

### 3.1 Introduction

In this chapter, the focus is specifically on **representation**, the ways in which text producers use meaning-making resources like language, images and objects to portray (or represent) people, events or situations. Representation is connected with society's ways of seeing the world and can be seen in all kinds of texts around us. Most obviously, issues of gendered representations of women and men surround us in the media and in advertisements. But it's not just in the media or commercial spheres. Representation can also be relevant to other modes and contexts. Take spoken language where, for example, politicians in their speeches might allude to issues connected with gender. Or in computer-mediated contexts like social media sites, gender might be represented in a certain way depending on the writer's beliefs or the intended audience. So exploring representation continues the earlier debate about whether gendered meanings are *created* in response to social attitudes and beliefs or *frame* and *shape* these attitudes and beliefs.

And, on a wider level, repeated representations can create **discourses**, a term defined by Michel Foucault (1972: 49) as 'practices which systematically form the objects of which they speak'.

#### KEY TERMS

**Representation:** the portrayal of events, people and circumstances through language and other meaning-making resources (e.g. images and sound) to create a way of seeing the world

**Discourses:** combining meaning-making resources to present particular ways of seeing the world

What Foucault is drawing to our attention is that repeated practices, often language use, create another layer of meaning. Discourses, too, offer ways of seeing the world and are clearly relevant to the study of language and gender. The language that writers and speakers use can encode specific attitudes to gender and position readers or listeners to accept or reject the discourse with which they are presented.

### 3.2 Exploring gender and discourse

According to Jane Sunderland (2004), discourses can be given specific names, for example an *equal opportunities* or *political correctness* discourse could

exist in relation to gender. Therefore, an organisation might issue guidelines to its staff about acceptable pronouns (*he, she, they*) to use in communications with customers or about appropriate address terms (*Mr, Miss, Ms*) that can be used or not in order not to exclude people on the basis of gender or marital status. Additionally, Sunderland suggests that discourses can have certain functions. Some of the functions that she identifies are:

- **Resistant:** a discourse that challenges accepted views
- **Subversive:** a discourse that undermines accepted views
- **Conservative:** a discourse that shows a more traditional and unchallenging attitude
- **Progressive:** a forward-thinking discourse

She also highlights the ways that discourses can exist alongside other ones, becoming *competing, dominant, co-existing* or *alternative*, etc. In a particular society, a *dominant* discourse might be a *conservative* one that it is still more appropriate for women to stay at home and care for their children. If there is another discourse that working mothers can be a positive influence for children, then this could be a *competing, co-existing* or *alternative* discourse – depending on where, how and by whom these discourses were presented.

What this means is that there may not be one single discourse about gender at any one time but a range of discourses that depend upon these questions:

- Who has produced the text?
- What are their motivations?
- Who is the implied or intended audience?
- What type of text is being produced?
- What is the intended purpose?

### 3.3 Semiotics: signs and gender

One of the key ways that we see gender enacted in the world is through the signs that surround us. Just as we started by exploring the semantic distinctions between biological sex and gender, there is the equivalent difference in the symbols that can be used to represent male and female. In biological terms, the combined **graphemes** XX and XY represent women and men with their originating in scientific classification.

Ferdinand de Saussure's early twentieth-century concept of **semiology** explores the link between a **signifier** (the thing that carries or produces meaning) and the

*signified* (the meaning itself or the mental concept). Saussure took a linguistic focus and considered this in respect to words. So the nouns 'man' and 'woman' act as the signifiers and the signified are our mental concepts of what a man and a woman are. For example, the dictionary definitions in Chapter 2 suggest some of the meanings we give to those particular nouns.

A later theorist, Roland Barthes, expanded upon Saussure's views to incorporate images. For both Saussure and Barthes, meanings are not a natural result of what we see but are often (although not exclusively) culturally specific. Barthes divided his signs into their *denotations* and their *connotations*, i.e. the cultural meanings that we give to them.

#### KEY TERMS

**Grapheme:** the smallest unit of the writing system such as the letter of the alphabet

**Semiology:** the study of signs

**Signifier:** the form which the sign takes, for example, a word or an image

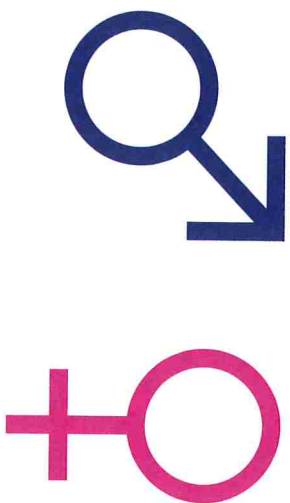
**Signified:** the mental concept associated with the sign

**Denotation:** what a word stands for in its most literal sense

**Connotation:** the aura of emotional meaning that we associate with a word

For example, look at Figure 3.1, which shows the symbols commonly used to represent the genders of man and woman. On the left is the symbol for man and on the right is the corresponding symbol for woman.

