

Michele Sala (ed.)

**GENDER, LANGUAGE AND
TRANSLATION.
REPRESENTATIONS AND
TRANSCODIFICATIONS**

CERLIS Series

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Michele Sala (ed.)

Gender, Language and Translation:
Representations and Transcodifications

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MARÍA LÓPEZ-MEDEL

Madam Ombudsman: Use and Translation of Masculine Job Titles for Women in the EU

1. Feminisation and neutralisation of positions held by women in English and Spanish

Sexist language has been defined as language that ignores women, describes women as being inferior to men, and is stereotyping and humiliating of women (Niedzwiecki 1993). One of the main aspects of sexism in language is the use of masculine gender for women's nouns and occupations.

In languages with gendered nouns, like Spanish, job titles and professions undergo a slow process of feminisation after one or more women have reached a position previously occupied only by men. The natural process is divided in three steps: first, the masculine noun and article are used when referring to a woman (*el juez*); second, the noun maintains its masculine ending but adopts a feminine article (**la juez*); and third, a new feminine form is created of a previously masculine-only noun (*la jueza*). An exception is made when the noun is invariable and therefore only the article needs changing (*la periodista*). In between these steps we can also find the addition of the adjective *mujer* (*female* or *woman*) to the masculine or feminine noun and the feminine article (**las mujeres jueces, las mujeres juezas*). The trend in Spanish is to gradually feminise roles and professions carried out by women and the language academy constantly adds these feminine endings to the dictionary, although both the order of presentation (always masculine-first) and the content of the entries can be sexist (the masculine form

tends to include the full definition and the feminine is contingent upon the masculine form).

On the contrary, the English language has since the 1980s been subjected to the neutralisation of its gendered person nouns, especially those ending in *man* (*policeman* > *police officer*, *postman* > *postal worker*) but also in *ess* (*waitress* > *waiter*, *air hostess* > *cabin crew*, *actress* > *actor*). In some cases, the masculine noun has replaced the feminine and is used as neutral (*actor*, *waiter*), while in others a genderless option is used for both sexes (*crew*, *worker*).

Both languages have also followed separate paths in respect of forms of treatment. While in English a new form (*Ms*) now prevails to refer to women without mentioning their married (*Mrs*) or unmarried status (*Miss*), in Spanish the title of married woman is applied to all women irrespectively (*Sra.*). Distinguishing between married and unmarried women is a form of sexism because it revolves around their relationship with men (this does not account for lesbian married couples). Nevertheless, the difference is still not clear among women themselves who do not always know which form of treatment to choose when prompted to. This confusion can cause serious incidents like the faulty calculation of the weight of an airplane's load. In April 2020, 38 adult women chose *Miss* instead of *Ms* during registration on a Birmingham-Majorca flight. The airline's software allocated an average of 35 kg for *Miss* and 69 kg for *Ms*. Due to adult female passengers choosing what was supposed to be a title for girls (*Miss*), the plane took off with an excess weight of 1.2 tonnes (Air Accidents Investigation Branch 2021).

1.1. Studies

The use of non-sexist and gender-neutral language has been studied in settings like the drafting of job vacancies. A study carried out by a social media showed that women tend not to apply to a job offer if they think that a male candidate is more likely to be hired or if they do not fulfil all the requirements. In the meantime, men are happy to send an application if they fit 60 % of the criteria (Linkedin 2019a).

Another study by the same network pinpointed the words and expressions that attract and deter applications from men or women in a

job vacancy context (Linkedin 2019b). For example, the word *aggressive* would discourage 44 % of women from applying as opposed to 33 % of men. In the same context, different benefits appeal more to each of the sexes. Besides recommending the use of gender-neutral language, focusing on performance instead of requirements, and adding information on benefits that can attract women's applications, this social media monitors view-to-apply ratios to adapt the appeal of a vacancy to both sexes (Linkedin 2019a).

Notwithstanding half a century of studies and regulations, the drafting and translation of positions and occupations in EU texts still adopt the masculine gender by default (for instance, in EPSO job advertisements and the official directory *Who is who*). Some guides recommend including the acronym *m/f* (in this order, not alphabetically) after the masculine form; the European Parliament's job site uses both *m/f* and *male or female* (*ambos sexos* in Spanish) in brackets also after the masculine form. Nevertheless, it has been shown that the Spanish translation of vacancies is by large masculine except when the original contains a metonym, which is then kept (López-Medel 2021a). The trend to maintain gender choices in translation and the different effects of several non-sexist language techniques, especially in a literal translation setting like the EU's, have also been the subject of study (López-Medel 2021b). As mentioned before, metonyms in the original in reference to people seem to be kept in (literal) translation and contribute to the de-gendering of the target text.

