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"A MAN-HATING LESBIAN FEMINIST": a study of the collocations of the word *feminist*

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ABSTRACT

The use of sexist language reveals a great deal about a society´s attitudes towards women. Studies have previously shown that the English language holds far more negative and pejorative terms for women than for men. This essay examines the collocations of a single term, *feminist*, in order to explore society´s attitudes towards women in Britain today. Focus lies on contemporary newspaper language and the data is collected from the Bank of English corpus. All the texts that are studied were published between the years 2000 – 2005. The collocations are categorised as conveying negative, positive or neutral attitudes and the results show that although the neutral instances are in the majority, the number of negative collocations is extensive. The number of *different* terms, however, is higher among the negative collocations and the expressions in this category are often very harsh, conveying strongly derogatory attitudes. The positive category is by far the smallest one and when viewing the results as a whole, it can be concluded that negative attitudes towards feminists, and towards women, in Britain today are extensive.

Keywords: feminist, collocations, attitudes, English, newspapers, corpus, Britain

1. INTRODUCTION

In October 2010, on the 40th anniversary of its publication, a review by Neil Lyndon of Germaine Greer's feminist manifesto *The Female Eunuch* appeared in *The Sunday Times*. The book attracted a lot of attention at the time of its publication and formed a great influence on the feminist movement of the time. Lyndon, however, strongly disapproves of its content and argues that Greer achieved virtually nothing with it, except portraying men as oppressors. Lyndon also claims that 'the notion of the repressive, patriarchal state is one of the cardinal lies of feminism' (Lyndon 2010). Such a statement is undoubtedly a harsh judgement on the feminist movement, suggesting not only that the oppression of women is a lie told by feminists, but also that feminism is based on *multiple* 'cardinal lies'. Lyndon's viewpoint regarding the nature of feminism, it would seem, expresses feelings of disdain towards the work of the feminist movement. Does this derogatory attitude towards feminism stand for Neil Lyndon alone, or is it a reflection of the feelings of the general public? Does Lyndon's statement reveal something about society's view on feminism and feminists today? If so, what can this view on feminists tell us about society's attitudes towards women?

1.1.   Topic and aim

The use of sexist language is an excellent indicator of a society's attitudes towards women. In Britain overt sexist language is stigmatised, although there are far more negative and pejorative terms for women than for men in English (Romaine 2000:107-9). In order to explore current social attitudes towards women, this essay will examine the collocations of a single term, *feminist*, in an attempt to answer the following question: *What do collocations of the word* feminist *reveal about society's attitudes towards women in Britain today?*

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, the literature and theories on which this study is based will be discussed. The meaning of collocations, context and connotations will be dealt with (2.1.), after which the connections between sexist language and attitudes towards women are discussed (2.2.). Ideas about what society's view on feminism is today will then be presented (2.3.) before the section is concluded with a brief summary (2.4.).

2.1. Language and meaning

When determining the meaning of a word, it is not the word itself as much as the context in which it appears that conveys its connotations (Romaine: 2000:102). An isolated word does not give any information about the attitudes connected with it. The true meaning of a word, therefore, lies not in the theoretical definition of it, but in the way it is used. Consequently, in order to explore and reveal the meanings associated with a certain word, the words collocated with it need to be examined. Collocations can be explained as 'the tendency of two words to co-occur, or as the tendency of one word to attract another' (Hunston 2002:68).

Some collocations are more predictable than others. For example, there are logical reasons why the word *children* collocates more frequently with the word *toys* than the word *women* does (Hunston 2002:68). It is perhaps the less obvious collocations, though, that are of real interest and that may reveal underlying patterns of linguistic meanings. Such patterns of collocations might not be detected and identified unless statistically studied, seeing as native speakers themselves are not always aware of the collocations they use (Hunston 2002:20-21, 68). Linguistic studies might therefore bring about awareness and understandings of how collocations can attach certain connotations to specific words, and how native speakers contribute to the maintaining of these connotations through their everyday language use.

2.2. Attitudes and sexist language

The purpose of this essay is to explore attitudes towards women that are conveyed through language. Language that suggests gender-based negative attitudes can be considered sexist. In order to understand the mechanisms behind social attitudes towards women, it can therefore be relevant to consider what role sexist language plays in bringing about these attitudes.

First of all, we need to establish what sexist language is. Sexist language is language which, on the basis of gender, discriminates against and disadvantages its target by suggesting inferiority and inequality. Many studies have shown how sexist language targets women and creates a male norm that is continuously emphasised (e.g. Romaine 2000:107-11, Pauwels1998:34-35). Moreover, 'sexist language is not just about the words used to describe women but also how they are used and to what ends' (Weatherall 2002:11). A seemingly neutral and non-sexist word might very well take on sexist meanings in the context and

manner in which it is used. Sexist language, therefore, is, besides words, also about behaviour and attitudes, not only *what* is said, but *how* it is said.

