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Language and Androcentrism: A Cross-Linguistic Study

in English and Spanish

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Abstract

Patriarchy is a social order that has pervaded all aspects of our socialization, including language. Aiming at preserving the male-dominated status quo, languages have been constructed from an androcentric viewpoint which reinforces women's subalternity in the non-linguistic realm. This paper thus endeavors to shed light on women's linguistic situation and the societal impact of linguistic sexism. To attain this, in the first place, I examine the question of language and androcentrism. As can be seen, languages undergo a male-biased process of acculturation which results in them absorbing, shaping into and reflecting the patriarchal social order. In the second place, I draw upon Deutscher's (2011) theory on linguistic relativism, which purports that linguistic patterns can eventually become mind habits—i.e. language influences memory, perception, associations, etc. Therefore, in being androcentrically constructed, language makes the perfect means to reinforce our binary interpretation of the world. Thirdly, I delve into what I consider to be the three possible main pillars of linguistic sexism. This part thus explores (1) the dictionary as a male-biased object that shapes usage and discourse, (2) sexist expressions in English and Spanish and their power to render the masculine normal and the feminine abnormal, and (3) the generic masculine and the tendency to dissolve the feminine into the masculine, which demonstrates that the hierarchical relationship "Man v. Woman" that exists culturally is echoed grammatically. Moreover, due to its current popularity with the youth, special attention is given to the singular use of *they*. Lastly, I put forth a cross-linguistic analysis of nursery rhymes and *canciones infantiles* to add a fourth pillar to what I have considered to be, along with the other three, the stronghold of linguistic sexism. To carry out this analysis, the songs have been grouped thematically into "Gender violence", "The Domestic Realm", "Objectification", and "Gender Identity". In so doing, I aim to illustrate how the binarism "Men v. Women" and androcentrism are instilled in children by means of language. As a result, the literature review and the cross-linguistic analysis carried out in this paper evidence that the male elites have historically strived to turn language into a male-dominated instrument, thereby weaponizing its influence over our cognitive processes to perpetuate women's subjugation to men. Ultimately, my

intention is for this paper to raise awareness of a subtle, underestimated type of sexism which grows stronger the less people know about it.

Keywords: androcentrism, patriarchy, linguistic sexism, linguistic relativism, feminism.

1. Introduction

Patriarchy is a social organization that has permeated every aspect of our lives, including languages. They have been shaped from an androcentric understanding of the world meant to perpetuate male domination. Consequently, not only are languages reflective of the patriarchal social order, but they can also contribute to reinforcing it. Linguistic sexism is thus a subtle social blight to which different feminist schools of thought have been drawing attention in the recent years. This paper aims to shed light on the societal consequences of linguistic sexism by (1) exploring the literature of what I consider to be the three possible main pillars of sexist language, (2) conducting the analysis of a fourth pillar I put forth, and (3) relating all these data with Guy Deutscher's (2011) research on linguistic relativism. Therefore, this paper has been structured as follows: in Section 2, I will look to provide the reader with a brief insight into linguistic androcentrism, the male-prompted acculturation process that languages undergo, and the Jakobson-Boas Theory—which will prove essential to understand the social impact of linguistic sexism. In Section 3, I will delve into the abovementioned first three pillars: the male-made dictionary, sexist expressions, and the generic masculine. In Section 4, I will draw upon different studies which bear out the Jakobson-Boas Theory so as to stress the importance of purging language of sexism and urge readers to cognize the societal impact it has on society. Finally, in Section 5, I will offer cross-linguistic analyses of nursery rhymes and *canciones populares infantiles* as a fourth pillar of linguistic sexism. In summary, both the literature review and the cross-linguistic analyses I carried out evidence that language has been made by and for men, which, in turn, has helped perpetuate women's subalternity in the non-linguistic reality. In essence, in casting light on women's linguistic situation, my ultimate intention is for this paper to prompt its readers to reflect upon a type of sexism that is often overlooked.

2. Language and Androcentrism: A Cognitive-Linguistic Approach

The following statement is of no surprise these days: we live in a patriarchy. As Kate Millet (1970) states, "every avenue of power within the society, including the coercive force of the police, is entirely in male hands" (p. 25). In other words, societies are man-made, and patriarchy is a form of social domination which pervades every aspect of our lives—including language. This causes biological sex to be transformed into a social "status category with political implications" (p. 24)—i.e. social gender—, the consequences of which being a social order that engenders the "birthright priority whereby males rule females" (p. 25). This birthright priority is achieved by means of subjugating sex to "patriarchal polities with regard to temperament, role, and status" (p. 26), which provokes it to be socially burdened with stereotypes and codes of conduct (i.e. gender roles) meant to fulfill the necessities of the dominant group—i.e. men. As Carmen Fernández Martín (2011) explains, "[s]ocialization has followed men's rules and that is the reason why society has been constructed through an androcentric lens" (p. 68).

The body thus undergoes a male-dominated process of acculturation whereby "aggression, intelligence, force, and efficacy" is linked to the male gender while "passivity, ignorance, docility, 'virtue', and ineffectuality" to the female gender (Millet, 1970, p. 26). As Judith Butler (1986) expounds, "to be a gender, whether man, woman, or otherwise, is to be engaged in an ongoing cultural interpretation of bodies" (p. 36). As a result of this acculturation, our society is dominated by an androcentric, hierarchical order which guarantees "superior status in the male, inferior in the female" (Millet, 1970, p. 26) and turns the man into the subject and the woman into the object, the latter thus confined to the domestic realm whereas men are the main actants of the public sphere—hence the main contributor to science, arts, etc., and, as we will see below, to language evolution.

Now, how is the above reflected in language? Like the human body, human language undergoes a process of acculturation. It is shaped by our traditions, customs, and the inherent necessity of describing what surrounds us; in other words, "cultural biases leave their mark on language systems and (…) [thus] social inequality results in linguistic inequality" (McConnell-Ginet, 1989, p. 41). A language, therefore, relies on elements of our reality to come into existence, and it "itself participates in how that content and reality are formed, apprehended, expressed, and transformed" (Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 3). In fact, so strong is the linkage between language and reality that, in the 19th century, Wilhelm von Humboldt had already theorized about this. He assured that the actual difference between languages is not in "what a language is *able* to express but rather in 'what it encourages and stimulates its speakers to do from its own inner force'" (Deutscher, 2010, p. 135). Later on, in the 1930s, Edward Sapir and his student Benjamin L. Whorf took Humboldt's theory to the extreme by claiming that one's perspective of the world was determined by one's native language. Nowadays, even though such theory has been cast out, and it is known that language does not affect our cognitive skills in such a radical fashion, Guy Deutscher (2011) explains that

> When a language forces its speakers to pay attention to certain aspects of the world each time they open their mouths or prick up their ears, such habits of speech can eventually settle into habits of mind with consequences for memory, or perception, or associations, or even practical skills. (p. 152)

To prove this, he draws upon the works of Franz Boas and Roman Jakobson and asserts that the fundamental differences between languages "are not in what each language allows its speakers to express (…) but in what information each language obliges its speakers to express" (p. 151), which chimes with Frank and Treichler's (1989) assertion that "linguistic usage shapes and reinforces selected cognitive tendencies, usually those in conformity with widely accepted cultural practices and beliefs" (p. 9). This means that, if I am linguistically compelled

to constantly discriminate between the masculine (positively) and the feminine (negatively), I will be more likely to do the same socially.

In this sense, in 1870, Richard Grant White—prominent literary critic—asserted that a woman cannot be the semantic agent of the word *marriage*, but its passive object:

> Properly speaking, a man is not married to a woman, or married with her; nor are a man and a woman married with each other. The woman is married to the man. It is her name that is lost in his, not his in hers; she becomes a member of his family, not he of hers; it is her life that is merged, or supposed to be merged, in his, not his in hers; she follows his fortunes, and takes his station, not he hers. (as cited in Treichler, 1989, p. 56)

As seen, grammar here reflects and reinforces the social perception of men as active subjects and women as passive ones. In other words, women "must remain grammatically and socially passive" (Treichler, 1989, p. 56). The example here provided might be thought of as outdated or belonging to a man "from another time". However, as Frank and Treichler (1989) explain, the current, "dominant language—created and sustained by white educated men—does not generally incorporate women's experience, nor are women's words or ways of speaking valued" (p. 15). Therefore, languages were and are (and probably will be) male-defined and male-dominated, and sexism is thus almost intrinsic to them.

