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Language Change in British Parliamentary Discourse: A Corpus-Based Study of Power and Authority Markers, 1930-2005

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From a political perspective, 1928 marks the beginning of a new period in the history of democracy in the U.K., this being when universal full suffrage was achieved via the Representation of the People Act. Taking into consideration this and other social and political factors, the main aim of the present paper is to investigate how the process of democratisation influenced the language employed by Members of Parliament between 1930 and 2005. For this purpose, we examine the use of markers of authority and power. Specifically, the evolution and use of gender-neutral occupational titles are analysed. The corpus used for this investigation is the Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022), which includes written records of British parliamentary debates.

Keywords: democratisation; parliamentary discourse; gender-neutral language; authority; power

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El cambio lingüístico en el discurso parlamentario británico. Un estudio basado en corpus de los marcadores de autoridad y poder, 1930-2005

Desde un punto de vista político, 1928 marca el inicio de un nuevo período en la historia de la democracia en el Reino Unido, una vez que se instaura el sufragio universal pleno mediante el *Representation of the People Act*. Teniendo en consideración este y otros factores sociales y políticos, el principal objetivo del presente artículo es investigar cómo el proceso de democratización influyó en el lenguaje empleado por los miembros del parlamento británico entre 1930 y 2005. Con tal propósito, examinaremos el uso de los marcadores de autoridad

y poder. En concreto, se analizará la evolución y el uso del lenguaje inclusivo en el campo de los términos empleados para referirse a las profesiones. El corpus empleado para esta investigación es el *Hansard Corpus* (Alexander y Davies 2022), que incluye transcripciones de los debates parlamentarios británicos.

Palabras clave: democratización; discurso parlamentario; lenguaje inclusivo; autoridad; poder

1. Introduction

Every living language gradually changes over the decades. As Ferdinand de Saussure indicated, "time changes all things: there is no reason why language should escape this universal law" ([1916] 2011, 77). For instance, some words become more frequently used while others disappear. These language transformations do not, however, only simply reveal the communicative needs of speakers of that language. Since language is both a human and social phenomenon, these changes affect and reflect the way we think as individuals and as a community (Cushing 2018, 2). This study takes the view that we can learn more about language changes when we analyse them in conjunction with social changes that co-occur in the same context. Such changes are usually political, cultural and/or economic.

A growing body of research has studied the sociocultural process of democratisation, which can be defined as "the tendency to avoid unequal and face threatening modes of interaction" (Farrelly and Seoane 2012, 393). In terms of methodological considerations, democratisation can be analysed qualitatively and/or quantitatively. This sociocultural process has often fallen under the study of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1992, 201, for example), although recent studies suggest that it can also take full advantage of corpus linguistics (Baker 2006, 1; Flowerdew 2012, 175; Partington and Marchi 2015, 217). We endorse the view that the combination of both approaches resolves some issues related to, for instance, the representativeness of the population or the existence of bias (Baker and McEnery 2015, 5). This study is a further advance in the relatively new field of corpus-based discourse analysis and it will help pave the way for future research.

The time framework chosen for this diachronic study spans from 1930 to 2005. From a historical point of view, in 1928 universal suffrage was achieved in the British electoral system via the Representation of the People Act. We hypothesise that the extension of the franchise not only meant that the British Parliament became completely demographically representative and more democratic, but also that its politicians had to appeal to the newly enfranchised voters, and consequently, this change was reflected in their discourse. Given that the twentieth century has witnessed social and political movements associated with gender equality, this study assesses to what extent and how these sociocultural changes have been reflected in the language employed by Members of Parliament (hereafter MPs) in the U.K. The decline of titular nouns of address (Leech et al. 2009, 259-61) and the use of gendered pronouns and nouns (Baker 2010, 69-

75) have been studied recently. However, little is known about gender marking in job titles in Parliamentary Discourse. This study seeks to obtain data which will help to address this research gap. The main research question in this study is: how and to what degree has British parliamentary language removed "overt markers of power asymmetry" (Farrelly and Seoane 2012, 393) in the changing and ongoing process of democratisation from 1930 to 2005? To answer this question, the general and specific objectives (G.O. and S.O., respectively) are:

G.O.1: To investigate the diachronic development of semantically tagged words associated with expressions of exercise of subjection, command, control, power, obligation and equality in this time period.

S.O.1.1: To examine the frequency changes of gender-neutral occupational titles (*chairperson*, *spokesperson*, *statesperson* and *police officer*) and gender-marked occupational titles (*chairman*, *chairwoman*, *chair lady*, *Madam Chairman*, *spokesman*, *spokeswoman*, *statesman*, *stateswoman*, *policeman* and *policewoman*).

S.O.1.2: To determine the relationship between particular social and historical events and these frequency changes.

