

The Personing of Neutral Inclusivity: Tracing the Spread of *person* Compounds in Occupational Naming

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Abstract

Feminist linguistic reforms provide an example of planned social language change that seeks to ensure inclusivity and equality in the linguistic representation of women and men. Gender-neutralisation has been promoted as the preferred strategy for gender-inclusive representations in English. The strategy has included options such as lexical replacement, e.g., *flight attendant* instead of *hostess*; neologisms such as *firefighter* for *fireman* and morphological compounding with zero morphs *chair*∅ for *chairman* and compounds with *person*. Interestingly, some *person* compounds have emerged into the gender-inclusive language landscape that were not promoted or supported as part of feminist language planning e.g., *waitperson*. Our discussion focuses on the gender-neutral morphological compounding evident in a number of occupational nouns. Drawing upon on-line survey data (www.teagirl.arts.uwa.edu.au) we trace the spread and diffusion of *person* compounds. Our findings reveal that degrees of social-gender loading and occupational prestige interact with positions about gender-inclusivity in confounding ways. Gender-neutralisation through the adoption of *person* compounds faces challenges from so-called PC debates about linguistic ‘awkwardness’ and the availability of zero morph compounding through the creation of neologisms, e.g., *chair*.

Keywords

Sociolinguistics, Feminist Language Planning, Language and Gender

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Feminist Language Planning and Naming Occupations

Evaluation and assessment are crucial features of language planning (LP) design, implementation and revision (Cooper 1989, Ricento 2000, Tollefson 1991) but may occur haphazardly or irregularly due to the complex nature of LP. This process might include the documentation of the uptake and diffusion of planned language changes and/or users' attitudes and responses to the proposals introduced as part of language policy developments. To date the evaluation and documentation of feminist language planning has largely focused on pronoun reform (Baranowski 2002, Holmes 2001, Romaine 2001, Pauwels & Winter 2004a, b), the introduction of *Ms* as a courtesy title (Pauwels 1987, 2001) and other naming practices for women and men (e.g., Cooper 1984). In terms of changes to occupational nomenclature and naming there have been surveys of newspaper texts and advertisements which assessed the uptake of gender-inclusive naming practices (either through the strategy of gender-neutralisation or gender-specification), (e.g., Cooper 1984, Fasold 1987, Pauwels & Wrightson-Turcotte 2001). Although these investigations included *person* compounds, they did not focus on the spread and response to such compounds. Given extensive public commentary about the use of *person* compounds as both a highlighted gender-neutral option or a reviled linguistic 'incongruity'¹, as well as its creativity beyond feminist language planning, we believe that the uptake and spread, and response to *person* compounds deserves specific attention. In this paper we focus on the lexicalisation of a series of descriptions referring to occupational roles.

The reform of gender-biased or discriminatory naming practices in relation to professions, occupations and workplace roles was of high priority to feminist language planners given their public visibility. Indeed feminist language reform primarily targeted formal language use in institutions and agencies such as education, the media and employment as they are sites of public record and scrutiny (Baranowski 2002, Winter & Pauwels 2003). Effecting change in these sites was seen as a key to the adoption and spread of change in other sites and locales less subject to or regulated by legislative measures and other protocols in this case equal opportunity and anti-discrimination.

The employment sector, however, is not a homogeneous or uniform site in relation to being subjected to regulatory practices or with regard to its 'public' nature. This is reflected in our selected list of occupations (see below), with some crossing work and

1 Pauwels (1998:185-191) provides examples of responses to feminist language guidelines in the Australian media that demonstrates the productivity of *person* compounds, even in contexts where the *man* sequence is not a recognised morpheme compound e.g., 'What a steaming heap of personure' ...(*Northern Territory News* 9/10/1988).

leisure contexts, for example ‘someone who fishes’. Some occupations may be part of large public organisations as well as smaller private concerns or apply to the field of self-employment. The status of occupations and their prestige are likewise sensitive to historical, cultural and social change. Our evaluation of the spread of *person* occupation compounds is grounded in a critical sociolinguistic perspective (Mey 1985) that views feminist language planning as a form of cultural practice itself subject to cultural practices of work, leisure, gender and discourses of identity.