As many feminist scholars (among others, Bodine, 1975; Martyna, 1980; Stanley, 1978; Zuber & Reed, 1993) have already stated, language is the perfect means for the male elites to control society and preserve the patriarchal status quo. As Fernández (2011) puts it, it is "a tool men (and by extension society) [has] used to reproduce sexist patterns of behaviour" (p. 68). In the same line, Susan J. Wolfe (1989) explains that languages like English are "biased in favor of the male in both of syntax and semantics" (p. 81) and thus teemed with current examples like that of White, reason why terms like "Manglish", "the he/man approach" or "man-made English" (Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 5) have started to resonate among scholars.

In order to prove this, I will briefly scrutinize the male presence in dictionary making and sexist expressions and will then delve into the so-called generic masculine.

3. Dictionaries, Sayings and the False Generic

3.1. The Maletionary

It is imperative that one begin by asserting that a dictionary is (1) an institution which shapes usage and discourse and (2) a lexicographic, male-biased object. Concerning (1), a dictionary is "constructed within a given culture, and it may variously embody that culture's values and practices" (Treichler, 1989, p. 58). Therefore, making and authorizing a dictionary entails a twofold outcome: firstly, it becomes representative of a language usage that is "constrained by social rules and conventions regarding who can speak, whose words will be more heavily weighted, who will listen, who will record, and so on" (p. 58). Secondly, it is not merely constructed by this usage, but it echoes it every time it defines a word. As Treichler (1989) expounds, "a dictionary definition places a word within a particular grammatical, cognitive, and material context, thus constraining (dictating) usage, conceptualization, and perception" (p. 51). Thus, an although editors insist on not prescribing, but describing usage, dictionaries do play "significant roles as cultural authorities for meaning and usage", as they function as "linguistic legislators" (Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 5) aiming at maintaining the patriarchal status quo.

Regarding (2), as it is men who have historically been the chroniclers of the world, "the lexicon of a standard dictionary consists largely of words for activities, interests, and concerns associated primarily with men" (Treichler, 1989, p. 53). As Fernández (2011) asserts, "dictionary makers tend to be predominately middle-aged and middle-class males, and it is their conscious and unconscious attitudes towards female gender that reinforce sexist stereotyping" (p. 70). Therefore, it is no surprise that only 7 out of 46 members in the Real Academia Española are women (Asociación de Academias de la Lengua Española, 2019), or

that there has never been a woman among the chief editors of the Oxford English Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2022). Consequently, this male dominance entails that an already patriarchal reality should be lexicographically depicted through an androcentric lens[1].

To illustrate this, I am going to focus on some examples provided by Treichler and Frank (1989) and Fernández (2011). To begin with, let's examine the Stedman's Medical Dictionary's definition of *clitoris* as a "homologue of the penis in the male except that it is not perforated by the urethra and does not possess a corpus spongiosum" (Treichler, 1989, p. 52). This definition suggest that the male should be taken as a point of departure to describe the female. It conjures up the concept of women being (biologically) subordinated to men: the clitoris needs the pennis to be defined, Eve needed Adam's rib to come into being, and cars are designed for male bodies (see Criado, 2020). Similarly, the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) refers to the "lack of maternal care, or separation in early childhood from one's mother regarded as a cause of psychological problems in later life" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., Compounds) as *maternal deprivation,* but it does not contain *paternal deprivation* or another similar term. Other dictionaries, however, do contain the term *father absence*, which sounds gentler and implies a lesser negative impact on the family (Treichler & Frank, 1989). Furthermore, the Diccionario de la Real Academia Española (DRAE) defines *cocinillas* as "hombre que se *entromete* [my emphasis] en las tareas domésticas, especialmente en las de cocina" (Real Academia Española, n.d., Definition 1) and distinguishes between (1) *mujer pública* and *hombre público* as follows: (1) "prostituta" (Real Academia Española, n.d., Definition 1) and (2) "hombre que tiene presencia e influjo en la vida social" (Real Academia Española, n.d., Definition 1). Finally, in 2001, the DRAE's fifth entry for *hombre* read,

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[1] In fact, in dictionaries like the Random House Dictionary, "masculine-gender examples are three times more common than feminine-gender examples" and when "female sentences do occur, seven out of ten are likely to reflect stereotypes" (Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 5).

"Individuo que tiene las cualidades consideradas varoniles por excelencia, como el valor y la firmeza" (Fernández, 2011, p. 71). Likewise, the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (1984 edition) defined *women* as "(a female person with) female nature or qualities, such as caring for weak creatures, personal attractiveness, and interests in people" while *men* was defined as "a male person with courage, firmness, etc." (p. 71).

By looking at the above few examples, it already seems that dictionaries are solid pillars supporting the binarism "Men v. Women", as they mirror back an androcentric reality. As Fernández (2011) asserts, "[d]ictionaries not only give us linguistic data, but also reflect the ideology, the cultural paradigms, the prejudices, etc. of that society" (p. 72), reason why words referring to women (or "womanly" activities) are either more loaded with negative connotations than those referring to men or depend on the masculine counterpart to be defined[2]. In this sense, there is a myriad of male/female words in which the rationale "'male equals positive, female equals negative'" (Lakoff, 1975, as cited in Fernández, 2011, p. 73) is reproduced, which turns dictionaries into the shelter of a semantic process known as pejoration. As has been noted by Muriel Schulz (1975), there seems to be a "ubiquitous deprecation of female terms" as well as "a connection between a semantic feature (female) and a semantic process (pejoration)" (as cited in Wolfe, 1989, p. 90) that is constantly reinforced by dictionaries.

Therefore, dictionaries are the locus of this semantic process by deliberately not forcing apart pairs like *courtier/courtesan*, *bachelor/spinster*, or *governor/governess* and *cortesano/cortesana*, *solterón/solterona*, or *gobernante/gobernante*, which change their meaning depending on whether the referent is male or female (see Fernández, 2011, for a more comprehensive list). For instance, the word *bachelor* is defined as "[a]n unmarried man (of

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[2] Caswell et al. (2012) refer to this as *gender asymmetry*.

marriageable age)" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., Definition 4a) while *spinster* is defined as "[a] woman still unmarried; *esp.* one beyond the usual age for marriage, an old maid." (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., Definition 2b). That the OED specifies that the woman is not of marriageable age spreads a pejorative nuance attached to *spinster*. According to Fernández's (2011) corpus-based research, words such as *aging, elderly, old, lonely, wiry, dried-up, bitter, fastidious, uptight*, etc., normally collocate with *spinster*. Conversely, *ideal, best, most/highly eligible, handsome, nice, hottest, one-night*, etc., usually collocate with *bachelor*. In Spanish, although the DRAE does not provide such a pejorative definition of *solterón, na*, this pair behaves similarly. While we can find expressions like "solterón de oro", we find "quedarse para vestir santos" or adjectives like *amargada* and *reprimida* attached to *solterona*. Lastly, it is also worth mentioning the presence of sexism when illustrating the usage of a word. Here, Treichler (1989) points out Random House Dictionary's choice to exemplify the usage of the words *hell* and *overdone* as follows: (1) "she made his life a *hell* on earth" and (2) "she gave us *overdone* steak" (p. 57). It is obvious that both examples strengthen the stereotypes of women as (1) being hysterical and (2) being restricted to the domestic realm.

To wrap up this brief reflection on dictionary making, I would like to point out that descriptivism has been used by male editors as a stronghold against feminist criticism (Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 5). It is obvious, though, that the descriptivist stance they adopt is a biased one—otherwise, the DRAE would specify that *mujer de la calle*, *mujer del partido*, *mujer mundana*, or *mujer pública* are pejorative terms to refer to a woman, just like it does with the word *facha*. A balance between descriptivism and prescriptivism has to be found, and the latter cannot only deal with linguistic issues, but also sociolinguistic ones—i.e. the impact of linguistic sexism on women. Therefore, male editors' decision not to purge dictionaries from sexism and thus to authorize sexist meanings seems to lie in the perpetuation of "negative

representations of women[, for they] serve the interests of one group (men) at the expense of another (women)" (Treichler, 1989, p. 53).

