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Absent husbands and whispering voices: a critical analysis of the representation of men in two popular Flemish women's magazines

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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Absent husbands and whispering voices: a critical analysis of the representation of men in two popular Flemish women's magazines

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This study examines the textual representation of men in two popular Flemish women's magazines, *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle*. We compare *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1958 with its successor *Libelle* of 2008 through building on the tradition of critical discourse analysis. Our analysis of the names used to refer to men in the two magazines illustrates how the representation of men has changed during this period. In 2008, men were found in different roles than they were in 1958. This analysis is supplemented by an analysis of the processes through which men are represented in relation to women (readers). The key findings suggest that women's relationships with men, although different, are still integral to the ethos of these magazines. Although the importance of marriage has declined, the number of roles that men take on in women's lives has increased, and, most notably, the presence of a loving man in women's lives is still a central theme.

Keywords: women's magazines; linguistic discourse analysis; language and gender; naming analysis; systemic-functional grammar

1. Introduction

In the last few decades, the amount of research focusing on women's magazines has increased significantly (Wassenaar 1976, Ferguson 1983, Ballaster *et al.* 1991, Wadia 1991). This enhanced interest in women's magazines is not so surprising, given the influence such magazines are believed to have on their readers and, in a broader sense, on contemporary society. However, the impact of women's magazines on their readers and on society does not only stem from the success of the magazines themselves, but also (and perhaps predominantly) from the power and influence of media discourse in general. According to Talbot (1995, 2007), media discourse plays a vital role in constituting people's realities:

Addressing a mass audience imposes on mass-media producers the need to construct an implied reader as addressee. [...] The need to construct an implied reader puts the producers of mass-media texts in a powerful position. They have the right to total control over production, such as what kinds of representations of events are included. (Talbot 1995, p. 146)

The implied readers postulated by mass-media producers are constructed as communities (Talbot *ibid.*). In the case of women's magazines, the targeted audience is, based on its femaleness, addressed as a single community. The picture of the world presented by women's magazines is that the individual woman is a member not so much of society as whole but of *her* society, the world of women (Ferguson 1983, p. 6). In earlier research on

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women's magazines, this social group has been described as a 'surrogate sisterhood' (Ferguson 1983, Winship 1987). Wadia (1991) pointed out that women's magazines often show ambivalence in the treatment of the question of femininity: independence and attachment to the male figure seem to be in conflict.

This study seeks to examine how the male figure is positioned within this female community, that is, how men are represented in these magazines and how men can perform the roles in relation to women readers are defined. We focus on two popular Flemish women's magazines, *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle*. *Het Rijk der Vrouw* ('Women's Realm') came onto the market in 1925 and was intended for both young women and more experienced housewives. The magazine was a 'service' (Walker 1998, p. 2) for housewives and girls, offering contributions on fashion, fancywork and interior design. It also included several readers' letters, often with moralising advice on married and family life (Flour *et al.* 1995).

The magazine *Libelle* was launched in 1945 with the subtitle 'weekly for the Flemish woman'. This magazine was intended for housewives of the middle class, but from the 60s on, it was also aimed at women who, worked outside the home (Flour *et al.* 1995). *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and *Libelle* competed with each other until 1990, when both magazines merged. The merger resulted from similar target groups that the magazines shared: readers between 25 and 54 years old,¹ for whom family life was of core interest.²

Since 'research on the media coverage of various events is conducted on the assumption that news media do not mirror the real world, but [they] construct versions of reality' (Stamou 2001, p. 653), this study is built on the tradition of critical discourse analysis (CDA). This approach can be described as a means of uncovering the 'codes' of social relations. By paying attention to the priorities, categorisations and descriptions of the social and physical world in media discourses, insight can be gained into the ideas, values and beliefs that are portrayed (Hyde 2000, p. 160).

Our own analysis is based on two linguistic methods: naming analysis and transitivity analysis. Naming analysis examines which textual and linguistic resources are used to name men and how these choices contribute to their representation. In the transitivity analysis, we investigate how men are represented in relation to women (readers). This analysis is based on Hallidayan grammar (see e.g. Halliday 1994), which is one of the building blocks of CDA. Section 2 situates both naming and transitivity analyses in the broader context of CDA.

2. Methodological framework

2.1. Critical discourse analysis

The tradition of CDA can be found in van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (1999), Wodak and Meyer (2001) and Wodak and Chilton (2005). The framework has often been used to examine representations (Stamou 2001, Pietikäinen 2003, Trioen and Temmerman 2009). According to CDA, language should be considered as discourse, that is as a form of social practice.