Changes to the naming of occupations involve replacement of the generic use of gender-exclusive *-man* compounds, of asymmetrical morphological practices which demand suffixation for making female agents or incumbents e.g., *waitress* vs *waiter* or involve lexical modification e.g., *lady lawyer/ female doctor*. For English, gender-neutralisation has become the preferred strategy for eliminating gender-bias in occupational noun formations. One option within this strategy is the replacement of the gender-specific and gender-exclusive *-man* compound with a *person* compound. Alternative options include the use of zero morphs e.g., *waiter* to denote both male and female waiters, or neologism e.g., *flight attendant* to replace *air hostess/steward*, or other lexical modification e.g., *chair*. Some forms have emerged that were never recommended in guidelines as alternatives e.g., *waitperson*. This linguistic creativity reflects the compounding possibilities for naming occupations – the suffixation of *person* to the specific activity. Consequently, the productivity of *person* compounding may reflect a generalisation of the word formation process. Critics and opponents of planned social language change have seized upon this productivity to create alternatives and manipulate opinion through exaggeration, e.g., *personhole* for *manhole* in contrast to the recommended *access hole*. This capacity was reflected in some of our survey participants’ open-ended comments as exemplified in ID171’s acknowledgement that this ‘humorous’ effect emerges out of the availability of *person* compounding.

- (1) ID171: *I often use words made up with '-person' semi-humorously, especially if there isn't a satisfactory word to use instead. Sometimes gender inclusive language indicates that the sex of the person is not known; when it is known gender-specific words are not always inappropriate - but when it's not obvious whether the reference is to a particular individual or to the position in general I usually say 'they' or a '-person' word, even though it sometimes sounds a bit silly*

As highlighted by ID171 the availability of the *person* compound for naming occupations or roles seems to be able to be extended to perceived lexical gaps, *especially if there isn't a satisfactory word*. However, the compound may *sound a bit silly* in certain generic contexts. These comments highlight a central problem for the spread and diffusion of *person* compounds: its productivity possibilities on the one hand and tensions for the pragmatic acceptability or appropriateness status of the *person* compound on the other. In light of the contexts of *person* compounding we propose two key aims for this discussion:

- (1) To what extent has the *person* compound strategy been adopted² as a replacement for gender-exclusive forms in generic and gender-specific contexts?
- (2) What are the facilitators and constraints for the adoption or non-adoption of *person* compounds in the face of the tension between productivity and acceptability of *person* compounding?

Methodology and Data

The data for this discussion draws upon sections of an on-line survey administered as part of the TEaGIRL (Transcultural Englishes and the Gender Inclusive Reform of Language: www.teagirl.arts.uwa.edu.au) project³. At Census date (1st March 2005), 713 participants completed the relevant components of the survey for this discussion⁴.

Specifically, we focus on a number of ‘closed’ questions that included *person* compounds as one alternative among a range of options for naming gender-specific and generic occupation incumbents. In addition we include those open-ended descriptions that generated *person* compounds. The open-ended descriptions required participants to name the incumbents, gender-specific and generic references, for a number of occupations. Open-ended descriptions that failed to generate any instances of a *person* compound have been excluded from this discussion. Consequently there are no gender-specific scenarios included from the open-ended descriptions. The two gender-specific descriptions ‘A woman who acts in films’ and ‘A man who stays at home to look after his children’ did not generate *person* compounds. In addition, the generic description ‘Someone who looks after other people’s children’ did not result in any *person* compounds but did generate a large proportion of gender-neutral lexical replacement forms such as *childcare worker*, *childminder*, *sitter*. This is due to the fact that gender-exclusive forms for these occupations, traditionally undertaken by women, of minding children and acting such as *nanny*, *actress* are not particularly sensitive to compound replacement due to their lexical structure. For example, a gender-neutralisation strategy for *actress*, ‘a woman who acts in films, is the re-evaluation of *actor*, i.e., a generic zero morpheme outcome. This option accounted for 18.4% of responses.

The data set for the discussion is presented in Table 1 and classified according to whether they were closed- or open-ended questions and if the descriptions were gender-specific or generic.