3.2. Sexist Expressions in English and Spanish

For this section, I will draw upon Fernández Martín's (2011) cross-linguistic study on sexist expressions. I believe it essential to underscore a type of linguistic sexism that is often overlooked due to its metaphoric nature. These idiomatic expressions creep into our "cognitive map" in the shape of stereotypes that have the power to "maintain 'the social and symbolic order' (…) [while] mark[ing] a dividing line between what is normal and acceptable [i.e. the masculine] and what is abnormal and unacceptable [i.e. the feminine]" (pp. 68-69). Therefore, I will review 4 interesting sections[3] from Fernández's article.

In the first section, she underscores the blatant relation between female genitalia and passivity, as the vagina is often likened to a receptacle waiting to be filled up by the pennis[4]. She thus provides words like *box, hole, honeypot,* or *muff* in English and *cueva, gruta, túnel,* and *concha* in Spanish to illustrate the linkage between the vagina, passivity, and penetration. Moreover, Fernández (2011) draws upon Romaine's (1999) division of metaphors alluding to male genitalia into two branches: (1) erections and orgasms that are uncontrollable and (2) war and mythic terms. In (1), we find terms evoking penetration such as *drill, chopper, hose, pipe,* or *snake*. In (2), we find terms evoking conquest and a violent dominance over women such as *sword, gun, meatspear, beef bayonet, prick,* and *King Kong*. In Spanish, terms like *cachiporra, cipote, manubrio, pistola, porra, rompebragas,* or *trabuco* also conjure up the idea of "sexual intercourse as painful penetration" (p. 78). In addition to this, she also provides a few more examples loaded with sexual aggressivity against women in both English and Spanish: *to get*

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[3] These sections being titled "Women, Men, and 'Their Sex'", "Food Imagery: Women as Edibles", "Animal Imagery", and "Old Sayings".

[4] I.e. the female genitalia as a place for men to enter and conquer (often violently).

into someone, to nail, to cut a slice of the joint, to rip her guts down, cepillársela, hincársela, montarla, pasarla por la piedra, pincharla, etc. (p. 79).

As for the second section, Fernández (2011) explains that "men symbolically consume women (…). Women are at the disposal of men for them to enjoy and taste" (p. 80). She illustrates this by alluding to the linguistic association between women and food in the shape of nicknames such as *honey, sweetie, candy, cherry*, etc., that evoke the idea of women as being "available for consumption" (p. 80). In Spanish, words and expressions like *bombón, estar de vicio, estar buena, estar para chuparse los dedos*, or *estar para comérsela* signal the same disparagement.

In "Animal Imagery", Fernández (2011) explains that our relationship with animals divides our linguistic classification of them in terms of "proximity, domesticity, competition for resources and suitability for human food" (p. 80). Subsequently, this classification is transformed into analogies used to reflect men's "domestication, dominance, property status, sexual access and the thrill of the hunt" over women (p. 81). This is shown in animal pairs carrying a heavy sexist load. For instance, Fernández underscores the pair *hen party* and *stag party* in English, the former denoting "stupidity, fussiness and domesticity", the latter suggesting the idea of "men as noble, strong and wild", preparing themselves for hunting and "gathering before the wedding" (p. 82). In Spanish, she reflects women's debasement in pairs representing them as "reproductive machines" (e.g. *conejo/coneja*), "prostitutes" (e.g. *perro/perra, zorro/zorra*), and "shrewd creatures" (e.g. *lagarto/lagarta, pájaro/pájara, lobo/loba*) (p. 82).

Finally, Fernández (2011) asserts that the androcentric, negative depiction of women is encoded in proverbs, sayings, and formulaic expressions and explains that this popular knowledge proves to be particularly baneful, as it is passed from generation to generation, seen as ancient "axioms of incontestable truth" (p. 83), and hence ingrained in the social imaginary.

It thus constitutes a rather subreptitious source of "truth" which stereotypes women by "penaliz[ing] or reward[ing] individuals according to the moral standards of society as dictated by male patriarchy" (p. 83). In other words, these sayings may entail a very convenient manner for patriarchy to constantly reinforce social attitudes towards women—i.e. women as gossipy, witless, wicked, victimized individuals, etc. To prove this, she categorized these adages into different semantic fields. Firstly, those depicting women as venomously talkative: "a woman's tongue is the last thing about her that dies", "silence is a fine jewel for a woman, but it is little worn", "secreto a mujer confiado, en la calle lo has echado" (p. 84). Secondly, sayings depicting women as unintelligent: "when an ass climbs a ladder we may find wisdom in women", "a la mujer el hombre la ha de hacer" (p. 84). Thirdly, sayings depicting women as sly and evil: "el judío y la mujer vengativos suelen ser", "la mujer y la avispa por el rabo pican" (p. 84). Fourthly, sayings justifying violence against women: "a spaniel, a woman, and a walnut tree, the more they're beaten the better they be", "a la mujer y la burra, cada día una zurra" (p. 84). Finally, sayings depicting women as sexual objects: "one hair of a woman draws more than a team of oxen", "beauty draws more than oxen", "tiran más dos tetas que cien carretas" (p. 85).

3.3. Generic Masculine

The current presence of the generic masculine in language comes from and responds to the same necessity of maintaining the androcentric status quo unthreatened. In this regard, while dictionary making attempts to feed negative representations of women, the generic masculine seems to aim at obliterating women from reality. In fact, it is noteworthy to look at the definitions of the words *man* and *hombre* in the OED and the DRAE. On the one hand, the OED defines *man* as "[a] human being (irrespective of sex or age)" and specifies[5] that "now

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[5] Rather than changing the definition to, for instance, "male human being".

[is] frequently understood to exclude women, and is therefore avoided by many people" (Oxford English Dictionary, n.d., Definition I). On the other hand, the DRAE defines *hombre* as "[s]er animado racional, varón o mujer" (Real Academia Española, n.d., Definition 1). Thus, one can already see that, grammatically, there is a tendency to dissolve the feminine into the masculine, which means that the hierarchical relationship "Man v. Woman" that exists culturally is echoed grammatically[6].

In this sense, prescriptivist (and male-made) grammars have traditionally argued that the masculine gender is the unmarked one within the grammatical system of gender and that, in certain contexts, the masculine gender equals gender neutrality. As Meyers (1974) explains, "for human nouns, *masculine* appears to be the general feature, *feminine* the special one" (as cited in Wolfe, 1989, p. 85). Similarly, the Real Academia Española asserts that the masculine gender "puede referirse a grupos formados de hombres y mujeres y, en contextos genéricos o inespecíficos, a personas de uno u otro sexo" (as cited in Mendivíl, 2019, p. 36). The main problem of the generic masculine lies, in fact, in this gender bearing both un- and sex-specificity. As Márquez (2016) explains, to merge the specific and the generic in the same linguistic sign is a logical issue that prompts ambiguity in language, the emergence of a false generic masculine, and women's invisibility.

As a matter of fact, according to Meyers' and the RAE's assertions, job advertisements such as (1) *Doctors Wanted* or (2) *Se necesita médico* would mean 'male and female doctors are needed' and 'se necesita médico varón o mujer'. However, if one added *Women Need Not*

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[6] It is important to understand that English and Spanish do not work alike in terms of grammatical gender, the former being a natural gender language and the latter a gendered one. Therefore, this section is a brief overview of the generic masculine stemming from a feminist perspective (Aliaga, 2018; Márquez, 2016; Stanley, 1978; Treichler & Frank, 1989; Wolfe, 1989). Nevertheless, as I acknowledge that the complexity of Spanish in terms of gender demands that different proposals be put forward, I urge the reader to refer to José Luis Mendívil Giró's (2019) study, which, despite not chiming with this paper's ideology, it adopts a different stance on the subject that is worth knowing of. Furthermore, due to the increasing popularity of the Singular *They* with young speakers in the recent years, subsection 3.3.1. is devoted to examining its history and success as an anti-sexist mechanism.

Apply to (1)—i.e. *Doctors Wanted: Women Need Not Apply* (Treichler & Frank, 1989)—the sex specificity of the sentence would be blatant. Likewise, if one added *las mujeres serán contratadas directamente* to (2)—i.e. *Se necesita médico (las mujeres serán contratadas directamente)*—the sex specificity of the sentence would also be evident [7]. Therefore, ambiguity is triggered in such cases, demanding disambiguation, which has to do with the fact that most nouns in English and Spanish are inherently interpreted as masculine. As Wolfe (1989) says, we speak in English "'as if the person referred to were male unless we have information to the contrary', a habit Stanley attributed to the predominance of men in most occupations and socially prominent and powerful positions" (p. 86). Something similar happens to Spanish nouns, in which there is a tendency to associate word endings to male or female referents. As Márquez (2016) explains, "[l]a histórica vinculación del morfema de género con el contenido lingüístico de 'sexo' justifica la necesidad de precisión", a need for accuracy that became obvious when women gained access to the public sphere (see Aliaga, 2018, on *reanálisis del género gramatical*).

