

RESEARCH


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FEMALE OF POSITIONS, PROFESSIONS AND LABOR ACTIVITIES ACCORDING TO THE PERCEPTION OF THE POPULATION AND THE ROYAL SPANISH ACADEMY

**Femenino de cargos, profesiones y actividades laborales según
percepción de la población y la Real Academia Española**

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Female of positions, professions and labor activities according to the perception of the population and the Royal Spanish Academy

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The study focuses on the slow evolution of job titles, professions, and work-related terminology from a gender perspective by the Real Academia Española (RAE), which does not align with the spoken language of the majority of the population and contradicts the common use of some expressions. The main purpose of this research is to conduct a systematic analysis of the usage of terms with female gender markers related to occupations and professions, as presented in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language (DLE) in its twenty-third edition from 2014, in order to contrast the normative stance of the RAE with its real and everyday usage. **Objectives:** To assess the usage of designations with female gender markers proposed by the RAE concerning job titles, professions, and work-related activities. To contrast the acceptance of these designations by teachers and students. To analyze the persistence of sexist biases in the use of terms applied to both men and women. **Methodology:** A quantitative approach and a non-experimental cross-sectional design were employed, with a comparative descriptive focus. The sample consisted of 465 students and teachers from higher education institutions located in four political regions of Peru. **Results:** Out of the 24 job titles studied with the designations recommended by the RAE, 42% (10) were not accepted by teachers and students. A persistence of sexist biases in the usage of words related to job titles and professions was identified, demonstrating a predominance of male terms. It was concluded that the RAE is slowly incorporating job titles, professions, and work-related designations, which do not align with the common usage of the population. **Conclusions:** The research sheds light on the discrepancy between the designations proposed by the RAE and their acceptance in the everyday speech of the studied population. It highlights the need for a more rapid adaptation of linguistic norms to social and gender-related changes. The results underscore the persistence of sexist biases in language related to job titles and professions, emphasizing the importance of promoting inclusive and equitable language in society.

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Keywords: speech, gender, job names, professions, male brand, feminine brand, dignities.

RESUMEN

Introducción: El estudio se enfoca en la evolución lenta de las nominaciones de cargos, profesiones y actividades laborales desde una perspectiva de género por parte de la Real Academia Española (RAE), que no se alinea con el lenguaje hablado por la mayoría de la población y contradice el uso común de algunas expresiones. El propósito principal de esta investigación es llevar a cabo un análisis sistemático del uso de los términos con marcador de género femenino relacionados con ocupaciones y profesiones, tal como se presentan en el Diccionario de la Lengua Española (DLE) en su vigesimotercera edición de 2014, con el fin de contrastar la posición normativa de la RAE con su uso en la vida real y cotidiana. **Objetivos:** Evaluar el uso de las denominaciones con marcador de género femenino propuestas por la RAE en relación con cargos, profesiones y actividades laborales. Contrastar la aceptación de estas denominaciones por parte de docentes y estudiantes. Analizar la persistencia de sesgos sexistas en el uso de términos que aplican a hombres y mujeres. **Metodología:** Se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo y un diseño no experimental de corte transversal, con un enfoque descriptivo comparativo. La muestra consistió en 465 estudiantes y docentes de instituciones de educación superior ubicadas en cuatro regiones políticas de Perú. **Resultados:** De los 24 cargos estudiados con las denominaciones recomendadas por la RAE, el 42% (10) no fueron aceptados por los docentes y estudiantes. Se identificó una persistencia de sesgos sexistas en el uso de palabras relacionadas con cargos y profesiones, evidenciando un predominio de términos masculinos. Se concluyó que la RAE está incorporando lentamente las denominaciones de cargos, profesiones y actividades laborales, y que estas no están en consonancia con el uso común de la población. **Conclusiones:** La investigación arroja luz sobre la discrepancia entre las nominaciones propuestas por la RAE y su aceptación en el habla cotidiana de la población estudiada. Se evidencia la necesidad de una adaptación más rápida de la normativa lingüística a los cambios sociales y de género. Los resultados subrayan la persistencia de sesgos sexistas en el lenguaje relacionado con cargos y profesiones, lo que señala la importancia de promover un lenguaje inclusivo y equitativo en la sociedad.

Palabras clave: habla, género, denominaciones de cargos, profesiones, marca masculina, marca femenino, dignidades.