2. EU guidelines

The EU recommendations on equal treatment date back to 1985, when the Joint Committees on Equal Opportunities (COPEC) commissioned a review of terminological ambiguities of professional denominations among the (then) seven official languages in the framework of the *Staff regulations of officials and other servants* (EU 1962). Together with this systematic analysis, a study of traditional feminine professions was proposed and the creation of a mixed terminology that would promote

diversity of employment. A divergence among official languages was found where there appeared to exist two contradictory, and concurrent trends: sexualisation and neutralisation of positions.

One year later, a list of 78 female position nouns in French was submitted. The committee deemed it appropriate to present this list to the French Academy but the language authority was opposed to changes and supported the conservation of masculine denominations for women (Roger 1989). The time when women, especially in higher positions, could be referred to in the feminine gender seemed very far away.

The European Union has issued multiple style guides, either constrained to a particular body or of general use, that contain directions on the gender of professional denominations and that are open to the public. We will review some of these guides on the lookout for instructions in this sense.

The oldest one is the *English style guide* (EU 2020c), created by the Commission's English department and of compulsory use. It was first published in 1982 and since 1993 contains a subsection on gender in language that became a section on its own in 2004 which was then reproduced in the *Commission style guide* (EU 2019) and the *Interinstitutional style guide* (EU 2020d). The latter is the next one chronologically, from 1993. Its gender-neutral language section (only in the English version) corresponds almost word for word with that of the *English style guide*. In 2008, the Parliament was the first EU institution to publish a monographic gender-neutral language guide. Updated ten years later, it contains directions in all official languages. Finally, *Inclusive communication in the GSC* (EU 2018) was published in 2018 by the General Secretary of the Council, also in all official languages, with a section on non-sexist language. The last two guides (the Parliament's and the Council's) are mere recommendations and as such do not appear on the list of resources for writers and translators.

The Parliament's guide authorises the universal use of masculine in occupations in semantic-gender languages (*diputado, député*) unless the sex of the incumbent is of significance. If this is the case, and only if it is a woman, she can choose to be named in masculine and her decision prevails. The rule is to distinguish between the position or occupation (always in masculine) and the sex of the person (in masculine by default). The assessment of whether or not it is necessary

to specify the feminine gender is left to the judgment of the editor or translator.

The Council's inclusive style guide encourages the use of gender-neutral nouns "that make no assumption about whether it is a man or a woman who does a particular job or plays a particular role, e.g., 'official', 'chair' and 'spokesperson'" (EU 2018: 8) and includes *spokesperson* as a replacement for *spokesman* and *spokeswoman*. It also features examples of how to avoid the *man* particle.

The European Commission's *English style guide* (regularly updated) states the preference for gender-neutral language but concedes the generic use of masculine terms. For roles, the guide leans towards neutral forms (*chair, spokesperson*). Also, words containing *man* should be replaced by an alternative.

As previously mentioned, the English version of the *Interinstitutional style guide* has a specific section on gender-neutral language based on the Commission's text.

By contrast, the Commission's Spanish department's guide (EU 2020b) calls for the use of the accepted feminine forms whenever a position is held by a woman. This guide, of internal use since 2005 and last updated in 2020, has a subsection devoted to positions occupied by women. It also asks for the official directory to rectify as soon as possible the masculine spelling of professional denominations regardless of the person who holds each position and calls it a linguistic anomaly.

None of these guides include suggestions related to the noun *ombudsman* with the exception of 6 examples in the *Interinstitutional style guide* that do not mention the existence of a gender issue. The feminine *ombudswoman* does not produce any matches.

2.1. Recommendations and use of ombudsman in the EU

Sweden was the first country to appoint in the 19th century a citizens' representative to mediate before government bodies and its denomination, *ombudsman* (from *commission* and *man*), became a loan word from Swedish in other languages. The role was then extended to deal with complaints made against schools, hospitals, banks, the media, etc.

