

Old creatures and poor children. The use of non-gendered words for gendered individuals in historical speech-related material.

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Abstract

Previous research has shown that non-gendered (epicene) words, such as *creature*, *person* and *child* are often used with a gender-bias, both today and in historical material. The present study, which is based on sections of my dissertation (Lilja 2007) looks into the use of these three words in historical texts, with a focus on speech-related material from the courtroom setting (examinations and depositions) in England and New England 1670–1720. The findings are contrasted with those from previous research, which has used fictional material (novels and plays) from the same period. With regard to *creature* and *child*, the present study finds that they are primarily used with female reference, which confirms the findings of previous research. However, with regard to *person*, which in previous research has been found to be used with primarily male reference, the results indicate a difference between the material from England and that from New England: in the English material *person* is mainly used with male reference, whereas it is mainly used with female reference in the American material. This might be due to the specific nature of the New England material, most of which comes from the Salem witch trials.

Introduction

There are many ways to talk about men and women. You can refer to their occupation (*weaver*, *mayor*, *midwife*), their relationship with others (*sister*, *father*, *aunt*), indicate your appreciation or dislike for them (*darling*, *bastard*, *saint*, *rogue*), or simply use the most basic of terms, which merely indicate gender and relative age (*man*, *woman*, *boy*, *girl*). In this study, I will refer to all words that are used to denote men and women as *gender-related terms* (see further below).

In the last few decades, several studies have been conducted into the use of gender-related terms in various speech-communities, both contemporary (cf. Hellinger & Bußmann 2001, 2002, 2003 (eds)) and historical (cf. Bäcklund 1996, 2006; Lilja 2007; Norberg, 2002; Persson 1990; Sveen 2005; Wallin-Ashcroft 2000). These studies, as well as the present one, are based on the assumption that we can gain some insight into the creation and realisation of the gender norms of a society by looking at *what words* the inhabitants of that society use to refer to men and women, and *how* these words are used.

This idea is, of course, not a new one. Linguists have long noted that the English language exhibits a gender bias when it comes to the words used to denote men and women respectively. Since men have traditionally held political power and social supremacy in Western society, men have long been regarded as

the 'norm' with women representing the deviant 'other' (cf. Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2003: 2; Kimmel 2000: 5–8; Romaine 1999: 10; Shoemaker 1998: 2–3). This view has had many consequences, not least within medicine¹, but the idea of the 'male as norm' can also be seen in the language; words denoting women are linguistically 'marked' for femininity, signalling their deviation from the norm (Graddol and Swann 1989: 99–100; Holmes and Sigley 2002: 247).

This markedness can take two forms, which are not mutually exclusive: morphological markedness, where an affix is added to an otherwise unmarked stem (for instance *bachelorette* and *priestess*), and semantic markedness (*woman*, *hag*), where the word in itself includes connotations of femininity. When a word is marked, it carries a specialised meaning, which means that it cannot be easily transferred to other objects (cf. Graddol and Swann 1989: 99–100). To exemplify, a term which is marked for femininity (*girls*, *actresses*) ordinarily cannot be used to encompass men, whereas male terms, which are often unmarked, can, and often do, refer to women as well (cf. *guys*, *actors* in Present-day English). Importantly, whereas referring to women with an unmarked term (such as *actor*) is in no way considered an insult – indeed, in some cases it is vastly preferable (cf. *priest* vs. *priestess*) – it is seen as highly insulting for a man to be referred to with a term marked for femininity (as in "He's such a girl!") (Romaine 1999: 93; Schulz 1975: 65; Sunderland 1995: 165).

Since words marked for femininity take on some of the connotational value of their referents (i.e. women), they often carry different connotations than their male equivalents (cf. Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 15; Romaine 1999: 7, 12). As noted by Schulz (1975: 64–74), over time, several female terms have undergone a semantic pejoration which the equivalent male terms have been spared:

Again and again in the history of the language, one finds that a perfectly innocent term designating a girl or woman may begin with totally neutral or even positive connotations, but that gradually it acquires negative implications, at first perhaps only slightly disparaging, but after a period of time becoming abusive and ending as a sexual slur. (Schulz 1975: 65)

Schulz attributes the repeated pejoration of female terms to the limited social and political influence which women have had historically, pointing to the relatively minor contributions they have been allowed to give to the arts, literature, higher education or philosophical teachings in the West.

