



Università
Ca' Foscari
Venezia

Master's Degree
in Language Sciences

Final Thesis

**Stereotypes, prestige
and grammar:
occupational job titles
in Italian**

Supervisor

Prof. Gianluca Lebani

Assistant supervisor

Prof. Giuliana Giusti

Graduand

Sara Ricci

Matriculation number

876611

Academic Year

2019 / 2020

Table of contents

Introduction.....	1
1 Gender systems	10
1.1 The Italian gender system.....	12
1.1.1 Non-human nouns.....	12
1.1.2 Human nouns	13
1.1.2.1 Lexical gender	13
1.1.2.2 Morphological gender.....	13
1.1.2.3 Common and epicene nouns.....	15
1.1.2.4 The suffix <i>-essa</i>	16
1.1.2.5 Motion	17
1.1.3 Agreement.....	18
2 Grammatical and sociocultural gender	22
2.1 Agreement anomaly: prestige	24
2.2 Resistance to change.....	29
3 State of the Art	34
3.1 Masculine generics	34
3.2 Gender stereotypes.....	45
3.3 Occupational prestige	58
3.4 The Italian context	61
4 The first experiment.....	64
4.1 Method.....	65
4.1.1 Participants	65
4.1.2 Materials	66
4.1.3 Procedure and design.....	68

4.1.4 Data analysis	69
4.2 Results.....	69
4.3 Discussion.....	75
5 The second experiment	81
5.1 Method.....	82
5.1.1 Participants	82
5.1.2 Materials	83
5.1.3 Procedure and design.....	83
5.1.4 Data analysis.....	84
5.2 Results.....	85
5.3 Discussion.....	89
6 Conclusion	95
7 Acknowledgments.....	103
8 Bibliography.....	104
9 Appendix.....	119

Introduction

The feminisation of professions is the act of inflecting in the feminine grammatical gender those role nouns which have commonly carried the masculine gender only. The traditional division of labour between women and men determined clear expectations on the roles they would assume in society, and conveyed the fact that the activities carried out by male individuals were higher in hierarchy of status than those carried out by female individuals. If the feminine grammatical gender does not occur as freely as the masculine one, but in reference to a stricter range of roles, it is because language reflects this structural social imbalance. During the period while a set of positions and careers were being denied to women, there were scarce reasons for the matter to arise. Once women started entering traditionally male-dominated fields, the need arose for the availability of terms aimed at denoting a woman in a certain role. Commenting on the relationship between women's social positions and the way they are talked of, Mills (2003) states that “there is a complex two-way dialectic process going on in language, whereby language items both affirm and contest the status quo, and changes in social structures necessitate the development of new vocabulary” (p. 88).

Although the first guidelines for a non-sexist use of the Italian language, commissioned by the Italian government, date back to 1986 (Sabatini, 1986), the lack of feminine agentive nouns is still common. In fact, in Italy the political interest in gender-fair language has been subject to inconsistent attention and national language policies have never been actually promoted (Giusti and Iannàccaro, 2020; Azzalini and Giusti, 2019). Once it emerged, proposed solutions to the gendered language issue (i.e., the act of representing women through language) have never taken a form other than that of a recommendation (cf. Robustelli, 2012, for a history of the cultural and governmental institutions' approaches towards the issue; cf. Robustelli, 2018, for a broader picture of the country's language policies). Emblematic is the official website of the Italian government, in which the titles denoting female government officials confusingly fluctuate from the masculine to the feminine grammatical gender without any apparent logic. On the one hand, government policies have been missing. On the other, Italian researchers have belatedly addressed sexism in language in comparison to other Western countries, in which starting from the Seventies awareness of sexist language entered into linguistic and psychological research (Cardinaletti and Giusti, 1991). In addition, while in those years the feminist movements raised the issue and required to abolish sexist language, in Italy women have never collectively addressed the question (Giusti, 2009). To briefly summarise, while in many other Western countries political action has been taken to equally represent women and men (despite the communities' initial oppositions), “the discussion in the Italian media is still limited to whether and how individual women should be named with regularly inflected feminine nouns” (Giusti and

Iannàccaro, 2020, p. 12). Actually, there is a widespread consensus among language users as to the preference of the “unmarked” masculine (often improperly called “neuter”) over expressions which promote women’s visibility: Italian speakers resist a fair linguistic representation of female professionals. Frequently, prominent figures ridicule the issue, high-status women claim their self-identification with the masculine term and other high-status women may be mocked for requesting to be addressed in a form which respects their gender. The lively debates between opponents and defenders of language change show the topicality of the matter not only in the academic but also in the popular discourse (Gheno, 2019, collects social media users’ comments of opposition).

One of the most frequent arguments brought against feminisation is its triviality: there would be other, more important obstacles to gender equality, and one term rather than another would not make any difference. Leaving aside the inadequacy of the presupposition that actions are mutually exclusive, in this work the reader will be provided with a detailed review of the scientific evidence against the supposed irrelevance of gendered language. First of all, the prescribed use of masculine generics (i.e., the dual reference of masculine forms to either male referents or to referents whose gender is unknown or unspecified) is not innocuous, but enacts a literal exclusion of women from mental representations. A large body of experimental research demonstrated that masculine signs primarily convey a specific (i.e., literal) meaning, supporting the claim that masculine generics make women invisible and are therefore a sexist practice (for a review see Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen and Sczesny, 2007). This is what Ng (2007) calls a “linguistic routinization of discrimination”, which speakers involuntarily perpetrate by merely following the grammatical rules. Considering that English words such as *he* and *men* or Italian words such as *giornalisti* ‘journalists-M’ are spontaneously interpreted as referring to male individuals (and considering that the automatic activation cannot be suppressed but only revised at a later stage), it seems reasonable to suppose that even those professions attached exclusively to the masculine grammatical gender activate a mental representation of male jobholders only.

In addition, language plays an important role in the transmission and persistence of gender stereotypes. If the feminine grammatical gender does not occur as freely as the masculine one, but is “allowed” by speakers to appear in reference to a smaller number of professions, this means that the array of possibilities which a community thinks of as designated to women is not as vast as that destined to men. “Women can do anything”, but as admirable exemplars of exceptions who succeeded in a field in which the other women do not belong to. If presented as such, speakers probably disagree with such a sexist statement. However, the way feminisation of professions is discussed reveals precisely this underlying thought. Declarations such as “the linguistic term is not important; it is important that [I/she] got to assume that role” imply that those women are exceptions and moreover

should be satisfied just for being there. On the contrary, actual gender equality should see female professionals as a standard. This normalisation cannot take place without a linguistic equal treatment of men and women. A community will hardly perceive high-status women as an ordinary occurrence if the word denoting a woman in a certain position cannot even be pronounced. Those words are not pronounced because they conflict with current stereotypes of woman. A hundred years ago, female university teachers hesitated in defining themselves with a feminine job title, preferring the word *professore* instead (Lepschy, Lepschy and Sanson, 2001). Nowadays this uncertainty has no foundation and indeed it seems a groundless stance: we automatically respect an individual's gender identity by defining *professore* a male teacher and *professoressa* a female teacher, because we have gone beyond the stereotype regarding university teaching.

Signifier and signified, or form and concept, are closely interconnected. Jakobson (1959) stated that meanings cannot be inferred “without the assistance of the verbal code”. According to him, “there is no *signatum* without *signum*”: there is no meaning without sign (p. 232). When words are unfamiliar, the concept they convey is unfamiliar. Vice versa, if a concept is unfamiliar the corresponding words will also be unfamiliar. Language is the foundation of one's own cognition and of an entire culture. Against those who claim that there is no need for a feminine linguistic sign for a female professional to exist, the answer is that the concrete existence of those women still does not imply that they are part of the collective imaginary as ordinary agents. Prestigious and leading positions are so intrinsically male that one may not even realise that Italy has never had a female leader: lack of linguistic form and lack of concept go hand in hand. On the other hand, a fervent opponent may still say: “if women's social positions do not change, the existence of words is useless: let reality change first”. However, this is a redundant argument: society has already reached a point in which no single occupational field is restricted to men. Let our language concretise this concept. On top of that, as will be shown in this study, in certain fields the number of female professionals equals or even outnumbers that of male professionals, but the masculine forms continue to prevail and to impede awareness of this.

The feminisation of professions is sometimes ascribed with hostility to the field of political correctness. Even if it were the case, in a cultural environment truly devoid of sexism, feminine forms should not raise any resistance. As maintained by Fairclough (2003), “changes of discourse are not merely re-labellings but shifts to different spheres of values” (p. 23). The respect we have towards an individual is expressed through the words we direct to them and the words with which we talk about them. To mention just one meaningful example, for nearly a century Down's syndrome has been known as “mongolism” due to the facial resemblance to the “Mongolian family” (after John Langdon Haydon Down published the *Observations on an ethnic classification of idiots* in 1866), but in 1965

the World Health Organisation abolished the term (Howard-Jones, 1979). Linguistic intervention resulted from the acquisition of a new perspective and a change in attitude. At the same time, linguistic intervention induced those who were mechanically utilising that term to reflect on its existence and on the meaning it conveyed. Social changes and linguistic changes are interrelated. To extrapolate from this example, feminine high-status role nouns constitute the sign of the transformation of the concept of woman as an individual who naturally pursues any existing career. Evidently, such shift to a different conceptualisation of women has still not entirely occurred.

What is more, feminising professions is not an especial consideration of a disadvantaged group, nor an extremist feminist drift, but a matter of grammatical correctness. In fact, the Italian language has a grammatical gender system. This means that every existing name has a grammatical gender, which is arbitrary in words denoting inanimate entities and which corresponds to the referents' sex in words denoting humans. When referring to humans, it is by virtue of one's own sex or gender identity that we use certain a linguistic sign: word shapes do convey meaning. The fact that linguistic gender parallels biological distinctions is not a characteristic of Romance languages only, but of the vast majority of languages with a gender system across the world. A visible reference to women and men through inflected forms is the principle which underpins a grammatical gendered language: nouns denoting women carry the feminine gender, while nouns denoting men carry the masculine gender.

Our language does not have available an additional grammatical gender through which non-binary gender identities may feel represented. The linguistic strategies which are being proposed in informal contexts, especially in the field of political activism, (namely the alternative suffixes of the asterisk '*', the schwa 'ə', the 'u' and the 'x') constitute a rejection of the societal binary sex and gender opposition. In this work only the terms *woman – female – feminine* and *man – male – masculine* will be employed, not to diminish the ongoing process, nor to purposefully ignore non-binary persons, but because these phenomena deserve a separate discussion and go beyond the framework of this study. Collective sensibility is on two parallel tracks, one of which is even an issue to respect the inner structure of our language.

The emerging use of additional (a)gendered suffixes is an instance of the connection between language and identity. Both self-perception and social recognition are produced linguistically. Giusti (2011, 2016) remarks how the lack of feminine agentive nouns undermines women's identity, triggering a perception of incongruity between the female identity and the professional identity. Prestigious masculine (i.e., the masculine feature assigned to prestigious role names regardless of the concrete referent) actually insinuates that high-status positions are best associated to maleness and makes the identity of women split into a female and a male half, as if the concepts of being a woman

and being in a prestigious position would conflict. Those who suggest that it is not necessary to make explicit an agent's gender identity forget that the masculine suffix is likewise a specification. The following passage by Llamas and Watt (2010) describes language as a central element of public and self-perception:

The connection between language and identity is a fundamental element of our experience of being human. Language not only reflects who we are but in some sense it is who we are, and its use defines us both directly and indirectly. We use language in a direct way to denote and describe who a person is through use of naming and kinship terms, descriptions based on appearance, behaviour, background, and so on, and we use language to assign identities indirectly when we base our judgements of who people are on the way they speak. Language-mediated attribution of identity to individuals is so ingrained in human social affairs that we consider a person lacking a name to also lack an identity (p. 1).

Our language use suggests that women's identity in the workplace is not yet fully formed. The lack of feminine agentive nouns is just one of the instances in which gender inequalities are reproduced. It is generally agreed that references to women and men are asymmetrical across all language types (see for example Stahlberg, Braun, Irmen and Sczesny, 2007). Alternatively stated, "linguistic sexism is a universal phenomenon" (Hellinger, 2011, p. 565). The refusal to acknowledge the femaleness of a distinguished role is part of a broader range of linguistic strategies via which women are delegitimised in the work environment. In the media, women are often removed from the level of formality and reduced to the level of familiarity. For example, by introducing the female name with a determinate article (e.g., *Conte e la Boldrini, la Meloni e Salvini*), by omitting the female surname (e.g., *Kamala and Biden, Draghi e Ursula*) and even by omitting both name and surname, as can be seen from the headlines below.

- *Napoli, la scienziata: "Ho fotografato il buco nero, ma l'Italia punta ancora poco sulla ricerca"* (la Repubblica, 25/03/2021).
'Naples, the-F scientist-F: «I have photographed the black hole, but Italy poorly funds the research»'
- *WWF Italia, dopo la presidente anche il direttore è donna* (LiguriaNotizie.it, 20/01/2021).
'WWF Italy, after the-F president-F, even the-M director-M is a woman'
- *Prada sceglie una donna come responsabile diversità, equità e inclusione in Nord America* (Fashion Network, 21/10/2020).
'Prada chooses a woman as chief diversity, equity and inclusion in North America'

Had the scientist, the director and the chief executive been men, their identity would have been visible in the headlines.

In addition to a linguistic unequal treatment of the two sexes, the media reiterate covert forms of gender stereotypes by underrepresenting women, especially those in positions of power and authority. Azzalini (2020) describes the results of the Global Media Monitoring Project – whose aim is to map women’s representation in newspapers, television and radio news – reporting that in 2015 in Italy the overall visibility of women was stuck at 21% (the European average being 25% and the global average being 24%). However, when considering social positions (such as homemakers, students, villagers) their visibility ranges from 43% to 77%, but when considering prestigious professions women are drastically underrepresented. In fact, only 15% of women in politics and 10% in economy are sources or subjects of news. In other words, we see women and we hear women’s voices, but mostly in the capacity of common citizen and very rarely as professionals who contribute with knowledge and experience. The fact that expert women are underrepresented in the media is an additional “indicator of subtle gender stereotypes that strengthen the historically unequal power relations between men and women” (Azzalini, 2020, p. 198).

It is clear that our society struggles to conceive women as experts. Linguistic asymmetries and “subtle” media stereotypes go generally unnoticed. Unless specific attention is paid, these gender-different treatments pass outside of awareness. It is precisely because they work at an unconscious level that they have an active role in maintaining the status quo. Meanwhile, Italian girls perform better than boys from lower middle school until university. According to the AlmaLaurea Report 2017, at high school female students are more regular, get higher marks, study more hours, have more international experiences and in their free time have more social and cultural activities; at university they graduate on time in higher number and their average final grade is higher. The same is also true in the STEM disciplines (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics), where they constitute a minority. Nonetheless, five years after the attainment of the title, women’s position in the job market does not reflect these higher academic achievements. Women’s employment rate is lower, they are more likely to hold positions for which they are overqualified, they suffer from a gender wage gap and they have lower chance of securing permanent contracts. These data are constant both in STEM and in traditionally female-dominated disciplines (i.e., the psychological, literary and linguistic fields).

The cognitive basis of gender typical and stereotypical information probably derives from the physical differences between the sexes (Stewart and Valian, 2018, p. 81): women can give birth and

breastfeed an infant, and they have lesser physical strength¹. Actually, until the Fifties Italian women were prohibited from obtaining qualified positions such as magistrates due to the “naturally” masculine character of the activities. Female body was considered unsuitable because it was able to seduce and procreate (Cacouault-Bitaud, 2008, p. 172). Apparently, an automatic stereotype exists which conceives people in oppositional terms: if a woman is “nurturant”, she cannot also be competent. If caregiving is her domain, she cannot also embrace politics and economics. According to Ridgeway and Correll (2004), “the core aspects of gender beliefs consist of both a hierarchical dimension that associates men with greater status and instrumental competence and a horizontal dimension of fundamental difference that associates each sex with what the other is not” (p. 527). At present, this dichotomy between gender identities is confirmed by the way we talk about female professionals. Language has the power of opposing this perceived incongruity which dictates different expectations for the two sexes, by pronouncing in the same word power and femaleness: the idea behind an expression like *sindaco donna* ‘female mayor-M’ is different from that behind *sindaca* ‘mayor-F’.

The cultural resistance towards feminine prestigious role names produces morphosyntactic inconsistencies which generate uncertainty as to how to talk about women. In linguistics, “genders are classes of nouns reflected in the behaviour of associated words” (Hockett cited in Corbett, 1991, p. 1). For instance, the feminine trait of the word *nonna* ‘grandmother’ is reflected in an associate word like *cara* ‘dear-F’, while if referring to *nonno* ‘grandfather’ the word *caro* ‘dear-M’ is employed. If a masculine term is used in reference to a woman, which gender value should be assigned to the associated words? Oscillations including *il sindaco è arrivato, il sindaco è arrivata, la sindaco è arrivata* ‘the mayor has arrived’ demonstrate that prestigious masculine generates an uncertainty that is unparalleled in native speakers’ linguistic competence.

Given the continued resistance to utilise feminine prestigious agentive nouns, this research aimed at investigating the effects of their use. In Italy, two studies have been conducted on the effects of the feminisation of professions: Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) and Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012). They were based on the evaluation of identical stimuli with the only difference being the sex of the alleged authors or referents and/or the grammatical gender used to denote women. Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) focused on a pair of words: *professore* and *professoressa*. They compared the word *professore* used for both male and female referents with *professoressa* used for female referents. Merkel, Maass and Frommelt (2012) compared four professions put in three different forms (i.e.,

¹ They have lesser physical strength assuming that “strength” is associated with physical size; however, in *Un altro genere di forza* (2019) Chiricosta maintains that even our concept of strength is a cultural construction, and that the dichotomy between strong sex and weak sex disappears by shifting the conception of what *strength* is.

masculine forms, feminine symmetric forms and feminine asymmetric *-essa* forms) and addressed exclusively to female referents.

In the present study, two experiments were carried out. In the first experiment, thirty professions were utilised to compare both female and male referents, and female referents introduced by different grammatical genders. More specifically, a questionnaire was employed to compare the following conditions: the masculine form used for male referents (MM), the masculine form used for female referents (MF) and the feminine form used for female referents (FF). This experiment aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1) Does the linguistic form influence the perception of prestige?
- 2) Does the linguistic form influence the perception of competence?
- 3) Does the linguistic form influence the perception of typicality?

While linguistic intervention did not affect perceptions of prestige and competence, results documented an effect with respect to gender typicality, with a difference between MM and FF: female proper nouns introduced by job titles carrying the feminine grammatical gender diminished the male bias. In fact, Experiment 1 demonstrated that gender expectations continue to exist and that they are governed by a general male bias: the majority of the jobs were perceived as “typically male” irrespective of the experimental condition, further confirming that an unconscious stereotype exists which connects *work* with *maleness*. Such bias diminishes when semantic and grammatical gender make explicit that the worker is a woman.

The second experiment measured response times and proportion of affirmative responses to single lexical items of high and low prestige professions, each randomly presented both in the masculine and feminine form, to further investigate whether the perception of prestige is influenced by the morphological ending. Experiment 2 examined the following research question:

- 1) Is there a grammatical gender effect on prestige ascriptions?

If masculine and feminine suffixes conveyed different meanings, an interaction of gender and prestige would be found, with high-prestige and low-prestige items being processed differently in the masculine compared to the feminine condition. In Experiment 2, a main effect of gender and a main effect of prestige were found: feminine words were processed faster than masculine words, and high-prestige words were processed faster than low-prestige words. No interaction was found between grammatical gender and prestige ascriptions. Therefore, Experiment 2 did not provide evidence for the fact that masculine job titles augment prestige ascriptions. Overall, the present study demonstrated that female professionals can utilise the feminine job title without suffering from competence and

prestige loss while at the same time opposing deep-rooted gender stereotypes regarding the typicality of professions. If women are made visible in the discourse, the perception of professions' typicality changes.

This work is organised as follows. Chapter 1 serves as a brief overview of gender systems worldwide, with a specific focus on the Italian language: the expression of gender, the mechanisms of gender assignment and gender agreement are described. Chapter 2 discusses the interrelation between linguistic gender and sociocultural gender, going through various instances of the manifestations of prestigious masculine (Section 2.1), together with the reasons generally given to justify it (Section 2.2). Chapter 3 reviews literature on masculine generics (Section 3.1), on the stereotypicality of professions and gender stereotypes in the workplace (Section 3.2), on the interplay between language and perceived occupational prestige (Section 3.3) and on the research made in Italy on the effects of morphological changes on perception with respect to professional job titles (Section 3.4). Chapter 4 presents the first experiment, outlining the method (i.e., participants, materials, procedure and design and data analysis) and showing the analysis results and the discussion. Chapter 5 describes the second experiment, following the same structure of the preceding chapter. Finally, the last section summarises the work, discusses the implications of the research findings and provides final remarks.

Chapter 1

Gender systems

A language has a gender system if it shows agreement between a lexical item and the words related to it. Not all languages have the grammatical category of gender. Of the 257 languages listed in *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online* (WALS: Dryer & Haspelmath, 2013), 112 have a gender system. Of these, nearly half have two genders (45%), around a quarter have three genders (23%) and the remaining 11% have four genders. The remaining systems (21%) have five or more genders.

With respect to geographical distribution, gender languages are more or less spread worldwide. Corbett (2013a) illustrates how the two largest existing families differ regarding gender existence: the nearly 1250 languages of the Austronesian family, spread in the Pacific, mainly have no gender, whereas in the Niger-Congo family, with its almost 1500 languages found in western, central and southern Africa, a massive presence of gender languages is attested. Other relevant areas with no gender languages are North-America and great part of Asia (Sino-Tibetan family); other families with a high presence of gender languages are the Khoisan, the Afroasiatic, the Nakh-Daghestanian, the Dravidian and the Indo-European, respectively found in southern and northern Africa, the Caucasus, South India and Europe and Asia (Corbett, 2013a).

As regards gender assignment, i.e., the mechanism put in place by native speakers for allocating gender feature values to nouns, there are two criteria: semantic and formal (Corbett, 1991; 2013b). According to the semantic criterion, a noun's meaning determines its gender. Tamil (Dravidian family) – in which words denoting god and male human are masculine, words denoting goddess and female humans are feminine and the others are neuter – and Dizi (Afro-Asiatic family) – in which females and diminutives are feminine and all the rest are masculine – are two examples of the semantic assignment criteria (pp. 9-11). In most of the cases, gender assignment based on semantics follows some regular logic: “animate is often distinguished from inanimate, human from non-human, male from female” (p. 30). The referents' sex is the most common principle upon which semantic assignment is based (Corbett, 2013c). According to the second criterion, the formal one, a noun's form determines its gender. This can happen on morphological or phonological basis. The first kind refers to the declensional type to which a word belongs, and the second kind refers to a word's sound shape. Purely formal systems do not exist: languages may adopt semantic rules, or semantic and formal rules, i.e., formal rules are applied to the “semantic residue” (Corbett, 1991, p. 13). Russian (Indo-European family), in which given the declensional type of a word its gender is known, is an example of morphological assignment, and finally Qafar (Afro-Asiatic family) shows a

phonological assignment system, since the presence of final accented vowels is determinant for gender assignment (Corbett, 1991, pp. 40-51).

The criteria for gender assignment may coincide. Corbett (1991; 2013b) maintains that, if conflicts arise, semantic rules always prevail over formal rules. This theory finds confirmation in Italian data (Thornton, 2009a): *virago* ‘man-like woman’, for example, should be masculine on the basis of its phonology and should be feminine on the basis of its semantics (see Section 1.1), and it is in fact feminine.

To give a comprehensive account of the category of gender in different languages falls outside the scope of this work. The relevant information of this concise overview is the interplay between semantic gender and grammatical gender for human referents. In fact, in the majority of gender languages (see Fig.1), given the linguistic gender, the referents’ sex can be deduced, or rather, it is precisely by virtue of the referents’ sex that we use a certain linguistic sign. Sex and animacy are the primary criteria which regulate gender assignment. Formal rules are applied to “what is left”. Henceforth, the remainder of this thesis will exclusively consider the Italian language. The following sections will illustrate how gender is expressed in Italian, first with respect to the categories *human* and *non-human*, and then describing agreement, which was only mentioned and which is the very essence of gender systems.

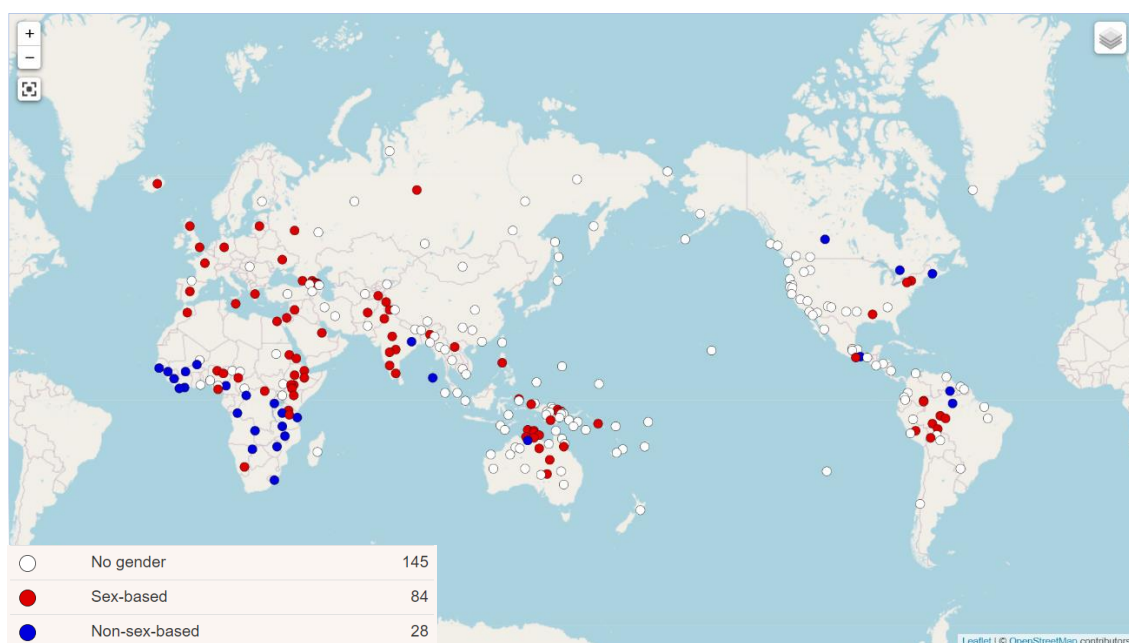


Fig. 1 – Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems. The World Atlas of Language Structures Online. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology.

1.1 The Italian gender system

In the Italian language, two genders can be distinguished: masculine and feminine. Italian has a grammatical (or formal) gender system, which is opposed to natural gender systems. Natural gender systems are based on purely semantic gender assignment. As previously shown, this implies a transparent correlation between semantic gender and linguistic gender. The English language is considered a particular example of this type, since the (few) words which carry explicit gender, i.e., personal, reflexive and possessive pronouns, unequivocally refer to male humans, female humans and inanimate entities (given these characteristics, English is also defined as “pronominal gender system”). Conversely, gender assignment in Italian is based on both semantic and formal criteria. Every noun is either feminine or masculine, but obviously not all nouns denote either females or males. Therefore, one could be led to believe that in gender-marked languages the relationship between grammatical and semantic gender is mostly arbitrary – as Bates, Devescovi, Hernandez and Pizzamiglio (1996) state in their work on gender priming in Italian. However, this holds only with words denoting inanimate entities.

1.1.1 Non-human nouns

The gendered system of inanimate referents is based on formal criteria: their grammatical gender has no relation with their meaning. Inanimate nouns are inflected for number (singular and plural) and uninflected for gender. The following phonological rule is generally given, for any category of nouns: “nouns ending in *-o* are almost always masculine”; “nouns ending in *-a* are usually feminine” (Maiden and Robustelli, 2013, pp. 34-35). The respective plural forms are *-i* and *-e*. There are various exceptions to this rule (to cite only two: *mano* ‘hand’ is feminine, *problema* ‘problem’ is masculine). There is also a substantial number of nouns ending in *-e* which can be to a similar extent feminine (*mente* ‘mind’) or masculine (*dente* ‘tooth’). Finally, there exists a very small number of words ending in *-i* (*analisi* ‘analysis’ is feminine, *brindisi* ‘toast’ is masculine) and in *-u* (*gioventù* ‘youth’ is feminine, *tiramisù* ‘tiramisu’ is masculine). Within the class of animate referents, a distinction has to be made between non-human and human referents. In most of the cases, nouns denoting non-humans behave like inanimates (Marcato and Thüne, 2002). *Delfino* ‘dolphin’ is masculine independently of the animal’s sex. Nouns of this type, which indicate both male and female referents maintaining the same grammatical gender, are called “epicene”. There are also a few cases in which non-human referents have two different lexical entries for males and females, such as *toro* (masculine) ‘bull’ and *mucca* (feminine) ‘cow’. Nonetheless, I shall not dwell on objects and animals, since there is no point of contention nor uncertainty over their use.

1.1.2 Human nouns

When referring to humans, the grammatical category is *not* distinct from the semantic interpretation. Masculine nouns overwhelmingly denote males and feminine nouns overwhelmingly denote females (see Section 1.1.2.3 for exceptions). Apart from those which express gender lexically, in human nouns information on gender is given through a system of inflectional morphology.

1.1.2.1 Lexical gender

A smaller class is represented by nouns which are inflected for number and uninflected for gender. The term *lexical gender* refers to a lexicalised semantic property, to the denotative meaning of a word (Luraghi and Olita, 2006, p. 31). Gender is coded in the root words:

masculine	feminine
<i>uomo, uomini</i> ‘man, men’	<i>donna, donne</i> ‘woman, women’
<i>padre, padri</i> ‘father, fathers’	<i>madre, madri</i> ‘mother, mothers’
<i>re, re</i> ‘king, kings’	<i>regina, regine</i> ‘queen, queens’
<i>fratello, fratelli</i> ‘brother, brothers’	<i>sorella, sorelle</i> ‘sister, sisters’
<i>marito, mariti</i> ‘husband, husbands’	<i>moglie, mogli</i> ‘wife, wives’
<i>genero, generi</i> ‘son-in-law, sons-in-law’	<i>nuora, nuore</i> ‘daughter-in-law, daughters-in-law’

Table 1 – Lexical gender.

1.1.2.2 Morphological gender

Normally, gender is expressed through a system of morphological inflections attached to the same lexical root. Grammars often present the “formation of the feminine” section, as if the masculine were the default forms and the feminine derived from that norm. However, the meaning of the lexical roots is independent from the inflectional endings, which convey number and gender information.

The class -o/-a

The most common inflectional class is that in *-o/i* (singular/plural) for males and *-a/e* (singular/plural) for females (see Table 2).

masculine	feminine
<i>ragazzo, ragazzi</i> ‘boy, boys’	<i>ragazza, ragazze</i> ‘girl, girls’
<i>amico, amici</i> ‘male friend, male friends’	<i>amica, amiche</i> ‘female friend, female friends’
<i>cuoco, cuochi</i> ‘male cook, male cooks’	<i>cuoca, cuoche</i> ‘female cook, female cooks’
<i>maestro, maestri</i> ‘male teacher(s)’	<i>maestra, maestre</i> ‘female teacher(s)’

Table 2 – Common morphological inflections for gender: *-o/i* for males and *-a/e* for females.

These morphemes may be attached to nominal derivatives, which are composed of a lexical root followed by an agentive suffix (the lists of the existing agentive suffixes, including those in the following paragraphs, are taken from Lo Duca, 2004):

agentive suffix	male, female (translation)
<i>-ai-</i>	<i>fioraio, fioraia</i> (‘florist’)
<i>-ari-</i>	<i>segretario, segretaria</i> (‘secretary’)
<i>-aiol-</i>	<i>pizzaiolo, pizzaiola</i> (‘pizza maker’)
<i>-ier-</i>	<i>guerriero, guerriera</i> (‘warrior’)
<i>-in-</i>	<i>ballerino, ballerina</i> (‘dancer’)
<i>-an-</i>	<i>ortolano, ortolana</i> (‘greengrocer’)
<i>-log-</i>	<i>geologo, geologa</i> (‘geologist’)

Table 3 –Class *-o/-a* with agentive suffixes.

The gendered inflections *-o/-a* may also be attached to adjectival derivatives and verbal derivatives:

nominalized adjective	gerund	past participle
<i>contadino, contadina</i> (‘farmer’)	<i>laureando, laureanda</i> (‘graduand’)	<i>candidato, candidata</i> (‘candidate’)

Table 4 – Class *-o/-a* with adjectival and verbal derivatives.

The class *-e/-a*

Another inflectional ending for masculine singular is *-e*. The morphemes *-e/-i* (singular/plural) for males and *-a/-e* for females may be attached to the following agentive suffixes:

agentive suffix	male, female (translation)
-ier-	<i>infermiere, infermiera</i> ('nurse')
-on-	<i>imbroglione, imbrogliona</i> ('swindler')
-or-	<i>controllore, controllora</i> ('ticket inspector')

Table 5 – Class -e/-a.

The widely used words *signore* 'gentleman, Mr' and one of its asymmetric counterpart *signora* 'madame, Mrs' (the other being *signorina* 'Miss') belong to this group.

The class -tore/-trice

A very rare feminine form for the masculine nouns in -tore is -tora (e.g., *tintora* 'dyer'). The productive suffix is -trice. Feminine and masculine nouns share the morphological inflections for number: -e for singular and -i for plural. It is the agentive suffix to be gendered:

feminine	masculine
<i>pittrice, pittrici</i> 'painter, painters'	<i>pittore, pittori</i> 'painter, painters'
<i>autrice, autrici</i> 'actor, actors'	<i>autore, autori</i> 'actor, actors'
<i>senatrice, senatrici</i> 'senator, senators'	<i>senatore, senatori</i> 'senator, senators'

Table 6 – Class -tore/-trice.

1.1.2.3 Common and epicene nouns

Common nouns are those "which are fully stable, and for which the different genders are directly attributable to the difference in meaning" (Corbett, 1991, p. 67). Their word-structure is the same for feminine and masculine; their different semantics (and grammatical gender) is specified by the context in which they occur. Common nouns in Italian belong to the class -e/-e or -a/-a. Conversely, epicene nouns have one only grammatical gender, though they denote persons of either sexes. The list of these exceptional nouns includes few words. The most common feminine words are: *persona* 'person', *vittima* 'victim', *guida* 'guide', *guardia* 'guard', *sentinella* 'sentinel', *matricola* 'freshman', *celebrità* 'celebrity', *maestà* 'majesty', *scorta* 'body guard', *recluta* 'recruit'. The most common masculine words are: *membro* 'member', *personaggio* 'character', *ostaggio* 'hostage', *soggetto* 'subject', *individuo* 'individual', *spirito* 'spirit', *prodigio* 'prodigy'.

Common nouns: the class -e/-e

Common nouns are inflected only for number: they take the morphemes -e for singular and -i for plural. Present participial forms, with their endings in -ante (if derived from verbs of the first

conjugation) and *-ente* (if derived from verbs of the second and third conjugation), belong to this class:

	feminine	masculine	translation
singular	<i>la giudice, la cantante</i>	<i>il giudice, il cantante</i>	the judge, the singer
plural	<i>le giudici, le cantanti</i>	<i>i giudici, i cantanti</i>	the judges, the singers

Table 7 – Common nouns: class *-e/-e*.

Common nouns: the class *-a/-a*

The other class of common nouns is less canonical, given that it is uninflected for gender only in the singular form. Plural forms show the gendered endings *-e* for feminine, *-i* for masculine:

	feminine	masculine	translation
singular	<i>la collega, la pilota</i>	<i>il collega, il pilota</i>	the colleague, the pilot
plural	<i>le colleghe, le pilote</i>	<i>i colleghi, i piloti</i>	the colleagues, the pilots

Table 8 – Common nouns: class *-a/-a*.

The agentive suffixes *-ista*, *-idra*, *-iatra* are part of this class: *la giornalista* ‘the-F journalist’/ *il giornalista* ‘the-M journalist’.

1.1.2.4 The suffix *-essa*

The female-specific suffix *-essa* is poorly productive and has a dual meaning: one the one hand it denotes the wife of the title holder – *dogaressa* meant ‘the doge’s wife’; on the other it denotes the female agent of an activity – *impiraressa* meant ‘pearl threader’ (Cortelazzo 1995). The first denotation is visible in words like *principessa* ‘princess’, *contessa* ‘countess’, *duchessa* ‘duchess’; the second in words like *professoressa* ‘female professor’, *dottorressa* ‘female doctor/female graduated’, *studentessa* ‘female student’. Lepschy, Lepschy and Sanson (2001) report various definitions from nineteenth-century dictionaries which show how, before acquiring a neuter denotation, the feminine forms of ‘male doctor’ – both *dottorressa* and *dottora* – have had a derisive meaning for centuries, indicating presumptuous women and thus insinuating that they were a poor substitute for their male colleagues.

According to Lepschy, Lepschy and Sanson (2001), nineteenth-century dictionaries lack the words *studentessa* and *professoressa*, showing *studente* and *professora* instead. Many words in *-essa* have actually been invented by male speakers from late nineteenth century to the first half of the twentieth century, using them to clearly derogate the addressed women (Thornton, 2004). The hostility towards women accessing traditionally male professions is linguistically attested both in *-essa* words and *-ora* words. Sarcastic definitions of *professora* have also been collected, such as the

following, taken from Rigutini-Fanfani 1880: “*femm. di Professore; ma si userebbe più spesso per ischerzo: Vuol far la professoressa, ma non sa nulla*” (Lepschy, Lepschy and Sanson, 2001, p. 18) – which is translatable as: feminine of ‘Professor’; but more often used as a joke: “She wants to be a professor-F, but she doesn’t know anything”. It is the suffix *-essa*, however, which is charged with negative connotations in general terms. More recent dictionaries and current online dictionaries for words in *-essa* and confirm these significations. To cite only two, in the dictionary of the Italian language Devoto-Oli (1967), the term *presidentessa* denotes both a female president and a president’s wife; the term *ministressa* is labelled as evoking some kind of joke and may also indicate the minister’s wife. The dictionary of the Italian language Dardano (1980) denotes the *-essa* form of *sindaco* ‘mayor’ as mocking.

