

The fact that this piece was written in 1939 is important in that the attitudes of the time were such that women’s and men’s roles in society were more defined. This is an advisory text for children and although it is advising all children of the opportunities that are available to them, in an optimistic way, it is clear that the chances for women are more restricted. They way that women and men are represented through language is particularly revealing.

Throughout the text it is interesting to note that the male is always mentioned first. The text refers to the ‘boy and girl’ and the ‘king or queen’. According to Sapir Whorf and the theory of Linguistic Determinism, any repeated pattern in language may affect the way that the person described is perceived by readers. This order of precedence, which is still common in our language with collocations frequently having the male first (‘men and women’, ‘Mr and Mrs’ etc), according to some theorists may perpetuate the idea that women are less important than men.

The use of terms for men and women’s jobs is also worth noting. For example, in the second paragraph, the writer states that ‘boys can even rise to be chefs, a position generally held by men.’ The term chef is defined here specifically as belonging to men, and this is still true. Indeed it might even have to be marked by some writers, as in ‘*female* chef’. This is a feature of the language that the women’s roles in a range of professions are marked because the job has been perceived as male – thus a footballer might be marked as a ‘woman footballer’.

This is an advisory text with the purpose of informing young school-leavers and their parents about careers in the hospitality field. It probably has a target audience of 15 year olds.

On the surface this text is a light-hearted well intentioned piece of writing which tries to be even-handed in the way it presents this field of work to both genders. Thus there are moments of enthusiasm, such as ‘Well, how to set about it!’, in the exclamatory mood which give this feeling of adventure for these young readers. The use of the pronoun ‘anyone’ or the old fashioned ‘one’ are deliberately trying to address male and female readers equally.

There are, however, more subtle ways in which the roles of men and women are prescribed and the genders are represented. One is the order in which the genders are presented. More often than not in the text the males come first (‘boys and girls’, ‘king or queen’). This order of precedence has a subtle effect of placing the male as the most significant in the reader’s eyes – particularly if you agree with the Sapir Whorf hypothesis that language determines thought. In the text it does not seem to be done deliberately, except, perhaps when the ‘female’ role is more common it is that role that comes first, as in ‘under-parlourmaid or parlourmen’.

