

# Gender Ideology in the Definitions of *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*

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## *Abstract*

From the perspective of social semiotics, gender terms are important signs for meaning making in society, in that they not only reflect social norms regarding different genders, but also play an important role in the formation of a range of other equally important semiotic notions. This article studies the gender ideology as reflected in the definitions of a number of headwords in the 7th edition of *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (CCD7). The analyses reveal that CCD7's definitions serve to construct gender and marriage norms in accordance with the prevalent gender ideology of the society. Based on a binary view of gender, CCD7 constructs a normal-abnormal continuum, which defines heterosexual relationships and heterosexual marriages as the social norms. This study regards the act of defining as a social semiotic process under the influence of the prevailing ideology, and reaffirms the status of gender terms as a significant shaping force in social semiotics.

*Keywords: gender ideology, social-cognitive approach, critical discourse analysis, construction, definition, Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*

## **1. Introduction**

Definition is the central task of lexicography (Béjoint, 2000, p. 6). Definitions not only provide users with the “exact” meaning of a certain word, but also carry certain authoritative functions, exemplified by the fact that they are sometimes used in court cases (Moon, 1989, p. 60). Definitions reflect ideology. Moon (1989, p. 59) argued that it is impossible for lexicographers to avoid displaying their prejudices in the defining language. The act of defining, more than anything else, embodies the compilers' value judgments and ideological grounds. In practice, definitions are often in conformity with the dominant ideology, or “the ideological values of the public that is supposed to buy it” (Béjoint, 2000, p. 124). Moon (1989, p. 77) pointed out that definitions at best convey the prevailing ideology of the society whose language

is recorded. Landau (2001, p. 303) stated similarly that the English lexicography produces definitions that generally represent “the views and prejudices of the established, well-educated, upper classes”.

Gender is an important aspect of ideology and is identified as one of the key factors determining the degree to which dictionary users are likely to recognize themselves in the dictionary (Benson, 2001, p. 33). Meanwhile, gender terms play an indispensable part in social semiotics, since quite a few semiotic signs are derived directly out of them and make meaning in light of their meanings. Critics have long been complaining about the influence of dominant male ideology in dictionaries, “though thousands of dictionaries exist for many different purposes, men have edited or written virtually all of them; and the words they have collected have, in large part, been from the speech or writing of men” (Benson, 2001, p. 31). In French dictionaries, *femme* (woman) was always defined in relation to *homme* (man), but *homme* was never defined in relation to *femme* (Béjoint, 2000, p. 134). In Chinese dictionaries, *fu* (妇, woman) was once defined as “servant to her husband” (Huang, 2001, p. 10). Lexicographic practices of this kind suggest that gender ideology has an influence on definitions. However, the question regarding how that influence is exerted remains relatively under-theorized with the exceptions of works by Hoey (1996), Landau (2001) and Tenorio (2000). Hoey (1996) studied the contrast and compatibility in the definitions of “man” and “woman”, and uncovered a systematic bias in the dictionary definitions in preference of men. Landau (2001) noticed that dictionaries were often accused of biases for their treatment of definitions concerning women. Tenorio (2000) found that despite its editorial board’s policy to prevent discrimination in language usage, there were still some incoherent definitions of gender terms in the *Collins Cobuild English Language Dictionary*. These studies also observed that gender images might be constructed through discursive choices such as norm-constructing and points of view. However, the issue still deserves more attention.

Recent trends in the study of language and gender have provided us with new perspectives on the issue, notably the tendency to view gender as the result of social cognition and social construction. In social constructionist terms, knowledge is a social product mediated through language and social cognition. Language conveys meaning and creates the system of human knowledge. Language does not just mirror reality. Rather, it constitutes and creates it (Marecek, Crawford & Popp, 2004). Language is at the core of the social construction of gender. Gender identity is seen as a social construct, which is multiple and fluid, rather than as a “given” social category (Jaworski & Coupland, 1999, pp. 412-413). People should be seen as “doing gender” rather than statically “being” a particular gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Besides, there has been a “postmodern shift” (Swann, 2003, p. 625) in the way language and gender are perceived, a shift from relative clarity and fixity to relative complexity and fluidity. The emphasis is on diversity and on plural masculinities and femininities, rather than on a simple binary divide (Coates, 2015, p. vi).

In light of social semiotics, treating gender terms as social semiotic notions has a long tradition and can be traced back to the publication of Lakoff’s (1973) classic work, *Language and Woman’s Place*. Efforts have also been made in studying the

semiotic processes involved in the construction of gender (van Buren, 1992) and how social cognition affected gender notions (Litosseliti, 2013, p. 44). However, in-depth analysis of key texts in constructing gender, such as dictionary definitions, is still scarce.