For this purpose, the *Hansard Corpus* (Alexander and Davies 2022) will be used. It consists of over 1.6 billion words and contains written records of British parliamentary debates from 1830 to 2005.

After this introduction, the following section provides an overview of the conceptual frameworks that have been employed by scholars to define and analyse democratisation of discourse and focuses on the interrelationship between social and language changes in this process. Section three presents the methodology employed, including a description of the corpus examined. Section four reports the analysis of the results based on the data and the implications of the findings. The conclusions presented in section five assess the significance of these results and include a final comment on some areas for future research.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Intralinguistic Aspects

Democratisation of discourse as a concept was first introduced by Fairclough (1992, 201-207) in the field of Critical Discourse Analysis. Several authors who have built on his work have theorised about the existence of a new "tendency […] to phase out markers of distance, respect, superiority or inferiority" (Leech et al. 2009, 259) in an allegedly more democratic society. Similarly, for Hiltunen and Loureiro-Porto, democratisation is especially noticeable in the "*decrease* of various linguistic features marking social

hierarchy and gender [...] and the concomitant *increase* of more egalitarian expressions that emphasize solidarity and minimize the imposition on the addressee" (2020, 2; italics in the original). Briefly put, democratisation is a notion that involves the study of inequality and expressions of power through linguistics.

As in the case of other terms, there has been a debate in the literature over the scope of the democratisation of discourse. Because it interacts with, or even leads to, other linguistic phenomena, such as synthetic personalisation (Fairclough 2010, 65), informalisation of discourse and colloquialisation (Hiltunen et al. 2020, 1-15, for instance), a more comprehensive and detailed framework is needed to differentiate between each of these linguistic processes. In a broad sense, Fairclough identified several distinct areas of democratisation of discourse. The focus of this study is on one of these linguistic areas, specifically, the avoidance of sexist language (1992, 201). According to Fairclough, this might involve, for example, the decrease in the use of the generic pronoun "he" (1992, 203). Other areas concerning the acceptance of social dialects, greater informality in language and "access to prestigious discourse types" (Fairclough 1992, 201) are beyond the scope of this study. This, however, does not necessarily mean that there is no overlap between these areas. In fact, in some cases, they interact with each other.

The relationship between gender and language began to be explored in linguistics as early as in the second wave of feminism (1960-1980; Cameron 1985, 3). More specifically, sexist language has attracted critical attention. It manifests itself through discriminatory and exclusionary usages of language towards women, which are based on the presupposition that "maleness is standard, the norm, and that femaleness is non-standard, or the exception" (Doyle 1998, 149). Graddol and Swann (1989, 2-3) state that raising awareness of the stereotypical representations of men and women through the investigation of sexist language might be useful for changing language habits, and as a result, reducing social inequalities. As mentioned above, the use of gendered language has been identified as one of the areas of discursive democratisation (Fairclough 1992, 201). Baker further develops Fairclough's point, indicating that "as (patriarchal) societies become more democratic, there would be reductions in gender-based bias, which would hopefully be reflected in language use" (2010, 69).

Scholars have attempted to demonstrate whether or not there has been a general recent transition towards gender-neutral language through corpus-based studies. From a sociolinguistic perspective, some areas that have been explored are the use of semantically derogative suffixes *-ette* and *-ess*, which, as Holmes comments, are "widely perceived as trivialising women's occupations" (2001, 127), the use of titular nouns of address and gendered pronouns and nouns. Central to the entire issue of gender-neutral language is the study of gender marking in job titles, which has not been explored in so much detail in the literature. In Mills' (2008) discussion of language reform, she considers it to be one of the most important proposals for the removal of sexist language. This strategy mainly consists in replacing "terms that have been developed to refer to professions which have been traditionally dominated by women

and which are not prestigious, for example 'air hostess' and 'cleaning lady' [...] [with] 'flight attendant' or 'air steward'" (Mills 2008, 85). The underlying reason behind the use of these new terms is to provide prestige to these jobs. The use of the ending *-man* has been identified as a sexist usage of language, since it is a generic term that excludes and silences women and "bring[s] male images to mind" (Doyle 1998, 149). Some common examples of gender marking in job titles are *policeman* and *businessman*.