1. INTRODUCTION

The United Nations (UN) proposes sustainable social development, aiming to create a prosperous and sustainable world in which people live in peace with both other human beings and nature (UN, 2021). This constitutes one of the fundamental objectives of society in general and, especially, of public policies. This challenge includes the need to promote gender equality, which means equal opportunities and

rights for both men and women, ensuring that both have the same level of access to resource distribution and holding positions, among other things. This is one of the pillars for achieving the social challenges set forth in the fifth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) of those outlined in the 2030 Agenda (UN, 2021): achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls. According to Barrientos-Báez et al. (2018), gender equality is an important issue in modern management, both public and private. Another study points out the existence of a significant gender gap that highlights the difficulties faced by women in finding full-time employment and the precariousness that results from this situation (Barrientos-Báez and Alonso-Ruiz, 2018).

However, despite efforts and progress in the knowledge society, there are still processes conditioned by gender-related elements (Shepherd, 2017; Vázquez and Urbiola, 2014), which are also reflected when formulating designations in the linguistic field related to holding a position from a gender perspective, commonly in line with biological differences (Chetkovich, 2019) and the feminine label, especially when performing a job, political, or institutional function.

Gender is a sociocultural construction related to sexed bodies, which includes values and powers depending on the historical context in which one lives (Alcaide, 2002); therefore, it is not synonymous with sex. In society, at all times and in accordance with the division of labor and the exercise of different roles, names, designations, or denominations are formulated for people who perform or fulfill certain functions. This designating function is accomplished through the use of language, an instrument that provides people with the corresponding words. In this research, a normative criterion is used (RSA, 2014), in which the reference is the form considered correct and acceptable and included in grammar works, also taking into account the social, cultural, and sociolinguistic aspects involved (Lledó, 2006; Lora, 1996; Guichard, 2018; Campos-Serna et al., 2013; Saget 2018) and dictionaries (RSA, 2014).

This study is considered important for its contribution, both to users in the application of the feminine gender marker and to the Royal Spanish Academy (RSA) by allowing it to understand the specificities of the local use of the feminine gender marker in order to increase knowledge in this area. Similarly, it is valued for its contribution to the theory of knowledge regarding how the DLE (Dictionary of the Spanish Language) deals with words marked with the feminine gender marker related to holding a position. In addition, it contributes to pragmatics by proposing grammatical and spelling amendments that assist the RSA in achieving profound changes in the morphological and grammatical system, a phenomenon that gains more visibility as a topic of conversation in linguistics (Niklison, 2020).

Linguistic theory, from its inception with Ferdinand de Saussure, recognizes two important aspects of language: *langue* (language) and *parole* (speech). The first is considered as a system of signs or a set of grammatical rules and vocabulary that resides in the mind or consciousness of a speaker, allowing them to interpret and react to the words they hear or read. The second pertains to how the speaker expresses

themselves in reaction to the words they have heard or read. This second aspect, parole (speech), does not always reflect the first, langue (language), because individuals can develop unique ways of expressing themselves or may be influenced by emotional or other stimuli (Pinzón, 2005). In 1965, in his book "Syntactic Structures," Noam Chomsky presented a similar duality, that of competence, which, when translated, is understood as the knowledge a speaker has of their linguistic system, allowing them to produce infinite sentences in various communication settings. This competence is accompanied by the social context and the psychological relationships between the speaker and the interlocutor (Chomsky, 1965).

Therefore, the study addresses the following question: What is the use and application, from a gender perspective, of the feminine gender marker in words related to holding a position, professions, and female work activities recorded in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language (DLE) of the Royal Spanish Academy (RSA) in comparison with the daily usage of speakers?

2. OBJECTIVES

To contrast the use and application, from a gender perspective, of the feminine gender marker in words related to holding a position, professions, and female work activities registered in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language (DLE) of the Royal Spanish Academy (RSA) with the everyday usage of speakers.

To analyze the difference in preference proportions between men and women regarding the use of designations for female job titles, professions, and work activities.

To determine the predominance of the use of masculine and/or feminine markers based on the normative position recorded in the Dictionary of the Spanish Language (RSA, 2014).

3. METHODOLOGY

The study had a quantitative approach, a non-experimental design, a cross-sectional design, and a comparative descriptive scope (Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza, 2018, p. 614). It used a non-probabilistic sample of 465 students and teachers from higher education institutions in the regions of Lima, Huánuco, Tacna, and Cuzco. 60% of the participants were female, and the age ranged from 16 to 77 years.