Figure 3.1: Symbols for male and female



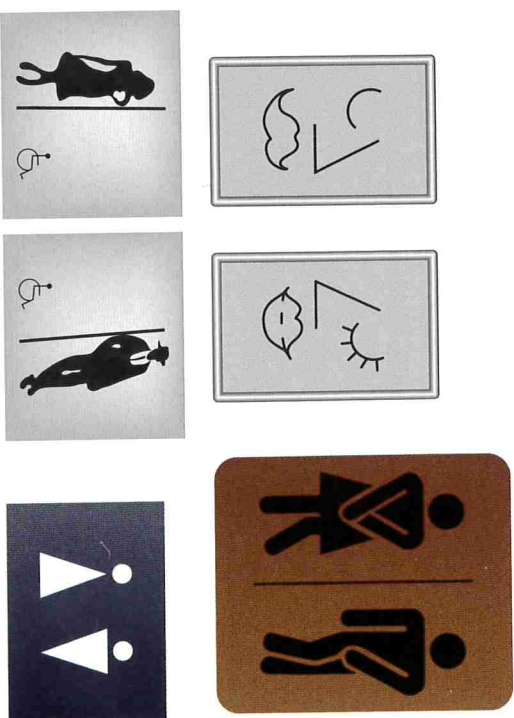
The 'denoted' images are simply man and woman and the connotations are all our notions of masculinity and femininity. The male gender is represented through the Mars planetary symbol and the female gender through the Venus one. We have already seen how the terms 'Mars' and 'Venus' were used in a popular book to explain men and women's differences, but now you can see how these were already linked to men and women symbolically in a visual way. Add into the mix the colours – blue for men and pink for women – and we have the modern and highly recognisable English cultural binary representations of gender encoded in symbols of images, colour and their connotations.

### 3.3.1 Toilet signs and gender

One aspect of our social experience where gender separation is most evident in the world around us is in public toilets. Toilet signs thus provide interesting examples of the link between the signifiers and the signified. Pictograms for men and women are based on depictions of body shapes, dress styles and body parts. Look at Figure 3.2 to see this in practice.

In these signs, a way to represent gender is through clothing, with men in suits and women in dresses. Physical shapes often emphasise differences between the genders, emphasising the stereotypes of muscly men and slim women. Also, non-verbal features such as gesture, facial expression and body posture all represent perceptions of masculinity and femininity. In other signs, attempts at humour variously show men looking over the toilet door at the women's cubicles or use jokes – as in one sign which reads 'men to the left because women are always right'.

Figure 3.2: Different toilet signs



Toilet signs can sometimes just use an image or a word, or else combine the two to create the meaning. Whatever the visual representation, meaning-making occurs by using our cultural knowledge to interpret the signified. Toilets too are a site of changing gender attitudes as gender neutral ones now feature in educational establishments and workplaces. The sign in Figure 3.3 directly addresses this equality issue by saying 'All gender restroom'.

Figure 3.3: Gender neutral toilet sign



### ACTIVITY 3.1

#### Exploring gendered toilet signs

Look at Table 3.1 which offers a selection of the toilet signs found using an online search. You could make this activity more visual by conducting your own image search for toilet signs. Consider these questions:

- What metaphors or cultural references are being used?
- Do the representations seem equal? If not, where is the imbalance and what creates this?

Table 3.1: Examples of text used for different toilet signs

Women	Men
Mermaids	Neptune Pirates
Wonder Woman	Sailors Batman
Ladies	Fellas
Red Riding Hood	Big Bad Wolf
Dollfaces	Old Sports (from F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel <i>The Great Gatsby</i> )

## 3.4 Representing gender through metaphor

Activity 3.1 explored how metaphors can illustrate representations of maleness and femaleness. You could see this with the metaphorical allusions to fairy tale and film characters used within the toilet signs. Using an approach from **cognitive linguistics**, we can think of metaphors as **conceptual metaphors** and consider the ways that we can map how writers and speakers express the concept of gender and what seems to be the essence of being female or male. In order to map these (and find patterns), we can divide our metaphors into two areas:

- **target domain**: the concept that is understood through another domain of knowledge (source domain)
- **source domain**: a domain of knowledge used as a vehicle for understanding another concept (target domain).

