‘Men in Grey Suits’: Androcentric Language in the House of Commons

A Corpus-Assisted Feminist Critical Discourse Analysis

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Abstract

Whilst the number of women in the British Parliament increases in line with social progress towards gender equality, androcentric language use in the House of Commons prevails and perpetuates a harmful outdated hierarchical order of gender. The aims of this study are two-fold, (1) to gain insight into how androcentric occupational titles are used to negotiate the hierarchical structure of the Chamber, (2) to explore how MPs’ male bias is reflected by their use of androcentric generic nouns. From a gender perspective with the theoretical framework of feminist critical discourse analysis (CDA), this study analyses debates from the Hansard at Huddersfield Corpus. The analysis found that the term chairman can be used to ascribe rank as it contains an additional level of authority that the gender-neutral chair lacks. Through the use of androcentric generic nouns, the analysis uncovered how a male bias is internalised from various linguistic constructions such as conventional expressions and quotations that portray man as the norm. Stereotypical associations to denominators of professions, subject areas, and their hierarchical order determined by the hegemonic relationship between women and men were found to influence lexical choices. As a result of MPs’ use of androcentric generic nouns, non-male people are misrepresented and constrained by the implications of their connotated gendered meanings.

Key words

Androcentrism – House of Commons – Critical Discourse Analysis – CDA – Hansard at Huddersfield Corpus – Male Bias
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Appendix 1: Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language (2019)
1 Introduction

The British Parliament is an institution in a position of considerable power, and it is a governing space with a historically male majority (UK Parliament 2020a). Until 1918 when the first woman was elected to parliament\(^1\), this ruling discourse had an undeniably male standpoint. Although unevenly so, today the elected British Parliament is represented by both men (66%) and women (34%) (ibid). As such, the House of Commons is one manifestation of Smith’s critique of ruling texts which argues that the remaining gender imbalance in society can be attributed to the fact that ruling discourses have historically been represented by men (Smith 1997: 172). In the British Parliament, the problematic gender imbalance can be observed not only in sheer numbers but also in language features. In 2013, the House of Lords had a short debate regarding gender-neutral language in the drafting of legislation, which specifically discussed the advantages and disadvantages of singular they pronoun use as a strategy to replace generic male pronouns. This debate followed reports on how generic male pronoun use can reinforce outdated stereotypes. In 2015, amendments for gender-neutral language were proposed in an official report, but never fully implemented. Evidently, despite continuous acknowledgements of how the use of such language features is problematic from a gender perspective, little action has been taken to address this problem.

Feminist linguistic scholars have identified how a systemic bias across languages functions as both a symptom and a cause of the social, cultural, and linguistic structures that maintain and reinforce gender inequality (Hellinger and Bussman 2001; Hellinger 2006). This feminist critique of language maintains that gender inequality is upheld from within the foundation of language itself because of the androcentric standpoint from which linguistic structures have developed. More specifically, the bias causes and reinforces the following issues: androcentric generics (generic male pronouns), asymmetrical gender-marking (female doctor), stereotyping (surgeon vs. nurse), and female invisibility (mankind) (Hellinger 2006). These types of language features have been referred to in the research literature as linguistic androcentrism. Linguistic androcentrism has been investigated in a number of studies, particularly so with a focus on generic male pronouns (see Martyna 1978; Cole et al. 1983; Gastil 1990; Meyers 1990; Miller and James 2009; Adami 2009; LaScotte

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\(^1\) As a member of Sinn Fein, Constance Markievicz was the first woman to be elected to the House of Commons. However, since Markievicz did not take her seat, in 1919 Nancy Astor (Conservative) became the first woman to actually enter parliament after she was elected in a by-election (UK Parliament 2020b).
In the political context of the British Parliament, linguistic research from a gender perspective has focused primarily on overt, or explicit, sexism rather than the implicit nature of androcentric sexism. Using the Hansard corpus (https://www.english-corpora.org/hansard/), Ilie (2018), for example, analysed patterns of gender discrimination in the House of Commons as they occurred in three forms: comments based on female MPs’ physical appearance instead of their professional performance, derogatory and belittling forms of address, and stigmatisation of women through the use of abusive and discriminatory stereotypes. The study of androcentric language in the British Parliament, however, is scarce. Also using the Hansard corpus, Hladíková (2019) investigated how language reforms have affected the use of -man compounds (chairman, spokesman and fisherman) by comparing their frequency to their -woman and -person equivalent (and/or alternative gender-neutral forms) in the House of Commons between 1970-2005 and found that, despite increasing popularity of the other forms, man-compounds are largely preferred. At the time of writing, no research on androcentric language has been performed using the Hansard at Huddersfield corpus (https://hansard.hud.ac.uk), which contains much more recent data. In order to fill this gap, using data from Hansard at Huddersfield (ibid) from 2021, this synchronic study will analyse androcentric generic nouns within the powerful institution of the House of Commons and, through a critical discourse analytical lens, problematise its implications for sexism and gender discrimination within and beyond the British Parliament.

1.1 Aims and research questions
This project aims, broadly, to identify instances of linguistic androcentrism in the form of androcentric generic nouns (e.g., mankind, chairman) in debates in the House of Commons and investigate in what kinds of linguistic and discursive constructions they occur. Secondly, I aim to study how the power relations that exist in the institution in terms of gender and rank in the House are discursively produced when using androcentric generic nouns. Thirdly, I aim to critically analyse the impact of the bias within the discursive context of the Chamber, to explore how the internalised bias affects the lexical choices of both male and female MPs during debates. Finally, I aim to consider further the implications of male bias in this legitimised powerful political institution, within the theoretical framework of androcentrism in the relations of ruling texts (Smith 1997), linguistic androcentrism (Hellinger 2006) and
critical discourse analysis (Fairclough 2010; Lazar 2005). Accordingly, the research questions are as follows:

1. Some of the House’s occupational titles are androcentric, such as *chairman* and *spokesman*. How are they used to negotiate and ascribe rank among MPs within the hierarchy of the House of Commons?
2. How does the use of androcentric generic nouns reflect male bias among MPs?

2 Background

2.1 Women and gender equality in the British Parliament

A primary aspect that differentiates the House of Commons from the House of Lords is that members in the House of Commons have been elected. Women’s history in the House of Lords is significantly shorter than in the House of Commons. Despite the Sex Disqualification Act 1919, which coincided with the first female MP Nancy Astor taking her seat and stated that ‘a woman shall not be disqualified by sex or marriage from the exercise of any public function’, the House of Lords remained exclusively male until the Life Peerages Act in 1958 (UK Parliament 2021a). In contrast, the number of elected women in the House of Commons has grown over the course of a century:

![Figure 1. Percentage of female MPs out of all MPs since 1918 (UK Parliament 2020a).](image)
In December 2021, there were 223 female MPs in the House of Commons, constituting 34% of the Parliament. As indicated by the diachronic increase in fig. 1, the number is expected to increase over time. In the Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit of 2018, four factors were highlighted as barriers that prevent women from reaching equal representation in Parliament:

a. The culture of Parliament as highlighted in recent reports of bullying and harassment, and sexual harassment;
b. The challenges that working in Parliament poses for family life, including the unpredictability of business and potential long hours (with measures to date tending to benefit those who live in and around London);
c. The financial impact of standing for Parliament (particularly for disabled candidates); and
d. Online threats and threats to physical security, in particular gender-based intimidation, harassment and violence against female parliamentarians and female candidates. (UK Parliament 2018: 6)

Since the notable increase of women representatives in 1997, which was partly due to Labour’s use of all-women shortlists for selecting candidates, incidents of sexism and abuse were increasingly reported (Ilie 2018). In addition, it is worth noting that genders represented in both the House of Commons and the House of Lords are limited to men and women. So far, non-binary gender is not legally recognised under the Gender Recognition Act (GRA), as it was rejected based on the argument that amending the GRA to include a third gender would have ‘complex practical consequences’ (UK Parliament 2021b).

2.2 Response to androcentrism and amendments for gender-neutral language

In 2013, the House of Lords had a short debate regarding gender-neutral language in the drafting of legislation, which specifically discusses the advantages and disadvantages of generic pronoun use. This debate draws on a Written Ministerial Statement from the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Jack Straw), which is a response to the Interpretation Act 1978 stating that words that refer to the masculine gender include also the feminine. He noted that ‘many believe that this practice tends to reinforce historic gender stereotypes’, and contended the following:

From the beginning of next Session, Government Bills will take a form which achieves gender-neutral drafting so far as it is practicable, at no more than a reasonable cost to brevity or intelligibility. This policy already applies to tax law rewrite Bills and is consistent with the practice

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2 In 1997, 120 female MPs were elected, of which 101 were Labour MPs. This was an increase from 9.2% in the 1992 general election to 18.2% in 1997. (UK Parliament 2013)
3 In legal discourse, this phenomenon is referred to as ‘The Masculine Rule’ (Petersson 1998; Williams 2008)
The debate mostly concerned problems of intelligibility with the use of singular *they*, and the Lords were in disagreement regarding whether singular *they* is correct English language use and whether it is a feature actually used by ‘ordinary’ people. Garzone (2020) studied strategies used to achieve gender neutral legislation by comparing legislation in the UK drafted between 1973-2017. The results showed a decrease of generic *he* in each decade, which was largely replaced by the strategy of avoiding pronoun use completely and instead using common nouns. Corresponding with the Lords’ expressed concerns, Garzone found no instances of singular *they* in her corpus composed entirely of UK General Acts.

The next time this issue was raised was in 2015, in a revision of the Standing Orders. As specified in the report, ‘the Standing Orders of the House of Commons codify much of the procedures and practices of the House but do not describe them’ (UK Parliament 2015a). In this report, listed as one of the drafting changes, is ‘amendments for gender-neutral language, such as “he or she” for “he”, when the pronoun does not refer to a holder of a specific office, or drafting to avoid the need to use a gendered pronoun’ (ibid). However, it was decided that ‘now might not be the most appropriate time to make substantive changes to them’, and the amendments that were made addressed the former suggestion (e.g., *he* becomes *he or she*) but did not change the drafting to avoid the need to use gendered pronouns (see UK Parliament 2015b). These amendments for gender-neutral language do not acknowledge the fixed order of gendered binomials (e.g., *he or she, men and women*), which are androcentric and, thereby, are not necessarily entirely gender-neutral.

In 2018, the Gender-Sensitive Parliament Audit facilitated by the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) mainly addressed gender imbalance in terms of representation in numbers and in terms of sexism in the form of harassment and bullying. In addition, there was a mention of gender-neutral language in the work of the two Houses’ Communications teams as they reach out to communities across the UK, where the use of gender-neutral language would constitute gender-sensitive behaviour. It stated, however, that ‘this may not always be undertaken consistently’ (UK Parliament 2018: 18).

In conclusion, amendments for gender-neutral language have evidently been suggested in reports numerous times, but only ever implemented to a certain extent – specifically, generic pronoun use. Additionally, it appears to be limited to written discourse and generally disregarded in spoken discourse.
2.3 The hierarchical order of the House and parliamentary language: rules of behaviour and courtesies

In order to analyse the spoken discourse of the House of Commons, the rules of behaviour and courtesies of the House need to be considered. This is an integral part of the debates as they discursively maintain the hierarchical order of the Chamber. Therefore, the rules of parliamentary language need to be acknowledged in order to understand the role of the different positions in the House. As the list of rules in its entirety is extensive, for the scope of this project I present a limited selection deemed particularly relevant for the analysis.

First in order is the Speaker, who serves the function of mediator and chairs the debates. The Speaker sits in the Chair and is of the highest rank and authority in the room. Lindsay Hoyle has been speaker since 2019, and when he is absent the Speaker’s Chair is occupied by the next in rank which is the principal Deputy Speaker, Chairman of Ways and Means. Next in line are the other two Deputy Speakers, the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means and then the Second Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means. Whoever occupies the Chair exercises all the authority of the Speaker. Only MPs are allowed to speak during debates and do so once called by the Chair. Whilst notes are permitted, reading a prepared speech is prohibited for the purpose of maintaining spontaneity in session. In the name of spontaneity, the House of Commons continues the cut-and-thrust style of debates which entails listening to MPs’ speeches and intervening with reactions. Since this style of debate can become quite heated, there are restrictions as to what type of language is permitted. The Speaker is the judge of ‘unparliamentary language’ and will issue a warning or ask the MP in question to leave if such language is used.

During session, all MPs must address other MPs through the Chair and are not allowed to directly interact with other MPs. Accordingly, the only person who can be referred to by ‘you’ is the Chair. When referring to other MPs – although never directly – they must do so with the appropriate title and never by name only. In reference to an MP seated on the same side of the House, ‘my honourable friend’ is appropriate. In reference to an MP seated on the opposite side of the House, ‘the honourable Member opposite’ or ‘the honourable Member for [constituency]’ is appropriate. In addition, Privy Counsellors (members of the Privy Council, such as past and present members of Cabinet, the Speaker, the leaders of the

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4 I use this term reluctantly as it is yet to be replaced by Chair of Ways and Means. Since 1967 when the Committee of Ways and Means was abolished, this title is only a formality.
main political parties, Archbishops, among other senior public figures) are titled ‘right honourable’, and Ministers are to be referred to by office or as ‘the Minister’. There are also embellishments to add, such as ‘gallant’ (for those who serve or have served in the army) and ‘learned’ (for senior barristers). However, they are largely falling out of use following the Modernisation Committee’s recommendations in the late 1990’s. Since these recommendations, Privy Counsellors are to no longer be given precedence to speak in debates.

The seating arrangements largely reflect the hierarchical order in the Chamber. The Ministers conventionally occupy the front benches on the right hand side of the Chair, and on the front benches to the left of the Chair sit the Official Opposition Spokespersons. The back benches seat the rest of elected MPs, the governing party behind the Ministers and the MPs of the Opposition (including minority parties) behind the Shadow Ministers. In other words, the highest ranked are seated closest to the Chair. Furthermore, above the Chair is the Press Gallery, which is reserved for the Parliament’s journalists and reporters, including the Hansard reporters. Finally, to the sides of the Press Gallery is the Public Gallery seating the public (‘Strangers’) who come and watch the proceedings.

3 Theoretical and methodological framework

This section presents the relevant theories and reviews previous research and is divided into four parts. Firstly, I will define androcentrism and contextualise the power dynamics of gender that are involved in institutional and ruling discourses. Secondly, a description of linguistic androcentrism is provided. Thirdly, existing literature on linguistic androcentrism and sexism in British Parliament will be reviewed. Lastly, a discussion of Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is presented as methodological framework.

3.1 Androcentrism and ruling discourses

In order to address this concept, androcentrism needs to be defined. For the purpose of this project, I draw on a sociological understanding of androcentrism, namely the presupposition of male perspective as the norm in society resulting in the othering and/or erasure of women and gender minorities. As Bailey et al. put it, ‘androcentrism refers to a societal system organized around men and evident in both individual biases and institutional policies’ (2019: 308). Dorothy Smith, sociologist most known for coining Standpoint Theory, attributes
androcentrism to the fact that men have been the actors in the establishment of all ruling structures and texts of society (1997). More specifically, she refers to texts of institutions – such as the Bible and other religious texts, the foundational texts of academia (the social sciences in particular), legislation and jurisdiction. Thus, the ruling texts have been written by men, for men. Smith argues that the ruling texts, ‘academic, scientific, cultural and other discourses, including the mass media; the complex relations of international finance and currency markets’, have historically developed into a social consciousness of accepted objectivity which has become far removed from actual individuals (1997: 116). The problem is that this accepted objectivity or ‘complex of objectified relations’ (ibid) is a generalisation of those represented in the establishment of the ruling discourses, which were exclusively men. In order to rectify this male bias, Smith argues, the ruling discourses need to represent a range of people that more accurately reflect the distribution of gender, race, and class across society.

3.2 Linguistic androcentrism

The linguistic perspective of androcentrism is concerned with the language features that uphold androcentrism. Hellinger (2006) categorises these features as grammatical gender, referential gender, lexical gender, and social/covert gender. Since the English language is grammatically genderless, grammatical gender (the gendered morphosyntactic property of a noun in connection to a satellite element) is not applicable in this context. Similarly, referential gender applies to languages with grammatical gender and additionally depends on social cues. For instance, a personal noun which is grammatically feminine but lexically gender-neutral and can refer to a person of any gender is an example of referential gender. However, since English lacks grammatical gender it is not applicable in this context. Lexical gender refers to animate and personal nouns, e.g., sister/brother or woman/man. In contrast to terms such as sibling or person, these are gender specific. In languages with grammatical gender, there may be additional morphosyntactic markers on the noun itself. In English, this is usually not the case – however, there are exceptions, such as widower and princess which are marked by suffixation (ibid: 266). Lexical gender is also the determiner of pronominal choice, which in cases of gender-neutral nouns depend on contextual cues. These specific cases often necessitate generic pronoun use, which introduces us to social/covert gender (hereafter social gender). Social gender accompanies personal nouns that carry certain gendered associations, and ‘has to do with stereotypical assumptions
about what are appropriate social roles for women and men, including expectations about who will be a typical member of the class of, say, surgeon or schoolteacher’ (ibid). In the context of ruling discourses, personal nouns are often comprised by a man-compound (e.g., chairman, spokesman) due to the historical androcentrism of the institution. As a result, personal nouns can have social gender whether they are referentially or grammatically marked or not.

