1. Introduction

Several assumptions are often made concerning the legislative and legal world and its language. One of these assumptions is that words are crucially important in law (a.o. Danet 1980 in Pauwels: 1998, 29): ‘in a most basic sense, the law would not exist without language’. Van Son (1996, 15) stresses this importance in De taal van de advocaat (The Lawyers Language) by mentioning that in Dutch lawyers were called taalmannen (!), ‘language men’, in former centuries.

Another assumption is that, as Kurzon (1989) and the authors of Femme, j’écris ton nom. Guide d’aide à la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres, grades et fonctions (1999) point out, legal language is conservative. The context of the assumption here is the feminisation of titles etc. in modern French. By way of example these authors mention that French legal language has up till now kept feminine word forms like demanderesse (plaintiff) and défenderesse (defendant). These words are formed with the suffix –eresse that is only seldom found in modern French. These and other feminine word forms were attested in several documents throughout the Middle Ages. In the 16th century, however, the masculine forms became predominant in French (Houdebine-Gravaud: 1998, 149).

In Dutch the above mentioned terms are translated as eiseres and verweerster, both exclusively used in legal language and also built with feminine suffixes still productive. These agent nouns, however, are used in a way that is unusual in modern Dutch, i.e. without the article, and therefore maybe somewhat conservative anyway? In both examples, we can see that the feminine derivation is used. So, are feminine agent nouns, job-titles common in Dutch legal documents?

2. Visibility of men and women in Dutch legal texts in Belgium with some reference to use in Belgian French

If for German, English and French research on gender in legal texts was in some cases carried out several decades ago (Guentherodt: 1984, Ritchie: 1975 e.g.), for Dutch the interest in gender aspects of mainly administrative language is a fairly recent phenomenon (Lutjeharms: 1998, Verbiest: 1997 and 1999).

2.1 Origin of the research

This paper is the outcome of several years’ work performed on (literally) hundreds of student papers on the genesis of a Belgian law, decree or ordinance. When reading (and correcting) these papers, as when reading other legal or official documents in Dutch, I was often struck by the absence of feminine agent and role nouns, job titles and personal pronouns. Mostly masculine agent and role nouns and job titles are used in what is often considered a generic, gender neutral way. As far as the legal actors are concerned, it seems as though mainly male function and role names that function as generic forms are used, (rechter = judge, procureur = public prosecutor, commissaris = commissioner).
Law subjects are referred to not only through male role nouns (overtreder = offender, dader = perpetrator, eigenaar = owner), but also through neutral nouns (rechtzoekende = litigant, tussenpersoon = intermediary, gemachtigde = deputy, authorized representative). Theoretically, the use of neutral agent nouns should guarantee equal treatment of men and women, but since neutral agent nouns are generally combined with male pronouns, the overall image that is created is rather male. Only in legal texts that specifically concern women, e.g. women’s labour, motherhood and trafficking/trading in women, do women appear to be explicitly mentioned.

2.2 Do masculine designations include women?

Les mots masculins désignent-ils aussi les femmes? is a question that is also asked by Lamothe / Moreau (2001), though not specifically with respect to legal language. Lamothe / Moreau had a questionnaire filled out by two groups of people, both French speaking, one group from Québec and one from Belgium. The groups were chosen because, even though they speak the same language, they have different traditions concerning linguistic feminization both at a lexical and a syntactic level (see below).

In Canada feminization was introduced in the late 70’s. The feminine forms of professeur and ingénieur (i.e. professeure and ingénieure) for example, are very commonly used, as well as what the authors call syntactic feminisation with regard to generic and collective use as in Les droits de la personne humaine instead of Les droits de l’homme, or Réunion des chargés et chargées de cours.

In French-speaking Belgium it was only in 1993 that a decree recommended that administrations should feminize job titles. Lamothe / Moreau link this to the fact that the feminist movement is much more active in North America than in Europe, and that in Canada women work in professions that European women never entered. They consider it interesting therefore to compare the perception of linguistic gender by both groups.