### KEY TERMS

**Cognitive linguistics**: the study of language that draws on insights from cognitive science

**Conceptual metaphor**: a structure that presents one concept in terms of another

**Target domain:** the abstract concept/area of knowledge that is understood in terms of a more concrete one

**Source domain:** a concrete area of knowledge that is used to understand an abstract concept

To show how this can be applied, let's look at a nineteenth-century English nursery rhyme that offers metaphorical representations for both genders. Text 3A shows an abbreviated version.

#### Text 3A

What are little boys made of?/frogs and snails and puppy dog tails

What are little girls made of?/sugar and spice and all things nice

What are young men made of?/sighs and leers and crocodile tears

What are young women made of?/ribbons and lace and sweet pretty faces

The source domain for girls is food ('sugar and spice'), an association already noted as typical. For young women, this changes to small decorative items of clothing ('ribbons and lace') and the shifting of the source domain to one of external appearance is shown in the noun phrase 'sweet pretty faces'. Even here the modifier 'sweet' still retains a food association. For boys, there is an assumption that the source domain is animals, and presumably ones chosen for their unpleasantness ('frogs and snails'); in a similar vein, other versions of the rhyme use slugs and snakes as variations for the animals. The verse for young men suggests a source domain based around sexual behaviour with the 'sighs and leers' and falseness in the animal metaphor of 'crocodile tears'. We can see that by looking at the textual function of specific metaphors we can identify clusters and patterns which offer evidence of stereotypes and constructed social roles for gendered participants, even at an early age. In this rhyme social roles for young men are built around sexual behaviours and for young women around the way that they look.

## 3.5 Gender and power

One of our big debates so far has been the extent to which gender is a social practice rather than something innate. This leads nicely into a focus on gender from the point of view of one theoretical approach, that of **Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA)**. A CDA approach, grounded in its focus on the nature of social

power, attempts to make links between gender and ideological aspects of power, dominance and inequality in society. Earlier we considered 'dominance' as explaining male and female spoken interactions and now we can explore if ideas of male dominance are represented in literary texts. Using CDA, differences between representations of men and women can be explored, along with the 'discourses' that these then promote.

#### KEY TERM

**Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA):** an approach to studying language that focuses on aspects of social power and inequality in text and talk

### 3.5.1 Exploring the representation of masculinity and femininity in literature

A literary genre famous for representing men and women in gender stereotypical ways is that of the romance novel. It's a genre that does not seem to have updated representations in line with social change. Romance novels are very formulaic with the same broad representations of masculinity and femininity repeated in similar scenarios by different writers. These are understood by readers who are aware of these stereotypical representations and expect them to be maintained. The roles given to characters within this genre reflect a dominance/power model since, in many cases, hierarchical positions are used as a plot device to represent men as more powerful than women. One repeated scenario is romance within a workplace context, where the man is positioned as the CEO of an organisation and the woman is often his secretary.

#### ACTIVITY 3.2

##### Investigating representations of masculinity and dominance

Text 3B is an extract from Thomas Hardy's *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*. It features an encounter between Alec D'Urberville and Tess Durbeyfield. The novel was written in the nineteenth century and is set in a rural part of England. Tess is a young girl who comes from a poor family and works on farms as a milkmaid. Her parents encourage her to meet the D'Urbervilles, a rich local family because they think that they might be related (something that is not true). Alec, the son, is attracted to Tess and attempts to seduce her. Here he is driving her in his carriage.

Read Text 3B and then answer these questions:

- Analyse the presentation of masculinity and femininity in this extract. How are the different statuses of the characters presented?
- Explore the descriptions of Alec's behaviour towards Tess and his assertions of dominance. How does the language he uses in direct speech represent his masculinity?

#### Text 3B

He loosened rein, and away they went a second time. D'Urberville turned his face to her as they rocked, and said, in playful railery: "Now then, put your arms round my waist again, as you did before, my Beauty."

"Never!" said Tess independently, holding on as well as she could without touching him.

"Let me put one little kiss on those holmberry lips, Tess, or even on that warmed cheek, and I'll stop—on my honour, I will!"

Tess, surprised beyond measure, slid farther back still on her seat, at which he urged the horse anew, and rocked her the more.