To illustrate the semantic pejoration of female gender-related terms, one can consider word-pairs that were once semantically equivalent. Two oft-quoted

¹ According to the long-lived Galenic view, which was prevalent in Europe between the second and the seventeenth century, there was no real difference between the male and the female body. However, due to a lack of vital heat, the female genitals, which were otherwise identical to their male counterparts, were retained within the body (Fletcher 1995: 34 ff). One consequence of this so-called one-sex model of the body was that doctors did not need to study the female body (it was, after all, a male body with some parts inside out), nor make any adjustments in their treatments depending on the sex of their patients.

word-pairs are *master–mistress* and *lord–lady*, but we could include *bachelor–spinster* and *boy–girl* in the list as well. In these word-pairs, the male term has consistently either retained its original meaning or even acquired further positive connotations. In contrast, the female terms have either acquired a sexual tone, or undergone pejoration in accordance with the tendency described by Schulz in the quote above. Of course, in some cases the semantic devaluation of female terms has been extreme, as with for example *hussy* (from *housewife*) and *gossip* (from Old English *godsib*, meaning a person being related to you through the act of baptism, such as a godfather or sponsor).²

When it comes to title terms, such as *lord* and *lady*, there is a tendency for the female terms to undergo a process which Schulz calls “democratic leveling” (1975: 65). Whereas *lord* is still used to refer to a man of nobility (and to deities), *lady*, once used exclusively to address and refer to women of the highest rank, started its journey down the ranks in the fifteenth century, when, as a courtesy, it was extended to include the wives of the lower gentry, i.e. knights and baronets (Nevalainen 2002: 190) (see Table 1).

Table 1. A generalised view of the terms *lord* and *lady* in Early Modern England and their corresponding rank (adapted from Nevalainen 2002: 190).

<i>Term/Rank</i>	<i>lord</i>	<i>lady</i>
Nobility	x	x
Knights and baronets	–	x

As time passed, *lady* was extended even further, to the point where it today can be used as a synonym for *woman* (as in *cleaning lady* rather than *cleaning woman*). Furthermore, a study by Cralley and Ruscher (2005) has shown a correlation between using the terms *lady* and *girl* to denote adult women and sexism. This indicates that *lady* has sunk in value from being used about the most respected women in society – the nobility – to being used disparagingly and with contempt.³

There is thus some evidence to suggest that there is a link between the use of gender-related terms and the status accorded to people of different gender and social groups. If we, in line with sociolinguistic theory, accept that the words used about people in a given society indicate what niches these people occupy in that society (if not in actuality, then in the minds of people), then studying these words becomes a point of interest not only for linguists, but also for e.g. sociologists. Using contemporary material is of course invaluable for determining the current state of affairs, but historical data can yield valuable clues to how the present situation came to be and should, therefore, not be discarded.

Epicene terms

The ways men and women can be referred to are, as mentioned above, both numerous and diverse. In my thesis (Lilja 2007) I focused on eight semantic

² OED, s.vv. *hussy* and *gossip*, 11 Oct 2012.

³ For a further discussion of the use of *lady* in present-day English, see Romaine (1999:125–130).

categories that were of particular interest to my research questions:

- central terms (e.g. *man, woman, lad, lass*)
- relational terms (e.g. *husband, wife, aunt, widow*),
- epicene terms (e.g. *child, person, neighbour, twin*),
- occupational terms (e.g. *maid, weaver, clergyman, midwife*),
- title terms (honorifics and terms of address) (e.g. *lord, madam, sir, Your Honour*),
- depreciative terms (e.g. *rogue, witch, fool, murderer*),
- appreciative terms (e.g. *saint, hero*), and
- religious, social and political terms (e.g. *Dutchman, Jacobite, Protestant, Papist*).

In the present paper, I will focus on one of these categories, namely the epicene terms. To be included among the epicene terms, a word should:

1. refer to a person, either in relation to someone else (*neighbour*) or not (*person*),
2. not mention the referent's profession, title or current activity,
3. not imply censure or approval, and
4. **not specify the gender of the referent**⁴ (Lilja 2007: 50–51, emphasis added)

Including terms that are supposedly gender-neutral in a study about gender-related terms might seem counter-intuitive, but previous studies have shown that even these words can be used with a certain gender-bias (e.g. Norberg 2002: 100–111; Persson 1992; Wallin-Ashcroft 2000: 63–76). As will be shown below, my study confirmed that these terms are not completely gender-neutral, despite the lack of overt gender markers. In what follows, I will discuss the use of three of the epicene terms: *creature, child* and *person*.