The survey technique was employed, and an ad hoc questionnaire was used as the instrument. The questionnaire consisted of twenty-four questions about the naming of female job titles, professions, and work activities. Each question had four alternatives, one of which included the designation recommended by the RSA. The questionnaire was validated by experts in the field with a recognized track record in innovation. Data collection was coordinated with the authorities of each educational institution.

Subsequently, the questionnaire was sent in Google Forms format via email and WhatsApp messaging.

Descriptive analysis was conducted to present two-way frequency tables or contingency tables. Then, inferential analysis was performed to compare proportions using the Z-statistic of the standard normal distribution, with a significance level of 5%.

4. RESULTS

Below are the main results based on the surveys conducted with teachers and students from various higher education institutions, both university and non-university. The preferences for designations are summarized in frequencies and compared using the parametric Z-test.

Table 1

Frequency of use, according to designations of female job titles, professions, and work activities, as well as gender, where the preference of the RSA does not predominate, and the difference in proportions of these between males and females in various higher education institutions in 2022.

Female positions/professions/occupations	Denominations	Masculine		Feminine		Total		Z-score	p-value
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
Fiscal	La fiscal [§]	142	76.8	200	71.4	342	73.5	1.27	0.177
	La fiscala ^{&}	19	10.2	28	10.0	47	10.2	0.09	0.397
	Otro	24	13.0	52	18.6	76	16.3		
Perito	La perito [§]	108	58.4	157	56.1	265	57.0	0.49	0.353
	La perita ^{&}	38	20.5	73	26.1	111	23.8	-1.37	0.156
	Otro	39	21.1	50	17.9	89	19.2		
Gerente	La gerente [§]	129	69.7	165	58.9	294	63.2	2.36	0.024
	La gerenta ^{&}	43	23.2	94	33.6	137	29.5	-2.39	0.023
	Otro	13	7.1	21	7.5	34	7.3		
Cónsul	La cónsul [§]	130	70.3	189	67.5	319	68.6	0.63	0.327
	La consulesa ^{&}	25	13.5	46	16.4	71	15.3	-0.85	0.277
	Otro	30	16.2	45	16.1	75	16.1		
Superintendente	La superintendente [§]	119	64.3	173	61.8	292	62.8	0.55	0.342
	La superintendenta ^{&}	51	27.6	91	32.5	142	30.5	-1.13	0.211
	Otro	15	8.1	16	5.7	31	6.7		
Árbitro	La árbitro [§]	84	45.4	145	51.8	229	49.2	-1.35	0.161
	La árbitra ^{&}	60	32.4	91	32.5	151	32.5	-0.02	0.399
	Otro	41	22.2	44	15.7	85	18.3		
Médico	La médico [§]	77	41.6	115	41.1	192	41.3	0.12	0.396
	La médica ^{&}	56	30.3	81	28.9	137	29.5	0.31	0.380
	Otro	52	28.1	84	30.0	136	29.3		
Concejal	La concejal [§]	103	55.7	157	56.1	260	55.9	-0.08	0.398
	La concejala ^{&}	54	29.2	91	32.5	145	31.2	-0.75	0.300
	Otro	28	15.1	32	11.4	60	12.9		
Teniente	La teniente [§]	150	81.1	228	81.4	378	81.3	-0.09	0.397

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	La tenienta &	25	13.5	49	17.5	74	15.9	-1.15	0.206
	Otro	10	5.4	3	1.1	13	2.8		
	La burgomaestre §	107	57.8	140	50.0	247	53.1	1.66	0.101
Burgomaestre	La burgomaestra &	69	37.3	132	47.1	201	43.2	-2.10	0.044
	Otro	9	4.9	8	2.9	17	3.7		

Nota: § Assigned or renamed by teachers or students

& Assigned or renamed by the Royal Spanish Academy (RSA)

Source: Author's own work

Table 1 shows the frequency of use, according to designations for job titles, professions, and work activities by gender. It also presents the test for the difference in proportions of these designations between males and females (Z-test for independent samples) in various public and private institutions in four regions of Peru. Out of the 24 female job titles, professions, and work activities studied with designations recommended by the RSA, 42% (10) were not accepted by teachers or students. For example, the female job title "fiscal" is mostly preferred to be called "la fiscal" (73.5%) rather than the RSA's recommended "la fiscal" (10.1%).

