3 AMBIGUITY IN GENDER IDENTIFICATION

In the present part I attempt to demonstrate that the English language, and in particular the English noun in the institutionalised discourse, may delicately reflect past social reality.

Dual nouns are nouns used to refer to both male and female individuals. In my view, all these nouns (that are presently considered to be dual) were originally masculine and only in the course of time, after women’s entrance into social life, they became dual and started to be used in connection with the referents of both sexes.

“The dual class is on the increase, but the expectation that a given activity is largely male or female dictates the frequent use of gender markers: thus a nurse but a male nurse; an engineer but a woman engineer. No rational rules can be given for whether a noun should have dual gender distinction or not. It seems, for example, quite arbitrary that guest and servant should be dual in contrast to host-hostess and waiter-waitress”.

(Quirk et al. 1985: 315-316)

Hence, it is arguable whether the nouns (with the zero gender inflection) that have female counterparts are masculine or dual nouns. The uncertainty of this is clearly seen also in legal language where some of the nouns are used with the feminine inflections -ess, -trix, -ina (as in tsarina).

3.1 Transparency of Gender Identification in Nouns with a Feminine Gender Inflection

This part is devoted to the straightforwardness and effortlessness in the gender identification of morphologically marked nouns (with a feminine gender inflection). The findings demonstrate that the most frequent feminine gender inflection in the analysed texts is the inflection -ess.

- **ambassador**: a person who is the highest level of diplomat representing his country in another country
- **ambassadress**: woman ambassador; ambassador’s wife
- **benefactor**: a person who gives property or money to others, especially in a will
- **benefactress**: a woman who leaves property or money to others, especially in her will
- **heir**: a person who receives or will receive a property when someone dies
- **heiress**: a female heir
manager  a person who runs a shop or a department
manageress  a female manager
procurer  a person, mainly a man, who arranges for women to provide sexual intercourse for money;
procureress  a female procurer
proprietor  a person who owns a property
proprietress  a woman owner

The feminine singular noun inflection -trix is used less frequently. Its plural variations are -trices, -triseez, and -trixes.

administrator  a person legally authorized to administrate an estate, esp. of a deceased person
administratrix  a female administrator, esp. of an estate
executor  one appointed to carry out the provisions of a will
executrix  a female executor
testator  a person who leaves a will in force of his/her death
testatrix  a female testator

Legal English infrequently uses the inflection -e to create singular feminine from a singular masculine noun.

The inflection -e is ‘borrowed’ from French where it is used to form feminine gender nouns. English has preserved this gender distinction in the institutionalised discourse as well as in everyday speech. The following examples are found in the analysed texts.

fiancé  is the man that a woman is engaged to (who has officially agreed to marry);

fiancée, pl. fiancées  the woman that a man is engaged to (who has officially agreed to marry);


divorcé (AmE)  a man whose marriage was legally ended;
divorcée,  a woman whose marriage was legally ended;
pl. divorcées  (Oxford Advanced Dictionary, 2000: 468)

confidant  a person that you trust and who you talk to about private or secret things;
Oxford Advanced Dictionary (2000: 257) defines the noun *confidant* as “a *person* that you trust; someone to whom private or political matters are confided or entrusted”. The noun *person* used in the definition describing the noun with the zero gender inflection suggests its generic nature. It implicitly says that the noun is used to refer to both male and female referents. The definition of *confidante* (OAD, 2000: 257) is clear, it shows the feminine orientation of the noun.

The analysis proved my expectations: transparency of gender orientation of the nouns with a feminine gender inflection. The results show that they refer only to female human beings.

The feminine gender orientation of the noun *testatrix* in the following two extracts taken from Jackie Kennedy’s and Marylyn Monroe’s wills is expressed:

a) non-linguistically - by the physical existence of the two famous women,

b) linguistically by the feminine possessive pronoun *her* (in the second example).

The within Will was subscribed in my presence and sight at the end thereof by **JACQUELINE K. ONASSIS**, the within- named **Testatrix**, on the 22nd day of March, 1994, at 1040 Fifth Avenue in the State of New York.

(taken from The will of Jacqueline K. Onassis)

**SIGNED, SEALED, PUBLISHED and DECLARED by** **MARILYN MONROE**, the **Testatrix** above named, as and for **her** Last Will and Testament, in my presence and I, at **her** request and in **her** presence and in the presence of each other, have hereunto subscribed my names as witnesses this 14th day of January, One Thousand Nine Hundred Sixty-One...