The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* traces the first use of the word in English to the late 1950s. It is used in other languages, like Slovak, Dutch, Hungarian, Irish or Estonian, as seen on the translation of the EU's website to its official languages.

The word seems to have escaped the neutralisation impetus followed by almost every other English person noun ended in the *man* suffix (*chairman*, *spokesman*, *fireman*, *policeman*). Nevertheless, the feminine version is present in several dictionaries, although the entries in masculine and feminine can greatly differ from each other, as seen in the following excerpt from the *Merriam Webster Dictionary*:

- Ombudsman: “a person who investigates, reports on, and helps settle complaints: an individual usually affiliated with an organization or business who serves as an advocate for patients, consumers, employees, etc.”;
- Ombudswoman: “a female ombudsman”.

The masculine entry contains a definition (29 words) whereas the feminine one adds the adjective *female* to the masculine noun, forwarding readers to the masculine entry.

The Union's policy with regard to positions occupied by women is to accept the decision of the incumbents to be called in feminine or masculine. The EU ombudswoman (who previously held the same position in Ireland), when asked in 2016 how she preferred to be called (*ombudsman* or *ombudswoman*), admitted that “some of my female colleagues in the office would like me to start calling myself Ombudswoman” and that she was “open to making this change” (Stupp 2016: 1). However, the EU position's name has not been officially changed since she took office in 2013 and, as we will see in the analysis, the EU website and corpus still contain a vast proportion of masculine forms compared to feminine, despite a woman having been appointed to office almost a decade ago.

When contacted for the drafting of this paper, the head of the EU ombudswoman's communication department admitted this is an issue much discussed in the office but any change would necessarily have to be the subject of a modification of the *Treaty on the Functioning of the EU*, which “needs to be updated in this respect” (Gadesmann 2021). The TFEU refers to “European's Ombudsman” and for that reason all official documents use the masculine noun. In fact, article 228 of the

TFEU uses *ombudsman* with the masculine article *he* five times, the possessive *his* six times and the pair *he or she* once.

However, the current ombudswoman “is very happy to be called Ombudswoman” and the feminine pronoun is used in the office when referring to the person, not the institution, according to the communication department. An effort is also made to use other non-sexist terms, like “the Office” (Gadesmann 2021).

The rule of using the masculine form when referring to the position and the feminine if multiple simultaneous conditions are met (when referring to an individual, and if their sex is relevant, and if we know it is a woman and if she has not chosen to be named in masculine) is rarely applicable to English since nouns are generally genderless. Other English-language positions in the institutions are neutral too (*president, MEP, secretariat*), with the significant exception of *chairman*, still in use in spite of a specific reference against it in the gender-neutral language section of the English *Interinstitutional style guide*.

The current EU recommendations on non-sexist language with regard to roles and professions establish the use of the masculine form for the office and the person by default, and the feminine form only if a set of simultaneous conditions are met.

A glance at the etymology and loanword status of *ombudsman* (in masculine) stands in contrast with the neutralisation process followed by other *man*-ended nouns.

3. Method

Since the EU style guides do not seem to include the noun *ombudsman* in their non-sexist language recommendations, we will look at the use of the word and its variants in the official and the department’s websites, and large EU corpora. Other EU language tools are also studied, like the automatic translation service and the terminology database.

The goal is to compare the use of female, male and neutral forms of the noun in EU texts, based on the hypothesis that the masculine prevails. The dominant gender options prevalent in different official languages and the presence of more or less sexist options are other areas of interest.

Another subject of our analysis is the tendency to adopt a neutral form only when the holder of the position is a woman. This can be confirmed by listing the denominations of international offices together with the sex of their incumbents.

With a view to proposing a non-sexist form in replacement of the masculine noun used in the EU, denominations of relevant positions around the world are studied from the listings of specific international organisations. The suggested expressions must not be sexist, be valid whichever the sex of the person when they refer to the office or make gender visible when the incumbent is a woman, and fit in with the scope of the work at the EU.

The final proposal must consider the current status of English in the EU as the main language for drafting and as the source for translations. Therefore, the suggested denominations must not only fulfil the requirements in English but also in other official languages, considering the expectation of a literal translation (Koskinen 2008).