This article explores the gender ideology reflected in the definitions of gender-related words in the seventh edition of the *Contemporary Chinese Dictionary* (CCD7). The following questions will be addressed: What defining strategies are employed in the definitions? What are the gender norms and gender values reflected in the definitions? What are the typical features of the gender ideology reflected in the definitions? Since dictionaries are considered an important type of social and educational discourse and gender is considered as a result of social construction mediated through social cognition and language, we will adopt van Dijk's social-cognitive approach of CDA as the framework in exploring the issue.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The social-cognitive approach to critical discourse analysis was developed by van Dijk (2001, 2009). The approach aims to make explicit the link between discourse, cognition and society. Central to its theoretical construct is the discourse-cognition-society triangle. This approach values “the fundamental importance of the study of cognition in the critical analysis of discourse, communication and interaction” (van Dijk, 2009, p. 64). It is interested in the study of mental representations and the processes of language learners when they produce and comprehend discourse and participate in the knowledge, ideologies and other beliefs shared by social groups. Meanwhile, this approach examines how cognitive phenomena are related to discourse structure, communicative situations and societal structures, such as domination and social inequality (van Dijk, 2009, p. 64). In practice, this approach involves the analysis of topics, local meaning (involving phenomena such as word choice), context models, mental models and social cognition (involving knowledge, attitudes and ideologies) (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 147).

According to van Dijk (2009, p. 65), the context of the discourse is defined by “the combined cognitive and social dimensions of the triangle”. In the study of social problems such as race, gender and global inequality, adequate discourse analysis requires both detailed cognitive and social analysis (van Dijk, 2009, p. 66). Van Dijk (2009, p. 66) regarded context as a subjective mental representation and named it *context model*. Within the discourse-cognition-society triangle, context models mediate between discourse structures and social structures at all levels of analysis. Mental models serve as the interface of the individual and the social, and explain how group beliefs may affect personal beliefs and be expressed in discourse. Social cognition refers to the beliefs or social representations individuals share with others of their group or community, such as knowledge, attitudes, values, norms and ideologies.

Following the social-cognitive approach, we will conduct analysis at the following four levels.

**Analysis of the context model** (the macro-context of the communication). In our

study, this involves analysis of the lexicographic background, status of the dictionary, function of the dictionary, etc.

**Analysis of the local meaning** (the wording of the definition). This concerns detailed analysis of the defining language, the specific wording and syntax employed in the definition.

**Analysis of the mental model.** This means the subjective representations of the events and situations observed, participated or referred to by the definitions.

**Analysis of the social cognition.** This means the knowledge, values, norms and ideologies reflected by the definition and shared with the group or community.

The results will be summarized as the gender ideology in the definitions of the dictionary. Since the objects of analysis are definitions, it is necessary for us to introduce some basic knowledge of defining, e.g., its main styles and constraints. This knowledge will prove essential for analysis of the local meaning.

Generally speaking, there are three definition styles (Hartmann & James, 1998, p. 36). The first and most commonly used is the analytical, Aristotelian definition, which consists of a hyperonym—the name of the closest superordinate category (genus proximum) and a small set of distinguishing features (*differentiae specificae*) (Adamska-Sałaciak, 2012, p. 324). It is also referred to as the genus-differentia definition, and regarded by most lexicographers as “the most prestigious type of definition” and “the hallmark of their trade” (Béjoint, 2000, p. 198). The second is the encyclopedic definition, which tends to describe objects in physical or pictorial terms (Hartmann & James, 1998, p. 36). Definitions which are genus-differentia in form may also be encyclopedic in nature (Benson, 2001, p. 167), and encyclopedic information can be conveyed through structures that cause it to be interpreted in terms of variable degrees of salience (Benson, 2001, p. 169). The third is definition by synonyms, which has been a popular practice by lexicographers for centuries, though complete synonyms are extremely rare.

The constraints on definitions in a dictionary are threefold. First, there are semantic constraints. Monolingual dictionaries often assume a context-free core meaning inherent in words (Hornscheidt, 2008, p. 109), and this concept of meaning has strong naturalizing effects. Often the core meaning is perceived as natural and inherent to a word (Hornscheidt, 2008, p. 109). Second, there are formal constraints. The conventional form of the dictionary definition embodies the premise that each sense of a word can only have one meaning. The structure of the definition constrains the dictionary to define words from a single perspective, suppressing variability and multiplicity of meaning. Third, there are spatial constraints. The economy of space in dictionaries means that words can be seen as competing for space and that the length of the definition of a certain word is often an indication of its relative importance in the language.

### 3. Data and Method

This study is mainly based on qualitative analysis of the definitional language concerning gender retrieved from CCD7. The data include definitions of 41 words from CCD7. These words were selected from a total of 491 male-related entries and 559 female-related entries, which are an exhaustive collection of all gender-related

entries in CCD7. The 41 words we have selected cover all major word categories and are supposed to represent the totality of gender-related entries as completely as possible. Besides, these words have been chosen with a consideration of their relative importance in representing the gender ideology. For example, the list includes 男性 (*nanxing*, male) and 女性 (*nvxing*, female), the prototypical vocabulary concerning gender, and words related to love, relationship and marriage, which weigh significantly in the construction of gender. It also comprises words which relate to women in various ways, including epithets for, adjectives describing and actions involving women. The original definitions are in Chinese, so translations are provided for analysis in English. Most of the translations come from the 2002 edition of *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary (Chinese-English Edition)*, published by the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. Where translations are not available due to revisions of the dictionary, the writers have supplied the translation following the original Chinese definitions as closely as possible.

