elle attendra 347 ans avant d'accueillir la première, Marguerite Yourcenar.

On sait moins qu'à l'heure actuelle, l'Académie ne compte aucun-e linguiste, aucun-e agrégé de grammaire, aucun-e historien-ne de la langue. Si elle voulait, à nouveau, être prise au sérieux, elle devrait commencer par se donner les moyens de remplir correctement la mission dont elle est si fière - même si cette mission pourrait être remplie, à

¹⁷³ Eliane Viennot, «“Madame le Président” : l'Académie persiste et signe... mollement,» *Libération*, October 23rd, 2014, accessed May 14th, 2017. http://www.liberation.fr/chroniques/2014/10/31/le-masculin-et-le-feminin_1133582

moindres frais, par n'importe quelle commission d'universitaires spécialisés habillé-es normalement. Elle devrait aussi éviter de se dire «gardienne» de la langue, ce pour quoi personne ne l'a missionnée.

Passons au fond. L'Académie se fait une gloire d'accueillir régulièrement de nouveaux noms de métiers féminins. Elle se félicite ainsi d'avoir enregistré *avocate* en 1935 ; le mot était pourtant couramment employé sous l'Ancien Régime, y compris par nos meilleurs poètes. Elle s'insurge contre les désinences féminines introduites depuis trente ou quarante ans, comme «*professeuse, recteure, sapeuse-pompière, auteure, ingénieure, procureure, etc. pour ne rien dire de chercheure, qui sont contraires aux règles ordinaires de dérivation*». Rien de plus juste. Mais si l'assemblée avait rempli sa mission, elle aurait signifié, en temps et en heure, qu'une partie de ces mots avaient des féminins depuis des lustres (*autrice, procureuse, professeuse, chercheuse*). Qu'une autre partie était facilement déclinable au féminin dans le respect des règles de dérivation (*rectrice*). Et que les terminaisons en *eure* sont parfaitement acceptables lorsque rien de plus ordinaire ne se propose, vu qu'elles sont attestées dans des centaines de documents notariés ou historiques de l'ancienne France (*seigneure, possesseure...*). Quant à *sapeuse-pompière*, on ne voit pas bien au nom de quoi ces messieurs-dames s'y opposent.

Le masculin peut-il être neutre ? L'Académie, s'avérant incapable de faire son travail, répète donc la plaisanterie du «*masculin à valeur générique ou non marqué*», pour les cas où des noms s'avéreraient «*rebelle à la féminisation*» ; cas que, dans sa grande bonté, elle veut bien dire rares. Les grammairiens masculinistes ont pourtant longtemps recopié des listes entières de mots *ne devant pas être déclinés au féminin*. «*Il faut dire cette femme est poète, est philosophe, est médecin, est auteur, est peintre ; et non poétesse, philosopheuse, médecine, autrice, peintresse, etc.*» écrivait ainsi Andry de Boisregard (*Réflexions sur l'usage présent de la langue françoise*, 1689). Preuve, évidemment, qu'on utilisait ces mots autour d'eux. Rappelons surtout qu'aucun mot n'est *rebelle à la féminisation*, parce que les mots dérivent d'une *racine* et non d'une forme masculine à laquelle il faudrait couper ou ajouter quelque chose. A partir de n'importe quelle racine, le français est apte à faire des substantifs des deux genres, des formes verbales, des adjectifs, des adverbes. Enfin, il faut le répéter : le masculin est le masculin, qu'on le veuille ou non. De la même manière, on a longtemps essayé de nous faire croire que la masculinité de

la représentation nationale n'était pas grave, que les députés représentaient la nation tout entière.

Du reste, les affirmations péremptoires et les arguments d'autorité surgissent dès que cette «thèse» est défendue, en lieu et place des arguments scientifiques. Comme il n'y a pas de neutre en français, soutient l'Académie (avec raison), *«pour désigner les qualités communes aux deux sexes, il a donc fallu qu'à l'un des deux genres soit conférée une valeur générique afin qu'il puisse neutraliser la différence entre les sexes»*. Mais pourquoi aurait-on besoin de le faire ? Le général de Gaulle aurait-il eu tort de commencer ses discours par *«Françaises, Français»* ? Et comment se fait-il, si tant est qu'il faille choisir entre le masculin et le féminin, que le sort tombe toujours sur le masculin ? Les linguistes qui ont œuvré pour que ce soit le cas étaient plus francs que ceux d'aujourd'hui : parce que *«le genre masculin, étant le plus noble, doit prédominer toutes les fois que le masculin et le féminin se trouvent ensemble»*, stipulait Vaugelas en 1647 (*Remarques sur la langue française*). Peut-on être plus clair ?