One of the most influential studies in this area of research has been carried out by Holmes and Sigley (2002). Their objective was to detect frequency changes in the use of the types of titles which contained *-man* and *-woman* as a bound suffix, "gendered heads preceded by an occupational indicator [...] e.g. cleaning woman" and "gendered phrasal premodifiers followed by an occupational indicator, e.g. woman doctor" (Holmes and Sigley 2002, 252). In their comparative analysis, Holmes and Sigley observe that references to men have decreased significantly, whereas references to women in occupational titles have "more than doubled between 1961 and 1991" (2002, 261). Concerning occupational titles which are associated with positions of power and authority, Holmes and Sigley (2002, 258) note more specifically that, for example, the raw frequency of generic *chairman* in the same period decreased from 119 to 111. Romaine's (2001, 162) corpus-based study expands on Holmes and Sigley's work and notes that in older corpora from the 1960s and 1970s there are no instances of the gender-neutral *chair/spokesperson* or the gender-specific *chair/spokeswoman* that are frequently used today, although the term *chairman* is still the preferred option these days. This trend towards a more inclusive language has been observed in other varieties of English as well. There has been a sharp rise in gender-neutral terms from the 1970s until the 2000s in data from the Corpus of Contemporary American English (Baker 2014, 102). However, it must be noted that the majority of previous corpus-based studies, as far as we are aware, have only focused on written English and are based on data from general corpora.

2.2. Extralinguistic Aspects

To fully understand the extralinguistic reasons behind the democratisation of discourse, it is necessary to investigate how it has been influenced by social, cultural and political factors. From a historical viewpoint, it can be argued that the process of democratisation in the U.K. did not fully develop until the twentieth century. Several changes in the electoral system (namely, the first four Reform Acts passed in 1832, 1867, 1884 and 1918; Klemperer 2019, 19-20) gradually gave the vote to a larger proportion of society. However, significant sectors of the population, especially women, remained disenfranchised because of their income, property owning status, age or marital status. It was not until 1928 that all women acquired the right to vote on the same terms as men. Women were also entitled to become MPs in 1928 (Heater 2006, 145). Once the Representation of the People (Equal Franchise) Act was passed in 1928 (Heater 2006, 145), true equality was finally achieved in the electoral system, since more than fifty

percent of the electorate were women. Subsequent reforms, including the Representation of the People Acts in 1948 and 1969 and the Parliament Act of 1949, lowered the voting age, increased the number of seats and decreased the power of the House of Lords (Butler 1988, 298), arguably making the electoral system more democratic.

The history of feminism has been frequently divided into three waves. This chronological representation remains a controversial issue and has ideological implications, since it is implicitly considered that each of these waves is a change or departure that significantly transforms the previous one, rather than being a development (Rivers 2017, 21). In addition, the main presupposition behind this conceptualisation is that each of these waves is static (Harnois 2008, 120) and, consequently, it negates the fact that, for example, significant progress was accomplished between the 1920s and the 1960s towards greater equality between men and women. Even though the idea of what constitutes a feminist wave is open to debate, for the sake of clarity and for the purpose of this study, we assume that there have been these three distinct periods in the feminist movement.

The starting point in our study, that is, the Representation of the People Act in 1928, was the culminating historical event for the first-wave feminist movements which mainly advocated for women's suffrage because, as has been mentioned already, it established universal suffrage. The second wave, which began in the 1960s in the context of the Civil Rights Movement and ended in the 1980s, addressed other issues, such as sexuality, abortion and gender equality in the workplace (Evans 2015, 5). The Third Wave marks the end of the time framework under study. Since Rebecca Walker proclaimed the commencement of the Third Wave in her influential article "Becoming the Third Wave" (2001, 78-80), it has been characterised as a generational clash between heterosexual middle-class liberal women and young feminists who no longer view feminism as a homogenous movement and who have mainly tried to work "with more constructionist models of gender" (Mills 2008, 22) in the U.K.

3. Research Design

The corpus used as its source of reference is the Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022), which contains 1.6 billion words and 7,545,101 texts. It consists entirely of written records of the political meetings that have taken place in the Houses of Parliament of the U.K. between 1803 and 2005. The Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022) is an open-access specialised corpus which is mainly divided into two subcorpora, each of them corresponding to one of the two chambers: the House of Commons and the House of Lords. This study will only take into consideration parliamentary debates from 1930 to 2005 in the House of Commons, which comprise 1.26 billion words (Demmen et al. 2018, 88). In this article, we take the view that political discourse exclusively involves political agents. This lower house is suitable for our research purposes as it is only composed of elected politicians. The data from the House of Lords has been disregarded because

this institution is not as representative of the British population. Some members of this upper house have no party affiliation and therefore this institution has less "democratic legitimacy" (HM Government 2007, 25).