In the context of women's magazines, a CDA approach has proven to be exceptionally fruitful. Holmes and Nice (2012, p. 123) point to Ballaster *et al.*, (1991) for discerning two dominant analyses of women's magazines: the approach which regards women's magazines as having a *baleful influence* on their readers and the approach which regards the magazines as *bringers of pleasure*.

As we have not carried out a reception study, we will not make interpretive statements about the effect of the representations the magazines offer, but limit our analysis to the

textual and linguistic resources used to refer to men and how these choices contribute to their representation.

2.2. Naming analysis

Naming analysis examines the different names which are used to refer to (social) actors or events within a given text (Trioen and Temmerman 2009). As such, naming analysis examines *onomasiological variation* (Geeraerts *et al.* 1994), which is a form of conceptual (or ‘semantic’) difference involving differences in categorisation. Since ‘the vocabulary one is familiar with provides sets of preconstructed categories, and representation always involves deciding how to “place” what is being represented within these sets of categories’ (Fairclough 1995, p. 109), it should be clear that every linguistic representation brings a specific meaning, based on a specific viewpoint. In this study, we examine the names that are used to represent men in order to assess how these names contribute to the magazines’ overall representation of men. Our application of naming analysis starts with a quantitative phase, examining how often a name is used, followed by a qualitative study of the selected names.

2.3. Transitivity analysis

We apply transitivity analysis to examine how men are represented in relation to other actors (mainly women). This analysis is based on Halliday’s (1994) ideational framework in systemic-functional grammar. The ideational component of language refers to the function of communicating ideas and representing a state of affairs (Talbot 2007, p. 14). It is a fundamental property of language that enables human beings to build a picture of reality and to make sense of their experience of what goes on around them and inside them (Halliday 1994, p. 101). The grammatical clause represents this process, which consists of three basic components: the *process* itself (the representation of a situation or action), the *participants* in the process and the *circumstances* which are related to the process. For English, Halliday described three main types of processes (material, mental and relational). These are easily transferable to Dutch, as English and Dutch are related languages (Trioen and Temmerman 2009, p. 186).

Material processes can roughly be equated to ‘actions’ (the main participant being the ‘Actor’, e.g. ‘the lion [Actor] caught the tourist’). Mental processes can be equated to ‘feelings’ (with the ‘Sensor’ as main participant, e.g. ‘Mary [Sensor] liked the movie’). Relational processes are typically processes of ‘being’ and ‘having’. A supplementary category is formed by the verbal processes, which refer to processes of linguistic communication with the ‘Sayer’ as main participant (e.g. ‘his face [Sayer] tells stories untold’). Halliday also describes the supplementary categories of behavioural and existential processes, but these will be left out of the discussion (except for one example in Section 4.2.2), because they are less relevant for our purposes.

3. Corpus/sample

The corpus consists of 12 randomly chosen (by means of a randomiser³) issues of both *Het Rijk der Vrouw* (from the year 1958) and its successor *Libelle* (from the year 2008). Through these issues, we have analysed all articles in which (relationships with) men were mentioned. The full corpus contains 55 articles: 26 from *Het Rijk der Vrouw* and 29 from *Libelle*. In *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, all texts referring to men are readers’ letters or the answers

of the magazine to these letters. In *Libelle*, however, most articles relating to men are testimonies of women readers or pieces of advice given by experts, professors and therapists. The reporter of such articles combines these different utterances into one comprehensive whole and provides it with background commentary, thus creating the overall meaning of the article.

Taking into account this polyphonic organisation of discourse that enacts different voices (Roulet 2011), the articles are subdivided into two categories, according to the main voice speaking. The first is the category ‘women readers’, which contains the articles from *Libelle* in which women interviewees testify about a given topic concerning relationships with men (such as ‘unfaithful men’) and the readers’ letters from both *Libelle* and *Het Rijk der Vrouw*. The second category, ‘experts’, consists of opinions and pieces of advice on relationships given by ‘professionals’. The answers to the readers’ letters are also included in this category. In *Libelle*, these answers are formulated by different experts, according to the topic of the readers’ letter. For example, a lawyer answers letters about legal problems, whereas a therapist gives advice on relationships. In *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, the expert remains anonymous.

4. Analysis of the data

4.1. Naming analysis

In the naming analysis, we have adopted a quantitative and a qualitative approach. In the first phase, we investigated how many times a certain name occurred. In the second phase, the different names were compared with each other. Names, which could only be traced a few times, but which convey a significant meaning, have also been examined thoroughly, inspired by the research method of Trioen and Temmerman (2009). We started with the nouns we encountered for referring to men, but if these nouns were part of a noun phrase (such as ‘a good and serious fiancé’ or ‘the man whom you will one day love’), we included the full noun phrase in our database. This allowed us to study the meaning in context of the referring noun.