The 41 words are then divided into eight categories and analyzed with the social-cognitive approach of CDA. The categorization is based on the interconnections and complementarities among the entries. The four levels of analysis, namely, context model, local meaning, mental model and social cognition, however, are not done in a mechanical and rigid manner. Rather, they are organized and presented as integrated analyses for each category. The analyses of some examples embody all four levels, while the analyses of some other examples cover only some of the levels. Examples in the same category may share some levels of analysis, especially the levels of context models and social cognition.

#### **4. Main Findings**

The context model for this study is a typical case of dictionary communication. The dictionary serves as the authority on language and the source of knowledge. The readers or consulters of the dictionary are supposed to “learn” from the dictionary. The compiler-reader relationship is a hierarchal one, which has to do with the historical status of the dictionary. CCD is endowed with the task of setting standards for the modern Chinese language. Compilation of the dictionary was a national endeavor; the compilation task was undertaken by Language Institute of Chinese Academy of Social Sciences upon the order of the State Council of People’s Republic of China. The trial version came out in 1960, the first edition in 1978, and the subsequent second through seventh editions were published respectively in 1983, 1996, 2002, 2005, 2012, and 2016. CCD is extremely influential in China and has been serving as a model for many other Chinese dictionaries. Since its publication, most medium and small-sized dictionaries in China have been compiled using CCD as their model. Nearly all student Chinese dictionaries in China are based on CCD, and due to the lack of qualified Chinese dictionaries on the market, it also serves as a learners’ dictionary for foreigners learning Chinese (Zhao, 2015). The authoritative and didactic nature of CCD makes it a nearly unquestionable source of knowledge concerning the Chinese language. Thus the definitions of gender terms carry significance in themselves. This section provides detailed analyses of eight categories of gender terms.

#### 4.1 Defining gender from a biological perspective

The concept of gender, in itself, has multiple layers, and each layer has a different perspective (Litosseliti, 2013, p. 11). The perspectives can be sociological, for instance, emphasizing the social properties of each gender; or it can be biological, stressing the biological differences. The definitions given in CCD put more emphasis on the biological perspective. To be more specific, it gives prominence to the human reproductive function.

(1) 男性：人类两性之一，能在体内产生精子。

*Nanxing*: one of two genders that has organs to produce spermatozoa for fertilizing eggs.

(2) 女性：人类两性之一，能在体内产生卵子。

*Nvxing*: one of two genders, able to produce ova.

The above definitions for male and female have implications in three aspects. First, the presumption behind such definitions is the binary view of gender: a person can either be male or female. Such an embedded presupposition can be implicitly evaluative (Benson, 2001, p. 165). The embedded binary view denies the existence of any other gender that is neither male nor female. Second, they are concerned solely with biological differences. Third, there is an emphasis on the reproductive functions of people. This definition is potentially offensive to groups of people who have been deprived of reproductive functions due to various factors. “The proximity of the reader to the cultural center of the descriptive dictionary, which purports to describe the language ‘as it is’, becomes a question of degree to which he or she is able to recognize herself as a member of the community to which the language belongs.” (Benson, 2001, p. 33) Besides, biological explanations of socially constructed differences between men and women are often used to justify male privileges or reassert family and gender roles, for example, women’s so-called “natural” roles as mothers and nurturers (Litosseliti, 2013, p. 11).

Gender can be seen as a broader, a more encompassing and complex term. As Graddol and Swann (1989) argued, the many different life experiences of women and men cannot be simply explained by biological differences between the sexes. Biological differences cannot account for the fact that a person may be more or less feminine and more or less masculine. Furthermore, “the many variations of maleness and femaleness over time/over one generation to the next, across cultures, and across contexts, show that the traits assigned to a sex by a culture are socially determined and learned, and therefore alterable” (Litosseliti, 2013, p. 11). There are ways to steer clear of this sole reliance upon biological descriptions. For example, we can offer commonsensical examples to illustrate what male means, without mentioning anything about the ability to produce spermatozoa. From a social semiotic perspective, the definition of gender has far-reaching consequences and is concerned with the recognition of gender identities and the construction of gender relations.

#### 4.2 Defining relationship from a heterosexual norm

Relationships constitute an important dimension of gender construction. The definition of relationships, therefore, establishes certain norms concerning the interrelations

among people of different genders. For a social person, being in a relationship is a social practice and also brings changes to the person in a social semiotic sense. For a large proportion of human history, the relational norm could be said to be heterosexual, though there are periods in history, ancient Greece for instance, where intimate relationships between people of the same gender were considered a normality. The definitions in CCD7 illustrate that heterosexual relationships are regarded as the normality.

- (3) 恋爱: 男女互相爱慕; 男女互相爱慕的行动表现。

*Lianai*: mutual love and the behavior of this between man and woman.

- (4) 单相思: 指男女间仅一方对另一方爱慕。

*Danxiangsi*: be lovesick for sb. without his or her knowledge or with no return of feelings.

- (5) 爱情: 男女相爱的感情。

*Aiqing*: love between a man and a woman.

Both 恋爱 (relationship) and 爱情 (love) are defined as something between a male and a female. Love is defined as the love between man and woman, indicating that only the amorous feelings between man and woman can be defined as the legitimate form of love. Anything other than that will be considered deviating from the social norm.

