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Article

# DISCRIMINATING DICTIONARIES? FEMININE FORMS OF PROFESSION NOUNS IN DICTIONARIES OF FRENCH AND GERMAN\*

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## Abstract

Following societal changes, professions that were traditionally dominated by men are now open to women too, triggering the need for nouns to refer to these female professionals. Languages show differences with respect to the creation and use of these feminine profession nouns. Whereas in German, feminisation has been accepted for quite some time, in French, the use of feminine forms of profession nouns was not very common until recently, but this is changing. This paper investigates the inclusion of feminine forms of profession nouns in different editions of dictionaries of French and German over time. The results show a contrast between French and German when it comes to the presence of feminine forms of profession nouns in dictionaries. Still, the number of feminine forms present has, especially for French, massively increased over time, suggesting that changes are ongoing. Different factors that influence the discrepancy between French and German are discussed.

## 1. Introduction

In the last decades, societal changes have led to more equal job opportunities for women and men by opening traditionally male-dominated professions to women, too. This change affects language as well, since we need nouns to refer to women practising these professions. In some languages, the creation and use of feminine forms of profession nouns is more complicated than in others, depending on language-specific linguistic properties and

\* We would like to thank two anonymous reviewers for their valuable comments and suggestions. All remaining errors are our own.

language policy. Comparing French and German in this respect reveals an interesting contrast: whereas in Germany the feminisation of profession nouns is unproblematic and very common, in France the subject is still highly debated. In German, a noun such as *die Feuerwehrfrau* ‘the female firefighter’ is accepted by most native speakers, but the feminine form of *un pompier* ‘a fireman’ in French is not so straightforward, since the logical feminine form *une pompière* is generally not accepted by native speakers from France (Van Compernelle 2007). Other francophone regions, such as Québec, Belgium, or Switzerland have been more progressive in this respect (e.g. Arbour and de Nayves 2014). Nevertheless, the situation is now changing in France too, leading to an increased use of feminine forms of profession nouns.

The discrepancy between French and German raises the question as to whether dictionaries of both languages differ qualitatively in the ways they integrate feminine profession nouns in the lexicon. Are dictionaries discriminating against women by excluding these feminine forms? To study the integration of feminine profession nouns in the lexicon, we believe that dictionaries present an interesting domain, since they serve multiple goals. Dictionaries are not only descriptive in representing actual language use as accurately as possible, but also prescriptive in serving as guidelines to language users. Related to this latter point, dictionaries are also influenced by the language policies of official institutions. The delicate balance in dictionaries between an accurate description of language use and the language policy of official institutions is particularly problematic with respect to the topic of this paper, since language policy plays an important role in the phenomenon of feminisation. Whereas in some countries feminisation is encouraged, in others influential institutions are more conservative towards it – and often towards language change in general.

Although many researchers have discussed issues related to feminisation before, most studies focus on the origin and development of the phenomenon (e.g. Fleischmann 1997, on French; Kastovsky and Dalton-Puffer 2006, on German); the attitude of language users towards feminine profession nouns (e.g. Van Compernelle 2009, for French of France; Dawes 2003, for French in Switzerland; Stahlberg et al. 2001, on German); or on the actual use of these forms (e.g. Abbou 2002, Brick and Wilks 2002, Dister and Moreau 2006, Lipovsky 2014). Since there are few studies investigating the integration of feminine forms in dictionaries, the present study aims at filling this gap.

In this paper, we will address the following questions: (i) Have feminine forms of profession nouns been listed in dictionaries (and since when)? (ii) Can we observe changes over time when comparing different editions of a dictionary? (iii) What strategies of feminisation exist and how are these strategies represented in the dictionaries? Adopting both a synchronic and a diachronic perspective, we will attempt to answer these questions by comparing different editions of dictionaries of French and German. We will start with a short overview of the history of feminisation in France and Germany and present the existing devices used to feminise profession nouns. In addition, some studies on feminisation in dictionaries will briefly be discussed. In the second part, we focus on the methodology and results of our dictionary search.

## 2. Feminisation: the phenomenon

Starting off in the United States, the debate on feminisation of profession nouns reached Europe in the 1980s. The phenomenon is embedded in a more general awareness of

non-discriminating language use that has arisen in the last decades, relating not only to the derivation of feminine forms of occupational nouns, but also to gender-inclusive writing, aiming at rendering women visible in language. Whereas in France the focus is still mainly on the former aspect, in other countries inclusive writing has become the main point of interest.

### 2.1 Feminisation in French

In France, the Prime Minister Laurent Fabius set up a commission in 1983 to investigate the feminisation of profession nouns and to propose feminine forms for traditionally male professions (Houdebine 1987). This commission, headed by the Minister for Women's Rights Yvette Roudy and the writer Benoîte Groult, published its final report in 1986. Although the Prime Minister recommended the use of feminine forms in official documents, the commission's final report received widespread criticism. The *Académie française* judged the commission's work as unnecessary and potentially dangerous for the purity of the French language (Fleischman 1997, Paveau 2002). Subject to this severe criticism, the work of the Roudy commission failed to make an impact.

The phenomenon returned to the political agenda in 1997, with some female ministers claiming the title *Madame la ministre* instead of *Madame le ministre*, bringing about a second investigation of linguistic feminisation by the general commission of terminology and neology. In their final report from 1998, they concluded that the feminisation of profession nouns should not be problematic; an official guideline on the feminisation of profession nouns was published by the French government in 1999 (Becquer et al. 1999). Nevertheless, the *Académie française* still does not accept the majority of propositions of the official guideline, although they have released a statement indicating their acceptance of feminine forms, as long as they follow the derivation rules of the French language.

In other francophone countries, the discussions did not go on for so long, with the Province of Québec being the first to actively stimulate the feminisation of profession nouns. In 1979, 1982 and 1984, the Canadian government published three *Avis de recommandation*, containing proposals feminine forms, finally resulting in a first official guideline on feminisation in 1986 and a second one in 1991. Comparable guidelines appeared in Belgium in 1991 and in Switzerland in 1994 as well (Dawes 2003).<sup>1</sup>

How do we refer to a female professional in French? Although for some profession nouns feminine forms were available, these have sometimes acquired a different meaning or a negative connotation over time (e.g. forms ending in *-euse* are often felt to be pejorative). But what about the other nouns? Traditionally, it is assumed that the French masculine gender can also be unmarked and encode neuter gender, a position still favoured by the *Académie française*. Thus, the masculine would be capable of referring to both women and men. Under this logic, the feminine gender appears marked and restrictive, because it refers solely to females. According to the Académie, therefore, the feminine could even be considered the discriminating gender (Fleischman 1997, Paveau 2002).