Consequently, if we did not disambiguate these sentences, we would be violating Grice's Maxim of Quantity, which dictates that one needs to be as informative as possible while providing as much information as needed. Due to this violation, "se identifica a la especie humana con el conjunto de los varones y, como consecuencia, se da como algo natural la ausencia de mujeres" (Márquez, 2016, p. 11). Thus, feminist approaches to language have come to define these examples as instances of a *pseudogeneric* usage. If more blatant examples with the words *man* and *hombre* were examined, not only could it be seen that they are instances of a *pseudogeneric* use but it could also be noticed that they do not work due to their potential

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[7] Álvaro García Meseguer (1997) coined this phenomenon as *salto semántico* (as cited in Márquez, 2016).

ambiguity. Therefore, in sentences like (1) *all men are human; some men are women* and (2) *el hombre es un animal que amamanta a sus crías* there is an alleged generic use of the masculine; however, the collision of the un- and sex-specificity (Márquez, 2016; Treichler & Frank, 1989) causes these sentences to be nonsensical—(1) implies that a woman is a type of man and (2) implies that human males can breastfeed. In addition, many studies proving that the generic masculine does not actually evoke gender neutrality have been conducted. In English, Treichler and Frank (1989) point out a few key studies: first, when college students were asked to choose pictures to illustrate captions like "Social Man" and "Urban Man", there was a tendency to select pictures where only men appeared (see Schneider & Hacker, 1973); second, researchers found that sex-biased job advertisements influence high school students' job preferences (see Bem & Bem, 1973); finally, researchers found that students understood texts better when *pseudogeneric* pronouns were replaced by nonsexist pronouns (see Mackay & Fulkerson, 1979).

Due to what has been seen so far, feminist approaches to masculine generic argue that the prescription of this use entails that women are bound to a linguistic subalternity reflective of the social reality. In an attempt to enshroud women's linguistic subordination to men, many scholars have contrived three fallacies. In the first place, they define grammatical gender as "a formal, arbitrary marking of morphological forms in keeping with the grammatical rules of a given language", thereby ignoring its semantic component (Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 13) and thus its effects on society. Nevertheless, as Márquez (2016) states, "una definición puramente formal del género no puede explicar, por ejemplo, la motivación que se observa en fenómenos como la abundante creación de femeninos específicos desde los orígenes del idioma" (p. 4). Furthermore, this brings about the well-known dichotomy between sexist language and sexist usage (i.e. language and speech), which has been alluded to by many linguists to unburden language from social responsibilities. This dichotomy purports to demonstrate that

sexism does not exist within linguistic systems but in the speakers' minds (see Álvaro García Meseguer, 2002, for the term *sexismo del oyente*).

Nonetheless, this claim stops holding true when Saussure's division between *langue* and *parole* is summoned up, for they are two inextricable realities only separable when studying language. As Márquez (2016) explains,

> [S]i entendemos la clásica división entre *lengua*/*habla* como una clasificación epistemológica que supone la consideración de dos puntos de vista posibles a la hora de acercarse al hecho real único que es la lengua, deja de tener sentido tal pregunta [¿es la lengua sexista o lo son los hablantes?]. La dicotomía pertenece al plano de la investigación y no al de la realidad. (p. 3)

In the second place, linguists like Ignacio Bosque "hablan del 'error' en el que caen los hablantes al 'confundir de forma incorrecta lengua con realidad', género gramatical con sexo" (Márquez, 2016, p. 4). However, history proves otherwise. If one looks back into the past, there are plenty of examples demonstrating that biological sex and grammatical gender share a direct linkage and thus grammars were constructed bearing this association in mind. For instance, in 1560, Wilson wrote that "in speaking at the leaste, let us kepe a natural order, and set the man before the woman for maners Sake" (as cited in Bodine, 1975, p. 134); in 1646, Poole wrote that "[t]he Masculine gender is more worthy than the Feminine" (p. 134); in 1651, James Shirley wrote that "All Nouns the Male, or Female Gender Have, As Nature first to things the Sexes gave" (as cited in Treichler & Frank, 1989, p. 14); in 1712, Michael Maittaire stated that "[t]he gender signifies the kind or sex" (as cited in Stanley, 1978, p. 802); in 1795, Lindley Murray said that "[g]ender is the distinction of sex" (p. 802); in 1851, Goold Brown asserted that "[t]he Supreme Being (*God*, . .) is, in all languages, masculine; in as much as the masculine sex is the superior and more excellent" (p. 804) (see Roca, 2005, for examples in Spanish grammars). From the 20th century on, these assertions disappeared from handbooks, but not

their underlying intentions. As Márquez (2016) states, there are two possibilities when approaching the generic masculine: either the semantic content of the grammatical gender is ignored, thereby enabling the generic masculine, or acknowledged, thereby precluding the possibility of a true generic masculine. Apparently, language regulators like the RAE are bent on overlooking the semantic content of the grammatical gender, thus choosing the first possibility. In other words, there is a blatant resistance to acknowledge the semantic function of grammatical gender so that the use and advocacy of the generic masculine can be justified.

Finally, language regulators have often described solutions to the ambiguous generic masculine as "artificial". As Bodine (1975) asserts, "the feminists' demand is viewed as an attempt to alter the English language" (p. 131). However, because the linguistic sign is shaped by historical factors (Culler, 1976), and the relationship between signified and signifier constantly shifts (Saussure, 1916, as cited in Benveniste, 1966), it is actually very difficult to determine what is artificial. What is more, this language regulators' rationale on artificiality could be turned against themselves if one examined, for instance, the history of the Singular *They*, which despite being widely used by writers, and even proscribed by 18th-century grammarians like Ward (1765)[8], language regulators have deliberately tried to curb its use, thereby altering language evolution themselves.

3.3.1. *The Singular Use of They*

In spite of its use being more controversial than ever, the singular use of *they* is not a contemporary issue. Manifestations of the sex-indefinite use of the pronoun *they* can be traced back to Jane Austen or Walter Scott (Bodine, 1975). Nevertheless, it is still a problematic topic for some grammarians probably due to their androcentric conception of the world—and thus

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[8] "[T]he plural *they* equally represents objects of all the three genders; for a plural object may consist of singular objects, some of which are masculine, others feminine, and others neuter" (as cited in Bodine, 1975, p. 135).

of language. As already seen in previous sections, a hierarchical conception of gender was already present in early grammarians such as Wilson (1553), who stated that, linguistically, "'the worthier is preferred and set before. As a man is sette before a woman" (Bodine, 1975, p. 134). Consequently, this male-biased interpretation of language pervaded the eighteenth-century English grammars, which gravitate around an androcentric view of pronoun usage. Therefore, in following the rationale of their forerunners, grammarians such as Kirby (1746) claimed that "[t]he masculine Person answers to the general Name, which comprehends both Male and Female" (as cited in Bodine, 1975, p. 135). What is more, these statements were institutionalized by the Act of Parliament of 1850, which compelled English speakers to use the generic *he* (Bodine, 1975). As Zuber and Reed (1993) explain, this was a blatant "political move forcing language to perpetuate a male-dominated social structure" (p. 519).

In this respect, every time the patriarchal social order has been threatened, grammar handbooks were produced in mass to preserve the status quo. As a result, "more than 200 [grammars] appeared in England between 1750 and 1800" (Zuber & Reed, 1993, p. 517), and something of the like occurred in the twentieth-century America. Subtly, these handbooks turned into "powerful, although not always accurate, monitors of language" (p. 518) which, under the pretext of uniformity, aimed at perpetuating "an androcentric pronoun system" (p. 520). In the same vein, schools inherited a prescriptivist approach to teaching English, thereby reproducing the same condemnatory statements against alternatives to generic *he*. In fact, twenty-eight out of the thirty-three handbooks reviewed by Bodine (1975) objected to standardizing the Singular *They*, one of them alleging that "grammatically, men are more important than women" (p. 139).