- (6) 婚姻: 结婚的事; 因结婚而产生的夫妻关系。

*Hunyun*: matrimony, marriage; wedlock; live as husband and wife after marriage.

- (7) 结婚: 男子和女子经过合法手续结合成为夫妻。

*Jiehun*: a man and a woman become a married couple through legal procedures.

Marriage is defined as the combination of two people who are going to live as husband and wife, indicating that it can only happen between a man and a woman, which happens to be the only recognized form of combination by the Chinese law as well.

Sexual love is also defined as something which can only happen between two genders, conforming to the traditional view.

- (8) 性爱: 指两性之间的爱欲。

*Xingai*: sexual love between two sexes.

- (9) 同性恋: 同性别之间的人之间的性爱行为。

*Tongxinglian*: sexual desire for those of the same sex.

Homosexuality is included as an entry, since it is a social fact which cannot be overlooked altogether. But again, two points are worth mentioning about this definition. First, it forms an antithesis to the definition of sexual love in (8). Second, it reduces homosexuality to mere sexual acts, denying its spiritual side. By limiting homosexual relationships to the carnal level, it tries to stay in accordance with the definition of love, which, as aforementioned, is the psychological bonding between

two genders. Nevertheless, it could be considered an improvement compared with the portrayal of homosexuality in the trial version of CCD (1973), which defined it as a “psychologically pervert act”.

### 4.3 Defining marriage as the social norm

In Chinese culture, there has been a tendency to view marriage as privileged over singleness (Fei, 2014; Cheng, 2015). Marriage has been regarded as the destiny for women, a convenient channel for them to gain social approval (Cheng, 2015, p. 150). The preference for marriage can be explained from several aspects. It is, in the first place, the legitimate way of sustaining a long-term sexual relationship with someone from another sex, and hence, the legitimate way to reproduce one’s offspring. Secondly, it is one of the fundamental forms of social organization, the means by which families are formed and blood ties are established and descended. Thirdly, marriage may, in certain circumstances, yield economic benefits, in the form of dowries or other wedding gifts. In ancient as well as modern China, marriage weighs significantly in the lives of both men and women.

(10) 老姑娘：年纪大了还没结婚的女子。

*Laoguniang*: a single woman who is above the proper age of marriage.

(11) 大男大女：指超过适婚年龄较多的未婚男女。

*Danandanv*: single men or women above the average age for marriage.

老姑娘 (*laoguniang*) refers to a woman who is still not married over the proper age. The presumption is that a woman should normally get married before a certain age. Otherwise, she would be deemed eccentric, or a failure in life. The English equivalent “spinster” has more or less the same connotations. (11) 大男大女 (*danandanv*, over-aged single men and women) is constructed along the same line as (10), only extending the scope to both genders. The notion behind the above terms is that a person, a male or a female, should get married when they reach a certain age. The marriage norm has great significance in society because it is concerned with the means of social reproduction, in the sense that a stable society can be maintained and developed only through marriage. To strengthen the marriage norm, society has devised legal, social and religious restrictions concerning marriage (Fei, 2014[1947], p. 50).

Another notion is that one can only legitimately bear children after marriage, as (12) suggests. As Fei (2014[1947], p. 42) points out, marriage and reproduction are always closely connected and reproduction is often based on marriage.

(12) 奉子成婚：男女双方因女方怀孕而结婚。

*Fengzichenghun*: get married because the female party of a relationship is pregnant.

Since marriage is considered the norm, unmarried people past a certain age are inevitably presented as peripheral members of the society. The definition of (13) 打光棍儿 (*daguangguner*, remain a bachelor) indicates three situations in which one might remain single: unmarried, divorced, or having lost one’s spouse. None of the three situations are desired in a society which values marriage and establishment

of a family. The Chinese term 打光棍儿 (*daguangguner*) embodies, in itself, a derogatory sense. By this notion, the people who stay single are represented, not as choosing at their own will, but as imposed by the environment or resulting from their own incapability. A similar yet currently more popular term, 单身狗 (*danshengou*, single dog) is often used to refer to a single person. By comparing a single person to a lonely dog, the term indicates the undesirability of the status of being single. The definition of 单身汉 implies that men can be divided into two categories, either single or married. This dichotomy of men based on their marital status again reflects the marriage norm at work.

- (13) 打光棍儿: 指成年人没有结婚或离异, 丧偶过单身生活 (多用于男子)。

*Daguangguner*: an adult who is either unmarried or divorced, and thus leading a single life (usu. of a man remaining a bachelor).

- (14) 单身汉: 没有妻子的人, 有时也指没有跟妻子一起生活的人。

*Danshenhan*: an unmarried man or a man who is not living with his wife.

Combining the heterosexual norm and the marriage norm, which are inherently connected to each other, we arrive at a Normal-Abnormal continuum, constructed through the definitional language of related entries. Along this continuum, the most normal, socially accepted forms are heterosexual relationships and heterosexual marriages at the proper age; less normal, less accepted forms are single people, or marriage past a certain age; if we make a further distinction of single people into voluntarily single and involuntarily single, we will find voluntarily single people are still less normal and less accepted; and towards the abnormal endpoint we would find homosexual relationships and same-sex marriages, though again, their social acceptability is culturally dependent. A tentative categorization of the above entries and definitions in terms of the Normal-Abnormal continuum is given in Table 1. The code of normality, once established, has deep implications for individuals and the society, and forms the basis of the semiotic features of family and relationship.