The suggestion that the English language holds sexist features has long been pointed out by feminists and there are many examples of how women, through language, are made to seem less important and even invisible. The use of masculine generics is one example, the entitlement of women according to their being married or not (which men are not), is another (Weatherall 2002:12-14, 21). These characteristics of the English language that are used every day are in fact deeply rooted sexist features that put women in an inferior position. In other words, there are already built-in linguistic features that convey disparaging attitudes towards women, which presumably might "justify" the use of derogatory language in other cases as well, at length further strengthen negative attitudes towards women. It has also been shown that words referring to women are connected with very different connotations than those referring to men, suggesting a society where women and femininity are not as highly valued as men and masculinity (Weatherall 2002:23). What the attitudes towards women are in a society, it would therefore seem, is linked to the extent to which sexist language is used. It is clear that language is not detached from the society in which it exists. Rather it functions as a reflection of society's attitudes and dominant values. Linguistic behaviour may therefore reveal what these attitudes and values are. Consequently, a widespread use of sexist language, would also suggest that negative attitudes towards women are extensive.

2.3.   Society's view on feminism today

The term that is investigated in this essay is *feminist*. In order to better understand and be able to explain the collocations of this word, a review of existing social attitudes towards feminism is essential. Society's view on feminism today is far from being a positive one. McRobbie would even go so far as to say that feminism now is subject to feelings of hate and that most young women of today would not dream of calling themselves feminists. Through the media, popular culture and politics, achievements of the feminist movement are undermined and feminism is portrayed as something outdated and redundant, something that a modern young woman would not want to be associated with (McRobbie 2009:11,16,24). McRobbie goes on to argue that, now that women are able to compete with men for power and authority in the field of work, they fear that they will lose their sexual desirability to men. Therefore, women return to a traditional, and often excessive, femininity 'or else she fears being considered

aggressively unfeminine in her coming forward as a powerful woman, she fears being mistaken for a feminist' (McRobbie 2009:67). Mc Robbie calls this exaggerated femininity in appearances and behaviour the new, or post-feminist, masquerade (McRobbie 2009:66-68). The behaviour that McRobbie describes here does not only indicate existing negative social attitudes towards feminism, but as an act also works to undermine feminist achievements and induce further negative attitudes towards the feminist movement. The existence of these pejorative attitudes is also pointed out by Sunderland, who argues that 'feminism has acquired negative associations, entailing situated notions such as 'being anti-men'' (Sunderland 2006:10). If this indeed is the view on feminism today, there is no wonder that many women avoid labelling themselves as feminist, even if they would agree with the basic concepts of feminism. The question then is, why, and how, have these negative associations come to be? If the media, as McRobbie states, is one of the forces engaged in undermining feminism, there should be some evidence of this in the newspaper texts studied here.

2.4.   Section summary

The literature that has been reviewed in this section forms the theoretical framework for this study. There is a vast amount of literature on sexist language and the works mentioned above are only a small selection of those which deal with language meaning, feminism and current attitudes. In the next section the data collection method will be described.

3.   METHODOLOGY

In the following section, the choice of data collection method will be accounted for (3.1), after which the procedure of the data collection is described (3.2) and the methodological limitations are discussed (3.3). The section is finally concluded with a short summarising paragraph (3.4).

3.1.   Choice of data collection method

The purpose of this essay is to examine a general use of a specific term. It is therefore essential that the data collection method used offers a sufficient amount of data and that the data studied present a picture that can be considered as reliable as possible. At present,

language corpora provide the best means of collecting such data (Hunston 2002:20). Using corpora is a feasible way of collecting the amount of data needed to be able to carry this study through and to render the results plausible. Hunston also brings out study of collocations as one of the cases where a corpus is a vital tool (Hunston 2002:20-21). There is really no other comparable method that would be possible to use in a study of this kind.

The focus of this study is on written British English in newspaper texts from the 21st century. Currently, the corpus holding the most recent samples of written British English is the *Bank of English* corpus. The Bank of English is a *general corpus* and contains written British English from a wide range of sources. Another example of a general corpus is the British National Corpus, which also contains a large amount of written British English from many different text types (Hunston 2002:14-15). However, the British National Corpus is not representative of the 21st century, which makes it irrelevant for the specific purpose of this essay (University of Oxford 2010). The Bank of English is therefore a more suitable choice.

The contents of the Bank of English can be accessed through *Wordbanks online*. Wordbanks online is an online corpus containing samples of written and spoken English, from the Bank of English (Collins 2010). Its 550 million words derive from a wide range of sources of which the majority 'date from between 2001 and 2005 making it one of the most current corpora available for subscription' (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd 2010). Wordbanks online thereby provides the accessibility, amount of data and recentness of sources necessary for the purpose of this essay.