The official guideline *Femme, j'écris ton nom* (Becquer et al. 1999) proposes feminine forms for over 2,000 professions, titles and grades, based on productive derivation strategies in French. In the following we will briefly discuss these strategies.<sup>2</sup> Masculine forms

ending in an  $\bar{e}$  combine with a feminine article (1a) and masculine forms ending in  $\bar{e}$  or  $\bar{i}$  usually receive an additional  $\bar{e}$  to refer to females (1b)

- (1) a. *un/une architecte* ‘an architect’, *un/une ministre* ‘a minister’  
 b. *un député* > *une députée* ‘a deputy’  
*un apprenti* > *une apprentie* ‘an apprentice’

Masculine nouns ending in a consonant fall into two groups: nouns ending in  $\bar{(t)eur}$  and those with another ending. The latter usually derive their feminine by the addition of the suffix  $\bar{e}$  (2a–c):<sup>3</sup>

- (2) a. *un étudiant* > *une étudiante* ‘a student’  
 b. *un policier* > *une policière* ‘a police officer’  
 c. *un chirurgien* > *une chirurgienne* ‘a surgeon’

If a masculine noun ends with the suffix  $\bar{eur}$ , either this suffix is replaced with its feminine counterpart  $\bar{euse}$  if the noun is directly derived from a verb (3a), or it is only combined with a feminine article if the verb is no longer directly related to the noun (3b). In the latter case, an  $\bar{e}$  can optionally be added:

- (3) a. *un annonceur* > *une annonceuse* ‘an announcer’  
*un coiffeur* > *une coiffeuse* ‘a hairdresser’  
 b. *un professeur* > *une professeur(e)* ‘a teacher’  
*un ingénieur* > *une ingénieur(e)* ‘an engineer’

For nouns ending in  $\bar{teur}$  (the suffix being either  $\bar{teur}$  or  $\bar{eur}$ ), two major feminisation strategies exist:  $\bar{teuse}$  if the verb and the noun are directly related, as in (4a), or  $\bar{trice}$  in other cases, as in (4b). In a few cases, there is only a change in the article, optionally combined with the addition of an  $\bar{e}$  (4c):

- (4) a. *un chanteur* > *une chanteuse* ‘a singer’  
*un acheteur* > *une acheteuse* ‘an actor/actress’  
 b. *un directeur* > *une directrice* ‘a director’  
*un sénateur* > *une sénatrice* ‘a senator’  
 c. *un auteur* > *une auteur(e)* ‘an author’  
*un docteur* > *une docteur(e)* ‘a doctor’

Some of these nouns originally had a feminine form (e.g. *doctoresse*) which is no longer used in modern French. Following the guideline, these nouns should be treated as epicenes, involving only a change of article and optional addition of the suffix  $\bar{e}$ .

The official guideline for French (Becquer et al. 1999) sometimes proposes multiple alternatives for a given noun. Some forms are more frequent than others, and there are also geographical differences, since some forms are only used in varieties of French outside France. In Quebec, forms like *la professeure* are very common; in European French, epicene forms such as *la professeur* are preferred instead. Parallel to the feminisation strategies described above, another device exists to refer to female professionals, as shown in (5):

- (5) *une femme écrivain*  
 a.F woman writer.M  
 ‘a female writer’

In this case, the female denoting form is derived by compounding the profession noun with the French noun for ‘woman’, *femme*. This strategy, though disapproved of by the official guideline *Femme, j’écris ton nom* (Becquer et al. 1999), is nevertheless quite frequent in French.

## 2.2 Feminisation in German

In German, as in French, the masculine was traditionally assumed to be the generic gender, capable of referring to both women and men. However, this generic status of the masculine in German has been heavily debated, and several researchers have shown that in fact people’s judgments are biased in that when participants were asked to indicate whether a noun refers to a male or a female: in most cases, they would indicate a male referent when they were presented with a generic masculine form (e.g. Irmen and Steiger 2005, Stahlberg and Sczesny 2001).

The debate on sexist language started with the works of female linguists such as Senta Trömel-Plötz and Luise F. Pusch, who published several studies on discriminating language use in German, as well as a first guideline on feminisation in 1980 (Guentherodt et al. 1980). The topic then reached a more general public and was discussed in the federal government, raising awareness of non-discriminatory language use and the appearance of linguistic devices to avoid sexism and improve women’s visibility in the language. Although, as in French, not all recommendations were followed, non-discriminatory language use had already become very common in the 90s (Epple 2000, Elmiger 2008).

For most occupational nouns, the derivation of the feminine form is straightforward in German, since the feminine form is usually derived by adding the suffix *-in* to the masculine form (6a), possibly combined with some changes (e.g. addition of an umlaut) of the base form (6b):

- |     |    |                       |   |                       |                |
|-----|----|-----------------------|---|-----------------------|----------------|
| (6) | a. | <i>der Lehrer</i>     | > | <i>die Lehrerin</i>   | ‘the teacher’  |
|     |    | <i>der Minister</i>   | > | <i>die Ministerin</i> | ‘the minister’ |
|     | b. | <i>der Arzt</i>       | > | <i>die Ärztin</i>     | ‘the doctor’   |
|     |    | <i>der Beförderer</i> | > | <i>die Beförderin</i> | ‘the carrier’  |

Some nouns derive their feminine form by changing the last part of the noun, as shown in (7):

- |     |                          |   |                          |                   |
|-----|--------------------------|---|--------------------------|-------------------|
| (7) | <i>der Feuerwehrmann</i> | > | <i>die Feuerwehrfrau</i> | ‘the firefighter’ |
|     | <i>der Kaufmann</i>      | > | <i>die Kauffrau</i>      | ‘the salesperson’ |

Substantivized participles, if combined with a masculine or feminine definite article, can be used to refer to males and females (8a). With an indefinite article or without an article, the noun can receive an ending depending on its case (8b):

- |     |    |                            |                 |                            |                     |
|-----|----|----------------------------|-----------------|----------------------------|---------------------|
| (8) | a. | <i>der/die Abgeordnete</i> | ‘the delegate’, | <i>der/die Vorgesetzte</i> | ‘the superior’      |
|     | b. | <i>ein Vorgesetzter</i>    | >               | <i>eine Vorgesetzte</i>    | ‘a superior (nom.)’ |
|     |    | <i>einem Abgeordneten</i>  | >               | <i>einer Abgeordneten</i>  | ‘a delegate (dat.)’ |

Although a feminine form can easily be derived from most German animate nouns, some problematic cases seem to exist. Schoental (1989) lists the following examples:

- |     |                                      |                                      |
|-----|--------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| (9) | <i>der Kapitän</i> ‘the captain’     | <i>der Säugling</i> ‘the new-born’   |
|     | <i>der Offizier</i> ‘the officer’    | <i>der Passagier</i> ‘the passenger’ |
|     | <i>der Torwart</i> ‘the keeper’      | <i>der Laie</i> ‘the layman’         |
|     | <i>der Lehrling</i> ‘the apprentice’ | <i>der Gast</i> ‘the guest’          |
|     | <i>der Flüchtling</i> ‘the refugee’  | <i>der Vormund</i> ‘the guardian’    |

For most of these nouns, a feminine form could nevertheless be imagined (e.g. *die Offizierin*), except for those ending with the suffix *-ling*. The dictionary search will inform us whether or not feminine forms of these nouns have been created.