Table 1. Gender-related terms along the Normal-Abnormal continuum

←	→	
Normal	Abnormal	
爱情 ( <i>aiqing</i> , love)	老姑娘 ( <i>laoguniang</i> , spinster)	同性恋 ( <i>tongxinglian</i> , homosexual)
婚姻 ( <i>hunyun</i> , marriage)	大男大女 ( <i>danandanv</i> , over-aged single men and women)	
结婚 ( <i>jiehun</i> , marry)	打光棍儿 ( <i>daguangguner</i> , remain a bachelor)	变性 ( <i>bianxing</i> , transgendered)
性爱 ( <i>xingai</i> , sexual love)	单身汉 ( <i>danshenhan</i> , bachelor)	

#### 4.4 Constructing cultural stereotypes in the defining language

CCD has an overwhelming number of words describing the looks of women. They

can be further divided into several categories. The first category describes women's looks in a direct way. For example,

(15) 花容月貌: 形容女子美丽的容貌。

*Huarongyuemao*: flower-like features and moon-like face—a pretty woman.

(16) 天姿国色: 形容女子容貌非常美丽, 也指容貌非常美丽的女子。

*Tianziguose*: women of matchless beauty.

(17) 标致: 相貌, 姿态美丽 (多用于女子)。

*Biaozhi*: (usu. of women) beautiful, handsome.

(18) 秀色可餐: 形容女子姿容非常美丽或景物非常优美。

*Xiusekecan*: be a feast to the eye (usually said of a very attractive woman or beautiful scenery).

(19) 花枝招展: 形容女子打扮得十分艳丽。

*Huazhizhaozhan*: (of women) be gorgeously dressed.

(20) 风韵: 风度神韵 (多用于女子)。

*Fengyun*: (oft. of a woman) graceful bearing; charm.

In the definitional language above, the adjective 美丽 (*meili*, beautiful/good-looking), appears three times. Its frequency in the dictionary context naturally establishes a connection between women and the popular social aesthetic conception towards women: a typical woman should be good-looking, and women are partially judged by their looks. This is in line with the recurrent finding in the English context that females are described in terms of appearance and sexuality more than males are (Moon, 2014, p. 10).

(21) 郎才女貌: 男的才华出众, 女的姿容出色, 形容男女双方非常相配。

*Langcainvmao*: a brilliant young scholar and a beautiful woman—a good match.

In (21), men and women are not measured by the same standards. Men are judged by their talents while women by their looks. Since women are constantly judged by their looks, when their looks diminish as they age, they will be seen as less valuable, as the following examples demonstrate.

(22) 徐娘半老: 指有风韵的妇女已到中年。

*Xuniangbanlao*: a middle-aged woman who used to be beautiful.

(23) 人老珠黄: 妇女年老失去青春容颜, 就像珍珠年久变黄不值钱一样。

*Renlaozhuang*: (of women) no longer be held in esteem in old age, like a pearl whose lustre has faded over time.

Since beauty is established as the benchmark for the value of women, definitions of (22) and (23) are easily understandable. (22) carries a sense of irony: a woman has been beautiful in her young age, but that woman has reached her middle age and she tries hard to cling to her looks. (23) compares women to pearls which turn yellowish and devaluate with the flow of time. Both entries describe women against aging, representing the process of aging as detrimental. This echoes the view expressed in

Moon (2014) that, with respect to women in older age groups, loss of youthfulness is equated with loss of sexual status, visibility and ultimately value.

(24) 丰乳: 采取手术, 服药等方法使女性的乳房丰满; 丰满的乳房。

*Fengru*: breast enlargement; to enlarge a woman's breast through surgery or drugs; well-developed breasts.

The term 丰乳 (*fengru*, breast enlargement), can be used both as a verb and as a noun. As a verb, it refers to the process of breast enlargement by surgery or pharmaceutical means. As a noun, it refers to well-developed or fully-grown breasts. The presumption behind the definition is that a woman's breasts should be well-developed; and underdeveloped or small breasts can be considered a deficiency in women.

Ornaments are, in nature, the extension of one's looks. They are used either as tools or accessories in an effort to beautify one's looks. It is noted that these tools or ornaments are often defined in relation to women, due to the fact that they have been used mostly by women. Nevertheless, the defining language employed contributes to women's image as someone in the "male stare".

(25) 绞脸: 妇女修饰容貌时用绞在一起的细线一张一合去掉脸上的汗毛。

*Jiaolian*: (of a married woman) depilate facial hair; remove fine hair from the face by rolling two twisted threads over the skin.

(26) 珞: 妇女戴在耳垂上的一种装饰品。

*Dang*: eardrop; earring, item of jewelry worn by women, on or pendant from the ear, esp. the earlobe.

(27) 粉黛: 妇女化妆用的白粉和青黑色的颜料; 借指妇女。

*Fendai*: (female cosmetics) white powder and black pigment; (beautiful) woman.