Quant aux arguments d'autorité : *«L'héritage latin a opté pour le masculin»*, dit la coquine, qui n'ose pas dire que *«le latin avait opté pour le masculin»* (quelques-uns de ses membres doivent savoir qu'il n'en n'est rien). De qui parle-t-elle, alors ? Il faut le dire à sa place : des grammairiens qui, à partir des années 1630, ont décidé que le français devait être réformé, c'est-à-dire masculinisé. Et qui ont parfois, eux aussi, fait semblant d'agir au nom du latin (quand cela les arrangeait).

Autre poudre aux yeux : les *«professeurs Georges Dumézil et Claude Lévi-Strauss, à qui la Compagnie avait confié la rédaction de [sa Déclaration de 1984], ont produit un texte si magnifique qu'il a été «adopté à l'unanimité»*. Belles preuves ! On ne sache pas que Dumézil et Lévi-Strauss aient été des spécialistes de la langue française. Qu'ils aient été applaudis n'a rien d'étonnant, mais rien de concluant non plus.

Enfin, l'Académie cherche à effrayer : *«Des changements, faits de propos délibéré dans un secteur, peuvent avoir sur les autres des répercussions insoupçonnées. Ils risquent de mettre la confusion et le désordre dans un équilibre subtil né de l'usage.»* Certes. Mais ce ne sont pas les féministes qui, du XVII^e au XX^e siècle, ont cherché à introduire dans la langue française, *des changements faits de propos délibéré*. Ce sont des lettrés partisans de la domination masculine, qui voulaient la voir régner jusque dans la langue. Ce sont eux qui ont répété qu'il fallait oublier les

anciens usages. Ce sont eux qui ont rendu possibles des énoncés comme «*le président est enceinte*».

La vraie règle. Venons-en pour finir au cœur de l'affaire en cours. Faut-il dire «Madame le» ? On attend en vain la réponse. Vrai barbarisme, pourtant. Faute de se prononcer sur ce point, l'Académie reprend son habituel couplet sur les noms de fonction qui seraient «neutres», et, comme il n'y a pas de neutre en français, masculins.

Il faut ici rappeler *la vraie règle*, énoncée en 1607 par Charles Maupas : «*Tout nom concernant office d'homme est de genre masculin, et tout nom concernant la femme est féminin.*» (*Grammaire française, contenant règles très certaines...*) Règle répétée par Antoine Oudin en 1632 : «*Tous les noms de dignités et d'offices appartenants à l'homme sont masculins : pape, évêque, empereur, roi, comte, conseiller, avocat, procureur, licencié, marchand, etc.*» De même, sont féminins les noms «*d'offices et conditions appartenantes aux femmes : reine, comtesse, duchesse, abbesse, nonne, conseillère, barbière*» (*Grammaire française rapportée au langage du temps*). Voilà donc quel était l'usage avant les interventions des masculinistes. On remarquera, au passage, que les participes présents s'accordaient aussi, à cette époque, et que la règle du «*genre le plus noble*» n'avait pas encore été inventée (*appartenants* s'accorde avec *offices*, *appartenantes* avec *conditions*).