The systematic way that these language features are embedded in languages across the world is, in this project, viewed as both a symptom and cause of gender imbalance and inequality. Within language use, this imbalance is expressed both interconnectedly and separately in the following forms: androcentric generics (generic he), asymmetrical gender-marking (female doctor), stereotyping (surgeon vs. nurse), and female invisibility (mankind) (ibid). As discussed in section 3, the detrimental impact of androcentric generics in legislation has been acknowledged in British Parliament to the extent of generic male pronoun use, but the impact of lexical gender in androcentric generic nouns has not been acknowledged. The same extends to spoken androcentric language use, which has not been addressed at all (not to be confused with explicit sexist language use, which has received attention). Asymmetrical gender-marking is a phenomenon that occurs in English with words marked by lexical and social gender. When stereotypes and/or internalised bias informs speakers that the referent’s gender does not align with traditional assumptions, a gendered marker is presented which creates asymmetry. To keep within the limits of this project, asymmetrical gender-marking has been omitted from inquiry. Moreover, stereotyping refers here to gender-neutral nouns which, based on internalised bias, are associated asymmetrically to one gender in particular. The reason this is androcentric is based on the fact that when the gender of the referent is unknown or irrelevant, many occupational titles of high status will frequently be assigned a male pronoun whereas low-status occupational titles will be assigned a female pronoun (ibid: 267). This is a frequent feature in ruling discourses as they contain a considerable number of high-status jobs which were created by men, for men. Finally, female invisibility refers to what is often defined as androcentrism in general: using a word with lexical male gender to refer to people of any gender. Mankind is a clear example of this, referring to all of humanity from a male output. Consequently, the word suggests that women (or anyone who is not a man) are a lesser part of or irrelevant to humankind.
3.3 Review of previous research

3.3.1 Linguistic androcentrism

In the 1970’s, issues surrounding sexism and gender inequality started to be studied to a greater degree in social sciences and humanities. Bodine (1975) identified a male bias in language and demonstrated the presence of androcentrism in prescriptive grammar as it was observed in prescriptive grammarians’ reluctance to the use of singular *they*, which led to the use of sex-indefinite *he*, and *he or she.* Since then, androcentric generic pronouns have been thoroughly studied from many linguistic perspectives, such as psychology (see e.g., Martyna 1978; Cole et al. 1983; Gastil 1990; Miller and James 2009), sociolinguistics (see e.g., Meyers 1990; LaScotte 2016), and corpus linguistics (see e.g., Adami 2009). In the 1990’s, linguistic androcentrism was predominantly studied within the fields of psychology and psycholinguistics. As the literature on this topic has expanded, what constitutes grammatical ‘correctness’ of generic pronouns has been contested from prescriptive and descriptive perspectives. Hung Ng (1990: 455) for instance, studied the androcentric coding of *man* and *his* in participants aged 11-17 and found that they were associated with men rather than women – therefore arguing that the male bias could be declining. He states that ‘the grammatically proper [my emphasis] generic words in English for sex-definite human referents are the masculine words *he*, *his*, and *man* rather than *she*, *her*, singular *they*, or *woman*,’ despite referencing Bodine’s (1975) article on prescriptive grammar. I would argue that the author has come to a faulty conclusion as the results rather indicate that the androcentric use of *man* and *his* contributes to the erasure of women because the terms are lexically masculine.

Furthermore, Holmes and Meyerhoff’s (2003) handbook provides a wide selection of articles that study sexism, gender discrimination, and male bias in language use, as do Hellinger and Bussman (2001) with a cross-linguistic perspective. In the past two decades, the literature has continued to expand with contributions particularly within the fields of linguistics and psychology (see e.g., Hellinger 2006; Ryan and Branscombe 2013; Hegarty et al. 2013; Bailey et al. 2020). The rise of corpus linguistics has also contributed to the literature, making it possible to quantitatively study sexist language use (see Holmes; Romaine in Holmes and Meyerhoff 2001). Paul Baker is a prominent scholar in the study of gender using corpus methods and studies gendered bias from the perspectives of implicit and explicit sexism via patterns of language use (see Baker 2008; 2010; 2014). Using four corpora of British English, he found that over time there had been a general decrease of male
pronouns, a small increase of female pronouns, and only a slight increase of gender-neutral equivalents of e.g., *spokesman* and *chairman* (Baker 2010). These results correspond with the results of other studies reviewed in this chapter, as well as what the contextual information from the British Parliament suggests.

When it comes to androcentric generics (excluding generic pronouns), existing research is scarce. In a study that examined gendered and racial biases in associations to the generic nouns *mankind* (masculine), *human* (neutral), *man and woman* and *woman and man* (binary), Bailey and LaFrance found that whilst the binary nouns contained no male bias, the neutral noun was, among male participants, associated with men and masculinity (2017). Correspondingly, Lindqvist et al (2019) performed a study where participants were asked to read a job application with gender neutral language for a real-estate agent position and found that 62% of the participants associated the genderless *applicant* with male/masculine gender. Evidently, both studies indicate that the male perspective continues to be the norm in instances where referential gender is unknown.

### 3.3.2 Male bias in language within British Parliament

Research from a linguistic perspective in this area is relatively limited, but it is well documented within the study of Law. Legislation drafted using generic male pronouns is referred to within legal discourse as ‘the Masculine Rule’, where *he* subsumes *she* (Williams 2008). Petersson (1998) provides a historical perspective on how ‘the Masculine Rule’ came to be in the 1800s, how women were represented in legislature before then, and how it has changed in recent years. As mentioned in section 2.2, Garzone (2020) found a diachronic decline of male generic pronouns in UK General Acts and observed a preference for gender-neutral nouns rather than gender-neutral pronouns as a replacement. Furthermore, although there is a decline, the results show that male bias has not been fully extinguished. In the field of political science, Collier and Raney (2018) highlight the shared sexism experienced by female MPs in Westminster Parliaments in Australia, Canada, and the UK, through norms and rules in their work environment which they analysed through a feminist institutionalist lens.

Within linguistics, projects specifically concerned with the British Parliament tend to focus on explicit sexism rather than androcentric features, often through discourse analytical perspectives. In a case study of women Labour MPs in the House of Commons, Walsh (2001) applied a feminist critical discourse analysis to analyse how these women are represented in what she calls the masculinist discourse of the print media and argues that the
masculinist bias of the Labour Party remains in practice despite the assumption that the party seems, in theory, committed to gender equality. Garcés and Filardo (2004) qualitatively analysed pragmatic elements of language use in debates in the House of Commons in 2003 using the Hansard Corpus and identified sexist patterns in forms of address, patronising lexical choices, and equating men with neutral terms and women with ‘marked sex’. However, the method of analysis was unclear and selective in nature and therefore needs support by further studies. Furthermore, Sunderland (2020) explored prejudice as an understanding of sexism, specifically focusing on the discourse of Boris Johnson. Using data from parliamentary sessions as well as media coverage, she analysed how the Prime Minister uses derogatory language towards men and women, about women which is derived from gendered asymmetries (e.g., ‘man up’, ‘big girl’s blouse’). Similarly, Ilie (2012) analysed how gendered asymmetries occur in parliamentary power balance during critical moments in session and compares those between the Swedish Riksdag and the House of Commons. She found that ‘in both parliaments gendered addressing strategies are often embedded in female MP-targeted master suppression techniques that result in turning issue-focused discussions into person-focused parliamentary confrontations’ (ibid: 518). This study demonstrates how even gender-neutral terms can be used against women in Parliament because of the androcentric history of the institutions. As presented in section 1, Ilie (2018) identified three types of patterns of sexism in the House of Commons: objectification, patronising, and stigmatisation of women.

Finally, the only study focusing on androcentric language using data from debates in the House of Commons is Hladíková’s PhD thesis (2019), which actually investigated British spoken language in general and therefore used data from the Hansard Corpus and the Spoken British National Corpus (Spoken BNC). This is a primarily quantitative corpus-based study interested in the frequency of androcentric nouns. The results show that the three most frequent nouns were chairman, spokesman and fisherman, and that chairman and spokesman were used for unknown referents in c. 30% of cases, and fisherman in c. 80% of cases. Corresponding with Baker (2010) and Garzone (2020), the diachronic changes showed a general preference for gender-neutral alternatives as opposed to -woman and -person compounds as the -man compounds decline. Furthermore, the frequencies show that the formality of the context (Hansard constituting formal and the Spoken BNC constituting informal) was a crucial factor in which compound was used, as the man-compounds were much less frequent in the Hansard Corpus.
To conclude, the present study will be able to complement Hladiková’s study with its qualitative character and provide a deeper understanding of the dynamics involved in this institutional discourse. Additionally, since no study of androcentric features has been carried out using the Hansard at Huddersfield Corpus – thereby, with recent data – this study will serve as an update on linguistic androcentrism in the House of Commons.

3.4 CADS and CDA – corpus-assisted CDA

To preface this section, I wish to clarify that this project views Corpus-Assisted Discourse Studies (CADS) as a method and means of data collection, and Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as an encompassing theoretical framework of analysis. Therefore, the methodological framework can be referred to as corpus-assisted CDA.

Since the rise of corpus linguistics in recent decades, scholars from all areas of linguistics and many other fields of academia have incorporated corpus methods in their research. Within the study of discourse, it is so frequently used that it has become its own interdisciplinary field: CADS, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative methods to study discourse (Ancarno 2020). By default, discourse analytical studies tend to be qualitative, which has its limitations in terms of replicability and sometimes reliability. In the case of CDA this is particularly true, as it is often subject to the criticism of being selective in its data collection as a means to prove a preconceived hypothesis (Baker and Levon 2015; Cheng 2013). CDA does often have a preconceived hypothesis, which can often be questionably confirmed by purposely selected data which does not necessarily show the entire truth. Consider Fairclough’s 4-step methodology for a dialectical-relational type of CDA, for example:

Stage 1: Focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect.
Stage 2: Identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong.
Stage 3: Consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong.
Stage 4: Identify possible ways past the obstacles. (Fairclough 2013: 235)

The first step implies that the researcher presumes a ‘social wrong’ potentially before even observing the data. However, if the project is driven by the corpus processes, the analysis will follow linguistic patterns uncovered by quantitative measures (Baker and Levon 2015) – making the study both reliable and potentially replicable to some extent.
This project anticipates a ‘social wrong’, i.e., androcentrism, in institutional discourse since it has been previously identified by linguists in language use. However, letting the corpus tools identify the patterns of androcentrism (i.e., providing all instances of the queries, not just the instances considered asymmetrical – see section 4) considerably reduces the bias of the researcher. A primary feature that distinguishes CDA from other linguistic approaches is that it does not follow a fixed set of methods but has been designed to be interdisciplinary (Fairclough et al. 2013), and therefore lends itself well to corpus methods.

3.4.1 CDA and power
In CDA, power and discourse are inherent to each other. Drawing on Foucault’s theorisation of power as embedded and distributed among networks of relations through discursive practices (Foucault 1980), Fairclough understands power and discourse as relational elements of a dialectical process – ‘they are different but not discrete’ (2010: 4). Initially created to critically review neo-liberal capitalism, CDA is a qualitative perspective intended to complement macro-perspectives on social change by critically scrutinising discursively mediated power. It is a perspective, rather than a theory or method, reliant on an interdisciplinary inquiry of power relations (Fairclough 2010; Van Dijk 2011; Wodak 2015). To Fairclough, what distinguishes CDA from other perspectives are the following criteria:

1. It is not just analysis of discourse (or more concretely texts), it is part of some form of systemic transdisciplinary analysis of relations between discourse and other elements of the social process.
2. It is not just general commentary on discourse, it includes some form of systematic analysis of texts.
3. It is not just descriptive, it is also normative. It addresses social wrongs in their discursive aspects and possible ways of righting or mitigating them. (Fairclough 2010: 11)

The social process he mentions refers to three levels of social reality – social structures, social practices, and social events – which exist simultaneously (ibid: 232). Social structures constitute abstract levels of the process, namely the concept of language. Social practices are the orders of discourse that constitute institutions, which mediate the more concrete levels of the process: social events, namely specific text (text here meaning language use, written, spoken or otherwise mediated) (ibid: 294). This framework allows for what Fairclough calls analytical dualism, where discourse can be critically analysed as the mediator of concrete levels of linguistic/semiotic elements of social events and abstract levels of social structures.
(ibid: 348), which is necessary in the critical analysis of institutional discourse given the always present element of power.

Van Dijk offers the following criteria as primary aspects of the perspective of CDA:

- It focuses primarily on social problems and political issues rather than the mere study of discourse structures outside their social and political contexts.
- This critical analysis of social problems is usually multidisciplinary.
- Rather than merely describe discourse structures, it tries to explain them in terms of properties of social interaction and especially social structure.
- More specifically, CDA focuses on the ways discourse structures enact, confirm, legitimate, reproduce, or challenge relations of power abuse (dominance) in society.

(Van Dijk 2015: 467)

In particular, his final criterion provides a useful point of entry into the study of androcentrism. It asks the question of how institutional discourse (here, the House of Commons) enacts, confirms, legitimates, reproduces, or challenges relations of power abuse in society through androcentric language use. In order to answer this question, it is necessary to consider the hegemonic structures which underlie the gendered bias of institutional discourse. Fairclough (2010) argues that an important aspect of how power is mediated through institutional discourse is that people are typically unaware of the ideologies and biases that underlie our talk. In this way, structures continuously shape discourse. Accordingly, the subtle androcentric elements of discourse maintain the hegemonic relationship of men and women through ‘the imbrication of speaking and writing in the exercise, reproduction and negotiation of power relations, and in ideological processes and ideological struggle’ (Fairclough 2020: 129).

3.4.2 On the feminist perspective

The hegemony of gender is an aspect of power with which feminist critical discourse analysts in particular are concerned. Lazar argues that since hierarchically gendered social arrangements are imbued across institutions, feminist critical discourse analysis (FCDA) should be recognised as its own methodological framework (2005; 2013). She emphasises the role of institutions when it comes to sustaining a patriarchal social order which systematically privileges men as a demographic and disadvantages women as a demographic:

To claim that patriarchal gender ideology is structural is to say that it is enacted and renewed in a society’s institutions and social practices, which mediate between the individual and the social order.
In other words, because individuals have little awareness or control over the androcentrism which is embedded in the social order, gender ideology is hegemonic (Lazar 2005: 7). FCDA approaches the hegemony of gender from a poststructuralist perspective which emphasises the central role of language use and discourse in the social construction of gendered subjectivities (Prasad 2005: 165). Lazar explains that ‘the prevailing conception of gender is understood as an ideological structure that divides people into two classes, men and women, based on hierarchical relation of domination and subordination, respectively’ (2013: 217). I would argue that the hierarchy also extends beyond the binary as there are people that society does not categorise as women or men, who also are positioned as subordinate. Since poststructuralist theorization allows for the viewing of discourse as a situation under constant negotiation, contestation and struggle (Lazar 2013: 214), considering this hierarchy beyond the binary actually further emphasises the centrality of male domination.

To conclude, I draw on Grant (1993: 181) who states that ‘to know as a woman means to know from the perspective of the structure of gender’. I would extend this further to argue that having never experienced a cis-male perspective means to know from the perspective of gender. Grant (ibid) continues, ‘in contrast, a feminist perspective means that one has a critical distance on gender and on oneself’. It is this latter poststructuralist perspective that I take in this study in order to critically analyse gender and its hegemonic structure which is evident in the study of androcentrism.

4 Materials and methods

This section presents the method of data collection, followed by method of analysis. The process of data collection and analysis were carried out in four steps as explained below.

4.1 Material

The material used in this study consists of data culled from the Hansard at Huddersfield Corpus (https://hansard.hud.ac.uk). Hansard at Huddersfield is a project hosted by the University of Huddersfield which launched in March 2018 and contains transcripts of nearly all debates from both Houses in the UK Parliament from 1803-2021. It offers additional tools in order to make linguistic research more accessible to the readily available data and thereby functions as an extension to the Hansard website (https://hansard.parliament.uk/) which is the
Parliament’s official record. The metadata provided by the search function is speaker, date, and debate title.