Every single naming practice is a result of processes of selection and construction: by selecting a form out of a range of other possible forms, a particular way of representing the named referent is foregrounded (Trioen and Temmerman 2009, p. 185). Therefore, it should be emphasised that ‘neutral names’, as such, do not exist. Rather, the traced naming practices are to be considered under a range of possibilities, each having its own place on a horizontal axis. To situate each name on this axis, we start from Trioen and Temmerman’s

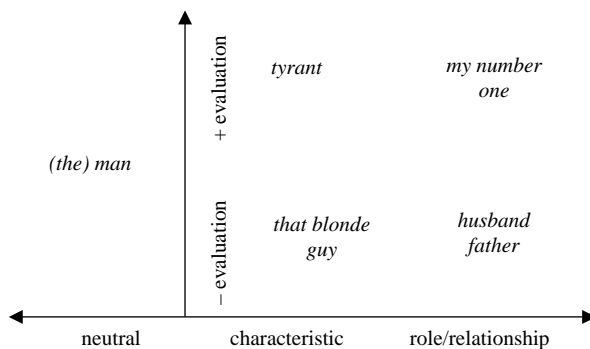


Figure 1. Visual conceptualisation of the different categories with examples from the corpus.

(2009, p. 187) continuum with a tripartite division. However, for this study, these categories are introduced in a new scheme, adjusted to the names we found in this corpus (cf. Figure 1).

The horizontal axis consists of three categories. Neutral names refer to the named referent in the most general way: they can be considered as naming practices that do not provide evidence of a certain approach or an evaluation. The names in the categories 'characteristic' (such as 'blonde') and 'role/relationship' (such as 'father' and 'husband'⁴) approach the named referent from a particular point of view: they highlight one particular aspect of the named referent more than another. It should be noted that, in many cases, the boundaries between these different groups are fuzzy.

However, the categorisation on the horizontal axis is not sufficient. The names in the categories 'characteristic' and 'role/relationship' need to be specified further. For this reason, the horizontal axis intersects with a vertical axis that indicates a gradation on the vertical axis; those terms that include an evaluation of the named referent. This evaluation can be positive or negative (such as 'my true love' and 'a tyrant'), depending on the appreciation of the speaker for a specific referent. The degree of evaluation may vary: we consider 'my first love' to be more evaluative than 'the man whom you will one day love' as the man in the second instance is a hypothetical person, who is described in a certain role.

The neutral names on the horizontal axis are not specified further, since there are, strictly speaking, no gradations of neutrality possible. In this study, we only consider three naming practices as neutral: the personal pronoun *hij* ('he'), the proper name of the man and the name (*de*) *man* ('(the) man'). It should be noted that the name *man* ('man') can also be categorised in the category 'role/relationship', namely when it is preceded by a possessive pronoun as *jouw* ('your') or *mijn* ('my'), *man* ('man') meaning 'husband'.

For each magazine, we have categorised the names for men according to the voice speaking (women readers or experts). For these categories, we have described the neutral names (A) and the names referring to a characteristic, role or relationship (B). If applicable, we have listed the evaluative names in a separate section C category.

4.1.1 Naming men in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1958

Women readers

(A) Neutral names (52 out of 83 names)

The majority of the names in the category 'women readers' is neutral. The personal pronoun *hij* ('he') occurs most often. This pronoun only appears when the man it refers to has already been mentioned (such as 'my friend'). The use of the name *een/de/deze/die man* ('a/the/this/that man'⁵) can also be considered as neutral. The proper name of a man only appears once.

(B) Names referring to a characteristic, role or relationship (31 out of 83 names)

The name *mijn/haar man* ('my/her man') pictures the named man as the husband of (the friend of) the female reader. Names that indicate the female reader will soon get married to the named man are *mijn toekomstige echtgenoot* ('my future husband') and *mijn verloofde* ('my fiancé'). The name *vriend* ('friend'), typically combined with the indefinite article *een* ('a'), refers to a friendship between the named man and the woman reader, in which love is not (yet) or not outspokenly involved. Finally, the name *jongen* ('boy') refers to the young age of the named referent, as example 1, from a letter of a 17-year-old girl, illustrates:

Zijn er geen jongens die niet van flirten houden!

Aren't there any boys who do not like flirting! (RdV 662-6)

Experts

(A) Neutral names (163 out of 338 names)

Approximately 48% of the names are neutral. The most frequently occurring name is the personal pronoun *hij* ('he'), followed by the name *een/de/die/deze man* ('a/the/this/that man'). This name is often used in a generic way: instead of referring to one specific man, the name refers to 'the man' in general, as this second example shows:

De man vooral moet ervoor zorgen het nodige geld te verdienen om aan vrouw en kinderen het nodige te verschaffen.