The questionnaire included 26 short sentences with an underlined masculine word in each. The testees were asked to indicate whether each of these words referred only either to a man or men (masculine interpretation), or also referred to a woman or women (mixed interpretation). Although for both groups the answers showed a great deal of variety depending on the items, only 6 words for the Québec group, and 5 for the Belgian group had less than 50% of mixed interpretation, one of them being homme d’église, which in Belgium was considered as mixed by only 6%. This was not surprising, since in traditionally catholic Belgium there are very few women priests.

With more than 50% of mixed interpretation for most items, the main trend is clearly to read masculine forms as including women. Of course, as the authors mention, the test itself continuously referred to the fact that women could be included, so that the testees were permanently reminded of it. Except for one item, i.e. the above mentioned homme d’église, all percentages of inclusion of women by Belgians, however, are higher than inclusion percentages by Canadians, probably because the latter are less used to masculine forms that include women. On the other hand, inhabitants of Québec being used to feminine forms have a more masculine perception of masculine forms.

Lamothe / Moreau also synthesize the results as follows. A masculine form is more easily interpreted as mixed in the following cases:

- when it is in the plural form;
- when it has a generic value;
- when it has an epicene form;
- when it is the signifiant of a social category where women are well represented;
• when it is used in a context that doesn’t orient/guide the reader towards an exclusively masculine interpretation.

It is probable, however, that masculine nouns will be interpreted as referring only to men

• when they are in the singular,
• in a specific use,
• in a form that is different from the feminine form,
• referring to a social category with few women and
• in a context that is associated with masculine elements.

2.3 The situation in Flanders

The situation in Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) could be compared as far as traditions concerning feminisation are concerned to that of French speaking Belgium as described by Lamothe/Moreau.

2.4 He or He/she? Two student enquiries

2.4.1 Law students

A small scale enquiry was carried out among a number of law students who recently handed in their copies of the above-mentioned paper. The aim was to discover their mental image of the gender of people “behind” agent nouns. The students were asked to choose three jobs they would like to do after law school. For each, they were required to write five or six lines about what a good representative of the job has to be or has to be able to do. The investigation, presented as an enquiry about job image building, may also give us an idea as to whether “he’s” and “she’s” are concerned by the jobs.

Of the 71 respondents 26 were male, 45 female. This fairly well reflects the current gender proportions at our law school. While filling out the form, the students had just studied a coursebook in which I systematically use \textit{hij/zij} (he/she) to refer to generic function and role names. Nevertheless only 5 out of 71 systematically use \textit{hij/zij} to refer to generic male names. Of these five respondents only one is a male student.

Furthermore, one student uses two generic names and one feminine form. With the generic form she uses \textit{hij/zij} or generic constructions like ‘people who…’, with the feminine form, of course, only \textit{zij}. The fact that this student uses the generic forms for professions like juridisch adviseur (legal adviser) and juridisch vertegenwoordiger van een bedrijf in het buitenland (legal representative of a company abroad), whereas the feminine form is used for lerares (female teacher) is probably not a coincidence, since the teacher’s profession in Belgium is highly “feminized”.

Most of the students, however, use only \textit{hij} (he) when referring to generic forms: 25 out of 26 for male students and 30 out of 45 for female students, i.e. 55 of the total number of 71, although there are almost twice as many female as male students. As we can see from these numbers, the situation is very clear for male students. For female students on the other hand, there is a grey zone between the two extremes. Ten students make some kind of a mix. One of them uses three generic masculine forms. In one case her reference is a masculine pronoun (vakbondsleider = trade union leader), in one case both \textit{hij/zij} and \textit{zij} (maatschappelijk assistent = social worker) and in the third case \textit{hij/zij} (kabinetsmedewerker = private secretary’s office assistant). Three students use generic nouns which they refer to either with \textit{hij/zij} or with \textit{hij}, one of both being used systematically within one category.
by each of these students. One student uses three feminine nouns (advocate, lerares, verpleegster = nurse) and feminine pronouns, except for the first profession she mentions, i.e. lawyer. Although she uses the feminine form, she repeatedly refers to it with masculine personal pronouns, which of course is considered as grammatically incorrect.