L'affirmation selon laquelle «*il convient [...] de distinguer des noms de métiers les termes désignant des fonctions officielles et les titres correspondants*» ne repose donc sur rien. La différence faite ici entre métiers et fonctions est d'ailleurs récente ; au XIX^e siècle encore, c'est bien sur les noms de métiers que les masculinistes campaient. C'est ainsi que Bescherelle stipulait en 1834 : «*Quoiqu'il y ait un grand nombre de femmes qui professent, qui gravent, qui composent, qui traduisent, etc. on ne dit pas professeuse, graveuse, compositrice, traductrice, etc. mais bien professeur, graveur, compositeur, traducteur, etc. par la raison que ces mots n'ont été inventés que pour les hommes qui exercent ces professions.*» Obligés de céder sur les noms de métiers, les masculinistes s'accrochent donc désormais désespérément aux noms de fonctions - surtout celles qui se sont ouvertes aux femmes en 1945, et qui constituaient leurs derniers monopoles. Mais ont-ils songé que si l'on doit dire «M^{me} le Président» à Sandrine Mazetier, alors il faut le dire à toute cheffe d'Etat ? Et «M^{me} le roi» à la reine d'Angleterre ? et «M^{me} le

chancelier» à M^{me} Merkel ? et «M^{me} le baron» à la baronne de Rothschild ? On les attend de pied ferme.

Ils vont donc devoir céder là aussi, quel que soit leur dépit de voir se multiplier les *députées*, les *sénatrices*, les *présidentes*, les *conseillères*, les *générales*, les *colonelles*, les *lieutenantes*... sans parler des *officières* et des *chevalières* de la Légion d'honneur, qui ont aussi tendance à se multiplier depuis quelque temps ; voire les *Immortelles*. Faudra-t-il, encore, attendre un siècle ou deux pour que tout cela paraisse normal aux Quarante ? Et aux hommes politiques, qui se jettent sur cette polémique comme s'ils n'avaient rien de mieux à faire ?

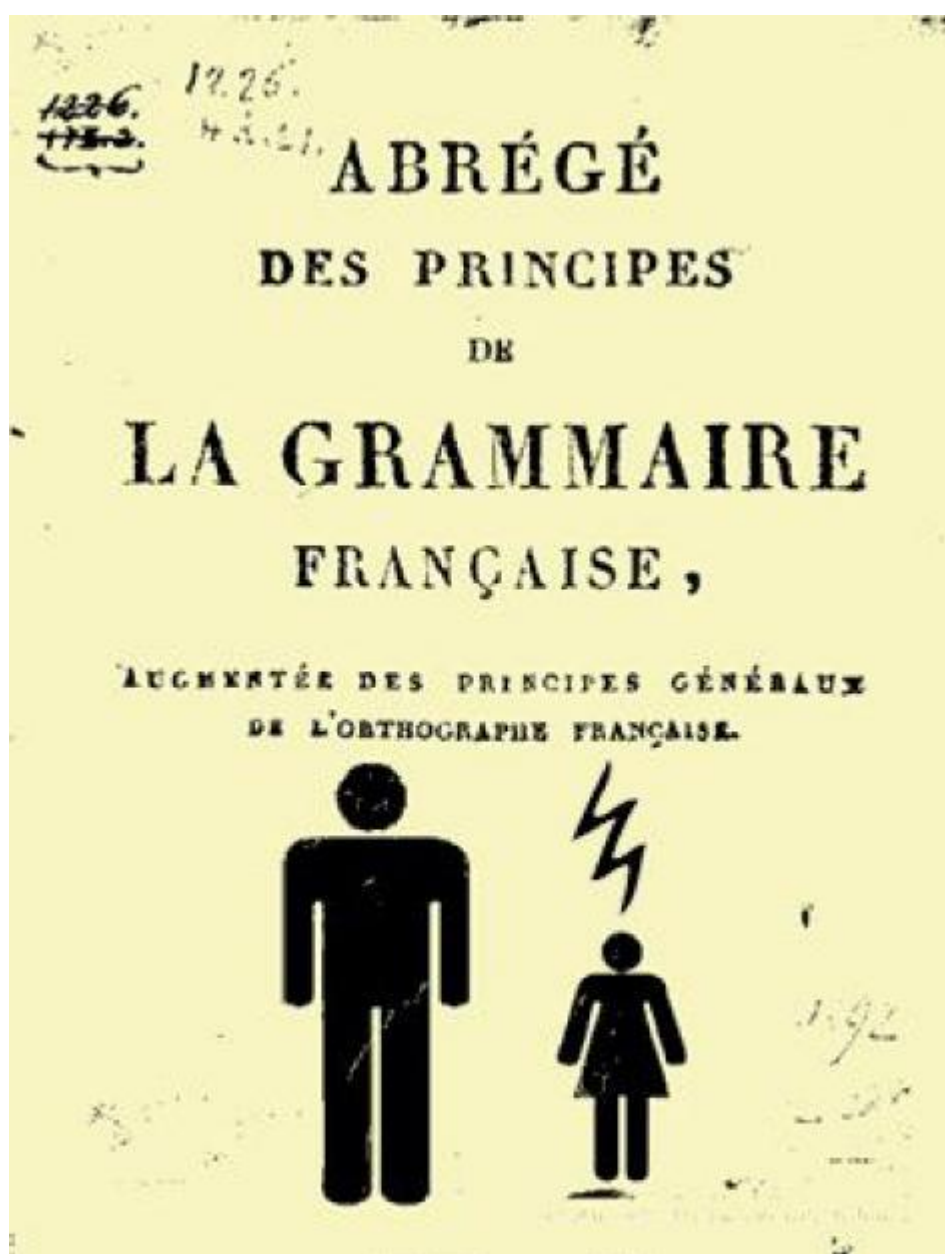
Créatrice de deux collections, «la Cité des dames» et «l'Ecole du genre», aux Publications de l'université de Saint -Etienne, afin de diffuser les recherches sur l'histoire des femmes et du genre