The man in particular has to earn the required money to provide wife and children with necessities. (RdV 666-3)

Another neutral name is *heer* ('sir'). This name is often used as a form of address in the standard expressions *geachte heer* or *waarde heer* ('dear sir'). The proper name of a man only appears once.

A neutral name can be accompanied by an adjective or a relative subordinate clause that adds an extra (evaluative) meaning. This third example illustrates this:

De man, die u eens beminnen zult, zal in u een echt jong meisje vinden, behorend tot degenen die trouwe echtgenoten worden.

The man, whom you will one day love, will find in you a young girl, who is one of those who will become faithful wives. (RdV 662-7)

As the referent in this case is a hypothetical man, we still consider this naming to be neutral.

(B) Names referring to a characteristic, role or relationship (175 out of 338 names)

The majority of the names in the experts' texts refer to a characteristic, role or relationship of the named referent. Names that refer to the fact that the named man is married are *uw/haar man* ('your/her man') and *echtgenoot* ('husband'). The name *uw/haar man* ('your/her man') is also often used in a generic way, as the fourth example shows:

Een vrouw moet rekening houden met de werkelijkheden van het leven en begrijpen dat haar man soms wat zenuwachtig is en zich niet altijd uitsluitend met haar kan bezighouden.

A woman has to bear in mind the realities of life and understand that her husband can get nervous sometimes and that he cannot busy himself exclusively with her. (RdV 666-3)

Names that refer to the young age of the named man are *jongen* ('boy'), *jongeman* ('young man') and *jongelieden* ('young men'). The name *vriend* ('friend') refers to a (platonic) friendship between the named referent and another person. The names *verloofde* ('fiancé') and *bruidegom* ('groom') refer to the fact that the named man will soon get married. Names that refer to other men who are involved in the story are *een/die andere man* ('an/the other man'), *een andere jongen* ('another guy'), *andere jongelui* ('other young persons') and *al de andere* ('all the others').

The name *vader* ('father') represents a man in his role towards his children.

(C) Evaluative names

Some names in the experts' texts include an evaluation of the referent. The name *buitenstaander* ('outsider') describes the man as someone who does not experience something first hand. The name *eerste liefde* ('first love') refers to the man as the reader's first love. Another evaluating name is *tiran* ('tyrant'): this name represents the man by means of his despotic character. Finally, names such as *goede en oprechte kameraden* ('good and sincere comrades'), *een oprechte, eerlijke jongen* ('a sincere, honest boy'), *een*

goede echtgenoot ('a good husband') and *een brave en ernstige verloofde* ('a good and serious fiancé') give a positive representation of the named men, reinforced by the evaluative adjectives.

4.1.2 Naming men in *Libelle* of 2008

Women readers

(A) Neutral names (810 out of 975 names)

Neutral names make up the vast majority of the names that could be traced in the testimonies. The most frequently occurring name is the personal pronoun *hij* ('he'). As in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, this pronoun only appears when the man it refers to has already been mentioned before. The name *een/de man* ('a/the man') and the proper name of the man also belong to this category. Again, neutral names can show up in the B category when they are determined by an adjective or a relative subordinate clause.

(B) Naming referring to a characteristic, role or relationship (165 out of 975 names)

The names *mijn/jouw man* ('my/your man'), *partner* ('partner'), *echtgenoot* ('husband') and *lief* ('love') all refer to the fact that the reader has a love relationship with the named man. The name *vriend* ('friend') can be interpreted in two different ways. The fifth example shows that it may refer to a boyfriend:

Waar ik het wél moeilijk mee heb, is dat Katrijn, mijn oudste dochter, zo veranderd is sinds ze is gaan samenwonen met haar vriend.

I find it hard that Katrijn, my eldest daughter, has changed so much since she lives together with her friend. (L3-18)

However, this name can also refer to an ordinary friendship between a woman and a man. The sixth example illustrates this:

Toen we in het begin samen waren, heb ik ooit op een feestje staan rock-'n -rollen met een jeugdvriend [...]

When we first got together, I had been dancing at a party with an old friend [...]. (L2-23)

The names *ex* ('ex'), *ex-vriend* ('ex-boyfriend') and *ex-man* ('ex-husband') refer to the fact that the relationship between the reader and the man in question is over.