Due to the limitations of the scope of this study, only data from the year 2021 was retrieved. The first step of data collection entailed determining which queries to search for in the corpus and downloading the hits to excel. Since 1989, UNESCO have published several versions of *Guidelines on non-sexist language* (UNESCO 1989) which were recommended for institutions such as parliaments in order to reform sexist language use. The recommendations were generated by UNESCO representatives with acknowledgements to the American Psychology Association, the National Union of Journalists, and the McGraw-Hill Book Company and their respective guidelines for gender equality. Although it has not been adopted by the British Parliament, it entails many of the specific terms that fall within androcentric language. Therefore, the queries are provided by the latest version of these guidelines (UNESCO 2019), and are listed under the sections ‘false generics’, ‘man-compounds’, and ‘occupational titles’. The queries were designed as they are presented in the table. Additionally, their plural, female, and gender-neutral equivalent(s) (where relevant) were retrieved as a comparative element for the analysis. Unsurprisingly, not all terms were used in the House of Commons in 2021, and all items with less than 5 hits were excluded from the study. Table 1 presents all terms (with more than 5 hits) that were found in the dataset before their semantic classifications, along with their gender-neutral equivalents as displayed in UNESCO (2019). A noteworthy limitation to the list is that it does not account for lexical variations dependent on English variety (consider e.g., *cop/constable*).

Additionally, the noun *man* was found to occasionally appear in the form of a verb construction (as is detailed in section 4.3.3) which was not omitted from the analysis as it could provide further insight into the use of the term.
Table 1. All androcentric generic noun queries found in the dataset appearing in order from most frequent to least frequent.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Androcentric (singular)</th>
<th>Androcentric (plural)</th>
<th>Alternatives (as presented in UNESCO 2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>Men</td>
<td>Person(s); Human(s); Individual(s); Human race/beings/species; People(s); Humanity; Women and men or Men and women; Humankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chairman</td>
<td>Chairmen</td>
<td>Chair, Head, Convener, Chairperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fisherman</td>
<td>Fishermen</td>
<td>Fisher; (Fisherwoman and Fisherman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spokesman</td>
<td>Spokesmen</td>
<td>Spokesperson</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Businessman</td>
<td>Businessmen</td>
<td>Businessperson (Businessman and Businesswoman is appropriate if gender is relevant in the context and if used gender-fairly – i.e. an equal number of times for each expression in the text).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policeman</td>
<td>Policemen</td>
<td>Police officer (Policeman or Policewoman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manpower</td>
<td></td>
<td>Human resources, Labour force, Workforce, Personnel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mankind</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>Person(s); Human(s); Individual(s); Human race/beings/species; People(s); Humanity; Women and men or Men and women; Humankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sportsman</td>
<td>Sportsmen</td>
<td>Athlete; Sports enthusiast; (Sportsman or Sportswoman)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middleman</td>
<td>Middlemen</td>
<td>Go-between; Intermediary; Facilitator</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.2 Manual classification

Since many of the queries are not always used asymmetrically, some needed semantic classification. Therefore, the second step entailed manual classification of the relevant terms. The gender-neutral term *chair* was classified as ‘person’ or ‘other’ in order to prune the irrelevant hits. All references to the ‘chair’ as title were classified as ‘person’, but there was a line with potential ambiguity that recurred in several debates (1): 1. ‘Before I ask the Clerk to read the title of the Bill, I should explain that although the Chair of the Committee would normally sit in the Clerk’s chair during a Committee stage, I will remain in the Speaker’s chair while we still have the screens around the Table’ (Eleanor Laing, 20/09/21). This example contains three separate hits, the first of which is classified as ‘person’, because this refers to the titleholder as opposed to the object, and the second and third as ‘other’, because whilst the titleholders in question would have claim to the chairs, the speaker is referring to the chairs as objects.
All androcentric terms were classified into the categories ‘asymmetrical’ or ‘other’. Features are asymmetrical when the term is of masculine gender (androcentric) and refers to something with female or unspecified gender. The following is an example of *man* classified as ‘asymmetrical’ (2): 2. ‘I stood in stunned amazement at the extraordinary example of *man*’s inhumanity to *man*’ (Andrew Mitchell, 12/16/21). In this example, the speaker is referring to the Srebrenica massacre, i.e., people of unspecified gender. Contrastively, when *man* refers to a man in particular, it was classified as ‘other’ (3): 3. ‘He was a *man* of absolute, firm principle, enormous charm and great humour’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg. (09/09/21).

In cases where the context provided by the concordance line and metadata was not enough to decipher the gender of the referent, the Hansard website was utilised to access the full debate. The concordance lines include around 20 words, see for instance (4): 4. ‘the Chamber at the beginning of the debate, but the **Chairman** of Ways and Means made it very clear that, in’ (Rosie Winterton, (30/11/21). In some instances, however, the full debate in text was not enough due to the rules and courtesies of the Chamber which dictates that only the Speaker can address MPs by name, and therefore who is e.g., chair or spokesperson was never verbally specified. In these cases where the referent’s gender could not be deciphered, the line was left unclassified. Out of the total 2717 concordance lines that were classified (the gender-neutral terms excluded), 47 lines were left unclassified (1.7%). This decision was made in line with the qualitative nature of this project, as no claims are made based on frequency. Fig. 2 shows the distribution of asymmetrical uses compared to other uses by raw frequency, and fig. 3 shows the same data in percentages. Since the dataset is not a sample, but rather constitutes all hits available across the year 2021 and therefore the whole population, no significance testing has been carried out.
Figure 2. The distributions of asymmetrical items and other/unclassified items listed from highest total number of hits to lowest total number of hits.

Figure 3. The distributions of asymmetrical items and other/unclassified items in percentages listed from highest to lowest discrepancy.
4.3 Method of analysis

As discussed in section 3, this project used corpus methods as a means of data collection and (feminist) CDA\(^5\) as a method of analysis. In order to be able to analyse the large number of concordance lines with asymmetrical items using the theoretical framework of (feminist) CDA, another round of classifications, or rather categorisations, was carried out which provided an overview of the data. As opposed to the first round of classifications whose purpose was to prune irrelevant hits, this second round was done in order to structure the subsequent and final step of the analysis. Rather than approaching the asymmetrical items searching for pre-determined themes to observe, each concordance line was inspected to identify the discursive features present. Therefore, for the purpose of finding recurring patterns across the concordance lines that can guide the CDA in a structured way, this third step of the analysis entailed identifying and labelling the observed recurring linguistic construction types and topics. Each category of androcentric generic noun\(^6\) – false generics (*man/men, mankind*), man-compounds (*manpower*) and occupational titles (*chairman/chairmen, fisherman/fishermen, spokesman/spokesmen, businessman/businessmen, policeman/policemen, sportsman/sportsmen, *middleman/middlemen*) – was assigned its own set of categories (see table 2) which were determined by the researcher as the concordance lines were observed. Each category of androcentric generic noun required its own set of categories since they have different functions, as will become evident by the examples below. All queries were assigned categories of linguistic construction types, and some, where relevant, were assigned topical categories (see table 2).

\[
\begin{array}{lll}
\text{Queries} & \text{Linguistic construction types} & \text{Topic} \\
\text{Man-compounds} & \text{Generic} & \text{Military, maritime industries, healthcare, building industry, crisis} \\
\text{Occupational titles} & \text{Unspecified referent, gendered referent} & \text{N/A} \\
\end{array}
\]

\(^5\) I refrain from calling it FCDA because of its binary tendencies, but the theoretical ideology and framework of this project remains feminist.

\(^6\) For the sake of consistency, I use the labels from UNESCO’s (2019) guidelines.
4.3.1 Man-compounds

The man-compounds are all used in the same generic type of linguistic constructions, the term *manpower* representing workforce of unspecified gender (5): 5. ‘they should be seen as enablers rather than as replacing *manpower*. We cannot replace boots on the ground.’ (Tobias Ellwood 24/06/21). Additionally, whilst *manpower* is the only man-compound from the UNESCO (2019) list, others including *man-made, money man, one-man*, and *man trap* were found in the dataset. They were retrieved under the query *man* but were classified as a generic use of man-compound.

Particular recurring topics could be identified in this round of classifications in preparation for the CDA. If the topic could be identified by the concordance line alone, it was assigned the relevant category. The following is an example assigned the topic *military* (6): 6. ‘…are of huge concern is the availability of trained military *manpower*.’ (Jim Shannon 24/06/21). Furthermore, a recurring topic among *man-made* was *crisis*, which involved themes such as climate change, famine and environmental disasters. The following concordance line exemplifies the topic *crisis* (7): 7. ‘to the Tigray region of Ethiopia, as a potentially catastrophic *man-made* famine is unfolding.’ (Sarah Champion 15/06/21). The category *building industry* was assigned to instances of *man-made* that referred to any kind of material structure built by human beings, such as (8), 8. ‘…its banks or a storm surge; the mine workings are *man-made*.’ (Stephen Kinnock 08/03/21). A number of concordance lines were left without a topical category as no relevant topic could be identified from the concordance line alone. If needed at a later stage in the analysis, the full debates in question were consulted to assign a relevant topic.

4.3.2 Occupational titles

In the case of occupational titles, the types of linguistic construction concern the gender of the referent. In other words, the categories are used to distinguish between when the referent in question is known and when the referent in question is hypothetical or of unknown gender. In cases where the referent is a specific individual it is always a woman since the dataset is now limited to asymmetrical items. For instance (9), 9. ‘…Natalie Ceeney, *chairman* of the
Access to Cash Review, has warned…’ (Marion Fellows 21/01/21), is an example of *chairman* being used asymmetrically to refer to a woman. In contrast, the following is an example of a referent of unknown gender (10), 10. ‘Monday on a motion relating to the appointment of the *chairman* of the Electoral Commission…’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg 18/03/21). Here, topical classifications are not applicable as topics could not be identified by the concordance lines alone.

### 4.3.3 False generics

The false generics is the category with most diverse types of linguistic constructions. The category *quotations* is quite straightforward – it refers to when the androcentric generic noun occurs as part of a quote. However, since the fact that the phrase is being quoted is not informative in terms of content or context, recurring topics were classified. The recurring topics observed were *violence, religion, workforce, and military*. The following example (11) is a quote assigned the topic *violence*, 11. ‘It reminds me of another Burns quote: “Man’s inhumanity to man Makes countless thousands mourn!”’ (Owen Thompson 25/01/21).

Furthermore, *conventional expressions* were another recurring type of linguistic construction, which includes anything along the lines of expressions, sayings, metaphors and so forth. An example of a *conventional expression* assigned the topic *religion* is the following (12), 12. ‘is the basis on which plans are being made, but man proposes and God disposes’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg 08/07/21). Most *conventional expressions* were left without an assigned topic as no recurring patterns of topics were found, see e.g. (13), 13. ‘best of both worlds; we are essentially in a commercial no-man’s land.’ (Ian Paisley Jnr 05/07/21). Moreover, *verb constructions* refer to instances of the infinitive verb *to man*. These concordance lines occurred during the topic of, either *military* (14.), 14. ‘track to deliver the squadrons required as planned and to man our aircraft carriers’ (Ben Wallace 22/03/21), or *workforce* (15), 15. ‘come in for two or three days a week to man the phones, take bookings and research options.’ (Sarah Olney 19/10/21).

Finally, to distinguish between when androcentric generic nouns referred to human beings in general and when they referred to professions stereotypically associated with men, the linguistic construction types *generic* and *stereotype* were used. Here is an example of a *generic* use of *man* also assigned the topic *violence* (16), 16. ‘…No words can really describe the evil perpetrated by man upon their fellow man in a deliberate act of extermination’ (Richard Holden 28/01/21). In contrast, an example of a concordance line where the referents have been assigned a gender based on stereotypical assumptions, in the
topical category workforce (17), 17. ‘like to thank this group of people – by the volunteer lifeboat men working for the Royal National Lifeboat Institution’ (Damian Collins 20/07/21).

4.3.4 Metadata, context, and CDA
The fourth and final step is the critical discourse analysis itself. The analysis is guided by Fairclough’s three-dimensional conception of discourse as it aligns with the aims of this study. In this model, ‘discourse, and any specific instance of discursive practice, is seen as simultaneously (i) a language text, spoken or written, (ii) discourse practice (text production and text interpretation), (iii) sociocultural practice’ (Fairclough 2010: 132). Here, the first dimension regards the immediate situation, which is the interaction between MPs. The analysis of the first dimension occurs at word-level, i.e., lexical choices which reveal underlying attitudes and biases. The second dimension regards the discourse in its institutional discursive context. This entails considering how it is produced, distributed and consumed which transpires in the form of debate, within the constraints of the rules of conduct, under constant negotiation of the hierarchical relations in the House, and for public consumption. As such, the androcentric lexical choices are interpreted in their institutional discursive context. The third dimension regards the societal level and is concerned with how the androcentric discourse is part of a wider sociocultural practice which dialectically influences lexical choices and discourse practices that manifest as androcentrism and gender inequality in Britain.

Figure 4. Based on Fairclough’s three-dimensional box model of discourse, this figure is a visualisation of the layers of the discursive events in this analysis.

Along with the dataset, the corpus and the Hansard Website provide metadata and context containing aspects of power dynamics between speakers. This is integral to the analysis as it explains, rather than just describes, the discourse based on social structures and
properties of social interaction which Fairclough (2010), Van Dijk (2011) and Wodak (2015) describe as key aspects of CDA. This includes gender of the speaker and referent, party affiliation, seniority in both age and rank, position in debate/committee which provide clues as to what purpose the androcentric generic noun serves. Also important to the context is the topic of the debate and the rules of conduct discussed in section 2.3 as they guide the lexical choices in many cases. In this fourth and final step of the analysis, the patterns identified in previous steps are exemplified and contextualised, making the dialectical process of internalising and externalising implicit male bias further visible.

5 Analysis

This section contains the critical discourse analysis of the asymmetrical androcentric generic nouns. Each section is divided into subsections that correspond with patterns found in the second round of classifications. The first section analyses occupational titles, which is followed by man-compounds, and lastly, false generics.

5.1 Occupational titles

Prefacing the analysis of each occupational title is a figure demonstrating the distribution of the gender-neutral (provided by UNESCO 2019), masculine, and feminine forms of the query. Although the gender-neutral and feminine forms are not strictly part of the analysis, they help to provide an overarching perspective of how the terms are actually used. To that end, depending on which form has the most hits, the singular or plural form of the query constitutes the figure’s data as it indicates how the query tends to be used. Additionally, this comparative element aims to avoid giving the impression that the androcentric terms constitute the majority.

5.1.1 ‘Thank you, Madam Chairman.’

The position of Chair is frequently mentioned in the House of Commons as the position is an important part of the Chamber’s procedures (see section 2.3). In 2021, the gender-neutral chair is used most frequently, the masculine chairman much less frequently and the feminine chairwoman the least frequently (see fig. 4).
Out of the total 469 hits of *chairman*, 87 (18.6%) were asymmetrical and 17 (3.6%) remain unclassified because the gender of the referent could not be found. 28 out of the 86 asymmetrical uses referred to a referent of unknown gender and the remaining 58 referred to women.

A recurring referent was the Chairman of Ways and Means, Eleanor Laing (Conservative), who was mentioned by her title 20 times. The Chairman of Ways and Means is always referred to by the title ‘Chairman’ as a formality as opposed to other Chairs, and thereby MPs are constrained by the rules of parliamentary language. In cases where the Speaker is absent, as principal Deputy Speaker, the Chairman of Ways and Means takes the role and authority of the Speaker. Therefore, when the position of Chairman of Ways and Means is occupied by a woman, the title is asymmetrical. As she initiates a sitting in the Speaker’s Chair, she says (18):

18. I should explain that I am resuming our former practice of chairing the Committee at the Table now that the House is almost back to normal after the covid restrictions. During the Committee stage Members should still, of course, address the occupant of the Chair by name, not as Madam Deputy Speaker. “Madam Chairman” or – it says here – “Chair” are also acceptable. [Interruption.] The right hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) says, from a sedentary position, that I am not a Chair but a Madam Chairman, and he is absolutely correct. (Eleanor Laing 18/11/21).
Even though she reads that ‘Chair’ is an acceptable title, it seems that in her case it is not instilled with the same authority or status as Madam Chairman. Bob Stewart, who is also a Conservative MP, is evidently under the same impression as he interrupts her to say so. Not only do they differentiate between chair and chairman, but they also emphasise the title ‘Madam’ which, since she is a woman, highlights the gendered asymmetry. Were the Chairman of Ways and Means a man (as they all have been until Eleanor Laing), no asymmetry would be apparent as he would be ‘Mister Chairman’ or ‘Sir Chairman’. The form of address would still, however, be androcentric since it insinuates that the position is for a man to occupy. Eleanor Laing and Bob Stewart imply that ‘Madam Chair’ is not valued at the same level of power as ‘Madam Chairman’ is, even though the text she is reading states it should be. This means that it likely has more to do with the hegemony of gender than the hierarchy of the House. In nine other instances of chairman over several debates she clarifies how she should be addressed in the Chair, and many more can be observed in her uses of chair.