If we compare the feminisation devices in French and German, we can conclude that in French there is considerably more variation than in German, where the derivation of the feminine form by means of the suffix *-in* is applicable to the majority of animate nouns, apart from substantivized participles and some irregular forms. In French, in contrast, at least two major strategies exist: Some animate nouns can refer to females when they are used with a feminine article, possibly in combination with the suffix *-e*. Other animate nouns derive their feminine counterparts by changing their masculine suffix into its feminine form. Whereas in German the majority of feminine forms are derived from the masculine base noun, in French most nouns either derive their feminine forms using a suffix alternation (e.g. *-eur* becomes *-euse*) or do not change at all, with only few nouns being derived from the masculine base form by means of suffixation (cf. Khaznadar 2002). Under this view, French could be considered less androcentric than German, since in German in most cases the feminine form is derived from the masculine form, which presumably makes the masculine form the ‘default option’.

### 2.3 Feminine forms in dictionaries: other studies

The phenomenon of feminisation has not only been subject to lively debate in politics, but also among linguists. Since the 1980s, many studies have appeared that discuss feminisation and non-discriminatory language use in different languages and from different perspectives. Surprisingly, few studies focus on the presence of feminine forms in dictionaries. Baider et al. (2007) investigate the definitions in entries for the nouns *homme* ‘man’ and *femme* ‘woman’ in the online *EuroWordNet* dictionary. Their comparison reveals that androcentrism still prevails in this online dictionary, since most examples given in the entries refer to males. Darmstädter (2011) compares the 8th and the 9th editions of the French dictionary of the *Académie française* to determine whether the changes between the two editions reflect changes in language use, including the feminisation of profession nouns. She observes that the *Académie française* still disfavours the use of feminine forms, prescribing the use of compound forms with *femme* (e.g. *femme médecin* ‘female doctor’) when no feminine form exists. Matthey (2000) discusses the history of non-discriminatory language use, the possible feminisation strategies in French and the implementation of them in Swiss French. She also compares the entries for the French noun *ministre* ‘minister’ in distinct editions of different dictionaries of French (*Larousse* 1901, 1957, 1996 and 2000, *Petit Robert* 1979, 1991, 1994 and 2000, *Robert historique* 1992) and in a dictionary of Swiss French (*Dictionnaire suisse romand* 1997). She concludes that the dictionary of Swiss French is more open to feminisation than the dictionaries of standard French from France. Epple

(2000) investigates diachronic changes in the presence of female-denoting nouns in different editions of bilingual translation dictionaries of American English, French, German and Spanish. She finds considerable progress in the visibility of women among the different editions of the dictionaries with respect to the inclusion of female-denoting nouns. However, as she shows, in the examples in the dictionaries' entries of animate nouns, women are often not included.

### 3. Methodology

We hope to determine whether societal changes are reflected in dictionaries and whether we can observe changes over time by investigating to what extent feminine forms of profession nouns are included in dictionaries. If feminine forms are present, questions arise with regard to their status or connotation, which we address in this study.

#### 3.1 Dictionaries consulted

To investigate the presence of feminine forms in dictionaries, we examined the entries for a number of profession nouns in the French *Petit Robert* dictionary and in the German *Duden Universalwörterbuch*. The same nouns were also checked in the *Petit Robert Électronique* and the *Duden-Online* digital dictionaries. Potential developments in the inclusion of feminine forms in the dictionaries have been investigated by consulting different editions of both dictionaries. Details are listed in [Tables 1](#) and [2](#).

For both languages, we started with the first editions of the dictionary series: the first edition of the *Petit Robert* from 1967, and the first edition of the *Duden Universalwörterbuch*, dating from 1983. The other editions were chosen in such a way that roughly for each decade we had at least one edition to investigate. The online versions of the dictionaries were chosen as representations of the present situation.

#### 3.2 The sample

We composed a list of profession nouns for French, based on the different feminisation strategies indicated in the guideline *Femme, j'écris ton nom* (Becquer et al. 1999). In this way, we have tried to include feminine forms derived using different feminisation devices. Details and examples are listed in [Table 3](#).

The list of profession nouns for German is based on the list for French, whilst ensuring the presence of feminine forms derived using different feminisation strategies. Since most German feminine forms are derived by means of the suffix *-in*, these nouns constitute the majority of the German list. Details can be found in [Table 4](#).

In addition to the nouns presented above, we also included the ten nouns that according to Schoental (1989) should be difficult to feminise (see the list in (9)) in order to determine whether these nouns still do not have any feminine form attested. The results of these additional nouns are presented separately in the discussion.

We searched for all the nouns in the lists above in the dictionaries in our sample. All data were collected in an Excel file so as to be able to compare the different dictionary editions. For each noun, we indicated whether the feminine form was present, how the noun was classified, and whether any remarks were made concerning the use of this feminine form. These remarks indicate, for instance, that a specific feminine form has a pejorative connotation, or is only used in a specific context, or in certain regions or countries.

**Table 1.** Dictionary editions *Petit Robert* French.

Dictionary name	Editions
<i>Le Petit Robert</i>	1967, 1977, 1984, 1994, 1996, 2003, 2012, 2016
<i>Le Petit Robert Électronique</i> (www.lerobert.fr) (last accessed on 28 March 2017)	

**Table 2.** Dictionary editions *Duden Universalwörterbuch* German.

Dictionary name	Editions
<i>Duden Universalwörterbuch</i>	1983, 1996, 2001, 2011
<i>Duden Online-Wörterbuch</i> (www.duden.de) (last accessed on 28 March 2017)	

**Table 3.** Feminisation strategies French.

Class	Type of noun	Examples	Number
A.	Masculine in $\bar{e}$ (epicene forms)	<i>un/lune architecte, un/lune guide</i>	8
B.	Masculine in $\bar{é}/\bar{i}$	<i>un députée/lune députée, un apprenti/lune apprentie</i>	4
C.	Masculine in consonant (not $\bar{t}$ (t)eur)	<i>un chirurgien/lune chirurgienne, un policier/lune policière</i>	13
D.	Masculine in $\bar{eur}$	<i>un programmeur/lune programmeuse, un professeur/lune professeuse</i>	11
E.	Masculine in $\bar{teur}$	<i>un lecteur/lune lectrice, un chanteur/lune chanteuse</i>	15
Total			51