Question type	Genericness	Description	Person compounds
Closed-ended	Gender	‘A woman who waits tables’	<i>waitperson</i>

2 Mapping adoption – take up and spread – of lexical forms is limited in corpus-based approaches (but see Pauwels and Winter 2004a, 2004b) due to token infrequency and typically user anonymity. In order to trace users’ practices across linguistic/discourse environments with regard to their sociocultural linguistic communities we adopted a survey-based (on-line) methodology with multiple question types and scenarios. We acknowledge that ‘reported’ practices may be biased in favour or against the focussed features in complex ways but (non)selection of a compound or self generated tokens construct evidence of (non)adoption of the reform practices.

3 The authors acknowledge support from the Australian Research Council which funded the research [Discovery Project Grant DPO344041.

4 Submitted responses that were incomplete for the selected items have been excluded in this discussion.

questions	Specific	'Mr Lim who chairs a meeting'	<i>chairperson</i>
		'Ms Lim who chairs a meeting'	<i>chairperson</i>
	Generic	'A person who fishes'	<i>fisherperson</i>
		'A person who works in business'	<i>Male/female businessperson</i> <i>businessperson</i>
Open-ended questions	Generic	'A person who carries out repairs around the house'	<i>handyperson</i> <i>(home) maintenance person</i> <i>fix-it-person</i> <i>(home) repair person</i> <i>odd job person</i> <i>DIY -person</i> <i>craftsperson</i>
		'Someone who speaks on behalf of an organisation'	<i>spokesperson</i> <i>chairperson</i>

Table 1: *person* compounds in closed and open-ended questions for selected occupational scenarios.

The productivity of *person* compounding is evident in the diversity of forms generated for the open-ended description 'A person who carries out repairs around the house' with 7 different schematic terms and 2 of these included varying forms e.g., *home maintenance person* and *maintenance person*.

Gender-Neutralisation Adoption (*person* and zero morphs)

To address the first aim of this paper, the adoption of *person* compounds, Table 2 presents the proportional representation of the various gender-neutralisation strategies recorded for each of the descriptions or occupations. The lexical replacement alternative for 'a woman who waits tables' was *server*. The open-ended description 'Someone who speaks on behalf of an organisation' generated lexical replacement forms such as *representative*, *agent* while many forms – e.g., *worker*, *builder*, *DIYer* – were produced for 'A person who carries out repairs around the house'.

Gender-Specific	Proportion (%)			Total
	<i>person</i> compound(s)	zero (∅)	lexical	
'Ms Lim who chairs a meeting'	31.6	33.8	-	65.4
'Mr Lim who chairs a meeting'	16.0	23.8	-	39.8
'A woman who waits tables'	1.7	7.0	16.5	25.2
Generic				
'Someone who speaks on behalf of an organization'	63.9	0.7	11.9	76.3
'A person who works in business'	55.6	-	-	55.6
'A person who carries out repairs around the house'	16.1	-	11.9	28.0
'A person who fishes'	3.5	7.8	-	11.3

Table 2: Proportional distribution of neutralisation options for selected occupation names.

The adoption patterns for *person* compounds presented in Table 2 reveal that the generic (open-ended) description 'Someone who speaks on behalf of an organisation' –

spokesperson, *chairperson* – represents the greatest uptake of all occupations (63.9%). In contrast, ‘A woman who waits tables’, an open-ended description, generated only 1.7% of *person* compounds. Of the closed-ended questions, the *person* compounds for ‘a person who works in business’, account for the greatest adoption (55.6%) while ‘a person who fishes’ reveals that the *person* compound accounts for 3.5% of tokens and more generally gender-neutralisation represents 11.3% of all occupational naming. Only 3 of the occupations – chairing with a female incumbent (Ms Lim), speaking on behalf of an organisation, a person who works in business – show gender-neutralisation to be the preferred strategy with 65.4%, 76.3% and 55.6% respectively.