The percentage of the designation "la gerente" ($Z=2.36$, $p=0.024$) and "la gerenta" ($Z=-2.39$, $p=0.023$) differs significantly between males and females. Males prefer to use "la gerente" (69.7%), while females prefer "la gerenta" (33.6%). Likewise, there is a significant difference with the designation "la burgomaestra" ($Z=2.36$, $p=0.024$); females (47.1%) prefer to use this term compared to males (37.3%). The remaining designations did not show significant differences.

Table 2

Frequency of use, according to designations for female job titles, professions, and work activities and gender, where the preference of the RSA predominates, and the difference in proportions of these between males and females in various higher education institutions in 2022.

Female positions/professions/occupations	Denominations	Masculine		Femenine		Total		Z-Score	P-value
		n	%	n	%	n	%		
Vicepresidente	La vicepresidenta &	120	64.9	228	81.4	348	74.8	-4.03	0.000
	Otro	65	35.1	52	18.6	117	25.2		
Coronel	La coronel &	147	79.5	210	75.0	357	76.8	1.12	0.214
	Otro	38	20.5	70	25.0	108	23.3		
Subprefecto	La subprefecta &	120	64.9	228	81.4	348	75.5	-3.69	0.000
	Otro	61	33.0	52	18.6	113	24.6		
Contralor	La contralora &	73	39.5	126	45.0	199	42.8	-1.18	0.198
	Otro	112	60.5	154	55.0	266	57.1		
Alcalde	La alcaldesa &	156	84.3	258	92.1	414	89.0	-2.64	0.012
	Otro	29	15.7	22	7.9	51	11.0		
Veedor	La veedora &	121	65.4	177	63.2	298	64.1	0.48	0.355
	Otro	64	34.6	103	36.8	167	36.0		
Comandante	La comandante &	155	83.8	258	92.1	413	88.8	-2.80	0.008
	Otro	30	16.2	22	7.9	52	11.2		
	La primera ministra &	128	69.2	238	85.0	366	78.7	-4.08	0.000

Primer ministro	Otro	57	30.8	42	15.0	99	21.4		
Líder	La lideresa &	132	71.4	196	70.0	328	70.5	0.31	0.380
	Otro	53	28.6	84	30.0	137	29.4		
Rector	La rectora &	158	85.4	253	90.4	411	88.4	-1.63	0.105
	Otro	27	14.6	27	9.6	54	11.6		
Juez	La jueza &	159	86.0	258	92.1	417	89.7	-2.15	0.039
	Otro	26	14.0	22	7.9	48	10.4		
Premier	La premier &	152	82.2	222	79.3	374	80.4	0.76	0.298
	Otro	33	17.8	58	20.7	91	19.5		
Regidor	La regidora &	167	90.3	271	96.8	438	94.2	-2.94	0.005
	Otro	18	9.7	9	3.2	27	5.9		
Magistrado	La magistrada &	137	74.0	188	67.1	325	69.9	1.59	0.113
	Otro	48	26.0	92	32.9	140	30.1		

Note: ^s Assigned or renamed by teachers or students

& Assigned or renamed by the Royal Spanish Academy (RSA)

Source: Author's own work

In Table 2, it can be observed that the designations for female job titles, professions, and work activities recommended by the RSA are accepted by the majority of teachers and students. The designations "la vicepresidenta" ($Z=-4.03$, $p=0.000$), "la subprefecta" ($Z=-3.69$, $p=0.000$), "la alcaldesa" ($Z=-2.64$, $p=0.012$), "la comandante" ($Z=-2.80$, $p=0.008$), "la primera ministra" ($Z=-4.08$, $p=0.000$), "la jueza" ($Z=-2.15$, $p=0.039$), and "la regidora" ($Z=-2.94$, $p=0.005$) showed significant differences between males and females. Females had a higher proportion of preference for these designations. The remaining designations did not show significant differences.

5. DISCUSSION

According to Marenghi (2019), language has fundamentally been a living entity; time has allowed its signs to change based on the uses they receive in the world of daily life, but in a gradual, gradual, and unconscious manner. In this way, it became understandable that female voices for certain terms related to positions have conquered the space that rightfully belongs to them alongside the male terms (Marrades et al., 2019).

After contrasting the 24 designations for female job titles, professions, or work activities studied and the designations recommended by the RSA, 10 of them (42%) were not accepted by teachers and students from higher education institutions as part of everyday language use.