In the well-known *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana* ‘Recommendations for a non-sexist use of the Italian language’, published in 1986 by the National Commission for the realization of equality between men and women, the author Alma Sabatini categorically advised to avoid *-essa*, given that in most of the cases the linguistic system theoretically provides symmetric alternatives: *presidente* ‘president’ instead of *presidentessa* (class *-e/-e*), *avvocata* ‘deputy’ instead of *avvocatessa* (class *-o/-a*), etc. In addition, the suffix *-essa* is the only existing suffix which is asymmetric: a definite masculine counterpart does not exist. In present-day use some competitive forms coexist. More recent guidelines for gender equality in language (Robustelli 2012) suggest not to strive to abolish the words *professoressa*, *dottoressa* and *poetessa* ‘poetess’ given that they have come into common usage, but to avoid the other *-essa* words.

1.1.2.5 Motion

Relevant to the grammatical gender of animate nouns is the concept of *motion*. This term is being used to describe the morphological process of deriving nouns to designate beings of a certain sex out of nouns that denote beings of the same kind but of the opposite sex (Thornton, 2004). By changing the grammatical gender of nouns, new words are formed. This process has proven useful in the last decades, as women have started populating typically male professional fields. Nonetheless, this kind of word formation is not only productive from masculine to feminine, but also from feminine to masculine: *casalingo* ‘housewife-M’, *mammo* ‘mum-M’, *sirenetto* ‘little mermaid-M’ have been created by assigning the morphological class *-o/-a* to what has become a common lexical root (Thornton, 2004, p. 221).

An alternative to derivation to obtain gender-specification is compounding. This process may be realised in two ways:

1. By combining a role noun (head) with a personal noun carrying information about gender (modifier): *arbitro donna*: ‘referee-M woman’
2. By combining a personal noun carrying information about gender (head) with a role noun (modifier): *donna arbitro*: ‘woman referee-M’.

These forms are attested in various resources online. The encyclopaedia Treccani, for example, in the section² dedicated to the feminisation of professions, lists *donna poliziotto* (‘woman policeman’) and *donna magistrato* (‘woman magistrate-M’) as valid options. Nevertheless, such expressions are another instance of asymmetry in language. In fact, under any circumstances would a speaker specify the maleness of an agent through compounding, not even with stereotypically female professions: *uomo infermiera* (‘man + nurse-F’) or *infermiera uomo* (nurse-F + man’) are completely inexistent. Given that the forms in (1) and (2) involve masculine agentive nouns, Sabatini (1986) recommended their avoidance.

1.1.3 Agreement

Heretofore, the gender values of Italian (feminine and masculine) have been presented without explicitly specifying that gender is a morphosyntactic feature. In grammatical gender systems, gender is an agreement feature and every noun belongs to an agreement class. In other words, every noun has a property which determines the behaviour of the associated constituents in a sentence, the first being the *controller* and the seconds being the *targets* (Corbett, 2006). More specifically, “the term *agreement* commonly refers to some systematic covariance between a semantic or formal property of one element and a formal property of another (Steele 1978:610)” (Corbett, 2006, p. 4). The gender of Italian nouns has morphological implications for articles, adjectives, past participles, gerunds, pronouns, possessives and articulated prepositions.

While in natural gender systems nouns have covert gender, in grammatical gender systems they have *overt* gender (Corbett, 1991, p. 62). In the second case, the gender of nouns is *evident from the form itself*. This means that, in a grammatical gender language such as Italian, the form explicitly signals the gender of all nouns except common and epicene nouns. In his explanation of canonical gender – “the best and clearest examples, those most closely matching the ‘canon’” (Corbett, 2006, p. 9) – Corbett starts precisely from Italian instances. In the examples below some examples of gender (and number) agreement are shown:

² [https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/femminile-dei-nomi-di-professione_\(La-grammatica-italiana\)/](https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/femminile-dei-nomi-di-professione_(La-grammatica-italiana)/) (accessed on 23/11/2020).

(1) *La saggia maestra è andata a parlare con la mia compagna*

The-S.F wise-S.F teacher-S.F went-S.F to talk to my-S.F schoolmate-S.F

‘The wise teacher went to talk to my schoolmate’

(2) *Le sagge maestre sono andate a parlare con il mio compagno*

The-P.F wise-P.F teachers-P.F went-P.F to talk to my-S.M schoolmate-S.M

‘The wise teachers went to talk to my schoolmate’

(3) *Il saggio maestro è andato a parlare con le mie compagne*

The-S.M wise-S.M teacher-S.M went-S.M to talk to my-P.F schoolmates-P.F

‘The wise teacher went to talk to my schoolmates’

(4) *I saggi maestri sono andati a parlare con i miei compagni*

The-P.M wise-P.M teachers-P.M went-P.M to talk to my-P.M schoolmates-P.M

‘The wise teachers went to talk to my schoolmates’.

Canonicity implies that the controllers and the targets have overt expression of gender features and agreement is consistent, regular, repetitive, productive, asymmetric (some features are bound to others) and independent from the part of speech in which it occurs (Corbett, 2006, p. 9). It is important to note that the subjects of sentences (2) and (4) are not specular: plural masculine forms refer both to groups of men (specific meaning) and to people in general (generic meaning). Therefore, in sentence (4) it cannot be clear whether the persons who talked (*maestri* ‘teachers-M’) are only males or not, and whether they talked to a group of boys or to a mixed-gender group. Masculine values may carry a generic gender meaning also in the singular form, when the referent’s sex is unknown or irrelevant:

(5) *Un amico è per sempre*

A-M friend-M is forever

‘A friend is forever’.

Finally, in the case of coordinate nouns with contrasting gender, the targets take the masculine forms: *Giorgio e Anna sono arrivati* ‘George and Anna have arrived-P.M’. Prescriptive grammar establishes that even in the case of a mixed-gender group composed of numerous women and one man, masculine generics is to be used. Marcato and Thüne (2002, p. 196) note that this rule holds with human nouns, while with inanimate entities it is less rigid:

(6) *Simona, Franco, Francesca e Renza, sempre simpatici*

Simona (M) Franco (M) Francesca (F) and Renza (F) always pleasant-M

‘Simona, Franco, Francesca and Renza are always pleasant’

(7) *La rosa, la viola, il tulipano, la primula e la mimosa, tutte profumate*

The-F rose-F the-F violet-F the-M tulip-M the-F primula-F and the-F mimosa-F all-F
sweet-smelling-F

‘The rose, the violet, the tulip, the primula and the mimosa, are all sweet-smelling’

In (6), feminine generics would be considered grammatically unacceptable. One research has been conducted in Italian on the effects of the feminisation of generic plural forms (Merkel, Maass, Faralli and Cacciari, 2017). Results suggested that a different gender markedness was perceived as ungrammatical, but the greater the distance from the masculine forms and the grammatical violation, the higher the tolerability.

When a system predominantly presents instances of canonical agreement, there is a syntactic straightforward relation between the controller gender and the target gender. An instance of less canonical agreement is the case in which the controller does not allow one option, but alternative ones. A simple example of this phenomenon is shown by Corbett (2006, p. 206):

(8) *The committee has decided*: syntactic agreement (singular)

(9) *The committee have decided*: semantic agreement (plural)

Clearly, with regard to number values, the controller allows alternative agreements. In Italian, agreement is virtually always an obliged choice: the target(s) can have only one feature specification. Although gendered languages display variety in agreement options, such variety is not random, but is regulated in any language by the same rule. Corbett (1979, 2006) postulated such constraints in the Agreement Hierarchy:

attributive > predicate > relative pronoun > personal pronoun	
+ syntactic	+ semantic

Table 9 – The Agreement Hierarchy (Corbett, 1979).

Targets in attributive position take syntactic agreement (there is no choice between *this committee* and **these committee*). The more we move rightwards in the hierarchy positions, the fewer the possibilities of syntactic agreement and the higher those of semantic agreement. In Italian, ambiguity may arise only in those cases in which the grammatical gender of epicene nouns does not coincide with the semantic gender of the referents, as the following examples taken from the internet show:

(10) *La guida alpina che conduceva la cordata, Federico Daricou, è rimasto ferito gravemente*

The mountain-F guide-F leading the roped group, Federico (M) Daricou, was seriously injured-M

‘The mountain guide leading the roped group, Federico Daricou, was seriously injured’

(11) *La professoressa Emanuela Navarretta nominata nuovo membro della Corte Costituzionale*

The professor-F Emanuela (F) Navarretta nominated-F new-M member-M of the Constitutional Court

‘The professor Emanuela Navarretta nominated new member of the Constitutional Court’

In sentence (10), the attributive modifiers accompanying the feminine epicene noun (*guida*) have feminine gender, thus showing syntactic agreement and not semantic agreement (which would generate **il guida alpino*). The verbal predicate has instead masculine gender (*rimasto ferito*), given the referent’s sex. In (11), the attributive modifier of the masculine epicene noun *membro* has masculine gender (semantic agreement would give **nuova membro*), whereas the nominal predicate (*nominata*) is assigned feminine gender. In these examples, attributive modifiers must follow syntactic agreement and predicate modifiers may be declined according to both criteria. If the sentences continued showing a personal pronoun (*lei* ‘she’/*lui* ‘he’), then semantic agreement would be found. The Agreement Hierarchy postulated by Corbett is therefore valid also for these exceptional Italian cases. In all other instances, agreement is canonical.

Chapter 2

Grammatical and sociocultural gender

The aforementioned *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana* ‘Recommendations for a non-sexist use of the Italian language’ were published in 1986 by the Prime Minister’s Office and converged in the volume *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana* ‘Sexism in the Italian language’ the following year. These works were the first to raise the problem of sexism in language in Italy, in line with the international political climate of those decades. Some of the author’s points have already been notified in the previous chapter, namely the asymmetric terms of address for women, the lexicographic evidence of the negative connotation of *-essa* words, the use of the modifier *donna* combined with masculine agentive nouns and the supposed “unmarkedness” of the masculine gender, which “reflects and reinforces the identification of men with the universe” (Sabatini, 1987). The maleness of the prototypical human being is evident in countless cases, starting from the word “men” which denotes both the males of the species and the whole humanity.

Sabatini’s purpose was not to document the most explicit manifestations of an insulting attitude, which are the clearest evidence of how the cultural state reverberates on language and vice versa, but to shed light on unconscious internalised customs, on asymmetric ways of talking about women ordinarily delivered without any intention to offend. It is precisely because it is not seen that the “natural” is revealing. According to Sabatini (1987), language use reveals the underpinning principle of both language and society: men’s superiority over women. In fact, the structural imbalance between masculine/male and feminine/female is pervasive. The author identifies semantic asymmetries and grammatical asymmetries. We have semantic asymmetries when two expressions are identical in all but the grammatical gender and their meaning is different (e.g., *il-M governante* is a governor; *la-F governante* is a housekeeper) or their connotation is different (*un buon uomo* ‘a good man’; *una buona donna* ‘a loose woman’). Other semantic asymmetries consist of regularly directing certain images only to women (e.g., the association to the semantic fields of sexuality and housekeeping, the commentary on clothing). Grammatical asymmetries involve: instances of masculine considered as “neutral” (the unmarked gender is the one closer to the norm, to the ideal), differences in the terms of address (e.g., the definite article placed only before surnames of women; the use of *signora* ‘Mrs/Ms’ in place of honorifics) and the lack of feminine agentive nouns.

This last grammatical asymmetry is the object of this research. Nowadays the feminine symmetric terms of high-status professions are attested, but their occurrence is still uncommon: professional agentive nouns often carry masculine grammatical gender although they denote women. In light of the strict correlation between grammatical gender and semantic gender in human nouns,

and considering that the Italian language has at its disposal all means to signal female referents in discourse, it is impressive how a fair representation of female professionals is far and away distant from reality. The non-coincidence of grammatical and semantic gender in only one instance is unmotivated from a linguistic point of view. The existence of such anomaly finds its rationale in the influence of sociocultural gender on grammatical gender. Aside from the ongoing debate surrounding the relationship between sex – a biological fact, and gender – a psychological fact (for a review of the different positions among feminist scholars see Cameron, 1997), *sociocultural gender* is the complex of societal and self-expectations on individuals driven by their biological sex. Grammatical violations go unnoticed because they conform to the dictations of sociocultural gender, which fosters gender stereotypes and role schemas. The first is a “generalised view or preconception about attributes or characteristics, or the roles that are or ought to be possessed by, or performed by women and men” (UN Human Rights 2017). Schemas – broader and more neutral than stereotypes – are cognitive frameworks that help us categorize and make predictions on events, individuals and groups and although they may contain errors, they are essential to make sense of social phenomena (Valian, 1998, p. 104). Schemas are “hypothesis that we use to interpret people and social events. [...]. All stereotypes are schemas, but not all schemas are stereotypes” (Stewart and Valian, 2018, p. 80). Role schemas comprise professions (e.g., doctor), family roles (e.g., mother) and more general categories (e.g., woman) and an individual’s different roles may conflict (Valian, 1998, p. 104). Apparently, the lack of gender agreement in high-status roles is in line with the general expectations on women’s place in society. The following passage from *The Essential Difference*, cited by Cameron (2015, p. 357), encapsulates the matter:

People with the female brain make the most wonderful counsellors, primary school teachers, nurses, carers, therapists, social workers, mediators, group facilitators or personnel staff....People with the male brain make the most wonderful scientists, engineers, mechanics, technicians, musicians, architects, electricians, plumbers, taxonomists, catalogists, bankers, toolmakers, programmers or even lawyers
(Baron-Cohen, 2003, 185).

Such expectations dictated by culture are reinforced and perpetrated by language use. If traditionally female professions carried feminine grammatical gender also when referring to men, we could attribute the cause of gender disagreement to an alleged slow pace of linguistic change. But given that this is not the case, the only possible explanation is that the prestige of stereotypically male professions is undivided from the idea, more or less unconscious, that the doers must be *naturally* male. In Sabatini’s words, the male sex is the authentic prestige holder and those women who want

to rise through the ranks have to adapt to it (1987, p. 26). Burr (2003) expresses a similar view commenting on the reluctance to use feminine denominations with respect to high-level professions in France³: “women who hold these positions are either still seen or see themselves as having climbed too high up in the hierarchy for them to remain women and to carry a feminine title” (p. 133). McConnell-Ginet (2014) remarks that women in prestigious positions have special pressures to show that they are doing as well as men and different job titles may suggest otherwise (p. 13). The same is confirmed by Burnett and Pozniak (2020): “for some women, one of the main reasons they prefer to be referred to in the masculine (eg. *le ministre, le professeur, le médecin*) is that they have the impression that the masculine forms have a more prestigious connotation than the feminine ones” (p. 16). Slavic countries⁴ are in the same situation, if not worse. Formanowicz, Bedynska, Cisłak, Braun and Sczesny (2013) state that “Slavic languages in particular are known to possess feminine job titles that are associated with lesser status, with rural speech, or with the meaning *wife of* rather than *female job holder*” and that “many feminine forms are novel and may therefore sound awkward to a majority of language users” (pp. 63-64). It is in this context that, when in 2011 the newly elected Polish Minister of Sport and Tourism, Joanna Mucha, asked to be called with the feminine title, the linguist Jerzy Bralczyk defined this invitation “a rape on the Polish language” (Budziszewska, Hansen and Bilewicz 2014, p. 682). English-speaking countries, although without a grammatical gender system, were not exempt from the issue: Spender (1990) comments that when a woman enters traditionally male-dominated fields “she must signify that the norm, the positive, does not apply and so she becomes a *lady doctor, a female surgeon, a woman lawyer*” (p. 20). Nonetheless, while in many European countries⁵ language use has been a fundamental target in the battle for gender equality, in Italy linguistic change has never been actively promoted. Agreement incongruencies, as the examples in Section 2.1 show, are still widely used both in oral and in written language. The reasons (and the counter-arguments) generally given to justify prestigious masculine are discussed in Section 2.2.

2.1 Agreement anomaly: prestige

Burr (1992) and Formato (2014; 2016), among the others, continued the work of Sabatini carrying out descriptive and quantitative research on sexism in the Italian language of the media,

³ In France and Spain, the feminisation of professions shares commonalities with Italy. See Schafroth 2013 for a comparison.

⁴ See Doleschal and Schmid (2001) for Russian; see Koniuszaniec and Blaszkowa (2003) for Polish.

⁵ See Hellinger (2011) for an exhaustive review of language reforms. The author stresses the beneficial effects of such reforms, as in: “It is acknowledged that in everyday Swiss German more and more androcentric expressions are being replaced by forms of splitting, with the result that masculine plural nouns are increasingly losing their generic potential” (p. 575); see Moser, Sato, Chiarini, Dmitrow-Devold and Kuhn (2011) for an analysis and a comparison of the guidelines for gender-fair language provided in various European countries.

demonstrating that poor progress is being made. As noted by Cardinaletti and Giusti (1991), Giusti (2009; 2011; 2016), Di Rollo (2010), Robustelli (2014), Cario (2016), Nardone (2016), Latos (2017), Formato (2019) and Azzalini and Giusti (2019), culture and grammar are interrelated by cause of the still dominant cultural resistance in acknowledging the female presence in traditionally male-dominated fields, many of which denote power and prestige. Azzalini and Giusti (2019) recognise three contributing causes of this phenomenon: the lack of a widespread metalinguistic competence and awareness of the role of language in one's identity construction, the lack of national language policies and the fact that women who hold high-ranking positions define themselves with the masculine (p. 540). They also note that if the trait [+prestige] functions as a morphosyntactic feature, then a complete innovation is being performed, considering that it has never existed in the nominal classification of Italian (p. 540).

The evidence provided by scholarly works and the recommendations of important linguistic institutions such as the *Accademia della Crusca*⁶ are not sufficient to eliminate the hesitations in using feminine professional and institutional words. Even the official website of the Italian government addresses (the eight out of the twenty-one) current female ministers and (the ten out of the twenty-nine) undersecretaries with masculine titles. The same applies to official documents. The new guidelines⁷ for the evaluation of primary school children, for example, specify that the text presents the terms *bambini* 'children-M' and *alunni* 'students-M' only for simplification reasons, but that it is important to consider a person's gender identity, thus questioning the supposed inclusiveness of "unmarked" masculine. Paradoxically, in spite of this specification that same government ordinance is signed by *il ministro On. dott.ssa Lucia Azzolina*. Even in the media prestigious job titles commonly carry the masculine gender. What follows in the syntactic environment is an inevitable uncertainty over the gender properties of the related elements, as shown by these examples:

(1) *L'ex Prefetto di Treviso a capo del Dipartimento dei Vigili del Fuoco. Laura Lega era prefetto a Firenze, in precedenza era stato a capo della prefettura di Treviso* (Oggi Treviso, 21/11/2020).

'The ex-prefect-M of Treviso head of the Fire Department. Laura Lega was the prefect-M of Florence, previously had been-M at the head of the prefecture of Treviso.'

In (1), all morphological features are masculine. If there was no proper noun, the agreement targets would carry the gender required by the role noun, coherently with the functioning of gender systems.

⁶ <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/contenuti/infermiera-si-ingegnera-no/7368> (accessed on 8/12/2020).

⁷ <https://www.miur.gov.it/web/guest/-/scuola-primaria-firmata-l-ordinanza-che-prevede-giudizi-descrittivi-al-posto-dei-voti-numerici-inviata-alle-scuole-insieme-ad-apposite-linee-guida> (accessed on 8/12/2020).

This option would be grammatically correct at the cost of deleting the female subject. The proper noun is rightly given, though creating a series of mismatches in agreement which find no linguistic justification: a female subject in a completely masculine environment.

(2) *Tiziana Lippiello è il nuovo rettore di Ca' Foscari, prima donna nella storia nell'ateneo veneziano. Professore ordinario di Lingua cinese classica, Storia della filosofia e delle religioni della Cina presso il dipartimento di Studi sull'Asia e sull'Africa mediterranea, è stata eletta con 381 voti contro i 322 ottenuti dalla sfidante Monica Billio (Venezia Today, 16/09/2020).*

‘Tiziana Lippiello is the-M new-M chancellor-M of Ca’ Foscari, first woman in the history of the Venetian University. Full-M Professor-M of classic Chinese language, History of Chinese philosophy and religions at the department of Asian and North African studies, was-F elected-F with 381 votes against the 322 of the challenger Monica Billio.’

The syntactic incoherence resides in the fact that the grammatical genders of subject and predicate do not correspond. In the first sentence, a female proper noun is followed by a masculine nominal predicate (*Tiziana – è il nuovo rettore*). In the second sentence, the reverse happens: a feminine verbal predicate refers to a masculine subject (*Professore ordinario – è stata eletta*). The unconscious competence of native speakers prevents any incongruency in gender and number: agreement is always automatically produced. The regular functioning of the language is in contrast with the internalised notion of “prestigious masculine”.

(3) *La prefetto di Firenze Laura Lega ha fatto scattare un provvedimento interdittivo antimafia nei confronti di due società [...]. Sale così a otto il numero complessivo di interdittive antimafia adottate da aprile ad oggi dal prefetto di Firenze (CGIL Toscana, 27/07/2020).*

‘The-F prefect-M of Florence Laura Lega introduced an anti-mafia measure against two societies [...]. It’s the eighth anti-mafia measure adopted since April by the-M prefect of Florence.’

The Agreement Hierarchy postulates that even in non-canonical instances targets in attributive position take syntactic agreement. In (3), consequently, the definite article should carry the same gender of the nominal controller – principle that is applied shortly later in the same paragraph. In short, the same noun in the same portion of text is incoherently accompanied first by a feminine (*la*) and then by a masculine determiner (*dal* is an articulated preposition composed by *da* + *il*-M).

(4) *Beatrice Venezi: «Io, maestro in gonnella». Dopo Samantha Cristoforetti, prima italiana nello spazio, e Sara Gama, capitana della nazionale di calcio femminile, arriva Beatrice Venezi, direttore d'orchestra acclamata a livello internazionale, a buttare giù un altro mattoncino del muro della disparità (Vanity Fair, 28/10/2019).*

‘Beatrice Venezi: «I’m a master-M in a skirt». After Samantha Cristoforetti, first Italian-F to go space, and Sara Gama, captain-F of women’s national soccer team, Beatrice Venezi, orchestra director-M internationally acclaimed-F tears down another brick of the disparities wall.’

Even in a space which celebrates the progress made towards gender equality, there is uncertainty over the denomination of women. The first typically male role carries feminine gender (*capitana*), but the other does not (*direttore*). In addition, the title makes in all seriousness the argument that certain roles are a male prerogative and it is considered newsworthy that a woman personifies them. The semantic asymmetry is clear: the same stem with a feminine morphological ending (*maestra*) would not convey the same message.

(5) *#11febbraio Giornata internazionale delle donne e delle ragazze nella scienza. Celebriamola con Olga, la bambina scienziato che con le sue mille domande, somiglia, ne siamo certi, a tanti nostri piccoli lettori (Facebook post from Terre di mezzo Editore, 11/02/2021).*

‘#11february International Day of women and girls in science. Let’s celebrate it with Olga, the child-F scientist-M who, with her thousands of questions, resembles – we’re sure of it – many of our little-M readers-M’

It is unbelievable that on the International Day of women and girls in science there are difficulties in producing the word *scienziata* ‘scientist-F’. Apparently, even celebrating women in science, the model scientist must be a man (even worst, in (5) this cultural resistance comes from a publishing house, whose work is based on words).

(6) *È bella, è mamma, è tosta: vi presentiamo il primo vigile del fuoco donna della Sicilia (Balarm, 11/12/2020).*

‘She’s beautiful, she’s a mom, she’s tough: we present you the first female firemen of Sicily’

In (6), the word *donna* following a masculine title remarks that firefighters are male. However, if the referent is *bella* (beautiful-F) and *tosta* (tough-F), she should also be *la prima* (the-F first-F).

It has also been noted that the hesitation in using the proper feminine term is sometimes reduced in ironical or pejorative contexts, as these examples (taken from Robustelli 2014) show:

(7) *Bosnia, la giudice nuda sulla scrivania. La Corte Suprema la licenzia in tronco (L'unione sarda, 7/02/2014).*

‘Bosnia, the-F judge naked-F on the desk. The Supreme Court abruptly fires her.’

(8) *La «aspirante» sindaca e i barboni di Parigi (Corriere, 5/01/2014).*

‘The-F «aspiring» mayor-F and the tramps of Paris.’

Cannata (2010) remarks that the feminine professional titles may be used as an insult precisely on account of their gender-markedness. Quantitative research on the contexts in which feminine terms appear has been conducted by Formato (2016) and Nardone (2016). With her work on the terms *ministra* and *ministro*, Formato (2016) found that the collocations and the adjectival modifiers used with *ministra* convey a stereotyped and less official images of female professionals (apart from that, she also demonstrated that the feminine term often has the anaphoric function of referring back to the masculine counterpart). Nardone (2016) conducted an analysis of the Italian corpora *itWaC* concentrating on the following role nouns: *segretaria*, *direttrice*, *collaboratrice*, *dottoressa*, *professoressa*. Other feminine words had so few occurrences that they could not be analysed (for example, *architetta*, *procuratrice*, *chirurga*, *avvocata* were in a ratio of 1:97, 1:339, 1:150, 1:130 respectively). Other words, such as *ispettora*, *medica* and *notaia*, never appeared in the corpus, as further evidence of the fact that the masculine form is still the norm. The analysis showed that those terms are characterised by a semantic pejorative asymmetry as compared to their masculine equivalent. Nardone (2016) confirmed that the feminine forms are associated with ideas of subalternity, while the masculine forms are associated with ideas of prestige and authority. This would lead women to prefer to be denoted as their male colleagues.

The presence of women in high-ranking roles inhibits the natural language proficiency possessed by every speaker. The great uncertainty as to which linguistic sign is appropriate makes the female signifier split in half: to fit a certain role, a woman has to evoke something male. It is clear that feminine forms do not constitute a grammatical deviation from the norm and their avoidance is of an ideological nature. Prestigious masculine has been used by women to avoid being ridiculed since their first access to traditionally male roles. Lepschy, Lepschy and Sanson (2001) collected evidence in early twentieth century dictionaries of the fact that women preferred to call themselves *professore-M*. At that time, the issue existed for a couple of words. A hundred years later, it exists for any other high-ranking role. At the present day, this is not only an informal norm accepted within

the speech community, but it may also be a formal rule defended even by linguists⁸ and promoted by grammars designed for Italian and foreign learners (see Fig.2). The conservative attitude of Italian speakers is such that their language eliminates female professionals in the conviction of following what is “correct”. Those women who claim the right to be addressed with feminine forms may encounter the scepticism⁹ of those who defend a “proper” use of the language.

MALE TITLE	FEMALE TITLE	MEANING
signore	signora, signorina	<i>Mr.; Mrs./Ms., Miss</i>
dottore	dottoressa	<i>Doctor</i>
professore	professoressa	<i>Professor</i>
avvocato	avvocato	<i>Lawyer</i>
geometra	geometra	<i>Draftsperson</i>
ragioniere	ragioniera	<i>Accountant (Bookkeeper)</i>
architetto	architetto	<i>Architect</i>

Some feminine forms have been eliminated in Italy, especially in the area of the professions.

Parchitetto	<i>male or female architect</i>
Pavvocato	<i>male or female lawyer</i>
lo scultore	<i>male or female sculptor</i>

Fig. 2 – Examples of prestigious masculine in grammar books (Danesi 2016, *Complete Italian Grammar*, pp. 12 and 17).

2.2 Resistance to change

The common practice of commenting on language evokes a particular passion when it comes to feminisation. One of the points made by opponents is a supposed adherence to the language system, which would prevent users from language change. What this argument fails to consider is that if only in one case the sex of a referent does not determine agreement, then that case is the innovative one (Azzalini and Giusti, 2019). In any other occurrence, gender discordances would be considered grammatical errors, and in fact they are never produced. Linguistic “purity”, rather, requires the current use to be changed – a thing that is possible “within the structure of Italian, without doing violence to the language” (Sabatini, 1985, p. 64). In addition, change through time is a constitutive element of language, and linguistic motion is a simple and natural process to ensure availability of terms which reflect (already happened) social changes. It is also said that occupational titles refer to

⁸ Example of a female linguists ridiculing Cecilia Robustelli in her personal blog for defending the feminisation of professions: <http://blog.terminologiaetc.it/2012/05/24/sessismo-linguistico/> (accessed on 12/12/2020).

⁹ When in 2015 Parliamentary Speaker Laura Boldrini sent a letter to the MPs of the Lower Chamber advocating the use of feminine job titles, she encountered criticism from many sides, including ironic comments on the internet such as “brava e intelligente!” <https://ricerca.repubblica.it/repubblica/archivio/repubblica/2015/03/06/boldrini-vuole-il-vocabolario-al-femminile17.html> (accessed on 22/12/2020).

the functions performed and include both sexes¹⁰, thus making irrelevant the gender specification, but it is obvious that in a gender system every morphological ending carries gender information, and in Italian the neuter gender does not exist. This argument would not hold if applied to any other noun category. In addition, psycholinguistic evidence demonstrates that the “neutral” potential of masculine expressions cannot be supported (see Section 3.1). Giusti (2011) remarks how coherence in agreement is also necessary for the correspondence of a statement to reality: gender – non-human nouns excluded – and number are never random, but carry information standing for actual referents.

To justify the resistance to feminine job titles speakers also miscategorise the terms, claiming that otherwise they should accept also “pediatro” and “giornalista”. The straight answer is that common and epicene nouns function differently from mobile-gender nouns. An equally valid response is that this is not just “a question of linguistics, but of how the people involved feel” (Valian cited in Martyna 1980, p. 483) and men – as in “the male of the species” – evidently have no reason to feel discriminated by language use nor by the societal structure. Other reasons given are the defence of women’s freedom to be called as they wish (claim which, again, would be senseless in any other situation and which perpetuates the uncertainty over the female status) and the supposed cacophony of new terms (as was the case with *professoressa* a century ago).

Finally, feminisation is not encouraged by the general public in the assumption that a word “is just a word” and that other more important causes deserve to be supported in its place¹¹: what is important is to ensure women an increasing access to certain positions, independently of which linguistic label is adopted. This position presupposes two opinions: first, that one battle does exclude the other – which is not true – and second, that a word’s shape is relegated to the abstract world and does not affect the state of things. Cameron (1995) remarks how self-contradictory it is to consider the demands for language change as trivial: how can the same proposal be considered a little thing and an attack on language at the same time? The author dismisses her hypothetical speaker with the provocative suggestion of adhering to feminist language policies: if it really does not matter what words are used, then let us change them and make both parties satisfied (p. 141), also in light of the fact that “normativity is an inalienable part of using language” which applies even to what is considered a “natural” fact about language (p. 10). If language is a neutral tool of communication, both androcentric and gender-inclusive language are fit for purpose.

¹⁰ A representative example is Susanna Camusso, who, when in 2010 was elected as general secretary of the Italian General Confederation of Labour (CGIL), asked to be appointed as *segretario-M* giving this reason.

¹¹ To cite one example, according to female MP Michela Marzano, what is important is the female presence in institutional headquarters, and focusing attention on language may be *un pretesto per perdere poi di vista l'essenziale* ‘an excuse to lose sight of the essential’: her fight for gender equality does not contemplate the way women are referred to https://www.repubblica.it/rubriche/parla-con-lei/2014/03/18/news/una_ministra_non_fa_la_differenza-81304591/ (accessed on 22/12/2020).

Considering the attention on language use as unimportant fails to recognise the interrelation between language, identity and thought. Although strong forms of linguistic determinism hypothesis seem false (the idea that language determines the human mindset – Whorf 1956), most sociolinguists accept the theories of linguistic relativity, which postulate that language influences perceptions and thought (cf. Brown and Lenneberg, 1954; Winawer, Witthoft, Frank, Wu, Wade and Boroditsky, 2007; Fausey and Boroditsky, 2010; Boroditsky, Fuhrman and McCormick, 2011); a different phrasing of the influence of language on thought is Slobin’s *thinking-for-speaking* hypothesis (1996). At the same time, there is also evidence to suggest that language is influenced by the cultural environment in which it develops (Holmes, 2013). In short, language is influenced by and influences culture.

In addition to affecting the sense of belongingness and inclusiveness, language makes concepts available. The idea that to give a problem a name impacts not only how we register an event but also whether we do it (Ahmed, 2015) does not apply only to problems (e.g., *racism*, *sexism*). Actually, “those who have no name have no identity” Giusti (2011, p. 17): giving names is the first step for the recognition of concepts and is therefore crucial for the creation of new role identities (Giusti 2011; 2016). In this respect, Spender (1990) comments that “in order to live in the world, we must *name* it. Names are essential for the construction of reality for without a name it is difficult to accept the existence of an object, an event, a feeling” (p. 163). Masculine occupational job titles make the identity of women split into a female and a male half, as if the concepts of *women* and of *prestige* could not spontaneously merge together. If feminine signs indicating certain positions “sound weird”, it is because what they symbolise is not yet part of the collective imagination. At the same time, continuing to use masculine signs inhibits the formation of different conceptualisations.

It is often said that what is important is not how we name a female professional, but the fact that a female professional managed to get there. This counterargument makes the very argument that feminisation is needed: it should no longer be an achievement that a woman is in a certain position, but it should be normal. The lack of the feminine name implies that those roles are generally meant for men and that a woman should feel grateful and satisfied for being there, because she is not in the place she usually belongs. To give an example, if in the mental lexicon only the word *ministro* exists, when thinking of that role only the image of a male individual will be retrieved. Normalising the use of the symbol means to normalise the availability of the idea (see Fig. 3).

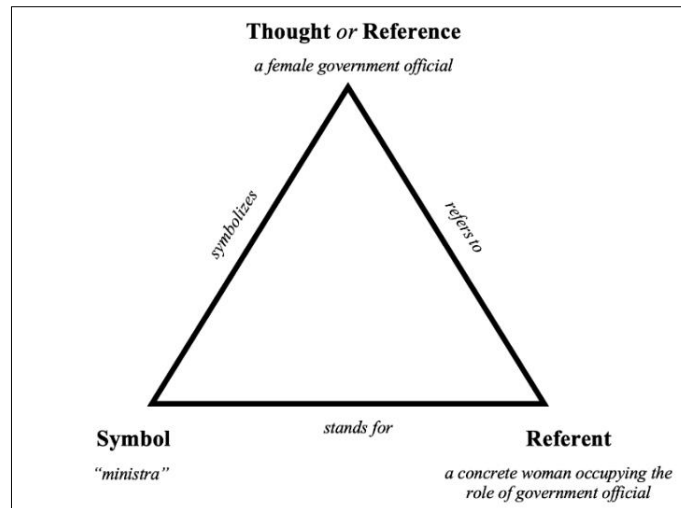


Fig. 3 – Adaptation of the semiotic triangle (Ogden & Richards 1923) with the example of *ministra*.

The continued use of masculine forms naturalises the belief that distinguished roles are for men and consequently reduces women’s chances of being identified as appropriate appointees to those positions (see Section 3.1). In Cameron’s words, how an individual is treated in public is more politically relevant than how they feel privately, and “there is nothing trivial about trying to institutionalize a public norm of respect rather than disrespect, and one of the most important ways in which respect is made manifest publicly is through linguistic choices” (1995, p. 143). Linguistic choices reveal an individual’s attitude and are instrumental in the maintenance of the status quo. Grammatical prestigious masculine both reflects and shapes role identities and gender stereotypes. The association of maleness with prestige assumes different forms across different cultures:

There are numerous examples of the way in which there is no loss of prestige when females are referred to in male terms but there is a loss of prestige when males are referred to in female terms. In a society where male primacy must be carefully cultivated, semantics makes a substantial and significant contribution in structuring this supremacy. The semantic derogation of women fulfils a dual function: it helps to construct female inferiority and it also helps to confirm it (Spender, 1990, p. 23).

Here Spender (1990) refers to the semantic asymmetries of the English language, maintaining that words’ pejoration takes place only when they are used in association with women, although they designate the same state for the two sexes. For example, *spinster* and *bachelor* designate an unmarried person but the former is negative and the latter is positive (the same happens in Italian, with *zitella* and *scapolo*). In the case of *master* and *mistress*, only the latter has acquired sexual connotations. Similarly, *lord* retains its initial meaning, while *lady* is no longer reserved to high-rank women. In

addition, it is the norm to call a mixed-sex group “guys”, but it is a mistake and an insult to call them “gals”. The author’s position is that meaning is created by “dividing the world into positive-masculine and negative-feminine” (p. 18).

With respect to the Italian language, Giusti (2020) notes similar asymmetries concerning the words *signore* ‘Mr’ and *signora* ‘Mrs’. In fact, the asymmetry lies not only in the existence of the term of address *signorina* ‘Miss’ (which categorises a woman according to her marital status and/or age and which has no masculine counterpart), but also in the different use made of the terms *signora* and *signore*. Basically, the former is widespread, the latter is more formal. For example, it is totally normal to get the attention of a woman walking down the street by saying “*scusi, signora*”, while it is very unlikely to say “*scusi, signore*” (instead saying only “*scusi*”, as the other option might sound too reverent). The same can be said for “*buogiorno, signora*” and “*buongiorno, signore*”. It is also more common to hear *il signor* followed by the surname rather than the name, while *la signora [+name]* is commonly used.

There are various instances of asymmetry which attribute more prestige to the masculine term. Language *constructs and confirms* the idea that maleness is the norm, and, in a language in which reference to sex is inevitable when referring to humans, the continued use of prestigious masculine for occupational titles should be seen in this perspective.

Chapter 3

State of the Art

Given that feminine prestigious professional nouns have still not entered common usage, the present research aimed at investigating the effects of their use. Its aim was to provide insight as to whether, coherently with the theories of linguistic relativity, linguistic forms impact perceptions, namely the idea of prestige, of competence and of typicality of professions. In fact, the cultural resistance to utilise regularly declinable words and the existence of semantic asymmetries (such as *maestro / maestra* ‘master / teacher’) seem to suggest that a shift in the morphological ending may convey a different meaning. Experimental evidence on grammatical and semantic asymmetries is limited. This chapter first reviews literature on masculine generics (Section 3.1), which debunks the myth of the correspondence of the masculine with the neuter gender providing evidence instead of the direct association between masculine signs and male mental representations. In Section 3.2 the research made on the stereotypicality of professions is described, given that the use of prestigious masculine reveals and reinforces the underlying gender biases which assign fixed roles to women and men. Section 3.3 gives an overview of the way in which the interplay between language and perceived occupational prestige has been studied. To conclude, Section 3.4 illustrates in detail the research made in Italy on the effects of morphological changes on perception with respect to professional job titles.