For contexts with the possibility of a *person* compound and a zero morph form, ‘fishing’ and ‘chairing’, the zero(\emptyset) forms attract larger proportions e.g., 7.8% and 3.5% for ‘fishing’ and for ‘Mr Lim chairing’ 23.8% compared to 16.8%. This is relevant for gender-specific and generic descriptions with the difference appearing to be greater with male incumbents or stereotyped as evoking masculinity in the case of ‘fishing’. For example, the percentage point difference between the \emptyset and *person* compound alternatives for ‘Ms Lim chairing’ is 2.2 compared with 7.0 points for ‘Mr Lim’. The ‘chairing a meeting’ description facilitated more use of a *person* compound with a female occupant *Ms Lim* (31.6%), than a male one (16.0%), confirming Ehrlich & King’s (1998) research. The availability of a lexical replacement e.g., *server* in the ‘waiting’ scenario recorded the largest proportion of gender-neutralisation options (16.5%). Unfortunately we didn’t include the lexical form *angler* as an option for the ‘fishing’ context.

It would seem that the gender-specific or generic context of the description is not as marked as might be expected based on the low gender-neutralisation for the generic ‘A person who fishes’ (11.3%) and ‘a person who carries out repairs around the home’ (28%) and the gender-specific ‘waiting’ (19.1%) occupation. The preference for gender-exclusive representations is in evidence with 78.2% and 78.7% of *-man* compounds for ‘fishing’ and ‘repairing’ and 72.9% for the lexical form *waitress*.

Facilitators or Constraints of the Spread of *person* Compounding

The second aim of the paper is to examine which ‘factors’ act as constraints or facilitators in the spread of *person* compounding. So far we have identified a number of features for *person* compounding:

- (1) it is a productive word forming process that may be subject to over-generalisation,
- (2) its appropriateness for naming some/all occupations is variously contested and,
- (3) the spread and adoption rates of the form varies across domains of occupation.

In this section we propose four (4) factors which may account for the productivity of *person* compounding in this data set. They are social change sensitivity, occupation prestige, genericness and question type. We believe that these ‘factors’ help to clarify the uptake and spread of gender-neutralisation and in particular *person* compounds in the naming of occupations.

Social change sensitivity

The first ‘factor’ deals with the construction of the occupation and its sensitivity to real and perceived social change. This ‘factor’ resonates with feminist language planning and its socio-political historical background. Figure 1 is a graphic representation of what we are calling ‘social change sensitivity’.

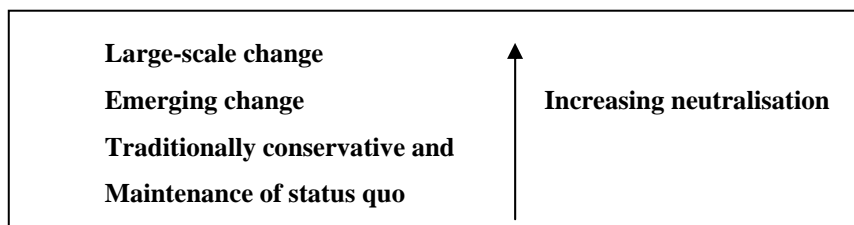


Figure 1: Social change sensitivity and gender-neutralisation in occupational naming

This hierarchy also captures the ‘language reflects reality’ perspective in that it suggests that with social change comes increasing representation for women and men in non-traditional occupations and consequently increased linguistic neutralisation. Of course it is difficult to make claims about universal change across speakers’ communities. For the set of *person* compounds discussed here it would seem that *Ms Lim chairing* and *someone who works in business* might be thought of as contexts in which there has been considerable social change but in the case of chairing it is more likely that neutralisation will feature for a feminine incumbent. Women in chairing roles reflect more social change than men in such roles. This contrasts to *a woman waiting*, *a person repairing* and *Mr Lim chairing* which are closer to the maintenance of the status quo. The generic *a person speaking* seems to align with middle positions in that the prevalence of the occupation is itself a product of social change and depending on the representative organisation being more or less conservative or sensitive to change.

Occupation Prestige

The second ‘factor’ refers to the work-related uses of the naming practices specifically. This dimension suggests that the more public, and the greater degree of professionalism (prestige) and formal education associated with the occupation, leads to an increased expectation that naming occupations will require gender-neutral labels. Figure 2 represents this link with the increased expectation for gender-neutralisation with public, prestigious occupations.