The rationale of these textbooks for not accepting singular *they* revolves around agreement in number, (un)consciously leaving out the question of gender—i.e. *they* is ungrammatical because it does not agree with its antecedent in number. However, it seems to

be perfectly grammatical that a pronoun does not agree with its antecedent in gender. This strategy thus evinces that the rejection of the Singular *They* had (and has) little to do with grammar and much with bigotry. In fact, as Bodine (1975) explains, there are other occasions where "unnecessary number is to be dispensed with by the arbitrary choice of either the singular *or* plural, [whereas] unnecessary gender is to be dispensed with by the use of the masculine *only*" (p. 136). Therefore, it seems that the underlying reason for treating gender and number differently is that of their social implications. That is to say, while replacing *they* for generic *he* places men on the top of the hierarchy, using *life* or *lives* in sentences like "The Life of Men and The Lives of Men" (p. 136) provides no benefit for the male elites.

In this regard, the survival of the singular *they* in spite of all the attempts to penalize its use raises the question of its necessity. If after hundreds of years of persecution, it is still alive, it seems sensible to assert that generic *he* has failed to fulfill its role as an indefinite-sex pronoun. In fact, the linguistic and psycholinguistic literature "supports the claim that someone hearing or reading a sentence like *Every student should do his best* will perceive the referent of *student* to be male" (Zuber & Reed, 1993, p. 520), which accounts for its failure. Consequently, it is little wonder that the proscription against singular *they* has been "systematically violated in speech by all but the most self-conscious speakers of American English"[9] (as cited in Zuber & Reed, 1993, p. 522). Thus, to neglect *they* as the most used sex-indefinite pronoun in the English language means impinging on the speakers' capacity to refer to the world they live in.

In short, English speakers have invented nothing new and much less "altered" language; they simply "continue a centuries-long tradition, in both speech and writing, of using 'singular

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[9] Specifically, two uses of the singular *they* have predominated among English speakers: (1) animate indefinite pronouns + singular *they* and (2) animate gender neuter antecedents + singular *they* (Zuber & Reed, 1993).

they' with indefinite antecedents" (p. 516). In fact, as Bodine (1975) states, speakers' demand that the Singular *They* be accepted is just a natural "counter-reaction to an attempt by prescriptive grammarians to alter the language" (p. 131).

4.   The Societal Impact of Linguistic Sexism

Earlier in this paper, I referred to Deutscher's (2011) Jakobson-Boas theory on linguistic relativism. To briefly recap, this theory posits that in forcing speakers to constantly stress (or not) grammatical aspects bearing a semantical linkage with reality (e.g. gender), language influences speakers' behavioral patterns. Thus, now that the androcentric nature of language has been demonstrated, I will draw upon Caswell, Prewitt-Freilino, and Laakso's (2012) study to prove the sociolinguistic impact of sexism. Were I to have no limitations in terms of words, I would also expound on other interesting studies (see Gabriel & Gygax, 2016; Liu et al., 2018; Wasserman & Weseley, 2009). However, as this is so, I decided to concentrate on one study.

Caswell et al. (2012) put forward that "when language constantly calls attention to gender distinctions by discriminating between masculine and feminine nouns and pronouns (…)[,] individuals may be more apt to draw distinctions between men and women" (p. 269). To bear this out, they compiled a list of 111 countries, the languages of which were categorized into gendered, natural gender or genderless. Subsequently, they referred to the 2009 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report and the 2010 Human Development Index to establish a relation between the type of language spoken and the levels of gender equality in each country. Furthermore, to control for other potential influences on gender equality, they integrated into their study the following covariates: geographic location, religious tradition, system of government, and relative human development. Then, they formulated the following hypotheses: (1) "Countries predominated by a gendered language system should consistently evidence less gender equality across the various indexes than countries where natural gender

or genderless languages are spoken" (p. 272) and (2) "[c]ountries predominated by a natural gender language system should evidence greater gender equality than countries with other grammatical gender systems" (p. 273).

The results yielded by the survey supported both hypotheses. As expected, gendered languages scored lower than natural gender and genderless languages in gender equality (even when the covariates were removed), and natural gender languages scored higher than the others in gender equality. Therefore, Caswell et al. (2012) assert that their findings "suggest a relationship between the gendering of language at a macro level and society-wide indicators of gender equality" (p. 278). Furthermore, they also suggest that the whole issue may have to do more with a language's ability to create gender symmetry than with it containing grammatical gender per se[10]. Finally, Caswell et al. (2012) acknowledge that although these results cannot

> address questions about the process through which these differences emerge or if language systems play a causal role (…), by including other possible causal factors in our model, we know that the pattern of variation in gender equality cannot be completely explained by divergent geographic locations, religious traditions, government systems, or level of development alone. (p. 279)

Be that as it may, these findings demonstrate that languages do have an impact on gender equality, thereby supporting Deutscher's (2011) theory.

5. Nursery Rhymes and *Canciones Populares*: A Cross-linguistic Analysis

With this section, my intention is to add a fourth pillar to what I consider the stronghold of linguistic sexism. Thus, I decided to analyze children's nursery rhymes and *canciones populares* to deal with patriarchy and childhood. In so doing, these analyses purport to illustrate

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[10] In this sense, Caswell et al. (2012) believe that "natural gender languages may be the most successful at promoting gender-inclusive language, because unlike genderless languages they are able to include gender-symmetrical forms in pronouns and nouns" (p. 279).

how the binarism "Men v. Women" and androcentrism are instilled in children by means of language. To attain this, the songs (see Appendix) have been grouped into five different themes, and, subsequently, a cross-linguistic analysis has been carried out. As will be seen, the patriarchal social order begins to be inculcated when children are only starting to socialize. Their growth and maturation are intertwined with sexist attitudes fostered—among others—by these songs, which sets the tone for the future normalization of such attitudes among teenagers (see Díaz-Aguado, Martínez Arias, Babarro, & Falcón, 2021).

5.1. Analysis and Discussion

5.1.1. Gender Violence

For this subsection, I have chosen "Don Federico Mató a su Mujer", "El Verdugo Sancho Panza" and "Peter Pumpkin Eater" to carry out a comparative analysis between them. The rationale for grouping them is that, thematically, the three songs deal with gender violence within the household. This violence takes the shape of murder in the first two texts. In the third one, though, there is no explicit murder, but the husband does physically restrain his wife within the private sphere.

Firstly, it is essential to observe how grammar reproduces the social hierarchy between women and men that exists in the non-linguistic realm. In the three texts, the men are (syntactically) Subjects and (semantically) Agents whereas women are Objects and Patients. It is Don Federico who *kills*, *chops* and *cooks* his wife; Sancho who *murders* his wife, and Peter who *has*, *keeps*, *puts*, and *loves* his wife. Linguistically, men perform the action and women receives it, which chimes with the ideological expectation of women as passive individuals and men as active ones—recall Treichler's (1989) example on the word *marriage*. In addition, it is interesting to retrieve Fernández's (2011) point in women as edibles, since it is reflected here and further illustrates the linguistic activeness of men. In both the first and the third texts, it is implied that women are eaten by their murderers: Don Federico "la puso en la sartén" and Peter,

who is described as a "pumpkin eater", entraps his wife in a pumpkin. Besides this, only the men own a name in each text: Don Federico, Sancho and Peter. However, women are nameless and only referred to as *wife of*, *costurera*, *bella dama*, *mala bruja* and *vieja*, which strips them of an identity and thwarts the reader from empathizing with the female characters. In fact, in examining how women and men are referred to, one can see that these lines drip with a patriarchal organization of reality. In the first song, we have **Don[11]** *Federico* and a *General* on one side, but a *mujer*, a *costurera*, a *bella dama* and a *mala bruja* on the other side. Therefore, while men receive titles denoting high social status, women are reduced to being men's possessions (*wife of*), to professions alluding to the private sphere (*costurera*), to their appearance (*bella mujer*), and to debasing stereotypes—e.g. *mala bruja*; recall Fernández's (2011) disparaging sayings and metaphors on women as evil creatures. Furthermore, the three songs normalize the domestic realm as a hostile prison for women (cf. Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper"), as it is at home where gender violence takes place in each text with no consequences. In fact, the *pumpkin shell* in the English nursery rhyme could even be understood as a metaphor for this domestic imprisonment. Moreover, it is noteworthy to point out what each character loses in the first text. In this respect, Don Federico loses his wallet, the seamstress loses her thimble, the general loses his sword, the beautiful lady loses her fan, etc. While the **wallet** links the man to the public sphere, the **thimble** links the woman to the private one—see Patmore's "The Angel in the House". Likewise, while the **sword** links the man to male stereotypes (e.g. bravery, strength, etc.), the **fan** links the woman to female stereotypes (e.g. beauty, ignorance, docility, etc.)—remember Millet's (1970) list of stereotypes. Finally, it is also worth noting the endings of the first and the third text, as they can be turned into

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[11] "Tratamiento de respeto que se antepone a los nombres de pila. Antiguamente estaba reservado a determinadas personas de elevado rango social" (Real Academia Española, n.d., Definition 1).

subversive acts. As for the first one, it is remarkable that the woman become Subject and semantic Agent of the verb *decir* and reject Don Federico, thus acquiring certain degree of activeness. Nevertheless, it is still referred to as a *mala bruja*. As for the third text, it suggests that ignorance is the locus of gender violence, since it is only when Peter "learned to read and spell" that he could love.