3.1 Masculine generics

Masculine generic establishes the dual reference to either exclusively male referents (specific meaning) or to mixed-gender referents (generic meaning), and it always needs to be interpreted in light of this duality (cf. Section 1.1.3). Nonetheless, experimental evidence demonstrates that the masculine symbol is undivided from the masculine conceptualisation, which accordingly is retrieved automatically, and that only afterwards the generic meaning is retrieved through a strategic process. This general meaning comes second, as the activation of the specific meaning cannot be overridden. The past fifty years have seen a dramatic increase in the interest for the effects and interpretations of generic masculine forms. This proliferation of studies has heightened the need for a different conception of the traditionally supposed “unmarkedness” of generic forms. The criticism¹² to masculine generics originated in the US American context with regard to the noun “man” and the pronoun “he” used to refer to generic humans – representative examples are Lakoff (1975) and Miller

¹² Bodine (1975) reports that feminist critics encountered reactions which “ranged from agreement, to disagreement, to ridicule, to horror, but invariably the feminists’ demand is viewed as an attempt to alter the English language” (p. 131).

and Swift (1976). Meanwhile, experimental evidence was given by American linguists and psychologists.

Schneider and Hacker (1973) compared student-selected pictures for the chapters of a sociology textbook: those chosen for chapter titles containing the term “men” (e. g., “Industrial man”) included less women than the equivalent label which did not (e.g., “Industrial life”), thus providing evidence for the association of the term with maleness only. The authors hoped the results would affect the policy of text publishing and would “help bring about a more humane society” (p. 13). Bem and Bem (1973) investigated the impact of sex-unbiased job advertising, asking to rate undergraduates’ willingness to apply for the jobs described. Results showed that it made women more willing to apply for male-dominated positions, and men more willing to apply for female-dominated positions. The effects of masculine generics pronouns on job attitudes in the English language were also studied by Stericker (1981), McConnell and Fazio (1996) and Stout and Dasgupta (2011), among the others.

Martyna (1978) made use of personal pronoun-selection exercises showing how *he* and *she* were used for predominantly male professions and female professions respectively, thereby providing proof of the ambiguity of a pronoun carrying double meaning and its exclusiveness in actual language use: if *he* had been a generic term, there should have been no shifts to the feminine pronoun. The author also recalls the proposal made back in 1884 by a lawyer named Charles Crozat Converse to introduce the gender-neutral pronoun *thon* (from *that one*) in the English language given “the imperative need” for a new pronoun¹³ in order to avoid ambiguity (p. 131). Mackay and Fulkerson (1979) conducted pronoun comprehension experiments measuring reaction time and error rates of students who were asked to judge whether sentences containing masculine pronouns could apply to women. The very high error rate indicated that masculine pronouns were interpreted literally. Similarly, Mackay (1980) confuted the assumption that depending on the context masculine pronouns contribute no new meaning of their own. Answers to pronoun-comprehension questions demonstrated that the anaphoric function of masculine pronouns elicited a male representation of the antecedents (80% of the subjects comprehended generic *he* as *male* and not *male or female*).

Kessler, McKenna and Graham (1979) were the first to investigate the effects of generic language on recall and interest. The results of the questionnaires showed that women exposed to texts with masculine generics were less engaged with the content material in comparison to texts which explicitly stated the female presence. Crawford (1984) conducted a similar experiment comparing

¹³ Since the eighteenth century, various attempts have been made to introduce into the English language gender-neutral pronouns for the sake of clarity, which included the followings: *tey*, *thon*, *et*, *ip*, *ou*, *co*, *per*, *ne* and *hiser* (Holmes, 2013, p. 327).

memory retention of texts written with male pronouns used generically and texts written with both female and male pronouns. Participants were asked to answer the questions two days after their exposure to the material. The study provided evidence for an effect of generic versus specific language on female students' memory. Similarly to Martyna (1978), Hughes and Casey (1986) made use of an experiment on pronoun selection to demonstrate that in the case of *teacher* prescriptive grammar rules were significantly violated.

Snizek and Jazwinski (1986) manipulated gender-neutral descriptors and asked to draw pictures of the texts' protagonists, demonstrating that generic terms function specifically. In a similar vein, Hamilton (1988) asked college students to complete sentence fragments presenting masculine or unbiased generics, to describe their mental images and to give names to the individuals they were thinking of: in the masculine generics condition, male representations were more frequently elicited. Gastil (1990) made participants read sentences aloud and orally describe the mental images conjured. As expected, results provided strong support for the association of generic *he* with male images, more than *he/she* and *they*. The mental representations evoked by generic language were also studied in relation to the exposure to feminist proposals of language reform (e.g., Khosroshahi 1989). Further evidence of the association of masculine generics with a male bias in the English language was provided by Harrison (1975), Moulton, Robinson and Elias (1978), Hyde (1984) and Wilson and Ng (1988). To briefly summarise, early research on the supposed generic language has consistently shown that it cannot be considered as such. Rather, it actualises a literal exclusion of women.

In addition, the effects of the ambiguity of *he* and *man* were studied through the American legislative history lens: term definitions which include and exclude women at the same time caused fluctuations in law interpretations and applications, submitting individuals' rights to judges' predispositions (cf. Ritchie 1975). Additional empirical evidence was given by discourse analysis: naturally occurring language use demonstrated a clear male bias through the specification of the female presence in contexts which theoretically already included both sexes¹⁴, or through general statements on human beings which nonetheless embrace a male perspective, as in "man's vital interests are life, food, access to females" (article by Fromm, 1972 cited in Oehler Bibrell, 1982). Taken together, these studies showed that "human beings were to be considered male unless proven otherwise" (Bodine, 1975, p. 133). Both in production and in comprehension generic *he* and *man* were likely to be interpreted literally, assigning women a non-existent status. It is also worth mentioning Hamilton's (1991) work, which proved that not only masculine generics, but also neutral

¹⁴ Alma Sabatini (1987) provided evidence for the same phenomenon in the Italian language, with the review of journalistic extracts such as *ventimila studenti... anziani e donne* 'twenty-thousand students-M... elders-M and women' which show that women are often designated as a separate category.

terms (*individual, person*) display a male bias. For this reason, she embraced the hypothesis “People = Male, Male = People”¹⁵.

Linguistic equal treatment between men and women can be achieved through two strategies: neutralisation (replacing masculine terms with gender-neutral terms, such as singular *they* instead of *he, person* instead of *man*) and feminisation (using splitting forms to give women visibility). In a natural gender system such as English, overt gender marking exists for a limited number of words and can be quite easily avoided. In grammatical gender systems, which are the vast majority, gender marking is unavoidable and the use of generic language is pervasive. In recent years, there has been an increasing amount of literature on masculine generics in gender-marked systems and its effects on mental representations. On the one hand, the link between grammatical gender and sex might have been weaker given that even inanimate nouns have a grammatical gender, thus showing that grammatical gender is an exclusively formal property untied from semantics (as opponents of feminist linguists claimed). On the other, the results found with English might have been replicated.

Masculine generics, which is an almost universal norm (an extensive analysis is given by Hellinger and Bußmann 2001; 2002; 2003), has been found to create male bias over-representing men in people’s imagery. Grammatical gender is initially encoded and inevitably activates male-biased associations, thus creating expectations on the referent’s sex even when it was not meant to be specified. Colé and Segui (1994) corroborated the hypothesis that grammatical gender is initially encoded through a double lexical decision task conducted in French in which participants processed more slowly gender incongruent pairs of words than gender congruent pairs of words. Bates, Devescovi, Hernandez and Pizzamiglio (1996) had similar results with Italian data. Automatic male-biased associations have heightened the need for gender-fair language as a response to this structural asymmetry. As summarised by Braun, Sczesny, and Stahlberg (2005), masculine generics in both natural and grammatical gender systems is considered by many “as both a symptom and a source of a fundamental androcentrism” (p. 3) which “reflects – and reconfirms – relationships between the sexes” (p. 4).

Research into generics in grammatically gendered languages began in the German language (Klein, 1988; Scheele and Gauler, 1993 – cited in Braun, Sczesny, and Stahlberg, 2005). While experimenting in the German language, Braun, Gottburgsen, Sczesny, and Stahlberg (1998), made use of a fictitious newspaper article to show that the estimated number of female professionals

¹⁵ Despite this overwhelming evidence, when in the 1970s feminist attacks on masculine generics began, women such as Alleen Pace Nilsen opposed to eliminating them: “Educational and psychological damage occurs only when people think that generic terms refer exclusively to males. [...] I fear that in the long run this will serve to exclude women even further from the mainstream of thought and action”. (Nilsen, 1973 cited in Penelope, 1988, p.123). It is important not to think of “women” as a single homogenous unit against sexism (in language).

supposed to attend a meeting of geophysics were significantly higher in number if the meeting was presented with joint masculine and feminine forms rather than with masculine plural forms only. Their second experiment had the same design and described the annual meeting of a sport association. Consistently with experiment 1, the presence of feminine forms prompted a higher cognitive inclusion of women. Stahlberg, Sczesny and Braun (2001) demonstrated that the proportion of male and female individuals mentally retrieved depended on the generic forms used to label a group. The questionnaire, presented in three different versions, asked to name the favourite characters and personalities. A comparison of masculine generics (e.g., *Romanheld* “hero in a novel”), neutral forms (e.g., *heldenhafte Romanfigur* ‘heroic character in a novel’) and feminine and masculine word pairs (e.g., *Romanheldin oder Romanheld* ‘heroine or hero in a novel’) showed that masculine generics triggered fewer female representations, while no differences were found between the other two conditions. This experiment was replicated using slightly different material (i.e., participants were asked to name random personalities, not the favourite ones) and gave the same results.

Braun, Sczesny and Stahlberg (2002) demonstrated that the linguistic label influences the perception of suitability for leadership positions: after being asked to name which politicians might run for the next chancellorship in Germany, participants named more female politicians when asked with gender-fair forms. That is a very important finding, as it shows that the presence of the feminine grammatical gender strengthened the feeling that some of the female politicians were the best candidates.

Following Stahlberg, Sczesny and Braun’s (2001) paradigm, Gabriel and Mellenberger (2004) and Gabriel (2008) conducted similar researches in German and Norwegian respectively, asking to name the most- or least-liked personalities (e.g., “which actor do you like the most?”). With instructions given in gender-balancing forms (e.g., “which actor/actress do you like the most?”), the number of female personalities named increased.

Irmen (2007) measured reading times of sentences presenting a masculine plural role name (e.g., *Soldaten* ‘soldiers-M’, *Floristen* ‘florists-M’) followed by either a masculine (e.g., *diese Männer* “these men”) or a feminine term (e.g., *diese Frauen* “these women”): in the second condition, reading significantly slowed down. Irmen and Schumann (2011) conducted two eye-tracking experiments to investigate how grammatical gender influenced the processing of role nouns in German. Each role noun occurred in the masculine or feminine form, accompanied by a male or female kinship term. Cues to referent gender were integrated immediately and the inconsistency between grammatical and referent gender slowed down reading, in line with the idea of a straightforward relation between the grammatical gender and the semantic gender.

Gygax and Gabriel (2008) focused on the resolution of the ambiguity of masculine generics in French using a word association paradigm. Participants were presented with a kinship term in the singular form (*sister, aunt, mother, brother, uncle or father*) accompanied by a role noun in the plural form. Role names were stereotypically male, stereotypically female or neutral. In Experiment 1, in the first part plural forms were all masculine (as in *une soeur* ‘a sister’ – *musiciens* ‘musicians-M’). Participants had to determine whether the first term could be part of the group introduced by the second one, by pressing as fast as possible *yes* or *no* buttons. If masculine plural forms were really interpreted generically, affirmative answers would always be found. To give occasion to negative responses, filler items of incongruent word pairs were added (i.e., in which also the role nouns were unambiguously gender marked, as in ‘mother’ – ‘kings’). In the second part of the experiment, role nouns were both masculine and feminine (as in *une soeur* ‘a sister’ – *musiciennes* ‘musicians-F’). Results suggested that female terms were hardly associated with the masculine forms. In fact, with kinship female terms the proportion of yes responses was lower, independently of the role stereotypicality. The effect was even stronger in the second part: the occurrence of feminine role names strengthened the specific interpretation of the masculine ones. This procedure was replicated in a second experiment to verify whether the results were independent of the source of communication. Part I (e.g., *une soeur – musiciens*) was identical to that of Experiment 1 but was preceded by comprehension questions on job advertisements, written either in the masculine or in the masculine and feminine forms. The results were replicated: affirmative answers were fewer in number with female kinship terms, and even lower if the subjects had been exposed to gender-fair advertisements. In both experiments, participants had difficulties in associating feminine terms with masculine generics, and even more when they were exposed to plural feminine forms. Both in the experimental task (part II of Experiment 1) and in the pre-experimental task (Experiment 2), presenting the feminine plural forms strengthened the *masculine = male* association.

Gygax, Gabriel, Lévy, Pool, Grivel, and Pedrazzini (2012) repeated Gygax and Gabriel’s (2008) Experiment 1 in French with one variation: after completing the first part of Experiment 1 (‘kinship term – masculine plural role noun’) and of Experiment 2 (‘kinship term – masculine or feminine plural role noun’) participants were reminded about the generic meaning of masculine forms, to see whether the explicit reference to the prescriptive rule would mitigate the inhibition effect found in the previous studies on masculine generics. The proportion of affirmative responses in deciding whether a woman could be part of a group introduced by a masculine term increased, but response times were still slower in comparison to masculine form/male referent combinations, signalling the automatic activation of the specific meaning. The generic meaning could not be activated through a passive process, but only through an active one. Even if explicitly motivated to

include women when encountering masculine used as a generic, participants could not spontaneously activate equal representations of the two sexes.

Gygax, Gabriel and Lévy (2014) made use of the Gygax and Gabriel's (2008) paradigm with the addition of a frequency manipulation of the gender of the kinship terms: the exposure to *feminine kinship terms – role nouns in the masculine form* gradually increased (from 25% in the first trial to 75% in the third). Their aim was to target the passive activation of mental representations through a frequency manipulation, given that the explicit instructions seem insufficient (Gygax, Gabriel, Lévy, Pool, Grivel, and Pedrizzini, 2012). An increasing occurrence of female characters, called “implicit learning”, may facilitate the activation of the generic interpretation of masculine plural forms. Part IV had the same proportion of female kinship terms of Part III, and also role nouns carrying both masculine (50%) and feminine (50%) gender, in consideration of the fact that in Gygax and Gabriel (2008) the occurrence of feminine role nouns had raised the probability of interpreting masculine role nouns as specific. In Parts I, II and III the proportion of positive responses increasingly grew and response times increasingly accelerated, thus showing that higher exposure to female kinship terms altered participants' spontaneous representations from a specific interpretation of masculine forms to a more generic one. However, the specific interpretation was not completely overridden by the generic one. In addition, the occurrence of role nouns in the feminine plural form (Part IV) led to a drastic rise of the activation of the specific interpretation, consistent with Gygax and Gabriel (2008). In conclusion, though the implicit manipulation proved to be more effective than the explicit instructions, the generic interpretation did not prevail.

Kaufmann and Bohner (2014) made participants read Spanish short stories, written either with masculine generics or with gender-inclusive forms (slash form: amigos/as or X-form: amigxs). Participants were then asked to write a continuation and give names to the stories' protagonists. The male bias was alleviated by the manipulation of the forms used to refer to the protagonists: X-forms had significant effects on female subjects, and slash forms on both males and females.

Gilam, Shamir, Tenenbaum and Vainapel (2015) presented Hebrew students with a questionnaire which measured motivation and attitudes towards the courses undertaken at university. No effects were found with male students, but they were found with female students. Questionnaires presented with gender-neutral language reported higher scores for women with regard to task value, goal orientation and self-efficacy, in comparison to questionnaires presented with masculine generics.

The effects of the masculine grammatical gender were also investigated through the event-related brain potentials (ERP). ERPs provide online records of brain processing, being “stimulus-locked, scalp-recorded voltage fluctuations caused by post-synaptic neural activity” (Brouwer and Crocker 2017, p. 1). For language processing, N400 and P600 are particularly relevant ERP

components, which are related to the processing of lexical-semantic (N400) and syntactic (P600) information. More precisely, the N400 is “a negative peak with a mean latency of 400 ms and a centroparietal distribution, that is larger in amplitude for words that are semantically incongruent with a preceding sentence context” (Chwilla, Brown and Hagoort, 1995, p. 274). Not only semantic violations, but also semantically correct but unexpected words increase the amplitude of the N400. The P600 “is a late centroparietally distributed potential with a positive polarity, starting at about 500 ms and typically extending up to at least 800 ms [...]. An increase in P600 amplitude has been found in response to several kinds of syntactic violations” (van Herten, Kolk and Chwilla, 2005, p. 242). A P600 effect occurs to syntactic violations and anomalies (i.e., sentences with a complex or non-preferred syntactic structure). Recent findings have shown that a P600 effect is also found with syntactically correct but semantically manipulated sentences (Regel, Meyer and Gunter, 2014), leading to the following conclusion: the N400 component is affected by semantic expectations at a lexical level, and the P600 component is affected by syntactic expectations and semantic expectations at a sentence level. ERPs effects have been widely used to study the influence of stereotypical information on linguistic processing (see Section 3.2), and rarely used as regards masculine generics. One example is the ERP study conducted by Majid, Misersky and Snijders (2019), which focused on the interpretation of plural role nouns in German. Participants read sentences with a masculine or feminine role noun followed by a congruent (masculine–men; feminine–women) or incongruent continuation (masculine–women; feminine–men), as in “The students (m/f) went to the canteen... because some of the men/women were hungry”. If masculine plural role nouns were interpreted generically, *women* continuations would not display similar effects to *men* incongruent continuations. However, both for feminine-men and masculine-women continuations a P600 was observed, providing evidence for processing difficulties which suggest that “the masculine form does not represent genders equally” (p. 652).

The effects of the linguistic label on job attitudes and on personnel selectors’ impressions were also studied. Implementing the paradigm provided with experiments conducted in English (e.g., Bem and Bem, 1973, Stout and Dasgupta, 2011), Merkel (2013) investigated whether the linguistic form of job advertisements influenced women’s motivation to apply. She presented Italian female participants with two texts written with masculine generics (e.g., *stiamo cercando un commesso* “we are looking for a salesman”) and two texts written with splitting-form (e.g., *stiamo cercando un/una commesso/a* “we are looking for a salesman/saleswoman”). For each job advertisement, participants were asked to rate their intention to apply and their likelihood of being hired, and to indicate whether the text was directed more to one sex or the other (the job being neither stereotypically masculine nor

feminine, according to Kennison and Trofe, 2003). The feminisation of professions raised women's willingness to apply and altered the perception of the text as mainly addressing women.

Horvath and Sczesny (2015) investigated whether linguistic forms influence personnel selectors' perception of fit for leadership positions using German-language job advertisements. The texts were presented with masculine generics (e.g., *Geschäftsführer* "CEO"), masculine forms with (m/f) (e.g., *Geschäftsführer (m/w)*) or word pairs (e.g., *Geschäftsführerin/Geschäftsführer*). The job advertisements presented either a high-status or a low-status leadership position. Results showed that word pairs raised the perceived suitability of women in comparison with the other two forms. If masculine forms were used, the likelihood of a female applicant being considered as suitable for a high-status position decreased. If word pairs were used, male and female applicants were perceived as equally good for high-status positions.

The effects of the linguistic form on adolescents' job attitudes were also investigated. Chatard, Guimond and Martinot (2005) asked French adolescents to evaluate on a ten-point Likert scale their degree of self-efficacy towards various occupations. The professions were presented with masculine generics (e.g., *enseignant*) or with inclusive forms (e.g., *enseignant(e)* or *enseignant/enseignante*). Results showed that a change in the grammatical gender had an impact on the perceived self-efficacy. Both female and male subjects' scores were significantly higher when professions were presented with inclusive forms in comparison with the masculine form only (no differences were found between the two inclusive forms). In particular, the feminisation of professions was strongly beneficial for female teenagers with regard to high-status professions, which are typically male-dominated and usually carry only the masculine grammatical gender. When professions such as "surgeon" carried both masculine and feminine gender, female subjects reported higher levels of self-efficacy. Chatard, Guimond and Martinot (2005) concluded by stressing that a systematic feminisation can lead to a multiplication of models of identification facilitating the removal of social barriers for women (p. 268) and that the lack of the feminine grammatical gender for the most prestigious occupations is a form of «symbolic violence» (p. 269).

Vervecken, Gygax, Gabriel, Guillod and Hannover (2015) investigated the effects of pair forms on adolescents from French speaking Switzerland. They presented typically male or female gendered occupations and gender-neutral occupations in different linguistic forms to provide insight as to whether ascriptions of success in those occupations would change (1 = only men, 3 = men and women alike, 5 = only women). In the pair form condition, participants mean responses were closer to the answer that men and women could equally succeed. These results were consistent regardless of the respondents' sex and of the typicality of professions: on a general level, gender-fair language generates gender-balanced perceptions of occupational success.

Similar results were found when experimenting with children. Vervecken, Hannover & Wolter (2013), with three experiments conducted in German and Dutch, demonstrated that the linguistic label has an impact on children's mental representation and occupational interest in traditionally male occupations. Their first experiment investigated whether the feminisation of professions facilitates mental associations with women. Children were asked by their teachers: "Suppose you are a film producer. Which first names would you give to the following movie characters?" The characters were then presented alongside their occupations and carrying either masculine gender or pair forms. As expected, when occupations were introduced by both masculine and feminine grammatical gender, more female names were evoked – regardless of the children's sex – and this effect was particularly strong with stereotypically male domains. In Experiment 2, children were asked by their teachers to indicate who can succeed in some professions (on a scale ranging from "only men" to "only women") listed either with exclusive forms (e.g., "firemen are people who extinguish fires") or inclusive forms (e.g., "firewomen and firemen are people who extinguish fires"). In the second condition, children of both sexes were more likely to consider men and women equally successful. In Experiment 3 children were asked "how much would you like to be...?" for each occupation. The linguistic form revealed no effects with male children but did reveal effects with female children: pair forms fostered girl's interest in traditionally male occupations.

Finally, Vervecken and Hannover (2015) manipulated the linguistic label used to describe stereotypically male occupations to German and Dutch children. The effect of the linguistic form was investigated with regard to perceptions of accessibility (in terms of status) and self-efficacy towards the jobs described. In the first experiment, children estimated how much people earn (in a scale ranging from "very little" to "very much"). Results showed that the pair form diminished earning beliefs as to stereotypically male occupations (a tendency for girls, a statistically significant result for boys), while no effects were found with stereotypically female and gender-neutral occupations. Given that in the male sample a main effect for age was found (the older the participants, the more ascriptions for earnings were attenuated) and that male and female participants did not match in age, Vervecken and Hannover (2015) conducted a second experiment to control for the possible confound of age. For each job, children were asked questions about the difficulty (how hard it is to do a job, how hard it is to learn it) and status (how important a job is, how much money people earn). Self-efficacy was also tested (how confident participants were to pass a possible future test to get that job). Results showed a main effect of the linguistic manipulation on the perceived status and difficulty of traditionally male-dominated jobs, both with male and female children: jobs presented with pair forms were ascribed lower status and were perceived as less difficult. Self-efficacy beliefs were also significantly affected, regardless of the children's sex. The authors comment that "linguistic

feminization of stereotypically male occupations also leads to the ascription of higher job accessibility by primary school children aged 6–12” (p. 86) and that “a language reform in the respective countries could contribute to reducing the skill shortage in traditionally male occupations in the long term, as it empowers young children to believe: *YES I CAN!*” (p. 88).

The influence of grammatical gender on perception was not only studied in relation to human referents, but also to inanimate nouns (Konishi 1993, Flaherty 2001, Borodisky, Schmidt and Phillips 2003), inanimate nouns and animals (Vigliocco, Vinson and Paganelli 2004, Vigliocco, Vinson, Paganelli and Dworzynski 2005) and non-words (Ervin 1962, Konishi 1994). Konishi (1993) conducted research with German and Spanish speakers concluding that grammatical gender carries connotative meaning of femininity and masculinity. In his view, “different genders for the same object may not be arbitrary but rather reflect the fact that different languages highlight different attributes of an object” (p. 521). Flaherty (2001) demonstrated that grammatical gender was not considered as arbitrary or neutral by asking Spanish children to allocate gender and to assign typical female or male names to objects presented in cartoons. In a similar vein, Borodisky, Schmidt and Phillips (2003) provided evidence for the influence of grammatical gender on the mental representations of inanimate objects through an experiment conducted entirely in English with German and Spanish speakers, using nouns which had opposite grammatical gender in the two languages. However, these experiments have been criticised for making explicit reference to gender or sex (cf. Sato, Öttl, Gabriel and Gyax, 2017). Vigliocco, Vinson, Paganelli and Dworzynski (2005) claimed that grammatical gender is salient for animate entities (animals included), but not for objects.

In conclusion, all studies on masculine generics involved the presentation of texts written either with masculine plural or with alternative forms, and the mental representations elicited were captured explicitly (writing stories, giving names, estimating percentages, reacting to texts, etc.) or implicitly (reaction times, ERPs). The tendency of associating masculine forms with male individuals was consistent across different studies and different languages. The activation of the generic interpretation of masculine generics never occupied a primary role: the linguistic form is a strong cue as to the sex of the referents. As a consequence, to maintain that expressions like *il ministro* are gender-neutral – because they only refer to the function assumed and not to the agent – means not only to contradict the unconscious linguistic competence in a gendered language, but also to unfoundedly deny empirical findings on the association of grammatical information with lexical representations. In particular, the research made on professional role names has shown that feminisation raises the perceived suitability for leadership positions (Braun, Sczesny and Stahlberg, 2002; Horvath and Sczesny, 2015) and influences the sense of belongingness and inclusiveness of women making them more motivated to pursue the job (Bem and Bem, 1973; Stout and Dasgupta,

2011; Merkel 2013). This gender-balanced perception of suitability and success is promoted both in adults and in children and adolescents: the feminine form has an impact on the easiness with which children retrieve female role models, strengthening their degree of self-efficacy and their interest towards traditionally male-dominated occupations (Chatard, Guimond and Martinot, 2005; Vervecken, Hannover and Wolter, 2013; Vervecken and Hannover, 2015; Vervecken, Gyga, Gabriel, Guillod and Hannover, 2015). As anticipated in Section 2.2, the use of certain linguistic symbols fosters the availability of the respective conceptualisation (i.e., it facilitates mental associations with women in prestigious and leading positions) and evokes the existence of actual female referents.

3.2 Gender stereotypes

As regards professional titles, in Italian and in many other gender-marked languages, the feminine gender does not occur as freely as the masculine one, but in reference to a stricter range of roles. As noted by Luraghi and Olita (2006), the unmarked meaning of a grammatical gender reflects a stereotype, namely the tendency of associating men and women to distinct activities (p. 40; see also Section 2.0). If there are cases in which the masculine or feminine gender is not marked but “neuter”, then in those cases maleness or femaleness is the prototype. A relatively recent analysis of job advertisements on Italian newspapers (Olita 2006) shows that – in spite of the neutrality dictated by the law¹⁶ – some titles occurred in the feminine form only. These titles were generic, with no specialisation required (e.g., *segretaria*, *commessa*, *venditrice*, *cameriera*): the sole feminine form never occurred for specialised professions, contrary to the masculine ones – often ambiguously used with generic or specific meaning.

Stereotypes have been studied in very different ways. MacKay and Konishi (1980), for example, investigated the use of human pronouns used to address non-human referents in children’s literature, as in the case of powerful lions personified as males and helpless mice personified as females. They concluded that “social stereotypes played a role in the choice of *he* vs *she* since antecedents of *he* tended to be strong, active, brave, wise, clever, and mischievous, while antecedents of *she* tended to be weak, passive, and foolish” (p. 149).

It is well established that gender schemas and stereotypes play an influential role in people’s understanding of social events (see the impressive amount of data collected by Valian, 1998 and Stewart and Valian, 2018). As noted in Section 2.0, “the term *schema* is broader and more neutral than the term *stereotype*, which tends to connote an inaccurate and negative view of a social group.

¹⁶ In compliance with the Italian laws n. 903/1977 and n. 125/1991, job advertisements must address persons of either sex.

Schemas may be accurate or inaccurate, and they may be positive, negative or neutral. [...] Without schemas, our world would consist of millions of unrelated individuals and events.” (Valian, 1998, p. 104). In the present work, the term *stereotype* will be used indiscriminately for two reasons: first, to conform to the terminology used in the psycholinguistic and sociolinguistic research consulted, in which no mention of *schemas* is made; second, to underline the detrimental effect that the schema of *woman* actually has on her professional life. In fact, with regard to professional performances, “gender and race schemas result in our slightly undervaluing the accomplishments and competence of women and people of color, and slightly overvaluing the accomplishments and competence of White men” (Stewart and Valian, 2018, p. 71). A considerable amount of literature has been published on the influence of gender schemas on the interpretation of people’s performances, proving that they bias perceptions and expectations to the disadvantage of women. Olian, Schwab and Haberfeld (1988) reported a meta-analysis of 19 experimental studies that varied the gender of job applicants and concluded that this manipulation influenced students’ or recruiters’ perceptions of job suitability. The meta-analysis confirmed a discrimination towards female applicants in hiring decisions. More recent research seems to confirm this trend: when evaluators were given identical information and were asked to rate employees’ competence, they rated men as more competent than women (Moss-Racusin, Dovidio, Brescoll, Graham and Handelsman, 2012; Sczesny, Spreemann and Stahlberg, 2006; Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs and Tamkins, 2004). It has also been proven that male dominated fields are less associated with motivation and hard work, and more with innate ability (Leslie, Cimpian, Meyer and Freeland, 2015).

The association between maleness and professional suitability has also been investigated in languages with a grammatical gender system, not only to compare men and women, but also to examine the phenomenon of prestigious masculine. It is worth mentioning two studies, conducted in Polish, which have various points in common with the first experiment of our research (reported in Chapter 4). Formanowicz, Bedynska, Cislak, Braun and Sczesny (2013) investigated if female applicants presented with feminine job titles were evaluated less favourably in comparison to female applicants presented with masculine job titles. To avoid any influence of world knowledge on the existing professions, two out of three studies utilised invented job titles (*diarolożka-F* and *diarolog-M*). The job applications presented a man, a woman with a masculine job title or a woman with a feminine job title. Participants were asked to indicate if they would hire the applicant and if that applicant would succeed, from a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much). In all studies, the ratings assigned to female applicants with feminine job titles were lower than both female applicants with masculine job titles and male applicants. Budziszewska, Hansen and Bilewicz (2014) investigated if the grammatical gender of the job title influenced the perception of women as regards the two

stereotypical dimensions of warmth and competence. Participants were presented with stories titled “In the year 2110” in which fictitious job titles were introduced. They were asked to evaluate the characters according to warmth, competence and employability. Results showed that women described with masculine job titles were perceived as more competent than those described with feminine job titles. These studies confirm the tendency of women to prefer the masculine over the feminine job titles to gain professional credibility. Menegatti and Rubini (2017) comment Budziszewska, Hansen and Bilewicz’s (2014) study by saying that “women in high-status positions are perceived as warmer, that is, closer to the stereotype of women, than when referred to with a masculine term. Thus there is a paradox according to which, in high-status positions, women could benefit from the use of masculine job titles” (p. 11).

In actuality, the characteristics generally ascribed to men and women seem to determine their suitability to job roles: women are generally thought of as nurturant and compassionate, and men as agentic and assertive. Women appear best suited for works involving care and assistance. Such expectations originate in the traditional division of labour which required persons of different sex to engage in different social roles (cf. Menegatti and Rubini, 2017). More precisely, such stereotypicality content has been framed in terms of three paradigms: Schein’s (1973, 2001) *think manager–think male* paradigm, Shinar’s (1975) *masculinity–femininity* paradigm and Powell and Butterfield’s (1979) *agency–communion* paradigm. A meta-analysis of the scientific evidence in support of the three paradigms conducted by Koenig, Mitchell, Eagly, Ristikari (2001) established “a strong and robust tendency for leadership to be viewed as culturally masculine” (p. 637). Schein (1973) demonstrated that successful managers were perceived as possessing the characteristics commonly ascribed to men and that, by implication, women were naturally less suitable than men for that position. Male managers were given a checklist of adjectives and characteristics and were asked to rate the “typical man”, the “typical woman” and the “typical successful manager” on those qualities: the ratings of men and successful managers were very similar, contrary to those of women. Schein’s (1973) study was replicated in 1989 (Heilman, Block, Martell and Simon, 1989) with the same results. In addition, in the 1989 study male managers were asked to rate two additional categories: “successful male manager” and “successful female manager”. Not only the typical female manager was perceived as having less leadership ability, but also as having negative qualities such as being bitter and selfish. Similarly, the *agency – communion* paradigm examined the content of gender stereotypes showing that communality is an essential trait of women, and this idea about what women are like fits poorly with the attributes believed necessary for being a successful leader. In this respect, Eagly and Karau (2002) talk of *role incongruity* between the female role and the leadership role. Apparently, the characteristics associated with females mismatch with those required for chief roles;

this would result in women being perceived less favourably as potential occupants of leadership roles and evaluated less favourably when they enact such roles.

Shinar's *masculinity-femininity* paradigm (1975) did not focus solely on leader roles, but on the collection of gender occupational norms of 129 occupational titles. She employed three different criteria among three different groups. The first criterion was to elicit ratings for each occupation giving "vague" instructions in terms of its being masculine, feminine, or neutral; the second criterion was to evaluate in base of the actual proportion of women and men employed in those occupations; the third was to give ratings according to the attributes and personality characteristics linked to them. Results showed that the classifications were very similar regardless of the criteria used, and that typicality was clearly defined for both male and female participants. The overall mean rating (3.16) was closer to the masculine pole (1) of the scale than to the feminine pole (7). Twenty-seven means were between 1 and 2, but only four means were between 6 and 7 (manicurist, nurse, receptionist, private secretary). The author concluded that "it seems reasonable to assume that those occupations stereotypically associated with high levels of competence, rationality, and assertion are viewed as masculine occupations, whereas those occupations stereotypically associated with dependency, passivity, nurturance, and interpersonal warmth are perceived as feminine occupations" (p. 108).

Since then, gender-typicality has been collected on various occasions. Beggs and Doolittle (1993) replicated Shinar's (1975) experiment, again with US college students, concluding that although the mean ratings were more gender neutral (3.41) in comparison to the previous experiment, gender expectations among US students continued to exist. Couch and Sigler (2001) elicited US students' perceptions of 105 occupations confirming that power was perceived as a masculine trait and caregiving as a feminine one.

Sastre, Fouquereau, Igier, Salvatore and Mullet (2000) were the first to provide a database on occupational gender in Europe, replicating the study of Shinar (1975) with French and Spanish students. The occupations were presented with masculine used as a generic. Again, the overall means were closer to the masculine pole than to the feminine one (3.455 for the Spanish sample, 3.453 for the French sample). Gender perceptions were very similar between the two countries, the shared most feminine occupations being manicurist, nurse, hospital attendant and receptionist. Stereotypicality ratings in the English language were also collected by Kennison and Trofe (2003). Their study comprehended 405 nouns divided into two sets of items. Participants were asked to indicate on a 7-point rating scale, displaying two diversified scales (*I = mostly female* or *I = mostly male*) "how likely [they] feel that the noun represents a person who is male or a person who is female". Results showed a high agreement across participants with respect to the items viewed as referring mostly to females, mostly to males and those gender-neutral. A comparison of these results with those from

prior research (Beggs and Doolittle, 1993; Shinar, 1975) showed that the strength of some word-specific stereotypes had changed (e.g., *doctor* and *lawyer* were less strongly biased as referring to mostly males).

Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham and Oakhill (2008a) collected gender norms ratings of 126 role names across three different languages (English, French and German). Given the effects of masculine generics on mental representations (see Section 3.1), an effect of the linguistic form on the stereotypicality was also investigated. In Study 1, participants were asked to assign the gender typicality of a list of role names presented with both masculine and feminine forms. Study 2 was identical in all except the removal of the feminine terms, with masculine role names serving as generics. The gender norms provided were consistent across the three languages; there were more male and neuter stereotyped role names than female role names. Interestingly, presenting the jobs with masculine forms only induced a general increase in the estimated proportion of males. Once again, the absence of the feminine forms strengthened the male bias, with the average stereotypicality perceptions positioned closer to the masculine pole.

Finally, Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny (2016) manipulated the linguistic form (masculine generics or pair forms) in an experiment conducted in Italian and German, to measure the following variables: gender-typicality, competence, social status and estimated salary. The use of word pairs in the questions “How many women and men pursue the profession [professional group]?” and “For whom is the profession [professional group] more typical?” increased the responses’ female typicality (pair forms also lowered salary estimates, while no effects were found for competence and social status). In short, the rating evaluations of gender-typicality have consistently proven that typically male roles outnumber typically female roles, and that the feminine linguistic form influences this perception attenuating it.

Gender-typicality has been identified as a relevant cue as to the sex of a referent, both in languages with and without grammatical gender. People always construct their mental representation making inferences (i.e., deducing the missing information through a combination of explicit information and world knowledge) and it has been demonstrated that the sex of a referent is automatically inferred even if it is not necessary for coherence (cf. Gygax, Sato, Öttl and Gabriel 2020). Readers deduce sex information on the basis of both grammatical gender (as amply documented in Section 3.1) and of gender typicality. The well-known Sanford’s (1985) riddle is one of the first examples given on the effects of gender-typicality on sentence processing, given that English participants could not find a coherent interpretation of the following passage:

A father and son are driving home one day, when they are involved in a serious accident. The father is killed out-right, but the son is driven to hospital, where he is about to undergo an emergency operation. However, the surgeon refuses to operate, saying: "I can't operate on him: he's my son." The question is, how can this be?

Only a small number of readers indicated that the surgeon was the mother's boy: the final sentence conflicted with the automatic expectation on the sex of the surgeon: *surgeon* was interpreted as male even though the word has no gender marking. A number of psycholinguistic and neurolinguistic studies have provided evidence for the activation of stereotypical information at the time that a role name is encoded. Apart from the aforementioned rating evaluations, various techniques have been used, including eye-tracking, priming, ERPs and sentence evaluation. Numerous studies involved the use of anaphoric and cataphoric terms that were consistent or inconsistent with the gender-typicality.