(taken from The will of Marilyn Monroe)

**3 .2 Vagueness in Defining Gender Identification in Nouns with the Zero Gender Inflection**

The dictionary explanations of the nouns with the zero gender inflection (presented in 3.1 (such as *administrator, ambassador, benefactor, executor, heir, manager, proprietor, and testator*) show that these nouns have a twofold usage: they are used either as masculine nouns
(to refer to male individuals) and as generic nouns (to refer to both male and female individuals). If the latter is the case they are generally considered to be dual nouns. Their inclusive two-gender (masculine and feminine) nature is in the dictionary explanations demonstrated by the noun *person* or the pronoun *one*. In both cases masculine pronouns *he, him, his, himself* are used to refer to

1. a male individual solely or
2. a male and a female.

Martyna (1983:73) calls this approach “a he/man approach to language that lies in the use of male terms to refer both to males in particular and human beings in general”. Biber et al. (1999: 316) claim: “even though such masculine pronouns may be intended to have dual reference, readers often perceive the referent to be male”.

It is arguable whether these nouns are masculine or dual nouns. I consider them masculine as I believe that their masculine character may be proved by the existence of their feminine counterparts (*such as administratrix, ambassadress, benefactress, executrix, heiress, manageress, proprietress, and testatrix*). The uncertainty of their gender identification is also noticeable in the analysed texts. The fact that such a noun may have several gender interpretations makes its gender orientation unclear and ambiguous. Hence, zero-gender-inflection nouns similarly to dual nouns require secondary linguistic means for the additional manifestation of the gender.

The results of the analysis show that the gender reference of the nouns with the zero gender inflection is not as straightforward as it is expected and that it can produce vagueness in defining the gender.

### 3.2.1 Masculine gender reference expressed by a singular noun with the zero gender inflection

The analysis shows that a singular noun with the zero gender inflection is primarily used to refer to masculine referents.

In Marilyn Monroe’s will the inflectionless noun *executor* is used to refer first to *Aaron R. Frosch* (the male individual) and then to *Arnold Weissberger* (the male individual). The masculine gender orientation of both referents is apparent. The said executors’ masculine identity may be proved by the secondary linguistic means: by their first names and masculine personal pronoun *he*, and possessive pronoun *his*. 
SEVENTH: I nominate, constitute and appoint AARON R. FROSCH Executor of this my Last Will and Testament. In the event that he should die or fail to qualify, or resign or for any other reason be unable to act, I nominate, constitute and appoint L. ARNOLD WEISSBERGER in his place and stead. (taken from the will of Marilyn Monroe)

In the following example the writer of M. Monroe’s will refers to the executor Aaron Frosch with the masculine pronouns he, his.

I give and bequeath all of my personal effects and clothing to LEE STRASBERG, or if he should predecease me, then to my Executor hereinafter named, it being my desire that he distribute these, in his sole discretion, among my friends, colleagues and those to whom I am devoted. (taken from the will of Marilyn Monroe)

In the Will of Doris Duke the noun executor refers to the male executor Bernard Laferty. The personal pronoun he serves here as the evidence of masculine gender reference.

ELEVEN: A. 1. I nominate and appoint BERNARD LAFFERTY as my individual Executor hereunder, but only if he shall agree to accept a maximum commission of Five Million Dollars ($5,000,000) for the performance of his duties as Executor. (taken from The Will of Doris Duke)

In the following example taken from the last will of John Winston Ono Lennon the gender inflectionless noun testator is used to refer to the male individual. The masculine reference of the noun testator is here linguistically justified by the possessive pronoun his (used three times) and the physical existence of John Lennon.

THE FOREGOING INSTRUMENT consisting of four (4) typewritten pages, including this page, was on the 12th day of November, 1979, signed, sealed, published and declared by JOHN WINSTON ONO LENNON, the Testator therein named, as and for his Last Will and Testament, in the present of us, who at his request, and in his presence, and in the presence of each other, have hereunto set my names as witnesses.