These are encyclopedic definitions that construct the cultural context in which women function as the object of male knowledge and, consequently, male consumption. In encyclopedic definitions, the interaction between the content of definitions and their semiotic forms is significant in two ways. First, economy of space forces the definer to select from the encyclopedic information available. Thus a dictionary definition for a proper noun does not contain just any information about its referent. The reader must assume that it contains only the information that is most salient. Second, this encyclopedic information is placed in specific locations within the structure of the definition, where different degrees of salience are attached to different pieces of information (Benson, 2001, p. 169).

In the definitions above, women serve both as the subject and the theme, in the typical pattern of "women do something to their looks", in which women are put in a salient position. This pattern suggests a strong connection between women and these items and their looks. Women are not inanimate objects waiting for men's attention; rather, they are active decorators, doing this or that to their looks, so as to win out in an imagined contest for men's attention.

#### 4.5 Constructing gender hierarchies privileging men over women

Women are defined in relation to men in several different ways. First, women are described as wives to men. (28), for example, defines women as belonging to the family of her future husband. (29) defines an adult, married women in a pejorative way: 老娘们儿 (*laoniangmener*) often refers to a woman who knows nothing but gossips. (30) is a metaphor, referring to the situation where someone's wife has an affair, relegating women to a morally vulnerable position. (31) refers to the legal spouse of a man, which is a term widely used during old China, when official law allows polygamy. (32) refers to the act that a husband dismisses his wife and runs her back to her own family. These definitions construct a gender hierarchy in marital relations: Women are seen as the property of their future husbands, as intellectually inferior beings, as property that can be coveted and stolen by others, as one in several from which the husband can choose at his will, or as something which can be dismissed legally without her own consent.

(28) 人家：指女子未来的丈夫家。

*Renjia*: family of one's husband-to-be.

(29) 老娘们儿：指已婚女子；指成年妇女（含贬义）。

*Laoniangmener*: (derog.) woman, especially one who is married.

(30) 戴绿帽子：称人妻子有外遇（含讥讽意）。

*Dailvmaozi*: wear a green hat, (of a man) having an unfaithful wife; be made a cuckold.

(31) 大老婆：正妻。有的地区叫大婆儿。

*Dalaopo*: wife of a man with a concubine.

(32) 休妻：旧时指丈夫把妻子赶回娘家，断绝夫妻关系。

*Xiuqi*: put one's wife away; discard one's wife; divorce one's wife.

In the defining language of (32) 休妻 (*xiuqi*, divorce one's wife), divorce is used as a one-way verb: it is something which only husband does to wife, but not vice versa. The husband is the subject and the initiator of the divorce, but there is no way the wife can act as the subject. Neither the definition nor the structure of the entry allows a woman to initiate a divorce.

(33) 女汉子：言谈，举止等具有男子汉气概的女子。

*Nvhanzi*: a tough woman; a woman with masculine aura.

(34) 男尊女卑：男的尊贵，女的卑贱，是以男性为中心的封建伦理观念。

*Nanzunvbei*: men are superior to women, male-centered feudal ethics which holds men as superior to women.

(33) 女汉子 (*nvhanzi*, a tough woman) is a word newly added to CCD. It refers to a woman who behaves as capable as a man and has a manly style. Usually, it contradicts traditional notions of women being shy, weak, timid, or vulnerable. The definition seems to have elevated women's status, but actually falls to the trap of measuring women against men. The counterpart of this word, a man who behaves like a woman, is often looked down upon by others. This contributes to the notion that

men are higher in status than women. We can find the source of this attitude in (34), which states clearly that men are nobler and higher in status than women.

#### 4.6 Defining women in relation to sex and prostitution

In defining a term, the perspective chosen is crucial. The perspective from which words are defined becomes the semiotic center of the dictionary, and the central perspective from which knowledge is produced (Benson, 2001, p. 177). In writing a definition, the lexicographers have to adopt a particular angle of vision, which in turn determines how the definition goes. (35) 淫妇 (*yinfu*) is defined as a sluttish woman. But again the question we have to bear in mind is: from what angle of vision is a woman seen as sluttish? The word is often used in classical Chinese novels. When a woman cheats on her husband, she is subsequently called 淫妇 (a sluttish woman) and is then subject to all kinds of social abuse. This is definitely a patriarchal perspective, by which the patriarchal society judges the behavior of women and restricts her freedom. The fact is that a woman who is called 淫妇 (a sluttish woman) may not be sluttish at all; and she might just as well have fallen in love with someone other than her husband. The same goes with 风骚 (*fengsao*, flirtatious) in (36), where a woman is described as coquettish or flirtatious.

(35) 淫妇: 淫荡的女人。

*Yinfu*: a sluttish woman.

(36) 风骚: 指妇女举止轻佻。

*Fengsao*: (of a woman) coquettish; flirtatious.

(37) 花魁: 百花的魁首, 多指梅花, 旧时也比喻有名的妓女。

*Huakui*: the queen of flowers, in old times, an epithet for the plum blossom; referring to a famous courtesan in old times.