To examine automatic information processing, Banaji and Hardin (1996) employed the semantic priming technique, which indicates the unconscious strength of association between two concepts. They presented two words in close succession: a prime word followed by a pronoun target word (*she, her, hers, he, him, or his*). Primes included three categories: words representing gender at the lexical level (e.g., *father, waitress*), gender-stereotyped words (e.g., *doctor, nurse*) and gender-neutral words (e.g., *citizen, cousin*). The judgement task focused on whether each target was masculine or feminine (Experiment 1) and on whether the target was a pronoun or not (in Experiment 2, other grammatical forms were added). Both kinds of judgement were faster when the gender stereotypicality of the prime matched the gender of the pronoun. Experiment 2 provided evidence for the activation of gender information even in a task which was gender-irrelevant (i.e., "is the target word a pronoun or not?"), confirming the potency of the phenomenon.

Osterhout, Bersick, and McLaughlin (1997) monitored event-related brain potentials to verify the ERP response to reflexive pronouns whose antecedent were lexically defined as female or male (e.g., *uncle, woman*) and to reflexive pronouns whose antecedent were gender-stereotyped (e.g., *doctor, babysitter*). Both definitional and stereotypical gender were presented in congruent and incongruent combinations, as in:

- *The man prepared himself for the interview* (definitional gender + congruent pronoun)
- *The man prepared herself for the interview* (definitional gender + incongruent pronoun)
- *The doctor prepared himself for the interview* (stereotypical gender + congruent pronoun)
- *The doctor prepared herself for the interview* (stereotypical gender + incongruent pronoun)

Results showed similar ERP responses to incongruent combinations: not only definitional but also stereotypical gender elicited larger positive going waves (P600). Given that a P600 effect is usually interpreted as occurring in response to syntactic violations and anomalies, this experiment was particularly revealing in that it showed that gender stereotypes are so prominent to be processed analogously to syntactic information. Similar mismatching effects for anaphoric pronouns were found by Kreiner, Mohr, Kessler and Garrod (2009), who conducted two ERP experiments in the English language.

Having established the importance of stereotypes in mental representations, questions have been raised about the nature of such stereotypical gender. The aforementioned studies seem to show that lexical and stereotypical gender are activated and processed in a similar way, coherently with the lexical view – which does not discern between the two claiming that both are stored as part of the lexical representation. By contrast, according to the mental model approach stereotypical gender is unspecified in the lexicon and is inferred from world knowledge or from any cue available in the discourse, as detailed in the studies below.

Through a self-paced reading task preceding a comprehension task, Carreiras, Garnham, Oakhill, and Cain (1996) found that reading times for gender-related labels and stereotypical gender were longer when they were incongruent. They presented short passages in English (Experiment 1) and Spanish (Experiments 2,3,4). In the English experiment, the first sentence introduced a stereotypically masculine or feminine character, and the following sentence presented a pronoun which either matched or mismatched with their gender typicality. For example, participants were asked if the electrician was mending a stereo after reading: “The electrician examined the light fitting – She needed a special attachment to fix it”. When the anaphoric sentence contained an incongruent pronoun, a reading difficulty, called “mismatch-cost”, was found. In the Spanish language, the first sentence introduced a stereotypical name whose article and suffix carried a grammatical gender which was consistent or opposite to the bias associated with that name. An example of inconsistent grammatical gender is that of the female footballer: “La futbolista quería jugar el partido – Ella había estado entrenando mucho durante la semana”. In this case, reading times were longer for the first part of the text – where it is the morphological information to be inconsistent – while no mismatch-costs were found for the following parts. It is noteworthy that, in a grammatical gender language such as Spanish, the mismatch-cost did not occur in the subsequent parts of the texts, where the coreferential feminine pronoun referred to a typically male role. This has been explained in terms of an immediate incorporation of stereotypical information which influences comprehension (i.e., an initial mismatch-cost was found) and which can be modulated by prior context (e.g., no mismatch-cost occurred when reading *Ella*). Subsequent reading times (Kennison and Trofe, 2003) and eye-movements (Sturt,

2003; Reali, Esaulova, Öttl and von Stockhausen, 2015) studies for English pairs of sentences presenting a stereotyped role name followed by a mismatching anaphoric pronoun confirmed Carreiras, Garnham, Oakhill, and Cain's (1996) results.

Duffy and Keir's (2004) English eye-tracking experiments demonstrated that gender stereotypes are automatically activated measuring reading times of sentences containing a stereotypically female or male role name and an incongruent reflexive pronoun. In Experiment 1, each sentence introduced a subject, followed by a verb and a pronoun which specified the character's sex, as in "The babysitter found herself/himself humming while walking up to the door" (female role names and congruent/incongruent reflexive pronoun); "The senator perjured himself/herself on the stand in an attempt to avoid prison" (male role names and congruent/incongruent reflexive pronoun). Fixation times on the reflexive pronoun were longer in the incongruent condition, compared with the congruent condition. When the pronoun mismatched with the stereotypical information, participants tended to reread that part of the sentence. Experiment 2 aimed at verifying whether the processing of words can be modified by discourse context. For this reason, the sentences of Experiment 1 were preceded by other sentences which either made explicit the character's sex or not: in the neutral version of the paragraphs, the character's sex was not stated (as in "The electrician was cautious and carefully secured the ladder to the side of the house before checking the roof"); in the disambiguating version of the paragraphs, the sex was explicitly stated (as in "The electrician was a cautious woman/man who carefully secured her/his ladder to the side of the house before checking the roof"). Results showed that in the neutral context, the second explicit mention of the role name was fixated for more time when there was a mismatch ("electrician... herself"). However, in the prior disambiguating content (e.g., "The electrician was a cautious woman") no differences were found between the mismatch and the match conditions. The researchers concluded that stereotypes do play a role in reading comprehension, but that they can be modulated by context: a disambiguating discourse context prevents their automatic activation.

Garnham, Oakhill and Reynolds (2002, 2005) have reported that the use of stereotypical information is not under the reader's strategic control. Garnham, Oakhill and Reynolds (2002) employed a sentence evaluation paradigm, in which English participants had to judge whether the second sentence was a good continuation of the first one. In Experiment 1, the initial part of the text introduced a stereotyped role name (e.g., "The fortune teller, who had recently finished lunch, went to the washroom") and the final part constrained the character's sex without stating it explicitly, but mentioning biological characteristics, or kinship relationships, or objects generally associated with one gender (clothing, makeup). Thus, their material never established gender for certain, but used only probabilistic information. In Experiment 1, information was presented in the same order of

Carreiras, Garnham, Oakhill, and Cain's (1996) study. Both the proportions of positive responses and reaction times demonstrated a mismatch effect. In Experiment 2, the pieces of information were inverted, with gender constraints in the first part and the role name in the final part of the paragraphs (e.g., "choosing a favorite silk tie from the drawer, the typist wondered whether it was too formal"). Regardless of presentation order, the results were similar. The reversed versions used in Experiment 2 corroborated the hypothesis that inferences based on stereotypes are drawn immediately, and that clear morphological or semantic information is not necessary for inferences to be made. Garnham, Oakhill and Reynolds (2005) conducted six experiments in the English language based on the presentation of pair terms, the first word being a role noun and the second being a kinship term (e.g., *sister*). Role nouns comprehended strongly biased terms toward male or female (e.g., *footballer*, *beautician*), neutral terms (e.g., *musician*, *novelist*) and filler items to which one could respond "yes" or "no" unequivocally (e.g., *sister – lady*, *sister – duke*). Participants had to indicate as fast as possible if the two terms could indicate the same person. When the role noun was stereotypically incongruent with the kinship term, participants gave more negative responses and/or needed more time to respond. Accuracy and decision time confirmed that individuals form a mental representation of the referents' sex which is based on stereotypical information. To further investigate this phenomenon, in the fourth experiment the researchers varied the instruction conditions encouraging participants to respond strategically and not automatically. Participants were reminded that "the following are examples where a *Yes/Same Person* response is appropriate: chauffeur – mother and receptionist – father". Even though the reminder that nowadays most professions are performed by either sex reduced the effects, the results were consistent across all instruction conditions, showing that stereotypical information is impossible or difficult to suppress.

Kreiner, Sturt and Garrod (2008) drew attention to the controversy surrounding the lexical view and the mental model view by noting that some studies compared lexical and stereotypical nouns without examining the effects of different discourse contexts (Banaji & Hardin, 1996; Osterhout et al., 1997a), whereas others examined the effects of discourse contexts without comparing the two noun types (Carreiras et al., 1996; Duffy & Keir, 2004). For this reason, their eye-tracking experiments investigated the effects of both definitional and stereotypical gender, employing both anaphoric and cataphoric pronouns, as in:

- *Yesterday the minister left London after reminding himself / herself about the letter* (stereotypical gender + anaphoric pronoun)
- *After reminding himself / herself about the letter, the minister immediately went to the meeting at the office* (stereotypical gender + cataphoric pronoun)

- *Yesterday the king left London after reminding himself / herself about the letter* (definitional gender + anaphoric pronoun)
- *After reminding himself / herself about the letter, the king immediately went to the meeting at the office* (definitional gender + cataphoric pronoun)

Results were as follows: in anaphora sentences, readers slowed down when the anaphor mismatched in stereotypicality. As expected, this mismatch-cost was similar for both definitional and stereotypical gender. However, in cataphora sentences, where the reflexive precedes the noun, a mismatch-cost was exhibited for definitional gender but not for stereotypical gender. Kreiner, Sturt and Garrod's (2008) studies reported a qualitative difference between the processing of definitional and stereotypical gender, leading the authors to conclude that "such a difference is consistent with the claim that definitional gender is lexically represented while stereotype gender is not" (p. 256). These experiments have been conducted primarily in English, clarifying that, in the absence of any other information, the referents' sex is inferred from stereotypicality, which is based on world knowledge and which can be overridden by contextual information.

In grammatical gender languages, a number of studies have addressed the interplay of linguistic and non-linguistic factors. Vigliocco and Franck (1999) investigated whether conceptual gender (i.e., grammatical gender reflecting semantic gender) is used in the encoding of gender agreement, showing a difference from features with no conceptual connotation (i.e., formal gender). They focused on the grammatical encoding of gender agreement between a subject and a predicate in Italian and French, eliciting agreement errors and comparing formal gender (e.g., *il cero in chiesa* 'The-M candle-M in church-F') with conceptual gender (e.g., *lo sposo in chiesa* 'The-M groom-M in church-F'). Errors with nouns having conceptual gender were less common than those having formal gender, showing that all information available including conceptual correlates of gender is taken into account to compute agreement. Experimenting with epicene nouns, Vigliocco and Franck (2001) confirmed that conceptual information strengthens syntactic accuracy. The different error rates showed that it was easier to produce errors when conceptual and formal information was incongruent (e.g., *un camion ha investito Fabio; la vittima era distratto* 'A truck hit Fabio-M; the-F victim-F was distracted-M') compared to when they were congruent (e.g., *un camion ha investito Fabiola; la vittima era distratta* 'A truck hit Fabiola-F; the-F victim-F was distracted-M'). The authors confirmed that conceptual information – and not only formal information – is taken into account during the encoding process.

Cacciari and Padovani (2007) focused on the mental representation of the referents' sex in the Italian language. They modelled their study on that of Banaji and Hardin (1996), employing the semantic priming technique. Their primes consisted of common nouns, which are not

morphologically marked for gender (the authors considered the word *ingegnere* ‘engineer’ to be a common noun, although it is capable of declension). Participants were shown a prime followed by the words *lui* ‘he’ or *lei* ‘she’, and their task was to indicate the gender of the pronoun. Primes were stereotypically female (e.g., *insegnante*, *badante*, *vergine*), male (e.g., *ingegnere*, *bracciante*, *dirigente*) or neutral (e.g., *emigrante*, *ospite*, *occidentale*). Results revealed a priming effect: decisions were taken faster when the gender stereotype associated with the prime was congruent with the gender of the pronoun.

Cacciari, Corradini, Padovani and Carreiras (2011) investigated common and epicene nouns in the Italian language through a self-paced moving window technique, to clarify the role played by grammatical and contextual information on pronoun resolution. For each noun, three contexts were devised: neutral (without information as to the referent’s sex), congruent and incongruent. For epicene nouns, congruent contexts were biased as to a correspondence of semantic gender and grammatical gender of the epicene (e.g., *vittima*-F biased towards a female referent); incongruent contexts were biased towards individuals whose semantic gender differed from the grammatical gender of the epicene (e.g., *vittima*-F biased towards a male referent). For common nouns, congruent and incongruent contexts were biased towards gender schemas (e.g., *assistente* being female in the first case and being male in the second). Results showed that when the antecedents were epicenes, pronoun resolution was guided by grammatical gender, with contextual information prevailing only in the final region. In contrast, when the antecedents were common nouns, pronoun resolution was set by contextual information. According to the authors, these results “are consistent with models of anaphor resolution that assume an early role for grammatical gender information in pronoun resolution” (p. 431). Taken together, these studies show that common nouns (and nouns used as such, like *ingegnere*) activate stereotyped information because morphological information does not provide any cue as to the referents’ sex: given the absence of grammatical information, individuals rely on contextual information (which includes stereotypes).

Another Italian study which addressed the role played by world-knowledge and grammar is that of Ronca and Moscati (2019). Their eye-tracking experiment involved bi-clausal sentences containing epicene nouns, in which morphological information either disambiguated the semantic gender of the following role noun or not (gerunds in Italian do not carry gender agreement):

- *Diventata ingegnere, si era comprata un nuovo studio in città* (early disambiguation, feminine)
‘When she became-F an engineer, she bought-F herself a new study in town’
- *Essendo ingegnere, si era comprata un nuovo studio in città* (late disambiguation, feminine)
‘Being-GER an engineer, she bought-F herself a new study in town’
- *Diventato ingegnere, si era comprato un nuovo studio in città* (early disambiguation, masculine)

‘When he became-M an engineer, he bought-M himself a new study in town’

- *Essendo ingegnere, si era comprato un nuovo studio in città* (late disambiguation, masculine)

‘Being-GER an engineer, he bought-M himself a new study in town’

While hearing the sentences, a picture appeared on screen showing a male individual, a female individual and two distractors (animals and inanimate objects). Results showed that in the Early disambiguation contexts the same general pattern was found for the masculine and the feminine conditions (i.e., in the masculine condition, the proportion of male-fixations was higher in the early than in the late condition, and the same happened in the feminine condition). However, in the Late disambiguating contexts the proportion of target-fixations was much smaller in the feminine condition compared to the masculine one. In other words, in the presence of morphological information eye gazes were directed toward the correct target to the same degree, while in the absence of morphological information a stereotype inference was made, which lasted until the feminine gender marker of the second sentence was met. Ronca and Moscati (2019) conclude that “when a feminine past participle is provided before the role noun, it swiftly blocks gender inferences. [...] Linguistic information can thus quickly and completely override gender inference. This indicates that the hearers’ representational model can indeed be completed with different sources of world-knowledge, but only if this addition is compatible with the explicit grammatical information” (p. 123).

The interaction between linguistic and non-linguistic factors was also investigated by incorporating in the same study stereotypes and masculine generics. Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham, and Oakhill (2008b) focused on the interaction between stereotyping and morphological gender marking, by employing a sentence evaluation paradigm and comparing English (natural gender) with French and German (grammatical gender). Participants were presented with pairs of sentences; the first sentence contained a stereotypically female, male or neutral role noun, as in “The social workers were walking through the station”. In the case of grammatical gender languages, role nouns carried masculine plural gender. The second sentence specified the subject’s sex with the anaphoric noun *men* or *women*, as in “Since sunny weather was forecast several of the *women* weren't wearing a coat”. Participants had to determine whether the second sentence was a good continuation of the first one and in all experimental conditions the intended response was *yes*. For this reason, filler items presenting semantic incongruities were added – as in “a) The professors were taking a break in the sun. b) Due to the bad weather, the majority of the women had an umbrella”. Results showed that English participants responded relying on the stereotypicality of the role noun: both the kind of responses and response times showed more and quicker affirmative responses for *engineers* followed by *men* and *nurses* followed by *women*. However, German and French participants found *men* continuations to be more sensible, and were faster in responding, in comparison to *women*

continuations. In French and German, the fact that men characters got more positive responses was independent of stereotypicality: when the second sentence signalled women, the proportion of negative responses was higher. This showed that while in English sex inferences depended on gender stereotypes, in grammatical gender systems they were dictated by the grammatical gender of the noun. The authors' comment is that

Not only for neutral but even for female stereotyped role names, the grammatical form of the role names overrode the stereotypicality. This is not to say that stereotypicality does not influence gender representation, but in the case where grammatical gender is available, such stereotypicality has little influence. [...]. Grammatical gender seemed to provide sufficient information for readers to build their mental representation of gender (p. 480).

The materials and the design of this experiment were replicated by Garnham, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Gygax, and Oakhill (2012), who aimed at analysing further the role of grammatical information in languages with different grammatical systems. In particular, gender marked pronouns were added to see whether they altered participant's mental representation: in the first sentence, the plural role noun was followed by a plural pronoun, which is gender-neutral in English (*they*), masculine in French (*ils*) and morphologically identical to the feminine singular in German (*sie*). An English example is: "a) The neighbours came out of the cafeteria. They went away. (b) Because of the cloudy weather, one of the women/men had an umbrella". As expected, in English the mental representations were biased by stereotypes. While for French the male bias found in Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham, and Oakhill (2008a) was maintained, in German it was attenuated by the presence of a pronoun identical to the feminine one, facilitating positive responses to *women* continuations and accelerating judgement times. These effects confirmed that morphology has an immediate impact on information processing, given that that mismatching grammatical information counteracted one another.

Sato, Gygax and Gabriel (2013) investigated the effects of grammatical and stereotypical gender information among bilinguals who spoke a grammatical and a natural gender language (French and English), to see whether possessing competence in more than one language affects the perception of such information. The authors used the same experimental paradigm and materials as Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham, and Oakhill (2008b). Interestingly, participants' gender representations switched in relation to the language used. While in their L1 representations were consistent with previous findings (i.e., stereotyped in English and male biased in French), in their L2 English participants showed an increase in male biased representations, and French participants showed a

decrease in male biased representations, relying more on stereotypical information. In addition, an effect of language proficiency was found (the responses of less-proficient bilinguals were closer to their L1). The authors concluded that “even small linguistic features can influence mental representations for the purposes of language comprehension” and that “mental representations of gender created by bilinguals who speak languages with different gender features appear to alternate as a function of the language at use” (pp. 13-14).

To briefly summarise, the studies described in this section has shown how stereotypes give rise to biased judgements on women’s professional performances. In fact, they seem to affect judgements of competence and job-suitability. Most importantly, the characteristics generally ascribed to women and men constitute a barrier to women’s advance to leadership roles, due to a *role incongruity* between the positions of power and the female stereotype. The perceptions of gender-typicality are largely shared and consistent across languages and over time. However, they are affected by the linguistic form, given that word pairs mitigate the general male-bias. The research made on the interplay between linguistic and non-linguistic factors has also shown that gender inferences are triggered by both stereotypical and grammatical features. In the absence of grammatical gender, mental representations are dictated by stereotypical information, while in grammatical gender systems the linguistic label even overrides widespread stereotypes. As summarised by Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham, and Oakhill (2008b),

when no mark of gender is provided by role names or their accompanying definite articles, the representation of gender is based on stereotypicality [...]; when a grammatical mark of gender is provided, the representation of gender is based on that mark of gender, and not on stereotype information (p. 480).

If language has such a power – of both modifying perceptions of gender-typicality and of overriding stereotypes in mental representations – it seems reasonable to think that normalising the use of feminine job titles would help contrasting the deeply ingrained beliefs as to the prototypicality of such professions. In the long term, the perception of *role incongruity* may even be diminished by regularly nominating professional power and female identity in the same single word.

3.3 Occupational prestige

Morphological and syntactic inconsistencies occur only in reference to prestigious role names. The suitability of masculine terms for designating positions of prestige prevails over the rationale behind a grammatical gender language (as described in Section 1.0, almost the entire family of grammatical gender languages is regulated by the principle of sex, animacy being the far less common

principle). Semantic asymmetries are another manifestation of the correspondence between masculine and prestige, as shown by the couples *il governante / la governante* ‘governor / housekeeper’, *segretario / segretaria* ‘secretary / assistant’, *maestro / maestra* ‘master / teacher’, *direttore / direttrice* ‘director, senior manager / headteacher’. As noted by Giusti (2001), the ambiguity between “higher” and “lower” connotations exists also for the masculine terms, and the more women assume prestigious roles, the more words acquire the specular feminine “higher” connotation. It is only by using them that words can lose the negative or “lower” connotations they may have (cf. Thornton, 2009b). If this does not happen it is because masculinity is generally ascribed more worthiness than femininity¹⁷. Ridgeway and Correll (2004) talk of a *gender hierarchy* which persists over time in Western society in its founding assumption:

Whatever the differences are, on balance, they imply that men are rightly more powerful. The essential form of gender hierarchy – that is, the cultural assumption that men have more status and authority than do women – has persisted during major socioeconomic transformations such as industrialization, the movement of women into the paid labor force, and more recently, the movement of women into male-dominated occupations such as law or medicine (p. 522).

Grammatical gender violations reflect the prestige ascribed to maleness. Prestige is a multifaceted phenomenon, whose definition varies among disciplines. According to the Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology (Vasiliki, 2009), “in the sociological literature, prestige is often conflated with status. In principle, both concepts designate social evaluation and are differentiated according to the object towards which it is directed: prestige refers to evaluation of individuals or groups, while status refers to social evaluation of positions”. Factors found to be influencing occupational prestige have extensively been studied, offering contradictory findings about the role played by gender. The traditional belief was that the rate of female presence in a professional field was an indicator of its prestige reduction, whereas more recent sociological studies have questioned the idea that female presence entails prestige devaluation (Gambardella and De Feo, 2008). In general terms, it seems very difficult isolate the gender effects from the other factors (level of education, social origin, relevant experience, etc.) and from the precise historical context which characterises society as a whole, including professional prestige and/or income (Cacouault-Bitaud, 2008). Putting aside the

¹⁷ Valian (1998) documents how such a schema is almost fully formed from an early age. For example, she comments that “boys who enjoy feminine activities are seen as weaker and more deviant than girls who enjoy masculine activities. Masculine activities gradually acquire a superior status [...]. Boys thus learn to devalue feminine activities and to shun them in order to avoid compromising their higher status. Boys cannot risk the stigma of being girllike” (p. 55); “calling a boy a sissy, or even simply a girl, is an insult. The message is clear: it is degrading, demeaning, and weak for a boy to act like a girl” (p. 56).

sociological question as to whether there is a causal relationship between female presence and prestige loss for a category as a whole, what is clear is that traditionally male-occupations are perceived higher in prestige than traditionally female ones (Jacobs and Powell, 1985; Glick, Wilk, and Perreault, 1995; Oswald, 2003; Ulfsdotter Eriksson, 2013). The occupations mostly associated with maleness are also assigned higher earnings (Alksnis, Desmarais and Curtis, 2008; Williams Paluck and Spencer-Rodgers, 2010; Furnham and Wilson, 2011), and in fact it is the case in reality as demonstrated by the gender wage gap (Eurostat, 2021). Furthermore, Williams Paluck and Spencer-Rodgers (2010) found that, although differential estimates are typically attributed to data evidence, men were associated with higher salaries irrespective of awareness of real wage inequities. They thus reinforced the argument that an automatic and unconscious stereotype exists that connects men, more than women, with wealth.

Despite the widespread use of grammatical prestigious masculine, the relationship between gender-fair language and status-related estimation has been poorly investigated. Two studies compared masculine singular with feminine singular titles in the Italian language (see Section 3.4), and two studies compared masculine generics with pair forms: Vervecken and Hannover (2015) and Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny (2016). The first experiment, conducted with children in either German or Dutch, documented a detrimental effect of inclusive language as regards status. Children were presented job titles with brief descriptions and were asked to estimate how important it is to be “X professional group” (from “not at all” to “very much”) and how much money they earn (from “very little” to “very much”). Results showed that linguistic intervention influenced participants’ status ascriptions, regardless of their sex and language: when presented with pair forms, stereotypically male professions were ascribed lower earnings and less importance.

Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny (2016) also measured perceived estimated salary and social status, with a cross-linguistic study conducted in Italian and German. Their web-based questionnaire was presented as investigating social perceptions of professions. Social status was measured by asking how much prestige do “X professional group” have in our society, how economically successful they are and what is their level of education; estimated salary was measured by asking how much they earn compared to the average Italian / Austrian salary. It was concluded that word pairs did not affect the perceived social status but did affect salary estimations: while stereotypically male professions did not differ in the two conditions, the estimated salaries of female professions were higher if presented with masculine forms only.

3.4 The Italian context

In Italy, two studies¹⁸ have been conducted on the evaluation of identical stimuli with the only difference being the sex of the alleged authors or referents: Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) and Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012). Given that the present research works within this context, particular attention will be given to the description of these works.

Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) were interested in the degree of agreement on the same message formulated by different sources (female or male) and on the same source (female) presented in different forms (feminine or masculine title). They also collected data on the perceived status of those sources. They modelled their work on that of Goldberg (1968), which basically proved that women were prejudiced against women. Goldberg's hypothesis (1968) was that the professional work of women was valued less favourably than that of men, even if their work were identical. He proved himself right by presenting to female subjects a set of six articles from different professional fields (Art History, Dietetics, Education, City Planning, Linguistics and Law). The same articles bore either a female or a male name, and no other mention was made of the authors' sexes. Participants were told to read them and answer the questions, even if they were not expert on the subjects. The answers, which concerned both the value of the message and the competence and status of the authors, strongly favoured men. Goldberg (1968) concluded that "women – at least these young college women – are prejudiced against female professionals and, regardless of the actual accomplishments of these professionals, will firmly refuse to recognize them as the equals of their male colleagues" (p. 30). Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) made use of a modified version of Goldberg's paradigm to investigate whether the term *professoressa* and *professore* ('female and male professor') were differently perceived. The interest in *professoressa* comes from the fact that although the negative connotation of the suffix *-essa* is generally acknowledged (the authors mention the authoritative dictionaries of the Italian language Devoto-Oli, Zingarelli and Sensini, but see also Section 1.1.2.4), the use of that term is not discouraged by the guidelines for a non-sexist use of the language (Sabatini, 1986). To verify whether *professoressa* actually constitutes an exception, the authors compared its effects on perception with those of its masculine counterpart. A distinction was made between the title and the qualification. The first one precedes the name and always concords with the semantic gender of the referent: *Professor Giovanni Grossi – Professoressa Giovanna Grossi*; the qualification follows the name and often carries masculine gender regardless the sex of the referent *Giovanni Grossi, che è professore – Giovanna Grossi, che è professoressa* ('who is a professor'). Participants were asked to

¹⁸ Merkel, 2013 and Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny, 2016 also researched in Italian, the difference being that they confronted masculine generics with word pairs (cf. Section 3.1).

read the same comment from a professor, and to evaluate the text (degree of agreement with the message) and the author (among the others: reliability, persuasiveness, status). Comparisons were made not only between male and female authors (Giovanni vs Giovanna), but also between the linguistic labels used for the female one (title vs qualification). In most of the cases, results showed an interaction between the two factors. The degree of agreement with the text and the reliability of the source were higher when the female source was presented with the (male) qualification. No significant difference was found with regards to the perceived status. This study was then replicated with one variation: by specifying that the working environment of the professors was the university. Again, when the author was female, the feminine title gained less agreement than the masculine qualification. With regards to the perceived status, that of the male professor was considered higher than that of the female professor, regardless of the linguistic label used. In other words, while there were no differences in the perceived prestige of generic professors, university teaching was perceived as more prestigious when the professionals were male. These results are in line with the continued use of prestigious masculine: the higher the social rank, the stronger the association of *prestige* with *maleness*. The conclusions of Mucchi Faina and Barro (2016) include the suggestion to use the masculine qualification instead of the feminine title for female professors. According to them, “in this specific case it is preferable the use of masculine generics” (p. 528). Clearly, such a recommendation cannot be supported. As noted by Giusti (2011) and Thornton (2009b), one should never be afraid to use feminine terms which may have a “lower” connotation than the masculine.

The other study conducted in Italy on the effects of morphological changes on perception is that of Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012). As in the previous case, this research involved the asymmetric suffix *-essa*, which this time was compared not only with masculine terms, but also with the symmetric suffix *-a* or *-e*. In fact, the authors recognise that masculine forms are inadequate because they reduce the mental representation of women. Another difference was the sex of the referents: only female professionals were considered. The items selected were two mobile-gender nouns (one of high- and one of low-prestige) and two common nouns (one of high- and one of low-prestige). The professions were respectively: president, police officer, lawyer, soldier. These terms are among the few which can carry the suffix *-essa*. Participants read four short biographies of women. Of these, two were addressed with masculine forms (MF), one with the asymmetric suffix (which they defined ‘TFF’: traditional form of feminisation) and one with the symmetric suffix (which they defined ‘ModFF’: modern form of feminisation). The conditions for each item are shown in Table 10.

MF	TFF	ModFF	Translation
il presidente	la presidentessa	la presidente	the president
il vigile	la vigilessa	la vigile	the police officer
l'avvocato	l'avvocatessa	l'avvocata	the lawyer
il soldato	la soldatessa	la soldata	the soldier

Table 10 – Items used in Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012). Three linguistic labels for female referents: masculine form (MF), traditional form of feminisation (TFF) and modern form of feminisation (ModFF).

Participants were asked to rate the stereotypicality of the professions and the professionals with respect to their status, competence and warmth. As expected, results showed an interaction for status: women labelled with the TFF (*la presidentessa*) were perceived as having less social status than those labelled with the ModFF (*la presidente*) and the MF (*il presidente*). No effects were found between ModFF and MF. A main effect concerning warmth was also found: women labelled with feminine forms were perceived as warmer than those labelled with MF. Neither for competence nor for stereotypicality significant effects were found. To conclude, the two studies conducted in Italy on the effects of morphological changes on perception provided evidence for the derogatory function of the suffix *-essa*, which marks female referents in a highly asymmetric way. Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012) conclude that symmetric forms of feminisation shield women from invisibility and status loss.

Chapter 4

The first experiment

The experiments conducted in Italy on the effects of the feminisation of professions were critical in setting the stage for the first experiment of the present research, but they involved the asymmetric suffix *-essa*. As described in Section 3.4, Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) compared the words *professore* used for both male and female referents and *professoressa* used for female referents. Merkel, Maass and Frommelt (2012) compared four professions put in three different forms (e.g., *il presidente*, *la presidentessa*, *la presidente*) and addressed exclusively to female referents. These studies provided evidence for a detrimental effect of *-essa* forms, indicating that they do not represent an appropriate option.

However, very little research has been conducted on the symmetric forms of feminisation. The present research aimed at addressing this gap, omitting the forms in *-essa* and providing insight into the effects of symmetric forms of feminisation of professions. Even if the comparison between MF (*l'avvocato*) and ModFF (*l'avvocata*) in Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012) did not result in significant findings, it appeared necessary to further explore the two forms, given the continued resistance to introduce symmetric feminine forms among language users. The present research compared the masculine form used for male referents (MM: *avvocato Alessandro Bianchi*), the masculine form used for female referents (MF: *avvocato Alessandra Bianchi*) and the feminine form used for female referents (FF: *avvocata Alessandra Bianchi*). More specifically, its aim was to see if the grammatical gender of the linguistic label would affect the perception of professionals with regards to the categories of prestige and competence. It also aimed at investigating the extent to which the grammatical gender would determine a difference in the perceived typicality of professions. Quantitative research was conducted between November and December 2020. The questionnaire used was adapted from Merkel, Maass and Frommelt (2012) and was submitted via the online platform named *Qualtrics*. Data were analysed through repeated-measures ANOVAs. This study aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1) Does the linguistic form influence the perception of prestige?
- 2) Does the linguistic form influence the perception of competence?
- 3) Does the linguistic form influence the perception of typicality?

Opinions about gender stereotypes on gender roles were also collected. No straightforward predictions could be advanced. With regard to prestige, the only experimental study involving Italian

symmetric feminine forms (Merkel, Maass and Frommelt, 2012) found no differences from masculine singular and feminine singular job titles. Even the Italian study which compared masculine generics and split forms (Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny, 2016) found no effects of the linguistic label. However, comparisons among gender-fair and masculine forms in German and Dutch (Vervecken and Hannover, 2015) showed that jobs presented with masculine forms only were ascribed higher prestige. With regard to competence, in Italy again no effects were found (Merkel, Maass and Frommelt, 2012; Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny, 2016), but a traditional gender bias associating competence with maleness has been previously attested (cf. Section 3.2). Finally, as regards to typicality, Merkel, Maass and Frommelt (2012) found no effects of the grammatical gender on perceptions, while Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny (2016) attested that split forms helped to avoid a male bias. In addition, typicality norms collected in German and French found that the general male-bias was diminished when masculine used as a generic was avoided (cf. Section 3.2).

The remaining part of the chapter presents the first experiment: in Section 4.1 the methodology employed in this research will be outlined. Thus, the participants involved, the materials employed and the method of data analysis adopted will be described. Section 4.2 will present the data gathered. In Section 4.3 the findings will be discussed. Finally, in Section 4.4 conclusive remarks will be presented.

4.1 Method

4.1.1 Participants

A total number of 111 participants volunteered in the study after agreeing to an informed consent form. It was necessary to check which subjects were not compliant with the instructions and therefore needed to be fended off by the pool. For this purpose, the prestige ratings of 10 highly prestigious professions were observed. On a scale ranging from 1 (=low prestige) to 7 (=high prestige), those subjects who displayed low agreement on the fact that at least 9 out of those 10 professions were prestigious were fended off. Low agreement is a number lower than 4 on the scale (independently of the three conditions MM, MF and FF). It was also decided not to consider 3 participants who completed the tasks in less than 10 minutes, having estimated that around 20 minutes were needed. The responses of one minor person were also eliminated. A total number of 80 participants remained (56 women and 24 men), with an average age of 34 years ($SD=13.96$). With regard to the educational level, 3 participants (4%) had a doctoral degree, 39 (49%) had a master's degree, 18 (22%) had a bachelor's degree and 20 (25%) had a high school or secondary school certificate.

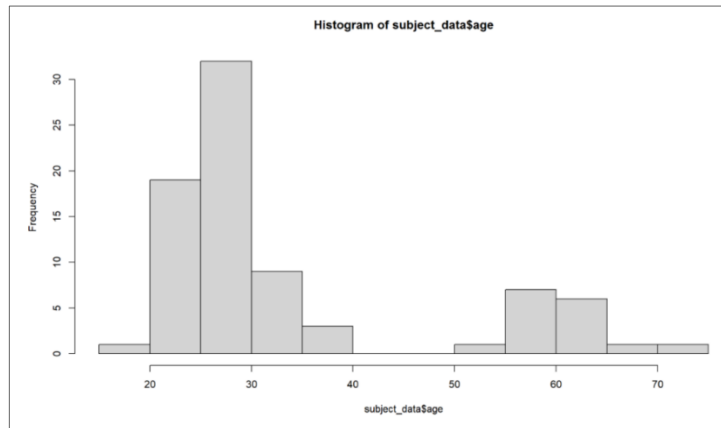


Fig. 3 – Age distribution of the participants.

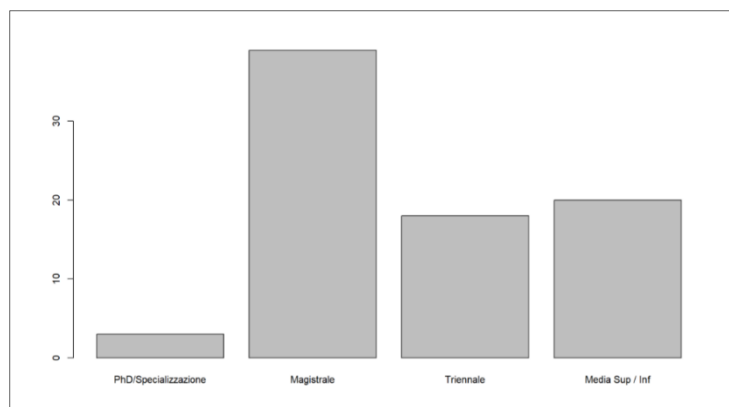


Fig. 4 – Educational level distribution of the participants.

4.1.2 Materials

The questionnaire consisted of 30 very short texts of roughly 3 sentences each. Every text described an individual and their occupation. Of these, half were high-status occupations and half were low-status occupations (see the Appendix for a complete list of the items). The 30 occupations were assigned to three 30-items test lists so that every item was randomly presented in only one condition (MM or MF or FF) and each group contained the same number of conditions. The structure of each 30-items questionnaire was therefore as follows:

- One condition for item: either masculine grammatical gender and male referent (MM), or masculine grammatical gender and female referent (MF), or feminine grammatical gender and female referent (FF);
- 15 high-prestige occupations presented in the same number of conditions: 5 MM, 5 MF, 5 FF;
- 15 low-prestige occupations presented in the same number of conditions: 5 MM, 5 MF, 5 FF.

In addition to the grammatical gender of the role noun, each item presented two more gender markers (namely one proper name and one subject pronoun or one gendered morphological ending). The proper nouns selected for each item were identical in all but the final letter, as in *Francesca/Francesco*.

MM	MF	FF
avvocato Alessandro Bianchi	avvocato Alessandra Bianchi	avvocata Alessandra Bianchi
notaio Alessio Martini	notaio Alessia Martini	notaia Alessia Martini

Table 11 – 3 conditions for each of the 30 items used in Experiment 1: Masculine Male (MM), Masculine Female (MF), Feminine Female (FF).

Translation: avvocato/a ‘lawyer’; notaio/a ‘notary’.

The grammatical inconsistency of prestigious masculine is such that it was problematic to create 15 specular low-prestige items: while MM and FF are always coherent, the lack of correspondence between grammatical and semantic gender in common role nouns would not have gone unnoticed:

- il ministro Alessandra Rossi (MF) ‘the-M minister-M Alexandra Rossi’
- *il cassiere Alessandra Rossi (MF) *‘the-M cashier-M Alexandra Rossi’

To avoid the issue, low prestige role nouns were not presented as adpositions, but as predicatives: given the use of masculine generics, linking verbs followed by masculine complements would not bring attention to gender disagreements.