"Will nothing else do?" she cried at length, in desperation, her large eyes staring at him like those of a wild animal. This dressing her up so prettily by her mother had apparently been to lamentable purpose.

"Nothing, dear Tess," he replied.

"Oh, I don't know—very well; I don't mind!" she panted miserably.

He drew rein, and as they slowed he was on the point of imprinting the desired salute, when, as if hardly yet aware of her own modesty, she dodged aside. His arms being occupied with the reins there was left him no power to prevent her manoeuvre.

"Now, damn it—I'll break both our necks!" swore her capriciously passionate companion. "So you can go from your word like that, you young witch, can you?"

"Very well," said Tess, "I'll not more since you be so determined! But I—thought you would be kind to me, and protect me, as my kinsman!"

"Kinsman be hanged! Now!"

"But I don't want anybody to kiss me, sir!" she implored, a big tear beginning to roll down her face, and the corners of her mouth trembling in her attempts not to cry. "And I wouldn't ha' come if I had known!"

He was inexorable, and she sat still, and d'Urberville gave her the kiss of mastery. No sooner had he done so than she flushed with shame, took out her handkerchief, and wiped the spot on her cheek that had been touched by his lips. His ardour was nettled at the sight, for the act on her part had been unconsciously done.

Extract from *Tess of the D'Urbervilles*, Thomas Hardy (1891: Chapter 8)

## 3.6 Gender and social actor representation

As a theoretical model, Theo Van Leeuwen's **Social Actor Network** (1996) offers us a useful framework to investigate both representations and discourses. In this model, he places emphasis on the participants presented either in the text or the interaction, calling them the social actors. Theo Van Leeuwen's network model offers a detailed sub-categorisation of social actors, allowing for a more detailed analysis of:

- *what* groups and individuals are referred to
- *how* they are referred to.

In his categories, he connects their functions with the language used to construct these. He has many of these categories but we will only explore some of the most helpful ones in identifying the representation of women and men. One of Van Leeuwen's main aspects of representation is through **nomination** (the naming of the social actor) but within this he labels further categories:

- **Functionalisation**: the roles and occupations held by the social actor
- **Classification**: aspects of identity, such as class, age and gender
- **Relational identification**: relationship to others, such as family or work connections
- **Physical identifications**: aspects of appearance.

### KEY TERMS

**Social Actor Network**: an analytical framework of categorising how social actors are represented

**Nomination**: the process of naming

Imagine a newspaper headline that read '20-year-old blonde primary teacher Gemma married famous author Anthony Howat in secret ceremony'. If you break this down, you can see how this highlights how Van Leeuwen's categories can be applied.

We have just seen that social actors can be represented through *nominatio*n, where the social actor's name or identity is used, but this can take different forms:

- **Formalisation:** shown through surname only or with titles/honorifics
- **Semi-formalisation:** shown through using both surname and first name
- **Informalisation:** where the first name only is used.

Another method of representation is collectivisation, where social actors are referred to as a group with plural grammatical forms. We will explore these forms and the various categories in media texts.

### 3.6.1 Gender and social actor representation in the media

So, to explore representation and discourses further, we could return to the idea raised in the introduction of women's family and work roles still being a topic of interest and debate. This is certainly an area that the British media report on regularly, presumably in the belief that their audiences are interested too. As you read these headlines from the same source, reflect on how these represent women as social actors.

- 1 The poisonous legacy of Superwoman lives on today: feminist career women demand jobs for ALL women, but could that view damage the lives of mothers and their children?
- 2 Why career women should definitely LIE about having a family: mother-of-three says admitting to your boss that you have kids is a dangerous business.
- 3 Working mothers risk damaging their child's future prospects.
- 4 Children of working mothers fall behind those of stay-at-home mums.
- 5 Working mothers have FATTER children: recent rise in obesity rates among children is blamed on women going out to work.

Even without applying any linguistic analysis, it's likely that you have identified the negativity in the representation. Perhaps this stems from the terms 'career women' and 'working mothers' as marked ones. If you think of the possible male equivalents, 'career men' and 'working fathers', these do not seem to work as natural collocates.

In the headlines you may now have noted that the women are not *nominated* but are *functionalised* in roles and collectivised, for example in plural terms as

'career women' and 'working mothers' or as 'stay-at-home mums'. There is, however, what van Leeuwen calls 'relational identification'. This is where social actors are represented in terms of their personal or work relationships with each other and it is realised linguistically by a closed set of nouns denoting these relations – 'husband', 'uncle', 'colleague' would be examples for men. In the headlines, the key relational identification is in reference to the mothers' children, using the possessive form 'their child/children' to activate the relationship.