The designations that were not accepted in the everyday language use by speakers were: fiscal, perito, gerente, cónsul, superintendente, árbitro, médico, concejal, teniente, and burgomaestre. For example, in the case of the female job title "fiscal," the majority prefers to use "la fiscal" (73.5%) over the RSA's recommended "la fiscal" (10.1%). Therefore, it can be affirmed that there is slow progress in the designations by the RSA in the DLE. This situation occurs due to the difficulty of updating any dictionary like the DLE (Martínez-Jiménez et al., 2020, p. 155), with printed editions

often appearing every ten years or more, while online updates are annual, in contrast to updates in the Oxford English Dictionary, which are quarterly (OED, 2023).

In addition to the above, it is observed that the designations are still not in line with the language spoken by the majority of the population. In this regard, Trombetta (2020) indicates that there has been strong speaker style control regarding the variant used; thus, the speaker is very aware of the linguistic form they practice and can alternate usage depending on the communicative situation in which they are involved. Therefore, it is not surprising that women are gradually finding greater social equality. Rincón et al. (2017) assert that language promotes change to continue being a mirror of its speakers, who to a greater or lesser extent accepted the female variants of the words as part of the communicative situation in which they found themselves.

The slow progress in designations is due to the persistent inequality in the different levels of job positions and leadership roles held by men and women in various fields and organizations. It has been understood that social acceptance of the feminine term is more difficult in positions of leadership or dominance, as often seen in the so-called "glass ceiling" that women have faced in organizations (Cuadrado and Morales, 2007).

From its origins, the word "jueza" (judge) was associated with the masculine. Starting from the term "juez" (judge), various subsequent changes were incorporated in rebellion against the norm and the prevailing language (Sancha, 2022). Demands for the academic dictionary have come from initiatives of various groups (associations, political parties, etc.) that alerted to discriminatory meanings (Moreno-Guerrero et al., 2019). Therefore, in history, there have been precarious definitions proposed for job titles, leading to difficulties, and changes have been incorporated due to social demands.

When determining preferences by gender, it was found that designations for female job titles, professions, and work activities have some preference based on the gender of the teacher or student. For example, it was found that for the job title "gerente," males prefer to use "la gerente," while females prefer "la gerenta." The following designations are preferred by females: "la burgomaestra," "la vicepresidenta," "la subprefecta," "la alcaldesa," "la comandante," "la primera ministra," "la jueza," and "la regidora." These are manifestations that indicate "evidence of group homogeneity according to gender or gender social identity" (Alcaide-Aranda, 2023, p. 7).

In this study, it was found that female designations such as "vicepresidente," "coronel," "subprefecto," "contralor," "alcalde," "veedor," "comandante," "primer ministro," "líder," "rector," "juez," "premier," "regidor," and "magistrado," which are recommended by the RSA, were accepted by the majority of teachers and students.

6. CONCLUSIONS

When contrasting the 24 female job titles, professions, or work activities studied with the designations recommended by the RSA, 10 of them (42%) were not accepted by

teachers and students from national universities and institutes as part of everyday language use. These designations were: fiscal, perito, gerente, cónsul, superintendente, árbitro, médico, concejal, teniente, and burgomaestre, confirming cultural, historical, and social inertia.

When analyzing the designations for female job titles, professions, and work activities, they show certain preferences based on the gender of the teacher or student. The designations "la gerenta," "la burgomaestra," "la vicepresidenta," "la subprefecta," "la alcaldesa," "la comandante," "la primera ministra," "la jueza," and "la regidora" are preferred by women. This leads to the conclusion that these are manifestations indicating samples of group homogeneity according to gender or social gender identity. It is evident that sexist biases still prevail in the use of words applied to men and women. On the other hand, males only prefer the designation "la gerente," and the remaining designations do not show gender preference.

In this context, it is determined that despite the fact that any network of relationships is conditioned by elements of gender, and the RSA is not exempt from this context, the use of the masculine form continues to predominate. This is reflected in the speech of the population, which continues to emphasize the masculine and hesitates or vacillates in using the feminine form. Therefore, it is important to propose grammatical and orthographic amendments to keep up with changes and also analyze words at their phonological, grammatical, and lexical levels. Finally, this study seeks to support the work of other researchers who delve into this topic and, consequently, contribute to the RSA and the Spanish Language Dictionary (DEL).

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