5.1.2. The Domestic Realm

For this subsection, I have chosen "Los días de la semana", "I Had a Little Hen", and "There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe" to carry out a comparative analysis between them. The rationale for grouping them is that, thematically, the three songs deal with the binary opposition Public Sphere v. Private Sphere—as well as with the concept of Production v. Reproduction.

First, "Los días de la semana" is articulated around the days of the week. In the text, each day is presented in a parallel structure governed by the verb *jugar*, which constitutes an epiphora around which gravitates the tragedy of this song: a child cannot play because she is a girl. Every *jugar* is followed by an adversative clause that replaces this verb with another one which prevents the little girl from playing. Every time she is about to play, the action is interrupted by the adversative conjunction *pero* and a chore is introduced: the girl cannot play because she has to do the laundry, iron the clothes, sew, sweep, cook, embroider, and knit. All the actions, which are related to the private sphere, entrap the girl within the household and socially burden her—recall Millet's (1970) concept of birthright priority and what I said about codes of conduct and gender roles.

The second text depicts a very similar scenario. The rhyme begins by the speaker asserting his[12] possession of the *hen*—he is the Subject/Agent of the verb *to have* while she is its Object/Patient—and describing her as *little* and *prettiest*, adjectives that chime with how women are socially expected. Subsequently, the rhyme acquires a parallel structure dominated by the anaphora *She*, and the hen turns into the Subject/Agent of different verbs related to chores. In this sense, it is interesting to look at the ditransitivity of the verbs *washed*, *baked*, *fetch* and *brewed*, as the iO *me* illustrates who the beneficiary of the hen's actions is. Furthermore, the complex-transitive verb *kept* also evinces what her social role is here: to liberate the husband of these chores and make the house readily available for him to use.

These first two texts are representative of the binarism Production v. Reproduction. These two concepts stem from a Marxist feminist approach that understands women's situation as menaced not only by patriarchy, but also by capitalism (Paltasingh & Lingam, 2014). Marxist feminists see capitalism as men's mechanism to guarantee their privileged position in society by means of establishing two spheres: the public (where production takes place) and the private (where reproduction takes place). The public sphere is male dominated, and it is where income-generating activities, intellectual activities, socialization, etc., occur. Conversely, the private sphere is female (albeit male dominated as well), and it is where the reproduction of the labor force occurs—i.e. cooking, cleaning, childcare, etc. Therefore, patriarchy uses capitalism to entrap women within the domestic realm to cater to the male head of the house, who can thus enjoy all the privileges of the public sphere—in these two texts' case, the boys and the husband. As Tattwamasi Paltasingh and Lakshmi Lingam (2014) explain,

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[12] I am assuming the gender of the speaker because in earlier versions the rhyme speaks about a *wife*, not a *hen*. Later on, *wife* was replaced by *hen* in an attempt to conceal the underlying sexism of this text.

The labour is almost wholly produced by the female dependents within the household and because the male head of household is expropriating surplus labour when he consumes the use values produced by his dependents. He benefits from this relation of exploitation, both in the use values he appropriates and on the leisure time resulting from the necessary labour time he relinquishes. (p. 46)

Thirdly, I have chosen "There Was an Old Woman" to illustrate another issue linked to the concept of reproduction: women's biological exploitation. Childbearing is one of the functions[13] patriarchy imposes on women and capitalism exploits. In this sense, this short nursery rhyme revolves around a woman overwhelmed by this biological responsibility: "She had so many children, she didn't know what to do". There is no sign of the husband, and it is her who is entrapped in the private sphere to fulfill her role as a woman: to give birth and rear children. Within patriarchy and capitalism, women's bodies are used to men's advantage:

The number and spacing of children is also determined by the husband or male head of the family, as a consequence men have control over children for purposes of inheritance of labour and property (Sen, 1984). Ideologies are strengthened in such a way which devalues the status of women who do not have children or sons. (Paltasingh & Lingam, 2014, p. 50)

What is more, if one remembers Fernández's (2011) corpus-based research on the words *spinster* and *solterona*, it is obvious that current society still expects women to fulfill the childbearing part of their reproductive labor. A baneful expectation that his nursery rhyme inculcates children with.

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[13] Surrogacy, drug dealing [drug couriers], etc., are other examples of this biological exploitation.

5.1.3. Objectification

For this subsection, I have chosen "Soy capitán de un barco inglés", "When I Was Bachelor", and "The Old Man" to carry out a comparative analysis between them. The rationale for grouping them is that, thematically, the three songs deal with the objectification of women.

In the first song, an English captain is presented as the speaker, and it is through his voice that women are depicted. The song opens with a parallel structure whereby this speaker describes himself as a captain, which immediately establishes a social hierarchy in which he is above the women. Indeed, they are not related to any profession, but reduced to their physical characteristics. By means of the synecdoche[14], the speaker dehumanizes these women, who are referred to as nothing else than "la rubia" and "la morena", and thus precludes the listener from empathizing with them. Furthermore, this dehumanization is heightened by the way these women are treated as readily available objects for the captain to collect and compare, which syntax perfectly reflects. In this sense, whereas *capitán* is the Subject of the verb *tener*, *mujer*[15] is its dO, which, semantically, defines the man as the owner and the women as the entity owned. Also, it normalizes the idea of men as philanderers.

Subsequently, the compound sentence "la rubia es / fenomenal / y la morena / tampoco está mal" exemplifies the reinforcement of the objectification (and hence dehumanization) I mentioned earlier. Syntactically, the two independent clauses can be functionally analyzed into a Subject (*la rubia* and *la morena*), a verb group subcategorized as intensive (*es* and *está*), and the Subject Complement (*fenomenal* and *mal*). It is precisely this use of the complementation pattern that likens women to objects waiting to be valued by men, as it allows the male speaker

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[14] That is, the author uses a part (the hair) of a whole (a woman) to represent that whole.

[15] It is interesting to note that this syntactic pattern is repeated 22 times throughout all the rhymes/songs. That is to say, a man is the subject of a verb while a woman is its object/prepositional complement 22 times.

to predicate a sexist quality of the female subject[16]. Finally, it is worth noting how the verb *casar(se)* works at the end of the song, since it mirrors the use of the word *marriage* that White (1870) endorsed—see section 2. As in his example, it is the captain who marries whomever woman he wants, not the other way round: "me casaré / con la que me guste más". Consequently, women's voices are silenced, and they are stripped of a choice about their sexual/romantic lives.

Secondly, in "When I Was a Bachelor", the speaker defines himself as a former bachelor and describes a previous lifestyle which stereotypes single men as unkempt and in need of a woman to take care of the domestic sphere: "I lived by myself / (…) The rats and the mice / They made such a strife". This perpetuates gender roles which fetter women to the private sphere (i.e. housewives) and objectify them. In fact, it is the bachelor's "inability" to do the domestic chores that takes him to marry a woman and turn her into a commodity—she is carried in a "wheelbarrow"—to better his life. In this sense, syntax is again essential to understand this objectification process. There are two (di)transitive verbs around which gravitate the objectification of the woman: *to buy* and *to bring*. The bachelor is Subject to these two verbs whereas the wife is their dO. He is literally buying a wife and bringing her to the household so he can liberate himself from the chores of the private sphere—remember the Production v. Reproduction concept seen above. Furthermore, the use of the possessive determiner *my* reinforces the idea of the wife being a mere object he owns. Finally, it is also noteworthy to recall Caswell et al.'s (2012) concept of *gender asymmetry* and Fernández's (2011) analysis of the pair *bachelor/spinster*—see subsections 3.1. and 3.2.—, since it is precisely this asymmetry that is being instilled in children when singing this rhyme to them:

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[16] Think of sexist expressions following this complementation pattern like *estar buena*, *estar maciza*, *ser un bombón*, *estar potorra*, etc.

the idea of a bachelor as a philanderer and a spinster as a wiry, aging woman who is lost without a man.