It is worth noting that Laing’s use of chairman is far from exclusive as she refers to both men and women as ‘Chair’, too – in fact, she uses chair (96 items) much more frequently than chairman (10 items). Therefore, it raises the question of for whom the term chairman is reserved. Interestingly, with the exception of Caroline Nokes (Conservative) (19), 19. ‘…We now go to the Chairman of the Women and Equalities Committee, Caroline Nokes.’ (Eleanor Laing 11/03/21), she uses chairman only in reference to herself. This example is particularly ironic since the referent is the Chair of the Women and Equalities Committee but is being addressed in an androcentric way. Given what the previous line has suggested about the authority and status embedded in the term chairman, it can be reasonably assumed that Eleanor Laing addresses Caroline Nokes (Conservative) by ‘Chairman’ as a show of respect, and potentially an attempt to induce and attach a level of authority and status to the referent in the eyes of others. Inadvertently, using this form of address for this purpose maintains the gendered power imbalance because the part of the word chairman that gives it its power is -man. Caroline Nokes, in contrast, is a frequent user of the word chair and was not found to use any androcentric generic nouns in any of the debates in 2021.

Another MP who stands out in this dataset is Jacob Rees-Mogg (Conservative). He frequently uses chairman both in reference to women and Chairs of unknown gender. In 2021, Jacob Rees-Mogg held the position of Leader of the House of Commons who acts as the government’s representative part of the Privy Council. Publicly recognised by his distinctive speech style which sounds as if from a different time, Jacob Rees-Mogg is...
associated with tradition and his observed use of *chairman* is therefore unsurprising. Out of his 22 asymmetrical uses of *chairman*, 8 are in reference to women and 14 are to referents of unknown gender. Consider for example the following (20):

20. In terms of how it reports to this House, it is expected that it would make a report after every plenary session and that the **chairman** would then be able to report to this House in the way that Select Committee **Chairmen** do by asking the Backbench Business Committee for a time on a Thursday to make a report or, indeed, to ask for a debate. (Jacob Rees-Mogg 06/12/21).

In this line, Rees-Mogg is answering a question regarding the operation of the Parliamentary Partnership Assembly (PPA). He is speaking of a future hypothetical scenario and has assigned the role of Chair masculine gender, which is a typical representation of his generic use of *chairman*. Additionally, he assigns all Select Committee Chairs masculine gender by using *chairmen*, further demonstrating the bias he carries with his language use. The following line is another typical example of his asymmetrical use of the term (21):

21. The government always like to see Committees set up in a timely fashion and will use their best offices, after the Queen’s Speech, to see what they can ensure that a **Chairman**, whoever that may be, is back in post as soon as is reasonably practicable. (Jacob Rees-Mogg 15/04/21).

This example demonstrates that even instances in which he is conscious of the fact that he could be referring to a woman just as well as a man, as he says, ‘whoever that may be’, he (sometimes) chooses the term *chairman*. Almost unexpectedly, in none of his uses of *chairman* or *chair* does he assign the referent a male pronoun, as Mark Pawsey (Conservative) does in the following line (22): 22. ‘The **chairman** must be free to set his own agenda and priorities.’ (Mark Pawsey 23/03/21). Instead, he used the generic singular *their* in the following line (23), 23. ‘It could not be done in the way that a **Chairman** of a Select Committee does their job and has a mandate from the House of Commons’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg 17/06/21), which is certainly not to be expected from somebody with his speech style. This gender-neutral pronoun indicates that Rees-Mogg did not, in fact, have a man in mind, but rather used *chairman* asymmetrically as a gender-neutral term.

In contrast with the previous discussion of Eleanor Laing’s use of *chairman*, it appears that Jacob Rees-Mogg does not necessarily use the term with such intention. These examples of his uses of *chairman* give the impression that he is rather oblivious as to the gendered element the choice of term infers, which corresponds with the linguistic practice
where male forms subsume women that has been reformed in parliamentary language. Regardless of his political views or career goals, the concordances suggest that his bias has less to do with attempting to induce a sense of power or authority and more to do with an underlying bias coming from the normalisation of men in the role of the Chair. For Rees-Mogg, this has manifested either, as indicated by example 23, as an understanding of the term to be inclusive of women, or, as an expectation that the role will be filled by a man. He thereby exemplifies what Lazar (2013: 217) describes when she suggests that even though individuals are often agents of oppression, asymmetrical gender relations cannot always be attributed to the intentions of individuals.

Eleanor Laing and Jacob Rees-Mogg are both highly ranked as Chairman of Ways and Means and Leader of the House of Commons and appear frequently in the dataset as they are often present in debates. There are, of course, many less frequent users of chairman, both women and men across a wide variety of debate topics in the dataset. Only Conservatives use chairman for a referent of unknown gender in 2021. A typical such use of the term is in reference to a hypothetical and future scenario, see for instance (24):

24. The Committee was very attracted to the idea of a chairman and panel approach, recognising that some of the issues will be considered by the inquiry are broad ranging so it would be right for the chairman to have access to appropriate expertise in various areas. (Jackie Doyle-Price 22/07/21)

Jackie Doyle-Price (Conservative) was discussing a motion regarding a public inquiry into the government’s response to Covid-19 and was, in this line, presenting the Committee’s discussion of how that would be carried out. In a completely unrelated topic of debate, namely on the authorisation of criminal conduct, Julian Lewis (Conservative) used it for a hypothetical scenario (25), 25. ‘In support of my right hon. Friend, it will come as no surprise that I would simply say that, whether one trusts this expert or that expert, or this or that Committee Chairman, that is what is known in philosophical terms as the appeal to authority’ (Julian Lewis (27/01/21). It appears that this type of lexical choice is similar to Jacob Rees-Mogg’s, not deliberate but rather manifestations of internalised bias – whether that is an expectation for a man to fill the position or if the word subsumes women as well. A concordance line that stands out among these hypotheticals is (26), 26. ‘There is nothing wrong with saying, “You could be directors, CEOs or perhaps even the chairman of an international bank.” They were amazed.’ (Sally-Ann Hart 19/09/21). In this debate, Sally-Ann Hart is arguing in support of an Education Bill regarding career guidance in schools and
she tells a story of school children from her constituency who were taken to London and for the first time got to see tall buildings with big, important rooms where big, important decisions are made. They saw the low-status workers in the building, such as cleaners, security guards, and receptionists which were jobs they said they could imagine having in the future – to which they were told that if they work hard, they could be directors, CEOs or chairman of an international bank. Hart gave no indication as to the demographics of these children but seemingly attempted to illustrate a pitiful state by saying that they have never seen tall buildings before, had only been considering low-status jobs and had never been told that they could ‘dream big’. The fact that she chose to say chairman as the antithesis of those traits speaks to the internalised bias that associates high-status jobs with men, which she passes on to the children listening.

Furthermore, when it comes to female referents (other than Eleanor Laing), all cases constitute the linguistic practice where the lexically male term chairman subsumes female chairs. The following is a typical example of this (27). 27. ‘It is a pleasure to follow the very good speech from the Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for Rotherham (Sarah Champion) …’ (Theresa May 30/06/21). In addition, a few interesting anomalies can be observed. Suzanne Webb (Conservative), Sheryll Murray (Conservative), and Rosie Winterton (Labour) refer to themselves as ‘Chairman’. ‘Madam Chairman’ appears to be reserved for the Chairman of Ways and Means only as it only occurs in reference to Eleanor Laing in the dataset. Not even Rosie Winterton as the First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means uses ‘Madam Chairman’. But unlike Eleanor Laing, there is not much to indicate that Suzanne Webb uses the term chairman with a particular purpose in mind (28), 28. ‘I speak as the chairman of the all-party group on 22q11 syndrome, which is a genetic disorder best described as the most common syndrome not heard of unless you have it, with many children having, among other things, learning difficulties’ (Suzanne Webb 13/05/21). Neither does Suzanne Webb (29), 29. ‘As chairman of the all-party group on cats, may I ask my right hon. Friend whether we can have a debate in Government time to look into the encouragement of pet-friendly tenancies?’ (Sheryll Murray 18/03/21). Rosie Winterton’s case is slightly different as she is occupying the Speaker’s Chair (30):

30. I should explain that although the Chair of the Committee would normally sit in the Clerk’s chair during Committee, in these exceptional circumstances, in order to comply with social distancing requirements, I will remain in the Speaker’s Chair. However, I will be carrying out the role not of Deputy Speaker, but of Chairman of the Committee. We should be addressed as Chairs of the Committee, rather than Deputy Speakers. (Rosie Winterton 11/02/21).
Interestingly, although she clarifies that she is ‘Chairman of the Committee’ as opposed to Deputy Speaker, she uses ‘Chair(s) of the Committee’ in the previous and the next sentence. Thereby, it seems that she uses chair and chairman interchangeably. There is an apparent contrast between Winterton’s and Laing’s use of the term chairman, as Winterton does not mark the difference in authority between chair and chairman in the way that Laing does when she says (18), ‘…I am not a Chair but a Madam Chairman…’ (Eleanor Laing 18/11/21). What can be deduced from these instances of women using chairman asymmetrically is that the internalisation of male bias is not just something that happens to men but is applicable regardless of gender.

5.1.2 Spokesman, businessman, policeman, sportsman, and middleman

Similar to the position of Chair, spokespersons are often mentioned in the House because they are also an important part of the Chamber’s proceedings. In particular, they refer to the Opposition spokespersons and different party spokespersons. Fig. 5 demonstrates the distribution of the different gendered variants in 2021.

![Figure 5. The total number of hits of spokesperson, spokesman, and spokeswoman in 2021 in the House of Commons.]

Out of the 23 hits of asymmetrical uses of spokesman/spokesmen, 8 refer to people of unknown gender and 15 to female referents. Both women and men use the term, commonly as ‘the Opposition spokesman’, ‘the SNP spokesman’, and ‘the shadow spokesman’. With the exception of one unknown referent, all singular spokesman refer to a female individual, e.g. (31). 31. ‘I listened to the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry), and was quite alarmed by what she said.’ (Edward Leigh
This debate concerns English Votes for English Laws (EVEL), a set of procedures in place from October 2015 until it was suspended in April 2020 and abolished following this debate in July 2021. In short, EVEL was implemented to let matters which concerned England and not Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland, be voted on by MP’s for English constituencies only. Debbonaire is one of the MPs against EVEL and therefore argues for equality between the four countries of the UK in legislation processes. Even though Debbonaire thanks Rees-Mogg because she is the spokesperson for the Opposition party, he was referring to the position itself rather than the person occupying it. Additionally, although the equality discussed in this debate is not directly about gender, the irony of this asymmetrical use of spokesman on the topic of equality does not go unnoticed. It is difficult to speak of absolute equality in a context so dependent on hierarchy and which deals with hegemonic structures as the Parliament. In terms of hierarchy in the House of Commons, the relations of all positions that Rees-Mogg mentions are not equal, and with reason. In this case, equality is more about demographics than status – whose representatives should be voting on which issues – and gender is a demographic that is not equally represented. Therefore, the (likely unconscious) choice of the masculine spokesman becomes marked in a discussion on equality.

The other instances with referents of unknown gender are mostly in the form of plural spokesmen, with the exception (33):

33. There has been so little contextualisation of the information. I saw not one Government spokesman, be it a Minister or a health adviser, say that the median age of covid death was 83. Why not? Because, as we know perfectly well, the Government feared a lack of compliance. (Bob Seely 22/04/21).

The topic of this debate is transparency and accountability of the Government in the ongoing pandemic, and Bob Seely (Conservative) notes that representatives of the Government have
been contributing to the spread of misinformation by releasing unclear information that can be easily misinterpreted or manipulated by the public. It becomes clear that Seely uses the term *spokesman* here to infer that no Government representative disclosed a piece of contextualising information, and his asymmetrical lexical choice reveals his male bias. Similarly, James Cartlidge (Conservative) exemplifies this kind of oversight (34), 34, ‘Does my right hon. Friend agree that if we are to look at the ministerial code, we should also look at the rules governing shadow spokesmen?’ (James Cartlidge 26/02/21). An interesting instance is Penny Mordaunt’s discussion on the wording of a Bill regarding maternity leave (35), 35, ‘It will make an important and long overdue change to existing law by enabling Ministers and Opposition *spokesmen* for the first time to take paid maternity leave from their job for an extended period.’ (Penny Mordaunt 01/03/21). A number of noteworthy things are happening here, first, the masculine *spokesman* is an unconventional choice in a discussion on maternity leave – particularly one that addresses supposed problems with the original wording of the Bill. The amendments she presents replaces the original term *persons* – which was implemented for the sake of gender-neutral drafting – to the terms *mothers* and *expecting mothers*. Although in this passage she does not motivate the reasons for this change, it can be reasonably assumed that the wording was changed to pertain to women only. Despite this, she explains that they intend to be inclusive towards potential transmen that this might affect in the future, and that ‘their lordships who spoke in favour of these amendments also spoke about their understanding of and commitment to LGBT rights’ (ibid), which makes the choice of *spokesman* stranger still. To conclude, although one is in legislature and another spoken debate, to Mordaunt it seems more problematic to use the gender-neutral term *person* than the androcentric term *spokesman* in reference to the person taking maternity leave.

When it comes to *businessman/businessmen*, there are no female referents as all items are referents with unknown gender in hypothetical scenarios. Fig. 6 presents the distribution of *businessperson, businessman*, and *businesswoman* in 2021.
The fact that none of the asymmetrical occurrences of *businessman/businessmen* refer to a known referent suggests that the term tends to be used to signify a particular demographic. See for example (36), 36. ‘When I speak to the ordinary businessman in the street – the self-employed trader, or the employer of five members of staff in a small shop…’ (Jim Shannon 14/06/21), in which the speaker assigns male gender to the generic businessperson who is specifically in a management position. Jim Shannon (DUP) is not the only one to talk about *businessmen* in this ‘ordinary’ sense (37), 37. ‘None of that actually matters at the end of the day for the ordinary consumer, the ordinary *businessman* or the ordinary member of our community who is striving for the best but sees the barriers ahead of them.’ (Gavin Robinson 22/06/21). When *businessmen* are spoken of as an example of an ‘ordinary member of our community’, the androcentric term discloses the inherent male bias by equating something gender-neutral with male gender.

A less typical concordance line is the following by Katherine Fletcher (Conservative) (38):

38. Those elected more recently, most not really of the Westminster bubble, are fiercely proud of place, passionate about their hometowns and their communities because they live there – they are their homes. We want what you want because we aren’t other, we are you – truly part of our places. We have kick-ass ladies, lovely mums, ex-Spads, lads, gents, gay and straight, *businessmen*, *servicemen*, all available in a variety of colours of melanin.’ (Katherine Fletcher 11/05/21).

This is in the context of inviting a newly elected member, Jill Mortimer (Conservative), into Parliament and is part of Fletcher’s speech following the Queen’s speech. Her speech, in
contrast to Shailesh Vara’s (Conservative) before her, has a colloquial tone and seemingly attempts to relate to ‘ordinary’ people as she states, ‘we aren’t other, we are you’. She speaks of diversity and, in this line, lists a number of demographics as representatives of ‘ordinary’ people. In contrast to previous examples, Fletcher does not use the word ‘ordinary’, instead she makes the point that there is no difference between ‘we’ and ‘you’. There is always a risk, however, and perhaps even an inevitable one, that when listing diverse demographics one is unable to be entirely inclusive. What then happens, contrary to the intended result, is the exclusion of minorities. Consider the explicitly gendered terms that she mentions, namely the female ‘kick-ass ladies’ and ‘lovely mums’ against the male ‘lads’, ‘gents’, ‘businessmen’, and ‘servicemen’. The first two male terms, ‘lads’ and ‘gents’ are generic, and the latter two, ‘businessmen’ and ‘servicemen’, are denominators of profession. The female ‘ladies’ is generic, but the adjective ‘kick-ass’ is included to add an empowering element which is not necessitated in the use of the male equivalent ‘gents’. The other female term, ‘lovely mums’, is not followed by a male equivalent. In sum, the female terms suggest that women in society are mothers whose independence needs to be explicitly noted as opposed to the generic male terms whose independence is an inherent trait, because men in society are workers.

Moreover, policeman/policemen occur in very small numbers, likely because of general efforts made in the UK to avoid the term and use gender-neutral versions instead. Below, the distribution of the different gendered terms is presented.