3.2. Collecting the data

The corpus was accessed through a free trial account available from the Collins Language web page (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd 2010). Once logged in to the corpus, the word *feminist* was entered in the query box and the text types were narrowed down to newspaper text (doc.textform Newspaper) from the United Kingdom (doc.ctry UK), published in the years 2000-2005 (doc.period 2000-2001, 2002-2003, 2004-2005). The window size was left at its pre-set 5 tokens to the left and right. No distinction was made between the *noun* feminist and the *adjective* feminist, partly because it is not always clear-cut when the word functions as a noun and when it functions as an adjective. More importantly, however, it was considered

equally interesting for the purpose of this essay to study the collocations of both the noun and the adjective. The corpus search resulted in 388 hits.

Each concordance line was gone through and all descriptive words or phrases referring directly to the word feminist were marked. Simultaneously, words or phrases that the word feminist in its turn referred to (e.g. feminist *movement*) were also marked. Instances where neither of these two types of references was made, where feminist referred only to a name, or where feminist was preceded only by the definite or indefinite article, were not taken into account. Such instances would not give any information about the connotations connected with the word feminist and were therefore considered irrelevant for the purpose of this essay. The collection of words from the two reference types were kept in two different groups that were initially analysed separately. In addition to these two groups a third group was created. This third group contained instances where the word or words preceding feminist were linked with the word or words following it (e.g. *modern* feminist *principles*). Such cases would not fit in with either of the two previous groups. However, they do provide important information about connotations connected with the word feminist, which is why a separate group was needed. In the next step, each word or phrase was categorised as positive, negative or neutral. In cases where it was not clear in which category a certain word or phrase would belong, the Oxford English Dictionary online was consulted. The context, i.e. *how* the words were used in the specific cases, was also taken into consideration when the meanings of the words were interpreted. The categorisations were thereafter sorted into three tables, one for each group. Once these tables were created, the categorisation process was repeated to ensure that each collocation was placed in the correct category. The entire categorisation can be found in appendix 1.

3.3.   Limitations

The results of this survey might have been different had the corpus search been carried out differently. A search based on the entire body of written texts available in the corpus, for example, could very well have given another outcome of the study. Newspaper language, however, is always the current norm and can therefore be considered as a reliable reflection of contemporary English. Moreover, the number of hits obtained from merely searching the newspaper texts provides a sufficient quantity of data considering the kind and type of this study.

The fact that the data studied here derive from texts published in the years 2000-2005, needs also to be taken into consideration when analysing the results. The most recent texts are still five years old and not fully representative of today. In addition, this essay does not claim to be presenting such results. However, the results serve as an indicator of existing connotations and of what they have been in the recent years.

Furthermore, a categorisation of words of the kind carried out here will always and inevitably be somewhat subjective. A word categorised as negative by one person, might very well be perceived as positive or neutral by another. The attempt in this essay, however, has been to try and avoid subjectivity as far as possible by, for example, consulting dictionaries for objective definitions in ambiguous cases. Naturally, even dictionary definitions need to be interpreted in some cases. In such instances the dictionary definition, combined with an interpretation of the context, forms the base of the categorisation. The categories are also presented in this essay, which makes it possible for any reader to make their own judgement of how the categorisation has been carried out.

Finally, the context available in each concordance line is rather limited. Had the entire context been known, the interpretations might have been different. It would, however, not have been practically possible in this case to carry out a study where the entire context of each instance was taken into account. Furthermore, the words immediately surrounding the word feminist are the ones that it in fact co-occurs with, and as such they provide important information about the connotations connected with it, even if the wider context is not known.

3.4. Section summary

This section has described the choices made for the data collection method, i.e. what method that was used and why. It has also explained how the collected data were organised as well as described the limitations of the chosen method. The next section will analyse and discuss the data collected.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

In this section the results of the investigation will be analysed and discussed. The section begins with an establishing of the conditions on which the analysis is based (4.1.), after which the results are summarised (4.2.). An analysis of different patterns that can be found among the collocations and what attitudes they convey follow in the next section (4.3.). The categorisation of ambiguous cases is thereafter dealt with (4.4.) and the effect of using unmotivated collocations is discussed (4.5.). The state of feminism today is dealt with next (4.6.) after which the section ends with a short summary (4.7.)

4.1. Prerequisites of the analysis

Before beginning the analysis of the results, a few explanatory words about the categorisation itself need to be said. The categorisation was initially subjective. Once this first categorisation was made, however, steps were taken to objectivise it. These steps included consulting dictionaries for definitions in ambiguous cases or, when dictionary definitions were not found (e.g. *froideur*) or considered not sufficient, searching the Internet for uses of particular words. As mentioned in the methodology chapter, the categorisations are not always clear-cut. Some words are particularly difficult, seeing as there are instances where the same word can have very different definitions if two separate dictionaries are consulted. One example is the word *feisty*. When looked up in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the definition of feisty is decidedly negative, whereas for example *Chambers 21st Century Dictionary* gives one distinctly negative and one distinctly positive definition[1]. Naturally, in cases such as these, the interpretation of meaning is subject to some difficulty. Furthermore, as pointed out in section 2.2., seemingly neutral words might be perceived as sexist depending on how and in which context they are used. Similarly, neutral, or even positive, words may very well take on negative meanings in certain contexts. Single words in the categorisation tables might therefore be interpreted as for instance positive when standing on their own, whereas the context in which they appeared would suggest a negative interpretation. This being said, the result of the interpretations and categorisations that have been made will form the basis of the analysis and discussion in this chapter.