There is also a tendency to relate women to prostitution, as sexual objects of men. 花魁 (*huakui*, the queen of flowers) in (37), is often used in ancient times to refer to a famous prostitute. Here again, women are seen as the object of men's sexual imagination. The definition given, along with the entry itself, is from the male perspective. The defined word becomes the semiotic periphery of the dictionary, the object of the knowledge produced at the center. It is in this sense that androcentrism operates within the semiotic structures of the dictionary itself. In fact, they could easily be updated in ways that would make them less evaluative. The fact that they have not been updated, however, is significant. The definition of 花魁 (*huakui*) is also an encyclopedia treatment and is thus related to objectification of women, since objectification often implies encyclopedic treatment (Benson, 2001, p. 166). These definitions contribute to the semiotic construction of women's status, and also of the patriarchal ideology.

#### 4.7 Constructing women as victims of objectification

Women in the dictionary have been objectified as an object of male knowledge. Objectification also implies the ideological construction of a "subject" and hence of a cultural context within which the discourse of the dictionary works (Benson, 2001, p.

166). One aspect of objectification is the identification of women as victims.

(38) 淫棍：惯于玩弄，奸污女性的男人。

*Yingun*: womanizer.

(39) 非礼：指调戏，猥亵（妇女）。

*Feili*: rude or improper behavior (towards women).

(40) 花心：指爱情上不专一的感情(多指男性)；指爱情上不专一。

*Huaxin*: flower heart, unfaithful towards love.

The definitions above all involve women in the specific roles of victims. (38) equals, roughly, to womanizer in English. Its definition puts women in the position of object, to be acted on and to be hurt. (39) is a verb, whose equivalent in English could be “to sexually harass someone”, meaning to conduct rude or improper behavior towards someone, and information in the parentheses suggests that the “someone” is usually a woman. (40) is an adjective used to describe someone who is unfaithful to relationships and plays with others’ feelings. The information in parentheses suggests that that unfaithful person is often a man, again putting women in the position of victims. The constant identification of women as victims is depressing, because victim status can be damaging. “If women increasingly view themselves entirely as victims through the lens of the oppressor and allow themselves to be viewed that way by others, they become enfeebled and miserable” (Talbot, 2005, p. 167). This sort of explanation puts women in a passive and victimized role and deprives women of their own voices, thus leading to the objectification of women, constructing them as “inanimate objects” (Matthiessen, Teruya & Lam, 2010, p. 79).

#### 4.8 Defining women’s rights

The length of an entry signifies, in a certain way, the importance attached to a word by lexicographers. From this perspective, 女权 (*nvquan*, women’s rights) in (41), is dealt with undue negligence.

(41) 女权：妇女在社会上应享有的权利。

*Nvquan*: women’s rights; rights due to women in a society.

In modern Chinese language, 女权 can be interpreted in two ways. It can either refer to women’s rights in specific, or the notion of feminism in general. The definition given in CCD7 opts for the specific and explains it as “rights due to women in a society”. The sense of feminism is absent from the dictionary. A better equivalent in Chinese of the word “feminism” is 女权主义 (*nvquanzhuyi*), but it is not included at all, which is to say that the notion of feminism is altogether absent from CCD. There is no way that the users may know anything about feminism from the dictionary, despite the fact that it is one of the most influential trends of thinking in the past few decades. Some would argue for the simplified definition on the grounds that a dictionary is not an encyclopedia, and if all views were to be presented, the definition would turn into an encyclopedic article (Gold, 1985, p. 233). But this is always a matter of choice and degree; if lexicographers feel compelled to explain

certain concepts more clearly, they always manage to do so. Political terms, especially those that are connected to socialist ideology, receive maximum attention, and consequently maximum space. For example, the definition of Marxism receives 11 lines; socialism, 9 lines; socialist reformation, 9 lines; and Three Represents, 10 lines. The fact that the definition of 女权 (*nvquan*, women's rights) comprises no more than one line indicates that the issue of women's rights ranks low on the scale against which lexicographers allocate dictionary space.

## 5. Discussion

This section consists of three parts: a discussion on how dictionaries contribute to the social ideology through a naturalizing process and relevant strategies of legitimation; an exploration into how things can be done better in future lexicographic practices; and some reflections on how gender terms in dictionaries relate to the issue of social semiotics.

### 5.1 Dictionaries as instruments of naturalization

Dictionaries can serve as instruments of naturalization, first and foremost because they are both carriers of social ideology and tools of education. Dictionaries are themselves a result of ideology and at the same time contribute to the stabilization of ideology. Ideology is defined as the representation of world outlooks which constitute social cognition and world (Fairclough, 2003). It is the means by which societies establish and maintain power relationships, the means of controlling and depriving (Reisigl & Wodak, 2009, p. 88). Fairclough (1992) argued that the dominant ideology-discourse structure is capable of naturalizing ideology as common sense or standard knowledge accepted by the society. To a certain extent, dictionaries are products of ideology, presented as common knowledge and shared understanding. Through a process of naturalization, the naturalness and commonality of definitions are internalized as daily discourse. This naturalizing process is also called "legitimation", "whereby something becomes legitimate according to the values of a particular society" (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 68). Van Leeuwen (2007) identified four legitimation strategies: authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization and mythopoesis. Legitimation through dictionaries fits into the authorization strategy, since dictionaries are normally considered authoritative sources of knowledge and serve as models of usage.