![Figure 7](image.png)

*Figure 7. The total number of hits of police officer, policeman, and policewoman in 2021 in the House of Commons.*

None of the singular policeman were used asymmetrically, therefore only policemen remains to be analysed. All but one asymmetrical use of policemen is in reference to the police as a
group, all used by Conservative men apart from one male Labour MP. Since there has already been an effort made through language planning strategies to replace the gendered terms for the police, it goes without saying that this use of *policemen* is biased and problematic. The lemma *police* is also frequently used in verb-form to refer to the regulation of something – which could be virtually anything. This is done in the aforementioned exception (39), 39. ‘…and have found that we are asking care homes to be the *policemen* of delivery people, plumbers and window cleaners with a possible £4,000 fixed penalty fine.’ (Craig Mackinlay 13/07/21). Ironically, care workers are predominantly women which contributes to the tendency to associate the word *nurse* with women, yet here Mackinlay (Conservative) uses a term with male lexical gender in reference to a profession stereotypically associated with women. This doubled asymmetry creates a stark contrast and therefore marks the lexical and social genders of the occupational titles, however unintentional it might initially have been.

In terms of *sportsman*, it is unsurprisingly low in numbers given its very specific topical nature which is not commonly discussed in the House of Commons. The distribution of *athlete, sportsman, and sportswoman* is displayed below.

![Figure 8. The total number of hits of athlete, sportsman, and sportswoman in 2021 in the House of Commons.](image)

The most notable aspect of the use of *sportsman*, is a palpable difference dividing the four asymmetrical uses in two. The first two hits are the following (40):

40. This is a matter for the British Olympic Association and the individual *sportsmen*. The British Olympic Association is required to operate independently of Government, and rightly so, under the regulations set down by the International Olympic Committee. This is a matter for the Olympic organisations and individual *sportsmen*. (Nigel Adams 02/03/21).
In this line, Nigel Adams (Conservative) is responding to Team Great Britain’s stance in boycotting the Olympic Games in China due to the Xinjiang conflict. When he uses *sportsmen* it is clear that he is referring to all British athletes and not just British male athletes. The androcentric history of sports and its remaining biases can be observed across countless areas such as media, education, healthcare, and general socialisation. It is therefore no surprise that athletes are stereotypically associated with men, and manifested in the word *sportsmen* in this very serious and pragmatic context. Furthermore, the other two concordance lines are different in that they are used in contexts through evaluative comments with emotions of admiration (41), 41. ‘Behind every great *sportsman* is, of course, a dedicated, loving and supportive family, and Randy’s was no exception.’ (Matt Western 13/07/21), and (42) 42. ‘One of the most celebrated *sportsmen* of his generation, Michael Jordan – arguably the greatest basketball player ever to grace the court – said: “I’ve missed more than 9,000 shots in my career.”’ (Rob Roberts 23/03/21). In the first of the two (41), Western (Labour) is calling Randy a great athlete with a ‘dedicated, loving and supportive family’ to support him. The phrasing, however, insinuates that *sportsmen* are the only athletes to which this applies, rendering female athletes’ experiences irrelevant and invisible. The second line (42) is somewhat ambiguous, as *sportsmen* could be used here in a symmetrical way – meaning that Michael Jordan is one of the most celebrated male athletes of his generation. However, when this alternative phrasing is considered in comparison to the original (42), as well as the phrase that follows with a gender-neutral noun – ‘arguably the greatest *basketball player* [my emphasis] ever to grace the court’ – it seems more likely that Michael Jordan is considered one of the most celebrated athletes of his generation, regardless of gender. Again, I reiterate in reference to both of these lines, that this underlying male bias can be attributed to the way people are socialised to understand sports as gendered.

Lastly, *middleman/middlemen* is a useful word in political debates because it applies to many contexts. In the dataset, it is used asymmetrically by only men in debates with the topics of healthcare, Covid-19, international trade, taxes, and funding. There are 8 hits of *middleman/middlemen* compared to the 11 hits of *intermediary/intermediaries*, and no female equivalent exists. Interestingly, unlike all other androcentric occupational titles in the dataset, all speakers are Labour MPs with the exception of one Conservative MP. The Conservative Marcus Fysh speaks in a debate titled Health and Social Care Levy (43):
43. All I was trying to do with the amendment was give scope for the Government to think about applying some of the funds from an element of national insurance or something related to it – that is, the levy, which clause 2 sets out – to help incentivise such pooled saving schemes. That is not necessarily insurance or private insurance with a middleman; it could be national schemes or community schemes that are properly co-operative and very low-cost. There are many modern approaches to that in the digital world, such as digital autonomous organisations, where there are no middlemen at all and people do not have to rely on a contract. (Marcus Fysh 14/09/21).

As opposed to other occupational titles, Fysh gives the impression that his audience perceives middlemen to be something negative or unwanted. All other concordance lines indicate the same, see for instance the following which implies that they are an unnecessary and avoidable cost to the Government (44):

44. The Government are starving local public health of money, although local public health would do it better for less. They are shovelling money to other mates setting up middlemen businesses to import personal protective equipment that never arrives – merely hundreds of millions of pounds in their case. (Matt Western 25/01/21).

None of the other androcentric occupational titles in the dataset – chairman, fisherman, spokesman, businessman, policeman, sportsman – and the purpose they serve are perceived as negative by the MPs. In a debate context, it is likely that most MPs are careful to be ‘politically correct’ so as to not offend a particular group of people, and therefore would likely avoid revealing any low opinions of particular professions. However, a middleman, or intermediary, is rarely really a profession and rather a function occupying part of a process, with which left-leaning politicians seemingly generally disagree. Here is another example of this (45), 45. ‘Why can the Government not use existing data and provide investment now – and cut out the middleman, saving our councils time and money in doing so? (Alex Cunningham 04/02/21). In comparison to the more pragmatic sense the word intermediary tends to be used, see e.g. (46), 46. ‘That will be done by taxing the alternative finance intermediary’s acquisition as though it were an acquisition by the investor.’ (Jesse Norman 19/04/21), it is possible that middleman/middlemen is a rhetorical choice made specifically in argumentation against them used in order to relate to the audience by compelling them to picture the intermediary as a person rather than an organisation. Undoubtedly though, because the word is middleman and not middleperson, the male bias continues through the gendered associations attached to the word. The lack of a female equivalent is, of course, indicative of the role’s androcentric history and the normative the male perspective.
5.1.3 *Fishermen and women*

Together, the singular and plural *fisherman* had the largest amount of asymmetrical hits of all androcentric generic nouns. Yet, the total number of *fisherman/fishermen* only constitutes 8% of the androcentric generic nouns with most hits, namely *man/men*. It is no surprise that such a large proportion was asymmetrical given the profession’s cultural and androcentric history in Britain (which is discussed in more detail in section 5.3.1.). Out of the 147 total hits, 122 were asymmetrical (83%). Below is the distribution of *fishers, fishermen, and fisherwomen.*

![Distribution of fishers, fishermen, and fisherwomen](image)

*Figure 9. The total number of hits of fishers, fishermen, and fisherwomen in 2021 in the House of Commons.*

Although there are no hits of *fisherwomen*, note that there was a (small) number of concordance lines reading ‘fishermen and women’ by both female and male MPs which were classified as symmetrical. The 122 asymmetrical *fisherman/fishermen* concordances were distributed across 21 debates, and often used several times by the same MPs, male and female. The fishing industry has been oft debated in the House since it has been impacted by Brexit. Such issues were often argued about even in debates that were more concerned with other aspects of the fishing industry, such as trade or safety. An exception to this common theme was the debate titled National Lost Trawlermen’s Memorial Day, which contained numerous speeches about the tragedies of life at sea and debated the implementation of such a day to commemorate the lives lost in the triple trawler tragedy. There is an overwhelming amount of emotional involvement and political engagement for the workers of the fishing industry that can be observed across the concordance lines, and many MPs highlight that they are human beings in a profession in hazardous work environments with many fatalities who tend to be taken for granted. See for instance (47):
47. I will spare some of the hon. Member’s blushes – we all like fish and chips a little bit too much. On a serious note, does he agree that we should also remember that, as Lloyd’s Register Foundation estimates, about 24,000 fishermen die around the world each year catching fish for us all to eat? (Lia Nici 13/12/21).

When referencing the workers of the fishing industry as fishermen, the audience is compelled to picture the person in question. Just as the previous discussion on middlemen deduced, the suffix -man invites the audience to picture a man. In combination with the profession’s androcentric history and culture as well as remaining male majority, it could be argued to be a reasonable generalisation – most fishers are men. Additionally, although this dataset is too limited to make a claim about the term’s general use, based on the very small number of hits of the gender-neutral fishers in comparison to the overwhelming preference for fishermen it can be reasonably assumed that fishers has not yet been normalised to be the default as fishermen is still preferred. However, when fishermen is used so comprehensively in reference to a particular demographic comprised by a vast male majority, the exceptions to the rule are completely overlooked. Especially in Parliament where the fishers’ rights and obligations are negotiated can the disregard of women and non-binary people have a detrimental impact. Since fishermen is frequently used by both men and women in the House, it is evident that women are just as oblivious as men are to the detrimental impact of the bias to the invisible women in the industry.

In contrast to most hits of occupational titles, they all refer to unknown referents. The way that the term fishermen is used is remarkably homogenous in comparison to other occupational titles. There are no apparent differences between higher and lower positions in the House’s hierarchy as compared to those that can be observed in other occupational titles, and no apparent nuances in terms of gender of speaker or referent. This lack of nuance exposes the gendered hegemony that this occupational title carries as it is more than just stereotypical associations and expectations – women are not considered a part of this industry. A sample study of UK fishing crews in 2018 found that out of 708 jobs, 701 were filled by male workers meaning that 1% of workers were female, which was a decrease from the previous year’s 2% female workers (Motova and Quintana 2019). The title itself with its bias almost acts as a hindrance to non-male people who are interested in the profession. Other factors are considered and extensively debated, the specific rights of Scottish, Welsh or other particular fishing communities, such as (48), 48. ‘In that same period, Scottish fishermen have been sold out, Scottish farmers have been betrayed, and powers to protects our regulations and standards – and even our NHS – have been
steamrollered by this Government.’ (Drew Henry 24/06/21). The hegemonic nature of the bias evident in MPs regardless of gender is signified by the proportion at which 3 of the 147 androcentric items acknowledge the existence of women in the industry, as well as the invariably masculine gendered way in which fishermen is used by MPs.

5.2 Man-compounds

5.2.1 *Manpower: healthcare, maritime industries, and the armed forces*

In comparison to the gender-neutral workforce with 731 hits, the androcentric manpower is only used 11 times in the House in 2021. It is used by men only from a variety of parties in reference to three specific topics – healthcare, maritime industries, and the armed forces. John Redwood (Conservative) is representing the healthcare category by himself using the term in two separate debates. In both debates, Redwood is referring to the healthcare and social care workforce. Interestingly, in one of them he specifically mentions nurses, which as previously mentioned are actually stereotypically associated with women, and doctors, which are stereotypically associated with men (Hellinger 2006). Thus, it appears that the word manpower subsumes women to Redwood. Although the topic maritime industries was only found in one of the 13 hits, it was given its own category due to the topic’s presence across all three types of androcentric generic nouns. In a debate on making an inquiry into the forced repatriation of Chinese seafarers (‘seamen’), Kevin Foster (Conservative) said (49), 49. ‘…back in 1946 there were some 15,000 to 20,000 Chinese seamen based in the city of Liverpool. Chinese seamen made up almost 15% of the entire manpower of the merchant fleet at that time.’ (Kevin Foster 21/07/21). In this context, it is likely that most, if not all Chinese seafarers were in fact men and the same applies to the workforce on the merchant fleet. The choice of both terms, manpower and seamen, insinuates that Foster intended for the audience to perceive the workforce on the merchant fleet as men – whether that is based on his own assumption or fact is unclear. However, it is possible that women were part of the workforce as stewardesses, laundry workers or nurses, who are made invisible due to the lexical choice of manpower.

Finally, the military category, which not unlike the fishing industry has an androcentric history and is still comprised by a vast male majority. This topic contains concordances from two debates, one of those debates constitutes all hits except one. Beginning with the exception titled Strength of the UK’s Armed Forces, Andrew Bowie (Conservative) states (50), 50. ‘They are reducing the size – the overall manpower – of the
armed forces but they are not reducing the capability.’ (Andrew Bowie 14/04/21). He uses *manpower* to specify the difference between size or number of people in the workforce, and the capability of the armed forces. Thereby, the women in the armed forces who constitute 13.8% in 2021 are unrepresented (UK Parliament 2021c). Since the armed forces are still generally thought of as a men’s sphere, despite it not necessarily being the reality anymore, using this kind of language upholds the gatekeeping of such a fundamental issue from women. An example of this is the other debate which concerns UK Defence Spending, and accounts for 7 of the 11 hits of *manpower*. Aside from the Deputy Speaker Rosie Winterton who as Deputy Speaker is politically impartial, only men spoke in this debate leaving women no voice in the matter. Making the same revelation as Bowie in his use of *manpower*, Tobias Ellwood (Conservative) who chairs the Defence Sub-Committee says (51):

51. To go back to the point about reducing our armed forces and the footprint of our *manpower*, the ability to seize and hold ground, separate warring factions, deliver humanitarian aid, assist civil authorities with tasks such as tackling covid-19, win over hearts and minds, restore law and order, respond to natural disasters and carry out countless other diverse tasks – that requires people. It requires professionals – it requires our soldiers, sailors and air personnel. (Tobias Ellwood 24/06/21).

He equates *manpower* with people, professionals, soldiers, sailors, and air personnel. It is possible that the choice of the word *people* as opposed to e.g., *men* is intentional in order to include women in such positions that are stereotypically associated with men. However, through the use of the androcentric generic noun, the gender-neutral *people* becomes equated with the masculine *manpower*. In androcentric societies, equating masculinity to gender-neutrality is a standard practice that is generally accepted because of internalised androcentrism (Bailey et al. 2019). This means that gender only becomes marked when women are considered, since femininity cannot be equated to gender-neutrality.

The other instances of *manpower* in this debate indicate towards this process, such as (52), 52. ‘Up until 2016, Army *manpower* was judged on the basis of personnel who were trained […] Another area of huge concern is the availability of trained military *manpower*.’ (Jim Shannon 24/06/21). Shannon (DUP) is concerned with the level of training soldiers have received and suggests that the size they are counting on includes soldiers with too little training which could be detrimental. Nothing but the word *manpower* in his passage suggests that gender is involved in any way, which indicates that the gendered word is used without gender in mind. This is likely because male soldiers are considered neutral, but female soldiers are considered gendered. In addition, it is also possible in a debate among
men that they are discussing the armed forces with only men in mind given their own male bias as well as the androcentric nature of the issue in a room full of men (and one female Deputy Speaker). For instance, Marcus Fysh (Conservative) is speaking about a vehicle (53), 53. ‘It can be made very cost-effectively and can deliver a very manpower-centric type of capability.’ (Marcus Fysh 24/06/21). From context it can be deduced that ‘manpower-centric type of capability’ means that the product can deliver a large number of soldiers, exemplifying a biased representation of the armed forces.

5.2.2 ‘It is a man-made crisis.’

Making the man-compound man-made gender-neutral is not a straightforward process. The terms presented by UNESCO (2019) to replace manmade are handmade, handcrafted, and manufactured. Handmade and handcrafted are generally used in reference to specific objects, usually to distinguish an object made by hand from one mass-produced in factories – which are both ‘human-made’. In this dataset, man-made is used to describe structures as built by humans and, the more abstract, crises created by humans. In terms of these two specific elements, man-made also alludes to the aspect of civilisation and the role that societies have played in creating those specific structures and crises. These elements can perhaps be more accurately described as constructed than the gender-neutral terms suggested in UNESCO (2019). Stephen Kinnock (Labour) makes a distinction between nature and humanity, and God and humankind (54), 54. ‘The blow-out was not an act of God, like a river bursting its banks or a storm surge; the mine workings are man-made. They are the responsibility of the Coal Authority and, by extension, of the UK Government.’ (Stephen Kinnock 08/03/21).

Letting man represent humankind in comparison to God is not unusual in biblical contexts. Likewise, the human/nature dichotomy is a familiar divide which Sir David Amess (Conservative) comments upon (55):

55. We are out of balance with nature and our environment. That must change. The natural world and the man-made world are closely linked, and therefore planning reforms should be legally implemented to enable nature’s recovery, strengthening protections for sites designated for nature, and increasing developer contributions to nature’s recovery. (Sir David Amess 26/05/21).

He speaks of the man-made world in a quite abstract sense, referring generally to civilisation – the rural and urban structures that have come from humankind’s advances. The industries responsible for these structures, as well as the mine workings Kinnock mentions – construction and the Government – are and have historically been professions with a male
majority. Therefore, *man-made* is not entirely inaccurate. However, this androcentric term exemplifies the normative male perspective by not acknowledging that women have been part of the process when it is in fact synonymous with ‘human-made’.

Environmental crises have also been described as *man-made*. In addition, Martin Docherty (SNP) makes the point that climate change is not the fault of all people, but in particular, a result of colonialism (56):

56. Given that indigenous communities are successful in maintaining control of their territories and traditions against the onslaught of *man-made* climate change, does the COP26 President agree that it is time for them to be treated as equal partners in decision-making processes, including the United Nations? (Martin Docherty 01/12/21).