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[1] OED definition of 'feisty': *Aggressive, excitable, touchy.*
Chambers definitions of 'feisty': *1 spirited; lively. 2 irritable; quarrelsome.*

Another point to be made before the results are examined more closely, regards the term in question, the word *feminist*. Although women as well as men[2] can call themselves feminists, it is probably safe to say that most feminists are women. Regardless, though, the word feminist ought to be considered a "female" word, given that it deals with the rights of women in a male-dominated world. Consequently, without thereby suggesting that all women are feminists, the attitudes aimed at feminists, will in the following discussion also be regarded as aimed at women.

4.2. Summary of results

As a first step in analysing the results, a summary of the number of instances will clarify things. Some collocations occurred more than once and the following summary therefore shows the total number of instances in each category as well as the number of *different* terms that occurred. To begin with, the results are summarised one group at a time, as presented in the categorisation tables. Group 3 consists of entire expressions, and since no two exact same expressions occurred, there is no distinction between the number of instances in total and the number of different terms in this group. The group by group summary, then, gives the following picture:

Group 1 (x + feminist(s)): Negative: 45 instances, 38 different terms

Positive: 23 instances, 15 different terms

Neutral: 32 instances, 19 different terms

Group 2 (feminist(s) + x): Negative: 39 instances, 36 different terms

Positive: 33 instances, 21 different terms

Neutral: 80 instances, 49 different terms

Group 3 (x + feminist + x): Negative: 24 instances

Positive: 15 instances

Neutral: 9 instances

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[2] In Sweden it is not uncommon for, for instance, male politicians to call themselves feminists. The former Prime Minister of Sweden, Göran Persson (Läsarnas Expressen 2007), as well as the current left-wing party leader Lars Ohly (Sveriges Television 2010), have both described themselves as such.

The negative instances are in the majority in group 1 and group 3, whereas group 2 holds a considerably larger number of neutral collocations. When bringing the three groups together and summarising the entire body of collocations, the result shows that the negative category contains 108 instances of which there are 98 different terms, the positive category holds 71 instances and 51 different terms and finally the neutral category adds up to 121 instances and 77 different terms.

As we can see, explicitly positive collocations have the by far fewest occurrences in the collection. The neutral collocations are in the majority, exceeding the negative category by 13 instances in total. What is interesting to note, however, is that, even though the total number of instances in the neutral category exceeds the number of collocations in the negative category, the number of *different* terms is much higher among the negative collocations. The negative category thereby presents a greater variety of expressions than the other two categories, which seems to be indicating that there exists rather a lot of creativity in the search for negative words to label feminists with. Many of these expressions are also rather forceful and harsh, overtly conveying strongly derogatory attitudes towards feminists. Consider for instance expressions such as *man-hating lesbian feminist*, *feminist fundamentalism* and *bloke-bashing feminist rot*. These are only a few of the many, not very merciful, expressions that occurred. Judging from the collocations studied here, then, the connotations of the word feminist are to a large extent negative and pejorative and display further examples of the sexism that exists in the English language. The nature of the collocations will, however, be explored more thoroughly in the following sections.

4.3. Attitudes and collocation patterns

Apart from the neutral *movement(s)* (10 instances) and the positive *icon(s)* (12 instances) there is no single word or expression that stands out as being far more frequent than others. However, if grouped together on the basis of similarity of meaning (e.g. words referring to nationality or violence) new patterns are revealed. A closer look at the list of collocations will for instance show that many of the words in the negative category are expressions of very strong and occasionally even uncontrolled emotion. Women are in accordance with traditional gender roles generally ascribed more emotional qualities than men. In the findings of this essay, however, the description of women, or feminists, as emotional is exaggerated and

almost taken to its extreme. Women are here portrayed as *aggressive*, *fulminating*, *fanatical*, *mad*, *rabid*, *enraged* etc. Descriptions such as these present a picture of women who engage in feminist activities as being irrational and controlled by their emotions, in a most negative sense, and made to seem almost ridiculous.

There are also instances of words that express a patronising attitude, suggesting that feminists are not to be taken seriously. Examples are *simple-minded* feminists or feminist *fantasies*, *squabbles*, *myth* and *nonsense*. Other types of expressions found in the negative category are the ones making different kinds of references to war or violence. Here we find such words as *militant*, *fighting*, *battle*, *attack* and *assassin*. To sum up the description of feminists so far would suggest that feminists are not only irrational and violent, but also insignificant. Naturally, these examples of expressions do not cover all of the findings, but they indicate that certain tendencies can be detected among the collocations.