Condition	Prestige	Sample text
MM	High	L’assessore alla cultura Giorgio Marino pensa che [...]. È deciso a [...].
FM	High	L’assessore alla cultura Giorgia Marino pensa che [...]. È decisa a [...].
FF	High	L’assessora alla cultura Giorgia Marino pensa che [...]. È decisa a [...].
MM	Low	Fare l’impiegato non era il suo sogno, ma Carlo Giorini è contento [...]
FM	Low	Fare l’impiegato non era il suo sogno, ma Carla Giorini è contenta [...]
FF	Low	Fare l’impiegata non era il suo sogno, ma Carla Giorini è contenta [...]

Table 12 – Example of the sentence stimuli and conditions: high and low prestige with MM versus FM versus FF.

High prestige translation: The Councillor for Culture Giorgi* Marino thinks that... S/he’s decided to...

Low prestige translation: Being an employee had never been their dream, but Carl* Giorini is glad...

After reading each text, participants were asked to answer the following questions, selected from those of Merkel, Maass and Frommelt (2012):

- 1) Questa professione è più tipica per uomini, donne o entrambi?
‘Is this occupation more typical for men, women or both?’
- 2) Come giudichi il prestigio sociale della persona descritta?
‘How do you judge the social status of the described person?’
- 3) Quanto pensi che sia competente la persona descritta?
‘How competent is the described person according to you?’

The 7-points scales displayed answer labels at the extremities and in the middle. Answers to Question 1 ranged from -3 (male) to +3 (female) with 0 labelled as neutral. Answers to Question 2 ranged from 1 (not prestigious at all) to 7 (extremely prestigious), with 4 labelled as “slightly prestigious”. Finally, the third scale ranged from -3 (completely incompetent) to +3 (completely competent), with 0 labelled as “uncertain”.

The concluding part of the questionnaire collected opinions on stereotypes about gender roles. The questions were selected from the 2020 Istat survey *Stereotypes about gender roles and the social image of sexual violence in Italy*¹⁹:

- 1) Per l’uomo, più che per la donna, è molto importante avere successo nel lavoro
‘For the man, more than for the woman, it is very important to be successful at work’
- 2) Gli uomini sono meno adatti a occuparsi delle faccende domestiche
‘Men are less suited to do housework’
- 3) È soprattutto l’uomo che deve provvedere alle necessità economiche della famiglia
‘It is up to the man to provide for the family’s financial needs’
- 4) In condizioni di scarsità di lavoro, i datori di lavoro dovrebbero dare la precedenza agli uomini rispetto alle donne
‘When jobs are scarce, employers should give priority to men over women’

Answers ranged from -3 (strongly disagree) to +3 (strongly agree), with 0 labelled as “uncertain”.

4.1.3 Procedure and design

The questionnaire was submitted using the Qualtrics software, Version 2020 (Qualtrics, Provo, UT). Before proceeding, participants were asked to give their informed consent. They were made aware of their rights, including the fact that results would be collected and analysed anonymously. The reasons for the research were given in terms of an interest in the way people formulate opinions and make evaluations on people and professions. It was made clear that there were no right or wrong answers. Rather, it was not necessary to overthink on them and responses given intuitively would be

¹⁹ <https://www.istat.it/en/archivio/249195> (accessed on 26/10/2020).

appreciated. The actual test was proceeded by a two-text practice, so that participants would familiarise with the task. This research presented a repeated measures design. Each of the 3 conditions (MM, MF, FF) was viewed by the subjects 5 times in high-prestige and 5 times in low-prestige items.

4.1.4 Data analysis

By-items and by-subjects analyses of variance were conducted using as the dependent measures the ascriptions of prestige, competence and typicality. In the by-item analyses (F1), repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted with *form* (MM, FM, FF) as a within-items variable. In the by-subject analyses (F2), repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted with *form* (MM, FM, FF) as a within-subjects variable and *genre* and *age* as between-subjects variables. The α level used for significance testing was 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected if both by-item and by-subject F-values are significant.

4.2 Results

Prestige

Descriptive results

With regard to the perceived social status of professions, almost all items were rated as prestigious to some extent. Considering that in the 7-points Likert scale “4” indicated “slightly prestigious”, on average only cashier (*commess**) and labourer (*operai**) were considered poorly prestigious. Figure 5 shows the response rates for each item (i.e., for each word stem).

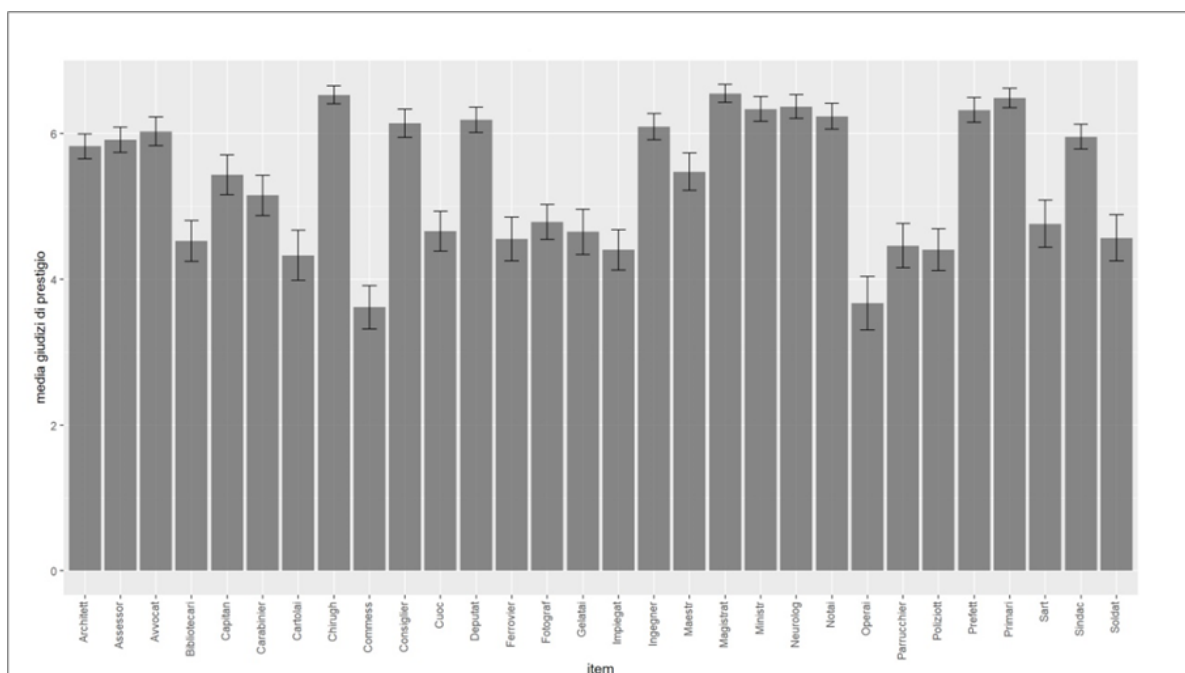


Fig. 5 – Response rates for each item with regard to prestige, on a scale ranging from 1 to 7.

Repeated measures ANOVA did not show a significant effect of the linguistic form on the perceived prestige, neither by item $F(2,58) = 0.075$, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2_p = 0.003$ nor by subject $F(2,112) = 1.912$, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2_p = 0.025$. The average prestige ratings are shown in Figure 6 (analysis by item) and Figure 7 (analysis by subject). Error bars depict 95% confidence intervals associated with each of the group means.

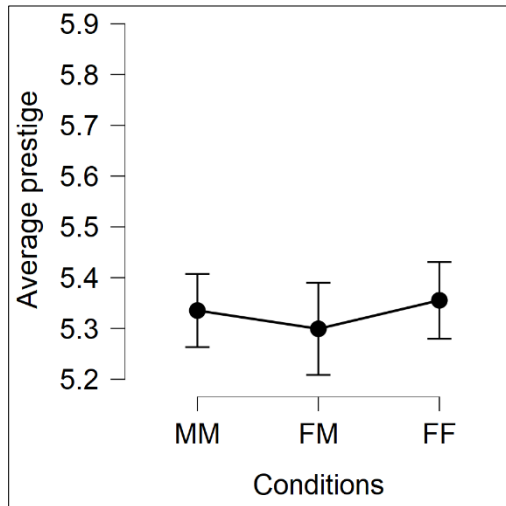


Fig. 6 – Average prestige as a function of each condition grouped by item.

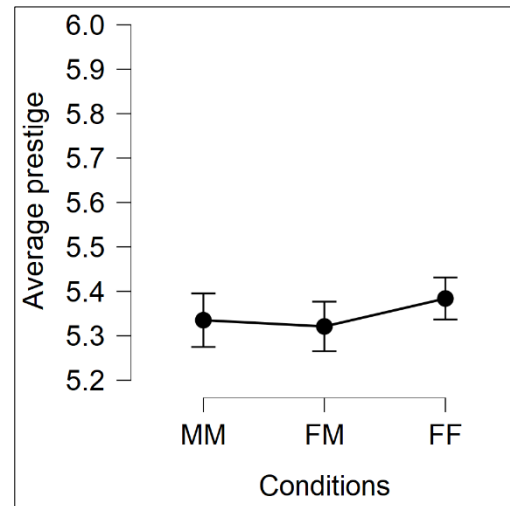


Fig. 7 – Average prestige as a function of each condition grouped by subject.

ANOVAs including participants' sex and age group as additional factors revealed no differences between the age groups, and a difference between male and female participants: $F(1,76) = 3.190$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2_p = 0.040$. As shown in Figure 8, male subjects were more severe in comparison to female subjects.

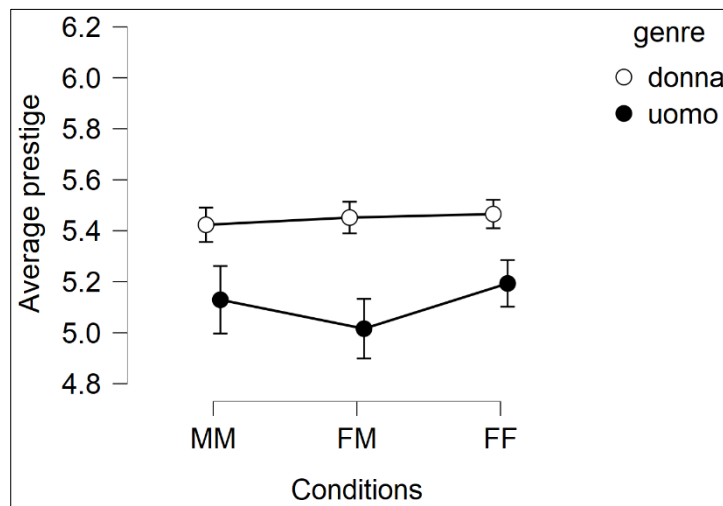


Fig. 8 – Average prestige assigned for each condition by female (in white) and male (in black) subjects.

Competence

Descriptive results

With regards to the average competence assigned for each item on a range from -3 from +3, no answer was collected below the zero. The response rates for each item with regard to competence are shown in Figure 10.

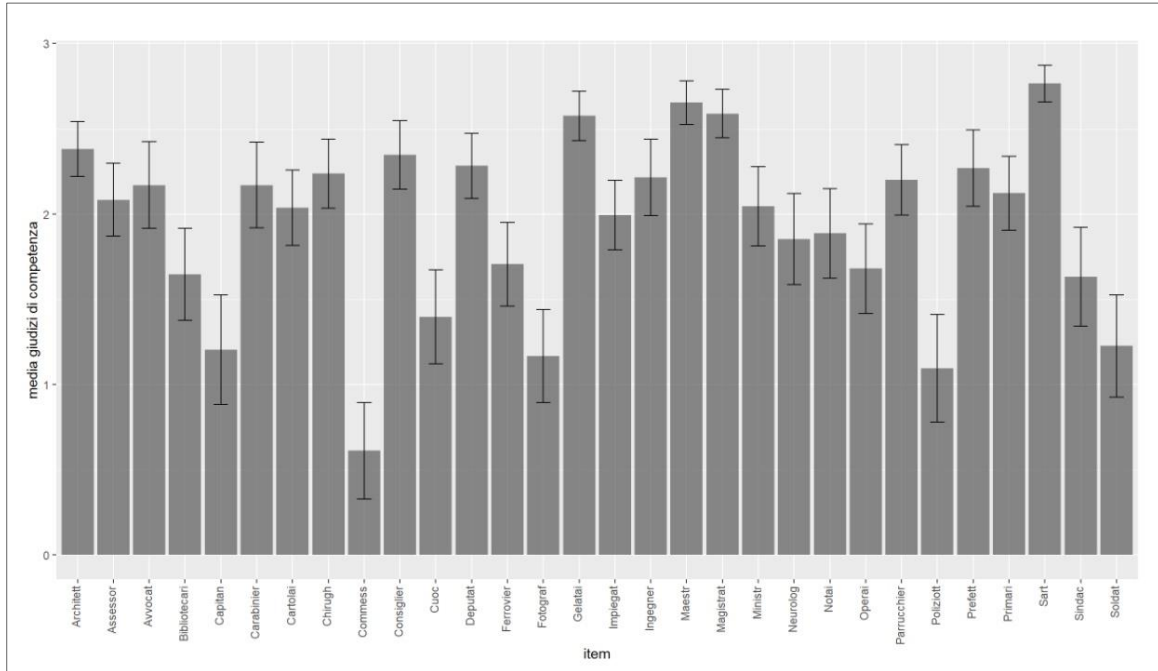


Fig. 10 – Response rates for each item with regard to competence, on a range from -3 to +3.

Analysis

Repeated measures ANOVA did not show a significant effect of the linguistic form on the perceived competence, neither by item $F(1,2,58) = 0.686$, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2_p = 0.023$ nor by subject $F(2,152) = 0.926$, $p > 0.05$, $\eta^2_p = 0.012$. Figure 11 shows the average perceived competence grouped with respect to the items; Figure 12 shows the average competence grouped with respect to the subjects.

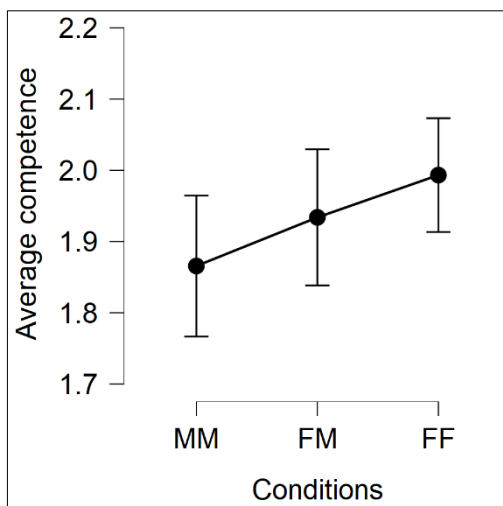


Fig. 11 – Average competence as a function of each condition grouped by item.

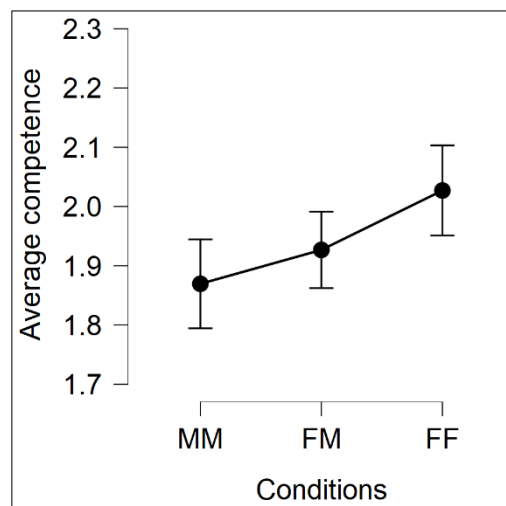


Fig. 12 – Average competence as a function of each condition grouped by subject.

ANOVAs including participants' gender and age group as additional factors revealed no differences between the gender groups, and a difference between the age groups: $F(1,76) = 4.335$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2p = 0.054$: younger participants were harsher judges in comparison with those aged +45 (see Figure 13).

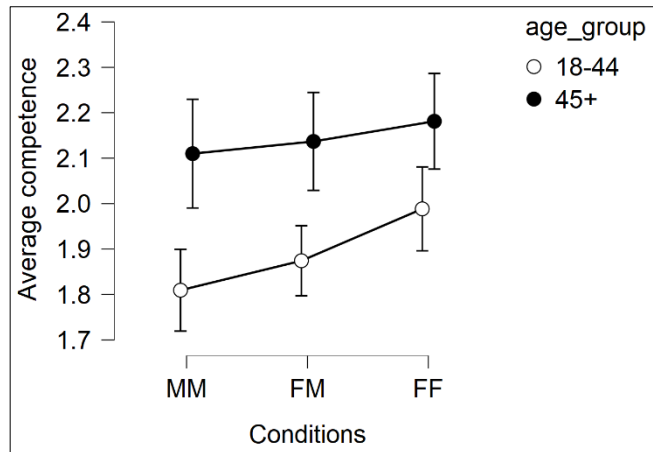


Fig. 13 – Average competence assigned for each condition by younger and older subjects.

Typicality

Descriptive results

With regard to the perception of typicality, the response rates indicate a male bias irrespective of the morphological ending attached to the items. In fact, out of the 30 professions presented, only one was perceived as typical of both sexes (*cartolai** ‘stationer’). Of the remaining 29, the following 6 were considered as typically female: *maestr** ‘teacher’, *sart** ‘tailor’, *parrucchier** ‘hairdresser’, *commiss** ‘salesperson’, *bibliotecari** ‘librarian’, *impiegat** ‘office worker’. The remaining 23 professions were considered as typically male. Figure 14 shows the average ratings for each item.

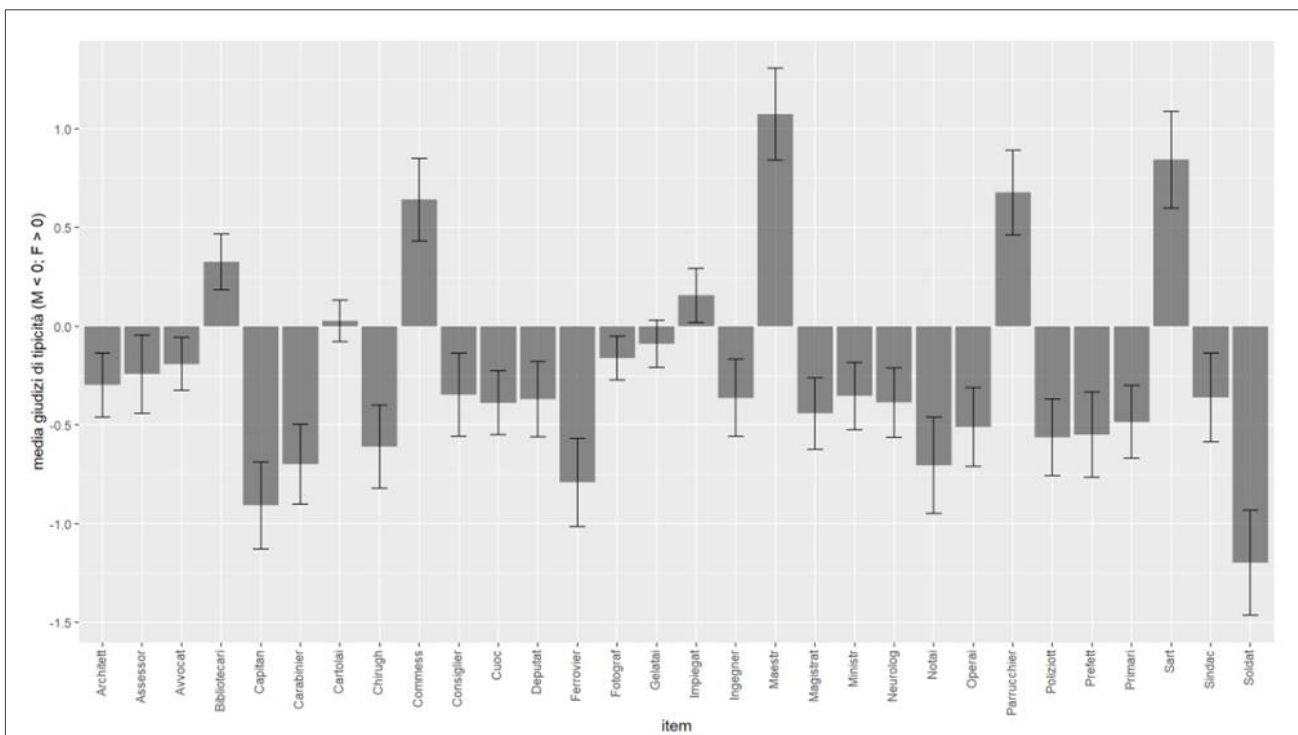


Fig. 14 – Average ratings for each item with regard to typicality on a range from -3 to +3. M < 0, F > 0.

Analysis

Repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant effect of the linguistic form on the perceived typicality grouped by item $F(2,58) = 7.884$, $p < 0.001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.214$ and by subject: $F(2,154) = 7.572$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = 0.090$ (see Figures 15 and 16). ANOVAs including participants' gender and age group as additional factors revealed a difference between the age groups: $F(1,77) = 8.644$, $p < 0.01$, $\eta^2_p = 0.101$. On a scale which associates -3 with male typicality and +3 with female typicality, the age group 45+ was closer to the neutrality, while younger participants displayed a complete male bias (M<0, F>0: see Figure 17).

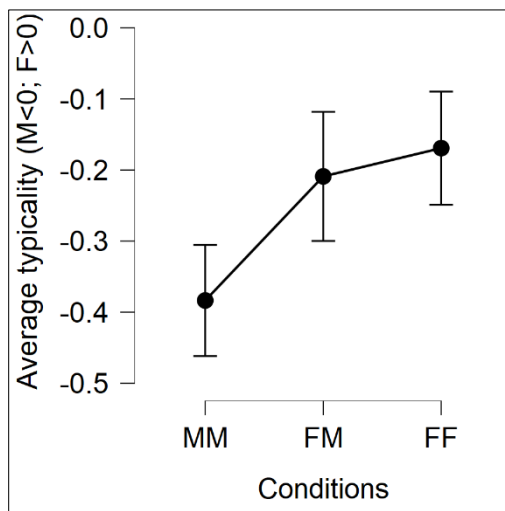


Fig. 15 – Average typicality as a function of each condition grouped by item.

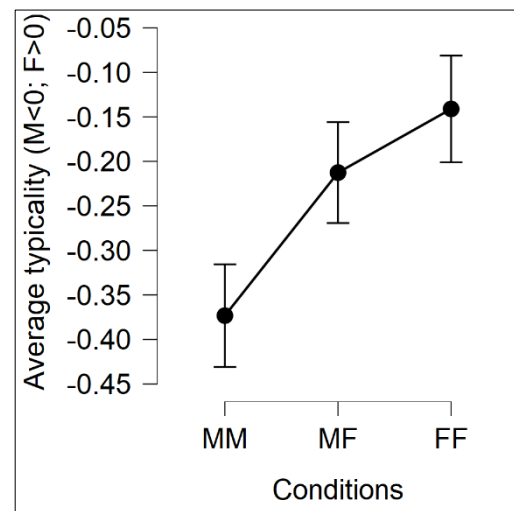


Fig. 16 – Average typicality as a function of each condition grouped by subject.

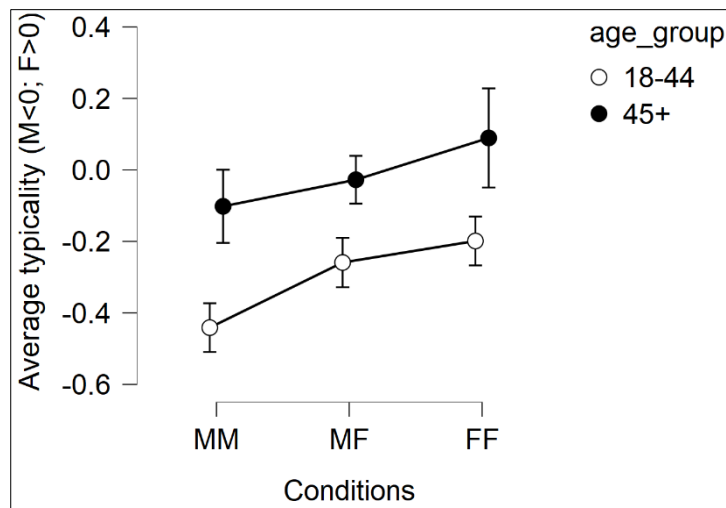


Fig. 17 – Average typicality assigned for each condition by younger and older subjects.

Post Hoc tests (using the Holm correction to adjust p) indicated a significant difference between MM and FF (by item: $p= 0.001$; by subject: $p<0.001$). The comparison between MM and MF revealed a significant difference by item ($p= 0.007$) and an important difference, not statistically significant, by subject ($p= 0.059$). No evidence was found of a difference between MF and FF (by item: $p= 0.49$; by subject: $p= 0.09$). The masculine grammatical gender combined with a male referent (MM) significantly increased the male bias, while the feminine grammatical gender combined with a female referent (FF) changed the perception of typicality. The case of MF induced a tendency to change perceptions which cannot be excluded nor affirmed: the difference between MF and FF was not significant, and the difference between MM and MF was statistically significant by-item and not by-subject.

Attitudes towards gender stereotypes

The concluding part of the questionnaire presented four sentences which reflected a traditional division of gender roles and collected the degree of agreement on each sentence. Results documented an egalitarian attitude towards gender stereotypes. On a scale ranging from $-3=strongly\ disagree$ to $+3=strongly\ agree$, the level of agreement for each statement was very low, both considering the percentages collected below the zero and considering only the answers ranging from -2 to -3 , which were always the majority. The response rates are shown in the graphs below. A consideration of participants' gender revealed that men were on average only slightly less in disagreement as compared to women, therefore aggregated data are presented.

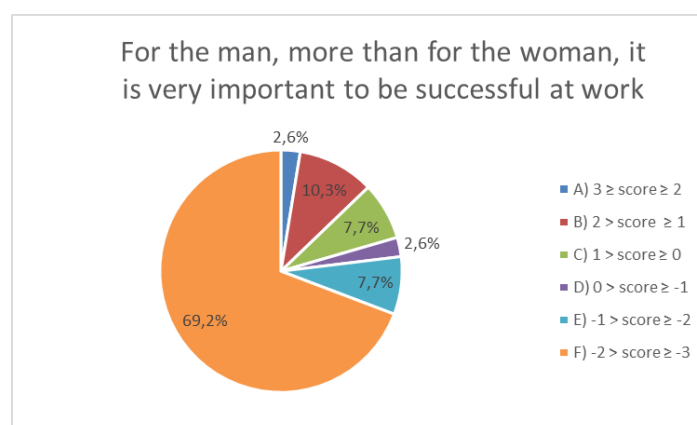


Fig 18 – Response rates to question n.1.

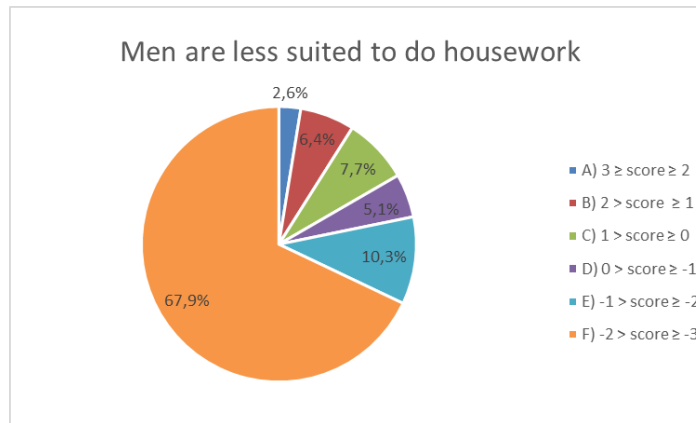


Fig. 19 – Response rates to question n.2.

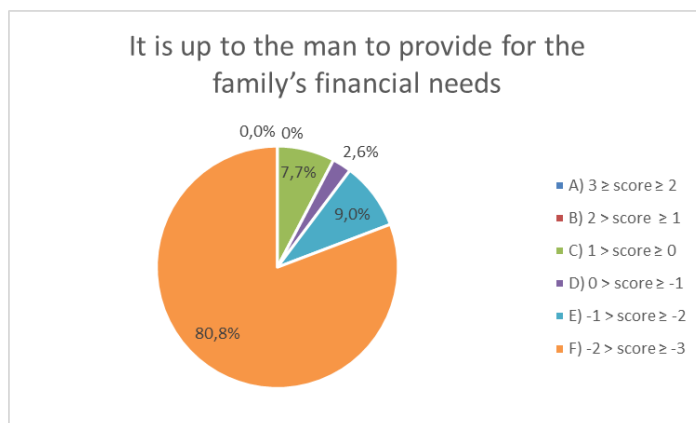


Fig. 20 – Response rates to question n.3.

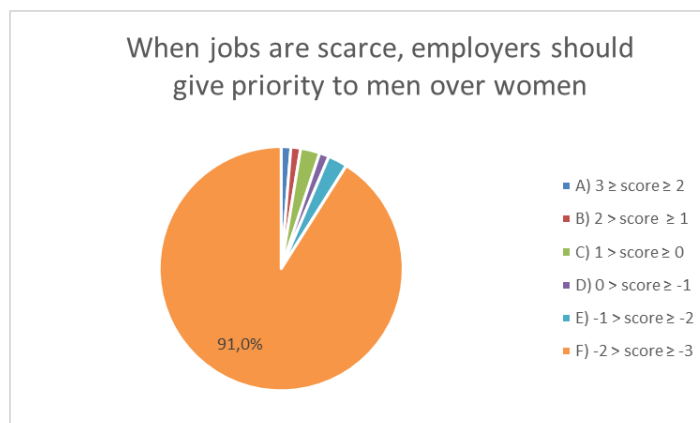


Fig. 21 – Response rates to question n.4.

4.3 Discussion

The data suggest that perception of prestige was not influenced by the grammatical gender used to denote female professionals, nor by the sex of the agent. These findings are in contrast with those of Verweken and Hannover (2015), who documented that professions named with split forms

in German and Dutch were ascribed lower earnings and less importance compared to those named with masculine generics. Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006), conducting the experiment in Italian, also proved that university teaching was ascribed higher prestige when carried out by a male professor rather than by a female professor. The results of the present research do not confirm these findings; rather they confirm Merkel, Maass and Frommelt's (2012) findings and Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny's (2016) findings. In fact, the first experiment documented lack of difference between masculine and feminine symmetric labels, and the second documented lack of effects on status ascriptions when comparing masculine generics with split forms. The present research did not provide evidence for the fact that masculine job titles augment prestige ascriptions. However, to date there are only few studies shedding light on the effects of language on perceived occupational prestige, both at the Italian and international level. For this reason, Experiment 2 of the present study further investigated the phenomenon.

With regard to the second research question, competence was not affected by the linguistic manipulation. These results confirm previous findings on the influence of grammatical or semantic gender on competence ratings (Merkel, Maas and Frommelt, 2012; Vervecken, Gygax, Gabriel, Guillod and Hannover, 2015; Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny, 2016). A line of research actually suggests that competence-related gender stereotypes may be in decline, pointing to the direction of a concept of woman who is no longer associated with lower competence (cf. Vervecken et al., 2015). For instance, Ebert, Steffens and Kroth (2014) employed implicit association tests (IAT) to examine the gender stereotypes of warmth and competence, and found a *women – warmth* association, but not a *men – competence* one. On the other hand, numerous studies continue to indicate a systematic bias in competence evaluations (Rivera and Tilcsik, 2019; Budziszewska, Hansen and Bilewicz, 2014; see also Boring, 2017). Rivera and Tilcsik (2019) confirmed such bias by making participants evaluate the same lecture transcript written by either “Professor Julie Anderson” or by “Professor John Anderson”; Budziszewska, Hansen and Bilewicz (2014) showed that women described with masculine job titles were perceived as more competent than those described with feminine job titles. In addition, gender biases continue to emerge in the words chosen to compose job evaluation reports and job selections: the adjectives used to describe men are primarily competence-related (i.e., *brilliant, excellent*), while women are significantly less likely to be described in such terms, evoking instead the sphere of sociality (i.e., *helpful, reliable*), as documented by Moscatelli, Menegatti, Ellemers, Mariani and Rubini, 2020; Stewart and Valian, 2018. Overall, the studies that confirm the existence of a traditional male bias in competence ascriptions continue to be numerous, while others – the present research included – maintain the opposite. Given the growing sensitivity in Western societies towards gender issues (an example of which is the great disagreement on sexist beliefs

displayed by participants in the final section of the questionnaire) it may be the case that the *competence – male* schema still operates in individuals' expectations at a general level, but it is slowly fading away.

The third research question, concerning the perceptions of gender typicality, found that gender expectations continue to exist and that they are governed by a general male bias. This trend continues to be stable across times and cultures (Shinar, 1975; Beggs and Doolittle, 1993; Couch and Sigler, 2001; Sastre, Fouquereau, Igier, Salvatore and Mullet, 2000; Kennison and Trofe, 2003; Gygax, P., Gabriel, U., Sarasin, O., Garnham, A. & Oakhill, J., 2008). There are clear expectations with respect to the jobs viewed as referring mostly to females and mostly to males, and the latter totally outnumber the former. When asked to take positions on explicitly sexist content as to traditional division of roles, participants (which were mostly young and female) expressed their great dissent. However, when asked whether or not a gender typicality of certain jobs exists, there is a gender association and it is mainly male, with the exceptions of a few stereotypically female professions. Male typicality was assigned to various common nouns (i.e., *cook, photographer*) and to all fifteen of the prestigious professions, which in the past were exclusively a male domain. The present study demonstrated that the perceived typicality of professions changes in presence of a feminine grammatical gender combined with a female noun. Although participants displayed a male-bias across all conditions, the double gender marking (both grammatical and semantic) shifted the results towards the neutrality. By making the agents' femaleness explicit through the grammatical gender (FF), the deep-rooted beliefs as to the gender-typicality changed. With regard to the case of a masculine job title combined with a female noun (MF), the findings may be interpreted in different ways. Considering the difference between MM and MF, although it was only significant by-item, we might suppose that there is a semantic gender effect whereby a cue denoting a woman is sufficient to alleviate the male bias. According to this interpretation, if gender markers exclusively denote men (MM), professions are perceived as strongly male. If a reference to women is made explicit (MF, FF) these perceptions changes. Alternatively, the tendency to alleviate the male-bias in the FM condition can be put aside in consideration of the fact that it was statistically non-significant. In this case, there would be a difference between MM and FF only, and thus the male bias would be attenuated only if the feminine grammatical gender is used. In either case, both the first interpretation (i.e., there is a difference also between MM and MF, with one level of difference: semantic gender) and the second interpretation (i.e., there is a difference only between MM and FF, with two levels of difference: semantic and grammatical gender) demonstrate that there is a gender effect. The case of MF provides ground for further research. This study did not include a comparison of the two grammatical genders in the absence of a first name (e.g., *chirurgo Rossi* vs *chirurgia Rossi*). What is clear is that, in the absence

of gender markers denoting women, professions are perceived as typically male; in the presence of gender markers denoting women, this bias diminishes. Therefore, it seems reasonable to suppose that when an appositive element carries the masculine grammatical gender and no other gender marker is given, (as in *chirurgo Rossi*; *ingegnere Martini*) the idea that the typical surgeon or engineer is male is reinforced, as the only gender cue is the masculine one.

A qualitative look at quantitative data may support the hypothesis that grammatical gender alters the perceptions of typicality. Out of a total of 30 professions, 6 were perceived as typically female. Table 13 presents the average by-item ratings assigned to those 6 professions under the three conditions (i.e., the mean of the average means collected for an item under *MM*, *MF* and *FF*, across the different participants). Irrespective of semantic and grammatical gender, these professions present a score above zero, which is associated to femaleness (the scale associated 0 to neutrality, scores below zero to maleness and scores above zero to femaleness: $M < 0$; $F > 0$). However, the scores collected in the *FF* condition are often closer to the female pole, while in the *MM* and *MF* conditions they get closer to the neutrality. For example, the ratings assigned for *bibliotecario* are 0.22 and 0.15, while *bibliotecaria* collected a score of 0.60; *commesso* displays the scores of 0.38 and 0.6, and *commessa* one of 1.09. Overall, these data seem to suggest that, although the masculine grammatical gender did not neutralise stereotypes, it induced slight shifts in perceptions attenuating the female bias.

Item	MM	MF	FF
<i>Bibliotecar*</i> ‘librarian’	0.22	0.15	0.60
<i>Commess*</i> ‘salesperson’	0.38	0.6	1.09
<i>Impiegat*</i> ‘office worker’	0.12	0.11	0.25
<i>Maestr*</i> ‘teacher’	0.72	1.38	1.17
<i>Parrucchier*</i> ‘hairdresser’	0.67	0.59	0.77
<i>Sart*</i> ‘tailor’	0.49	1.26	0.86

Table 13 – average by-item ratings assigned to the typically female professions, under the three conditions *MM* (masculine male), *MF* (masculine female) and *FF* (feminine female).

In many occupations, actual gender ratios still reflect stereotype norms. For example, in Italy 13.7% of mayors²⁰ are female, 19% of engineers²¹, 31% of deputies²², 35% of senators²³, 35.8% of council members and 42% of architects²⁴. However, this is not always the case. Data²⁵ updated to 2019 shows that female and male lawyers are in a 50:50 distribution. As documented by the statistical office of the *Consiglio Superiore di Magistratura*²⁶, in February 2020, 54% of magistrates were women, and the percentage increases when considering the magistrates who are in training: 61% are women and 39% are men. A similar phenomenon is happening in medical professions, where women are increasingly numerous and can often outnumber men (as documented by the data from the *Federazione nazionale degli ordini dei medici e chirurghi* investigated by the association *Women in surgery*²⁷). Of the Order of doctors and surgeons, 42% are women counter balanced by the large number of men aged 55-75, but from 1998 to 2018 there has not been a single year in which the professional qualification was gained by fewer women than men. More specifically, every year in the last 20 years the new female doctors and surgeons ranged from 53% to 63% of the total. In many respects, changes have occurred in the social system: women are constantly ascending in every work field which once was unattainable to them. Our language still does not attest – and does not promote – such changes. This research demonstrates that speakers are sensible to any gender cue available in discourse in shaping their ideas as to the gender typicality of a worker. It is clear that stereotypes play a central role in people’s imagery, and in fact *surgeons* are thought to be typically male even in a language with no grammatical gender marking such as English. Nonetheless, it is also clear that language is capable of overriding stereotypes. As already documented in Section 3.2, “when a grammatical mark of gender is provided, the representation of gender is based on that mark of gender, and not on stereotype information” (Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham, and Oakhill, 2008b, p. 480).