### 5.2 Suggestions for future lexicographic practice

Dictionary compilation comprises complicated processes of selection, explanation and representation. Under the spell of patriarchal traditions, we tend to observe and represent men and women through different perspectives. Men are usually pictured in much larger social contexts, fulfilling ability-requiring tasks, while women are usually depicted as revolving around the domestic sphere, raising children, doing housework, or looking after the elderly (Hu, Xu & Hao, 2019). The spatial and temporal constraints on women in dictionaries impinge on the perspectives through which we look at them. These internalized gender impressions inevitably bear on all tasks of lexicographic practice, including the central task of defining. That is

exactly why extra caution has to be taken in tackling the definition of gender terms. The fundamental difficulties lie in the perspectives attached to gender terms, and the contexts of use in which they are likely to be offensive. Perspective awareness, labelling, and application of usage notes are some of the ways which can be adopted in future lexicographic practice.

Keeping aware of various perspectives regarding gender terms may prove harder than it seems, since much knowledge concerning genders has long been internalized and accepted as shared knowledge. Lexicographers need to distance themselves from the objects of their work, refrain from their own ideological standing, or even challenge their own beliefs and the accepted version of truth. Lexicographers should strive to make explicit the false presumptions and the hidden perspectives underlying these terms, and then guard against them in the task of defining. The task may sound daunting, but it well deserves the effort.

Labeling will help in some way, since by labeling we can assign some words to specific historical periods and genres. Labeling is especially useful when dealing with offensive and insulting terms; by labeling some derogatory terms as insulting or offensive, we can warn users of the potential detrimental effects in using these terms and raise language awareness. However, too many labels would give the dictionary a heavy feeling, with the danger of being accused of viewing language “as a fortified castle of virtue” (Landau, 2001, p. 234). But all things considered, a castle of virtue is better than a castle of evil. It is deplorable that CCD does not have a strong tradition of labeling and most of the offensive terms are presented as if they can be used for all occasions. Changes in this aspect are needed.

Usage notes are useful tools for specifying contexts of use. They can point to the specific historical contexts from which these terms arise, or the concrete situations in which these terms have been used. They will solve some though not all of the problems in making explicit the implicit perspectives and presumptions. Basically, to clarify the ideological positioning of terms such as 淫妇 (*yinfu*, a sluttish woman) and 男尊女卑 (*nanzunnvbei*, men are superior to women), definitions need to be much longer than they are now. That means, above all, dictionaries shall devote more space and attention to the treatment of gender terms.

### **5.3 The role of gender terms in social semiotics**

Gender terms are not only linguistic notions, but also social semiotic notions. This seems somewhat obvious, since the idea of “language as social semiotic” has been well established since Halliday’s (1978) monumental work. Hence, all linguistic signs are at the same time signs in social semiotics. However, an emphasis on their status as social semiotic notions would help us to properly evaluate their importance in the realm of social semiotics. This needs some elaboration.

First, gender terms in dictionaries have discursive power. Lexicographical practice is discursive, contributing to the construction of power relationship in the society. Through its representation of the reality and social positioning of characters, it helps to produce and reproduce the inequality among social classes, genders and nationalities (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997, p. 258). Lexicographical practice reflects, and contributes to, discourses of various kinds. “Discourses are ways of representing

and constructing reality so that power relations are constructed, maintained and contested via discourse.” (Baker & Ellece, 2011, p. 99) Gender terms in dictionaries constitute part of the gender discourse of the society and contribute to the maintenance of the prevalent gender ideology.

Second, gender terms are not ordinary semiotic signs. They are social semiotic signs which operate at a fundamental level, which participate in the construction of basic social structures and the enactment of basic interpersonal relationships. Many forms of social semiotic signs and sign systems are dependent upon these essential gender items. Novels, dramas, movies, to name just a few, are all sign systems which draw heavily upon themes such as gender images, gender relations, love and marriage. Interests in gender have indeed transcended the scope of linguistics and covered nearly all areas of humanities. Only by acknowledging the social semiotic nature and semiotic significance of gender notions can we begin to fully appreciate their semiotic potential and theoretical implications.

## 6. Conclusion

This article explores the gender ideology in the definitions of CCD7 and arrives at the following findings. First, the formal constraints of dictionaries often restrict the definition of gender words to a single perspective. The biological perspective is adopted in CCD7's definition of basic gender items. Second, CCD7's definition of gender items is based on a binary view of gender. Third, CCD7 constructs a continuum along the line of normal and abnormal. Heterosexual relationships and heterosexual marriages are defined as the social norms, and other forms are either excluded or defined as deviating from the norms. Fourth, the definitions of some items establish a close connection between women and their looks. Fifth, the defining language tends to place women in the role of objects and victims for men. Last but not least, the definitions related to women's rights are confined in space, indicating the lexicographers' negligence of them. The binary gender, the courtship and marriage system, the emphasis on reproduction, the requirements on women's looks and sexual appeals, the norms and the deviations, the objectification and victimization of women, and the negligence of women's rights, collude to build a cohesive gender ideology which sustains itself through social construction and ideological indoctrination. The study also confirms the social semiotic nature of gender items, arguing that they are essential social semiotic notions which operate at a fundamental level.

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