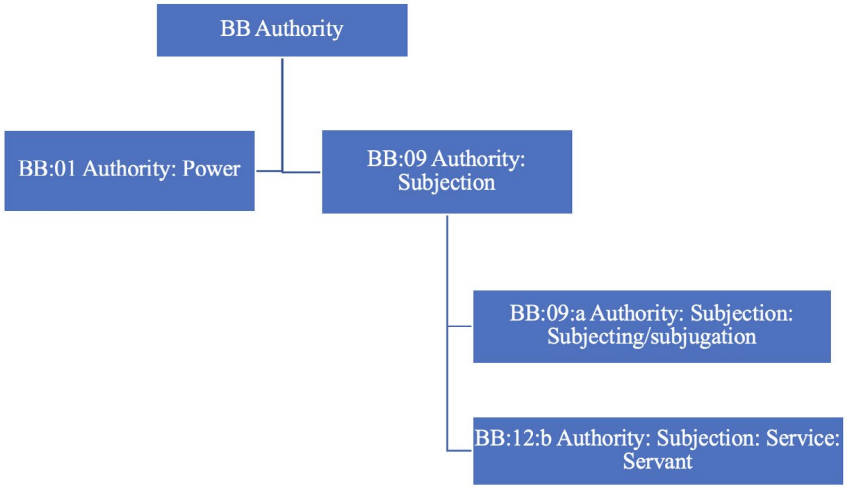
Users can access the data material of the corpus in two ways. One option is to download text files and upload them to a concordance programme like *AntConc* (Anthony 2022) for linguistic research. Alternatively, the data can be extracted from the online concordance website *English Corpora*, which was the preferred choice for our analysis. It allows users to intuitively navigate through the different functions online. Besides, the researcher is not required to install an application, and it is not necessary to take into consideration the file formats downloaded and their compatibility with existing software.

To track the development of the terms studied, the *English Corpora* web-based interface offers various options for linguistic research. The main tool that will be used is the *chart display*, which is a graphic representation of the diachronic evolution of a given term divided into smaller components. Each of these parts is a subcorpus that constitutes a decade. This display also provides statistical information on the raw frequency, the total number of words of each section and the normalised frequency (n.f.). For an accurate linguistic analysis, it is necessary to normalise the frequency, since the number of words that each subcorpus contains is not the same. This task is performed by dividing the raw frequency by the total size of the corpus and multiplying it by a million.

In addition, to disambiguate and filter the senses of the words under study, this investigation relies on the corpus tags provided by the Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022). Nowadays, the majority of corpora are tagged at a grammatical, semantic or textual level. In other words, different types of linguistic annotations are "introduced" (Baker and McEnery 2015, 1). As McEnery and Wilson contend, "by considering the environments of the linguistic entities" (2001, 112), linguists can find the semantic group of a specific word. This can be done by analysing the words that appear before or after a specific word in a given text, that is, its pre-context and post-context, and coding them "for different semantic categories (subject matter, problems, etc.)" (Biber et al. 1998, 42). The semantic annotation tool used in the Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022) is based on the Historical Thesaurus Semantic Tagger (HTST), which was developed by the Semantic Annotation and Mark-Up for Enhancing Lexical Searches project (SAMUELS) and the University Centre for Computer Corpus Research on Language (UCREL).

The Hansard Corpus has been semantically tagged into 37 categories (i.e., authority, health and disease, leisure, etc.) with their assigned codes. The major semantic fields are represented with capital letters, which indicate the superordinate semantic category. Further down, at the hierarchical level, numbers represent the basic level and lower case letters the subordinate level. Figure 1 shows a small fragment of this categorisation, which has been adapted from the *English Corpora* web-based interface (Alexander and Davies 2022):

FIGURE 1. Example of the organisation of the semantic categories in the Hansard Corpus



Automatic semantic tagging is a powerful tool for quickly identifying the uses of a word. However, it must be noted that it is not always 100% accurate (Baker and McEnery 2015, 1). Furthermore, not all of the words in the corpus are semantically tagged. Table 1 shows the semantic categories for each of the words analysed in this study:

TABLE 1. Occupational titles under study

Semantic code	Word
BB:03:a Authority: Control: Person in control	*chairman/men* *chairwoman/women* *chairperson(s)* *chairlady/-ies* *Madam Chairman*
BB:08:c Authority: Exercise of authority: One having delegated/ derived authority	*spokesman/men* *spokeswoman/women* *spokesperson(s)* *spokespeople*
BB:06:k:01 Authority: Rule/government: Politics: Politician	*statesman/men* *stateswoman/women* *statesperson(s)* *statespeople*
BC:07:a Law: Law enforcement: Police force/ the police	*policeman/men* *policewoman/women* *police officer(s)*

There are some methodological considerations that are worth commenting upon. Firstly, our searches in the corpus are lemmatised. This means that all the expressions examined include their inflectional forms. Secondly, a number of wildcard characters were used to retrieve data quickly. These include <?> for searching both *-man* and *-men* endings and <*> for the plural forms. Unconventional word division practices, such as *chair man* (written as separate words) or *chair-man* (hyphenated) have been taken into consideration.

To investigate the correlation between important events that have shaped the history of the U.K. and the frequency changes in the use of the terms studied, the chart display was also useful as it allows for a more fine-grained examination (year by year) of the evolution of the expressions under scrutiny. In addition, for the purpose of this analysis, which is more qualitative-led, a small number of fragments of political debates have been examined to illustrate the relevance of the terms under study in the discussion of the democratisation of discourse. A random sample of 50 concordance lines (and expanded lines) have been read for each term.