Names that attribute a certain role to the referent are *minnaar* ('lover'), *papa* ('daddy') and *vader* ('father'). The names *papa* ('daddy') and *vader* ('father') emphasise the fact that the man in question takes up a responsible role towards his children. In some cases, the reader does not only talk about her own partner but also about another man who is involved in the story. She then usually uses the proper name of the man to refer to him, or, in a few isolated instances, *een ander* ('someone else') or *de ander* ('the other'). The names (*mannelijke*) *collega* ('(male) colleague') and *baas* ('boss') refer to the professional relationships of the person speaking. The name *vreemde* ('stranger') refers to the man as an unknown person. In the seventh example, the man is not considered as a person, but more as a specimen. The diminutive *eentje* (lit. 'a little one') is somewhat deprecating.

Niet dat ik per se een mooie man zoek, maar wel eentje die zich verzorgt.

It's not that I'm looking for a handsome man, but I do look for one [lit. a little one] that looks after himself. (L4-87)

The name *buurman* ('neighbour') indicates that the named man lives in the neighbourhood, whereas the name *type* ('type') indicates that the reader usually falls

for this kind of man. The name *kerel* characterises the man as a sturdy, brave man and might best be translated as ‘bloke’, as in the eighth example:

Fred is een schitterende kerel, maar succes in zaken is voor hem erg belangrijk, het is zijn motor.

Fred is a brilliant bloke, but success in business is very important for him, it's his driving force. (L19-18)

Also age and appearance are characteristics that can be used to represent a man, such as *jongen* (‘boy’), *een korte donkere man* (‘a short, dark man’) and *die blonde* (‘that blonde [guy]’).

New in this category (compared to *Het Rijk der Vrouw*) is the reference to the origin or the occupation of the man: *een leuke Luikenaar* (‘a nice inhabitant of Liège’), *een Afrikaan* (‘an African’), *een grappige fotograaf* (‘a funny photographer’), *die nieuwe accountant* (‘that new accountant’) and *een leraar* (‘a teacher’). A similar name is *student* (‘student’). The name *crimineel* (‘criminal’) emphasises the fact that the man has a record of unlawful behaviour. The name *de eerste* (‘the first’) refers to the first love of the reader. However, by putting it into a saying, the name is used in a more generic way, as the ninth example shows:

Voor mij was de eerste meteen de beste.

The first one turned out to be the best one for me. (L13-22)

(C) Evaluative names

Some names referring to a characteristic, role or relationship are evaluative at the same time. The pet name *schat* (lit. ‘treasure’) indicates that the man in question is very dear to the woman speaking. With the somewhat ridiculing name *zo'n exemplaar* (‘such a specimen’), the man is considered more as an object (cf. Example 7, where this meaning was also hinted at). At the same time, this name indicates that the named man is unique. The names *mijn nummer één* (‘my number one’), *de ware* (‘true love’) and *Nieuwe Grote Liefde* (‘New Great Love’) indicate how much the man means for the reader. The name *eerste lief(de)* (‘first love’) refers to the man as the reader's first real love. Another evaluating name is *jongere versie* (‘younger version’). This name represents a man as a younger copy of a(n) (older) man. The 10th example illustrates this:

Dat hij een jongere versie van die leraar is, heb ik pas na een tijdje begrepen.

Only after a while I understood that he was a younger version of that teacher. (L13-20).

With the name *goed gezelschap* (‘good company’), the man is referred to as someone with whom the reader likes to spend time.

Experts

(A) Neutral names (49 out of 118 names)

In the experts' texts in *Libelle*, over 40% of the names are neutral. In contrast with the neutral names in the category ‘women readers’, these names are seldom further specified by an adjective or a relative subordinate clause. That way, neutrality is maintained. Furthermore, they are often used in a generic way.

(B) Names referring to a characteristic, role or relationship (68 out of 118 names)

A lot of names from the category ‘women readers’ reappear in this category: such as *mijn/jouw man* (‘my/your man’), *partner* (‘partner’), *friend* (‘vriend’), *ex* (‘ex’), *vader* (‘father’), *papa* (‘daddy’), *ex* (‘ex’), *ex-vriend* (‘ex-boyfriend’), *ex-man* (‘ex-husband’), *buurman* (‘neighbour’) and *baas* (‘boss’).

Adam is a name, which is used in combination with the name *Eva*, such as in the 11th example:

Eva is materialistischer dan Adam en even ambitieus.

Eve is more materialistic than Adam and equally ambitious. (L21-110)

In this sentence, the name *Adam* is a metaphor for ‘the man’ in general.

Other names are *Weegschaalman* (‘Libra man’) and *Kreeftman* (‘Cancer man’). These names appear in a section about the influence of astronomy on men and categorise them on the basis of their sign of the zodiac.