In the Global Gender Gap 2020, Italy is ranked 76th out of 153 countries. On a range from 0.00= imparity to 1.00= parity, its overall score is 0.707. However, while Education and Health have a score of 0.997 and 0.969 respectively, Economic participation displays a score of 0.595, and Political empowerment a score of 0.267. As can be seen from the Table below, the distance to parity involves economy and politics. If professional workers and politicians are not even nominated in the

²⁰ <https://ancitoscana.it/personale/315-le-donne-amministratrici-in-italia-i-numeri.html>. Note that, in the same article, female mayors are called: *donne sindaco, donna sindaca, sindaca, donne sindaco, donne sindaco*. Cf. this same reference for data on council members.

²¹ http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf

²² https://www.camera.it/leg17/564?tiposezione=C&sezione=1&tabella=C_1_2

²³ <http://www.senato.it/leg/18/BGT/Schede/Statistiche/Composizione/SenatoriPerEta.html>

²⁴ <https://www.ingenero.it/articoli/architette-contro-gender-gap>

²⁵ <http://www.cassaforense.it/riviste-cassa/la-previdenza-forense/previdenza/i-numeri-dell-avvocatura-2019/>

²⁶ <https://www.csm.it/documents/21768/137951/Donne+in+magistratura+%28aggiorn.+marzo+2020%29/26803fce-0c00-a949-d70d-0bdcf5f30e3>

²⁷ <http://www.ilducato.it/2020/04/13/mi-chiami-chirurgo-non-signorina-la-rivincita-delle-donne-in-sala-operatoria/>

feminine form, the collective imagery of women’s role in society will continue to be doubly-hindered in its progression towards a profound feeling that women can naturally assume those roles, rather than as exceptions to the default.

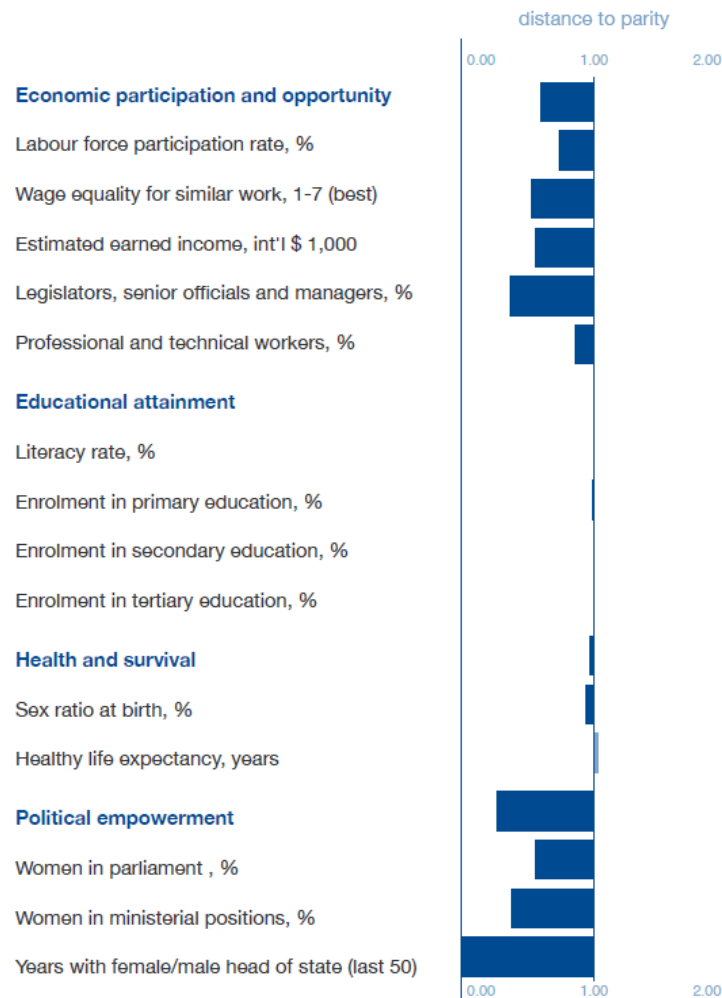


Table 13 – Country score card of Italy, provided by the Global Gender Gap 2020, p. 197 (adapted picture).

Distance to parity: 0.00= imparity, 1.00= parity.

Chapter 5

The second experiment

The judgements elicited in the first experiment showed a joint effect of semantic and grammatical gender on the typicality of both gender for each profession, and no effects on competence and prestige ascriptions. While various studies have dealt with stereotypes, the influence of language on prestige has not been treated in much detail. For this reason, a second experiment was carried out in order to examine whether the feminine grammatical gender entails prestige loss. Summarising the main Italian findings on prestige ascriptions, Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) found no differences between feminine and masculine forms, nor between female and male agents, if the teaching profession was presented without specifying any context. However, if the context was that of university, male university teachers were ascribed higher prestige regardless of the linguistic label used for female university teachers. Merkel, Maass and Frommelt (2012) demonstrated that only the nouns formed with the suffix *-essa* forms induced prestige loss, while women labelled with feminine symmetric forms were not perceived differently from men. Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny (2016) found no language effects on status ascriptions when comparing masculine generics with feminine-masculine word pairs. Finally, Experiment 1 of the present research did not provide evidence of language effects.

While data collection has always involved paper questionnaires or online questionnaires, no research has been found to examine prestige ascriptions measuring response times. To further investigate whether prestigious professions are perceived differently according to the gender they are attributed, this experiment recorded the proportion of affirmative responses and response times to single lexical items of high and low prestige professions, each randomly presented in both the masculine and feminine forms. Following Pachella (1974), reaction time can be defined as “the interval between the presentation of a stimulus to a subject and the subject's response” (p. 6), or as “the minimum amount of time needed for a subject to produce a correct response” (p. 36). Slowdowns in response times upon encountering a feminine role name might be used to draw inferences about the presence of uncertainty as regards the metalinguistic judgements. Otherwise stated, each measure evaluated how easily participants ascribed prestige to professions presented in the feminine and masculine forms. If they associated prestige to the masculine gender only, the proportion of affirmative responses would not be equal between the two genders. Still, if they responded affirmatively in equal measure, a masculine – prestige association (or a feminine – prestige loss association) would result in longer response times when presented with the feminine gender.

Quantitative research was conducted in January 2021. The experiment was set up on the *PsychoPy* software and uploaded to the *Pavlovia* platform in order to be launched online (Peirce and MacAskill, 2018). Data were analysed through repeated-measures ANOVAs. The purpose of the current study was to answer the following research question: is there a grammatical gender effect on prestige ascriptions?

Given the results of Experiment 1, it was hypothesized that the masculine grammatical gender would not augment prestige ascriptions. In fact, in the previous experiment the linguistic manipulation did not result in significant findings as regards the perception of prestige. If masculine and feminine suffixes conveyed different meanings, an interaction of gender and prestige would be found, with high-prestige and low-prestige items being processed differently in the masculine compared to the feminine condition.

This chapter proceeds as follows: the first section is concerned with the methodology used for this study (participants, materials, procedure, design and data analysis), the second section presents the findings and the third section discusses the answers to the research question.

5.1 Method

5.1.1 Participants

A total of 49 participants took part in the experiment after agreeing to an informed consent form. Three individuals were manually excluded from the study for non-compliant behaviour (they always pressed the same button). In order to detect which subjects should be fended off by the pool, Cohen's kappa coefficient (κ) was employed. Cohen's kappa coefficient is “a coefficient of agreement for nominal scales” (Cohen, 1960) used to measure inter-rater reliability taking into account also agreement which may occur by chance. The responses of nine participants displayed low self-agreement and were therefore eliminated from the pool. A total number of 37 participants were selected. They were 26 women and 11 men, with an average age of 31 years ($SD=12.11$). With regard to the educational level of the survey respondents, 1 (3%) had a doctoral degree, 15 (41%) had a master’s degree, 12 (32%) had a bachelor’s degree and 9 (24%) had a high school or secondary school certificate.

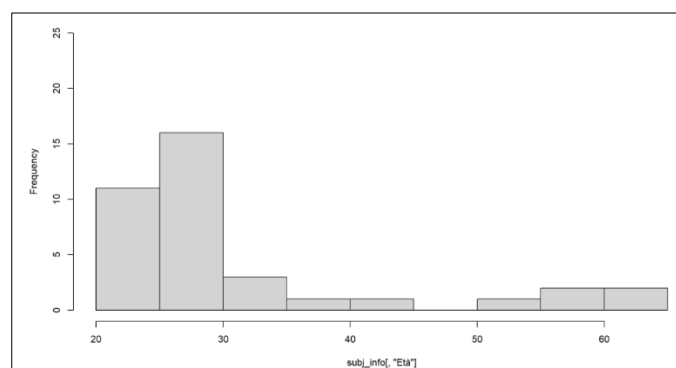


Fig. 22 – Educational level distribution of participants.

5.1.2 Materials

Stimuli consisted of single lexical items presented one at a time at the centre of a black screen, as shown in Figure 23.

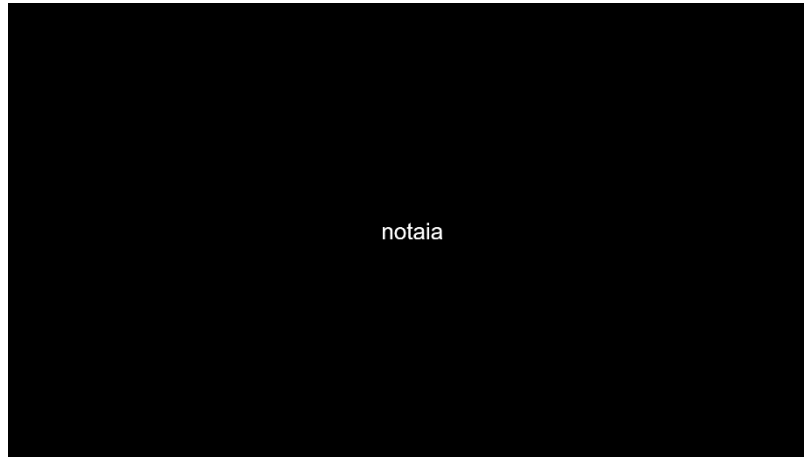


Figure 23 – Example of the stimuli used in Experiment 2.

The stimulus set consisted of the 30 lexical items used in Experiment 1. Each of the 30 items (15 common professions and 15 prestigious professions) was inflected for both masculine and feminine suffixes and shown twice. Each participant therefore saw 120 lexical items, presented in a random order across participants. The reader will find a complete list of the items in the Appendix. Participants were instructed to answer the following question: *il lavoro che vedi è prestigioso?* ‘is the job you see prestigious?’. More specifically, each participant completed four blocks of trials, each containing 30 items. Stimuli were balanced according to the following criteria:

- In each block, an item was shown once (i.e., either in the M or F condition);
- Each participant saw the same number of high- and low-prestige items;
- Each participant saw the same number of masculine and feminine items;
- Each participant saw any possible Gender by Item combination twice.

5.1.3 Procedure and design

The experiment was submitted by the *PsychoPy* and *Pavlovia* software (Peirce and MacAskill, 2018). Participants signed a consent form and were guaranteed that data would be collected and analysed anonymously. Before proceeding, participants were asked to meet the following requirements: to carry out the experiment via computers and not mobile phones, to sit in a quiet room, to pay complete attention to the task and to wear any prescription glasses, if necessary. The reasons for the research were given in terms of an interest in the way people perceive the prestige of professions. It was made clear that there were no right or wrong answers. Participants were asked to

respond as quickly as possible, given that reaction times would be collected. They were also asked to keep one index finger on the “yes” button and the other index finger on the “no” button for the entire duration of the experiment. “Yes” and “no” buttons were randomly assigned as “m” and “z” or “z” and “m” respectively. Visual stimulation consisted of alternating images of a white fixation cross (1.5 s) and a subsequent word (2 s). Letter height was set at 0.5 points. Answers needed to be provided during the time in which the word was on screen. Therefore, participants had 2 seconds to respond and there was a 1.5-sec interval between trials. Words were organised in 4 blocks of 30 items each. In order to proceed from one block to the next, participants were instructed to press the space bar on the computer keyboard. To familiarise participants with the task, participants had a 10-item trial session composed of 5 feminine and 5 masculine nouns, which were not included in the experimental conditions. To ensure an appropriate execution speed, the trial session included a feedback any time a button was not pressed within 2 seconds: *troppo lento/a!* ‘too slow!’. “Yes” and “no” instructions corresponding to the “m” and “z” buttons were permanently visible on screen only during the trial session, while in the experimental sessions they appeared exclusively at the beginning of each block. This research presented a repeated measures design. Each of the 2 conditions (feminine and masculine grammatical gender) was viewed by the subjects 60 times in high-prestige and 60 times in low-prestige items.

5.1.4 Data analysis

By-items and by-subject analyses of variance were conducted on participants’ response times and participants’ proportions of affirmative responses. The single trials which were completed in less than 500 milliseconds were eliminated. With regard to response times, in the by-item analyses (F1) repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted with *gender* (M, F) as a within-subjects variable and *prestige* (yes, no) as a between-subjects variable. In the by-subject analyses (F2), repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted with *gender* (M, F) and *prestige* (yes, no) as within-subjects variables. Data were normalised using the log transformation. With regard to the proportion of affirmative responses, in the by-item analyses (F1) repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted with *gender* as a within-subject variable, and *prestige* (high, low) as a between-subject variable. In the by-subject analyses (F2), repeated measures ANOVAs were conducted with *gender* and *prestige* (high, low) as within-subjects variables. The α level used for significance testing was 0.05. To reject the null hypothesis, both by-item and by-subject F-values should be significant.

5.2 Results

Proportion of affirmative responses

Descriptive results

The response rates assigned to each item (i.e., to each word stem) enable us to draw a distinction between two groups with respect to the perceived prestige. The participants' *yes / no* responses matched our classification in high- and low-prestige. Considering the affirmative responses only, the 15 professions which we considered highly prestigious were well above the 50% threshold, and the 15 professions which we labelled as poorly prestigious were below the 50% (see Figure 24).

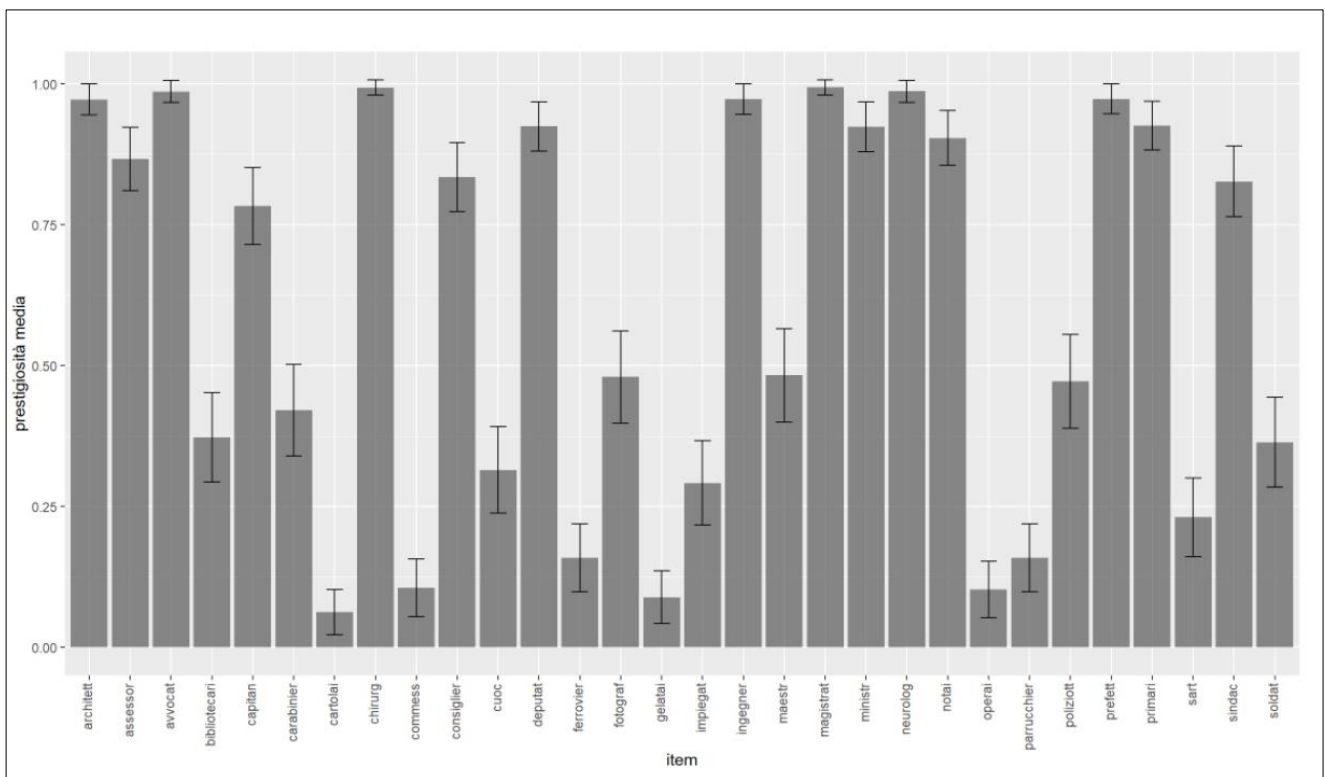


Figure 24 – Affirmative response rates for each item with regard to prestige.

More specifically, the proportion of affirmative responses assigned to each item in the feminine and in the masculine conditions are shown in Figure 25. Taking a closer look at the responses given in the two conditions, some items displayed a clear difference with the advantage of the feminine nouns, whereas others displayed the opposite. With respect to the high-prestige professions, the following 4 had a clear feminine advantage: *assessor** ‘council member’, *capitan** ‘captain’, *deputat** ‘deputy’, *prefett** ‘council member’, while the following 3 had a masculine advantage: *avvocat** ‘lawyer’, *notai** ‘notary’, *primari** ‘head physician’. With regard to the low-prestige professions, the following 6 displayed an advantage of the feminine nouns: *bibliotecari** ‘librarian’,

*ferrovier** ‘railway worker’, *gelatai** ‘ice-cream seller’, *maestr** ‘teacher’, *operai** ‘labourer’, *poliziott** ‘police officer’, and the following 2 displayed an advantage of the masculine nouns: *cuoc** ‘cook’, *parrucchier** ‘hairstylist’. Overall, in both subgroups feminine nouns collected more affirmative responses.

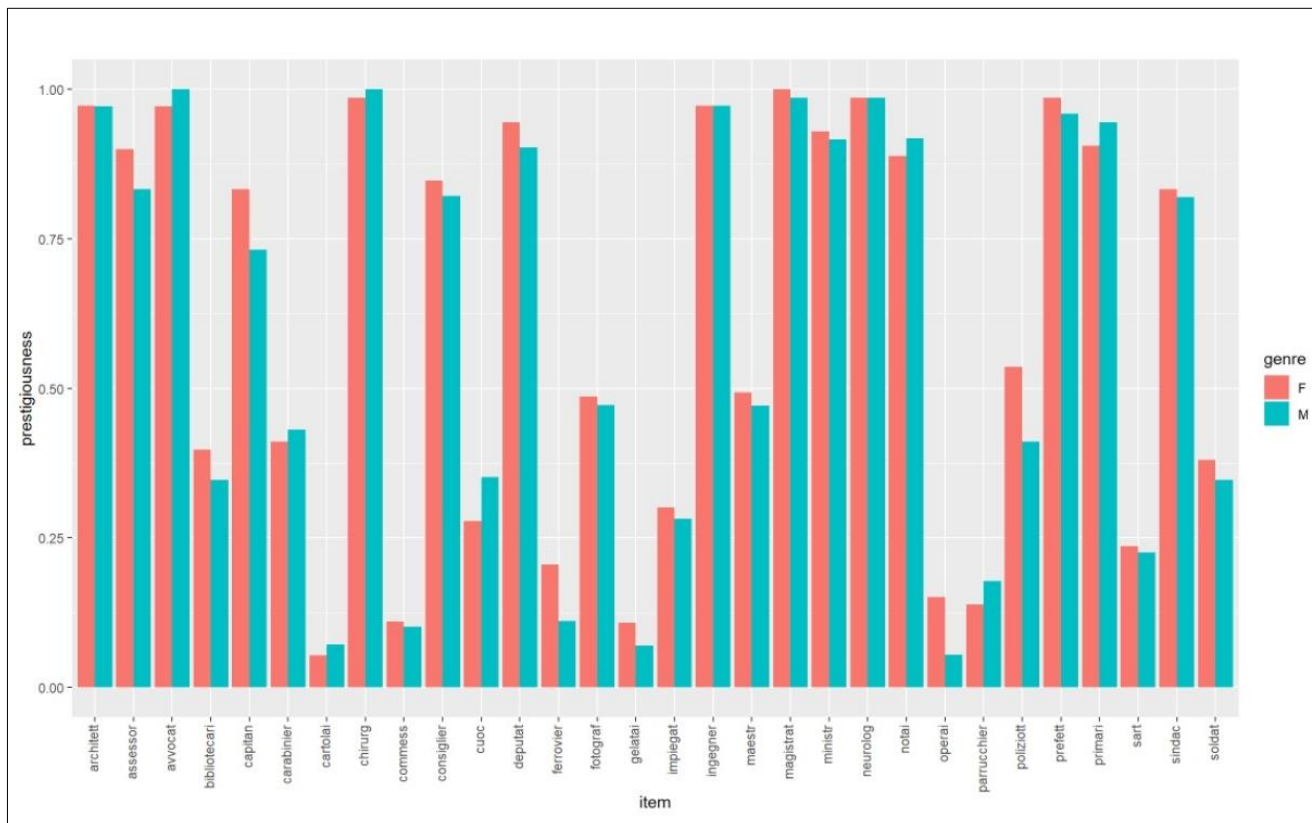


Figure 25 – Affirmative response rates for each item with regard to prestige and sorted by gender.

Analysis

Repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant effect of the grammatical gender on the proportion of affirmative responses grouped by item: $F(1,28)= 4.916, p<0.05, \eta^2_p= 0.149$ and by subject: $F(1,36)= 6.339, p<0.05, \eta^2_p= 0.150$. The proportion of affirmative responses to items carrying the feminine grammatical gender was higher than that given to items carrying the masculine grammatical gender. The results are presented in Figures 26 and 27 (error bars depict 95% confidence intervals associated with each of the group means).

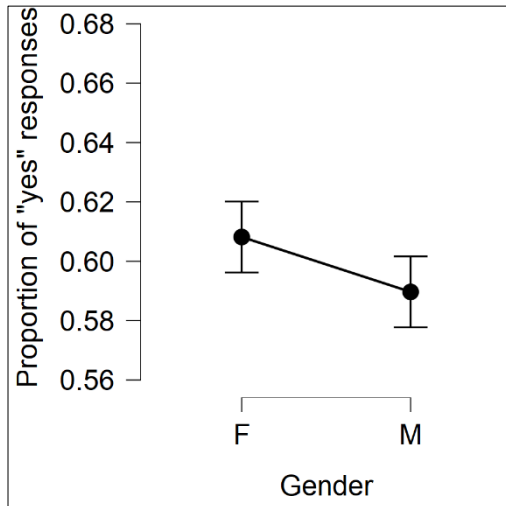


Figure 26 – Mean proportions of by-item affirmative responses by grammatical gender.

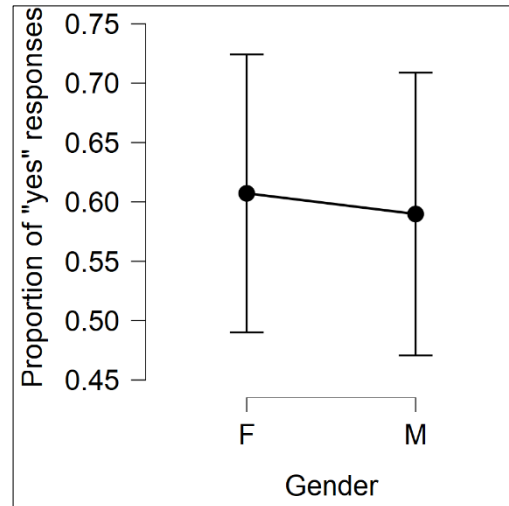


Figure 27 – Mean proportions of by-subject affirmative responses by grammatical gender.

As shown in Figures 28 and 29, repeated measures ANOVA also showed a main effect of prestige on the proportion of affirmative responses grouped by item $F(1,28)= 223.583, p<0.001, \eta^2_p= 0.889$ and by subject: $F(1,36)= 184.749, p<0.001, \eta^2_p= 0.387$, the overall proportion of affirmative responses decreasing with low-prestige items.

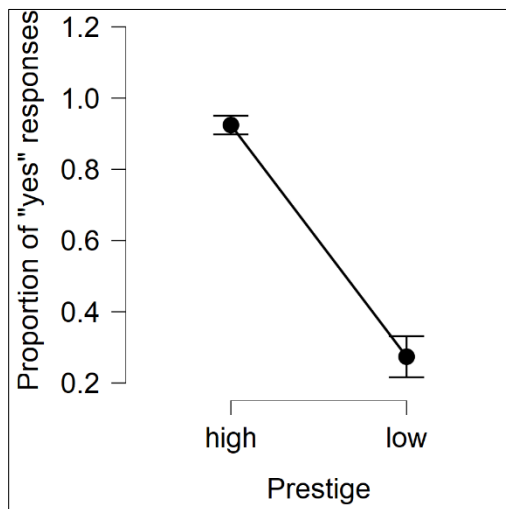


Figure 28 – Mean proportions of by-item affirmative responses by prestige.

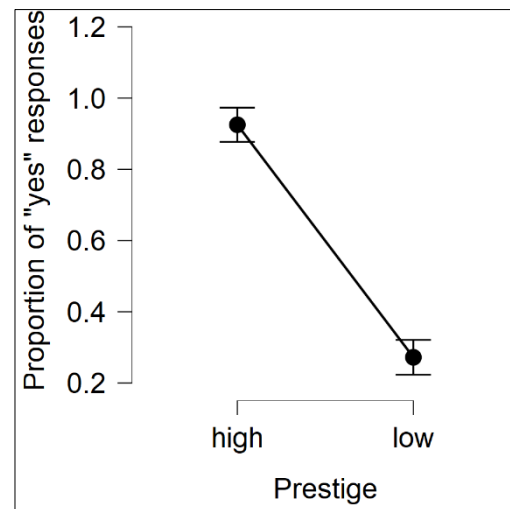


Figure 29 – Mean proportions of by-subject affirmative responses by prestige.

The results obtained from these analyses can be compared in Figures 30 and 31: no significant Gender by Prestige interaction effect was found, neither by item $F(1,28)= 0.449, p= 0.508, \eta^2_p= 0.16$, nor by subject $F(1,36), p=0.444, \eta^2_p= 0.016$.

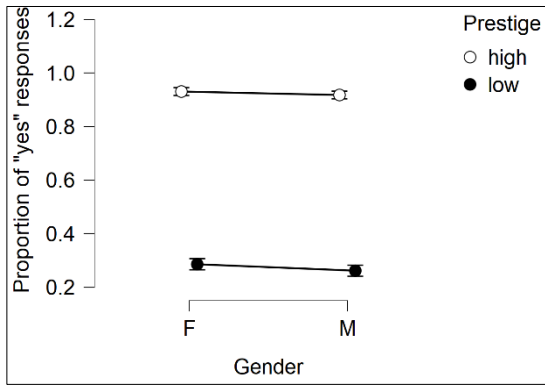


Figure 30 - Mean proportions of by-item affirmative responses by prestige and gender.

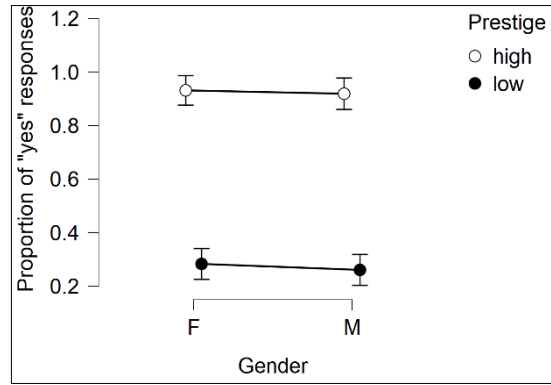


Figure 31 - Mean proportions of by-subject affirmative responses by prestige and gender.

Response times

Analysis

Repeated measures ANOVA showed a significant effect of the grammatical gender on response times, both by item: $F(1,28)= 11.566, p<0.01, \eta^2_p= 0.292$ and by subject: $F(1,36)= 7.526, p<0.01, \eta^2_p= 0.173$. As shown in Figures 32 and 33, feminine words were processed faster than masculine words.

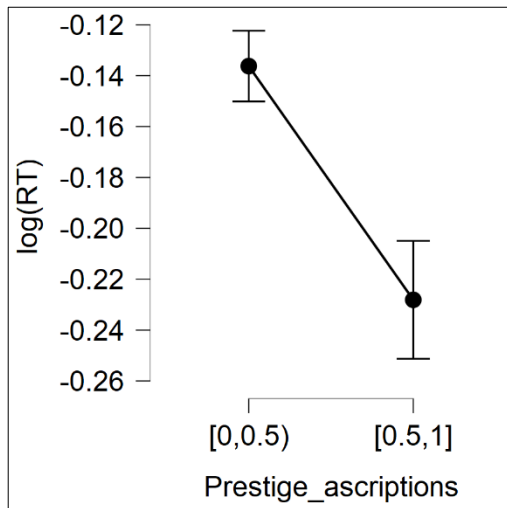


Figure 32 – Mean response times in logarithmic scale of by-item responses by gender.

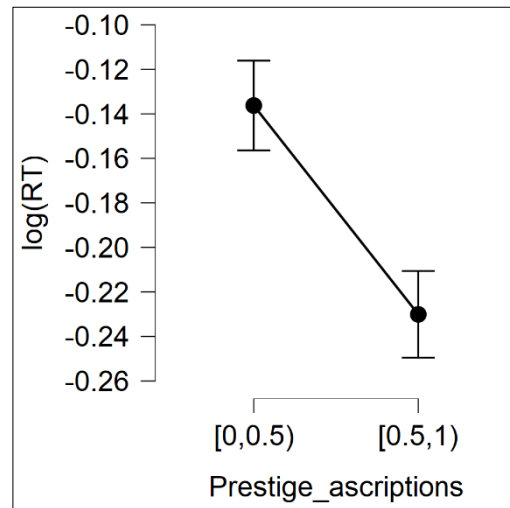


Figure 33 – Mean response times in logarithmic scale of by-subject responses by gender.

By-item and by-subject repeated measures ANOVA also showed a significant effect of prestige on response times, with high-prestige words being processed faster than low-prestige words: by item: $F(1,28)= 11.566, p<0.001, \eta^2_p= 0.492$; by subject: $F(1,36)= 31.357, p<0.001, \eta^2_p= 0.466$. ANOVAs including prestige as condition (high vs low) instead of the gold standard did not show any difference between the results.

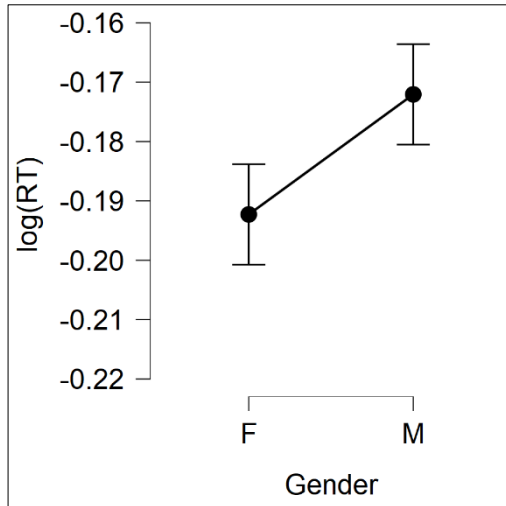


Figure 34 – Mean response times in logarithmic scale of by-item responses by prestige.

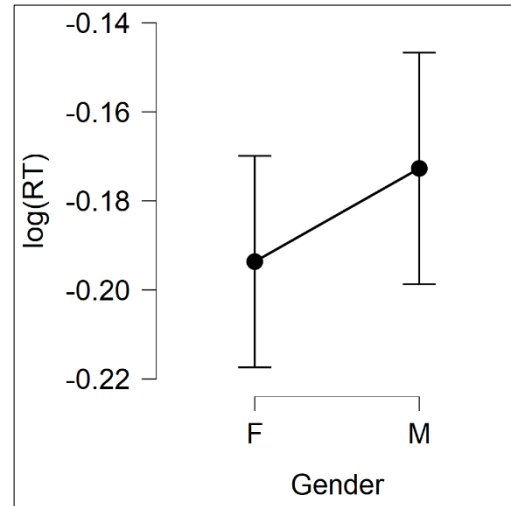


Figure 35 – Mean response times in logarithmic scale of by-subject responses by prestige.

Finally, the analysis did not reveal a Gender by Prestige interaction (by item: $F(1,28)= 0.039$, $p= 0.845$, $\eta^2_p=0.001$; by subject: $F(1,36)= 0.007$, $p=0.932$, $\eta^2_p= 2.043e -4$). The results obtained are summarised in Figures 36 and 37.

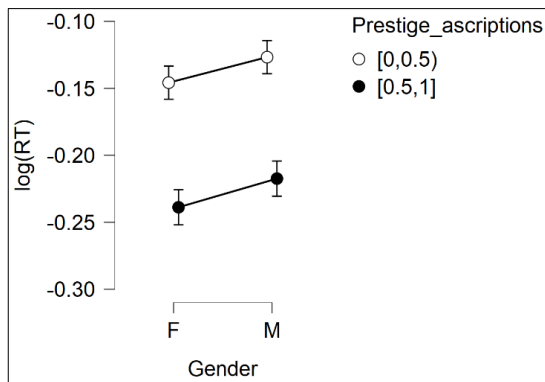


Fig. 36 – Mean response times in logarithmic scale of by-item responses by prestige and gender.

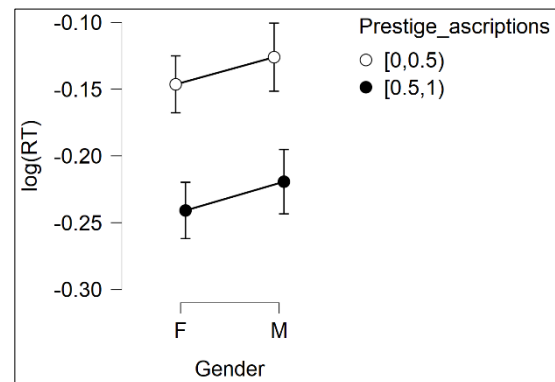


Fig. 37 – Mean response times in logarithmic scale of by-subject responses by prestige and gender.

5.3 Discussion

Our language's morphosyntactic rules are violated in reference to high-status women, as if prestigious masculine had acquired the traits of an additional grammatical category. The aim of the current study was to shed light on the reasons underlying the tendency to attribute the masculine grammatical gender to prestigious role names. The experiment reported here clearly demonstrated that there is no interaction between grammatical gender and prestige ascriptions, neither at a conscious (as shown by the proportion of affirmative responses) nor at an unconscious level (as shown

by the time it took participants to respond). Alternatively stated, metalinguistic judgements revealed that occupational job titles do not convey negative connotations in the feminine grammatical gender and do not acquire positive connotations in the masculine grammatical gender. The denotative meaning of an occupational job title is coded in its stem and is not altered by its suffix (clearly, this does not apply to the cases of semantic asymmetries). The cultural resistance to utilise the feminine symbol standing for the corresponding referent is undeniable, but it cannot be explained in terms of a different prestige conveyed by the morphological ending. The slow pace of linguistic change towards the respect of female professionals might be ascribed to language users' misconceptions about these suffixes. Given the unconscious stereotype that connects *male* with *wealth* (cf. Williams Paluck and Spencer-Rodgers, 2010), and given that male-dominated fields are commonly ascribed higher status (see Section 3.3), an erroneous assumption might exist that connects also prestige with masculine grammatical gender. As described in Section 2.0, women in prestigious positions are probably unconsciously subject to pressures to demonstrate that they are as worthy as men. They paradoxically demonstrate this feeling when making declarations such as "I don't need to change the title to demonstrate that I am as competent as a man", a sentiment to which one should respond: "but you do need the masculine job title to feel respected and comfortable in that role". The reluctance to make explicit one's own female identity reflects the possible risks that may arise from the specification of a divergence from the male norm, which instead constitutes a guarantee. It is easier to meet collective expectations rather than to break with tradition. The current research demonstrated that the idea of prestige is independent from one or another gendered suffix. These results match those observed in Experiment 1, and are therefore consistent across the methods employed (text passages or words out of context; controlled judgements or automatic judgements). These results are also in line with those observed in Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny's (2016) and Merkel, Maas and Frommelt's (2012) studies. Overall, there seems to be some evidence to indicate lack of correlation between gender-fair language and status-related estimation. Therefore, we can safely say that feminine agentive nouns do not entail prestige loss.

On the contrary, it was surprisingly found a main effect of gender in the first analysis (i.e., proportion of affirmative responses) and in the second analysis (i.e., response times): both high- and low-prestige stimuli collected more affirmative responses in the feminine rather than in the masculine condition, and feminine stimuli were processed faster than masculine stimuli.