**Table 4.** Feminisation strategies German.

Class	Type of noun	Examples	Number
A.	Feminine = masculine + $\bar{in}$	<i>ein Lehrer/eine Lehrerin, ein Arzt/eine Ärztin</i>	51
B.	Weak forms	<i>ein Abgeordneter/eine Abgeordnete, ein Vorgesetzter/eine Vorgesetzte</i>	4
C.	Change of part of the noun	<i>ein Feuerwehrmann/eine Feuerwehrfrau, ein Seemann/eine Seefrau</i>	2
Total			57

## 4. Results and discussion

This paper addresses the following issues: (i) Have feminine forms of profession nouns been listed in dictionaries (and since when)? (ii) Can we observe changes over time when comparing different editions of a dictionary? (iii) What strategies of feminisation exist and how are these strategies represented in the dictionaries? First, we will investigate the presence of feminine forms of profession nouns in the dictionaries and see whether a development over

time prevails. In a next step, we will focus on feminisation strategies and their integration in the dictionaries.

#### 4.1 Presence of the feminine form

For both languages, the percentages of feminine forms included or not included have been calculated for each dictionary edition. The percentages of the French dictionary are presented graphically in [Figure 1](#).

The results show a clear rise in the inclusion of feminine forms. The percentage of present feminine forms has increased considerably, notably between the 1996 and 2003 editions, as well as between the 2003 and 2012 editions.<sup>4</sup> Even in the latest editions, the percentage of inclusion does not reach 100%, indicating that feminine forms are still absent for some nouns. We will discuss these nouns in the following section.

The results for German show roughly the same pattern, as can be observed in [Figure 2](#).

The results for German show an increase in the inclusion of feminine forms over time, the most considerable change occurring between the 1996 and 2001 editions.<sup>5</sup> This corresponds with the results from French, also indicating a considerable increase over the same period. In contrast to the results for French, in the latest edition consulted (the online version), a feminine form is included for all nouns, the percentage of inclusion thus reaching 100%.

However, just paying attention to the presence or absence of a noun's feminine forms does not provide a complete picture, since some feminine forms, despite being included in the dictionary, might not be used without any restrictions. For this reason, we have also investigated whether the dictionaries include any remarks on the use of the feminine forms. For French, [Figure 3](#) displays the percentages of feminine forms for which remarks commenting on their usage are indicated.

Up until the 1996 edition the increase of feminine forms included seems to go hand in hand with an increase of remarks on these forms. In more recent editions, the percentage of feminine forms with remarks decreases, the use of these forms being less subject to restrictions. In comparison, the results for German show a different pattern, since only the first two editions examined (1983 and 1996) contain remarks on some feminine forms, and this only to a very limited extent. Remarks are only made with regard to the feminine forms *die Sekretärin* 'the secretary.F' and *die Chefin* 'the chief.F'. Neither in the newer editions nor in the online version are remarks included on the feminine forms in the nouns of the list.

In a dictionary, words are specified for category (noun, verb, adjective, etc.). Nouns may be specified for gender (e.g. as *n.m.* 'masculine noun' or *n.f.* 'feminine noun') as well. Although all French nouns are marked for gender, for some animate nouns the gender is not specified in the dictionary, the noun being marked by the abbreviation *n.*, without any further gender specification. This represents an instance of underspecification, which is especially intriguing with respect to epicene nouns, since in principle there is nothing to prevent these forms from being used with a feminine article to refer to a female. However, if a dictionary lists such a noun as *n.m.* rather than as *n.*, this epicene use does not appear to be possible according to the dictionary.

If we compare the noun specifications in the second (1977) and latest (2016) editions of the *Petit Robert* in our sample, we observe the distribution presented in [Table 5](#).

The percentage of nouns in our sample for which the gender is not specified in the dictionary has increased from 29% in 1977 to 80% in 2016, enabling the use of these

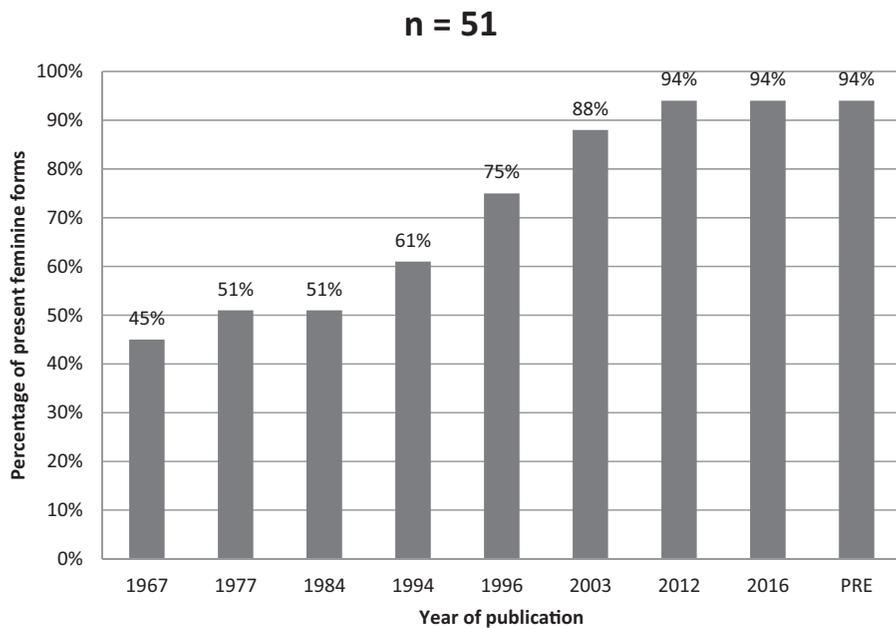


Figure 1. Presence of feminine form, *Petit Robert* French.