(C) Evaluative names

The name *dader* (‘perpetrator’) characterises the man as someone who has committed a crime. The other evaluative names are positive, such as *de man van je leven* (‘the man of your life’). The name *de persoon die jouw chemische boodschappen herkent als ‘zijn’ geur van welbehagen* (‘the person who recognises your chemical messages as “his” scent of well-being’) stands out. The name *stem* (‘voice’) is notable as well: in the sentence *En wat te zeggen van een stem die lieve woordjes in je oor fluistert?* (‘And what to say about a voice that whispers sweet nothings in your ear?’), *stem* (‘voice’) stands metonymically for ‘man’.

4.2. Transitivity analysis

By carrying out an analysis of the transitivity in the sentences of our corpus, we want to give a systemic-functional explanation of the relationships between women and men as they are represented in these magazines. We only examine those clauses, in which at least one participant role refers to a man and we focus on the processes having to do with actions, feelings and communication. Relational processes with the verbs *zijn* (‘to be’) and *hebben* (‘to have’) will not be included in the discussion: as these verbs need a complement in the form of a noun phrase to express a meaning. It is clear that the naming analysis is more illuminating than the transitivity analysis in such relational processes (Trioen and Temmerman 2009, p. 195) and the complementing noun phrases have already been analysed in Section 4.1.

4.2.1 Transitivity in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*

Women readers

Actions (material processes) (9/26)

The majority of the processes in the readers’ letters are material processes. With respect to content, there are no similarities between the verbs used (‘to drink’, ‘to return’, ‘to kiss’, ...). This is not so surprising, given the fact that these verbs depend to a large extent on the subject of the reader’s letters and thus are very diverse. Marrying is a central process. An illustration of this is found in the 12th example:

In november was het tien jaar geleden dat ik trouwde met een man, die twaalf jaar ouder was dan ik.

In November, ten years had passed since I married a man who was twelve years older than me. (RdV 671-10)

Feelings (mental processes) (3/26).

Mental processes occur three times. Feelings of men and women are expressed, as the 13th and the 14th example illustrate:

Jammer genoeg voor mij, en misschien ook voor haar, houdt haar man vreselijk van flirten.

Unfortunately for me, and maybe also for her, her husband loves to flirt. (RdV 706-10)

Ik voel dat ik hen zal kunnen liefhebben alsof het mijn eigen kinderen waren en ik houd zeer veel van mijn toekomstige echtgenoot, die vol attenties is voor mij.

I feel that I will be able to love them as if they were my own children and **I love my future husband**, who is very considerate towards me, **very much**. (RdV 703-10)

Communication (verbal processes) (6/26).

Verbal processes encode actions of linguistic communication. Half of these processes are expressed by the neutral verb *zeggen* ('to say'), as in the 15th example:

Toen dit achter de rug was, zei mijn man, dat hij zich ging laten verzorgen in een inrichting in de stad.

When this was all over, my husband said that he was going to have himself treated in an institution in the city. (RdV 671-10)

Verbal processes where the man is the Sayer include the verb *verwijten* ('to reproach'), as in:

Soms vraag ik me af of hij haar niet tegen mij heeft opgezet, al heeft hij mij niets van belang te verwijten.

Sometimes I wonder if he has set her against me, although he can't reproach me with anything important. (RdV 704-10)

Experts

Actions (material processes) (68/216). Also in this category, the majority of the processes are material. The material processes that occur most frequently are those referring to marriage: *trouwen*, *in het huwelijksbootje stappen*, *de grote stap wagen* and *een huwelijk aangaan* (in English, these synonyms are all translated as 'to get married').

Another frequently occurring verb is *verlaten* ('to leave'). The Actor in these processes is always the man referred to, as in the 17th example:

Het is waar, die jongen heeft je zonder een woord verlaten, terwijl jij hem in volle overgave je hart had geschonken.

It's true, this boy has left you without a word, while you had given him your heart. (RdV 706-7)

All the other material processes are, again, very divergent, because of the diversity of topics that are treated in the answers to the readers' letters.

Feelings (mental processes) (46/216)

The verbs *houden van*, *beminnen* ('to love') are by far the most frequently used in this category (25/46). Sensors can be men or women:

U dacht dat hij heel veel van U hield en dat U weldra verloofd zou geweest zijn.

You assumed that he loved you very much and that you would be engaged very soon. (RdV 671-4)

Indien je dus innig van je verloofde houdt, moet je doen wat hij je vraagt en alle omgang met je vriendin staken.

If you truly love your fiancé, you have to do what he asks you and break contact with your friend[♀]. (RdV 704-4)

Other mental processes include *begrijpen* ('to understand') and *voelen* ('to feel').

Communication (verbal processes) (30/216)

The neutral verb *zeggen* ('to say') occurs four times, always in the context of bringing a message to a man. Verbal processes that are used with both men and women as Sayers are *vertellen* ('to tell'), *vragen* ('to ask') and *verwijten* ('to reproach').