4. Analysis of websites and corpora

A restricted search of the Europa.eu website through Google's engine gives back 375,000 instances of *ombudsman* (in inverted marks) and 1,100 of *ombudswoman* (a difference of 341 times). The feminine form on the EU's official page rarely refers to the current ombudswoman but to national representatives from Croatia, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, etc. If we focus specifically on the office's website, ombudsman.europa.eu (note that the website is also in masculine), the word count is 85,800 times *ombudsman* to 131 of *ombudswoman* (655 fewer times). Interestingly, when we use the feminine spelling, the search engine recommends us to look for *ombudsman* instead (the word

processor does the same and marks *ombudswoman* as erroneous). Finally, the gender-neutral alternative noun *ombudsperson* appears 84 times on the office's site and 9,110 on Europa.eu (still more than *ombudswoman*).

The Directorate General for Translation runs an automatic eTranslation service open to the public, where documents and fragments can be entered for translation. It is an automatic translation tool based on the Euramis memories developed by the Directorate-General for Translation with more than one billion sentences translated by EU translators between the official languages.

In eTranslation, the word *ombudsman* offers only one option in Spanish: *defensor del pueblo* (in masculine). In other gendered languages, the translation is masculine too: *difensore civico*, *médiateur*, *provedor de justiça*, *ombudsmanul*, *Bürgerbeauftragter*. If we enter *Madam Ombudsman*, the resulting translation is feminine: *señora defensora del pueblo*.

Something similar happens with IATE, the EU's interactive terminology database. Out of the 24 results for *ombudsman* from English to Spanish, the masculine gender is suggested in all but one result: *defensor*, *defensor del pueblo*, *diputado*, *valedor*, *síndico*, *comisionado*, *comisario*. The exception is "Justicia de Aragón" as a translation proposed for "Ombudsman of the Autonomous Community of Aragon". This is awarded one star for unverified reliability. The loanword *ombudsman* is used six times in the Spanish results, although its reliability is either not verified or minimum.

Other EU offices may not be written in masculine in English but are masculinised in translation due to the original denomination being an individual person noun and the direct translation having a gender-variable form. The list of masculine denominations assigned to women in the official directory seems endless. The following examples belong to the organisational chart of the European Court of Justice.

Name	English denomination	Official translation (in masculine)	Feminine denomination suggested
Anne SCHNEIDER	Reader of judgments	Lector de sentencias	Lectora de sentencias
Antonia KIROVA	Legal secretary	Letrado	Letrada
Susan WRIGHT	Director	Director	Directora
Alejandra MANZANO VALLE	Head of Unit	Jefe de Unidad	Jefa de Unidad

Table 1. Official masculine denominations of women in the EU directory

4.1. Gender mismatch

The use of *ombudsman* as a gender-neutral loanword despite the *man* suffix (which, as we have seen, the *Interinstitutional style guide* recommends avoiding) and notwithstanding its etymological origin can raise confusion with regard to the gender agreement of other parts of the sentence. This can be seen on the website of the EU department.

The Spanish EU ombudswoman's website shows 14 times (in a 559-word text) the phrase *defensora del pueblo europea*. The adjective *European* has been agreed in gender with the noun *defensora* (feminine) instead of *pueblo* (masculine). A literal translation into English would read something like this: *European defender of the people* (and not *defender of the European people*). In a Google search, this collocation is present 661 times in Europa.eu, mainly on the ombudswoman's website but also on the European Parliament's site and other official EU pages. On the contrary, the direct translation, where the adjective is agreed with the masculine noun that it modifies (*defensora del pueblo europeo*) but the feminine position noun has been kept, appears 5,240 times in Europa.eu. The masculine position noun phrase (*defensor del pueblo europeo*) has 27,800 hits.

Other cases of gender disagreement related to this and other positions can be found in the official directory, which contains 68 instances of *defensor* in masculine and one of *defensora* in feminine. Besides several entries not translated, other positions are masculinised in Spanish despite being held by women (which is signalled through the form of treatment, *Sra.*).