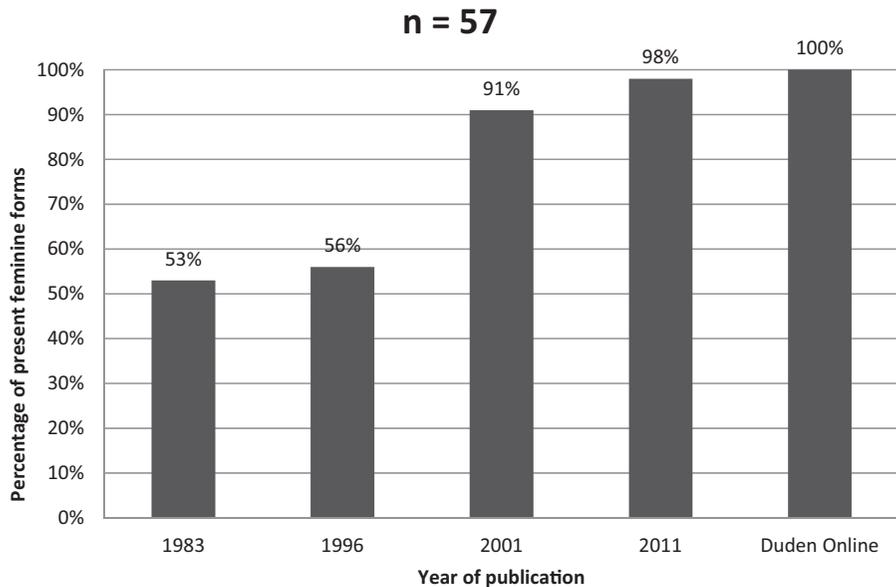
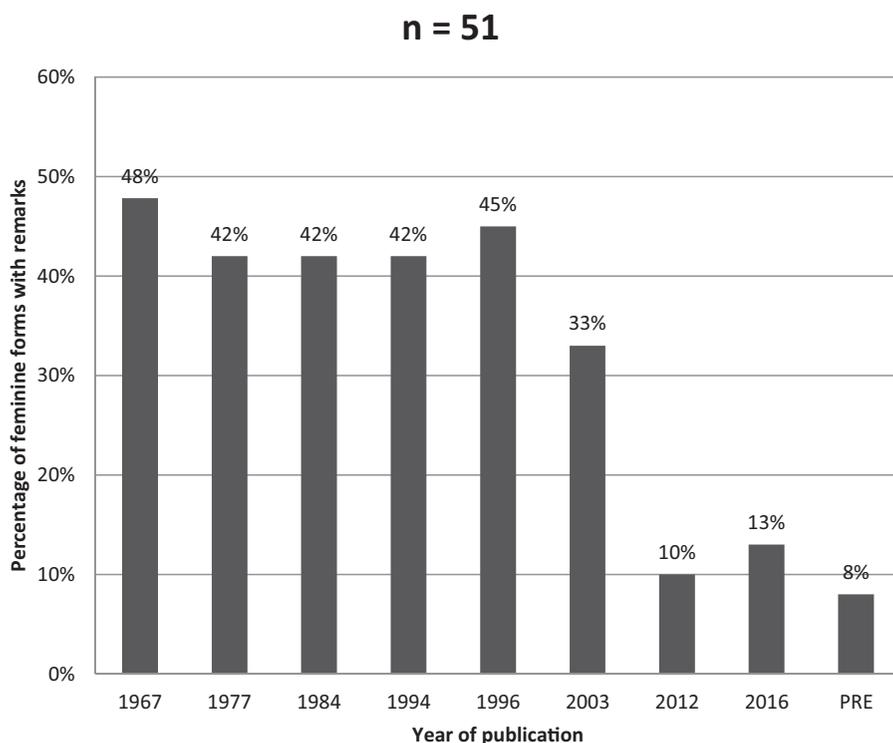


Figure 2. Presence of feminine form, *Duden Universalwörterbuch* German.



**Figure 3.** Remarks on feminine form, *Petit Robert* French.

**Table 5.** Noun specification in two editions of the *Petit Robert*.

Noun specification	<i>Petit Robert</i> 1977	<i>Petit Robert</i> 2016
<i>n.m.</i>	37 (68%)	10 (18%)
<i>n.m. et n.f.</i>	2 (4%)	1 (2%)
<i>n.</i>	16 (29%)	44 (80%)

underspecified nouns with both masculine and feminine articles – and thus as masculine and feminine nouns. In the *Duden Universalwörterbuch*, in contrast, we do not find such change. All profession nouns are specified as masculine nouns, and their feminine forms as feminine nouns. We do not find any underspecified nouns. This difference could be related to morphological differences between French and German, since in German the majority of animate nouns take the suffix *-in* to derive their feminine form. Nouns that can take both genders in German, such as substantivized adjectives (e.g. *der/die Abgeordnete* ‘the delegate’), are specified as masculine and feminine nouns.

#### 4.2 Dictionaries and feminisation strategies

As discussed in section two, both French and German use multiple devices to derive feminine forms of a profession noun, and guidelines have been published to suggest possible

**Table 6.** Feminisation strategies French.

Type of feminine form formation	Total number in sample	Number of listed forms <sup>6</sup>								
		1967	1977	1984	1994	1996	2003	2012	2016	PRE
A. epicene nouns <i>le/la guide</i>	8	3	4	4	5	6	8	8	8	8
B. <i>-el-i + -e chargé, chargée</i>	4	3	3	3	4	4	4	4	4	4
C. consonant + <i>-e policier, policière</i>	13	3	3	3	4	5	11	11	11	11
D. + <i>-euse sauveur, sauveuse</i>	5	2	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	5
D. epicene or + <i>-e censeur, censeur(e)</i>	6	1	1	1	1	2	4	6	6	6
E. + <i>-trice recteur, rectrice</i>	9	5	5	5	7	9	9	9	9	9
E. + <i>-teuse chanteur, chanteuse</i>	4	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3	3
E. epicene or + <i>-e auteur, auteur(e)</i>	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	2

forms. French in particular exhibits an elaborate array of feminisation strategies. For both languages, our sample contains nouns that use different methods to derive their feminine forms. We have checked in the dictionaries whether the feminisation strategies that are proposed in the guidelines are also present in them.

Table 6 shows the number of nouns for each of the feminisation strategies of French in our sample, as well as the occurrences of feminine forms derived using these respective strategies in the dictionaries.

All feminisation strategies appear in the different editions of the *Petit Robert*, but we can observe differences between the strategies in their presence over time, suggesting that not all strategies are equally acceptable, some strategies taking more time to integrate into the lexicon.

The nouns of which the masculine ends in a vowel (classes A and B) are not particularly problematic, as the results suggest. In the first editions the feminine form is indicated for 50% (class A) or even 75% (class B) of the nouns. In the most recent editions, feminine forms of all nouns of these classes are included. Depending on the feminisation strategy, nouns ending in a consonant (classes C, D and E) show different patterns. Feminine forms derived by a suffix change from  $\bar{-(t)eur}$  to  $\bar{-(t)euse}$  or to  $\bar{-trice}$  seem to be generally accepted, correlating with the fact that the suffixes  $\bar{-(t)euse}$  and  $\bar{-(t)rice}$  belong to the traditional inventory of French. In contrast, the integration of feminine forms that do not involve these suffixes takes more time. The integration of feminine forms derived by the suffixing of  $\bar{-e}$  appears to be more problematic, too. In fact, the two latter categories comprise many exceptions to the 'traditional' feminisation devices, including nouns such as *professeur* 'teacher' or *écrivain* 'writer'. The proposed feminine forms for these nouns, *la professeuse(e)* and *l'écrivain(e)*, are quite recent and involve rather innovative feminisation strategies.