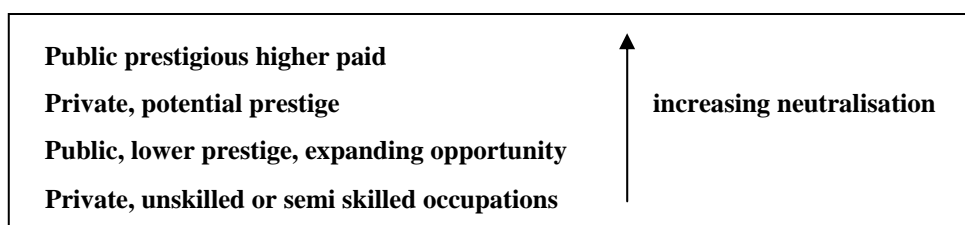


Figure 2: Occupation prestige and gender-neutralisation in occupational naming

This ‘factor’ maps with the lexical domain or field of reference for the data set items: All can refer to occupations that may be characterised in terms of the degrees of formal professionalism and prestige with ‘fishing’ and ‘repairing’ less likely to reveal gender-neutralisation for the occupational naming.

Participant ID391 reflects elements of this professionalism and associated respect aspects in the comment:

- (2) ID391: *i personally don't mind calling a woman a mailman or handy-man because i think every one basicly [sic] gets the point, i just think that when refering [sic] to secretaries or nurses a little more respect should be shown to include men or women in the case with doctors.*

For participant ID391 naming occupations and ensuring appropriate generic inclusivity is differentially constructed from *calling a woman a mailman or handy-man* as base-line understanding of their roles to neutralisation for occupations with increased prestige *referring [sic] to secretaries or nurses a little more respect should be shown.*

Linguistic Context: Genericness

The third ‘factor’ which we have labelled genericness, highlights the different possibilities for generic reference and gender-specific incumbents included in this data collection exercise. Figure 3 represents the expectation that gender-neutralisation is far more probable in generic contexts to name someone or a person in an occupation than potentially for un-known, but gender-specific, women or men.

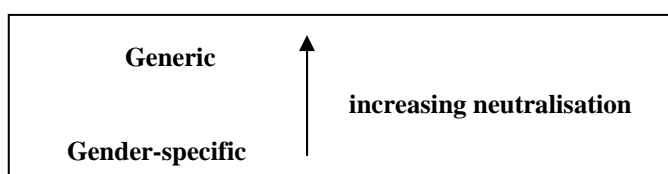


Figure 3: Linguistic context of specificity and gender-neutralisation.

Research Methodology: Question Type

The final ‘factor’ is directly relevant to the method of data collection in this project, and the potential impact the question type might have on the participant responses. The data set was part of a survey about gender-inclusive language and cannot be considered without reference to this design. Participants may use the closed questions as prompts and hence account for a greater incidence of gender-neutralisation by way of *person* compounds than in the open-ended descriptions. Figure 4 presents a graphic representation of the research methodology context. This fourth dimension reflects the nature of the data collection instrument for the specified *person* compounds and shows sensitivity to its potential impact on the adoption and spread of the form.

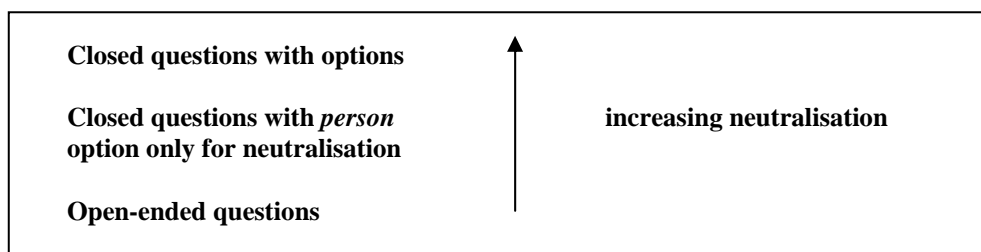


Figure 4: Question type and gender-neutralisation

If we take each of the occupation descriptions and rank them (i.e., assign a + to more likely gender-neutralisation or a – to less likely gender-neutralisation) for each of the four factors we observe the patterns provided in Table 3:

	Social change	Occupation prestige	Generic	Closed-question types
Person in business	+	+	+	+
Ms Lim chairing	+	+	-	+
Someone speaking	+?	+	+	-
Mr Lim chairing	-	+	-	+
Person fishing	-	-	+	+
A woman waiting	-	-	-	+
Person repairing	-	-	+	-

Table 3: Gender-neutralisation and contexts of meaning.