Woman's name	Official denomination (in masculine)	Feminine denomination suggested
Sra. K. MAKOWSKA	Jefe de Unidad Adjunto	Jefa de Unidad Adjunta
Sra. Emily O'REILLY	Defensor del Pueblo Europeo	Defensora del Pueblo Europeo
Sra. Cesira D'ANIELLO	Secretario General	Secretaria General

Table 2. Examples of gender disagreement in the official directory

The use of *jefe* (*head*, in masculine) for women, although vetted by the language authorities, is considered less frequent than *jefa* (feminine) (RAE 2005). In fact, the feminine form *jefa* has been registered in the academic dictionary since 1837 (RAE 2005). The feminine form *defensora* is also the correct denomination for a woman in that position.

defensor, ra del pueblo

1. m. y f. Persona designada por un Parlamento para velar por los derechos fundamentales de los ciudadanos ante los organismos gubernamentales. [Person appointed by a Parliament to ensure the fundamental rights of citizens before government agencies] (RAE 2020)

Other examples of gender mismatch are the apposition of the title *Madam* (feminine) to *ombudsman* (masculine), with 1,930 hits on Google including the transcription of a speech at the UN's Geneva headquarters in 2005. The United Nations also uses *ombudsman* irrespective of the person's sex, as in the denomination of its regional ombudswomen based in Bangkok, Entebbe, New York and Santiago. The official translation in Spanish is *ombudsman regional* (in French, the adjective takes the masculine or feminine form *régional/régionale*). The use of *ombudsman* for women contradicts the straightforward guidelines for gender-inclusive language in English by the United Nations that call for the use of non-discriminatory language and to make gender visible when it is relevant for communication (UN 2019). Other feminine titles adjacent to this masculine noun are *lady* and *Ms*. The adjective *female* is also used in Europa.eu (85 times).

5. Use of alternative denominations from around the world

Before proposing a non-sexist English denomination for the Union's office, we can hope to find acceptable forms by looking at a sample of English-language varieties of the same office, drawn from the list of more than 100 members of the International Ombudsman [sic] Institute.

In its members list (IOI 2021), out of 100 English denominations 73 contain *ombudsman* and 2 *ombudsmen* in Sweden and Lithuania. There is one *ombudswoman* in Croatia and one *ombudsperson* in Kosovo. The remaining 25 include collective and individual nouns (*authority, commission, advocate, defender, etc.*), as we can see in the table below.

English alternatives to ombudsman	Country	Sex of the current holder
Administrative Control Authority	Libya	man
Anti-Corruption & Civil Rights Commission	Korea	woman
Commission against corruption	China	man
Commission for Human Rights and Good Governance	Tanzania	man
Commission on Administrative Justice	Kenya	woman
Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice	Ghana	man
Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights	Cyprus	woman
Commissioner for Administration and the Protection of Human Rights	Estonia	woman
Commissioner for Fundamental Rights	Hungary	man
Commissioner for Human Rights	Azerbaijan	woman
Commissioner for Human Rights	Poland	woman
Complaints Commissioner	Turks and Caicos Islands	man
Complaints Commissioner	Virgin Islands	woman
General Inspection Organisation	Iran	man
Health Ombud	South Africa	man
High Commissioner for Human Rights	Russian Federation	woman
Human Rights Commission	Zimbabwe	man
Human Rights Defender	Armenia	man
Inspectorate of Government	Uganda	woman

Integrity and Anti-Corruption Commission	Jordan	man
Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights	Ukraine	woman
Parliamentary Commissioner for Administration	Sri Lanka	man
People's Advocate	Albania	woman
People's Advocate	Romania	woman
People's Advocate Office	Moldova	woman
Petitions Committee of the German Bundestag	Germany	man
Protector of Citizens	Serbia	man
Public Complaints Commission	Nigeria	man
Public Defender	Georgia	woman
Public Defender of Rights	Czech Republic	man
Public Protector	Zambia	woman

Table 3. English-language alternatives of *ombudsman* (IOI 2021)

Sometimes, within the same administration (for example, Mauritius) there is an ombudsman and an ombudsperson. The ombudsman, who is a man, represents adult citizens. The ombudsperson, who is a woman (but isn't called *ombudswoman*), represents children. Other times, the neutral *ombudsperson* is used irrespectively of the incumbent's sex. The only sure thing is that an *ombudswoman* is never a man (but most ombudswomen are called *ombudsmen*). The following table includes official designations of *ombudsman*, *ombudsperson* and *ombudswoman*, and the sex of the office holders in various countries.