An examination of the collocations on the basis of meaning also shows that references to nationality are frequent in the neutral category. In group 1 (x + feminist(s)), 11 out of 33 instances, i.e. one third of the instances, are collocations simply stating the nationality of the feminist in question. These instances might be considered as more or less the same and if viewed in this manner, the extent of the neutral category rapidly decreases. All instances of collocations stating nationality have here been interpreted as neutral. The stating of nationality, however, might not always be considered neutral. In a country where women have virtually no rights whatsoever, it would take a lot of courage to be an outspoken feminist. Any feminist in such a country would most likely be admired and respected by the surrounding world, regardless of what one might think of feminism itself. Statements such as *a Saudi feminist* or *an Afghan feminist* would therefore entail more positive connotations and, consequently, *Saudi* and *Afghan* would be categorised as positive collocations.

When studying the category of positive terms, it appears to be somewhat significant to describe prominent and leading feminists as *icons* (12 instances) and for feminists and feminist ideas to be perceived as *modern*. To be considered an icon is undoubtedly something very positive. The use of the word icon, however, could also be considered a bit extreme and exaggerated and be perceived as somewhat *too* positive or "too much". This extensive use of such a powerful word could perhaps be interpreted as an expression of a feminist need for

excessively positive terms to counteract the typically negative attitudes that feminism is subject to. The second example brought out here, the word *modern*, occurs three times in group 1 (x + feminist(s)) and is also found in various combinations in group 3 (x + feminist + x), such as *modern feminist principles*, *modern feminist politics* and *modern feminist vision*. Is this emphasis on modernism a reaction to the perception of feminism as being out-of-date and obsolete and perhaps an attempt to attract younger generations to a movement that is losing ground? If so, this positive collocation actually further confirms the negative view on feminism that McRobbie (see section 2.3.) speaks of and that is visible in the collection of negative collocations. On the other hand, the occurrence of the word *modern* might indicate that there is such a thing as a modern, or new, feminist movement, that there is hope for feminism and that it is developing still. However, the apparent view on feminism in society today is likely to make this development difficult and involve hard work for women engaged in feminist activities.

A further exploration of the positive collocations also shows that the types of war references that were found in the negative category to some extent even can be found in the positive category. Words such as *vanguard*, *revolution*, *resistance* and possibly also *hero*, *heroine* and *champion* can be considered as referring to war or at least some kind of fighting. Even when described in positive terms, hence, feminism is connected with fighting and struggle, and not surprisingly so. Considering the attitudes that feminism is met with, the work to get feminist ideas accepted in society *is* a struggle. Fighting can also equal defence, and, in this case, the defence of an established position now under threat. Feminists are therefore needed to fight in order to defend the rights of women in society today. The problem is that these fights are turned against them and used as evidence of feminists being rabid and fanatical warriors, as has been occasionally expressed in the collocations examined here.

4.4.   Ambiguous cases
Most of the examples of expressions brought out in this section are quite clear-cut cases, i.e. there is no question as to where they belong in the categorisation tables. Words such as *fanatical* and *mad* have already been mentioned, another expression is *violent*, to exemplify easily categorised negative terms. These words could hardly be interpreted as anything other than negative. Other collocations, however, are ambiguous and not as easy to categorise. One

example of an ambiguous collocation is the word *resistance*. Whether this word should be considered a negative or a positive one, it can be argued, depends on what the resistance is aimed at. Resistance in the sense of refusing to accept an injustice or inequality would generally be considered as something positive. It would, however, also be easy to imagine an opposite situation where resistance would be considered as quite the contrary. Based on the context in which the word appeared in the studied material, *resistance* was here interpreted in the positive sense.

A closer look at the distribution of clear-cut compared to ambiguous cases over the three categories, gives a clearer picture of the degree to which the collocations convey negative and positive attitudes respectively. An extensive number of clear-cut cases in a category might suggest attitudes that are firmer and more deeply rooted than a majority of ambiguous cases would indicate. It should be understood, however, that even such a categorisation is subject to interpretation and that the *degree* of ambiguity varies between different terms. These factors taken into account, though, still gives an outcome where the number of clear-cut negative collocations exceeds the number of clear-cut positive collocations. However, the number of ambiguous cases in the negative category also, and to a great extent, exceeds the ambiguous cases in the positive category (a table of ambiguous cases can be found in appendix 2). The fact that the negative category to begin with contains a substantially larger number of instances than the positive category, naturally contributes to this outcome. Does the occurrence of these ambiguous cases mean that the degree to which this category really is genuinely negative is not as high as has been argued? Not necessarily. Many of the ambiguous cases can be considered negative, although not *as* negative as other words in the category, but nevertheless, negative. As has already been mentioned, the degree of ambiguity varies. Naturally, there are also cases that are on the border between negative and positive or neutral. The overall picture, however, is a clearly negative one. The same difficulties that have been discussed regarding the negative category to some extent also apply to the positive and neutral categories respectively. It is not always absolutely clear, for instance, that all the words in the neutral category are completely neutral and free from values or judgements in the context in which they appear. An overview of the clear-cut cases in the categories, however, shows that there are more absolute instances in the negative category than there are in the positive category, further confirming the suggestion that occurrences of negative attitudes

towards feminists in society are more widespread and more profound than occurrences of such positive attitudes.