As we can conclude from Table 6, only for three nouns is no feminine form included in the most recent edition of the dictionary. These are the nouns *pompier* 'firefighter', *marin* 'seaman' and *transporteur* 'transporter'. The absence of the feminine form of *transporteur* – although its feminine form, *transporteuse*, is morphologically uncontroversial – might

**Table 7.** Presence of compound form *femme* + noun.

Dictionary edition	Number of occurrences	Nouns
1967–1994	3	<i>ingénieur, médecin, orateur</i>
1996–2003	4	<i>écrivain, ingénieur, médecin, orateur</i>
2012	3	<i>écrivain, ingénieur, médecin</i>
2016	4	<i>écrivain, ingénieur, médecin, orateur</i>
PRE	3	<i>écrivain, ingénieur, médecin</i>

either be due to the absence of women in this profession or to the general negative connotation of the suffix *-teuse*. The absence of feminine forms for the other two nouns, *pompier* and *marin*, could also be related to the relatively low percentage of women in these professions. The use of the proposed feminine form of the noun *marin*, which would be *marine*, might also be blocked by the presence of a polysemous feminine form *marine* referring to the navy. The feminine form *pompière* is also discussed by Van Compernelle (2007), who asked native speakers of French to indicate the official feminine forms of masculine profession nouns and to give their opinion on these forms. As Van Compernelle reports, one of his participants argued that the form *pompière* is awful, because ‘it sounds weird’ (Van Compernelle 2007: 17).

In addition, an alternative feminisation device is available in French, which involves the compounding of a (masculine) profession nouns with the noun *femme* ‘woman’, giving rise to forms such as *femme écrivain* or *femme médecin*. Although this feminisation strategy is rejected by the official guideline, it is nevertheless present in the *Petit Robert*, as Table 7 shows.

We have to note, however, that for all these nouns in the more recent dictionary editions, alternative feminine forms are also included.

In contrast to French, German uses fewer distinct feminisation devices, as can be observed in Table 8.

Most nouns derive their feminine form by adding the suffix *-in* to the masculine form. All feminine forms derived by means of this strategy are included in the most recent edition of the dictionary. This is also true of the substantivized participles that can take both a feminine and a masculine article. More problematic appear to be nouns that require the change of the head of a compound noun, as *Feuerwehrmann* ‘firefighter’, whose feminine form is *Feuerwehrfrau*. The other example of this type is *Seemann* ‘seaman’, whose feminine form would be *Seefrau*. As Table 8 shows, whereas in the first two editions examined the feminine forms are not listed for either of these nouns, *Feuerwehrfrau* is included in the two latest editions, as well as in the online version. The form *Seefrau*, on the other hand, does not appear in the print editions, only in the online version.

As we discussed in Section 2, Schoental (1989) lists some animate nouns that are difficult to feminise. In addition to the nouns of our sample, we have checked in the German dictionary editions whether feminine forms of these resistant nouns are present. The results are listed in Table 9.

For most of the problematic cases listed in Schoental (1989), feminine forms are now included in the German dictionary, although the feminine form *Gästin* ‘female guest’ is only present in the online version. The nouns with the *-ling* suffix seem to be an exception,

**Table 8.** Feminisation strategies German.

Type of feminine form formation	Total number in sample	Number of forms present				
		1983	1996	2001	2011	Online
A. masculine + <i>-in</i> <i>Lehrer, Lehrerin</i>	51	26	28	47	51	51
B. weak forms <i>der/die Abgeordnete</i>	4	4	4	4	4	4
C. head of compound noun changes <i>Seemann, Seefrau</i>	2	0	0	1	1	2

**Table 9.** Apparent problematic forms according to Schoental (1989).

Masculine noun	Duden 1983	Duden 1996	Duden 2001	Duden 2011	Duden online
<i>Kapitän</i>	-	-	<i>Kapitänin</i>	<i>Kapitänin</i>	<i>Kapitänin</i>
<i>Offizier</i>	-	-	<i>Offizierin</i>	<i>Offizierin</i>	<i>Offizierin</i>
<i>Torwart</i>	-	-	<i>Torwartin</i>	<i>Torwartin</i>	<i>Torwartin</i>
<i>Lehrling</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Flüchtling</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Säugling</i>	-	-	-	-	-
<i>Passagier</i>	-	<i>Passagierin</i>	<i>Passagierin</i>	<i>Passagierin</i>	<i>Passagierin</i>
<i>Laie</i>	-	-	-	<i>Laiin</i>	<i>Laiin</i>
<i>Gast</i>	-	-	-	-	<i>Gästin</i>
<i>Vormund</i>	-	-	<i>Vormundin</i>	<i>Vormundin</i>	<i>Vormundin</i>

since no feminine forms are listed, presumably due to morphological difficulties, since it is not clear what the feminine form of such a noun should be.

#### 4.3 Dating the integration of the feminine form

An interesting aspect to consider is the first appearance of a noun's feminine form in the dictionary. The profession nouns for which a feminine form is present in the first dictionary editions consulted (1967 for French and 1983 for German) are listed in Table 10 and 11.

A factor that might influence the inclusion and use of a feminine form is the status of the corresponding profession. As we can conclude from the nouns listed in Table 10 and 11, fewer feminine forms of prestigious professions are listed in the first dictionary editions, but there is a small difference between the languages, since in the first German edition more high-ranking feminine profession nouns, such as *die Ministerin* 'the female minister' or *die Richterin* 'the female judge', are listed, whereas in French the generic masculine form is traditionally used in these cases. In contrast, for less prestigious professions, it is the feminine forms that are included in the first editions. In the 1967 edition of the French dictionary, for instance, we find forms like *l'institutrice* 'the female teacher' and *la chanteuse* 'the female singer'.