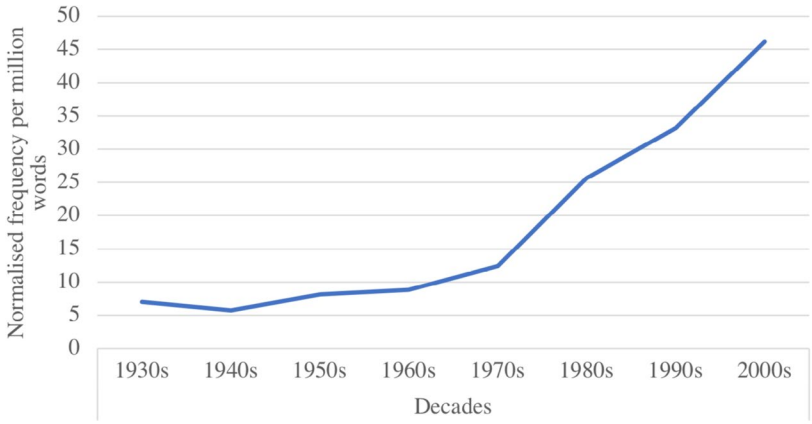
4. Analysis and Discussion of Results

This section presents the overall frequencies of all the gender-neutral occupational titles (*chairperson*, *spokesperson*, *statesperson* and *police officer*). This part is further divided into four subsections, which are devoted to the detailed analysis of each of the inclusive terms and their corresponding gender-marked term (*chairman*, *chairwoman*, *chair lady*, *Madam Chairman*, *spokesman*, *spokeswoman*, *statesman*, *stateswoman*, *policeman* and *policewoman*). The conclusions drawn from the corpus data of this study will serve to either refute or support a theory, namely, the existence of democratisation of discourse, which is manifested in the decrease of expressions that mark gender, as Hiltunen and Loureiro-Porto (2020, 2) state.

A number of statistical tests are used to determine whether frequency changes in diachronic studies are significant. Throughout this study, we have used the Coefficient of Variance (CV) to compare the frequencies of words across the multiple sections of the corpus. This measure divides the standard deviation of the word's frequency by the mean of the word and multiplies the result by 100 (Baker 2011, 72). The words *Madam Chairman* and *statespeople* received the highest CV score of all the words examined, whereas *policewoman/women* received the lowest score.

Before considering the specific development of each of the occupational titles studied, which is shown in the subsections below, it is first worth viewing how gender-neutral terms have evolved as a group and how frequency changes have been influenced by social factors. The collective normalised frequencies for gender-neutral terms are shown in figure 2 below:

Figure 2. Frequencies of gender-neutral occupational terms



The graph in figure 2 curves slightly upwards from the 1930s to the 1970s. Gender-neutral terms were not frequently employed in political discourse during this period, as it was generally assumed that the generic male form could be used to refer to women. From the 1970s onwards, the number of realisations of inclusive terms increased dramatically. It seems that this decade marks the beginning of a new era, both in terms of inclusive language and gender equality. More MPs began to be aware of gender issues. They desired to appeal to new feminist organisations and movements during this period, such as the Women's Liberation Movement. Several pieces of legislation and governmental bodies (which will be discussed further below) were established to prevent discrimination. It can be argued that the data in figure 2 demonstrates that these political changes, closely associated with a general "desire to reawaken women and society to persistent sex inequalities" (Evans 2015, 5), were expressed through a general increased use of gender-neutral occupational titles. In other words, following the conceptualisation of the history of feminism as a series of waves, these results seem to reveal that, in the context of the second wave of feminism, when the interplay between gender and language was evaluated (Cameron 1985, 3), extralinguistic aspects inevitably had an effect on Parliamentary Discourse. It became significantly less sexist.

The analysis of concordance lines shows that there was an intense resistance against the use of gender-neutral wording in the House of Commons until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Certain MPs have often refused to employ them and they have proposed alternative gender-marked expressions without much success instead, such as *Madam Chairman*. According to Mr Chapman, MP for Chipping Barnet:

(1) Until now, in modern English usage, the word "chairman" has embraced the female, although we could refer to a woman chairman as "*Madam Chairman*" (Hansard Corpus 1999; italics added).