Thirdly, in "The Old Man", objectification revolves around the main theme of this rhyme: prostitution. Here, the speaker portrays a sexual encounter between an "old man" and a "maid". An encounter which is commodified; that is, he kisses her and then pays her for that kiss: "He kissed a maid / And gave her a groat". As in the first song, there is an uneven social position between man and woman that is going to be essential to understand this transaction. In the second line, the speaker tells the listener that this old man is dressed in rather expensive garments; namely, that he is wearing a coat made of "velvet", a luxurious fabric which not everybody could afford. Conversely, the woman is only referred to as "a maid", without further description. Therefore, this old man is obtaining this kiss by exercising two privileges over the woman: (1) being a man in a patriarchy and (2) being an upper-class man in a capitalist society which commodifies women's bodies. The male character is literally paying to use the female character's body for his own pleasure. As Alison Jagger (1991) explains,

> Just as the capacity to labor becomes a commodity under capitalism, so does sexuality, especially the sexuality of women. (…) Like wage laborers, they [prostitutes] become dehumanized and their value as persons is measured by their market price. And like wage laborers, they are compelled to work by economic pressure; prostitution, if not marriage, may well be the best option available to them. (as cited in Robinson, 2007, p. 26)

Therefore, this children's rhyme normalizes the dehumanizing effect prostitution has on women and encourages the idea that women's body can be purchased.

5.1.4. Gender Identity

For this subsection, I have chosen "Al pasar por el cuartel" and "What Are Little Boys Made of" to carry out a comparative analysis between them. The rationale for grouping these

two songs is that, thematically, they deal with gender roles. For this analysis I will draw upon Judith Butler's understanding of social gender as an act. As known, the masculine and the feminine are artificial constructs used by the male elites to bring about a social order which privileges men and oppresses women. As Butler (1988) explains, "what is called gender identity is a performative accomplishment compelled by social sanction and taboo" (p. 520). In other words, this binary concept has come to polarize societies by forcing us to repeat, reenact, and reexperience these constructs: our social gender is nothing but an enforced performance. It is precisely this repetition, reenactment, and reexperience that the songs to analyze have forced on children. In Butler's (1988) words,

> to be a woman is to have become a woman, to compel the body to conform to an historical idea of "woman," to induce the body to become a cultural sign, to materialize oneself in obedience to an historically delimited possibility, and to do this as a sustained and repeated corporeal project. (p. 522)

These songs are, therefore, teaching children how to be masculine and feminine boys and girls.

The first song offers a gender-biased depiction in a traditionally manly setting: the barracks. Men are portrayed as stout, strong, brave, and violent[17], thus fitting in the masculine environment the text is set in; women, however, are seen as little, fragile, meek, and hence unfit for the barracks. This portrait of masculinity and femininity engenders codes of conduct[18] (remember section 2) this song hammers in children. Subtly, the patriarchal definition of a woman and a man is instilled in them.

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[17] The song even fosters gender violence: "estuve siete días / sin poderme levantar!"
[18] That is, how they should behave, what is socially acceptable for each of them, etc.

Firstly, it is interesting to scrutinize (a) what women and men are referred to as, (b) adjectivation, and (c) what activity each gender is related to. To begin with, women are only referred to as "niñas" whereas men are referred to as "coronel", "cacho de animal", "soldados", and "capitán". This evokes, on the one hand, a societal hierarchy in which men are on the top (high military ranks) and women are on the bottom and hence subordinated to them. On the other hand, it also defines how each gender must behave: while men are depicted as dominant ("coronel" and "capitán"), violent ("cacho de animal"), and brave ("soldados"), women are depicted as submissive, weak, and unassertive ("Soldado valiente / no me pise usted, / que soy pequeñita / y me puedo caer"). As for adjectivation, I find it rather telling that while women are qualified as "bonitas" and "pequeñitas", men are qualified as "valiente[s]". Not only do these adjectives describe the characters in this text, but also conjure up in children's minds a particular behavioral pattern they are expected to perform. Lastly, the text also sends the message that women and men cannot be involved in the same activities. In this respect, the speaker, rather patronizingly, urges girls to leave the barracks and go shopping ("Si eres pequeñita / y te puedes caer, cómprate un vestido / de color café"), but shows men as being in their natural environment—i.e. a war-like, violent one[19].

Secondly, the song conjures up women's subordination to men in society and normalizes male dominance—it is the strong who dominates the weak, the stout who controls the fragile, etc.—through syntax. By means of the ditransitive verbs *pegar*, *dar*, and *pisar*, men are made dominant, as it is the "coronel" and the "soldados" (Subjects) who violently step on the girls (iO)[20]. In fact, the action of being trampled upon can work as a graphic metaphor for women's oppression. Furthermore, the Subject is only female when the speaker states that she

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[19] In this sense, it is worth recalling Fernández's (2011) metaphors on war and violent dominance when referring to men.

[20] "vino el coronel / a pegarme un pisotón", "¡Qué pisotón me dio / el cacho de animal (…)", and "los soldados las [sic] pisan los pies".

was injured by the colonel ("estuve siete días / sin poderme levantar"), that pretty girls like her do not go to the barracks ("Las niñas bonitas / no van al cuartel"), to define herself as "pequeñita", or to advise other girls on what activities are suitable for them ("cómprate un vestido / de color café"). Indeed, it is worth noting that the voice of this text is female, as there might be an intention behind this. In the speaker being a little girl, female listeners may feel more identified with it and thus fall into the behavioral patterns it dictates. In short, it best serves the purpose of setting the boundaries between the manly and the womanly spheres.

Similarly to the previous one, the second song provides children with a sexist, binary portrait of society. First of all, the organization of the song already hints at the author's underlying intentions. This nursery rhyme shows a binary structure which mirrors that of a patriarchal society, thereby setting the boundary between what is socially considered as feminine and masculine—i.e. gender identity. As can be seen, the song is divided into two stanzas: in the first one, which is on the top of the social hierarchy, are the boys; in the second one, which is on the bottom of this hierarchy, are the girls. Each stanza tells the listener what boys and girls are made of—because they are not made the same, naturally. In so doing, the speaker instills this idea of men and women being entirely different from each other in children, a difference that goes beyond the individual and suggests that there is even a biological reason for them to behave differently[21]. Certainly, this is a justification to associate traditionally masculine behavioral patterns with boys and traditionally feminine ones with girls while prompting children to reenact them.

Both stanzas open with a parallel structure in which the speaker wonders what little boys and girls are made of. It answers to itself saying that it is of "snails, and puppy-dogs' tails"

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[21] In other words, the myth of men being from Mars and women from Venus—see Gray's (1992) *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus: The Classic Guide to Understanding the Opposite Sex* and cf. Cameron's (2008) *The Myth of Mars and Venus: Do Men and Women Really Speak Different Languages?*

that boys are made and of "Sugar and spice, and all that's nice" that girls are made, thus portraying the masculine as unkempt and grubby and the feminine as neat and spotless. Harmless as this might seem to be, it negatively stereotypes men and women and establishes their codes of conduct. For instance, Western societies require that women be well groomed, wear uncomfortable clothes and make-up, be thin, and so on. In short, they have to live up to this image of "Sugar and spice, and all that's nice"[22]. Likewise, although men are exempt from these burdens, they are not unaffected by them. When a man wears make-up, he is negatively judged; when a man wears a skirt, he is negatively judged; when a man wears jewelry, he is negatively judged. In other words, when a man diverts from this image of "snaps and snails", he is socially reprehended[23]. Nevertheless, whenever men chime with the image fostered by the rhyme, they are considered as manly, or even attractive, thus heaping praise on them. In Butler's (1988) words, "[p]erforming one's gender wrong initiates a set of punishments both obvious and indirect, and performing it well provides the reassurance that there is an essentialism of gender identity after all" (p. 528).