Dernier livre paru : «Non, le masculin ne l'emporte pas sur le féminin ! Petite histoire des résistances de la langue française», éditions IXE, 2014.
(1) Début octobre, il a refusé de dire «Madame la présidente» à Sandrine Mazetier qui présidait la séance à l'Assemblée nationale.

[Eliane Viennot Historienne, cofondatrice de la Société internationale pour l'étude des femmes de l'Ancien Régime \(Siefar\)](#)

Faut-il féminiser la langue française ?¹⁷⁴

Entretiens croisés réalisés par Nicolas Dutent Vendredi, 22 Janvier, 2016



¹⁷⁴ "Faut-il féminiser la langue française?" *L'Humanité*, January 22nd, 2016, accessed May 14th, 2017. <http://www.humanite.fr/faut-il-feminiser-la-langue-francaise-596557>

Nathalie Heinich, sociologue, directeur de recherche au CNRS et Danielle Bousquet, présidente du Haut Conseil à l'Égalité entre les femmes et les hommes.

Que désigne-t-on par « féminisation de la langue » ? Sur quelles motivations repose-t-elle et, a contrario, quelles résistances et difficultés (notamment pratiques) doit-elle affronter ?



Nathalie HEINICH Pourquoi « directeur de recherche » au CNRS et non pas « directrice » ? C'est que je résiste à la féminisation de la langue française. Non que je sois antiféministe, loin de là – je suis résolument antisexiste. Mais le féminisme ne se réduit pas à la visée « différentialiste », qui affirme la spécificité du féminin pour lutter contre les discriminations sexistes. Le féminisme devrait avoir bien plutôt une visée « universaliste », qui passe par la suspension de la différence des sexes dans les contextes professionnel ou civique, où elle n'est pas pertinente, car l'on y exerce une fonction indépendante de la personne qui l'exerce. C'est pourquoi je m'entête à dire « madame le ministre », « madame le maire », persuadée que c'est lorsqu'on ne prendra plus en compte le sexe dans les fonctions professionnelles ou publiques que l'on sera vraiment sorti du sexisme. Nous avons la malchance d'avoir, avec le français, une langue où le neutre n'existe pas, mais la chance d'en avoir un usage qui peut faire du masculin une forme de neutre. Certes, c'est là l'héritage d'une conception hiérarchique où le masculin peut englober les deux sexes (comme avec le mot « homme », qui désigne soit une personne de sexe masculin, soit un être humain) ; mais faut-il vraiment, pour tenter d'effacer cette hiérarchie, faire violence tant aux fondements de la linguistique, qui nous a appris qu'un mot ne reflète pas l'objet qu'il désigne (et n'a donc pas à accorder le genre grammatical avec le sexe, lorsqu'il y en a un) qu'aux règles de la langue française, qui ne permet pas de dire « un » personne, « un » vigie, « un » sentinelle s'il s'agit d'un homme, ou « une » mannequin s'il s'agit d'une femme ? Notre réticence spontanée à des néologismes tels que « une auteure », « une professeure », « une maîtresse de conférences », exprime à la fois le bon sens linguistique et, je l'espère aussi, un certain bon sens politique, qui ne place pas le féminisme dans l'affirmation tous azimuts du féminin, mais dans l'affirmation du droit à ne pas être perçu(e) et traité(e) en fonction de son sexe lorsqu'il n'y a pas lieu.