Docherty uses *man-made* to represent colonisers in contrast with indigenous people, which further points to the word’s association to civilisation and the progression of societies but in a most negative sense. Whilst men were responsible for the genocides of indigenous peoples as women had no independence and were bound to their fathers or husbands, women are not excluded from the role of oppressor or coloniser. Since *man-made* then subsumes women, it once again neglects their existence. Another crisis debated is the conflict of the Tigray region of Ethiopia, which James Duddridge (Conservative) emphasises is a consequence of human activity (57), 57. ‘This crisis has been caused by insecurity, an ongoing lack of humanitarian access and the deliberate destruction of agricultural equipment and medical facilities. It is a *man-made* crisis.’ (James Duddridge 14/06/21). As a response, Harriett Baldwin (Conservative) asks (58), 58. ‘The Minister said that quite clearly it is a *man-made* crisis. In that light, would he consider writing to the Nobel peace prize awarding committee to ask it to revoke the peace prize it awarded to Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed?’ (Harriet Baldwin 14/06/21). In doing so, she insinuates that the crisis can be attributed to one man in particular, deliberately using the term with this man in mind. This strategy highlights the androcentric nature of the term, as had the Prime Minister been a woman, the strategy would not have worked. However, had *human-made* instead been used, the gender of the Prime Minister would not matter.
5.3 False generics

5.3.1 Verb constructions and stereotypes

A small number of hits of man appeared in the form of verb constructions, such as (59), 59.

“Now tell me, which police officers would you like me to bring in off patrol to man the desk?” (Kit Malthouse 07/09/21). Used by both women and men of the Conservative party and one female MP of the Liberal Democrats, the verb to man means to provide people or staff to a particular position that needs it. The fact that both women and men use it and that it is used to refer to jobs regardless of stereotypical association indicates that the bias is deeply situated and goes undetected by the speaker and potentially the audience too. Consider, for example, the Secretary of State for Defence Ben Wallace (Conservative) who acknowledges the women of the armed forces, but then uses the androcentric verb construction (60):

60. If we wrap ourselves in sentimentality, what we get is a betrayal of the men and women who go to fight. On other points that the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne raised, we will go beyond the 48 F-35 fighters, and we will continue to purchase them until we have decided whether we have the right numbers to continue. We are on track to deliver the squadrons as planned and to man our aircraft carriers. (Ben Wallace 22/03/21).

It is no coincidence that this verb construction along with the word manpower as well as men used synonymously with soldier are still common practices in the context of the armed forces. In the position of Secretary of State for Defence, the use of inclusive lexis matters. This debate contained both female and male speakers, as opposed to the UK Defence Spending debate discussed in section 5.2.1, which could potentially prompt the more gender inclusive language use. Yet, this concordance line demonstrates that even when the speaker has explicitly acknowledged women in this androcentric context, the underlying male bias is exposed through language use – as such, it is maintained despite attempts to rectify it. In contrast, Sarah Olney (LibDem) uses the verb construction in the context of a job stereotypically associated with women (61), 61. ‘…they highlighted that at the moment they have enough trade to pay their previously full-time employees to come in for two or three days a week to man the phones, take bookings and research options.’ (Sarah Olney 19/10/21). This further indicates how deeply rooted the bias is as it is used without a sexist intent. It is also a manifestation of the accepted gender-neutrality of the masculine, as Olney gives no indicator to the genders of the employees but still uses lexical masculine gender.
A pattern that could be identified in a large number of the plural *men* is assigning referents a gender based on stereotypical assumptions in and thereby assuming a male perspective. Corresponding with previously analysed queries, the armed forces is a typical topic in which this occurs. In the UK Defence Spending debate, Marcus Fysh (Conservative) refers to soldiers as *men* on the topic of the vehicle delivering workforce (62), 62. ‘…because it gives the pilots much more ability to focus on the mission and on supporting the *men* under their charge without having to fly the aircraft.’ (Marcus Fysh 24/06/21). Another example is from Ben Wallace (Conservative) (63), 63. ‘We all remember what happened last time. It was called the Snatch Land Rover fiasco, and many brave *men* died defending that ridiculous policy, because of his Government’s choices.’ (Ben Wallace 24/05/21). In this context there is a notable difference when using gendered words such as *manpower* or *to man* as compared to *men* because the previously mentioned reveal stereotypical assumptions on an indirect level as the gendered part of the words are a reference to men, whereas the word *men* represents the source noun itself. When Fysh refers to the ‘*men* under their charge’ (62) and when Wallace highlights that ‘many brave *men* died’ (63), women are directly omitted as if they were never there which is factually untrue.

Another male stereotype is maritime professions, including fishing, trade, and the navy. Both Karl Turner (Labour) and Lia Nici (Conservative) make the same factual error as Fysh did where women’s involvement is neglected, as shown in Nici’s line (64):

64. On the point about the first and second world wars, however, does he agree that our minesweeping, our anti-submarine work, our convoy work and our armed trawling work has not been very well publicised, and that the 66,000 *men* around the UK who joined the Royal Naval Patrol Service helped to save the UK and to keep it fed, since fish was the only food that was not rationed at the time? (Lia Nici 13/12/21).

According to the Association of WRENS ([https://wrens.org.uk/about-us/history/](https://wrens.org.uk/about-us/history/)), women started joining the Royal Naval Services in 1914 because there weren’t enough men in the workforce given their high mortality rate, and have remained part of the workforce ever since. Nici’s choice of words renders women’s involvement invisible when it was actually crucial in a time of such high mortality and perpetuates the no longer accurate perception of the navy’s workforce as entirely male. In the same debate on the National Lost Trawlermen’s Memorial Day, Turner takes part in the same process (65), 65. ‘I think I am right in saying that it was Walter Scott who wrote, over two centuries ago: “It’s not fish you’re buying, it’s *men*’s lives.” Sadly, that was very true.’ (Karl Turner 13/12/21). Thus, even though there was
a male majority, this pattern of female invisibility contributes to the larger issue of androcentrism that portrays a misrepresentation of how gender is distributed across professions and constrains what choices are available to non-male people.

Men at sea and in the armed forces are not the only stereotypes that can be observed in the dataset. Other androcentric generalisations occur, such as (66), 66. ‘I have some sympathy with the comment that a man cannot have two paymasters.’ (Nigel Mills 17/11/21). Mills (Conservative) says this on the topic of MPs’ salaries, implying that having a paymaster (which is also androcentric) is only applicable for men even though he is, of course, aware that there are female MPs. Another example is Barry Gardiner’s (Labour) androcentric question (67), 67. ‘The hon. Member for Blackpool South (Scott Benton) and others have argued about money. What does it profit a man if he maximises the income to the Exchequer but loses his granddaughter’s future?’ (Barry Gardiner 21/10/21). This question is problematic because the question is relevant regardless of the person’s gender, and by automatically assuming a male perspective Gardiner perpetuates the outdated stereotype of man as breadwinner and woman as homemaker. That is not to say that this stereotype is never true, however, it is a damaging expectation for women who want something else. Similarly, Ian Lavery (Labour) and Jack Dromey (Labour) contribute to this asymmetry as well on the subject of life expectancy in a debate about income tax. They bring up statistics of life expectancy of men in different regions (68), 68. ‘A man who gets on a train at New Street and gets off at Gravelly Hill or Erdington is likely to live seven years fewer than he would if he continued his journey to Four Oaks in leafy Sutton Cornfield.’ (Jack Dromey 01/11/21). This is not inherently an asymmetrical use of man, but it is androcentric in that only men’s life expectancy is considered when it is a question of all people in the area. If the statistics he refers to neglects to report women’s life expectancy, it is the report which is androcentric pointing to a larger problem. If not, a more accurate view on the subject, and less problematic, would display the life expectancy of people in the area – which does not need to be women and men as separate, but their statistics as one combined category. It is also possible that the data he refers to is the combined statistics of women and men, and if so, Dromey has presented it with an androcentric example. This imbalanced representation exemplifies the presence of androcentrism as a discursive practice in other areas, such as statistics. If decisions in authoritative institutions such as the Parliament are made based on androcentric statistics, it is evident that linguistic androcentrism is not isolated but rather one of many manifestations of androcentrism.
5.3.2 Conventional expressions: men in grey suits

Conventional expressions are signified by their recognition factor in a large community, often in one shared language. Many of these expressions are manifestations of and reflect the underlying androcentric perspective that has been permeated through history, as they originate from a time before this was recognised as a problem. Others are more recent and thereby demonstrate how this bias is prevalent despite being recognised as a problem. In this dataset, there are a few that appear more than once. For instance, Jane Stevenson (Conservative) uses a variation of the ‘teach a man to fish’ proverb (69), 69. ‘Without resorting to the school assembly stalwart of giving a man a fish or a fishing rod, the Government’s investment in Wolverhampton has given our city a clear plan to a better economic future.’ Jane Stevenson 09/03/21), and so does Sam Tarry (Labour) (70), 70. ‘This is not about giving a man a fish to feed himself but about giving him a net to provide for himself.’ (Sam Tarry 13/07/21). The origin of this proverb is widely contested, and it is worth noting that androcentrism is not universal so it might not necessarily come from an androcentric background. However, when such a proverb is used in an androcentric society in an androcentric institution it takes part in the wider problem because regardless of etymology or background, it is produced, received and perceived in the current androcentric setting.

Another conventional expression used twice by Philip Hollobone (Conservative) is ‘beyond the wit of man’ (71), 71. ‘Surely it is not beyond the wit of man for us to have joint naval patrols with the French, so that if migrants are intercepted at sea they are landed not at Dover, but back in France?’ (Philip Hollobone 22/11/21). It is impossible to tell from this passage whether man here refers to men only or if man subsumes women and refers to humankind – regardless of which, it is androcentric. When used in this construction, wit refers to notions of sense, wisdom, and rationale which have been stereotypically associated with men as opposed to notions of emotion and hysteria as stereotypically associated with women. This concept is exemplified in the following line (72), 72. ‘Wiser men than he would have put everything on hold, but not Somerset’s leader.’ (Ian Liddell-Grainger 23/02/21). This conventional expression implies that women are not considered relevant in that context, neither wise nor a leader. In addition, there is the biblical connection to the three wise men to consider and other potential cultural associations that strengthen the impact of these expressions in terms of symbolic recognition. If they were made gender-neutral, the expressions might not be recognised as conventional which would disable their rhetorical effect. This represents another problem that indicates the overarching influence of androcentrism in culture and discursive practice and explains why it is not easily rectified.
Furthermore, this problem can also be observed in the conventional expression ‘no-man’s land’ which is used in the dataset in its literal sense meaning unclaimed territory. In a debate of topical questions where the Secretary of State for Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Affairs and First Secretary of State Dominic Raab answered MPs’ questions regarding various conflicts and crises around the world, Robert Halfon (Conservative) says (73), 73. ‘A Barnett-style revenue sharing formula and progress to resolve the status of the disputed territories are vital, as ISIL is regrouping in the no man’s land between Kurdistan and Iraq’ (Robert Halfon 19/01/21). Concerned with the unclear state of Northern Ireland’s agriculture in Brexit negotiations, Ian Paisley Jnr (DUP) argues that (74), 74. ‘We do not in Northern Ireland have the best of both worlds; we are essentially in a commercial no-man’s land.’ (Ian Paisley Jnr 15/07/21). This saying insinuates that once the land has been claimed, it is a man’s land. Thus, Paisley Jnr implies that the institutions he mentions earlier in the debate, wondering to which they belong – within the EU customs union, outside of EU territory, in UK territory – are men’s institutions. The androcentrism of this expression can be attributed to its development and accepted use in military settings comprised by a male majority, but it can also be considered in a more gender-neutral sense where man means human. This kind of use stems from before man started to have gender-specific meaning in Old English when it referred to humans regardless of age or gender. In the context of 2021, however, where man does have a gender-specific meaning and the society is built upon patriarchy using man to refer to humankind sustains the hegemony of gender. In addition (75), 75. ‘no man’s land’ has a metaphorical use that can be applied to abstract concepts as well as other material contexts, which through its accepted and widespread use keeps the implicit sexism in practice. There are more examples of conventional expressions that can be understood to treat man as human or to normatively assume a male perspective. For instance (76), 76. ‘So, for the third time today, could I ask my right hon. Friend to please reassure me that he will do all he can to ensure a debate on that important issue in the House, or ask the Government to make a statement on the matter and help protect man’s best friend?’ (Lee Anderson 25/03/21). Jacob Rees-Mogg speaking with a biblical reference which is an unmistakable androcentric ruling text (77), 77. ‘We are obviously hoping that everything will be back to normal and that is the basis on which plans are being made, but man proposes and God disposes’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg 08/07/21). In an androcentric way of referring to ‘ordinary’ people, Paul Beresford says (78), 78. ‘I have talked about this to many of my constituents, big businesses and the man in the street.’ (Paul Beresford 08/03/21).
Further androcentric conventional expressions include those that both personify and assign gender to a concept or object. Such expressions are ‘little green men’, the ‘straw man’ argument, and ‘the dirty man of Europe’. For instance (79), 79. ‘I suppose next it will be little green men from UFOs that Ministers use as their excuse for inaction.’ (John Stellar 20/05/21). This expression might seem harmless in comparison to previous examples discussed, but by assigning a gender to a concept at which humans can only guess, the male bias is revealed as norm once again. The same applies to the ‘straw man’ argument or fallacy, which occurs when a person’s argument is taken by the opponent who distorts it to the point of extremity and then ridicules the distorted argument. In the context of the House of Commons it is evidently a concern among some MPs that this is happening in debates as four of them voice their concern, see e.g. (80), 80. ‘Members who support the cut should at least have the decency to stand up and say so rather than hide behind straw men.’ (Jonathan Reynolds 15/09/21). The fault, in this case, lies with the gendering of the object ‘straw man’ which in reality is made to look human-like rather than masculine. If a straw man were made to look like a woman, gender becomes an added element whereas a straw man without femininity is considered gender-neutral. Furthermore, Luke Pollard’s (Labour) discussion of Britain’s failure to take action for the environment (81), 81. ‘Britain is, again, the dirty man of Europe.’ (Luke Pollard 08/11/21), is an example of personifying and assigning gender to a nation. This is a deviation from the Western model where countries are often personified as female, such as ‘mother of the nation’ and ‘Britannia’. More than just land, a nation represents culture, identity, language, law and countless other social aspects that become biased when assigned male gender. Lastly, the final example is a conventional expression explicitly based on a stereotype which represents a particular demographic. Katherine Fletcher (Conservative) holds the present androcentric institution accountable for its bias by asking (82), 82. ‘Can my right hon. Friend share how he plans to ensure that the communities’ voices are heard during the planning of this strategy so that their needs are in the mix, and it is not just the ideas from the men in grey suits and the established industry? (Katherine Fletcher 29/04/21). ‘Men in grey suits’ represent the demographic of men in positions of power, whether that be political, financial or otherwise which very much applies to male MPs. Essentially, the expression is not androcentric in itself, it rather acknowledges the androcentrism present in powerful positions of governments and corporations.
5.3.3 Quotations: man’s inhumanity to man

Androcentric quotations are used by many MPs both women and men, some of which seem particularly impactful as they are used by more than one MP. They tend to come from political leaders, literature, and religious texts, with very few exceptions. One such repeated quote is Edmund Burke’s (83) 83. ‘The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing’. It is used by Rosie Duffield (Labour) on the subject of the Holocaust Memorial Day, by Layla Moran (LibDem) on the subject of the Xinjiang conflict, and by Richard Drax (Conservative) on the subject of the conflict in Afghanistan. Duffield and Drax both used it to finish their speeches, whereas Moran used it to build her argument that the Xinjiang conflict is a genocide with which the UK Government should interfere. Although its actual source has been contested, it is a simple but powerful quote evidently used long past Burke’s passing. Each of these MPs use it to encourage the Government and UK citizens to take action as opposed to stand by whilst conflicts unfold, thus ‘good men’ represents humans. Kenny Macaskill (Alba) quotes another man in politics when the future of Scotland is debated (84), 84. ‘What Charles Stewart Parnell said of Ireland applies to Scotland: “No man has a right to fix the boundary of the march of a nation; no man has a right to say to his country – thus far shalt thou go and no further.’ (Kenny MacAskill 17/03/21). He argues that no Prime Minister, Government or country should be able to veto Scotland’s independence, whereby man is representative of those authorities. A politician quoted by several two MPs is Theodore Roosevelt, specifically the famous quote as presented by Paul Howell (Conservative) (85), 85. ‘It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man...in the arena.’ (Paul Howell 11/01/21). Interestingly, the androcentric nature of the quote is demonstrated by Conservative William Wragg who defends the Paymaster General Penny Mordaunt (86):

86. I would replace the word “man” with “woman” in the context, but he said: “It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles”. I just wish we were given fewer opportunities to point out those stumbles and give those criticisms. (William Wragg 22/04/21).