When looking at social actors, van Leeuwen also makes much of the *inclusion* (who takes part) and *exclusion* (who's left out). Interestingly, the social actors excluded from these headlines are the fathers. By not mentioning them they have been suppressed; it is as if they have no responsibility for their children. But this also has the effect of placing blame for children's obesity or lack of success on the working mother. Apparent throughout is the functionalisation.

Gender is foregrounded in these headlines. The semantic choices also highlight the negative effects of women's life choices in the associations of harm in the verbs 'damage', 'risk damaging' and the adjectives 'dangerous' and 'poisonous'. The headlines also have a declarative function making these appear as facts, despite the fact that the assertion that working women have fatter children is not supported.

### 3.6.2 Introducing social actor representation and verb processes

One important element of Theo Van Leeuwen's model is whether social actors are either *activated* or *passivated*.

- **Activation** occurs when the social actor is represented as the active, forceful element in an activity.
- **Passivation** happens when the social actor is represented as undergoing an activity or as being the receiver of an action or event. (This is not to be confused with the passive voice.)

In this model, the nature of *agency* is important; we can use Michael Halliday's categories of verb processes to help our analyses of social actor representation. This is because these focus on how particular meanings can be created and relationships between participants can be shown through the verbs used. But it is also useful for looking at power and dominance, so could be applied when taking a CDA approach too.

The verb processes can be categorised in the following ways:

- **Material verb process:** a process which is about what is going on outside the participant. Verbs used here are associated with actions and doing and involve one participant (called the agent) doing something to another participant (usually called the object).

- **Mental verb process:** a process which is about inner experience. Verbs used here are ones associated with the human senses of thinking, perception (like seeing and hearing) and feelings.
- **Verbal verb process:** a process which is about the exchange of meaning through 'saying'. Verbs used here are associated with communication.
- **Relational verb process:** a process which is about classifying and identifying experiences through the use of verbs like being, becoming or having.

### KEY TERMS

- Activation:** where the social actor is the active forceful element in an activity
- Passivation:** where the social actor is the receiver of an action or event
- Agency:** the one who is doing, often identified by the grammatical agent as the subject
- Material verb process:** verbs associated with actions and doing
- Mental verb process:** verbs associated with thinking and feeling, or with perception
- Verbal verb process:** verbs associated with saying and communicating
- Relational verb process:** verbs associated with being, becoming or having

### ACTIVITY 3.3

#### Exploring gender and social actor representation in literature

Text 3C is an excerpt from 'The Yellow Wallpaper', a short story written in 1892 by Charlotte Perkins Gilman. The narrative depicts an unnamed female narrator's struggles with her mental health after the birth of her child. It also presents a response to being confined by her family in an attic room with barred windows in the belief that this will help her recovery. Read the text, and consider the following questions.

- Who are the social actors and how are they nominated? How are they functionalised, classified and identified relationally?
- Who is activated and passivated? In what ways?

- What types of verb processes do you see used in relation to the different social actors?
- From your analysis, how are the characters represented in a gendered way?

#### Text 3C

John laughs at me, of course, but one expects that in marriage.

John is practical in the extreme. He has no patience with faith, an intense horror of superstition, and he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures.

John is a physician, and PERHAPS—(I would not say it to a living soul, of course, but this is dead paper and a great relief to my mind)—PERHAPS that is one reason I do not get well faster.

You see he does not believe I am sick!

And what can one do?

If a physician of high standing, and one's own husband, assures friends and relatives that there is really nothing the matter with one but temporary nervous depression—a slight hysterical tendency—what is one to do?

My brother is also a physician, and also of high standing, and he says the same thing.

So I take phosphates or phosphites—whichever it is, and tonics, and journeys, and air, and exercise, and am absolutely forbidden to 'work' until I am well again.

Personally, I disagree with their ideas.

Personally, I believe that congenial work, with excitement and change, would do me good.

But what is one to do?