Danielle BOUSQUET Il ne s'agit pas de « féminiser la langue », puisque le genre grammatical féminin existe déjà, mais de renforcer l'usage du féminin, trop peu ou plus usité. Le masculin ne l'a pas toujours emporté sur le féminin et les titres, métiers et dignités ont été très communément employés au féminin et au masculin dans la majeure partie de notre histoire. Si des membres de l'Académie française ont préconisé, au XVIIe siècle, que ce soit désormais le masculin qui l'emporte, c'est parce qu'ils estimaient que « le masculin est plus noble que le féminin ». L'usage de la langue n'est donc pas immuable au cours du temps et fait aussi l'objet de rapports de forces et d'évolutions. Autrement dit, le langage est politique. L'usage de la langue française repose aujourd'hui sur l'illusion que le « neutre » représenterait l'ensemble de la population. Or, comment des femmes peuvent-elles se sentir concernées quand elles entendent parler, à longueur de journée, des « hommes politiques » ou des « citoyens » ? Comment des petites filles peuvent-elles se projeter dans un métier si elles ne l'ont jamais entendu que conjugué au masculin ? Aujourd'hui, il est intéressant de constater que l'usage du féminin est très répandu pour certains métiers, alors que des blocages persistent pour les fonctions synonymes de pouvoir : directeur, maire, médecin, député..., pour ne prendre que ces exemples. Ceux qui résistent à rendre les femmes visibles dans la langue sont bien souvent ceux qui ont du mal à leur faire une place à égalité dans la société.

Où en est-on de ce processus ? Faut-il imposer ce changement par la contrainte ou le laisser à notre libre appréciation ?

Nathalie HEINICH On aura compris que la féminisation systématique de la langue française me paraît à la fois absurde et contre-productive. Que ceux ou celles qui veulent à tout prix la pratiquer le fassent, s'ils persistent à croire que c'est le bon combat – mais de grâce, qu'ils ne prétendent pas l'imposer, et surtout pas au nom du féminisme !

Danielle BOUSQUET Lutter contre les stéréotypes de sexe requiert beaucoup de pédagogie, c'est un travail de longue haleine, puisqu'ils sont prégnants dans tous les domaines. Le Haut Conseil à l'Égalité a rendu

public, le 5 novembre dernier, un Guide pratique pour une communication publique sans stéréotypes de sexe. Nous estimons que l'argent public ne doit pas contribuer à financer une communication sexiste, c'est pourquoi nous nous adressons prioritairement aux collectivités locales et aux services de l'État. Élaboré en partenariat avec des linguistes, des professionnel.le.s de la communication et des fonctionnaires, ce guide a été pensé comme un outil pratique qui donne des exemples de stéréotypes dans les images, à la tribune de colloques et dans l'usage de la langue. Cette dernière recommandation est la seule à avoir suscité polémiques et railleries, preuve que les résistances sont nombreuses. Pourtant, là encore, il ne s'agit pas de jouer un rôle de police de langage mais bien d'expliquer, d'apporter des conseils et de montrer que la langue contribue, elle aussi, à reproduire et justifier les inégalités entre les femmes et les hommes. User du féminin dans la langue est, au contraire, un instrument central pour avancer vers l'égalité.

La Croix

Libre donc réglo¹⁷⁵

JURGENSEN Geneviève, le 18/10/2014 à 0h00

« Pour ceux et celles qui trouvent la féminisation des titres ”ridicule” et dérisoire, il est une façon logique et directe de renvoyer ce sujet au peu de cas qu'elles et ils veulent en faire: cesser de se battre contre. »

Ces lignes sont signées Marie Donzel, chève d'entreprise et auteure comme elle l'écrit et l'orthographe elle-même sur son blog (1). La cause en question est celle de la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres et fonctions. Et la note, publiée le week-end dernier, commente bien sûr l'incident qui eut lieu à l'Assemblée nationale, quand un député du Vaucluse (et surtout de l'opposition, évidemment) insista pour interpellier l'un des six vice-présidents, une femme en l'occurrence, en l'appelant « madame le Président ».