This MP assumes that *chairman* has been historically employed in English as a generic term. However, this suggests a gender bias, because *chairwoman* has never been used for male referents. It is also important to mention, as Romaine (2001, 163) argues, that the increased frequency of *chairperson* (and other supposedly gender-neutral terms) does not mean that they are not also used as androcentric terms. In fact, in our study, a random sample of 50 concordance lines shows that *chairperson*, when not employed to refer to the office in general, has, to a certain degree, a gender-specific use. Sixty-seven percent of these concordance lines indicate that *chairperson* is used to denote exclusively women who occupy this post. Other forms examined, namely *spokesperson, statesperson* and *police officer*, do not exhibit this bias because they make reference to men and women in a similar proportion of instances.

4.1. Chairperson

The gender-neutral noun *chairperson*, as Holmes comments, is perceived by some speakers to be an "artificial and clumsy" (2001, 118) term. They consider that it hinders effective communication and it is unnecessary in English. Holmes further contends that the choice between using *chairman* and *chairperson* reveals the speaker's "ideological position" (2001, 118). Indeed, these terms are not only used to refer to job title, but are also important symbolic markers of women's status because this occupation is associated with ideas of representativeness and authority. From a historical and political viewpoint, *chairman* has been commonly employed to refer to specific powerful positions within the lower House of Parliament, such as the Clerk of the House of Commons (until the 1970s; U.K. Parliament, n.d.a). In addition, the Deputy Speaker in the House of Commons is usually referred to as the Chairman of Ways and Means (U.K. Parliament n.d.b). It was not until 1948 that a woman became a chairperson in the House of Commons (Reeves 2020, 16).

The two main gender-marked equivalents of *chairperson* are *chairman* and *chairwoman*. Interestingly, there are other terms which are also exclusively used to identify women, such as *chairlady* and *Madam Chairman.* Table 2 represents the diachronic evolution of *chair-* forms.

Table 2. Normalised frequency per million words of *chair-* forms

	Decades							
	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
chairperson(s)	0	0	0	0	0.07	0.32	0.59	0.35
chairman/men	10.44	9.74	9.10	10.06	9.67	11.60	8.73	5.70
chairwoman/women	0.04	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.05	0.24	0.10
chairlady/-ies	0	0	0	0	0.01	0	0.03	0
Madam Chairman	0	0	0	0	0.01	0	0.01	0

There are no occurrences of *chairperson* until the 1970s. Since then, the number of instances has increased to reach 0.35 per million words in the 2000s. Nevertheless, occurrences of this term have never matched those of *chairman*, which have remained significantly higher than *chairperson* from the 1930s until the 2000s. It is also noticeable, however, that the frequency of *chairman* has almost halved from the 1980s to the 2000s from 10.44 to 5.70 examples per million words, which suggests it is losing ground. As for the female-specific forms, their frequencies have remained fairly stable in the period studied. The use of *chairwoman* reached a peak of 0.24 instances per million words in the 1990s, but *chairperson* has become the preferred term over the female-marked word since the 1970s. The alternative forms *chairlady* and *Madam Chair* have not gained acceptability in parliamentary usage.

A more careful analysis reveals that the choice of *chair-* forms has been a controversial topic in parliamentary debates, especially in the 1970s and 1980s. To illustrate this, two fragments have been selected. In example (2), Mr Holland, MP for Carlton, describes the term *chairperson* in 1978 in the following terms:

(2) We have an Equal Opportunities Commission that seeks to make women into stevedores and men into chambermaids whilst distorting the English language with the need for such abortions [*sic*] as "*chairperson*" (Hansard Corpus 1978; italics added).

In his argumentative intervention against the Equal Opportunities Commission, a public body set up by the government to prevent gender discrimination (Government, U.K. n.d.), Mr Holland associates the word *chairperson* with the alleged decay of the English language, considering it an unnatural and incorrect term. Similarly, in example (3), Mr Cormack, MP for South Staffordshire, is also concerned about the use of this term. He raises a point of order to the Speaker and voices his criticism:

(3) Mr Speaker: May I ask for your guidance? The word "*chairperson*" was used in question 13 today: May I ask you to instruct the Table Office not to accept that abomination and abortion of the English to language? (Hansard Corpus 1982; italics added).

4.2. Spokesperson

The evolution of *spokes-* and *chair-* forms have differed considerably, as table 3 illustrates.

Table 3. Normalised frequency per million words of *spokes-* forms

	Decades							
	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
spokesperson(s)	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.57	2.20	2.39
spokespeople	0	0	0	0	0	0.04	0.31	0.72
spokesman/men	0.70	0.72	0.99	1.21	1.30	1.45	1.61	1.12
spokeswoman/women	0	0	0	0.01	0.08	0.05	0.45	0.29

The gender-inclusive job title *spokesperson* was not used until the 1970s. The results show that the frequency of this term has increased to 2.39 instances per million words. This data indicates that most spokespeople have traditionally been spokesmen and reveals, in a wider sense, how specific social roles have been constructed over time (Holmes 2001, 125). In the House of Commons, despite the increased number of female MPs, it was not until the 1970s that a woman became Deputy Speaker (Reeves 2020, 16).