Material and Method

Most of the research that has been carried out into the historical use of gender-related terms has focused on fictional material such as novels (Sveen 2005; Wallin-Ashcroft 2000) and drama (Norberg 2002). While these genres give us valuable insights into the conceptualisation of male and female norms, they cannot be said to be representative of authentic language use. Even though research has indicated that dramatic dialogue contains several features typically found in naturally occurring speech (turn-taking, lexical repetition and ellipsis; cf. Barber 1997: 29–40; Culpeper and Kytö 2000), other important features of orality (pauses, false starts, etc.) are missing (cf. Barber 1997: 35, Culpeper and Kytö 2000: 186–187; Salmon 1967: 39–41). In order to shed further light on this exciting field, I decided to work with non-fictional data, and focus my research on speech-related material. By comparing my results with those of previous research (primarily Norberg 2002 and Wallin-Ashcroft 2000), I can determine how accurately the authors of the novels and plays portrayed the actual use of the three terms under investigation here.

⁴ Note that the gender of the referent could often be inferred from the context.

Actual Early Modern English speech is, of course, unobtainable. However, research has shown that written records of trial proceedings display several characteristics that we associate with spoken, face-to-face discourse (cf. Culpeper and Kytö 2000; Kryk-Kastovsky 2000, Kytö and Walker 2003), which makes written trial records one of the best sources of Early Modern English speech available to us today. For my study, I have worked with two subsets of trial records: recorded examinations and witness depositions. In this context, *examinations* are texts which report conversations between one or several magistrates and the accused and/or witnesses in a turn-based dialogic format (for a discussion, see e.g. Grund, Kytö and Rissanen 2004: 150; Kytö and Walker 2003: 222; Kytö and Walker 2006: 20). An example is given in (1) below.

- (1) Q. w't have you done since whereby there is further trouble in your appearance?
An. nothing at all.
Q. but have you nott since bin tempted?
An. yes S'r, but I have nott done itt, nor will nott doe itt
Q. here is a great change since we last spake to you, for now you Afflict & torment againe; now tell us the truth whoe tempted you to sighne againe?
An. itt was Goody Olliver; shee would have mee to sett my hand to the book, butt I would nott neither have I. neither did consent to hurt them againe. (AmExam: Deliverance Hobbs v. Bridget Bishop et al. Boyer and Nissenbaum 1977: 91)

Depositions, in turn, are “statements from court cases, where witnesses, or occasionally the accused person, give an account of what they saw, heard or did” (Cusack 1998: 92). Normally, these statements are recorded in the third person by a scribe (see (2)).

- (2) This Informant saith, That while the Bonfire was burning, last Night, before the *Star-Inn*, the Major of the Regiment, and Mr. *Baker* of *Wadham-College*, were standing at the Gate of the said Inn, and this Informant saw Mr. *Baker* call several of the Soldiers to him, and clap'd them upon the Back; and as soon as they went from him, they fell to breaking Mr. *Hurst's* Windows, the Major and Mr. *Baker* still standing at the Gate, and looking upon them: And this Informant likewise saw three Soldiers break Mr. *Cole's*, the Glazier's, Windows, and said, *Damn him, we will break his Windows, because he is a Glazier, and can mend them himself.* (BrDepo: Depositions Concerning the Late Riot in Oxford)

We can, of course, never be sure of the accuracy of courtroom accounts, or how much the language of the people involved has been ‘cleaned up’ by the scribe. However, for the purpose of linguistic research, a record of a speech-event is generally understood not to record every aspect of the spoken interaction in question. Some features of spoken language are difficult to transfer into writing without resorting to comments in the third person (for example prosody, pauses between words, sighs, ironic intonation). Other features are conventionally omitted from most forms of writing since they add little to the text (for instance pause fillers, stuttering). As pointed out by Kytö and Walker, “[w]hat a ‘faithful’ or ‘verbatim’ record is generally expected to convey, to a large extent, is the lexical items and grammatical structures” (2003: 224). A transcription is thus

almost never an exhaustive reproduction of the speech-event it records, but that need not mean that it is unsuitable for linguistic studies. Examinations and depositions are therefore of limited use for researchers looking into prosodic features, but for studies of lexical items (such as the present one) they can still be very valuable.^{5 6}

Apart from the speech-related material, I also included a smaller corpus of non-speech-related texts, consisting of journals (travelogues and diaries). Journals had not been used to study gender-related terms previously, which made them an interesting material set. They were also often written without the author having publication in mind (at least initially), which means that they might be written without strict adherence to formality and offer a window into the everyday use of written language in Early Modern England and America. A typical journal entry is given in (3).