Table 3 shows that the occupational description – ‘A person working in business’ – tested in the survey through a closed question shows positive gender-neutralisation for each of the four ‘factors’. With regard to the ‘factor’ social change it can be argued that this occupation has undergone considerable change with many more women entering the realm of business. Similarly this occupation description ranks high in terms of the ‘factor’ occupational prestige. The positive ranking for the two other ‘factors’ is self-explanatory.

At the other end of the spectrum we have occupation descriptions including ‘A woman who waits tables’ and ‘A person carrying out repairs around the house’. They both score low (-) for the ‘factors’ social change and occupation prestige. Furthermore, the former scores negatively on genericness and the latter on question type. In between these extremes we have the occupation descriptions involving chairing, fishing and speaking on behalf of others. The question mark alongside ‘Someone who speaks on behalf of an organisation’ reflects the problematic nature of discussing social change in relation to this occupation. The occupation is itself a fairly recent phenomenon but one with increasing participation in the media, for example, but to assign a degree of change is difficult.

In Table 4 we present these gender-neutralisation ‘scores’ or rankings in relation to the respondents’ reported adoption of gender-neutralisation as a strategy and of *person* compounds specifically (see Table 2). Table 4 shows that there is some evidence that the ‘factors’ positively interact with the proportion (%) of gender-neutralisation for the set of occupation descriptions. More than 2 positive (+) scores – ‘A person in business’, ‘Ms Lim chairing’ and ‘Someone speaking’ correlate with relatively high proportions of *person* compounding adoption. However, the relative rank ordering among the four ‘factors’ would be speculative at this stage. We find that the factor research methodology,

	No. of + assignments	Overall neutralisation as a strategy (%)	- <i>person</i> Compounds* (%)
Person in business	4	55.6	100
Ms Lim chairing	3	65.4	48.6
Someone speaking	2/3	76.3	83.7
Mr Lim chairing	2	39.8	40.2
Person fishing	2	11.3	31.0
A woman waiting	1	25.2	6.7
Person repairing	1	28.0	57.5

**person* compounds as a proportion (%) of gender-neutralisation

Table 4: Gender-neutralisation and contexts of meaning.

or question type, i.e., open or closed-question, is having less influence on the selection of a *person* compound than might be expected, except in the situation where an alternative neutralisation form was not provided, e.g., ‘a person in business’. For example, the form with the largest proportional use of *person* compound, excluding ‘a person in business’, is *spokesperson* (83.7%) for ‘someone speaking’, an open-ended question. However, ‘A person who speaks on behalf of an organisation’ is only ranked 3rd in Tables 3 and 4 behind ‘a person in business’ and ‘Ms Lim chairing’, both of which were closed-option questions. We propose that question type, i.e., open or closed, exerts little, if any, influence on adoption patterns for *person* compounds which suggests that usage patterns are facilitated or constrained by other factors.

Table 3 revealed that the prestige of an occupation, and its sensitivity to social change, need to be considered as distinct factors. This is exemplified by ‘Mr Lim chairing’ which contrasts the two contexts but are the same for ‘Ms Lim chairing’. In Table 4 the two incumbents show difference in the adoption of *person* compounds with a larger proportion for ‘Ms Lim chairing’; (48.6%) than Mr Lim chairing (40.2%). Clearly ‘chairing a meeting’ reveals an occupation that demonstrates both social change and prestige sensitivities.