Country	English denomination	Sex of the current holder
Luxembourg	Ombudsman	woman
EU	Ombudsman (European)	woman
India	Ombudsman Punjab for the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace	woman
India	Ombudsman Sindh for the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace	man
OAS	Ombudsperson	woman
Canada	Ombudsperson (British Columbia)	man
Canada	Ombudsperson (Hydro One)	woman
Canada	Ombudsperson (Taxpayers')	man

Pakistan	Ombudsperson Balochistan for the Protection against Harassment of Women at the Workplace	woman
Mauritius	Ombudsperson for children	woman
Kosovo	Ombudsperson Institution	man
Croatia	Ombudswoman	woman
Belgium	Ombudswoman City of Ghent	woman
Israel	Ombudswoman of the Conference on Jewish Material Claims against Germany	woman

Table 4. Official designation in English of *ombudswomen* (IOI 2021)

There are 426 results of *ombudship* in a Google search. *Ombud* seems more popular and throws 20,100 results, like the CERN in Geneva (held by a woman) and a number of universities (for example, the University of Cape Town has a female *ombud*).

The British National Corpus available at the Sketch Engine online corpus management platform (with 100 million words of mostly written English from late 20th century) contains 332 instances of *ombudsman*, and none of *ombud*, *ombudswoman* or *ombudsperson*. On the contrary, *ombud* appears 1,270 times on the English Web 2020 corpus (made up of internet texts with more than 38 billion words), *ombudswoman* 438 times, *ombudsperson* 2,509, *ombudsman* 132,889, but there are no instances of *ombudship*. Finally, the European Parliament's corpus (EUROPARL7) contains 389 instances of *ombudsman* but no *ombudswoman* or *ombudsperson*. EUROPARL7 consists of around 60 million words of parliamentary proceedings in each of the EU's official languages.

In Spanish, the high public officer in charge of representing the fundamental rights of citizens before the public powers is called *defensor/a del pueblo* (in Spain), *defensor/a de los derechos humanos* (in some Latin American countries), *defensor/a de los derechos humanos* (in Mexico) and *procurador/a de los derechos humanos* (in Guatemala) (RAE 2005). The Royal Academy specifies that if it is a woman the feminine form must be used (*defensora*, *procuradora*). It is also possible to employ a metonym to refer to the person through the office he or she leads (*defensoría del pueblo* in Bolivia, Colombia, México, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela).

Perhaps an acceptable Spanish translation can be derived from the denominations of members of the Ibero-American Ombudsman

(sic) Federation (FIO 2021). This organisation profusely employs the English term *ombudsman* but shows gender-neutral options in the denomination of national offices. For instance, Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela use the term *defensoría* (*ombudship*). In Chile and Honduras, the office is called *national institute* or *committee* (respectively) of human rights. El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua use the metonym *procuraduría*. Only three countries adopt the masculine noun: *defensor del pueblo* in Spain (a man) and the Dominican Republic (a woman), and *procurador del ciudadano* in Puerto Rico (a man). Denominations in other Iberian languages (Portuguese, Catalan, Galician, Basque, etc.) are not discussed in this paper. In total, there are 8 women and 14 men who hold this position in the Iberian-American region. No feminine nouns are used for women (grammatical gender, like in *defensoría*, is not considered).

It can be added that the Royal Spanish Academy admits *defensoría* as a language variation in Bolivia, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela, and offers a masculine definition (“ministerio o ejercicio de defensor”). By contrast, *procuraduría* is the office or position of *procurador* (again, defined in masculine). In this case, the relevant sense is that of a promoter and defender of people’s interests, and complainant of their grievances.

6. Feminisation proposal for the EU

The suggested form for the EU ombuds office should not be sexist but be valid irrespectively of the sex of the person in charge. Also, given the nature of EU texts as originals for translation, the gender effects in translation to other official languages must be considered. In that respect, it is worth noting that person nouns are prone to have gender endings in some languages and therefore it can be more practical (from a non-sexist perspective) to opt for collective nouns or metonyms. Surprisingly, though, *ombudsman* can be translated into Spanish in feminine form in EU texts, although the numbers are low, with 3,112

defensor del pueblo and 1 *defensora del pueblo* in the EUROPARL7 corpus, and 11,841 masculine nouns against 14 in feminine in the EUR-Lex 2/2016 corpus.

The starting point is to discard the use of *ombudsman* because it contains the *man* particle, except when the officer is indeed a man. Therefore, a woman holding this position must be referred to as *ombudswoman*. Also, a true gender-neutral term can be chosen to rename the office and make it permissible, irrespective of the sex of the person in charge.