Spokesman was the prevailing job title in Parliamentary Discourse until the 1990s. The frequency of this gender-marked term increased to hit a high of 1.61 realisations per million words in the 1990s, although there was a significant dip in the 2000s. The generic masculine form was replaced to a large extent by the gender-inclusive term by the beginning of the twenty-first century. The female form *spokeswoman* is absent in the corpus data until the 1960s and it has not been frequently employed thereafter.

It appears that the job title *spokesperson* has not been as controversial as *chairperson* in the lower House of Parliament. Nevertheless, scanning the concordance lines, we observe that the distinction between *spokesperson* and *spokesman* has been a source of some confusion sometimes. This is clearly illustrated when Mr Varley, MP for Chesterfield, used both terms in his intervention in 1975:

(4) But I well remember when she was the Conservative Party's *spokesman*, or *spokesperson*, on energy in the late 1960's (Hansard Corpus 1975; italics added).

Other MPs have resorted to irony to reflect on the use of this gender-neutral term. In 1982, Mr Walker-Smith, MP for East Hertfordshire, highlighted the novelty of *spokesperson* in a slightly humorous tone:

(5) Dr Edith Summerskill, as Opposition principal *spokesman*; perhaps I should say in the contemporary idiom "*spokesperson*" (Hansard Corpus 1982; italics added).

Similarly, almost twenty years later, Mr Forth, MP for Bromley and Chislehurst, mocked the supposed inclusiveness that *spokesperson* conveys:

(6) By contrast, a *spokesperson* for Asda; so we have had a *spokesman*, a *spokeswoman* and a *spokesperson*; it is all very inclusive (Hansard Corpus 2001; italics added).

These extracts confirm Mills' (2008, 34) argument that irony and humour are frequent discursive examples of indirect sexism. In other words, some MPs suggest that the use of gender-neutral terms is a trivial issue and that it will not contribute to the construction of a better social reality. Even though discrimination against women can be enacted through language, many parliamentarians believed that inclusive language will not significantly alter the status of women. For instance, in 1984, Mr Beith, MP for Berwick-upon-Twee, expressed his thoughts about this issue in the following terms:

(7) Indeed, the argument about nomenclature, as between Parliament and Assembly, increasingly resembles those arguments about whether people should be called *chairpersons* or *spokespersons* or *chairmen* or *chairwomen*: It is an obsession with nomenclature which escapes the real discussion and argument about substance (Hansard Corpus 1984; italics added).

4.3. Statesperson

In the second half of the twentieth century, leadership positions that had been historically interpreted as 'male' were progressively occupied by women in the national government in the U.K. Margaret Bondfield became the first woman to hold a cabinet position as minister in 1929 (Rappaport 2001, 98). Fifty years later, Margaret Thatcher became the first female Prime Minister in 1979. Raising their visibility in language is crucial for promoting women's careers.

Table 4 shows the evolution of *statesperson* and its corresponding gender-marked terms. In view of the waning fortunes of the form *statesman,* it seems reasonable to suggest that it is being replaced by *statesperson* in British Parliamentary Discourse. The frequency of the former term has progressively decreased from 2.61 instances per million words in the 1930s to 0.27 in the 2000s. Conversely, its equivalent gender-neutral term, which was not employed until the 1970s, has seen a steady increase in its use until the 1990s. *Statespeople* and *stateswoman* have never been popular job titles.

Table 4. Normalised frequency per million words of *states-* forms

	Decades							
	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
statesperson(s)	0	0	0	0	0.04	0.32	0.59	0.35
statespeople	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.02	0.01
statesman/men	2.61	1.67	1.55	1.06	0.88	0.94	0.38	0.27
stateswoman/women	0	0	0	0	0	0.01	0.01	0.01

Unlike the previous terms studied, *statesperson* has been generally politically accepted in the House of Commons, as illustrated in examples (8) and (9):

(8) Mrs Thatcher has been built up in Britain as the senior and most prestigious European *statesperson* who can speak for Europe on a world platform (Hansard Corpus 1988; italics added).

(9) It is clear from what he has said since his release that he is a responsible and wise *statesperson* (Hansard Corpus 1990; italics added).

4.4. Police officer

Women working in law enforcement is not something new. The first female police officers were recruited in the 1910s in the U.K., but full gender equality, in terms of salary and rank inclusion, was not achieved until the Equal Pay Act and the Sex Discrimination Act were passed in 1970 and 1975 respectively (May 2015, para. 2; para. 6). The 1970s and 1980s also saw an upsurge in the number of women who joined the police in the U.K. "from 5.4 percent in 1975 to 10.8 percent in 1988" (Segrave 2014, 285). How did this move towards equity between women and men in policing influence parliamentary language?