(3) Sunday, January 1. Mr. Kingsford dined with us. The subject of his conversation generally turns upon himself and he seems to have it always in his eye to raise in you a mighty esteem for his riches and wealth, and though at the same time he is glad to get a dinner from any of his friends, he would fain make you believe he is worth a prodigious estate. A strange kind of ambition and vanity indeed to be thought a rich beggar! A man that appears like a poor fellow and yet is worth L40,000. He was complaining of the prodigious covetousness of his son-in-law Venner and setting him forth in very lively colours as a man that would sooner part with all his friends and relations than lose the least sum of money by them. (BrJour: Dudley Ryder. The Journal of Dudley Ryder)

There are two main reasons for using journals for the present study, rather than other non-speech-related text categories. Firstly, as stated above, this is a text category which has not been studied in any detail with reference to gender-related terms, which makes it particularly interesting to include in this investigation. Secondly, unlike other non-fictional text categories, such as, for instance, handbooks, the journals were not necessarily meant to be primarily educational. Consequently, one might expect the language we find in these texts to be fairly informal which might provide insights into everyday Early Modern written language.⁷

The material for this study was gathered from several sources and from both sides of the Atlantic (England and New England) to allow for geographical comparison. The English speech-related material was taken from the *Corpus of English Dialogues (1560–1760)* (CED), and the corresponding texts from New England from the Salem Witchcraft Papers (SWP). The journal texts were gathered from three corpora: the Helsinki Corpus (HC), ARCHER (A Representative Corpus of Historical English Registers), and EAmE (A Corpus of

⁵ For a discussion on the very formal and particular setting of the courtroom and the possible influence this could have on the material, see Lilja 2007: 20ff.

⁶ For more on the complex topic of text reliability, see Kytö and Walker 2003; Short, Semino and Wynne 2002.

⁷ Of course, not all handbooks were written in a formal manner, despite their educational nature; some are rather informal in their language, probably for pedagogical reasons.

Early American English) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Corpora included in the present study, their places of origin, dates of the individual speech-event (examinations and depositions) or alleged text composition (journals), and word counts.

	Text category	Region represented	Corpus	Date of speech-event/composition	Word count
Speech-related	Examinations	England	CED	1680–1716	98,173
		New England	SWP	1692–93	36,617
	Depositions	England	CED	1680–1716	36,697
		New England	SWP	1692–93	84,695
Non-speech-related	Journals	England	HC	1672–1698	10,470
			ARCHER	1704–1716	6,765
		New England	EAmE	1704	10,341
Total word count					283,758

At the time I conducted my thesis study there were not many suitable texts available in electronic format, which unfortunately prevented me from attaining a more even word count between the different text categories.⁸ To counteract the difference in size between the categories, the figures given will be normalised to indicate frequencies per 10,000 words unless otherwise indicated.

Once the material had been gathered, a corpus programme (WordSmith) was used to find and extract all the gender-related terms. Since Early Modern orthography can be a bit haphazard at times (especially in the material from the Salem Witch trials, which was written by non-professional scribes), this was not always easy.⁹ With the help of the WordList function, which provides a list of all orthographic units in the selected texts, all the relevant gender-related terms could be found and included in the study. In what follows, however, I will focus on only three terms: *creature*, *person*, and *child*.

Non-gendered words for gendered people: *Creatures, persons, and children*

As stated above, previous research (e.g. Norberg 2002; Persson 1992; Wallin-Ashcroft 1992, 2000) has shown that epicene terms are not, despite their nomenclature, always used arbitrarily with regard to referent gender, but can display a gender bias. Furthermore, this gender bias is not always stable over time, but can shift, from gender-neutrality to biased use or vice versa. Terms can even go from primarily being used with referents of one gender to occurring mostly

⁸ However, as has been shown by Romaine (1982: 105–114), not obtaining complete comparability between samples does not render a study fruitless, since “each individual text could be considered as a separate sample” rather than as part of an overarching text category (1982: 114).

⁹ To illustrate the degree of orthographic variation in the texts, in the Salem Witchcraft Papers the lexeme GIRL (including the plural form) is realised as “girl”, “girls”, “girle”, “gerle”, “gurll”, “gurls”, “garl”, “garle” and “gaurll”.

with referents of the other. I will look more closely at the semantic history of three epicene terms, which have been shown to be particularly interesting in this regard: *creature*, *person*, and *child*. These terms further display interesting patterns in my data, as will be shown below.