Extract from 'The Yellow Wallpaper', Charlotte Perkins Gilman (1892)

## 3.7 Different discourses about gender

By comparing the *discourses* about men and women who choose to go against a perceived social norm by staying at home or going to work, we can see if these have a *conservative* function, according to Sunderland's definitions outlined at

the start of this chapter. It is likely that the nature of the newspaper source will determine whether there is a more conservative and traditional point of view of social roles represented. Arguably issues of parenting and childcare are made into a gendered discourse rather than being a discourse on gender. This means that in practice, a non-gender issue (who works and who doesn't) is being gendered and positioning women and men in certain ways. However, to see whether there are competing discourses about fatherhood/masculinity and career choices and the equivalent for mothers, we would need to explore a range of texts. For example, parenting magazines, internet forums and newspapers could be sources of data for you to explore in more detail and confirm or contest ideas we have discussed here.

### ACTIVITY 3.4

#### Investigating gendered discourses

To investigate discourses further, look at these headlines representing 'stay-at-home' fathers: Then answer the questions.

- 1 Why don't more dads choose to stay at home? The answer is that they get bullied and are made to feel inadequate by yummy mummies.
  - 2 Stay-at-home fathers double in 20 years: now over 200,000 look after their children. As Britain's economy shrinks, is it the recession or a man-cession that keeps them there?
  - 3 You can never fancy a man who becomes a house husband or stay-at-home dad: In Carina's world he was the family breadwinner and she raised the children. When Carina and her husband swapped roles, he lost his sex appeal and his wife.
  - 4 The stay-at-home dad who says he lost not only his dignity but his children's respect: Once Jackson Jones used to be in charge of an annual budget of a million pounds, now he struggles to balance his monthly household bills and his family are not happy.
  - 5 Richard Leigh was so proud to be a stay-at-home dad. Now he fears it's harmed both his son and his daughter.
- How are the social actors identified? How is this achieved through lexical and grammatical choices?
  - Overall, what kind of discourse is there about men who stay at home to look after their children?

## 3.8 Gender representation in the media: health magazines

Now let's look at the media texts in Texts 3D and 3E, to see how representations and discourses change for women and men, even when the topic is the same. Health is an issue that should be of concern to all, but two separate websites exist to advertise the same publisher's magazines aimed at each gender. Arguably, given that some biological differences do exist, this may not be surprising but investigating how and if these differences are presented will be interesting.

### Text 3D

#### Banner for Men's Health magazine website

### Text 3E

#### Banner for Women's Health magazine website

Most noticeably from a visual perspective, the colours black and red dominate the banner used for *Men's Health*, which contrasts with the white and orange for *Women's Health*. Indeed, the choice of white text on black is reversed for women. Typographically, the fonts are dissimilar and the placement of the titles foregrounds that it's about the issue of health for women (as it's centred on the page) but downplays it for men (it's more hidden away at the top left of the page). The links to social media for *Men's Health* represent men as more technological, unlike women who have the more traditional option of a newsletter.

As the direction of English reading and writing is left to right we can see immediately that there is a hierarchy of importance and interest suggested by what the readers will read first. This convention creates the discourse structure, placing greater emphasis on fitness in *Men's Health* with three different headings of 'workouts', 'muscle' and 'fitness' that connote masculine attitudes to fitness. For women,



'beauty and fashion' appear before the 'style' equivalent for men, representing a stereotypical femininity of concern for appearance – even before health.

Within the sub-category of weight loss there appear more differences, with men being represented as valuing speed ('fast', 'shortcuts') and as being driven by eliminating fat in the desire for 'muscle'. So the alliterative 'burn fat fast' and 'fat-fighting foods' suggest this as a key goal for men. For women, 'burn' is not used as an imperative verb, but shifts to become a noun ('fat burners'), making the activity appear less active and engaged. The goal for women is expressed in the imperative 'stay slim forever' where the adjective is a complement of the verb, whereas for men the adjective 'slim' appears as a modifier for 'meals'.

'Weight loss stories' represents women as needing the support of other people's experiences and enjoyed sharing whereas for men, the option of 'motivation' implies that they may be more interested in the abstract qualities of this and do not require support from other people.

### 3.9 Gender and argumentation theory

You could use **argumentation theory**, a framework which considers the arguments used to justify particular courses of action. This stems from the Ancient Greek tradition of logical reasoning. This is relevant to our focus on discourses and representation. We can see how either the argument presented or the actions suggested may reflect or respond to the discourses around certain gendered groups. Within argumentation, the key elements are:

- **Premises:** or a set of assumptions
- **Implications:** what the possible effects are based on the assumptions
- **Presupposition:** assumptions that are based on assumed shared background knowledge that are not necessarily proved.