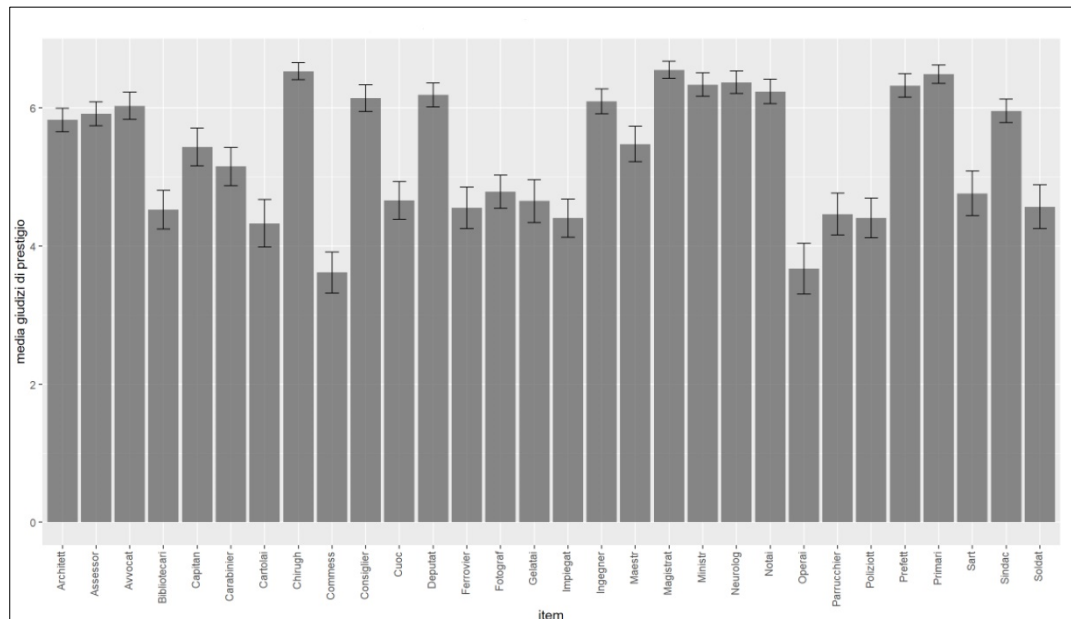
With regard to the first analysis, affirmative responses to the feminine gender were numerically superior. An advantage of low-prestige masculine nouns was only found with *cuoc** 'cook' and *parrucchier** 'hairdresser'. These were the only two low-prestige professions which lent themselves to a dual interpretation, analogously to the other well established semantic asymmetries.

Although this is not generally acknowledged (as compared to couples such as *segretario – segretaria*), the word *cuoco* is more likely to bring to mind a chef, probably also as a consequence of the presence of exclusively male chefs in the popular and numerous cooking shows daily delivered. Conversely, *cuoca* easily retrieves images of a generic food preparer, whose hierarchical position at work remains unspecified: she might work in a good restaurant as well as in a poor-quality canteen, and she might be the head of the kitchen as well as an assistant cook. Similarly, a *parrucchiere* is closer to a hairstylist, while a *parrucchiera* is closer to a hairdresser. A qualitative look at these two instances seems therefore to confirm the presence of two additional semantic asymmetries, albeit in smaller measure. Overall, participants did not struggle to consider the nouns in the feminine condition as prestigious. Rather, the proportion of affirmative responses to feminine professions was higher compared to masculine professions. The reason for this significant difference is not clear. Apparently, it would suggest that the feminine grammatical gender is more strongly associated to prestige, but our world knowledge cannot support this interpretation. A possible theoretical explanation for this result may be the so called women-are-wonderful effect (Eagly and Mladinic, 1994). A number of researchers have presented the paradox which speaks of an actual women’s workplace discrimination juxtaposed with the fact that experimental data may result in women being more positively evaluated as compared to men. Eagly and Mladinic (1994) comment that a preference for women “may reflect an awareness on the part of the respondents that it is no longer politically acceptable to derogate women. Indeed, women, along with many racial and ethnic minority groups, may be perceived as a disadvantaged group that deserves some special consideration” (p. 13). In the same vein, a widespread sensitivity to gender issues may explain the results of the first analysis.

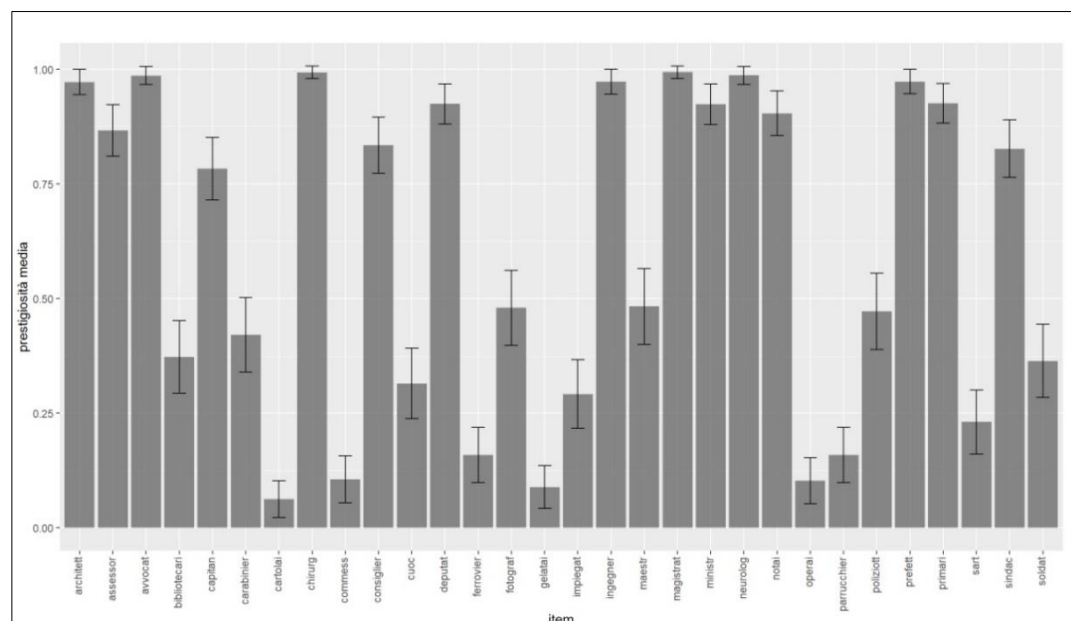
According to the results of the second analysis, faster reaction times occurred with words carrying the feminine gender, irrespective of the prestige they conveyed. Very little was found in the literature on analogous main gender effects. Whereas a large body of literature has compared semantic to grammatical gender (e.g., Bates, Devescovi, Pizzamiglio, D’Amico, Hernandez, 1995; Vigliocco and Franck, 2001; Vigliocco, Vinson and Paganelli, 2004; Vigliocco, Vinson, Paganelli and Dworzynski, 2005), fewer studies were found which compared the feminine to the masculine (grammatical or semantic) gender, especially employing reaction times. One of these is Dominguez, Cuetos and Segui’s (1999) study, which presented a lexical decision task with words and nonwords in the Spanish language. The words denoted animate entities (e.g., *perro* ‘dog-masc’, *perra* ‘dog-fem’) and adjectives (e.g., *ciego* ‘blind-masc’, *ciega* ‘blind-fem’). Results did not reveal any effect of the gender category on response times. Investigating the French language, Taft and Meunier (1998) elicited gender decision times: participants were required to indicate the grammatical gender of regular and irregular nouns, to clarify whether orthographic information contributed to the decision.

Stimuli consisted of words denoting inanimate entities. Even in this case, no effects of the gender factor were found. In the same framework, Chevaux, Franck, Meunier and Frauenfelder (2005) conducted three gender decisions experiments in French using inanimate nouns, and found that the main effect of gender on response times was not significant. Conversely, our study documented a main effect of gender, with feminine items being processed faster. A possible explanation for this result may be the qualitative difference of the metalinguistic judgments which were elicited: while the previous research involved grammatical-decision tasks, our research relied on individuals' world knowledge and personal beliefs. In addition, previous research involved inanimate entities or words commonly used to denote humans. In this regard, in our experiment an inverse frequency effect may have arisen at the level of lexical access. In fact, word recognition is affected by the neighbourhood density of a word, namely the number of phonologically similar words in the lexicon (Luce and Pisoni, 1998). As Warren (2013) explains, "a word with a lot of high-frequency neighbours is identified more slowly and less accurately than a word with only a few neighbours or with low-frequency neighbours" (p. 134). Considering that feminine job titles are less frequent than masculine job titles (both because of prestigious masculine and masculine generics), the word recognition of masculine items might have been affected by the dense neighbourhood they belong to. However, further research needs to be undertaken before the association between gender and response times is more clearly understood.

Finally, both the analysis of affirmative responses and of response times revealed a main effect of prestige. Participants responded faster to high-prestige words, suggesting that it is easier to recognize what is prestigious than to indicate what is not. Surprisingly, participants' *yes* and *no* responses matched our distinction between high- and low-prestige items. This finding was unexpected compared to the results of Experiment 1 of the present research. In fact, Experiment 1 and Experiment 2 included the same set of items and were submitted to the same participants, but in the former nearly all jobs were rated as prestigious to some extent (in the 7-points Likert scale, only two items were below the threshold level of "4" which was labelled as "slightly prestigious"). However, in the second experiment both response times and proportion of affirmative responses revealed that a straightforward distinction exists between what is considered prestigious and what is not. The response rates assigned for each item in Experiment 1 (Figure 36) and Experiment 2 (Figure 37) can be compared below.



Response rates for each item with regard to prestige in Experiment 1.



Response rates for each item with regard to prestige in Experiment 2.

This comparison reveals two notable findings. Firstly, it shows that time pressure elicited frank responses from participants, who otherwise were cautious and presumably worried about being offensive. Secondly, it demonstrates that different research methods lead to different responses. We could not adopt the method of the second research to investigate gender typicality in view of the fact that earlier studies on the effects of grammatical gender have been criticised for having compelled participants to make a binary choice about gender categories (cf. Sato, Öttl, Gabriel and Gyga,

2017). However, if applicable, response times are an effective method for capturing participants' opinions.

Taken together, the findings of Experiment 2 outline that there are clear positions as to the perception of occupational prestige, and that such perception is not influenced by gendered suffixes. In conclusion, women can safely define themselves with a title which is respectful of their gender without suffering from prestige loss.

Conclusion

The present study was designed to investigate the effects of the feminisation of professions. In fact, in the Italian language agreement in gender is canonical in all instances except one. High prestige job titles are often used in the masculine form even if the referent is female, thus (more or less unconsciously) indicating that the concept of high status is undivided from the masculine form, which is strictly connected to the male sex. In Italy, little research has been conducted on the effects of the feminisation of professions. For this purpose, two experiments were carried out: a questionnaire and a response time task. The first experiment investigated whether there was a grammatical gender effect (masculine vs feminine job titles) and a sex effect (female vs male agents) on the perceptions of prestige, competence and gender typicality of professions. The second experiment focused on prestige ascriptions, measuring proportions of affirmative responses and response times to single lexical items presented in the two grammatical genders. Before resuming the findings, commenting on their implications and making conclusions, this chapter revisits the framework this study is based on, with a synthesis of the key points covered in this work.

Chapter 1 served as an overview of the Italian gender system. Overall, gender assignment follows two criteria: semantic (i.e., a noun's meaning determines its gender) and formal (i.e., a noun's form determines its gender). Purely formal systems do not exist. On the contrary, formal rules are applied to the "semantic residue". Sex is the most common criterion which regulate gender assignment worldwide. This means that it is precisely by virtue of the referents' sex that we use a certain linguistic sign. When words refer to female humans, they are assigned the feminine grammatical gender; when words refer to male humans, they are assigned the masculine grammatical gender. With respect to the majority of Italian nouns, lexical roots convey their denotative meaning, and morphological inflections carry number and gender information. Grammatical gender is an agreement feature: the gender of every noun determines the behaviour of the associated constituents in a sentence.

The mere description of the Italian language system shows that its inner structure requires female jobholders be introduced by the feminine grammatical gender: reference to sex is inevitable when referring to humans. Chapter 2 described how lack of a visible reference to women only occurs when they hold prestigious positions. This unique morphosyntactic inconsistency finds its rationale in the influence of sociocultural gender on grammatical gender. Grammatical anomalies conform to the stereotype concerning women's place in society: traditionally, it is the male sex that is the authentic prestige holder. The reluctance to use feminine job titles undermines women's sense of identity (cf. Giusti, 2011; 2016): to fit a certain role, a woman has to evoke something male. The fact

that the feminisation of professions is a matter of controversy in public opinion further confirms the strong cultural resistance to a shift in conceptualisation of women. Fortunately, recent investigations aimed at eliciting Italians' grammatical opinions on occupational job titles showed an increased acceptability of the feminine forms (Castenetto and Ondelli, 2020). Considering that language is crucial for the recognition of concepts, and considering that it is through names that we construct our reality, the uncertainty as to how to nominate high-status women is not a trivial, but an essential issue.

Chapter 3 discussed the experimental evidence on the effects of linguistic change, demonstrating that language is instrumental in the maintenance of the status quo. In fact, masculine generics and gender stereotyped language hinder gender equality. More precisely, the third chapter reviewed literature on masculine generics, on professional stereotypes and on occupational prestige. A summary of the main findings is provided below:

- A direct association exists which connects masculine signs and male mental representations. It is not even enough to explicitly mention the prescriptive rule (i.e., reminding that masculine forms can refer to either sex) for the activation of the literal meaning to be overridden (e.g., Gygax, Gabriel, Lévy, Pool, Grivel, and Pedrazzini, 2012). It is undeniable that “masculine” cannot be considered “neuter”, but indeed “masculine”.
- The masculine signs “including” both males and females over-represent men in people’s imagery and actualise a literal exclusion of women, impeding the accessibility of female prototypes. On the contrary, feminine forms prompt a higher cognitive inclusion of women and facilitate the recall of female exemplars (e.g., in English, Schneider and Hacker, 1973; in German, Stahlberg, Sczesny and Braun, 2001; in French, Gygax and Gabriel, 2008; in Spanish, Kaufmann and Bohner, 2014; in Hebrew, Gilam, Shamir, Tenenbaum and Vainapel, 2015).
- The invisibility of women in discourse has repercussions at the professional level. Gender-fair language influences the sense of belongingness and inclusiveness, raising women’s motivation to apply to job positions as well as the perceived suitability of women for leadership positions (e.g., Horvath and Sczesny, 2015). Linguistic intervention has also proved effective in influencing female adolescents’ and children’s job attitudes. In fact, their perceptions of occupational success, self-efficacy and self-interest were higher when occupations were presented with split forms. To this regard, Chatard, Guimond and Martinot (2005) comment that the lack of the feminine grammatical gender for the most prestigious occupations is a form of «symbolic violence» (p. 269).

- The lack of certain feminine agentive nouns reflects and confirms gender stereotypes. Gender stereotypes dictate different expectations for the two sexes and seem to affect judgements of competence and job-suitability. Women are generally thought of as nurturant and compassionate, and men as agentic and assertive. Leadership and top managerial positions are perceived as culturally masculine roles, to such a point that a *role incongruity* exists between the female role and the leadership role (Eagly and Karau, 2002).
- Since the first collection of gender occupational norms (Shinar, 1975), beliefs about the “typically male” and “typically female” professions continue to be largely shared and broadly unchanged. The typically male professions consistently outnumber the others: the prototypical man could do anything, while few roles are attributed to the prototypical woman (i.e., teacher, nurse, beautician, secretary). However, when gender typicality norms were collected using feminine-masculine word pairs instead of masculine generics, this bias was attenuated (Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham and Oakhill, 2008a; Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny, 2016).
- Stereotypical information is used by language users to automatically infer the referents’ sex. In fact, gender-associated inferences are triggered by both grammatical gender and stereotypical information. In the absence of any other information, the referents’ sex is inferred from stereotypicality, which is based on world knowledge and which can be overridden by contextual information. For instance, the words *surgeon* and *nurse* are assumed to refer to a male and a female individual respectively, unless stated otherwise (e.g., Osterhout, Bersick, and McLaughlin, 1997; Kreiner, Sturt and Garrod, 2008).
- The investigation of the interaction between stereotypes and masculine generics in grammatical gender languages revealed that sex inferences were dictated by the grammatical gender of the noun (e.g., Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Garnham, and Oakhill, 2008b). Therefore, in natural gender systems mental representations depend on stereotypical information, while in grammatical gender systems the linguistic form overrides the stereotype.
- Italian common and epicene nouns (and nouns used as such, like *ingegnere*) activate stereotyped information because morphological information does not provide any cue as to the referents’ sex: given the absence of grammatical information, individuals rely on stereotypical information. For instance, in the absence of an early disambiguation, *ingegnere* is assumed to refer to a male individual. On the contrary, if explicit grammatical

information is provided, it blocks stereotype-based inferences (e.g., Cacciari and Padovani, 2007; Ronca and Moscati, 2019).

- The effects of grammatical and stereotypical gender information were also studied among bilinguals speaking a grammatical and a natural gender language (French and English). Participants' gender representations switched in relation to the language used. While in their L1 representations were consistent with previous findings (i.e., stereotyped in English and male biased in French), in their L2 English participants showed an increase in male biased representations, and French participants showed a decrease in male biased representations (Sato, Gygax and Gabriel, 2013).
- With respect to occupational prestige, traditionally male-occupations are perceived higher in prestige than traditionally female ones. This might be the reason behind the women's tendency to prefer the masculine over the feminine job titles. Two studies, conducted in Polish, confirmed that the masculine gender raised the perceptions of professional credibility. In fact, women described with masculine job titles were perceived as more suitable and more competent than those described with feminine job titles (Formanowicz, Bedynska, Cislak, Braun and Sczesny, 2013; Budziszewska, Hansen and Bilewicz, 2014).
- To date there has been little agreement on the effects of gender-fair language on status-related estimation. Vervecken and Hannover (2015), experimenting in German and Dutch, documented an effect of the linguistic form, with stereotypically male professions being ascribed lower earnings and less importance when presented with split forms as compared to masculine generics. On the contrary, Horvath, Merkel, Maass and Sczesny (2016), experimenting in Italian and German, did not find an effect of split forms on social status ascriptions. However, they found that the estimated salaries of female professions were higher if presented with masculine forms only.
- In Italy, two studies compared the masculine singular grammatical gender with the feminine singular grammatical gender. Mucchi Faina and Barro (2006) utilised the couple *professore – professoressa* only, whereas Merkel, Maas and Frommelt (2012) utilised four professions carrying the masculine grammatical gender, the feminine *-essa* suffix and the feminine symmetric suffix. The first experiment did not reveal an effect of the linguistic manipulation (masculine vs feminine job title for the female referent) on status ascriptions, but found that male university teachers were considered as more high-status than female university teachers. On the contrary, the second experiment documented that referents introduced by *-essa* forms were perceived as having less social status as compared to the masculine and the feminine symmetric forms.

Chapter 4 presented the first experiment of the current research. While previous research conducted in Italian focused on the comparison between split forms and masculine generics, or on the nouns formed with the suffix *-essa* as compared to the symmetric forms, very little research has been conducted on the symmetric forms of feminisation. For this reason, a questionnaire was employed to compare the masculine form used for male referents (MM), the masculine form used for female referents (MF) and the feminine symmetric form used for female referents (FF). This experiment aimed at investigating whether the linguistic form influenced the perceptions of prestige, of competence and of gender typicality of professions. Opinions about gender stereotypes on gender roles were also collected. Repeated measures ANOVA did not show a significant effect of the linguistic form on the perceived prestige, nor on competence. With regard to the perceived typicality, a significant effect was found, with a difference between MM and FF: the feminine grammatical gender combined with a female referent (FF) changed the perception of typicality. Experiment 1 also found that gender expectations continue to exist and that they are governed by a general male bias. When asked to take positions on explicitly sexist content as to traditional division of roles, participants expressed their great dissent. However, nearly all jobs were associated to males only. This study demonstrated that making the agents' femaleness explicit through the grammatical gender (FF), the deep-rooted beliefs as to the gender-typicality changed.

Finally, Chapter 5 further investigated prestige ascriptions, given that literature has emerged that offers contradictory findings about the role played by the linguistic form. Response times and proportion of affirmative responses as to whether the presented job was prestigious were collected. Repeated measures ANOVA did not find an interaction of gender and prestige ascriptions, showing that no direct association exists between masculine grammatical gender and prestige. On the contrary, professions carrying the feminine grammatical gender surprisingly collected more affirmative responses and were processed faster.

Overall, the present research demonstrated that feminine job titles do not entail prestige and competence loss, and at the same time they oppose deep-rooted stereotypes regarding the typicality of professions. The implications of these findings are highly relevant for the broader phenomenon of social categorisation, which is “the natural cognitive process by which we place individuals into social groups” (Jhangiani and Tarry, 2014, p. 517). Social categorisation occurs spontaneously: we are naturally inclined to think of others more as group members than as individuals. Jhangiani and Tarry (2014) explain that “social categorization occurs so quickly that people may have difficulty *not* thinking about others in terms of their group memberships” (p. 519). Of the different categories, which include ethnicity, age, social class and occupation, gender is particularly salient (see for example van Knippenberg, van Twuyver and Pepels, 1994), even among children (Bennett, Sani,

Hopkins, Agostini, Malucchi, 2000). In Stewart and Valian's (2018) words, "gender pervades every area of existence" (p. 79).

Gender typicality and stereotypes contribute to social categorization in that they are easily applied to group members. Once they are established, stereotypes are very hard to eliminate, also due to our tendency to search for, interpret and remember information in a way that confirms previously held beliefs. Stereotypes not only unconsciously influence the interpretation of the world around us, but also the perception of the self. Steele and Aronson (1995) demonstrated the effectiveness of what they called *stereotype threat*: the simple reminder of a cultural stereotype prompts conformity to those expectations causing performance decrements for members of those same groups. For instance, Good, Woodzicka and Wingfield (2010) demonstrated that high school students' performance in a chemistry lesson was influenced by the images of male and female scientists they were exposed to. In fact, when textbooks included images of female scientists only, female students' scores on a comprehension test were significantly higher compared to the male-scientist only condition, which on the contrary activated the stereotype threat surrounding women in STEM. Thus, the authors demonstrated that the way we represent a prototypical scientist contributes to the construction and the maintenance of the gap in science achievements. The contribution of linguistic structures is similar. Perceptions of gender-typicality play a crucial role in society, and language can modify those perceptions. Experiment 1 of the present study demonstrated that when a woman is introduced by a feminine job title, the perception of gender typicality moves towards neutrality. All in all, we have enough evidence to suggest that if examples such as (5) reported in Section 2.1 (with a *bambina scienziato* 'child-F scientist-M') are the only kind of linguistic input presented in texts, only male children's self-efficacy is boosted.

Importantly, as briefly mentioned in Section 2, gender categorisation is fully formed from an early age: gender expectations are active in adults as much as in children. Valian (1998) explains how, by the age of six, children know that certain objects are associated to one sex more than the other (e.g., hammers and irons), that girls and boys play in different ways and that women and men tend to be engaged in different occupations. The comment below reports a comment of a fourth-grade class girl who was asked why boys and girls did not play soccer together at recess:

"The boys never ask us to play. Then when we do play, only boys are chosen to be captains. And girls don't get the ball passed to them very often, and when a girl scores a goal, the boys don't cheer" (Valian, 1998, p. 57).

This indicates an early manifestation of the glass ceiling applied to children and fun rather than to professional life: given that soccer is a typically-male activity, girls cannot be captains and

their achievements are not acknowledged. This example encapsulates the pervasiveness of the beliefs about gender differences. Valian (1998) also explains that, similarly to adults, children label themselves as belonging to one group or the other and change their behaviour in order to be consistent with other members of the group. Gottfredson's (2005) theory postulates that children tend to favour professions which are in line with their gender group. Actually, if children soon absorb cultural norms and behave in accord to those expectations, it is no surprise that girls mainly aspire to "women's" work and boys to "men's" work (Gottfredson, 2005, p. 71).

Our educational system is responsible for the maintenance of stereotypes and poor action is being taken to reverse this tendency. Countless textbooks still contain sentences such as *la mamma cucina sempre, il papà legge il giornale* 'mum always cooks, dad reads the newspaper', without presenting the inverse. While investigating the words associated with female and male characters in Italian primary-school textbooks, Biemmi (2010) found that 50 professions were used to describe male characters and included a wide range of options, such as: *cavaliere* 'knight', *ferroviere* 'railway worker', *marinaio* 'sailor', *scrittore* 'writer', *poeta* 'poet', *giornalista* 'journalist', *medico* 'doctor', *direttore d'orchestra* 'conductor/orchestra director'. On the contrary, only 15 professions were used to denote female characters, including: *principessa* 'princess', *maga* 'wizard', *strega* 'witch', *fata* 'fairy', *maestra* 'teacher', *infermiera* 'nurse', *estetista* 'beautician', *parrucchiera* 'hairdresser', *casalinga* 'homemaker'. By talking in this way of women and men, children soon learn that women's possibilities are not as vast as men's.

The present study demonstrated that the masculine grammatical gender does not augment prestige ascriptions, but that it strengthens the male bias. While prestigious masculine contributes to the maintenance of gender stereotypes, professions carrying the feminine grammatical gender activate mental representations of female jobholders. Language must be a means through which counter-stereotypical information is transmitted. Feminine job titles are a signal of women's presence and imply that women can do the job too. Instead of naturalising in the discourse the fact that women in power do exist, we are currently embarrassed, uncertain or resistant towards the words that ascertain their identity. Language changes perceptions of gender-typicality, and perceptions of gender-typicality change one's own self efficacy and expectancy. Thus, an equal linguistic representation of women and men is crucial for a change to take place.

Finally, it is important that we stop thinking of individuals in oppositional terms. Instead of associating each sex with what the other is not, we should leave space to a more fluid conception of human beings. To be in power, a woman does not need to evoke masculine traits: being in prestigious positions and being a woman are not contradictory. Quite the opposite, women should present themselves with their specificity, their essence, their identity. The masculine grammatical gender

attached to any high-status position alludes to an old male model. Let's pave the way to an additional one. Let's substitute hesitation with pride in being a woman. Starting with language.

Acknowledgments

Ringrazio il Professor Gianluca Lebani per la competenza preziosa con cui mi ha guidato e per la costanza con cui mi ha seguito. In particolar modo, lo ringrazio per il suo fare disteso che mi ha sempre fatto sentire a mio agio e che, probabilmente a sua insaputa, piacevolmente placava la mia vena autocritica. Ringrazio la Professoressa Giuliana Giusti per avermi ispirato con il suo impegno e con le sue parole, dedicandosi da tempo a un tema così importante e diffondendo consapevolezza dentro e fuori l'università. La ringrazio anche per la sua eccezionale disponibilità e per l'ascolto che mi ha donato in alcuni momenti difficili.

La mia esperienza universitaria è legata anche ad altri due docenti che vorrei ricordare. Innanzitutto, ringrazio la Professoressa Francesca Santulli: che una persona del suo calibro abbia visto qualcosa in me è stata una sorpresa e una gioia che non so spiegare. Infine, ringrazio il Professor Luca Lorenzo Bonatti per le numerose lezioni extra su una materia ostica, e per il suo “continui così”, che per lui sono due parole ma per me sono un mondo.

Passando alla sfera familiare, ringrazio i miei genitori perché mi hanno permesso di vivere questo percorso con serenità. Li ringrazio per il loro esempio, per la loro cura, per il loro supporto continuo e totale, per avermi sempre lasciato libera di cercarmi e trovarmi senza interferire, e per i loro sforzi di comprendere: certe diverse vedute si faranno anche sentire, ma il vostro amore di più. Ringrazio mio fratello Simone perché è un complice, un amico, un alleato, un sostegno indelebile. Il mio amore per te non può avere eguali.

Ringrazio le mie care nonnine che sono ancora dignitosamente in vita nonostante siano vicine ai 90, e che sono, ognuna a proprio modo, due tipetti veramente forti. Siete due modelli di vita, che voglio saper combinare nella mia.

Ringrazio zia Stefania e zio Massimiliano per la loro presenza e il loro sostegno costante: se possono fare qualcosa, la fanno. È di grande aiuto sapere che, come ho un problema o un bisogno, voi ci siete. Ringrazio zio Marco perché la tua libertà di essere è sempre stata più forte delle convenzioni.

Ci sono diverse altre persone che sono tanto grata di avere con me. Ringrazio chi è cresciuto con me e continua a farlo, e chi è arrivato più di recente diventando in poco tempo ugualmente insostituibile. Vi dovrei dedicare tanto, persona per persona, denudandomi anche troppo. Una sintesi non la so fare. Taccio.

Infine, ringrazio una qualche forza universale che mi ha fatto nascere in una parte di mondo privilegiata, dato che in questo mondo le probabilità di non vivere una vita degna di un essere umano sono tante. Sono grata per tutto.

Bibliography

- Ahmed, S. (2015). Introduction: Sexism – A problem with a name. *New formations: a journal of culture/theory/politics*, 86(1), 5-13.
- Alksnis, C., Desmarais, S., & Curtis, J. (2008). Workforce segregation and the gender wage gap: Is “women’s” work valued as highly as “men’s”? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 38, 1416–1441.
- AlmaLaurea (2017). *Comunicato Stampa. Più brave a scuola e all’università, ma penalizzate sul mercato del lavoro*. Retrieved from https://www.almalaurea.it/sites/almalaurea.it/files/comunicati/2018/cs_al_donne_8_marzo.pdf (accessed on 29-03-2021).
- Azzalini, M. (2020). Subtle Gender Stereotypes in the News Media and Their Role in Reinforcing a Culture Tolerating Violence Against Women. In Giusti, G. & Iannàcaro, G. (eds). *Language, Gender and Hate Speech. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (pp. 197-212). Venezia: Edizioni Ca’ Foscari - Digital Publishing.
- Azzalini, M. & Giusti, G. (2009). Lingua e genere fra grammatica e cultura. *Economia della Cultura*, 4, 537-546.
- Banaji, Mahazarin R. & Hardin, Curtis D. (1996). Automatic stereotyping. *Psychological Science*, 7 (3), 136-141.
- Bates, E., Devescovi, A., Hernandez., A., & Pizzamiglio, L. (1996). Gender priming in Italian. *Perception and Psychophysics*, 58, 992-1004.
- Bates, E., Devescovi, A., Pizzamiglio, L., D’Amico, S. & Hernandez, A. (1995). Gender and lexical access in Italian. *Perception & Psychophysics*, 57 (6), 847-862.
- Beggs, J. M., & Doolittle, D. C. (1993). Perceptions now and then of occupational sex typing: A replication of Shinar's 1975 study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 23, 1435-1453.
- Bennett, M., Sani, F., Hopkins, N., Agostini, L. & Malucchi, L. (2000). Children’s gender categorization: an investigation of automatic processing. *British Journal of Developmental Psychology*, 18, 97–102.
- Bem, S. L. & Bem, D. J. (1973). Does Sex-biased Job Advertising “Aid and Abet” Sex Discrimination? *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 3(1) 6-18.
- Biemmi, I. (2010) *Educazione sessista. Stereotipi di genere nei libri delle elementari*. Torino: Rosenberg & Sellier.
- Bodine, A. (1975). Androcentrism in prescriptive grammar: Singular "they," sex-indefinite "he" and "he or she." *Language in Society*, 4, 129-146.
- Boring, A. (2017). Gender biases in student evaluations of teaching. *Journal of Public Economics*, 145, 27-41.

- Boroditsky, L., Fuhrman, O., & McCormick, K. (2011). Do English and Mandarin speakers think about time differently? *Cognition*, 118(1), 123-129.
- Boroditsky, L., Schmidt, L. A., & Phillips, W. (2003). Sex, syntax and semantics. In D. Gentner & S. Goldin-Meadow (eds.). *Language in mind: Advances in the study of language and thought* (pp. 61-79). Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Braun, F., Gottburgsen, A., Sczesny, S., & Stahlberg, D. (1998). Können Geophysiker Frauen sein? Generische Personenbezeichnungen im Deutschen [Can geophysicians be women? Generic terms in German]. *Zeitschrift für germanistische Linguistik*, 26, 265-283.
- Braun, F., Sczesny, S., & Stahlberg, D. (2002). Das generische Maskulinum und die Alternativen: Empirische Studien zur Wirkung generischer Personenbezeichnungen im Deutschen. *Germanistische Linguistik*, 167/168, 77-87.
- Braun, F., Sczesny, S., & Stahlberg, D. (2005). Cognitive effects of masculine generics in German. An overview of empirical findings. *Communications*, 30, 1-21.
- Brouwer, H. & Crocker, M. W. (2017). On the Proper Treatment of the N400 and P600 in Language Comprehension. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 8:1327.
- Brown, R. W., & Lenneberg, E. H. (1954). A study in language and cognition. *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 49(3), 454.
- Budziszewska, M., Hansen, K. & Bilewicz, M. (2014). Backlash Over Gender-Fair Language: The Impact of Feminine Job Titles on Men's and Women's Perception of Women. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 33, 681-691.
- Burnett, H. and Pozniak, C. (2020). Political dimensions of Ecriture Inclusive in Parisian universities. Manuscript. Université de Paris, LLF, CNRS.
- Burr, E. (1995). Agentivi e sessi in un corpus di giornali italiani. In: Marcato, G. (ed.). *Dialettologia al femminile. Atti del Convegno Internazionale di Studi, Sappada/Plodn (Belluno)* (pp. 349-365). Padova: CLUEB.
- Burr, E. (2003). Gender and language politics in France. In Hellinger, M., & Bußmann, H. (eds.). *Gender across languages. The linguistic representation of women and men*, vol. 3 (pp. 119-139). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Cacciari, C., Corradini, P., Padovani, R., Carreiras, M. (2011). Pronoun resolution in Italian: The role of grammatical gender and context. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 23 (4), 416-434.
- Cacciari, C., Padovani, R. (2007). Further evidence of gender stereotype priming in language: Semantic facilitation and inhibition in Italian role nouns. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 28 (2), 277-293.
- Cacouault-Bitaud, M. (2008). La femminilizzazione di una professione e il discorso sulla perdita di prestigio: il caso della Francia. *Sociologia del lavoro*, 112, 167-176.
- Cameron, D. (1995). *Language Hygiene*. London: Routledge.

- Cameron, D. (1997). Theoretical Debates in Feminist Linguistics: Questions of Sex and Gender. In Wodak R. (ed.). *Gender and Discourse* (pp. 21-36). London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Cameron, D. (2015). Evolution, Language and the Battle of the Sexes. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 30(86), 351-358.
- Cannata, N. (2010). Lui (non) è la patria. In Sapegno, M. S. (ed.). *Che genere di lingua?* (pp. 113-131). Roma: Carocci.
- Cardinaletti, A. & Giusti, G. (1991). Il sessismo nella lingua italiana. Riflessione sui lavori di Alma Sabatini. *Rassegna italiana di linguistica applicata*, 91(2), 169-189.
- Cario, N. (2016). Le parole che fanno bene e le parole che fanno male nei quotidiani. In Bacci Benivento, V., Cario, N., Di Campo, J., Del Re, A., Mura, B. & Perini, L. (eds.). *Siamo le parole che usiamo* (pp. 63 - 76). Padova: Padova University Press.
- Carreiras, M., Garnham, A., Oakill, J., Cain, K. (1996). The use of stereotypical gender information in constructing a mental model: Evidence from English and Spanish. *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 49, 639–663.
- Castenetto, G. and Ondelli, S. (2020). The Acceptability of Feminine Job Titles in Italian Newspaper. A Survey Involving Italian Native Speakers. In Giusti, G. & Iannàccaro, G. (eds). *Language, Gender and Hate Speech. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (pp. 75-89). Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing.
- Chatard, A., Guimond, S. & Martinot, D. (2005). Impact de la féminisation lexicale des professions sur l'auto-efficacité des élèves: une remise en cause de l'universalisme masculin? *L'année psychologique*, 105(2), 249-272.
- Chevaux, F., Franck, J., Meunier, F. & Frauenfelder, U. (2005). Access to Phonological and Gender Information during Visual Word Recognition. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society*, 27.
- Chwilla, D. J., Brown, C. M. & Hagoort, P. (1995). The N400 as a function of the level of processing. *Psychophysiology*, 32, 274-285.
- Cohen, J. (1960). A coefficient of agreement for nominal scales. *Educational and Psychological Measurement*, 20(1), 37-46.
- Cole', P., & Segui, J. (1994). Grammatical incongruence and vocabulary types. *Memory and Cognition*, 22, 387-394.
- Corbett, Greville G. (1991). *Gender*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Corbett, Greville G. (1979). The agreement hierarchy. *Journal of Linguistics*, 15, 203-224.
- Corbett, Greville G. (2006). *Agreement*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

- Corbett, Greville G. (2013a). Number of Genders. In Dryer, M. S. & Haspelmath, M. (eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Retrieved from <http://wals.info/chapter/30> (accessed on 25-11-2020).
- Corbett, Greville G. (2013b). Systems of Gender Assignment. In Dryer, M. S. & Haspelmath, M. (eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Retrieved from <http://wals.info/chapter/32> (accessed on 25-11-2020).
- Corbett, Greville G. (2013c). Sex-based and Non-sex-based Gender Systems. In Dryer, M. S., & Haspelmath, M. (eds.). *The World Atlas of Language Structures Online*. Leipzig: Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology. Retrieved from <http://wals.info/chapter/31> (accessed on 11-26-2020).
- Corbett, Greville G. (2014). Gender typology. In Greville G. Corbett (ed.), *The expression of gender* (pp. 87–130). Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Cortelazzo, M. (1995). Perché non si vuole la presidentessa? In Marcatò G. (ed.). *Donna e linguaggio* (pp. 49–52). Padova: CLEUP.
- Couch, J. V., & Sigler, J. N. (2001). Gender perception of professional occupations. *Psychological Reports*, 88, 693-698.
- Crawford, M., & English, L. (1984). Generic versus specific inclusion of women in language: Effects on recall. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 13 (5), 373-381.
- Danesi, M. (2016). *Complete Italian Grammar*. New York: McGraw-Hill Companies.
- Dardano, M. (1980). *Dizionario della lingua italiana*. Roma: Curcio.
- Deaux, K., & Emswiller, T. (1974). Explanations of successful performance on sex-linked tasks: What is skill for the male is luck for the female. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 29, 80-85.
- Devoto, G. & Oli, G. C. (1967). *Vocabolario illustrato della lingua italiana*. Milano: Felice Le Monnier.
- Di Rollo, A. (2010). Educazione linguistica e sessismo. In Sapegno, M. S. (ed). *Che genere di lingua?* (pp. 153-162). Roma: Carocci.
- Doleschal, U., & Schmid, S. (2001). Doing gender in Russian: Structure and perspective. In M. Hellinger, & H. Bußmann (eds.), *Gender across languages*, Vol. 1. (pp. 252–282). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Dominguez, A., Cuetos F., & Segui, J. (1999). The Processing of Grammatical Gender and Number in Spanish. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 28(5), 485-498.
- Duffy, S. A. & Keir, J. A. (2004). Violating stereotypes: Eye movements and comprehension processes when text conflicts with world knowledge. *Memory & Cognition*, 32, 551-559.