The term *creature* (from Lat. *creatura* 'anything created') came into English in the eleventh century, and was originally used to indicate anything created by God, animate or inanimate, and thus included both men and women, as well as animals, plants, etc. By ca. 1300, *creature* had become more specialised, and was taken to refer only to animate beings. At this time, the term had two primary functions. Firstly, it was used to refer to created beings in general, and then especially animals, as distinct from humans (*OED*, s.v. *creature* 3a, 12 June 2012). However, the *OED* also records another meaning that was prevalent at the same time:

2. A human being; a person or individual
 - a. With modifying word indicating the type of person, and esp. expressing admiration, affection, compassion, or commiseration. (...)
 - c. A reprehensible or despicable person. (*OED*, s.v. *creature* 3, 16 October 2012)

As is evident from the above definition and also from the quotations given in the *OED*, *creature* could thus be used in a variety of ways, to express vastly different sentiments ranging from affection to commiseration to contempt.

Given the versatility of the term, one might expect *creature* to occur equally with referents of both genders; however, in historical material this is not the case. Wallin-Ashcroft found that in eighteenth-century fiction, *creature* is found predominantly with female referents: of 123 instances of the term in her material, 86 occur with female referents, and only 14 with male (2000: 53).¹⁰ Looking at male and female terms in Shakespeare's comedies, Norberg found the same pattern, with eleven instances of *creature* being used about women, compared to seven instances denoting men (2002: 100–101).

In the material investigated here, *creature* is used to refer to humans in two ways: either generically to refer to pitiable humans in general (4), or with female reference (5). Overall, *creature* is used with general reference on seven occasions and with female reference six times. It is never used to refer to a specific, male individual, nor, interestingly, does it occur in the English courtroom material.

(4) So takeing leave of my company, tho' wth no little Reluctance, that I could not proceed wth them on my Jorney, Stop at a little cottage Just by the River, to wait the Waters falling w^{ch} the old little Hutt was one of the wretchedest I ever saw a habitation for human **creatures**. It was supported with shores enclosed with Clapbords, laid on Lengthways, and so much asunder, that the Light come throu' every where; [...] (AmJour: Sarah K. Knight. The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight.)

¹⁰ The remaining 23 occurrences are non-gender-specific.

(5) She was brought in & Mary Warren in a violent fit; Q. how dare you come in here & bring the divill w'th you to afflict these pore **creatures**. A. I know nothing of it, but upon lacys laying her hand on warrins arme she was then recovered from her fit. (AmExam: Examination of Mary Lacey, Jr., Mary Lacey, Sr., Ann Foster, Richard Carrier, and Andrew Carrier. Boyer and Nissenbaum, 1977: 520)

It would thus appear that when *creature* is used, it is always used with referents that the speaker/writer pities in some way. When the word is used to refer to specific individuals (as in example (5)), it never denotes the women who are accused of being witches in the witch trials but only about their victims, and only if these victims are women. This tallies well with Wallin-Ashcroft's findings.

In her discussion, Wallin-Ashcroft suggests that the gender bias with regard to *creature* in her material is due to the subordinate position of women in Early Modern society. Since women were considered to be less rational and more ignorant of matters both worldly and spiritual than men, and furthermore more or less dependent on them for their social status and, to some extent, survival, they were more likely to inspire feelings of compassion, affection and tenderness than were men, and thus came closer to the prototypical *creature* as defined by the time:

The prototypical values for the spiritual and mental aspects of [*creature*] must therefore be 'soulless' and 'ignorant' and for the social aspect 'dependent'. Again, the combined set of prototypical values agreed better with the concept of 'female' than with that of 'male'. (Wallin-Ashcroft 2000: 73)

Furthermore, collocating adjectives occurring with *creature* in fiction show that the term carried different connotations depending on whether it was used with male or female referents. Both Wallin-Ashcroft (2000: 55) and Norberg (2002: 104–105) report that when *creature* refers to a woman it is much more likely to collocate with positive adjectives (such as *dear*, *innocent* and *worthy*) than when it occurs with a male referent. Male *creatures* tend to be described in a much more negative light, as being *greedy*, *perfidious* and *wicked*. Wallin-Ashcroft (2000: 73–74) and Norberg (2002: 105) both conclude that the difference in adjective usage with *creature* is linked to the term's predominant use with female referents: when used to denote a man, *creature* implies that the referent is not a prototypical male, but rather a deviation from the norm, which attracts negative adjectives. Since *creature* never occurs with only male reference in my material, I cannot comment on this further. However, when *creature* is used with specific female reference in my material, collocating adjectives are mainly negative (*old*) or condescending (*poor*), as can be seen in examples (6) and (7).