That the status of the profession is an important factor with respect to the use of the feminine form is also reflected by polysemous nouns, such as *secrétaire* 'secretary', which can refer to both a high-ranking profession, *secrétaire d'État* 'secretary of state', as well as to a low-ranking position, i.e. someone who assists a person in answering the telephone,

**Table 10.** Feminine forms in *Petit Robert* (1967).

Noun	Translation	Noun	Translation
<i>acheteuse</i>	buyer	<i>guide</i>	guide
<i>adjointe</i>	assistant	<i>institutrice</i>	teacher
<i>administratrice</i>	administrator	<i>lectrice</i>	reader/lecturer
<i>apprentie</i>	apprentice	<i>metteuse en scène</i>	director
<i>attachée</i>	attaché	<i>oratrice</i>	speaker
<i>chanteuse</i>	singer	<i>partisane</i>	adherent
<i>chirurgienne</i>	surgeon	<i>programmeuse</i>	programmer
<i>conductrice</i>	driver	<i>secrétaire</i>	secretary
<i>députée</i>	deputy	<i>supérieure</i>	superior
<i>entrepreneuse</i>	businessman		

**Table 11.** Feminine forms in Duden Universalwörterbuch (1983).

Noun	Translation	Noun	Translation
<i>Abgeordnete</i>	deputy	<i>Ministerin</i>	minister
<i>Agentin</i>	agent	<i>Mitarbeiterin</i>	employee
<i>Ärztin</i>	doctor	<i>Polizistin</i>	policeman
<i>Assistentin</i>	assistant	<i>Professorin</i>	professor
<i>Auszubildende</i>	apprentice	<i>Programmiererin</i>	programmer
<i>Bäuerin</i>	farmer	<i>Regisseurin</i>	director
<i>Beauftragte</i>	representative	<i>Rektorin</i>	headmaster
<i>Buchhalterin</i>	administrator	<i>Retterin</i>	rescuer
<i>Chefin</i>	director	<i>Richterin</i>	judge
<i>Dichterin</i>	poet	<i>Sängerin</i>	singer
<i>Führerin</i>	guide	<i>Schriftstellerin</i>	writer
<i>Käuferin</i>	buyer	<i>Sekretärin</i>	secretary
<i>Lehrerin</i>	teacher	<i>Sprecherin</i>	speaker
<i>Lektorin</i>	reader/lecturer	<i>Vorgesetzte</i>	superior
<i>Medizinerin</i>	doctor	<i>Zeugin</i>	witness

writing letters, and so forth. In fact, whereas for the latter use the feminine form is indicated in the 1977 edition of the *Petit Robert*, for the former use the feminine form is not accepted. Thus, according to this dictionary, we can say *la secrétaire du directeur* ‘the female secretary of the director’, but not *la secrétaire d’État* ‘the female secretary of state’. In the most recent dictionary editions this has changed, enabling us to say *la secrétaire d’État*. This change suggests that the feminisation of profession nouns, starting off with less prestigious professions, eventually reaches high-ranking professions too, although factors such as social status and prestige might influence the actual use of feminine forms by female professionals themselves (Paveau 2002). In the earliest German edition (1983), on the other hand, alongside the masculine *der.M Staatssekretär* ‘the secretary of state’ we also find the feminine form *die.F Staatssekretärin*.

Another factor that might contribute to the use of a feminine profession noun is the presence of women in a profession. In the German dictionaries, feminine forms such as

*Ministerin* ‘female minister’ or *Richterin* ‘female judge’ are present in the oldest dictionary edition consulted. The feminine form of the noun *Kanzler* ‘chancellor’, *Kanzlerin*, on the other hand, appears for the first time in the 2001 edition, probably due to the absence or limited number of female chancellors. However, since 2005 Germany has a female federal chancellor in the person of Angela Merkel, and so the feminine form *Bundeskanzlerin* is frequently used now.

#### 4.4 Final discussion

With all the results of the dictionary search in mind, we can now try to answer our research questions presented in the introduction. First, we wondered whether feminine forms of profession nouns would be present in dictionaries of French and German and whether we could observe a development in their inclusion over time. Another question we have raised is to what extent the different feminisation strategies are represented in the dictionaries.

When we compare the results of French and German, we see an increase in the inclusion of feminine forms in both languages. Surprisingly, even in German, feminine forms appear to be absent in older dictionary editions, yet German has a relatively longstanding tradition in the feminisation of profession nouns compared to French. Comparing the increase in inclusion of feminine forms shows that the most prominent changes are located in the same period in both languages, following changes in society in recent decades. Although both languages display an increase in the presence of feminine forms, in the French dictionaries some gaps prevail, whereas in the German ones, at least in the online version, a feminine form is listed for each noun in our list.

When we compare the ways in which feminine forms are presented in the dictionaries, a clear difference between French and German prevails. In French many nouns are marked in the dictionaries as *n.*, indicating a tendency towards underspecification of gender on nouns, a noun’s gender being specified in the context only. In German, on the other hand, the dictionaries show a preference for explicit marking of both the feminine and the masculine gender by including the masculine and feminine forms as separate entries. Differences appear as well with respect to the percentages of feminine forms which also include remarks on their usage. Whereas in the French dictionaries the entries of many feminine forms indicate restrictions on their use, no such restrictions are included in the German dictionaries, suggesting that in a language like French, feminine forms first appear in non-standard varieties of the language before they are eventually adopted into the standard language. In addition, we observe that in German the feminisation of profession nouns referring to high-ranking professions started earlier than in France as well.

An aspect we have briefly touched upon in the introduction is the effectiveness of language policy. Related to this, we wondered whether feminine forms proposed in official guidelines on feminisation have been integrated in the dictionaries. Comparing French and German reveals that there is considerably more variation in feminisation devices in French than in German, in some cases confronting a language user of French with multiple options for one single noun. Although feminine forms derived by all different strategies are included in the French dictionary, some strategies appear to be more problematic than others, depending on various linguistic or social factors, and the integration into the lexicon of feminine forms involving these strategies takes more time. Furthermore, forms that are not proposed or even disfavoured by the official guidelines are sometimes listed as well. German has one major feminisation strategy involving the addition of the suffix *-in* to the

masculine noun, and examples of this strategy are included in the dictionaries, as well as feminine forms derived by means of other devices. Relating this to the effectiveness of language policy, our results for French suggest that language change imposed from above, in this case feminisation strategies, is not always effective. In some cases, dictionaries seem to follow language users rather than language authorities. This can be related to the different functions of a dictionary. As we already mentioned in the introduction, a dictionary has two conflicting functions: description and prescription. On the one hand, the dictionaries try to represent actual language use – with some delay – and include feminine forms that language users actually use. This is certainly true of the dictionaries investigated here, the *Petit Robert* and the *Duden*, both being largely based on corpora (*Le Robert*; *Duden*). On the other hand, dictionaries are also taken to indicate ‘correct’ language use and give language users clues as to what forms should be used in a specific context. Given the observation that feminine forms are largely present in the latest dictionary editions and that the number and nature of remarks on these feminine forms has considerably decreased too, the dictionaries show an increasing equality between masculine and feminine forms. Following their prescriptive function, they seem to encourage the use of feminine forms for most profession nouns.