Furthermore, resistance to the *person* forms is stronger in those occupations perceived as less prestigious or lower in status e.g., fishing, waiting, home repairs. Interestingly waiting on tables is a common part-time type of employment providing support for students and is part of an industry that has grown with corresponding lifestyle and leisure implications in many global locales and yet the gender-specificity is influencing the lower proportion of *person* compounds together with the differing morphological structure of the exclusive form *waitress*. However, for the gender-specific Ms Lim, it is the occupational prestige and the status of recent social change sensitivity that appears to generate the *person* compound. The factor ‘occupation prestige’ and its possible links with public contexts, might provide the most reliable predictor or context for gender-neutralisation through *person* compounding. It was also apparent from the additional comments participants attached to the on-line survey, that *person* compounds were most resisted in relation to lower prestige occupations combined with less apparent social change, i.e., maintenance of status quo in relation to gendered stereotypes for incumbents, as seen in examples (3) – (7):

- (3) *ID180: There seems to be a general trend in most society to move towards gender-inclusive language, though sometimes it is awkward (e.g. "Handyperson").*

- (4) (ID323: *it's critical in formal communication. In informal communication, though, I think that some conventions (i.e. "fisherperson") are extreme, but in some they represent equitability based on reality (not assuming that a doctor is male because I know there are many female doctors).*
- (5) ID487: *Sounds silly, but I really haste [sic] some of the uglier, less poetic words we use to correct sexist language. (postperson - ouch!)*
- (6) ID167: *Would anyone say "fisherperson" with a straight face? I come from a country with a history of ideologically motivated language butchery and I assure you it's not pretty, whatever the ideology*
- (7) ID148: *What I do myself is to use ... and try to avoid gender-specific terms. I also avoid things like "policperson" because they sound a bit ridiculous to me. I had never thought about "nanny" though and your questionnaire has acted as a conciousness-raising task for me.*

We note that in response to the occupations discussed in the open-ended commentary – ‘fishing’, ‘policing’, ‘postal delivery’ and ‘repairing’ – that many of them were either not directly linked to questions about naming and/or did not include the *person* compound referred to in their texts. For example, as part of the closed-option questions we included ‘a woman in the police force’ with the options *policewoman, police officer, female police officer, policeman, female policeman*. We did not include an option *policperson* [not found in guidelines, general recommendations] but ID148’s comment reflects the perception of productivity for the *person* compound. *Postperson* was also not included as an alternative in a prior question about preferred reform naming options. It seems that the very possibility of *person* compound can be extended to almost any occupation. The comments reveal the precarious status of the *person* compound as an object of ridicule, *would anyone say "fisherperson" with a straight face*, refer to perceived stylistic problems, *sometimes it is awkward* and the ignorance, because of its possibility, for lexical replacement. It suggests that occupational naming is ‘normal’ with *person* compounds. The linguistic representation of occupations with perceived resistance to social change (-) and lower prestige (-) are most commented upon in highlighting rejection of the adoption of *person* compounds. The comments indicate that *person* compounds *sound ridiculous* or are *uglier, less poetic*. We speculate that issues around the absence of occupational prestige and social change sensitivities, i.e., less evidence of change, are being discursively constructed around a rhetoric of style. However ongoing research is being conducted to investigate these attitudes in relation to suprasegmental features and syllabic structure.

Conclusions

In this paper we have shown that *person* compounds are being adopted in various proportions largely connected to (a) gender-neutralisation strategic options and (b) the social and relative prestige sensitivities of occupations in contemporary society. In terms of an option among gender-neutralisation strategies, *person* compounds are more often adopted and used in those cases where zero morph neologisms are not available. The degree of uptake of *person* compounds in which various other forms are available (e.g., lexicalised alternatives, zero marking) appears more sensitive to issues of social gender and/or occupational prestige than gender-specificity or genericness. Gender-neutralisation appears to be more linked to prestige or occupation status than gender of

the incumbent, i.e., women who chair are more likely to be accorded gender-neutral reference in a gender-specific context than those women who ‘wait’ tables or ‘act in films’.

The productivity of the *person* compound has resulted in two effects: it has led to overgeneralisation of the form to lesser or greater effect (compare *waitperson* and *policeperson*) and it has provided a weapon or vehicle of anti-reform exemplification discourses as well as insecurity about some forms because of the potential for attack or ridicule if innovative *person* compounds are created. Thus reviewing the spread of feminist language planning through the adoption of *person* compounds reveals that its ease of replication or analogy in occupation name change brings with it perils for attack based on resistance to change for some employment types.

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