4.2.2 *Transitivity in Libelle*

Women readers

Actions (material processes) (16/34)

The majority of the processes are material processes. As in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, these processes include very diverse verbs, according to the topic of the readers' letter. As the examples 23 and 24 show, both men and women can be Actors:

Hij wil mij adopteren zodat ik kan delen in zijn erfenis.

He wants **to adopt** me so I can share in his inheritance. (L3-80)

Ik heb een man leren kennen en wil graag met hem gaan samenwonen.

I have met a man and I would love **to live together** with him. (L22-50)

Feelings (mental processes) (5/34)

In the mental processes, again the most frequently occurring verb is *houden van* ('to love') (3/5). The other mental processes are *vallen op* ('to fancy') and *denken aan* ('to think about').

Communication (verbal processes) (5/34)

The neutral verb *zeggen* ('to say') is used twice. Other verbal processes are *uitschelden* ('to abuse') (with a male Sayer), *vragen* ('to ask') and *liegen* ('to lie').

Existential processes (1/34)

One process expressed would be labelled 'existential' in systemic-functional grammar as it has to do with 'being present' and 'existing':

Mijn man was er bijna nooit, waardoor het huishouden en de kinderen volledig voor mijn rekening waren.

My husband was almost never there, as a result of which I had to take care of the household and the children. (L10-40)

Absence from the household is a very meaningful part of the representation of men here.

Experts

Actions (material processes) (13/18)

Again, we cannot distinguish a general trend with respect to the verbs used in the material processes. In this category, in most cases, men are the Actors (15/18).

Feelings (mental processes) (3/18)

The mental processes include the verbs *graag zien* ('to love'), *iemand aantrekkelijk vinden* ('to find someone attractive') and *gevoelens koesteren voor iemand* ('to have feelings for someone'), with either men or women as Sensors.

In this section, we found no processes of communication.

5. Comparison between *Het Rijk Der Vrouw* (1958) and *Libelle* (2008)

We applied the linguistic frameworks of lexical (naming) analysis and systemic-functional transitivity analysis to map out the representation of (relationships with) men in two Flemish women's magazines, for the community of readers, which they create. As we wanted to gain some insight into the evolution of their representation over time, we have compared the two magazines with an interval of 50 years.

Most striking is the fact that in 1958, the subject of ‘men’ occurred only in one type of articles (that is in the readers’ letters and the magazine’s answers to them). In 2008, however, different types of articles have (relationships with) men as a topic.

We have examined two categories of voices speaking about men: women readers and experts. The majority of the names for men are neutral (‘he’ and ‘a man’). When we consider the names which describe men in a certain role or with a certain characteristic (possibly with an evaluative meaning extension), we see that in 2008, both voices use a much greater variety of names than in 1958. The names in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1958 almost always refer to the fact that the named man is married or is about to get married. Examples are *mijn man* (‘my man’), *echtgenoot* (‘husband’), *verloofde* (‘fiancé’) and *bruidegom* (‘groom’). In *Libelle* of 2008, however, we also find names that indicate that the named man has a relationship, but without being married. Examples are *partner* (‘partner’), *lief* (‘love’) and *vriend* (‘friend’). This last name also appears in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*, but then it only refers to a platonic friendship. In *Libelle*, *vriend* (‘friend’) has taken on a new meaning (as it has in wider society), in that it can also refer to a love relationship. Moreover, the use of words is much more adventurous and creative in *Libelle* than in *Het Rijk der Vrouw*. Names such as *ex* (‘ex’), *minnaar* (‘adulterous lover’) and *schat* (‘treasure’) only occur in *Libelle*. This evolution in the use of words reflects the change in the prevailing standards of relationships that has taken place over the past decades (Esping-Andersen 2009): in the 50s, women were expected to get married, bring up children and look after their families, but today these standards are different. First of all, a woman can have a relationship without being married. Furthermore, she can choose to remain childless or to separate from her partner if the relationship does not work out. The occurrence in the women readers’ voice of the word *minnaar*, which refers to a lover in an adulterous relationship, even shows that adultery is no longer considered such a taboo. Therefore, we can say that the evolution in prevailing standards is reflected in the choice of articles and in the use of words.

Explicitly negative evaluations such as *crimineel* (‘criminal’) or *dader* (‘perpetrator’) are not shunned in *Libelle*, but also in the 50s names hinting at the troublesome sides of relationships [such as *tiran* (‘tyrant’)] occurred.