He acknowledges that the message of the quote applies to the ‘doer of deeds’, no matter the person’s gender. By having to explain that he ‘would replace the word “man” with “woman”’ the phrase suddenly becomes gendered, which displays the asymmetry between the connotated meanings of man and woman.
A more recent politician, Tony Blair, was quoted by Andrew Bowie (Conservative) (87):

87. They believed the words of our own Prime Minister, Tony Blair, when he told the US Congress in 2003: “We are fighting for the inalienable right of humankind, black or white, Christian or not, left, right or a million different – to be free, free to raise a family in love and hope, free to earn a living and be rewarded by your own efforts, free not to bend your knee to any man in fear”.
(Andrew Bowie 18/08/21).

Tony Blair’s speech was given with regards to the terrorist attacks on September 9th, 2001 and when he says ‘free not to bend your knee to any man in fear’ he refers to fear of terrorism and any other authorities that threaten Americans’ right to freedom. Generally, such forces and authorities can be expected to be primarily constituted by men, but the phrase perpetuates this understanding and expectation of authority as male which is far from limited to this particular context. Corresponding with the three previous quotes, here man carries the literal meaning of male adult but actually refers to humans regardless of gender. Quoting powerful people is an impactful strategy in politics and, evidently, there is rhetorical purpose to the choice of the word man as opposed to human. By association to strength, stability, and authority – especially when contrasted with the antonymic features of weakness, instability, and subordination – the word man imbues a sense of power that the word human lacks. This binary internalisation of gender is perpetuated through such androcentric language use, the full impact of which likely is unnoticed by Bowie who was merely attempting to make a compelling speech about the current situation in Afghanistan.

The quotations from literature come from various sources including Robert Burn’s poetry, Shakespeare, and James Boswell’s biography of Samuel Johnson. All highly influential writers whose work reflect a time where androcentrism imbued practically all areas of British society, their work continues to perpetuate those same values as MPs make them part of the political process. Conservatives Jacob Rees-Mogg and Bill Cash use quotes which reflect a time before women’s suffrage where the male perspective was the only one relevant as women were considered lesser citizens, or less than citizens. This worldview is reflected in the following line (88), 88. ‘In the words of Shakespeare, Prince Philip would have said, “I cannot tell you what you and other men Think of this life, but for my single self, I had as lief not be as live to be In awe of such a thing as I myself.”’ (Bill Cash 12/04/21). In this quote, the speaker is only interested to hear what other men have to say. Similarly, from Samuel Johnson’s perspective, the following is only applicable for a man (89), 89. ‘“In
lapidary inscriptions a man is not upon oath.” I think the same applies to text messages, which are essentially the trivia, the flotsam and jetsam, the ephemera of life, and fundamentally unimportant.’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg 17/06/21). That is not to say that this is the worldview of Rees-Mogg or Cash, however, androcentrism continues to be normalised through such language use. Owen Thompson (SNP) fittingly quoted Burns twice on a debate held on Burns night regarding the precarious situation for Limited Company Directors during the pandemic of Covid-19 (90):

90. When the Chancellor said that no one would be left behind, it was a comforting show of solidarity to all: “A Man’s a Man for a’ that”, as the bard would have said. But it has been over 10 months and the pleas of 3 million people left to struggle have been utterly ignored. It reminds me of another Burns quote: “Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn!” The reasons for people being excluded have been raised many times in this Chamber, and the case is absolutely clear. (Owen Thompson 25/01/21).

‘A Man’s a Man for a’ that’ is a song about social justice and equality among men, as at the time of its writing in 1795 women had no independence. Much of Burns’ work was written in the name of social justice, and in ‘Man’s inhumanity to man makes countless thousands mourn’ the same applies. In the context of 2021, both poems are taken to apply to humankind as our society is less androcentric and is influential which is further discussed in section 5.3.4. However, when used in this context, the androcentric generic carries associations of gendered hegemony which impairs the poems’ call for equality. Using the voice of one oppressor to revoke another is somewhat hypocritical.

Lastly, there are quotations on the topic of religion, either directly biblical or taken from sermons. The androcentrism of the Bible is present in its exclusively male writers as well as its androcentric writing which aligns with the androcentrism carried through Christianity as a religious institution. It has been somewhat reduced in recent years, for instance, signified by certain branches which now allow female priests to be ordained and, of course, the general adaptation to social change towards gender equality, but androcentrism is still overwhelmingly predominant despite these progressive changes. Examples of how biblical writing is androcentric can be observed as it is cited by Andrew Murrison (Conservative) (91):

91. On that front, Deuteronomy chapter 24, verse 16 offers some chilly reassurance: “The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin.” Less dramatically, the sins of the father should not
be pinned on the sons, daughters, or spouse – or on anyone other than the perpetrator. (Andrew Murrison 07/12/21).

In a debate on criminal penalty, Murrison argues that the criminal’s family should be legally unaffected by the actions of the perpetrator. This writing reflects a time in which men are the only demographic with agency, which Murrison translates to his audience in less violent terms and explains his metaphorical use of the verse. He does not, however, assign agency to anyone but a man as he equates the perpetrator with the father, leaving no indication that a woman could be the perpetrator and keeps the spouse in the same category as the children. Similarly, the verse cited by Jim Shannon (DUP) encourages people to believe in God but does so using the asymmetrical *man* (92), 92. “’Those who look to him are radiant, and their faces shall never be ashamed… Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!’” (Jim Shannon 25/11/21). Thus, all people who are not men are left neglected. The same complete oversight can be seen in the following conceptualisation of death (93), 93. ‘I preferred the brutal truth of Cranmer’s Book of Common Prayer: “Man that is born of a woman hath but a short time to live…In the midst of life we are in death.’” (Chris Bryant 12/04/21). The point of this verse is that death is a part of life, it is a part of being human. However, the way it is phrased insinuates that there is an alternative, that it is somehow different when a woman is born of a woman. Presumably, it is not, but since it was written with men in mind its bias was not questioned. Thus, this exemplifies a community’s acceptance of the normative male perspective as no comment was necessitated for a woman born of a woman. In addition, the man is portrayed as the subject or agent with a life to live, whereas the woman is portrayed to have the purpose of giving life, as opposed to living it. Furthermore, in a speech where John Hayes (Conservative) shares his disagreement with how institutions of higher education have taken action against transphobia and racism, which he calls ‘intellectual freedom’, he quotes a sermon held by John Henry Newman to anchor his argument in religious institution (94):

94. One might think that the institutions that, in the words of Cardinal Newman, give a man “a clear…view of his own opinions and judgments, a truth in developing them, an eloquence in expressing them and a force in urging them”, would be the champions of challenging contrasting ideas – the scions of scrutiny. (John Hayes 12/07/21).

Speaking of higher education as an institution for men is no longer accurate and is indicative of a male bias oblivious to the implications of such language. This quote suggests that only
men would need to concern themselves with such a pursuit, which entirely neglects centuries of women’s inaccessibility to education, uncredited work, and ongoing need to prove themselves capable of what is deemed ‘men’s work’, to then in 2021 be completely disregarded in political debates of higher education.

5.3.4 Generic: for the good of mankind

This final category is quite transparent in comparison to the quotations and conventional expressions in the sense that these concordance lines feature male biased language use produced by MPs themselves. As an inherently androcentric term, all uses of mankind are asymmetrical as there is no female variant. Mankind with 12 hits is used to about the same extent as its gender-neutral humankind with 11 hits. It is evidently a loaded word since it appears in debates with titles such as Holocaust Memorial Day 2021, Covid-19, Human Rights: Xinjiang, Nuclear Test Veterans: Service Medal, Animal Welfare, and New Clause 1 – Human Rights Abuses. The following is a typical example of mankind being used to represent humankind as one, where Bill Cash (Conservative) uses it twice in a speech giving thanks to Prince Phillip following his passing (95):

95. He used his role for the good of mankind, and his award scheme helped millions of young people to achieve their potential in this country, across the Commonwealth and throughout the world, from every walk of life, every faith and every race. […] He was a man for all seasons and for all mankind. (Bill Cash 12/04/21).

Another example of a typical use of mankind is when put in contrast to something non-human, for instance, animals (96). 96. ‘Mankind and the animal kingdom have had a long and close relationship since the very beginning of our creation, and it is incumbent upon us to ensure that we remain responsible stewards of the Earth.’ (Jacob Rees-Mogg 15/07/21). In the Xianjiang debate as well as in another debate which touched on the same subject, Nusrat Ghani (Conservative) inserts another previously discussed androcentric area as she infers (97):

97. When he was asked where was God during the holocaust, he responded that the question is not: where was God? The question is: where was man? Men and women in this House – the mother of all Parliaments – will do all we can to ensure that atrocities like the holocaust can never again take place. (Nusrat Ghani (22/04/21).
Similar to the examples in section 5.2.2, when God is put in contrast to humankind, the latter is androcentrically represented by man. Interestingly, she also assigns the British Parliament female gender with the role of motherhood despite its androcentric history.

In reference to genocides, variations of ‘man’s inhumanity to man’ is a preferred way to formulate such violence. In the debate on the Holocaust Memorial Day, Richard Holden (Conservative), Sheryll Murray (Conservative), Jim Shannon (DUP), Anthony Higginbotham (Conservative), Lee Anderson (Conservative), and Tom Randall (Conservative) used a variation of the phrase, for instance (98), 98. ‘There cannot be a starker reminder of the terrible atrocities man can visit upon man.’ (Sheryll Murray 28/01/21). Thereby, it can be deduced that this is an effective rhetorical phrase that, if human replaced man, likely would not be as impactful. As seen in the Xinjiang debate, the phrase has come to be associated with genocide through the holocaust (99), 99. ‘Genocide is a crime, and it has been described as the crime of all crimes – it is the most heinous act that man can do to man – but there are limits to a Member of Parliament answering that question with authority.’ (Tom Randall 22/04/21).

Whilst the holocaust can admittedly be attributed to one man in particular, the victims were people of all genders and the meaning of the phrase further extends to what the inhumanity of human beings can do to other human beings. Thus, it contributes to sustaining the normative androcentric order.

6 Discussion

This section presents a discussion of the findings and is divided into two parts. Firstly, the findings of the project are discussed in relation to previous research and the theoretical framework of the present study, and secondly, the findings are discussed in relation to the research questions. Throughout both sections of the discussion, reflections on the methodology and its limitations are included.

6.1 General discussion

The analysis of the concordance lines and their metadata uncovered that androcentric generic nouns (and some verb constructions) are used by both women and men of any positions within the House from a variety of parties. As such, it is clear that this bias is structural to the discourse of the institution and is therefore not easily spotted or reformed. In regard to occupational titles, as Hellinger (2006) suggests in her description of the linguistic category of social gender, norms and stereotypical associations guide speakers’ lexical choices. By
extension, as the analysis indicates, lexical gender tends to correspond with those norms and stereotypes. Whilst social change has opened up opportunities for women to break the norm, occupational titles such as *fishermen* show that language has not managed to adapt accordingly leaving androcentric terms the only option. With this in mind, it needs to be acknowledged that even MPs who make efforts to reduce androcentric influence in their speech or political ideology might not have access to a gender-neutral term. Without knowing the intentions of MPs, this can be a possibility in some of the concordance lines, consider e.g., *fishermen* whose gender-neutral variant has not been normalised, or the Chairman of Ways and Means whose authority is dependent on the androcentric term. Conversely, it also needs to be considered that as politicians whose career and livelihood is dependent on voters, lexical choices can be very much intentional in order to appease constituents and stay uncontroversial. For instance, by definition, Conservative MPs and their voters tend to remain conventional i.e., androcentric, and Labour which despite being a left-wing party is, by definition, a party for the working class with an androcentric background. However, as people are typically unaware of the ideologies that underlie our language use (Fairclough 2010), such androcentric structures shape institutional discourse and thusly maintain the asymmetrical power relations between genders. On this topic, a limitation to the method applied in this study is that a quantitative approach would offer more conclusive findings regarding the speakers’ and referents’ metadata, where metadata could be measured and compared to deduce whether there is significant difference in male biased language use between political party affiliation, gender, parliamentary position and so forth. In addition, a larger dataset would be more informative for such an inquiry.

However, in the analysis of the present dataset, a number of patterns were discovered. The analysis revealed that with some exceptions, the terms tend to be used without androcentric intention which can be attributed to the comprehensive extent that androcentrism is normalised in society. This corresponds with Lazar (2013) who argues that whilst individuals are agents of oppression, the consequent asymmetrical gender relations do not necessarily align with the intentions of individuals. She highlights the hegemony of gender is maintained because individuals have little awareness or control over the androcentrism which is embedded in the social order (Lazar 2005), which is thus exemplified in the discursive practices of the House of Commons. The androcentric occupational titles with female referents (with one notable exception, i.e., the Chairman of Ways and Means) suggest that the terms have adopted gender-neutrality, whereas most of those with unknown referents indicate that there is still an expectation that high status occupations or professions
comprised by a male majority are going to be male. There are also those, *fishermen* and *sportsman* in particular, that entirely disregard the existence of non-male people in the fields. The man-compound *manpower* was found to be used by men only, primarily in discourse seemingly reserved for men, indicating that the term can be used as a tool for gatekeeping the armed forces. In contrast, the bias of *man-made* proved more implicit since it refers to humankind. Across false generics it can be deduced that they tend to be used for rhetorical purposes. By using quotations and conventional expressions which are recognisable to the audience, their inherent androcentrism goes unnoticed by most as androcentric language use is generally an accepted practice.

Furthermore, the hegemony of gender was found to be manifested in the discourse according to three kinds of conceptualisations of the androcentric generic nouns. First, the internalised understanding and acceptance of masculinity as gender-neutral and femininity as gendered and marked, which was observed across all three types of androcentric generic nouns. This is a pattern that was also found in Garcés and Filardo (2004) in the discourse of the House of Lords, indicating that this is a common practice in British parliamentary discourse in general. Second, the use of lexically masculine terms that subsume female referents, which is asymmetrical because the same applies to only a handful of lexically female terms. As research within legal discourse has shown, this ‘Masculine Rule’ had been a standard practice for almost two centuries before the British Parliament committed to drafting gender-neutral legislation. The results of the present study indicate that this practice has not been consistently applied to spoken language within the House of Commons in 2021 when it comes to androcentric nouns, corresponding with Hladíková (2019). Third, and lastly, which is actually a variation or extension of the second, is the generalisation of a notion as male when that entails incorrectly neglecting women’s and non-binary people’s involvement. The reason I argue that this is a variation of the second is because it is not always possible to detect which of the two is happening. Examples of those that are clear include those described as factually incorrect e.g., (58) and (59). However, there are many concordance lines across all types of androcentric generic nouns where it is not clear whether the speaker makes a generalisation neglecting women’s and non-binary people’s involvement due to stereotypical associations and expectations, or if they continue to practice the ‘Masculine Rule’ where lexically male terms subsume women. In any case, these conceptualisations of the androcentric generic nouns are manifestations of the hegemony of gender which has been internalised in a dialectical process between discursive and sociocultural practices.
6.2 Research questions

The first research question pertains to how the occupational titles of the House of Commons are used to negotiate and ascribe rank within the Chamber. Corresponding with Hladíková’s (2019) results, chairman, fishermen, and spokesman are the most frequent androcentric occupational titles. Since chairman and spokesman are titles of participants in the debates their high frequency is unsurprising. Notably, whilst fishermen is masculine because of the professions’ male majority, chairman, as a title of high status, carries considerable connotations of authority. Whilst spokesman is an occupation with high status, the suffix -man did not necessarily add elements of authority as such. Rather, it was used asymmetrically due to stereotypical assumptions or as a gender-neutral term. Conversely, as shown by the analysis of chairman, this term is not always interchangeable with its gender-neutral chair, which carries certain problematic implications. According to parliamentary rules of conduct, the title Chairman of Ways and Means is fixed and has, until Eleanor Laing, only been held by men. The fact that the title is fixed as androcentric is problematic regardless of the gender of the titleholder, but it becomes asymmetrical when the titleholder is a woman. Since the amendments for gender-neutral language have addressed generic male pronouns it is strange that such a practice has not been implemented for the occupational titles of the House. In addition, the fact that the amendments do not apply to the titles indicates that the institution intends to continue these androcentric patterns of discourse. As evidenced by the concordance lines in which Laing clarifies her title as ‘Madam Chairman’ as opposed to ‘Chair’, the term chairman is a tool that can be used negotiate the authority and power to which the Deputy Speaker has claim. Already attached to an occupational title with considerable authority, this ability is integral to the suffix -man which gives the title an additional layer of power. However, since this is the only case that this can be observed in the dataset, it is likely that when Laing uses it for herself and other women, it is a manifestation of the male bias she has internalised herself. Another MP of high rank is Jacob Rees-Mogg as the Leader of the House who alongside Laing is an avid user of the androcentric chairman. However, his asymmetrical usage appears oblivious which implies that he is unaware of his bias as a man in that position. In comparison to Laing who is likely very aware of her being the first woman in her position, Rees-Mogg does not need to worry about his authority being questioned or undermined because of his gender. In other words, Laing perceives the term chairman as more authoritative than chair, which is why she perpetuates the same process onto others through her discursive practices. Here, the harmful implicit nature of androcentric
language becomes evident as using a lexically masculine term to empower one woman only reinforces the hegemonic structure at which men are superior and the rest are subordinate.