(6) But our Hostes, being a pretty full mounth'd old creature, entertain'd our fellow travailer, y^c french Docter wth Innumerable complaints of her bodily infirmities; and whisperd to him so lou'd, that all y^c House had as full a hearing as hee: which was very divirting to y^c company, (of which there was a great many,) as one might see by their sneering. (AmJour: Sarah K. Knight. The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight)

(7) [...] here Is an Argument of hope for this poor **Creature** that she Will be Snatched out of the Snare of the Diuel because there Semes to be Somthing of repentance. (AmExam: Examination of Mary Lacey, Jr.)

This differs from Wallin-Ashcroft's and Norberg's findings. This difference could be due to the specific setting of the witch trials, where any woman described as a *creature* would be either accused of witchcraft or an alleged victim thereof. Such women would not be likely to attract positive adjectives. Why *creature* is not used with human reference in the English courtroom material is harder to explain, especially since it is used so widely in fiction both before (Norberg 2002) and after this time (Wallin-Ashcroft 2000). It could be that using *creature* with human reference had fallen out of everyday use at this time and only lingered on in fiction and in the colonies, but further research is needed in order to say anything more certain.

If *creature* has a tendency to be used with female reference in historical material, the opposite seems to be true for *person*, another term which is, in theory, gender-neutral. *Person* originally denoted people of distinction, especially when acting in a certain capacity (cf. *personage*), but later came to be used for any individual human being, regardless of age and gender, as opposed to animals and things (*OED*, s.v. *person*, 1, 2 a–c, 16 October 2012). By the beginning of the eighteenth century, *person* acquired a pejorative and contemptuous note and could be used to signify low status or little worth (*OED*, s.v. *person*, 2 d, 16 October 2012).

In her material, Wallin-Ashcroft finds 105 instances of *person* with male reference, compared to only half that, 56, when the term denoted a woman (2000: 56). Norberg (2002: 101) finds fewer examples of the term in her material, but there, too, the instances with male referents (five) outnumber those with female referents (three) although no conclusions can be drawn from such low numbers. Wallin-Ashcroft discusses this gender bias in her thesis, speculating that it might be linked to the fact that *person* is used in opposition to animals and things, and thus contains prototypical values such as having a soul, intelligence and a role in society. In eighteenth-century England, she argues, these values were more prototypically 'male' than 'female' (2000: 68–69).¹¹

The use of *person* in my speech-related material is clearly gender biased, as it was in Wallin-Ashcroft's study. However, I found that the bias in my material was connected with the region in which the texts were produced (see Table 3).¹²

¹¹ As a point of interest it can be noted in connection with this that Parliament in the mid-nineteenth century declared that the term *person* only applied to men, a distinction that held fast until 1929. The cause for this declaration was that women suffragists claimed that they had the right to enter into previously male-dominated professions such as medicine and law, since the statutes regulating eligibility to these occupations used the gender-neutral *person*, which, these women reasoned, included women as well (Wallin-Ashcroft 2000: 68).

¹² Indeterminate cases, where the gender of the referent could not be determined, or where the term is or might be used to refer to people of both genders have been excluded from this discussion.

Table 3. The occurrence of *person* in the speech-related material normalised per 10,000 words. Raw figures given within parentheses.

Geographical origin	Male referent	Female referent
England	4.5 (61)	0.1 (1)
New England	0.3 (4)	9.9 (120)

In the material from England, an overwhelming majority of the instances of *person* were used with male reference: only one out of a total of 62 instances referred to a woman, which is in line with previous research. In the American texts, however, the opposite is true: of 124 instances of *person*, only four were used about men. Typical uses can be seen in examples (8) (from England) and (9) (from New England).

- (8) *L. C. J. H.* Is this **Person** Mrs. *Baynton*'s Brother?
Mrs. Night. This is he that went for her Brother.
 (BrExam: Tryals of Haagen Swendsen [etc])

- (9) The deposition of Rose Foster who testifieth & saith I have ben most grievously afflicted and tormented by Abigail Falkner of Andevour also I have seen Abigail Falkner or hir Apperance most grievously afflict and torment Martha sprague s sara phelps and Hannah Bigsbe sence the begining Augst and I verly beleve that Abigail Falkner is a wicth and that she has often afflicted me and the afforesaid **person** by acts of wicthcraft.
 (AmDepo: Rose Foster v. Abigail Faulkner. Boyer and Nissenbaum, 1977: 330)

Even when these figures have been normalised to account for the difference in size between the English and American material sets, the difference is noticeable and statistically significant (χ^2 : 164.6, df: 1, $p < 0.01$). The most likely reason *person* is used so often with female reference in the American speech-related material is that it is often used to denote the person being accused of a crime, and in the Salem witch trials the majority of people who were tried and/or testified were women. In contrast, the majority of participants in the British trials were men.