Returning to the main issue addressed in this study, we can conclude that dictionaries reflect changes in society related to the increased presence of women in all professions, since both dictionaries of French and German show an increasing inclusion of feminine profession nouns over time. There are few nouns for which no feminine form is yet included in the dictionary in either language. We should, however, keep in mind that dictionaries generally show a delay in the integration of new words in the lexicon.

## 5. Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that both in French and German the inclusion of feminine forms in dictionaries has developed over time. Language use – as far as reflected by dictionaries – thus seems to follow ongoing changes in society related to the increased presence of women in all professions. Interestingly, we have discovered developments in the presence of feminine forms in the dictionaries of both languages over time. Even in a language such as German, in which feminisation faces fewer obstacles, an increase in the inclusion of feminine forms of profession nouns in the dictionary has taken place.

Of course, we need to be cautious in drawing conclusions from the results of this study, since it only involved a limited number of nouns and dictionaries. In addition, although the results show that dictionaries reflect ongoing changes in society, our study does not address the actual use of feminine forms. Can we observe changes in the use of feminine forms as well? For instance, in a situation in which the sex of a noun’s referent is unknown, traditionally the masculine form was used. Considering the results of the present study, we might however wonder whether now the use of the feminine form might have become possible in such a situation too. We hope to return to these and other questions in future work.

## Notes

1. See, e.g., Matthey (2000) for a more detailed discussion of feminisation in Switzerland and Arbour and de Nayves (2014) for a comparative study on feminization in Canada and Europe.

2. Although present in the guideline, we do not discuss loanwords and abbreviations.
3. There are a few exceptions to this derivation: with nouns for which the addition of an *e* is felt to be difficult, as *témoin*, only the article changes (e.g. *un témoin*, *une témoin*); for other nouns, the addition of an *e* to derive the feminine form is optional (e.g. *un médecin*, *une médecin(e)*).
4. A paired-samples t-test in SPSS shows that both changes are significant at  $p < 0.05$ .
5. A paired-samples t-test in SPSS shows that this change is significant at  $p < 0.05$ .
6. The numbers in italics indicate that of all nouns searched for, the feminine form is included in the dictionary.

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## Appendix: Samples of nouns used

### A. French

Class	Nouns
A.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>architecte</i> (1994)</li> <li>• <i>guide</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>juge</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>maire</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>ministre</i> (1996)</li> <li>• <i>pilote</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>poète</i> (2012)</li> <li>• <i>secrétaire</i> (1977)</li> </ul>
B.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>apprenti</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>attaché</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>chargé</i> (1994)</li> <li>• <i>député</i> (1967)</li> </ul>
C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>adjoint</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>chancelier</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>chirurgien</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>écrivain</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>huissier</i> (1996)</li> <li>• <i>partisan</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>policier</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>pompier</i> -</li> <li>• <u>Exceptions</u></li> <li>• <i>chef</i> (1994)</li> <li>• <i>mannequin</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>marin</i> -</li> <li>• <i>médecin – une médecin(e)</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>témoin – une témoin</i> (2003)</li> </ul>
D.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>+ <u>-euse</u></li> <li>• <i>chroniqueur</i> (1977)</li> <li>• <i>entrepreneur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>footballeur</i> (1977)</li> <li>• <i>programmeur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>sauveur</i> (2012)</li> <li><u>Exceptions</u></li> <li>• <i>censeur</i> (2012)</li> <li>• <i>gouverneur</i> (2012)</li> </ul>

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Class	Nouns
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>ingénieur</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>précurseur</i> (2012)</li> <li>• <i>professeur</i> (2003)</li> <li>• <i>supérieur</i> (1967)</li> </ul>
E.	<p>+ <u>-trice</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>administrateur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>agriculteur</i> (1994)</li> <li>• <i>conducteur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>instituteur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>lecteur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>orateur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>recteur</i> (1996)</li> <li>• <i>sculpteur</i> (1994)</li> <li>• <i>sénateur</i> (1996)</li> </ul> <p>+ <u>-teuse</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>un acheteur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>un chanteur</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>un metteur (en scène)</i> (1967)</li> <li>• <i>un transporteur</i> -</li> </ul> <p><u>Exceptions</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>auteur</i> (2012)</li> <li>• <i>docteur</i> (2012 (<i>docteur(e)</i>) / 1967 (<i>doctoresse</i>))</li> </ul>

## B. German

Class	Examples
A.	<i>Agent</i> (1983) <i>Amtsträger</i> (2001) <i>Anhänger</i> (2001) <i>Architekt</i> (2001) <i>Arzt</i> (1983) <i>Assistent</i> (1983) <i>Autor</i> (2001) <i>Bauer</i> (1983) <i>Beförderer</i> (2001) <i>Bildhauer</i> (2001) <i>Buchhalter</i> (1983) <i>Bürgermeister</i> (2001) <i>Chef</i> (1983) <i>Chirurg</i> (2001) <i>Chronist</i> (2001) <i>Dichter</i> (1983) <i>Doktor</i> (2011) <i>Fahrer</i> (2001) <i>Flieger</i> (2001) <i>Führer</i> (1983) <i>Fußballspieler</i> (2001) <i>Gerichtsvollzieher</i> (2001) <i>Gouverneur</i> (2011) <i>Ingenieur</i> (2001) <i>Kanzler</i> (2001) <i>Käufer</i> (1983) <i>Lehrer</i> (1983) <i>Lektor</i> (1983) <i>Matrose</i> (2011) <i>Mediziner</i> (1983) <i>Minister</i> (1983) <i>Mitarbeiter</i> (1983) <i>Pilot</i> (2001) <i>Poet</i> (2001) <i>Polizist</i> (1983) <i>Professor</i> (1983) <i>Programmierer</i> (1983) <i>Regisseur</i> (1983) <i>Rektor</i> (1983) <i>Retter</i> (1983) <i>Richter</i> (1983) <i>Sänger</i> (1983) <i>Schriftsteller</i> (1983)

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Class	Examples
	<i>Sekretär</i> (1983)
	<i>Senator</i> (2001)
	<i>Sprecher</i> (1983)
	<i>Unternehmer</i> (1996)
	<i>Vertreter</i> (1996)
	<i>Vorgänger</i> (2001)
	<i>Zensor</i> (2011)
	<i>Zeuge</i> (1983)
B.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Abgeordneter</i> (1983)</li><li>• <i>Auszubildender</i> (1983)</li><li>• <i>Beauftragter</i> (1983)</li><li>• <i>Vorgesetzter</i> (1983)</li></ul>
C.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>Feuerwehrmann</i> (2001)</li><li>• <i>Seemann</i> (Duden-Online)</li></ul>

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