#### KEY TERM

**Argumentation theory:** the study of how conclusions can be reached through logical reasoning

### 3.9.1 Applying argumentation to gender and educational discourses

A recent educational gendered discourse surrounds the general underachievement of boys in English schools compared to that of girls. This is reported on by Ofsted, the organisation that inspects and passes judgement on the success of all English schools. Here the *premise* of the recommendations

made in an Ofsted summary report from 2003 (updating a previous one called *The Gender Divide* from 1996) suggests that if the required actions by teachers and schools are taken to address boys' specific learning needs, then their examination results and overall achievement will improve. The *implication* is that unless boys' underachievement is addressed then they will continue to fail. These statements all contain *presuppositions*, based on how boys are perceived and represented as a group. As you read Ofsted's recommendations in Text 3F, reflect on what you think their presuppositions are.

#### Text 3F

Making sure the school has a strong ethos where pupils and staff show respect for each other and offer plenty of extra-curricular activities, thereby making the school a place where boys feel they belong.

Implementing behaviour and discipline policies firmly but equitably, with good pastoral support, so the school is a place where boys feel comfortable with learning.

Using staff development to raise awareness of pupils' different learning styles and helping boys to organise their independent work by giving more frequent, shorter deadlines.

Improving the quality of teaching and classroom management, thus helping teachers to gain the respect and attention of boys.

Monitoring pupils' progress against benchmarks and targets, and intervening early so boys' problems are addressed before they cause demotivation.

Increasing the range and extent of learning support available for pupils and tackling low self-esteem among boys by helping them with organisation.

What you might have concluded from this are that the presuppositions seen concerned with boys' educational needs as different from girls'. The statements suggest that boys:

- learn in different ways and they need extra support to help them achieve
- are active and need extra-curricular activities outside the classroom to make them feel part of a school community
- need teachers to deliver high-quality lessons in order to get them to learn and for teachers to treat all students in the same way for boys to accept disciplinary decisions
- will only give respect if it is earned
- cannot organise themselves and require extra support than teachers to help them achieve.

We have not looked at how these are realised in the language used but you could reflect on how the presuppositions are encoded in the nouns like ‘demotivation’, ‘respect’, ‘attention’ and ‘organisation’ and the emphasis on how boys ‘feel’. Boys are as a group, throughout this report, presented as being different to girls, with their own needs and special, as worthy of a whole section. However, this is within a context of their lack of success compared to that of girls and so discourses are always of their own time; this is a current issue and may not be the same in the future.

**RESEARCH QUESTION**

**Your own research**

There is much scope for pursuing your own investigations into some of the areas we have discussed so far. You could explore:

- Representation of women in the workplace
- Gendered discourses in the media (newspapers, magazines, advertising) and on internet parenting forums
- Changing representations of women in young adult fiction such as *The Hunger Games*.

You could also find academic papers, short chapters in collections or whole books written by linguists in these areas that would develop your understanding. See the wider reading list at the end for some suggestions or use sites such as Google Scholar or academia.edu.

To give you a focus for analysis, review this chapter for the theories and concepts we have covered and look closely at the sections of detailed analysis of individual texts. Think about what would be interesting in lexical/semantic or grammatical choices to probe further in your own research.

**3.10 Gender representation in corpus data: talking and writing about sportspeople**

From a linguistic perspective, a very effective way to explore gender representation is to use a corpus approach. What’s possible in this approach is to process information from lots of different text types quickly and efficiently and to draw conclusions based on real data.

In 2016, the year of the Brazil Olympics, Cambridge University Press published a report titled *Language, Gender and Sport*. This was compiled from three different corpora:

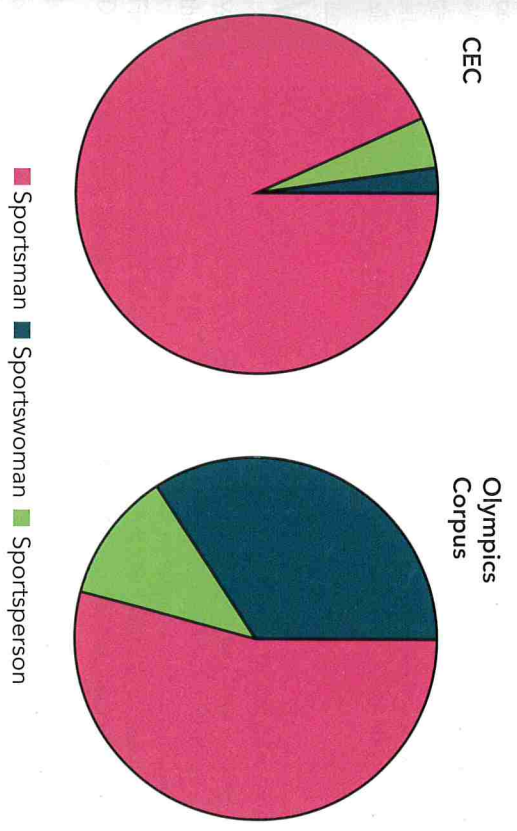
- 1 The Cambridge English Corpus (CEC), a multi-billion word collection of English language from a variety of contexts and genres, and covering both the spoken and written modes
- 2 The Sports Corpus, a 150 million-word subset of the CEC created by the tagging of the subject ‘sport’
- 3 The Olympics Corpus, created as the Rio Olympics took place and using seed words and specific URLs.