The second research question inquires as to how androcentric generic nouns reflect male bias among MPs. This study presupposes that a male bias is present in institutional discourse based on the theoretical framework of Smith (1997), Hellinger (2006), and Lazar (2005) and previous research including Baker (2010), Ilie (2013; 2018), Petersson (1998), Hladíková (2019), Sunderland (2020), and Walsh (2001), and endeavours to give an account of how androcentric generic nouns reflect that bias among MPs. In the case of occupational titles, the analysis demonstrates how stereotypical associations influence lexical choices. An issue that came to light through the analysis of occupational titles and the man-compound manpower is the gendered social order of work that has emerged from the prefix or suffix -man. In Britain in 2021 this order is incompatible with the reality, namely that whilst there are still limitations such as systemic male bias or maternity leave and childcare, gender no longer to the same extent dictates a person’s career prospects. Yet, occupational titles such as fishermen and androcentric nouns used for the armed forces such as manpower, men, and to man are still denominated by masculine gender. As such, this order regards male workers as normative and female workers as gendered and ‘other’, since -man represents the norm. There were exceptions where the interaction was marked by gender when an androcentric occupational title was mentioned, but then the mark was made by the subject of equality or maternity leave rather than being inherent to the occupational title. In accordance with Lazar (2005; 2013), in the binary conceptualisation of gender as a hierarchical structure, men are positioned with dominance and women with subordination. Thereby, as long as occupational titles reflect this prevailing conception of gender, MPs implement gendered hegemony into their negotiations of ruling decisions according to that framework. This is an example of the problem identified by Smith (1997), namely that when ruling discourses are represented by a male majority, they are going to continue the structuring of society primarily for men, where women and gender minorities are an afterthought and are underrepresented in the process. Thus, as MPs are subject to the internalisation of androcentrism, their bias continues the dialectical process through their own androcentric discursive practices.

It is evident in the analysis that women also use biased language, which emphasises how deeply rooted the internalised androcentrism is across society. The analysis of false generics found that quotations were sourced from other androcentric ruling discourses including literature, religious institutions, and other politicians, in accordance with Smith’s theory. Correspondingly, a large number of quotations came from a time in history
when the androcentric structure of society was explicit, which through their current use subtly permeates the same values which are subsequently internalised and externalised in the public debates. Additionally, conventional expressions and other generic uses of false generics tended to be used for rhetorical purposes mainly due to their recognition factor and the connotations of power, authority, and respect attached to lexically masculine terms. Accordingly, hegemonic masculinity is accepted as a standard discursive practice perceived through androcentric language use as unproblematic in the context of a debate. As opposed to the occupational titles and the man-compound *manpower* which were primarily connected to stereotypical expectations, the false generics and the man-compound *man-made* largely used *man* to represent all of humankind which is applicable to larger scales and more abstract concepts. The analysis also showed that in *man, men* and *mankind* as false generics were often used as representative of a particular authority or even institution responsible for various crises, genocides, wars, and environmental disasters. In doing so, a biased association between authority and men or masculinity is revealed, upholding the hierarchical order of the hegemonic relationship between women and men. As repeatedly argued in the analysis, the androcentric discourse between MPs is a perpetuation of the values they have internalised through the underlying androcentrism of society which, corresponding with Fairclough (2010) along with Prasad’s (2005) emphasis, occurs in a dialectical process.

7 Conclusion

As emphasised throughout this thesis, the House of Commons is shaped by its biased discourse which, in turn, shapes the British Parliament. As a qualitative study, the aim of this project was to gain insight into this process, specifically with regard to the role of androcentric discourse. This was achieved with the tools of the Hansard at Huddersfield Corpus and feminist critical discourse analysis. Since a corpus of texts was used as opposed to focusing on one or two particular texts, androcentric patterns of language use across the entire House of Commons could be identified. The analysis demonstrates the active role of the hegemony of gender in ruling discourse, where negotiations of power and status between the MPs and the rights of their constituents occur in this controlled environment. In the form of androcentric generic nouns, the hidden ideology of androcentrism is embedded institutional discourse. In addition, the analysis suggests that androcentric generic nouns constrain opportunities for non-male persons outside of the context of the Chamber, simply due to the title itself. As observed in the analysis, since the stereotypical associations and
underlying male bias is so deeply rooted and the normalisation of a male bias is so widely spread, making androcentric terms gender-neutral is not an unhindered or straightforward process.

Given that this is a relatively unexplored area of research, further research is necessitated in order to better understand the implications of androcentric language in institutional discourse. Limited by time and space constraints, this project was not able to investigate generic male pronouns and asymmetrical gender-marking. In addition, whilst this dataset provided a recent perspective on this current issue, a larger dataset could make more significant claims regarding androcentric language use across political parties and thereby of the British Parliament as an institution. Comparing written discourse to spoken discourse is another intriguing angle that would complement this project. Additionally, since androcentrism is inherent to the English language, further research into other types of ruling discourses such as academic, religious, healthcare, and international institutions would be fruitful. This study adds to the literature that problematises the implicit nature of androcentric language features and acknowledges how their linguistically structural properties make them persistently arduous to abolish. That is precisely why the powerful impact of androcentric language features needs to be explored further.

References


Hansard *Official Report*, Commons, 8/3/07; col. 146WS. Available at [https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070308/wmstext/70308m0003.htm#07030896000015](https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmhansrd/cm070308/wmstext/70308m0003.htm#07030896000015). (Accessed 4 March 2022)


Appendix 1: Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Language

GENDER EQUALITY GUIDELINES FOR UNESCO PUBLICATIONS

Annex 4: Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language

The representatives of Canada and the Nordic countries at UNESCO raised the issue of sexist language for the first time at the 24th session of the General Conference, in 1987. A call was made for the avoidance of gender-specific language in UNESCO, and the General Conference adopted a resolution dealing with this issue.¹ The General Conference went on to adopt an increasingly firm stance on the issue at its 25th (1989), 26th (1991) and 28th (1995) sessions.² This development indicated a growing awareness that language does not merely reflect the way we think: it also shapes our thinking. If words and expressions that imply that women are inferior to men are constantly used, that assumption of inferiority tends to become part of our mindset; hence the need to adjust our language when our ideas evolve.

There is a tendency to use ‘gender’ as a synonym for ‘women’. Care should be taken to consider what is really meant. ‘Gender’ is in danger of becoming such a vague word that it is overstretched and virtually meaningless. This would be unfortunate, both for the sake of language and for the cause of sexual and gender equality. With some rephrasing and careful attention to meaning, it is usually possible to improve accuracy. Where different genders are meant, it is always preferable to use a term that includes, or at least does not exclude, women. Further details can be found in UNESCO’s Guidelines on Gender Neutral Language, available at http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0011/001149/114950mo.pdf

The underlying principle of gender-inclusive language is that in all communications women and men are equal and should be treated and respected equally. In language, this equality takes the form of overall gender balance, parallel word choices for both men and women, and elimination of terms that stereotype, exclude, or demean women.

The following paragraphs propose alternatives for most commonly used discriminatory terms and concepts.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Avoid</th>
<th>Do use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stereotypes are generalized and fixed images of people belonging to a particular group formed by isolating or exaggerating certain features.</td>
<td>1) Do not refer to adult women as girls, gals or ladies. 2) The term girl is never appropriate in the workplace.</td>
<td>1) Woman/women is the word that corresponds to man/men 2) Unless when relevant, i.e. when referring to a minor, or a child, e.g. “Parents should be</td>
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</table>

¹ 24 C/Resolution 14.1 invites the Director-General ‘to adopt a policy related to the drafting of all of the Organization’s working documents aimed at avoiding, to the extent possible, the use of language which refers explicitly or implicitly to only one sex except where positive measures are being considered’.

² 25 C/Resolution 109, 26 C/Resolution 11.1 and 28 C/Resolution 1.13.
or by oversimplifying and underestimate individuals’ distinct identities.

3) Do not use lady, woman or female as adjectives (e.g. lady receptionist, woman director, woman driver).

4) Do not use female as a noun (e.g. “Our new programme officer is a female”).

5) Avoid using terms that make irrelevant assumptions about how women think or look (e.g. feminine intuition, the fair sex, the weaker sex, the little woman, masculine drive, women’s work, or adjectives such as lady-like, man-like, womanly and manly).

6) Avoid words and phrases that make any other assumptions about gender. For example, the phrase “Conference delegates and their wives are invited to attend the breakfast meeting” assumes that it is normal that all delegates are men and their spouses are women.

7) Brotherhood (of man)

encouraged to enroll girls in secondary education”.

3) Unless the gender is relevant in the context (e.g. “There are nowadays women director-generals in 3 UN specialized agencies out of 19”).

4) Except in technical writing, such as sociological studies, medical data, and when the corresponding word would be male (e.g. “In my Division there are six females and one male”).

5) These adjectives have many connotations, depending on one’s perception of such qualities. Choose adjectives that apply to both women and men and say exactly what you intend to say (e.g. elegant, well-mannered, strong or courageous).

6) Use neutral terms, such as spouse. Thus, the phrase “Conference delegates and their spouses are invited to attend the breakfast meeting” does not contain any assumption related to the gender of the delegates nor of their spouses.

False generics: Generics are nouns and pronouns intended to be used for both women and men. Linguistically, however, some generics are male-specific, which excludes women and creates ambiguity. The word man is generically used to mean human being or person, but it makes women quite invisible in language and leads to their portrayal as deviations from this ‘male = human’ norm. This should be avoided by using gender-neutral and gender-inclusive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1) Man, Men or Mankind</th>
<th>2) Man of letters/science</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3) The origin of man</td>
<td>4) Early man, primitive man</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Ancient man</td>
<td>6) Man-sized job</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7) Brotherhood (of man)</td>
<td>1) Person(s); Human(s); Individual(s); Human race/ beings/ species; People(s); Humanity; Women and men or Men and women; Humankind</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Scholar, academic, writer, author, critic, scientist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) The origin of humanity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Early peoples; Primitive humans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Ancient people/ civilization</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6) Demanding task, Big job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
generics, thus ensuring that women are included and represented fairly in writing and conversation.

| Man-compounds: The word man also occurs in compounds as a prefix, or as a suffix. |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Manmade                      | 1) Handmade, Handcrafted, Manufactured, |
| 2) Manpower                     | 2) Human resources, Labour force, Workforce, Personnel |
| 3) Man table                    | 3) Staffing table, Staffing |
| 4) Workmanlike                  | 4) Skillful, Efficient |
| 5) Man-days/hours               | 5) Worker-days/hours |

| Occupational titles: The suffix -man is used frequently in occupational titles and related designations. Occupational terms or job titles often convey assumed gender or class norms through the inclusion of irrelevant details and gender modifiers. Titles that convey identity modifiers can be altered in a number of different ways to remove specification. |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1) Businessman                  | 1) Businessperson (Businessman and Businesswoman is appropriate if gender is relevant in the context and if used gender-fairly - i.e. an equal number of times for each expression in the text). |
| 2) Chairman                     | 2) Chair, Head, Convener, Chairperson |
| 3) Spokesman                    | 3) Spokesperson |
| 4) Master of ceremonies         | 4) Comper |
| 5) Cameraman                    | 5) Camera operator |
| 6) Clergyman                    | 6) Cleric |
| 7) Draftsman                    | 7) Drafter; Draftsperson |
| 8) Fireman                      | 8) Firefighter |
| 9) Fisherman                    | 9) Fisher; (Fisherwoman and Fisherman) |
| 10) Foreman                     | 10) Supervisor; Chief; Lead |
| 11) Handyman                    | 11) Caretaker |
| 12) Mailman                     | 12) Postal carrier; Letter carrier |
| 13) Middleman                   | 13) Go-between; Intermedary; Facilitator |
| 14) Newsman                     | 14) Reporter; Journalist |
| 15) Policeman                   | 15) Police officer (Policeman or Policewoman) |
| 16) Repairman                   | 16) Repairer; Technician |
| 17) Salesman                    | 17) Sales clerk; Sales representative; Salesperson |
| 18) Sportsman | 18) Athlete; Sports enthusiast; (Sportsman or Sportswoman) |
| 19) Tradesman | 19) Tradesperson (Tradeswoman or Tradesman) |
| 20) Watchman | 20) Watch; Security guard |
| 21) Workman | 21) Worker |
| 22) Cleaning lady | 22) Cleaner |
| 23) Headmaster, Headmistress | 23) Principal |
| 24) Matron | 24) Director of nursing |
| 25) Housewife | 25) Homemaker |

**Feminine suffixes:** The addition of the feminine suffixes in job titles, such as -ess, -ette, and -trix, reinforces the notion that generic nouns are male, while female nouns are something less, or at least different. Generic nouns should be used for both women and men.

| 1) Actress | 1) Actor |
| 2) Aviatrix | 2) Aviator |
| 3) Executrix | 3) Executor |
| 4) Manageress | 4) Manager |
| 5) Sculptress | 5) Sculptor |
| 6) Stewardess | 6) Flight attendant |
| 7) Usherette | 7) Usher |
| 8) Waitress | 8) Waiter, Server |

**False generics “he, him, his”:** The expressions ‘she or he’, or ‘s/he’ have long been acceptable substitutes for false generic ‘he’. Used sparingly, ‘she or he’, or ‘s/he’ could be very helpful solutions. However, although these forms provide a quick solution, some readers might find them awkward or interruptive if overused. Other useful techniques to avoid the overuse of ‘she or he’, or ‘s/he’, depending on the context, could be the use of some other gender inclusive synonym, the use of ‘they, them, their’, ‘you, your’, and ‘one’, or simply by eliminating personal pronouns.

**Disclaimers:** Some writers choose to preface their use of false generics with an acknowledgment of the generic usage. However, it is advisable to avoid this technique to the

<p>| 1) “He, his him” | 1) “She or he”, or ‘s/he’ |
| 2) “A candidate must satisfy the recruitment panel that he has adequate qualifications” | 2) “A candidate must satisfy the recruitment panel that she or he (s/he) has adequate qualifications.” |
| 3) “Every specialized agency of the United Nations has an executive director. He is responsible for the administration of the agency” | 3) Use of ‘they’ as a neutral singular pronoun: “Chiefs of Section should ensure that they attend the meeting” |
| 4) “Any officer who wants his performance evaluated should submit the enclosed form completed by 31 March” | 4) Use of ‘they, their and them’ after indefinite pronouns: “Anyone who wants their performance evaluated should submit the enclosed form completed by 31 March” |
| 5) “Each staff member must be sure to renew his entrance badge annually” | 5) Use ‘you’ and ‘your’: “Be sure to renew your entrance badge annually” |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Symmetric language: When referring to different sexes at the same time use parallel or symmetric language.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Men and ladies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Man and wife</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3) Dr. Jim Taylor and his assistant Mary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4) Mr. Smith and Jane</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5) Ms. Jane Elliott and John Smith</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marital status of women and forms of address - the use of Ms, Mrs, and Miss</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1) Avoid identifying a woman as somebody's wife, widow, mother, grandmother or aunt, unless it is relevant in context and if men are described similarly.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) The use of the conventional titles 'Mrs' and 'Miss' defines women only in terms of their marital status, i.e. in terms of their relationship to men, whereas men are hardly ever described in terms of their relationship to women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1) Care should be taken that a woman, like a man, is addressed by the name which she prefers, i.e. as she indicates in her correspondence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) 'Ms' is the only term not linked to marital status of women and is now widely used for both single and married women (the plural form of which is 'Mses'). The use of 'Ms' is recommended especially when the parallel term 'Mr' is applied and when uncertain of the address a woman prefers. However, if a woman has a preference for 'Miss' or 'Mrs' her wishes should be respected</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Other tools on Gender-Inclusive Language**

UN Women Guidelines for Gender Inclusive Language:


Empire State College - State University of New York, ‘Gender-exclusive language: introduction and exercise’ - http://www8.esc.edu/esconline/across_esc/writerscomplex.nsf/0/564e043922d70d98852569c3006d727e?


Purdue University, USA, ‘Non-Sexist Language’ - http://www.hum.utah.edu/communication/classes/1600_4/wr7.pdf