Table 5 below illustrates the development of *police officer* and its equivalent gender-marked forms. It shows the gradual expansion of this inclusive term from 6.99 realisations per million words in the 1930s to 42.10 in the 2000s. The number of instances increased considerably since the 1970s. Conversely, during this period, the frequency of *policeman* has decreased consistently, reaching the lowest point in the 2000s with 7.16 realisations per million words. The usage of the occupational title *policewoman* has remained low by comparison with the frequencies of the two other terms mentioned above.

Table 5. Normalised frequency per million words of *police-* forms

	Decades							
	1930s	1940s	1950s	1960s	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s
police officer(s)	6.99	5.73	8.09	8.80	12.31	24.70	29.80	42.10
policeman/men	12.90	9.63	12.59	13.68	14.54	13.49	7.99	7.16
policewoman/women	0.74	0.47	0.30	0.37	0.35	0.46	0.35	0.33

There are no recorded instances of *police officer* being perceived as an imposition of political correctness in the extracts analysed. On many occasions, this form is used

interchangeably with *policeman* (but not with *policewoman*) by MPs to avoid repetition and redundancy, as shown in examples (10) and (11):

(10) This structure does not seem to be geared to reward the experienced *police officer*: It is no way to treat a professional *policeman* (Hansard Corpus; italics added).

(11) As for the *police officer*, I reiterate that it is essential that the *policeman* should also be able to go before the tribunal (Hansard Corpus; italics added).

Even though many authors coincide in conceiving democratisation of discourse as a tendency that involves the gradual elimination of markers of inequality (Fairclough 1992, 205-206; Farrelly and Seoane 2012, 393, for example), any possible connections that are made between linguistic changes and other socio-cultural changes should be carefully assessed, as Hiltunen and Loureiro-Porto comment (2020, 2): "[D]iscursive democratization is mediated through a variety of situational, cultural and political factors, which makes generalizations and cross-study comparisons difficult." Bearing this in mind, our findings show that the rise in frequency of gender-neutral occupational titles corroborate Romaine's (2001), Holmes and Sigley's (2002) and Baker's (2014) previous corpus-based research in this field of study. Their data also demonstrates the similar diachronic fortunes of these terms, both in British English and other varieties of English. Given that political discourse is highly sensitive to context, if we take into account the second wave of feminism and the legislative changes it brought about, it can be claimed that the use of gender-inclusive language, which aims to bring about equality, is the consequence of these societal changes, as Leech et al. comment (2009, 261). Hence, the idea that there exists a strong correspondence between this attested shift in language usage and other external factors serves to further confirm the existence of democratisation of discourse, both at a theoretical level and also as an ongoing and evolving process.

5. Conclusions

This article has aimed to investigate the diachronic development of semantically tagged words associated with expressions of exercise of subjection, command, control, power, obligation and equality from 1930 to 2005 in Parliamentary Discourse in the House of Commons. More precisely, gender-neutral and gender-marked occupational titles have been examined and some reasons for the frequency trends observed have been suggested. To this end, this investigation was based on the Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022). The following conclusions have been reached.

As for the occupational titles examined, two patterns can be observed. In the first place, from the 1930s to the 1970s, the corpus data clearly indicates that there has been a male bias in parliamentary debates, as exemplified by the absence of gender-

neutral terms like *chairperson* and *spokesperson.* The only exception is *police officer*, which was used even before the time framework studied. Secondly, since the 1970s, gender-marked male terms became less frequent and they were gradually substituted by more inclusive terms, even though this replacement proved at times to be a controversial issue in the House of Commons. A more detailed analysis of the use of gender-neutral terms shows that some MPs regarded them as a distortion of the English language, preferring to use male-generic forms. However, gender-marked forms hide women's increased representation in spheres related to authority and power, such as policing, political participation and leadership. Even though the concordance analysis reveals that the inclusive forms studied generally tend to refer to women and men in the same proportion (except *chairperson*), a more careful and systematic investigation is needed to examine the collocates that appear next to each of these terms and whether male generic forms follow the same pattern.

We postulate that the democratisation of discourse may be an explanatory process behind the frequency changes observed and that the combination of corpus linguistics and discourse analysis can be a powerful tool for testing how significant social and political factors have had an effect on this development. Thus, the scope of this study can be further expanded. A comparison between the House of Commons and House of Lords components of the Hansard Corpus (Alexander and Davies 2022) might reveal that the evolution of these terms has differed considerably in these two chambers in the same 75-year-period. We must remember that the House of Lords is not as representative of British society as the House of Commons and therefore it might not have reflected this sociocultural process in the same way. Another recommendation for broadening the breadth of analysis is to compare the use of the terms examined across the political parties. This might shed some light on how ideology affects the way authority and power are expressed in Parliamentary Discourse.

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