(taken from Last Will of John Winston Ono Lennon)

3.2.2 Feminine gender reference expressed by a singular noun with the zero gender inflection

It is commonly believed that a zero gender inflectional noun refers to a male individual or it is used generically. In spite of the existence of corresponding feminine gender-oriented nouns such as executrix, proprietress, testatrix and their preferred usage in legal
English, their corresponding inflectionless counterparts *executor, proprietor, and testator* are used to refer to a female individual.

In the next extract taken from the last will and testament of John Winston Ono Lennon the feminine reference of the noun *executor* can be confirmed neither by the executor’s first name (Yoko) nor by her surname (Ono) as neither of them carries a specific feminine inflection or any other female significance. Its feminine reference is manifested here linguistically by the morphologically unmarked feminine noun *wife* as well as the possessive pronoun *her* (in the phrase *to act in her place*).

I hereby nominate, constitute and appoint my beloved *wife, YOKO ONO*, to act as the *Executor* of this my Last Will and Testament. In the event that my beloved *wife YOKO ONO* shall predecease me or chooses not to act for any reason, I nominate and appoint ELI GARBER, DAVID WARMFLASH and CHARLES PETTIT, in the order named, to act in her place and stead. (taken from Last Will and Testament of John Winston Ono Lennon)

In Joe Jackson’s last will the feminine reference of the noun *executor* is manifested in two ways: by the morphologically unmarked feminine gender noun *wife* and the first name Katie.

*I hereby nominate, constitute and appoint my *wife Katie Jackson as *Executor* of this my last will and testament...* (taken from Last Will and Testament of Joe Jackson)

In Doris Duke’s will (below) the noun *proprietor* refers to the testatrix Doris Duke. The feminine reference of the noun *proprietor* is confirmed by her first name *Doris*. It might be proved non-linguistically by Duke’s physical existence.

*I, Doris Duke, ....To continue to operate or participate in the operation of any business in which I shall have been engaged, retaining my interest in any such business, as sole *proprietor*, majority stockholder, general or limited partner or otherwise, as long as may seem advisable, and without liability for any loss suffered by reason of the continued operation of any such business;...* (taken from The Will of Doris Duke)
3.2.3 Generic gender reference expressed by a singular noun with the zero gender inflection

It is observed that the usage of singular nouns with the zero gender inflection is also used generically. The generic nature of a singular inflectionless noun may be manifested in several ways:

3.2.3.1 Reference made by masculine pronouns (he, him, his) referring to both a singular male and a female individual

The authors of the analysed last wills and testaments use gender inflectionless nouns such as executor as generic terms for both a male and a female executor. In the next example (taken from the will of Doris Duke) the noun executor first refers to the male executor Bernard Laferty (as it is in I authorize BERNARD LAFFERTY, or if he is not serving as an Executor of my Will...). Later in the text of the same will the noun executor refers to ‘any other person’. It is used here generically as the noun person is a dual noun that commonly refers to human beings of both biological sexes. The reference to both sexes is expressed by the masculine personal pronoun he.

I authorize BERNARD LAFFERTY, or if he is not serving as an Executor of my Will, then any other person who may then be serving as an Executor [or if there shall be more than one (1) person serving in such capacity, then all such persons, jointly], in his [their] absolute discretion to remove the corporate Executor at any time and, in the event such corporate Executor is removed, I direct the person(s) with such removal power to appoint such bank or trust company as he [they], in his [their] absolute discretion, shall select to act in its place.

(taken from The Will of Doris Duke)

3.2.3.2 Reference made by masculine and feminine pronouns (he, she)

A singular noun with zero gender inflection may also be referred to with feminine and masculine pronouns (he, she) as it is seen in the last will and testament of the former USA president J. F. Kennedy.

Insofar as may be permitted by law, no Executor or Trustee shall be liable for any act or omission in connection with the administration of my estate or of the trusts herein created, or the exercise of any of the powers and discretions hereinbefore provided for, nor for any loss or injury to any property held in or under my estate or said trusts, except for his or her actual
fraud, and no Executor or Trustee shall be responsible for any act or omission of any other Executor or Trustee.  

(taken from Last Will and Testament of J. F. Kennedy)

3.2.3.3 Reference made by morphologically unmarked masculine and feminine gender oriented nouns referring to both (a) singular male and female individual/s

In the example below the dual nature of the noun executor is demonstrated by its dual-gender reference: the feminine gender oriented nouns wife and by the reference to David Hellman.