In conclusion, gender is an "identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler, 1988, p. 519). These two songs, therefore, initiate children into the repetition, reenactment, and reexperience of the set of acts that will socially define them as men or women while letting them have a glimpse at the consequences of diverging from these enforced behavioral patterns. In a few words, although patriarchy oppresses women, it impinges on everybody's lives, reason why the codes of

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[22] If one looks at language in depth, plenty of expressions such as *to doll yourself up* can be found, which supports this idea of women being required to "look nice" for men's pleasure and gaze—which has a lot to do with objectification.

[23] It is noteworthy to summon up the word *metrosexual*, which was much used to refer to men who would not behave as "mannishly" as they should. Nowadays, the Cambridge Dictionary still defines *metrosexual* as "a man who is attracted to women sexually *but* [my emphasis] who is also interested in fashion and his appearance" (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.).

conduct encoded in these two children's songs are detrimental to tolerance and the equality between the sexes.

6. Conclusion and Limitations

As has been demonstrated throughout this paper, language seems to be a central fulcrum of the patriarchal social order. The male elites have weaponized language's influence over our cognitive processing, thereby turning it into a form of control that aims at preserving the patriarchal status quo. In this paper, I have tried to shed light on the consequences of linguistic sexism by (1) examining the issue of language and androcentrism, (2) drawing upon Deutscher's (2011) theory on linguistic relativism, (3) exploring what I have considered to be the three possible main pillars of linguistic sexism (i.e. dictionaries, sexist expressions, and generic masculine), and (4) conducting a cross-linguistic analysis of nursery rhymes and *canciones infantiles* that I propose as the fourth pillar. Regarding this paper's limitations, more research and evidence are still needed to fully demonstrate to what extent societies are influenced and affected by language. Nevertheless, it is the fact that it has been written by a male author that I consider to be its main weakness. Harmless and paradoxical as this might seem, I have been raised and educated as a male and, therefore, I have probably not been able to dispense with the androcentric viewpoint I am denouncing. In an attempt to mitigate this, I have relied on female authors as much as possible during the writing process. Despite these limitations, I believe that the male-biased nature of language has been successfully proven. Thus, it is imperative that language be purged of androcentric perspectives and patriarchal attitudes so that it will not reinforce women's subalternity in the non-linguistic realm. Ultimately, and as was mentioned in the "Introduction", my goal is for this paper to raise awareness of a type of sexism that is often understated and thus urge readers to reflect upon it.

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Appendix. *Canciones Populares Infantiles* and Nursery Rhymes

1. *Canciones Infantiles Populares*

1.1. "Don Federico mató a su mujer"

Don Federico mató a su mujer.

La hizo picadillo.

La puso en la sartén.

La gente que pasaba

olía a carne asada.

Era la mujer de Don Federico.

Don Federico perdió su cartera

para casarse con la costurera.

La costurera perdió su dedal

para casarse con el general.

El general perdió su espada

para casarse con una bella dama.

La bella dama perdió su abanico

para casarse con Don Federico.

Don Federico perdió su ojo

para casarse con un piojo.

El piojo perdió su cola

para casarse con una Pepsi Cola.

La Pepsi-Cola perdió sus burbujas

para casarse con una mala bruja.

La mala bruja perdió su gatito

para casarse con Don Federico.

Don Federico le dijo que no

y la mala bruja se desmayó.

Al cabo de 3 días le dijo regular

y la mala bruja se puso a llorar.

Al cabo de 3 meses le dijo que sí

y la mala bruja le dijo por aquí.

1.2. "El verdugo Sancho Panza"

El verdugo Sancho Pan-za-za

ha mata-do a su mu-jer-jer-jer

porque no te-niá di-nero-ero-erro

para irse, para irse al ca-fé-fé-fé

El café era una casa-sa

y la casa una pared-red-red

la pared era una vía-vía-vía

por la vía, por la vía pasa el tren-tren-tren

En el tren había una vieja-ja

que tenía un loro blanco-co-co

y el loro repetía-tía-tía

¡Viva Sancho, viva Sancho y su mujer-jer-jer!

La mujer se enamoró-ró-ró

Sancho Panza se mató-tó-tó

y vivieron muy felices-ices-ices

todos juntos en el cielo sí señor-ñor-ñor

1.3. "Soy capitán de un barco inglés"

Soy capitán,

soy capitán

de un barco inglés (bis)

y en cada puerto

tengo una mujer.

La rubia es (bis)

fenomenal (bis)

y la morena

tampoco está mal.

Si alguna vez (bis)

me he de casar, (bis)

me casaré

con la que me guste más.

1.4. "Los días de la semana" by Miliki

Lunes antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar,

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que lavar.

Así lavaba así, así

Así lavaba así, así

Así lavaba así, así

Así lavaba que yo la vi.

Martes antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que planchar

Así planchaba así, así

Así planchaba así, así

Así planchaba así, así

Así planchaba que yo la vi.

Miércoles antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que coser

Así cosía así, así

Así cosía así, así,

Así cosía así, así

Así cosía que yo la vi.

Jueves antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que barrer

Así barría así, así

Así barría así, así

Así barría así, así

Así barría que yo la vi.

Viernes antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que cocinar.

Así cocinaba así, así

Así cocinaba así, así

Así cocinaba así, así

Así cocinaba que yo la vi.

Sábado antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que bordar.

Así bordaba así, así

Así bordaba así, así

Así bordaba así, así

Así bordaba que yo la vi

Domingo antes de almorzar

Una niña fue a jugar

Pero no pudo jugar

Porque tenía que tejer.

Así tejía así, así

Así tejía así, así

Así tejía así, así

Así tejía que yo la vi.

1.5. "Al pasar por el cuartel"

Al pasar por el cuartel

se me cayó un botón

y vino el coronel

a pegarme un pisotón.

¡Qué pisotón me dio

el cacho de animal

que estuve siete días

sin poderme levantar!

Las niñas bonitas

no van al cuartel

porque los soldados

las pisan el pie.

Soldado valiente,

no me pise usted,

que soy pequeñita

y me puedo caer.

Si eres pequeñita

y te puedes caer,

cómprate un vestido

de color café,

cortito por delante,

larguito por detrás

con cuatro volantes

y ¡adiós mi capitán!

2. Nursery Rhymes

2.1. "Peter Pumpkin Eater" in *The Real Mother Goose*

Peter, Peter pumpkin eater,

Had a wife but couldn't keep her;

He put her in a pumpkin shell

And there he kept her very well.

Peter, Peter pumpkin eater,

Had another and didn't love her;

Peter learned to read and spell,

And then he loved her very well.

2.2. "I Had a Little Hen" in *The Real Mother Goose*

I had a little hen, the prettiest ever seen,

She washed me the dishes and kept the house clean;

She went to the mill to fetch me some flour,

She brought it home in less than an hour;

She baked me my bread, she brewed me my ale,

She sat by the fire and told many a fine tale.

2.3. "There Was an Old Woman Who Lived in a Shoe" in *The Real Mother Goose*

There was an old woman who lived in a shoe.

She had so many children, she didn't know what to do.

She gave them some broth without any bread;

And whipped them all soundly and put them to bed.

2.4. "What Are Little Boys Made of" in *The Real Mother Goose*

What are little boys made of, made of?

What are little boys made of?

"Snaps and snails, and puppy-dogs' tails;

And that's what little boys are made of."

What are little girls made of, made of?

What are little girls made of?

"Sugar and spice, and all that's nice;

And that's what little girls are made of."

2.5. "When I Was a Bachelor" in *The Real Mother Goose*

When I was a bachelor

   I lived by myself;

And all the bread and cheese I got

   I laid up on the shelf.

The rats and the mice

   They made such a strife,

I was forced to go to London

    To buy me a wife.

The streets were so bad,

    And the lanes were so narrow,

I was forced to bring my wife home

    In a wheelbarrow.

The wheelbarrow broke,

    And my wife had a fall;

Down came wheelbarrow,

    Little wife and all.

2.6. "The Old Man" in *The Real Mother Goose*

There was an old man

In a velvet coat,

He kissed a maid

And gave her a groat.

The groat it was crack'd

And would not go,

Ah, old man, do you serve me so?