La sanction financière qui s'ensuivit –lourde et déclenchant une pétition signée de nombreux collègues de l'opposition– me surprit. Non que la provocation ne fût évidente. Mais le débat vif, et même la provocation, sont fréquents dans les parlements d'États démocratiques, et les sanctions heureusement sont rares. En l'espèce, la provocation était idéologique, on ne peut pas dire qu'elle était insultante, ni même entachée de manque de respect.

Quelle différence avec, par exemple, certains députés, de l'opposition eux aussi, imitant la poule, le 8 octobre 2013, pendant qu'une députée écologiste s'exprimait sur la réforme des retraites! Le président Bartolone demanda qu'on s'en tienne aux idées à défendre et que l'hémicycle ne se transforme pas en cour de récréation. Et il ordonna une suspension de séance d'une minute pour laisser le temps aux esprits de se calmer. Sage réaction à mon sens, qui remit tout le monde à sa place.

Réformer le langage doit rester un thème sensible parce que, sous couvert d'ajouter un e par-ci par-là et de défendre la cause des femmes, il s'agit évidemment de réformer la pensée. Peut-on

¹⁷⁵ Geneviève Jurgensen, “Libre donc réglo,” *La Croix*, October 18th, 2014, accessed May 14th, 2014. <http://www.la-croix.com/Archives/2014-10-18/Libre-donc-reglo-2014-10-18-1223357>

admettre que cela se fasse par ordonnance? Asséner que les Québécois écrivent chève et gouverneure n'a pas de sens. Avant tout parce que les Québécois font ce qu'ils veulent et nous aussi, accessoirement parce que, même au Québec, la féminisation des noms de titres et métiers n'a rien d'obligatoire, comme on peut le lire sur le site rigolo de la Banque de dépannage linguistique, sous l'égide de l'honorable Office québécois de la langue française (2).

Mais dans cette histoire, et particulièrement dans la citation du blog que je partage ci-dessus, ce qui m'a troublée, c'est l'idée que, lorsqu'un combat semble ridicule, il suffit de l'abandonner. On notera en effet que l'auteur du blog suggère l'abandon aux seuls défenseurs du statu quo. À ce train, il suffirait dans tout désaccord que l'un fasse de son caprice une cause, l'autre estimant qu'il n'y a pas de quoi fouetter un chat, pour que le premier l'emporte automatiquement. Ça nous emmènerait loin.

De toute façon, rien n'indique l'efficacité concrète de la féminisation du vocabulaire sur la promotion des femmes ni sur le respect de leur personne dans la vie quotidienne. Les femmes ne sont pas les égales des hommes, même en France où pourtant les progrès accomplis sont considérables, et leur situation est catastrophique dans bien des régions du monde. Mais, même dans ces régions, elle peut être complexe. Le viol en Inde est par exemple un problème national et le mariage des jeunes filles avant leur majorité (18 ans) reste l'usage fréquent, mais une femme y fut premier ministre dès 1966, puis à nouveau en 1980, et plus récemment une autre y fut président de la République, ce dont nous ne pouvons pas nous vanter. Au Pakistan voisin, les contrastes sont tels qu'on ne saurait non plus simplifier la question, si ce n'est pour souligner que l'enjeu, national, est loin de diviser la population de façon manichéenne (3).

La sanction sera-t-elle appliquée contre le député du Vaucluse? La vice-présidente s'appuyait, au perchoir, sur le règlement de l'Assemblée nationale. La féminisation des noms de fonctions et métiers ne semble pourtant pas y figurer. J'estime pour ma part que, particulièrement au Palais-Bourbon, défendre le règlement, tout le règlement et rien que le règlement, est une cause importante pour la liberté de tous. J'espère que ce sera le cas.

(1) blog.francetvinfo.fr/ladies-and-gentlemen/ (2) <http://bdl.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca> (3) Lire le passionnant article «Les femmes au Pakistan: une situation contrastée», sur le site de La Documentation française

JURGENSEN Geneviève