4.5.   Unmotivated collocations

As mentioned in section 2.1. in this essay, Hunston points out that there are collocations that are more logical or motivated than others. The word *children* is, for example, a more motivated collocation of the word *toys* than the word *women* is (Hunston 2002:68). Some of the collocations found here can be considered motivated, for instance *movement*, as in *feminist movement*, since this is a widespread and established concept. This term, like most of the motivated collocations, is found in the neutral category. The majority of the collocations, however, especially those occurring in the negative category, do not seem motivated or logical at all. As such, they are probably not entirely obvious and apparent to the language users themselves, which is why a corpus study may serve to clarify and give evidence of linguistic patterns otherwise obscure (see Hunston 2002:20-21). How do these seemingly unmotivated collocations affect the view and interpretation of the results? They are, undoubtedly, immediately noticed and attract more attention than the logical and motivated collocations do. In that sense, these collocations also make a greater impact on the reader. If suddenly faced with a term that is not expected in the context in which it appears, the reader is most likely to react more strongly to this word than to the surrounding ones. Consequently, one effect of using unmotivated and unexpected terms for describing feminists is that more attention is drawn to such words and to the message being sent out than would otherwise be the case, which presumably also leads to stronger reactions to what is being said. If the aim is to present a negative picture of feminists, the use of unmotivated negative terms in connection with the word feminist will put focus on the negative attitudes being conveyed, which ultimately would mean that the goal is efficiently achieved.

4.6.   The state of feminism today

The hatred towards feminism that McRobbie argues exists today (see section 2.3.) seems plausible indeed when viewing the results of this study. However, are the negative words found here expressions of the hatred that McRobbie speaks of, or is it this type of language that *causes* these feelings of hate towards feminism? The answer is probably that it works both ways and that one is connected to the other. We are undoubtedly affected by the

language that we are exposed to and if a certain word is constantly presented in negative terms, we are likely to eventually make the same negative associations and, ultimately, use the same pejorative language. The derogatory and sexist language is thereby maintained and the influence of sexist values in society is continued.

McRobbie (see section 2.3.) also speaks of the media, alongside with popular culture and politics, as one of the forces that take part in the undoing of feminism. The texts studied here come from newspapers and the media undermining of feminism that McRobbie points to seem to be evident in this material. Newspapers, and the media as a whole, have a great responsibility in what they communicate to their recipients. If they take an anti-feminist approach in their portrayal of feminism, the negative picture of feminism will be the dominating image that, for instance, young women are met with. Such a picture works to strengthen the fear of 'being mistaken for a feminist' that McRobbie (2009:67) argues exists among women today and as a result, the real issue, what feminism is really about, is effectively lost. The message being sent out is that feminism is not becoming for a woman to be engaged in, it is not desirable and it is not feminine, and an unfeminine woman is not very highly valued in society today. In order to be accepted and appreciated in society, a woman needs to live up to certain ideals and fit into the frame of what is thought of as female or feminine. These ideals and standards are set by a male world in order to fulfil men's desires and wishes and to sustain a male dominated society where women are kept in an inferior position.

An alternative interpretation, it could be argued, could perhaps be that the occasionally strongly disdainful terms that are used to describe feminists indicate that feminism is still a movement to be reckoned with. The fact that it evokes such strong emotions suggests that feminism is not yet entirely obsolete. Whether or not this is the case, however, it is clear that the position of feminism in society today is not an elevated one. The fact that a movement ultimately dealing with the rights of women and the equality between men and women is met by such demeaning attitudes, seems undoubtedly to be confirming the suggestion that women, or issues concerning women, are not as highly valued in society as men are (see Weatherall 2002:23).

4.7. Section summary

The results of this investigation seem to be confirming the picture presented by previous studies, where words connected with women are to a large extent associated with negative connotations (see for example Romaine 2000:107-9). Regardless of the fact that feminism is not a new phenomenon, feminists and the feminist movement still seem to be perceived as something threatening that needs to be repressed through derogatory and demeaning language. Through this kind of linguistic behaviour, sexist language will persist and women will always be its main target.

5. CONCLUSION

In this concluding section the observations made in the analysis and discussion of results will be summarised (5.1.), after which suggestions for further research are discussed (5.2.). The section then ends with a discussion of the limitations of the essay (5.3.).