However, the English courtroom material does include cases where women were accused, just as the courtroom material from New England includes cases of men on trial. These cases are more numerous than the meagre use of *person* with female and male reference respectively might suggest, if the gender of the accused was the sole determining factor for the use of this word. It is possible that there was a geographically based difference in the use of *person*, so that it was primarily used for women in New England and for men in England. If so, this dichotomy has since disappeared.¹³ Another possibility is that *person* was seen to

¹³ A brief study of 100 random samples of *person* in the spoken section of COCA (Corpus of Contemporary American English, 12 October 2012) reveals that the word is used 12 times with female reference, 26 times with male reference, and the remaining 62 times with referents of

be more appropriate for one gender or the other in the courtroom context, if not necessarily outside of it, so that for the duration of the Salem witch trials, e.g., the scribes felt awkward about referring to the men accused of witchcraft as *person*, preferring to use their names or occupations instead. Similarly, in England *person* might have had such a masculine ring to it in legal parlance that scribes and magistrates were unwilling to use it to refer to women.

In Present-day English, *person* has become used increasingly in occupational terms in a bid to make them gender-neutral and thus more applicable to all practitioners of the profession (e.g. *chairperson*, *spokesperson*). However, since, as has been pointed out by for instance Caldas-Coulthard (1995: 231), the new terms are used predominantly with female referents, it might be that *person* is losing its male gender bias in favour of a female one.

The last epicene term which I will bring up here is *child*. The *OED* gives the earliest meaning of the word as that of an unborn or newly born infant, a meaning which was later extended to cover the age span up until puberty (*OED*, s.v. *child*, 16 October 2012). With regard to gender, the *OED* points out that in certain dialects *child* has been applied especially to female infants, as in this oft-quoted line from Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*:

Shepherd: [...] Mercy on's, a barn: a very pretty barn! A boy, or a **child**, I wonder? (Act III, Scene iii, bold type added)

The *OED* further states that "[i]t has been pointed out that *child* or *my child* is by parents used more frequently (and longer) of, and to, a girl than a boy. Shakespeare nowhere uses 'my child' of or to a son, but frequently of or to a daughter" (*OED*, s.v. *child* 8 b, 16 October 2012). From this, there thus seems to be a certain historical gender bias inherent in the term, predisposing it to occur predominantly with female referents.

Wallin-Ashcroft and Norberg both find that *child* is used more with female than with male reference in their material, which is in keeping with the trends noted by the *OED*: out of the 56 uses of the term with gender-specific referents in Wallin-Ashcroft's material, 54 are used with female reference, and only two with male (2000: 60). In the Shakespeare plays studied by Norberg, *child* occurs equally often with referents of either gender, but since in these plays men are, overall, referred to much more often than women, Norberg concludes that there is still a gender bias in the material as regards this term (2002: 107).

As with *creature* above, Wallin-Ashcroft explains this gender bias with the prototypical semantic properties for *child* co-occurring to some extent with Early Modern notions of what was prototypical female attributes, such as diminutive stature, dependency, and ignorance; attributes which would evoke tenderness and condescension in others (2000: 65–66). A woman could thus (and perhaps can still, if the passage from *OED* quoted above is valid) retain childlike qualities, and hence be referred to as a *child* for longer than a man without insult necessarily

unknown or unspecified gender.

being implied (Norberg 2002: 107–108).

A parallel development, where the use of a gender-related term is expanded along the age parameter can be seen in the use of *girl* to denote adult women (Romaine 1999: 134–136), something which occurs in my material as well ((10) and (11)).

(10) about 3 in the afternoon, I sat forward with neighbor Polly and Jemima, a **Girl** about 18 Years old, who hee said he had been to fetch out of the Narragansetts, and said they had Rode thirty miles that day, on sory lean Jade, wth only a Bagg under her for a pillion, which the poor **Girl** often complain'd was very uneasy. (AmJour: Sarah K. Knight. The Journal of Sarah Kemble Knight.)