Being faithful to the word's etymological meaning, an alternative to the noun ending in *man* could be simply *representative*. This is also interesting from a translation point of view, since some Romance languages have an invariable equivalent noun, like the Spanish *representante*, devoid of gender traits when using gender-neutral terms before and after. Nevertheless, in other languages the noun is variable (*représentant/représentante* in French).

A new denomination can be extracted from the definition on the EU website. For example, with a metonym such as "Complaints office".

The European Ombudsman works to promote good administration at EU level. The Ombudsman investigates complaints about maladministration by EU institutions and bodies, and also proactively looks into broader systemic issues. (<https://www.ombudsman.europa.eu/en/home>)

Other possible metonyms are newly coined words: *ombud* and *ombudship*. Also, *commission*, *authority* and *office* are used in other organisations.

In Spanish, although we have seen that *ombudsman* can be seldom translated in feminine, the use of a metonym in English could guarantee a non-sexist translation, given the requirement and expectation of a literal translation. Therefore, one suggestion is using a prevalent term in Latin American Spanish when referring to the office (*defensoría del Pueblo*, admitted by the Royal Academy) and the individual variable person noun when referring to the person (*defensor/defensora*).

<i>Antecedent</i>	<i>Non-sexist proposal (EN)</i>	<i>Non-sexist proposal (ES)</i>
The office	Complaints office/Ombuds office	Defensoría del pueblo
The person	ombudsman/ombudswoman	defensor/defensora del pueblo

Table 5. Non-sexist proposals for the denomination of the EU office in English and Spanish

Our proposal distinguishes between references to the office or position (a metonym) and to the person (an individual person noun) and considers the effects of the original on the gender of the translation. The denominations suggested are used in other international organisations and have the approval of the language authorities. The individual nouns' gender must match the sex of the incumbent, since the universal use of the masculine gender when applied to women is sexist, in that, according to the definition provided by Niedzwiecki (1993), it makes them subordinate and invisible. Therefore, only the feminine form should be used when referring to a woman.

7. Conclusion

In the fight against gender inequality, language has more than a symbolic role. The Council of Europe positions sexist language at the bottom of the sexist violence iceberg that is topped by femicide (Council of Europe 2020). Non-sexist language is considered a tool for gender equality and can be used to improve the situation of women.

There has been much debate about the appropriateness and necessity to neutralise and feminise language, and about the perhaps not so positive effects of neutralisation for the advancement of women in society. Despite the current neutralising trend, the feminisation of nouns that denote positions and occupations is prone to encounter less rejection than that of other nouns. Sometimes, even grammatical authorities seem to be ahead of speakers in this respect when the former have to keep reminding the public of the long history of female forms like the Spanish *presidenta* (documented since the 15th century).

The 1980s cry for feminising women's occupations has lost momentum too soon and some sectors are still reluctant to discontinue

the use of male forms like *fishermen* or *ombudsman*. In Spanish this is much more worrying given the large quantities of gender-variable nouns, although in positions and profession nouns, Spanish is more likely to be feminine-specific than English.

The lack of representation of women in some areas of the workplace and more so in the higher spheres could be tackled, among other ways, by making women visible through language. Studies are needed to ascertain the effects of feminine, masculine and neutral forms of job titles in the selection process, from application to the recruitment of the final candidate.

In the EU, English texts have followed a process of de-gendering, not necessarily in line with the feminist agenda. Some masculine terms can still be found, such as personal pronouns or the *ombudsman* denomination. The translation into Spanish is dominated by masculine by default and this is supported by the existing guidelines. The directions to use masculine nouns in general and feminine only when a list of conditions is met, cannot be exactly called equal treatment.

More work needs to be done to make the language of EU texts not sexist, according to the European Commission's 2020-2025 equality plan (EU 2020a) to refute gender stereotypes and close the gender gap in work and care. But the use of masculine or neutral role nouns can hardly contribute to this goal. On the contrary, the use of feminine forms, like *ombudswoman*, is not denigrating and needs to be employed normally to prove it.

Feminisation of language is nothing more nor less than the right to exist as a woman in a world which no longer ignores sexual equality. Far from being a futile or superficial, insignificant demand, this is a giant step towards the emancipation of women. (Niedzwiecki 1993: 52)

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