5.1. Summary of observations

There are undoubtedly a large number of words conveying negative connotations in the results. However, the number of words conveying neither negative nor positive meanings is extensive as well. What is clear though, is that the category containing positive words is by far the smallest one. It appears as though the word feminist not only to a great extent attracts negative collocations, but is also more likely to be described in neutral terms rather than in positive ones. Hence, neutral or negative attitudes towards feminists seem to be more common than positive ones.

As mentioned in the beginning of section 5, the attitudes that are aimed at feminists in these findings, are also considered as aimed at women. It was also mentioned that this statement does not suggest that all women are feminists. They most certainly are not. The fact that most feminists are women, however, means that the attitudes that are aimed at feminists also *are* aimed at women. Furthermore, attitudes towards feminists tell us something about attitudes towards women in a larger scale as well. These attitudes suggest which female qualities that are appreciated and which are not, what kind of woman that is valued in society and what kind of woman that is not. What this study shows, then, is that negative attitudes towards

women are extensive in society today. The result is in itself also evidence of the existence of sexist language, a language that is used to keep women in an inferior position and that suggests that men and women are treated and valued differently. Hence, one of the consequences of a widespread use of sexist language is that men and women remain unequal. The patterns of collocations that are displayed here, unveil a linguistic behaviour that works to demean women and to undermine their credibility. As long as the use of such a language is accepted and allowed to exist, negative attitudes against women will persist.

The fact that there are, after all, quite a lot of neutral terms in the results, somehow becomes less important when compared to the strength and harshness of the negative collocations. Even highly positive words, such as *enlightened*, *informed* or *prominent*, are overshadowed by the extensive number of pejorative and derogatory descriptions. The negative category contains far too many instances for this result to be considered a positive one. When looking at the whole picture the image is discouraging, leaving a great deal yet to be desired regarding society's attitudes towards women in Britain today.

5.2.   Further research

The collocations that were found here derived from newspaper texts from the United Kingdom. A next step to take in further research could be to investigate whether the results would be the same in other types of texts as well, in order to explore the extent to which the attitudes that were found here are wide spread. Another relevant approach to take on this subject would be to make a comparison over time, to examine whether the attitudes towards feminism have changed and, if so, how. Additionally, what could such a comparison tell us about the future of feminism?

The results found here do not only provide information about attitudes towards feminists in society today, but also give an indication of the current state of feminism. McRobbie (2009) deals with this subject, but there seem to be room for further exploration of the status and social position of feminism today. Is the feminist movement still alive or is there perhaps no longer a need for it? Are the situations in other countries similar to the one in Britain? What does the future hold for feminism and feminist ideals? What role do feminist political parties play in the survival and power of feminism? These are only a few questions that could be relevant to explore on this subject in further research.

The study of attitudes towards women conveyed through language has been explored in various works before (e.g. Pauwels1998, Romaine 2000, Weatherall 2002). It is, however, nevertheless a field of study that needs to be continuously surveyed in order to unveil and diminish patterns of sexism in the English language. In this study, the word *feminist* was investigated and the results gave evidence of extensive negative attitudes connected with it. In addition to this study, it would be relevant to investigate what attitudes towards women today that can be found if other typically female words are studied. One question to consider is whether the word *feminist* is likely to attract more pejorative collocations than other words associated with women, or if these negative connotations are common to all female words.

5.3. Limitations

As with all essays of this kind, the time and size limits are inevitable. There are always limitations to what is possible to achieve within the given timeframe and by the means available. Apart from these given limitations, however, there are others that are specific for this particular essay. These limitations largely concern the choice of method and the means by which the categorisations were carried through. The methodological limitations have already been discussed in the methodology section. Considering the fact that they affect the outcome of the essay as a whole, however, some of them need to be mentioned in this section as well.

The texts that were chosen for this study were newspaper texts from the United Kingdom. Had the search been focused on other text types or included other text types in addition to the newspaper texts, it is possible that the results would have been different. As mentioned in the methodology section (3.3), however, the reasons for choosing newspapers as objects of study is that they constitute the current linguistic norm and thereby, to a large extent, reflects contemporary written English.

The time period investigated is also an important factor to consider with regard to the results of this study. All the texts that were searched through were published between the years 2000 – 2005. Had it been possible to access more recent texts than these, the results would naturally have presented a more up-to-date and current picture of the collocations used than the texts studied here are able to provide. What the studied texts do offer is a snapshot that after all covers half a decade, which must be considered as rather extensive material.

The categorisation process also affects the outcome of the investigation. Had it been done by someone else or in another way, the results might have been different. It is inevitable that the categorisation to some extent, initially at least, is somewhat subject. Although steps were taken to objectivise the process, the study would probably have benefited from even further objective measures. If, for instance, more people had been involved in the categorisation and offered their separate interpretations, the result could have been considered more well-founded than the present one. Such a solution was, however, not achievable in this case, and based on the external conditions of this essay, the categorisation was made as objective as possible. Another aspect of the categorisation that affects the outcome is the choice of categories. In this case, the results were divided into three categories; negative, positive and neutral. Although these categories are straightforward and easy to understand, they might be considered as somewhat too broad in the sense that they contain clear-cut cases as well as highly ambiguous ones. Additional categories would perhaps have given a more nuanced picture than the one presented here.