In the second part of this study, we applied the framework of systemic-functional transitivity analysis to examine how men are represented in relation to other actors. The results of the transitivity analysis are less clear. There are differences as well as similarities between *Het Rijk der Vrouw* (1958) and *Libelle* (2008). In both magazines, the majority of processes refer to concrete actions (material processes). With respect to the verbs used in these material processes, we can say that these are very diverse. This is not so surprising, given the fact that these verbs depend to a large extent on the subject of the readers’ letters. The category experts in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* forms an exception to this rule: in this category, the largest part of the material processes refers to the act of marrying. The transitivity analysis of this part of the corpus confirms the earlier conclusion we have drawn on the basis of the naming analysis, namely that *Het Rijk der Vrouw* (1958) almost exclusively represents men as husbands and focuses on love and marriage. But the second most frequent verb is ‘to leave’, always with a male participant in the Actor role. The fear or the negative outcome of being left (expressed by the women readers’ voice) and advice on how to avoid or how to cope with being left (by the experts’ voice) are main topics in this part of the corpus. In the 2008 corpus, quitting or stopping a relationship is also among the important topics, but both men and women can be Actors in the processes then. This nicely illustrates women’s evolution towards autonomy through the years.

In both magazines, the verb *houden van* ('to love') has a high frequency within the mental processes (having to do with feelings), which shows that love has been and still is a central topic in women's magazines. In the 50s, love implied sacrifices for women, as some of the Experts' advice shows. In the 2008 corpus, no such advice can be found.

The verbal processes (referring to communication) in both magazines show a remarkable presence of verbs of abuse ('to reproach' and 'to abuse'). It is inherent to an advice column that relational problems should be discussed and verbal violence seems to be an unrelenting problem throughout the years.

Finally in the existential processes, one example stands out in the 2008 corpus, where a husband is being represented as hardly ever present in his family, so as to be virtually non-existent.

6. General conclusions

A first conclusion to be drawn from our analysis is that the importance of men as a topic in women's magazines has increased over the years. Whereas in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1958, only readers' letters and the answers to them addressed the topic of men and relationships, in *Libelle* of 2008, different genres of articles do this. Also the number of different names to refer to men (and their roles vis-à-vis women) has increased. Three other conclusions are evident when taking a bird's eye view over the corpus:

(1) The importance of marriage is declining

Of course, this conclusion does not come as a surprise, but the language in women's magazines clearly illustrates this change. While marriage was a key topic in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* of 1958, *Libelle* of 2008 shows that a relationship with a man does not necessarily have to lead to a marriage. The different roles men can take on (see next point) and the frequent use of the verb *samenwonen* ('live together') show this.

If married, women in 2008 have different expectations than in 1958. But Wilcox and Nock (2006, p. 1339) state that 'rising expectations among women for marital equality may [...] have the unintended effect of lowering investments in marital emotion work on the part of men'. (This will be further examined in point 3.)

(2) The role of men in women's lives is changing.

Although men in *Het Rijk der Vrouw* were mostly introduced as being married, as engaged to be married or as possible marriage candidates, men in *Libelle* occur in a large variety of roles: they can be friends, (adulterous) lovers, exes, partners, colleagues and even objects (of ridicule). This is connected to the different identities of women that emerge. The processes used illustrate this: although women were advised to adapt and to 'give in' in a relationship in the 50s, women nowadays are advised to stand up for their rights, to leave a man who does not respect them and to enjoy life, love and sex. The readers of *Libelle* are portrayed as independent women, who earn their own income, who still see a long-term relationship with a man as a main goal, but who expect a relationship based on equality. However, to repeat Wadia (1991), independence from, and attachment to, the male figure seems to be in conflict. This brings us to our final point.

(3) A loving man is important in women's lives.

A final conclusion is that although the married state may have lost currency, the frequency of the verb '*houden van*' (to love) indicates that the importance of a relationship with a man has not diminished as a topic in women's magazines over the years. This is in line

with what Andersen and Hysock Witham (2011, p. 97) contend: ‘Contemporary society emphasises the significance of human bonds, even while human relationships are easily broken [...]’.

The negative attitudes of men in relationships are often discussed in the texts of our corpus (names such as ‘tyrant’ and ‘criminal’ or processes such as ‘being absent’ and ‘abuse’ illustrate this), but at the same time, there is an idealised (hypothetical) picture of relationships which is being kept alive with names such as ‘new great love’ and processes such as ‘a voice whispering sweet nothings in your ear’. This projection of an ideal relationship is something which has not changed through the years.

Notes

1. Medialogue, ‘Kwalitatieve info – Libelle’.
2. Sanoma Magazines Belgium, ‘Eigen bladen – Libelle’.
3. <http://www.random.org>
4. There are some testimonies about lesbian relationships in the corpus, but as we focus on man–woman relationships, these have not been included in the analysis.
5. In the translation of the naming practices, we try to approach the original meaning as closely as possible.

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