**KEY TERM**

**Seed words:** a list of words directly related to the topic that are used in the corpus search

Figure 3.4 illustrates how the Cambridge English Corpus and Olympics corpus compared in their usage of three terms: sportsman, sportswoman and sportsperson.

Figure 3.4: Comparing corpora



There were a number of key findings:

- Despite 'sportsman' appearing more frequently, the frequencies of 'sportsman/sportswoman/sportsperson' were considerably more balanced in the Olympics Corpus.
- Particularly significant was the relatively high usage of the **gender neutral term** 'sportsperson'. The report explains this as a deliberate attempt to address the sexist reporting that had previously been a feature of sports journalism and commentary.

- The significantly more mentions of female athletes in the Olympics Corpus than the Cambridge Corpus may reflect the increasing participation of women in Olympic sports, as well as the tendency to mark women's sport more than men's.

The report also found that there was a focus on women's appearance and men's behaviours in relation to sport in the Sports Corpus. Here, 'women' collocates with 'clad', as in 'scantily clad', and also with the verb 'dress'. Further evidence of this was found in the Olympics Corpus, where a **word sketch** for 'women' shows a strong collocation with the verb 'wear'. Other findings were that, in the Sports Corpus, 'married' and 'unmarried' are top collocations for 'women', but not 'men'. Age too was a factor for women, but not for men.

#### KEY TERMS

**Gender neutral terms:** words or phrases that avoid bias towards a particular gender

**Word sketch:** a short corpus-created summary of a word's collocational behaviour that has been automatically generated

Some evidence to support the perception that men are more competitive can be seen in the Sports Corpus. Here 'men/man' collocate in subject position with verbs like 'mastermind', 'beat', 'win', 'dominate' and 'battle'. In contrast, 'woman/women' collocate in subject position with verbs like 'compete', 'participate' and 'strive'. As the report highlights from analysis of concordances, even when men and women win, a different verb choice was sometimes used, for example, women 'clinch' titles, men 'claim' theirs; this seems to present women as having more of a struggle to achieve a title than men.

#### PRACTICE QUESTION

Comparing discourse

To compare representations and discourses, use the headlines about women in section 3.6.1 and the headlines about men in Activity 3.4.

- What similarities or differences are there between the discourses about women who work and men who stay at home?
- Are the discourses competing or alternative ones? Do they challenge a conservative or accepted discourse?
- Use specific examples of language to support your points.

### 3.11 Conclusion

If you look at old print-based or television advertisements for products you can see that representations of gender have changed over time, reflecting changing social attitudes. This highlights the way that representations aren't fixed but can alter. And, in our modern digital world and global culture, it's easy to find varied and competing discourses about gender. One aspect that you might feel that we haven't considered in a time of social media and the selfie is that of self-representation. Given that we have already considered gender from a social-constructionist perspective as a 'performance', then exploring the different meaning-making symbols that individuals use to represent themselves in both a gendered and non-gendered manner would be interesting. In the next chapter, we will be drawing attention to gender and identity, and how the technology at our personal disposal allows us to consider how we want to present ourselves as individuals to the world.

### Wider reading

You can find out more about the concepts and ideas in this chapter by reading these books:

Fine, C. (2010) *Delusions of Gender: The Real Science Behind Sex Differences*. London: Icon.

Koller, V. (2008) 'CEOs and "working gals": the textual representation and cognitive conceptualisation of businesswomen in different discourse communities'. In K. Harrington, L. Liosseliti, H. Sauntson, and J. Sunderland, (eds) *Gender and Language Research Methodologies*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sunderland, J. (2004) *Gendered Discourses*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.