(11) Saturday, January 7. Rose at past 9. Was merry with cousin and Mrs. Loyd. They stayed to dinner and went away at past 4. Mrs. Loyd is a very smart **girl**, has good natural sense and reads pretty much, but wants something of good breeding. (BrJour: Dudley Ryder: The Diary of Dudley Ryder)

Although it is hard to know at precisely what age the common nomenclature for a young female would change from *girl* to *woman* in the Early Modern period, contemporaries seem to have considered childhood to end at age 14, which would make at least the young woman in (10) an adult (Mendelson and Crawford 1998: 78–79). It could thus be people had started using *girl* as a term for adult women by the time period investigated here, although *woman* was still the most common term.

As was the case with *person*, the gender bias we find with regard to *child* in my speech-related material¹⁴ differs between England and New England (Table 4).

Table 4. The occurrence of *child* in the speech-related material, according to referent gender, normalised per 10,000 words. Raw figures given within parentheses.

Geographical origin	M	F
England	5.8 (78)	1.3 (17)
New England	0.5 (6)	5.0 (61)

Again, there is a statistically significant difference (χ^2 : 84.21, df: 1, $p < 0.01$) between the texts from the two regions: whereas *child* is used predominantly with male referents in the English texts (78 instances out of the total 95), in the texts from New England it is used much more frequently to refer to a girl (61 instances of 67). However, a more in-depth look at the data reveals that these figures are somewhat misleading, since one of the English texts deals with the birth of the Prince of Wales by the Queen, Mary of Modena, and the question of his legitimacy (the so-called Warming-Pan Plot), and the large majority (75

¹⁴ The non-speech-related material does not contain enough instances of *child* (four, all told, two male and two female) to allow any further discussion of them.

instances) of the uses of *child* with male reference comes from that one text.

In the material from New England, *child* is mostly used to refer either to participants in the proceedings (12), or to deceased children allegedly murdered by acts of witchcraft (13). As has been pointed out, the first category comprised mostly women, which could account for the few instances of *child* with male reference.

- (12) Tell us who hurts these **children**.
I do not know.
If you be guilty of this fact do you think you can hide it.
The Lord knows --
Well tell us w't you know of this matter
Why I am a Gosple-woman, & do you think I can have to do with witchcraft too
How could you tell then that the **Child** was bid to observe what cloths you wore
when some came to speak w'th you.
(AmExam: Examination of Martha Corey. Boyer and Nissenbaum 1977: 248)
- (13) Did not they bring the image of John Nichols his **child**?
Yes.
Did not you hurt that **child**?
Yes.
(AmExam: Examination of Deliverance Hobbs. Boyer and Nissenbaum 1997: 421)

Considering the people referred to as *children* in the New England material, it is not surprising that the adjectives used in conjunction with *child* or *children* are mostly such as would invoke pity and sympathy from listeners: *poor*, *unhappy*, *miserable*, and *afflicted*. Other common adjectives are *small*, *little*, *young*, *thriving*, the latter being mostly used about children having supposedly died at the hand of witches.

Discarding the instances of *child* referring to the Prince of Wales, the speech-related material seems to confirm the findings based on fictional material, that *child* is used more often to refer to girls and young women than to boys. Due to the particular nature of the New England material, however, this result should be treated with caution.

Summary and Concluding Remarks

Notions of prototypical male and female characteristics influence all the words we use to describe those around us, even if the words we use are, in theory, gender-neutral. The three epicene terms *creature*, *person* and *child* have all repeatedly been shown to be gender-biased in historical material. As the present study has shown, this is not only true of fictional material (i.e. of conceptualised gender stereotypes), but also of speech-related material, which should be indicative of actual language use.

Creature and *child* are used more often with female reference in my material, which is in accordance with earlier studies. In all likelihood this is due to the connotations of dependence and irrationality inherent in these words, which in the androcentric worldview prevalent in Early Modern Europe (including the

colonies) were characteristics attributed to women rather than to men.

Previous studies using fictional material have shown that *person* is used mainly to refer to men in this period. However, in the New England material studied here, *person* is primarily used with female reference. Whereas it is possible that this is due to a dialectal difference between England and New England around the year 1700, I can find no support for this still being the case today. It might also be that the use of *person* with one gender or the other is primarily context-based and, in the case of the New England material, a temporary gender bias.

One of the aims of this study was to see how closely my results, based on speech-related material, adhered to previous studies of the gender-related terms *creature*, *person* and *child* in fictional texts from the same period. Overall, the results were similar enough to indicate that the authors of the plays and novels investigated by e.g. Wallin-Ashcroft (2000) and Norberg (2002) used these words in a way that mimicked actual speech-events, given that we accept trial protocols as accurate representations of speech.

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