- Eagly, A. H., & Karau, S. J. (1991). Gender and the emergence of leaders: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 60, 685–710.
- Eagly, A. H. and Mladinic, A. (1994). Are People Prejudiced Against Women? Some Answers from Research on Attitudes, Gender Stereotypes, and Judgments of Competence. *European Review of Social Psychology*, 5(1), 1-35.
- Ebert, I. D., Steffens, M. C. & Kroth, A. (2014). Warm, but maybe not so competent? –Contemporary implicit stereotypes of women and men in Germany. *Sex Roles*, 70, 359–375.
- Ervin, S. M. (1962). The connotations of gender. *Word*, 18(3), 249-261.
- Eurostat (2021). *Gender pay gap statistics*. Retrieved from https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Gender_pay_gap_statistics (accessed on 28-02-2021).
- Fairclough, N. (2003). ‘Political correctness’: the politics of culture and language. *Discourse & Society*, 14(1), 17-28.
- Fausey, C. M., & Boroditsky, L. (2010). Subtle linguistic cues influence perceived blame and financial liability. *Psychonomic bulletin & review*, 17(5), 644-650.
- Flaherty, M. (2001). How a language gender system creeps into perception. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 32, 18-31.
- Formanowicz, M., Bedynska, S., Cisiak, A., Braun, F., & Sczesny, S. (2013). Side effects of gender-fair language: How feminine job titles influence the evaluation of female applicants. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43(1), 62–71.
- Formato, F. (2014). *Language use and gender in the Italian parliament*. PhD thesis, Lancaster University.
- Formato, F. (2016). Linguistic markers of sexism in the Italian media: A case study of ministra and ministro. *Corpora*, 11 (3), 371–399.
- Formato, F. (2019). *Gender, discourse and ideology in Italian*. York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Furnham, A. F., & Wilson, E. (2011). Gender differences in estimated salaries: A UK study. *Journal of Socio-Economics*, 40, 623–630.
- Gabriel, U. (2008). Language Policies and In-group Favoritism: The Malleability of the Interpretation of Generically Intended Masculine Forms. *Social Psychology*, 39(2), 103-107.
- Gabriel, U. & Mellenberger, F. (2004). Exchanging the generic masculine for gender-balanced forms: The impact of context valence. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 63, 273-278.
- Gambardella, D., & De Feo, A. (2008). Valutazione sociale delle occupazioni, femminilizzazione e effetti di genere. *Sociologia del lavoro*, 112, 99-116.

- Garnham, A., Gabriel, U., Sarrasin, O., Gygax, P., and Oakhill, J. (2012). Gender representation in different languages and grammatical marking on pronouns: when beauticians, musicians, and mechanics remain men. *Discourse Processes*, 49(6), 481-500.
- Garnham, A., Oakhill, J. & Reynolds, D. (2002). Are inferences from stereotyped role names to characters' gender made elaboratively? *Memory & Cognition*, 30(3), 439-446.
- Garnham, A., Oakhill, J. & Reynolds, D. (2005). Immediate activation of stereotypical gender information. *Memory and Cognition*, 33, 972–983.
- Gastil, J. (1990). Generic Pronouns and Sexist Language: The Oxymoronic Character of Masculine Generics. *Sex Roles*, 23 (11-12), 629-643.
- Gheno, V. (2019). *Femminili singolari. Il femminismo è nelle parole*. Firenze: Effequ.
- Gilam, G., Shamir, O. Y., Tenenbaum, Y. and Vainapel, S. (2015). The Dark Side of Gendered Language: The Masculine-Generic Form as a Cause for Self-Report Bias. *Psychological Assessment*, 27(4), 1513–1519.
- Giusti, G. (2009). Linguaggio e questioni di genere: alcune riflessioni introduttive. In Giusti, G. & Regazzoni, S. (eds). *Mi fai male* (pp. 87-98). Venezia: Cafoscarina.
- Giusti, G. (2011). Riferimento al genere e costruzione d'identità. In Giusti, G. (ed). *Nominare per esistere: nomi e cognomi* (pp. 13-28). Venezia: Cafoscarina.
- Giusti, G. (2016). Lingua e identità di genere: i nomi di ruolo in italiano. In Bacci Benivento, V., Cario, N., Di Campo, J., Del Re, A., Mura, B. & Perini, L. (eds.). *Siamo le parole che usiamo* (pp. 21 - 25). Padova: Padova University Press.
- Giusti, G. (2020). *Linguaggio, identità di genere e lingua italiana*. Ca' Foscari Open Knowledge. <https://learn.eduopen.org/course/view.php?id=432> (accessed on 01-12-2020).
- Giusti, G. & Iannàcaro, G. (2020). Can Gender-Fair Language Combat Gendered Hate Speech? Some Reflections on Language, Gender and Hate Speech. In Giusti, G. & Iannàcaro, G. (eds). *Language, Gender and Hate Speech. A Multidisciplinary Approach* (pp. 9-20). Venezia: Edizioni Ca' Foscari - Digital Publishing.
- Glick, P., Wilk, K., & Perreault, M. (1995). Images of Occupations: Components of Gender and Status in Occupational Stereotypes. *Sex Roles*, 32(9/10), 565-583.
- Good, J. J., Woodzicka, J. A., & Wingfield, L. C. (2010). The Effects of Gender Stereotypic and Counter-Stereotypic Textbook Images on Science Performance. *The Journal of Social Psychology*, 150(2), 132-147.
- Goldberg, P. (1968). Are women prejudiced against women? *Trans-action*, 5, 28–30.
- Gottfredson, L. S. (2005). Using Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise in career guidance and counseling. In S. D. Brown, & R. W. Lent (Eds.), *Career development and counseling: Putting theory and research to work* (pp. 71–100). New York: Wiley.

- Gygax, P. & Gabriel, U. (2008). Can a group of musicians be composed of women? Generic interpretation of French masculine role names in absence and presence of feminine forms. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 67(3), 141-153.
- Gygax, P., Gabriel, U., Lévy, A. Pool, E., Grivel, M., & Pedrazzini, E. (2012). The masculine form and its competing interpretations in French: When linking grammatically masculine role names to female referents is difficult. *Journal of cognitive psychology*, 24 (4), 395-408.
- Gygax, P., Gabriel, U., Sarrasin, O., Garnham, A. & Oakhill, J. (2008a). Au-pairs are rarely male: Role names' gender stereotype information across three languages. *Behavior Research Methods*, 40, 206-212.
- Gygax, P., Gabriel, U., Sarrasin, O., Garnham, A. & Oakhill, J. (2008b). Generically intended, but specically interpreted: When beauticians, musicians, and mechanics are all men. *Language and Cognitive Processes*, 23(3), 464-485.
- Gygax, P., Lévy A., & Gabriel, U. (2014). Fostering the generic interpretation of grammatically masculine forms: When my aunt could be one of the mechanics, *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 26(1), 27-38.
- Gygax, P., Sato, S., Öttl, A. & Gabriel, U. (2020). The masculine form in grammatically gendered languages and its multiple interpretations: a challenge for our cognitive system. *Language Sciences*, 83, 1-9.
- Hamilton, M. C. (1988). Using Masculine Generics: does generic *he* increase male bias in the users' imagery? *Sex roles*, 19, 785-799.
- Hamilton, M. C. (1991). Masculine bias in the attribution of personhood. People = Male, Male = People. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 15, 393-402.
- Harrison, L. (1975). Cro-magnon woman-in eclipse. *The Science Teacher*, 42, 8-11.
- Heilman, M. E., Block, C. J., Martell, R. F. & Simon, M. C. (1989). Has anything changed? Current characterization of men, women and managers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 74, 935-942.
- Heilman, M. Wallen, A. S., Fuchs, D. & Tamkins, M. M. (2004). Penalties for Success: Reactions to Women Who Succeed at Male Gender-Typed Tasks. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(3), 416-27.
- Hellinger, M. (2011). Guidelines for Non-Discriminatory Language use. In: Wodak, R., Johnstone, B. & Kerswill, P. (eds.). *The SAGE Handbook of Sociolinguistics* (pp. 565-582). London: SAGE.
- Hellinger, M. & Bußmann, H. (eds.). (2001, 2002, 2003). *Gender across languages. The linguistic representation of women and men*, vol. 1-3. Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Holmes, J. (2013). *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics*. London: Routledge.
- Horvath, L. K., Merkel, E. F., Maass, E. & Sczesny, S. (2016). Does Gender-Fair Language Pay Off? The Social Perception of Professions from a Cross-Linguistic Perspective. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6:2018.

- Horvath, L. K. and Sczesny, S. (2015). Reducing women's lack of fit with leadership? Effects of the wording of job advertisements. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 25, 316–328.
- Howard-Jones, N. On the diagnostic term "Down's disease". *Medical History*, 23(1), 102–104.
- Hughes, D. L. and Casey, P. L. (1986). Pronoun choice for gender-unspecified agent words: developmental differences. *Language and Speech*, 29(1), 59-68.
- Hyde, J. S. (1984). Children's understanding of sexist language. *Developmental Psychology*, 20(4), 697–706.
- Irmen, L. (2007). What's in a (role) name? Formal and conceptual aspects of comprehending personal nouns. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 36(6), 431-456.
- Irmen, L. & Schumann, E. (2011). Processing grammatical gender of role nouns: Further evidence from eye movements. *Journal of Cognitive Psychology*, 23(8), 998-1014.
- Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana fondata da Giovanni Treccani S.p.A, *Femminile dei nomi di professione*. Retrieved from https://www.treccani.it/enciclopedia/femminile-dei-nomi-di-professione_%28La-grammatica-italiana%29/ (accessed on 4-12-2020).
- Jacobs, J. A. & Powell, B. (1985). Occupational Prestige: A sex-neutral concept? *Sex Roles*, 12(9-10), 1061-1071.
- Jakobson, R. (1959). On linguistic aspects of translation. In Brower, R. A. (ed), *On translation* (pp. 232-239). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Jhangiani, R. & H. Tarry. (2014). *Principles of Social Psychology – 1st International Edition*. Victoria, B.C.: BCcampus.
- Kaufmann, C. & Bohner, G. (2014). Masculine Generics and Gender-aware Alternatives in Spanish. *IZGOnZeit. Online zeitschrift des Interdisziplinären Zentrums für Geschlechterforschung (IZG)*, 8-17.
- Kennison, S. M., & Trofe, J. L. (2003). Comprehending pronouns: A role for word-specific gender stereotype information. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 32, 355–378.
- Kessler, S. J., McKenna, W. & Graham, R. (1979). The Effect of Generic Masculine Language on Gender Imaging, Interest, and Recall. *Behaviourist for Social Action Journal*, 2(1), 1-2.
- Khosroshahi, F. (1989). Penguins Don't Care, but Women Do: A Social Identity Analysis of a Whorfian Problem. *Language in Society*, 18(4), 505-525.
- Koenig, A. M., Mitchell, A. A., Eagly, A. H., Ristikari, T. (2001). Are Leader Stereotypes Masculine? A Meta-Analysis of Three Research Paradigms. *Psychological Bulletin*, 137(4), 616–642.
- Konishi, T. (1993). The Semantics of Grammatical Gender: A Cross-Cultural Study. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 22(5), 519-534.

- Konishi, T. (1994). The Connotations of Gender: A semantic differential study of German and Spanish. *Word*, 45(3), 317-327.
- Koniuszaniec, G., & Blaszkowa, H. (2003). In M. Hellinger, & H. Bußmann (eds.), *Gender across languages*, Vol. 3. (pp. 259–285). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Kreiner, H., Mohr, S., Kessler, K., & Garrod, S. (2009). Can context affect gender processing? ERP differences between definitional and stereotypical gender. In K. Alter, M. Horne, M. Lindgren, M. Roll, and J. von Koss Torkildsen (eds.). *Brain Talk: Discourse with and in the Brain* (pp. 107–119). Lund: Lunds Universitet.
- Kreiner, H., Sturt, P., Garrod, S. (2008). Processing definitional and stereotypical gender in reference resolution: Evidence from eye-movements. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 58, 239-261.
- Lakoff, R. (1975). *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row.
- Latos, A. (2017). Il ministro è tuttora incinta? Fra la norma, l'uso e il parlante. *Studia de Cultura* 3, 54-64.
- Lepschy A. L., Lepschy G., Sanson H. (2001). Lingua italiana e femminile. *Quaderns d'Italia* 6, 9-18.
- Leslie, S. J., Cimpian, A., Meyer, M. & Freeland, E. (2015). Expectations of Brilliance Underlie Gender Distributions Across Academic Disciplines. *Science*, 347(6219), 262-265.
- Llamas, C. & Watt, D. (eds). (2010). Introduction. In *Language and Identities* (pp. 1-5). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Lo Duca M. G. (2004). Nomi di agente. In Grossmann, M. & Rainer, F. (eds.). *La formazione delle parole in italiano* (pp. 191-218). Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Luce, P.A., & Pisoni, D.B. (1998). Recognizing spoken words: The neighbourhood activation model. *Ear and Hearing*, 19, 1–36.
- Luraghi, S. & Olita, A. (eds.). (2006). *Linguaggio e Genere*. Roma: Carocci.
- MacKay, D. (1980). Psychology, prescriptive grammar, and the pronoun problem. *American Psychologist*, 35(5), 444-449.
- Mackay, D. & Fulkerson, D. (1979). On the comprehension and production on pronouns. *Journal of verbal learning and verbal behaviour*, 18, 661-673.
- Mackay, D. & Konishi, T. (1980). Personification and the pronoun problem. *Women's Studies International Quarterly*, 3, 149-163.
- Maiden, M. & Robustelli, C. (2013). *A reference grammar of modern Italian*. Oxon: Routledge.
- Majid, A., Misersky, J. & Snijders, T. M. (2019). Grammatical Gender in German Influences How Role-Nouns Are Interpreted: Evidence from ERPs. *Discourse Processes*, 56(8), 643-654.

- Marcato, G., & Thüne, E. (2002). Gender and female visibility in Italian. In Hellinger, M., & Bußmann, H. (eds.). *Gender across languages. The linguistic representation of women and men*, vol. 1 (pp. 187-217). Amsterdam: Benjamins.
- Martyna, W. (1978). What does “he” mean?: Use of the Generic Masculine. *Journal of Communication*, 28(1), 131-138.
- Martyna, W. (1980). Beyond the "He/Man" Approach: The Case for Non-sexist Language. *Signs*, 5(3) 482-493.
- McConnell, A. R., & Fazio, R. H. (1996). Women as Men and People: Effects of Gender-Marked Language. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 22(10), 1004-1013.
- McConnell-Ginet, S. (2014). Gender and its relation to sex: The myth of ‘natural’ gender. In Greville G. Corbett (ed.). *The expression of gender* (pp. 3–38). Berlin: Mouton De Gruyter.
- Menegatti, M. & Rubini, M. (2017). Gender Bias and Sexism in Language. In Giles, H. & Harwood, J. (eds.). *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Communication vol.1* (pp. 451-468). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Merkel, E. (2013). *The two faces of gender-fair language*. PhD thesis, Università degli Studi di Padova.
- Merkel E., Maass A., Faralli M. & Cacciari C. (2017). It only needs one man – or can mixed groups be described by feminine generics? *Journal of Applied Psycholinguistics*, 17(2), 45-59.
- Merkel E., Maass A., & Frommelt, L. (2012). Shielding Women Against Status Loss: The Masculine Form and Its Alternatives in the Italian Language. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 31(3), 311–320.
- Miller, C. & Swift, K. (1976). *Words and Women*. New York: Anchor Press.
- Mills, S. (2003) Caught Between Sexism, Anti-sexism and `Political Correctness': Feminist Women's Negotiations with Naming Practices. *Discourse & Society*, 14(1), 87-110.
- Mills, S. (2008). *Language and Sexism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Moscatelli, S., Menegatti, M., Ellemers, N., Mariani, M. G., & Rubini, M. (2020). Men should be competent, women should have it all: Multiple criteria in the evaluation of female job candidates. *Sex Roles: A Journal of Research*, 83(5-6), 269–288.
- Moser, F., Sato, S., Chiarini, T., Dmitrow-Devold, K., & Kuhn, E. (2011). *Comparative analysis of existing guidelines for gender Fair language within the ITN LCG Network: Marie Curie Initial Training Network: Language, Cognition and Gender (ITN LCG)*.
- Moss-Racusin, C. A., Dovidio, J. F., Brescoll, V. L., Graham, M. J., & Handelsman, L. (2012). Science faculty’s subtle gender biases favor male students. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 109(41), 16474–16479.

- Moulton, J., Robinson, G. M., & Elias, C. (1978). Sex bias in language use: "Neutral" pronouns that aren't. *American Psychologist*, 33(11), 1032–1036.
- Mucchi Faina, A., & Barro, M. (2006). Il caso di “professoressa”: espressioni marcate per genere e persuasione. *Psicologia sociale*, 3, 517-530.
- Nardone, C. (2016). Asimmetrie semantiche di genere: un’analisi sull’italiano del corpus itWaC. *gender/sexuality/italy*, 3.
- Ng, S. H. (2007). Language-Based Discrimination. Blatant and Subtle Forms. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 26(2), 106-122.
- Oehler Bibrell, J. A. (1982). *A study of masculine generics: how they are perceived and their effects on reading comprehension and certain psychological attitudes measures*. Phd thesis, Central Michigan university.
- Ogden, C. K. & Richards, I. A. (1923). *The meaning of meaning: a study of the influence of language upon thought and the science of symbolism*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World.
- Olian, J. D., Schwab, D. P. & Haberfeld, Y. (1988). The impact of applicant gender compared to qualifications on hiring recommendations: A meta-analysis of experimental studies. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 41, 180-195.
- Olita, A. (2006). L’uso del genere negli annunci di lavoro: riflessioni sull’italiano standard. In Luraghi, S. & Olita, A. (eds.). *Linguaggio e Genere* (pp. 143-154). Roma: Carocci.
- Osterhout, L., Bersick, M., McLaughlin, J. (1997). Brain potentials reflect violations of gender stereotypes. *Memory & Cognition*, 25(3), 273-285.
- Oswald, P. A. (2003). Sex-typing and prestige ratings of occupations as indices of occupational stereotypes. *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 97, 953-959.
- Pachella, R. G. (1974). The Interpretation or Reaction Time in Information Processing Research. In Kantowitz (Ed.), *Human Information Processing: Tutorials in Performance and Cognition*, New York: Lawrence Earlbaum Associates.
- Peirce, J. W., & MacAskill, M. R. (2018). *Building Experiments in PsychoPy*. London: Sage.
- Penelope, J. (1988). *Prescribed Passivity: The Language of Sexism*. Faculty Publications - Department of English, 89, University of Nebraska.
- Reali, C., Esaulova, Y., Öttl, A. and von Stockhausen, L. (2015). Role descriptions induce gender mismatch effects in eye movements during reading. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6:16707.
- Regel, S., Meyer, L. & Gunter, T. C. (2014). Distinguishing Neurocognitive Processes Reflected by P600 Effects: Evidence from ERPs and Neural Oscillations. *PLoS ONE* 9(5): e96840.
- Reynolds, D.J., Garnham, A., & Oakhill, J. (2006). Evidence of immediate activation of gender information from a social role name. *The Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 59, 886–903.

- Ridgeway, C. L. & Correll, S. J. (2004). Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations. *Gender & Society*, 18(4), 510-531.
- Ritchie, M. (1975). Alice through the Statutes. *McGill Law Journal*, 21(4), 685-707.
- Rivera, L. A. & Tilcsik, A. (2019). Scaling Down Inequality: Rating Scales, Gender Bias, and the Architecture of Evaluation. *American Sociological Review*, 84(2), 248–274.
- Robustelli, C. (2012). *Linee guida per l'uso del genere nel linguaggio amministrativo*. Firenze, Accademia della Crusca.
- Robustelli, C. (2013). *Infermiera sì, ingegnera no?* Accademia della Crusca. <https://accademiadellacrusca.it/it/contenuti/infermiera-si-ingegnera-no/7368> (accessed on 8-12-2020).
- Robustelli, C. (2014). *Donne, grammatica e media*. Roma: Associazione Gi.U.Li.A.
- Robustelli, C. (2018). Language policy in Italy: the role of national institutions. Paper presented at the *National language Institutions and National Languages* convention (pp. 169-181). Mannheim, 5-6.10.2017.
- Ronca, D., Moscati, V. (2019). The interaction of morphological gender with stereotypical Information: an eye tracking study on gender inferences. *International Journal of Linguistics*, 11(4), 111-125.
- Sabatini, A. (1986). *Raccomandazioni per un uso non sessista della lingua italiana. Per la scuola e l'editoria scolastica*. Roma, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri.
- Sabatini A. (1987). *Il sessismo nella lingua italiana*. Roma, Presidenza del Consiglio dei Ministri.
- Sanford, A. J. (1985). *Cognition and cognitive psychology*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson.
- Sastre, M. T., Fouquereau, E., Igier, V., Salvatore, N., & Mullet, E. (2000). Perception of occupational gender typing: A replication on European samples of Shinar's (1975) and Beggs and Doolittle's (1993) studies. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 30,430-441.
- Sato, S., Gygax, P. M., Gabriel, U. (2013). Gender inferences: Grammatical features and their impact on the representation of gender in bilinguals. *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition*, 16, 792–807.
- Sato, S., Öttl, A., Gabriel, U., & Gygax, P. M. (2017). Assessing the impact of gender grammaticization on thought: a psychological and psycholinguistic perspective. *Osnabrücker Beiträge zur Sprachtheorie*, 90, 117–135.
- Schein, V. E. (1973). The relationship between sex role stereotypes and requisite management characteristics. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 57(2), 95–100.
- Schein, V. E. (2001). A global look at psychological barriers to women's progress in management. *Journal of Social Issues*, 57, 675–688.

- Schneider, J. & Hacker, S. (1973). Sex role imagery and the use of generic “man” in introductory tests: A case in the sociology of sociology. *American sociologists*, 8, 12-18.
- Schafroth, E. (2013). La féminisation des noms de métier et des titres dans trois langues romanes (français, italien, espagnol): convergences et divergences. In: Karyolemou, M. & Pavlou, P. (ed.). *Language Policy and Planning in the Mediterranean World* (pp. 103-120). Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Sczesny, S., Formanowicz, M., and Moser, F. (2016). Can gender-fair language reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination? *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7:25.
- Sczesny, S., Spreemann, S., Stahlberg, D. (2006). Masculine=Competent? Physical appearance and sex as sources of gender-stereotypic attributions. *Swiss Journal of Psychology*, 65(1), 15-23.
- Shinar, E. H. (1975). Sexual stereotypes of occupations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 7, 99-111.
- Slobin, D. I. (1996). From ‘thought and language’ to ‘thinking for speaking. In: Gumperz, J. J., Levinson, S. C. (eds.). *Rethinking Linguistic Relativity*. Cambridge: University Press, Cambridge, pp. 70–96.
- Snizek, J. A. & Jazwinski, C.H. (1986). Gender bias in English: In search of fair language. *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, 16, 642-662.
- Spender, D. (1990). *Man made language*. London: Pandora Press.
- Stahlberg, D., Braun, F., Irmen, L., & Sczesny, S. (2007). Representation of the sexes in language. In K. Fiedler (ed.), *Social Communication* (pp. 163-187). New York, NY: Psychology Press.
- Stahlberg, D., Sczesny, S., & Braun, F. (2001). Name your favourite musician: Effects of masculine generics and of their alternatives in German. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 20(4), 464–469.
- Steele, C. M., & Aronson, J. (1995). Stereotype threat and the intellectual performance of African Americans. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 69, 797–811.
- Stericker, A. (1981). Does this « he or she » business really make a difference? The effect of masculine pronouns as generics on job attitudes. *Sex Roles*, 7, 637-641.
- Stewart, A. J. & Valian, V. (2018). *An Inclusive Academy: Achieving Diversity and Excellence*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Stout, J. G., & Dasgupta, N. (2011). When he doesn't mean you: Gender-exclusive language as ostracism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 37(6), 757-769.
- Sturt, P. (2003). The time-course of the application of the binding constraints in reference resolution. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 48, 542-562.
- Taft, M. & Meunier, F. (1998). Lexical Representation of Gender: A Quasiregular Domain. *Journal of Psycholinguistic Research*, 27(1), 23-45.

- Thornton, A. M. (2004). *Mozione*. In Grossmann, M. & Rainer, F. (eds.). *La formazione delle parole in italiano* (pp. 218-225). Tübingen: Niemeyer.
- Thornton, A. M. (2009a). Constraining gender assignment rules. *Language Sciences* 31(1), 14-32.
- Thornton, A. M. (2009b). Designare le donne. In Giusti, G. & Regazzoni, S. (eds.). *Mi fai male* (pp. 17-133). Venezia, Cafoscarina.
- Ulfsdotter Eriksson, Y. (2013). Grading Occupational Prestige: The Impact of Gendered Stereotypes. *International Journal of Organizational Diversity*, 13(1), 1-10.
- United Nations of Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner (2017). *Report on the realization of the equal enjoyment of the right to education by every girl*. Retrieved from <https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/ReportGirlsEqualRightEducation.pdf> (accessed on 30-11-2020).
- Valian, V. (1998). *Why so slow? The advancement of women*. Cambridge: MIT Press.
- Van Herten, M., Kolk, H. H. J. & Chwilla D. J. (2005). An ERP study of P600 effects elicited by semantic anomalies. *Cognitive Brain Research*, 22, 241–255.
- Van Knippenberg A., Van Twuyver M. e Pepels, J. (1994). Factors affecting social categorization processes in memory. *British Journal of Social Psychology*, 33, 419-431.
- Vasiliki, K. (2009). Prestige. *Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*. Ritzer, G. (Ed). Blackwell Publishing: Blackwell Reference Online.
- Vervecken, D., Gyax, P. M., Gabriel, U., Guillod, M., & Hannover, B. (2015). Warm-hearted businessmen, competitive housewives? Effects of gender-fair language on adolescents' perceptions of occupations. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6, 1–10.
- Vervecken, D., & Hannover B. (2015). Yes I can! The impact of gender fair descriptions of traditionally male occupations on children's perceptions of job status, job difficulty and vocational self-efficacy beliefs. *Social Psychology*, 46, 76–92.
- Vervecken, D., Hannover, B., & Wolter, I. (2013). Changing (S)expectations: How gender fair job descriptions impact children's perceptions and interest regarding traditionally male occupations. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 82(3), 208–220.
- Vigliocco, G. & Franck, J. (1999). When Sex and Syntax Go Hand in Hand: Gender Agreement in Language Production. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 40, 455–478.
- Vigliocco, G. & Franck, J. (2001). When Sex affects Syntax: Contextual Influences in Sentence Production. *Journal of Memory and Language*, 45, 368–390.
- Vigliocco, G., Vinson, D. P. & Paganelli, F. (2004). Grammatical Gender and Meaning. *Proceedings of the Annual Meeting of the Cognitive Science Society*, 26(26), 1405-1410.

Vigliocco, G., Vinson, D. P., Paganelli, F. & Dworzynski, K. (2005). Grammatical Gender Effects on Cognition: Implications for Language Learning and Language Use. *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, 134(4), 501–520.

Warren, P. (2013). *Introducing Psycholinguistics*. Cambridge: University Printing House.

Watt, C. (2010). The Identification of the Individual Through Speech. In Llamas, C. & Watt, D. (eds). *Language and Identities* (pp. 76-85). Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Williams, M., Paluck, E., & Spencer-Rodgers, J. (2010). The masculinity of money: Nonconscious stereotypes predict gender differences in estimated salaries. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 34, 107–120.

Wilson, E., Ng, S. H. (1988). Sex bias in visual images evoked by generics: A New Zealand study. *Sex Roles*, 18, 159-168.

Winawer, J., Witthoft, N., Frank, M. C., Wu, L., Wade, A. R., & Boroditsky, L. (2007). Russian blues reveal effects of language on color discrimination. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, 104(19), 7780-7785.

Whorf, B. L. (1956). *Language, Thought and Reality*. Cambridge: MIT Press.

World Economic Forum (2020). *Global Gender Gap 2020*. Retrieved from http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GGGR_2020.pdf (accessed on 05-03-2021).

Appendix

Appendix A: *Lexical items used for Experiments 1 and 2.*

Common professions	English translation
cartolaia, cartolaio	stationer
maestra, maestro	teacher
sarta, sarto	tailor
parrucchiera, parrucchiere	hairdresser
commessa, commesso	salesperson
bibliotecaria, bibliotecario	librarian
impiegata, impiegato	office worker
cuoca, cuoco	cook
fotografa, fotografo	photographer
gelataia, gelataio	ice-cream seller
operaia, operaio	labourer
poliziotta, poliziotto	police officer
carabiniere, carabiniere	police officer
ferroviera, ferroviere	railway worker
soldata, soldato	soldier
Prestigious professions	English translation
avvocata, avvocato	lawyer
notaia, notaio	notary
architetta, architetto	architect
assessora, assessore	council member
chirurga, chirurgo	surgeon
consigliera, consigliere	council member
deputata, deputato	deputy
ingegnera, ingegnere	engineer
magistrata, magistrato	magistrate
ministra, ministro	minister
neurologa, neurologo	neurologist
prefetta, prefetto	prefect
primaria, primario	head physician

sindaca, sindaco

mayor

capitana, capitano

captain

Appendix B: Materials used for Experiment 1.

Common professions:

1) Poliziott*

Quando il/la poliziott* Giuli* Signorini fa le multe, esegue il proprio compito con rigidità ferrea, decis* nell'agire seguendo ordine e disciplina. Se vede una macchina parcheggiata oltre 10 minuti il tempo previsto, non esita a lasciare una sanzione.

2) Carabinier*

Il/la carabinier* Silvi* Grassi è felice quando si occupa della tutela del lavoro, perché è fier* di identificare gli abusi e contrastare il lavoro irregolare. Vorrebbe sempre andare a fondo, consapevole che, spesso, le questioni solo apparentemente sono risolte.

3) Impiegat*

Fare l'impiegat* non era mai stato il suo sogno, avendo sperato a lungo di essere musicista. Eppure, Carl* Giorini è content* della sua nuova stabilità economica. Gestisce le pratiche con meticolosità e cura il contatto con i clienti con intelligenza emotiva e sociale.

4) Maestr*

Martin* Balestri è considerat* un* grande maestr*. In classe, educa i bambini e le bambine al dubbio, per quel che consente la loro giovane età. Infatti, li incoraggia a capire che le verità cambiano a seconda del punto di vista, e che è quindi importante stare in ascolto con umiltà e rispetto.

5) Bibliotecari*

Ludovic* Rossi aveva sempre fantasticato sul lavoro da bibliotecari* e non potrebbe desiderare di meglio. Pacat* custode di infiniti mondi su carta, gode di quell'odore unico e del fruscio delle pagine al punto tale che a volte si distrae, ma subito dopo recupera il tempo perso.

6) Cuoc*

Al ristorante serviva con urgenza un* cuoc* ed è stata subito inserita la prima persona disponibile. È stata una felice sorpresa: Paol* Gentile rispetta i tempi e cucina con passione e fantasia. Purtroppo, però, non riesce a nascondere che è agitat* quando la sala è al completo.

7) Sart*

Il/la sart* di riferimento della compagnia teatrale ha salvato la buona riuscita dello spettacolo. Infatti, Giann* Contino, armat* di ago, filo e tanta pazienza, ha ricreato in tempi record i costumi che erano stati danneggiati inesorabilmente, lavorando anche di notte.

8) Ferrovier*

Il/la ferrovier* Tizian* Bernardi ogni mattina si sveglia presto e va a camminare prima di entrare in servizio. Così facendo, affronta molto meglio le numerose ore in cui deve stare sedut*. Inoltre, si rapporta con colleghi e colleghe in modo più disteso e rilassato.

9) Soldat*

Il/la soldat* Renat* Galli ha poco spirito di iniziativa ma molto sangue freddo. È anche piuttosto tenace. Afferma di non sentire la nostalgia di casa, ma, quando il momento si avvicina, la voglia di rivedere volti e luoghi della sua vita da ragazz* si fa decisamente sentire.

10) Operai*

Agli occhi della dirigente, Patrizi* Leone si sta dimostrando un* operai* modello [un'operaia modello]: ha manualità, accetta di fare gli straordinari e mantiene alta la concentrazione. Cerca anche di non andare in bagno, forse spaventat* dagli incalzanti ritmi di produzione.

11) Parrucchier*

Antoni* Rizzo non pensava che avrebbe mai lavorato come parrucchier*, e invece lo sta facendo con entusiasmo. È content* per lo scambio personale che ha con ogni cliente, nonché per la soddisfazione di vedere le persone piacersi di più grazie al lavoro delle proprie mani.

12) Commess*

Fare il/la commess* ha per Vittori* Serra diversi lati positivi: concluso il turno, eventuali difficoltà sorte a lavoro non più sono un suo problema. Inoltre, non deve occuparsi delle paghe e della gestione delle vite altrui, e questo per lui/lei è un sollievo.

13) Cartolai*

Fare il/la cartolai* doveva significare condurre una vita tranquilla per potersi così dedicare anche al giardinaggio e alla famiglia. Quando Robert* Barbieri aveva colto l'occasione e comprato l'attività, non pensava che avrebbe lavorato con così tanta grinta e che si sarebbe affezionato* ai clienti.

14) Fotograf*

Dicono che Valentin* Mazza sia un* grande fotograf*, che ha saputo sfruttare la sua la precocissima passione per la comunicazione tramite immagini. Cercando le prospettive migliori e valorizzando ogni soggetto, lui/lei rende tutto speciale. Peccato, però, che non accetti critiche.

15) Gelatai*

Fare il/la gelatai* doveva essere un lavoro estivo utile a pagarsi parte delle rate universitarie, ma i piani di Lorenz* Morelli sono cambiati. Lavoratrice/tore instancabile, ora dirige un'attività propria, producendo un gelato dai gusti originali e ampiamente apprezzati.

Prestigious professions:

1) Avvocat*

L'avvocat* Alessandr* Bianchi raccoglie più dettagli possibile mentre parla con i clienti. Da una parte vuole evitare coinvolgimenti personali ma dall'altra non può fare a meno di conoscere chi ha davanti. Lei/lui ha una buona memoria ma, per paura di sbagliare, va sempre a rileggere gli articoli inerenti al caso.

2) Notai*

Spesso il/la notai* Alessi* Martini aspetta la persona da ricevere sulla porta del proprio ufficio per poi andare a sedersi insieme. A lui/lei non interessa se questo comportamento è insolito, perché così facendo mostra cortesia e allo stesso tempo è felice di sgranchirsi le gambe, per il massimo che può fare mentre lavora, con la corsa serale ancora lontana.

3) Chirurg*

Il/la chirurg* **Claudi*** **Benedetti** è una persona calma e meticolosa. A volte pensa alle prime volte, quando sentiva le mani sudare all'improvviso, e sorride. È affascinat* dai progressi dovuti alle nuove tecnologie e vorrebbe sempre seguire tutti gli aggiornamenti sulla chirurgia robotica, ma spesso la stanchezza vince sulla sete di conoscenza.

4) Neurolog*

Il/la neurolog* **Mari*** **Torti** preferisce non collaborare con i/le tirocinanti perché con loro si sente ancora più responsabile di quello che succede in reparto. Ad ogni modo, lui/lei sa che sono fondamentali e si rivolge loro con pazienza, umiltà e severità, a seconda delle situazioni.

5) Ingegner*

Impegnarsi contro la crisi climatica è fondamentale per l'ingegner* ambientale **Daniel*** **Paoletti**. Pensa che dovrebbe essere fra le priorità di chiunque, e a maggior ragione di una persona come **lei/lui**, che lavora in quell'ambito. Per questo, cerca di non accettare incarichi non coerenti con la sua missione.

6) Architett*

L'architett* **Federic*** **Costa** disegna edifici riservando egual attenzione all'aspetto funzionale e a quello estetico: se un progetto funziona ma non rispecchia la sua idea di "bello", lui/lei si ferma per cercare nuove ispirazioni più convincenti.

7) Magistrat*

Il/la magistrat* **Francesc*** **Russo** valuta documenti e testimonianze instancabilmente. Conduce le udienze con imparzialità, anche se di fronte a certi crimini deve sforzarsi per celare il suo sbigottimento. Incuriosit* dall'essere umano, nel tempo libero legge manuali di psicologia.

8) Deputat*

Il/la deputat* **Giovann*** **Mariani** vota i disegni di legge valutandoli per il loro contenuto, discernendo la proposta dalla fazione politica che l'ha avanzata. Osservatore/trice perspicace, preferisce ascoltare quello che ha intorno e scavare nella complessità delle questioni, piuttosto che esprimersi ed esporsi.

9) Assessor*

L'assessor* alla cultura **Giorgi*** **Marino** pensa che sia importante investire nelle scuole primarie e secondarie. Autorevole e decis*, ha eloquentemente invitato il consiglio comunale a rivedere le proprie priorità, inimicandosi diverse persone già all'inizio del mandato.

10) Prefett*

Da quando **Michel*** **Farina** è stat* nominat* prefett*, i componenti del comitato centrale per l'ordine e la sicurezza sono più distesi, perché lei, al contrario del precedente, fa sentire i colleghi liberi di esprimersi. Inoltre, è solare e ascolta ogni persona con attenzione.

11) Sindac*

Il/la sindac* della città ora è **Angel*** **Giordano**, docente di storia e filosofia in un liceo scientifico. Appena elett*, ha definito i vigenti decreti sul decoro urbano una vuota rassicurazione di facciata, insensatamente repressiva e lontana dai bisogni di chi vive la città. Ha promesso di cambiarli subito.

12) Primari*

Il/la primari* del reparto di anestesia e rianimazione, Valeri* Longo, sa valorizzare le caratteristiche delle persone che ha intorno e sa gestire le situazioni critiche con energia e risolutezza. Potrebbe essere meno insicur* nel rapporto con la burocrazia sanitaria, ma questo richiede anni di esperienza.

13) Consigliere* parlamentare

Essere designat* come consigliere* parlamentare era stata per Simon* Grego una gioia inesprimibile. Con la sua Laurea in giurisprudenza e il suo Master in relazioni internazionali e regolazione dei mercati, da anni si occupa di assistenza legale e di organizzazione dei rapporti istituzionali.

14) Ministr*

Quando il/la ministr* Pier* Ferri fa comunicazioni ufficiali, assume un atteggiamento fermo, rigido e orgoglioso. Nelle altre situazioni, però, è una persona solare e sorridente. Pensando al ruolo che ricopre, si sente grat* e in dovere di dare il massimo.

15) Capitan*

Il/al capitan* Raffaell* Bruno, da diverso tempo al comando di una compagnia, recentemente ha iniziato a dirigere l'ufficio preposto alle funzioni logistiche. È sempre appagat*, in particolar modo quando sfilava in alta uniforme da parata.