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APPENDIX 1

Categorisation of results

The numbers in parenthesis indicate how many times the word occurred. Where there are no numbers, there was only one instance of the specific word.

Group 1: x + feminist(s)

Negative	Positive	Neutral
feisty (2)	enlightened	American (4)
fulminating	doughty	17th – century
attacking	conciliatory	well-known
strident (3)	total (2)	younger/young (2)
man-hating lesbian	the best	early (5)
dour left-wing	sailing	Inner
crop-haired radical	pioneering	British (2)
quirky	leading (3)	Mexican
drum-banging	fashionable	left-wing
militant (3)	prominent (2)	first and second-wave
hardcore	modern (3)	post-
violent	straightforwardly	equality (3)
radical (2)	Informed	the first
aggressive	avowed	French (2)
bed-rock	ardent (3)	English
f******		Australian
lipstick		new
coal-face		surfer (2)
once iconic		Britain´s first
Poncy		

satirically		
"one of those"		
determinedly		
blaming		
the ire of		
scorned by		
the scourge of		
the serious Seventies		
Mean Tipp		
chain-smoking		
raging (2)		
Rabid		
obscure		
fanatical		
Mad		
rampant		
so-called		
Simple-minded		

Group 2: feminist(s) + x

Negative	Positive	Neutral
Anger	icon(s) (12)	group(s) (4)
Rage	hero	newspaper
battle(s) (2)	chums	lawyer (2)

Zeal	principles	principal
twist (2)	vanguard	academic
Gaze	heroine	commentators
froideur	cult movie	followers
rejection	credibility	causes
Lobby	resistance	politics (3)
Clout	credentials	movement(s) (10)
crusaders	revolution (2)	subtext
hatred	status	bookshop owner
demand(s) (2)	mandate	issue(s) (5)
fantasies	anthem	philosopher(s) (2)
nonsense	Intellectual Heritage	art practices
Attack	Viva	tradition
assassin	boldly wore	women
fundamentalism	' greatest achievement	writer (3)
defiance	champion	theorist
deification	breast cancer activists	work
skullcap	ardour	historian(s) (2)
Retort		theme
squabbles		legal issues
Myth		publishing house
tendencies		author (2)
soapbox		studies (2)
and other divorce supporters		novelists
have scrawled		voices

used to picket		tone
were decried		term of fashion
who were enraged		project
were vexed		paintings
are wary		movie/films (2)
leanings		century
fighting		event
enraged		perspective
		Encyclopaedia
		views
		organisations
		writings
		re-appraisal
		society
		pictureline
		discourse
		criticism
		critics (3)
		critique(s) (2)
		totems
		activists (3)

Group 3: x + feminist + x

Negative	Positive	Neutral
bloke-bashing feminist rot	breaking new feminist boundaries	Asian feminist group
hardline feminist theories	modern feminist principles	embryonic Italian feminist movement
angered feminist critics	a momentous feminist breakthrough	former feminist campaigner
saintly feminist crusaders	modern feminist politics	no simplistic feminist reading
a bruise-black feminist satire	the great feminist pioneers	Bulgarian feminist poetry
public feminist fight	a strong feminist streak	a specifically feminist pedagogy
an atypical feminist tale	peerless feminist credentials	the feminist past
the feminist pendulum	potent feminist statement	our feminist mums
no feminist paradise	a good feminist angle	American feminist activists
an 18th – century feminist firebrand	the biggest feminist influence	
the old feminist slogan	modern feminist movement	
radically feminist statements	prominent and outspoken feminist writer and campaigner	
a militant feminist fantasy	modern feminist vision	
the Age of feminist Puritanism	the best feminist movie	
outmoded feminist pitch	an energetic feminist revolutionary	
the old feminist belief		
hardline feminist message		

those feminist critics		
radical feminist perspective		
controversial feminist views		
old-fashioned feminist predictability		
ironic feminist take		
prescribed feminist subject-matter		
original feminist demands		

APPENDIX 2

Table of ambiguous cases

Group 1: x + feminist(s)

Negative	Positive	Neutral
feisty (2)	total (2)	well-known
determinedly	sailing	
lipstick	straightforwardly	
once iconic	avowed	
the serious Seventies		

Group 2: feminist(s) + x

Negative	Positive	Neutral
crusaders	resistance	activists (3)
gaze	vanguard	
lobby	revolution (2)	
zeal		
twist (2)		
demand(s) (2)		
tendencies		
leanings		
fantasies		
deification		

Group 3: x + feminist + x

Negative	Positive	Neutral
ironic feminist take	an energetic feminist revolutionary	
prescribed feminist subject-matter	the biggest feminist influence	
saintly feminist crusaders		
radically feminist statements		
those feminist critics		
radical feminist perspective		