I hereby nominate and appoint my wife DEBORAH KOONS, and my attorney DAVID M. HELLMAN, as Executor of this Will.

(taken from the Will and Testament of Jerome J. Garcia)

In the following example the generic nature of the noun executor is clearly exemplified by the nouns the masculine and the feminine.

The words `Executor," `Trustee," `child," `children," and `beneficiary," as used herein, shall comprehend both the singular and the plural, and the masculine or feminine shall be deemed to include the other wherever the context of this Will requires.

(taken from the Will and Testament of Jerome J. Garcia)

3.2.3.4 Reference made by masculine, feminine, and neuter pronouns

The next extract from the will of Doris Duke exemplifies that a gender noun with zero gender inflection executor may be referred to with masculine, feminine and neuter pronouns (he/she/it). It contributes to ambiguity in defining gender orientation in a singular noun with the zero gender inflection. It may be expressed:

a/ by masculine, feminine, and neuter personal pronouns (he/she/it)

Notwithstanding anything herein to the contrary, each Executor and Trustee hereunder shall be entitled to reimbursement for reasonable expenses incurred by him, her or it in connection with the performance of his, her or its duties as an Executor or Trustee or both hereunder, as the case may be.

(taken from The Will of Doris Duke)

b/ by the masculine, feminine, and neuter possessive pronouns his/her/its

I direct that no bond or other security shall be required of any Executor (including, without limitation, any preliminary Executor) or Trustee appointed herein or pursuant to the power granted herein for the faithful performance of his, her or its duties, any law of any state or jurisdiction to the contrary notwithstanding. To the extent permitted by law, any court of
competent jurisdiction shall grant an order for the advance payment of commissions without requiring the posting of a bond by any individual Executor acting hereunder.  
(taken from The Will of Doris Duke)

3.2.3.5 Reference of a noun with the zero inflection to a non-living body

Moreover, it is found out that an inflectionless noun is also used to refer to a nonliving body (a company, a firm, and organisation). If this is the case, the third-person singular pronouns are found to indicate an inanimate entity or a unit. In the instance below the ‘neuter’ reference of the noun executor is proved by the possessive neuter pronoun its and the name of the company United States Trust Company of New York.

However, if BERNARD LAFFERTY shall fail to effectively appoint a corporate Executor, then I hereby nominate and appoint UNITED STATES TRUST COMPANY OF NEW YORK, New York, New York, to serve as the sole Executor hereunder, conditioned only upon its willingness to accept a maximum commission of Seven Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars ($7,500,000).  
(taken from The Will of Doris Duke)

3.2.3.6 Generic gender reference expressed by both a noun with the zero inflection and a noun with a feminine gender inflection

Later on in the same will (when defining the meaning of terms) the author of the will explains the generic character of the noun executor in the following way: "Executor wherever used in this Will shall be taken to mean the executor, executrix, executors. To be all-inclusive the author uses also the plural masculine form executors but ‘forgets’ to use the feminine plural form executrices.

The terms "Executor" and "Executors" wherever used in this Will shall be taken to mean the executor, executrix, executors or administrators for the time being in office, and the terms "Trustee" and "Trustees" wherever used in this Will shall be taken to mean the trustee or trustees for the time being in office and each such Executor and Trustee shall have the same rights, powers, duties, authority and privileges, whether or not discretionary, as if originally appointed hereunder.  
(taken from The Will of Doris Duke)

The next extract is taken from the last will and testament of Joseph P. DiMaggio. It shows a generic and all-inclusive character of the document.
The term "Personal Representative" includes Executor, Executrix, Executrices, Executors, and Administrator, Administratrix, Administrators, and Administratrices, with or without the Will annexed, as well as all their substitutes and successors.

(taken from The Last Will and Testament of Joseph P. DiMaggio)

When the author explains the term personal representative, he/she uses both singular and plural forms of the feminine and masculine nouns Executor, Executrix, Executrices, Executors; Administrator, Administratrix, Administrators, and Administratrices. In naming singular nouns the traditional way is preserved: masculine noun executor is named first and then the singular feminine noun executrix. In the plural number the traditional order is violated: the plural feminine noun executrices is named first and then the plural masculine noun executors (instead of the commonly used order - a masculine and then a feminine noun). The nouns administrator, administratrix, administrators, and administratrices are ordered traditionally.