Five female students use generic masculine on the one hand and feminine forms on the other. Three of them do it systematically, i.e. they use feminine forms in all cases where this is possible (i.e. where a feminine form exists) and refer to them with feminine pronouns, but refer exclusively with male pronouns to generic masculine forms. One of these generic forms is professor that is seen as a male profession by that student. Finally, two students use both generic masculine forms and feminine forms, but do so unsystematically. Several students when using feminine names, use the word ambassadrice as a job name without thinking of the fact that this word in Dutch isn’t always a function name, but that it also is the name for an ambassador’s wife.

2.4.2 Students of Dutch in Germanic languages

As a control group the same enquiry was carried out on a very small scale (sixteen students) with students of Dutch in their second year of Germanic language studies. A comparison might, however, still be interesting for different reasons: first, because of the linguistic awareness of the students (they had a course on gender linguistics) and secondly, because in this group there are even more female students than in law school: two male, fourteen female students.

For this group the results are different from that of the law school group. Six out of sixteen students use only the masculine pronoun hij; among them are the two male students in the group. Out of the other ten female students, three only use zij, mostly with feminine agent nouns, four hij/zij or je (you) and three use hij/zij and hij rather unsystematically.

In this group there is no majority for hij, neither for hij/zij. Among female students there seems to be uncertainty about which form to use.

2.5 He or He/she? Data from student papers

Are the results of the enquiry among law students representative (significant)? How do they represent human beings in their papers? This will be illustrated with a few examples from papers selected on the basis of the date on which the law dealt with was promulgated. One of the papers is about the law of 28 March 1952 that concerns the aliens police. Another paper about a law of 13 March 1973 about detention on remand, and a third about a law of 29 April 2001 on the guardianship of minors. Is there an evolution in the representation of women in these laws?

Another selection criterium was the interest of gender bias in the paper / law. For that reason we will also have a look at a paper about the 14 May 1981 law concerning the right of inheritance of the surviving spouse as well as at the 4 July 1989 law concerning rape (indecent assault).

2.5.1 Law of March 28th 1952 concerning the aliens police

The paper about the 1952 law first mentions the word vreemdeling = foreigner/alien in the plural in a quotation from the famous Dutch jurist Hugo Grotius (1625) De iure belli ac pacis: “Men mag vreemdelingen die, na uit hun land verdreven te zijn, om bescherming vragen daurzaam verblijf niet onthouden”, i.e.: Aliens who have been driven out of their country and have asked for protection may not be denied permanent residence. This is followed by a few other plural forms: personen, vluchtelingen, mensen (persons, refugees, people); later in the text singular and plural forms are used alternately. The plural can be used here to avoid male gender bias. The word vreemdeling, just like vluchteling is grammatically masculine in Dutch. A feminine form can be built by adding -e,  

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but it is very rarely used. The masculine form as gender neutral is more common. A quick count shows that the student in his paper used the singular masculine form exactly as often as the plural of the word *vreemdeling*, i.e. 24 times each. The feminine form was not used. The gender neutral form, however, was always referred to with *hij* (he).

*Het wordt de vreemdeling niet makkelijk gemaakt om in België te verblijven. Hij moet over een toelating beschikken, die verleend wordt door de Minister van Justitie.*

*The alien will find it hard to remain in Belgium. He will need to have the necessary permit delivered by the Ministry of Justice.*

...dat een vreemdeling die het rijk binnenkomt zonder de vereiste toelating en zonder te verklaren dat hij vluchting is een inbreuk pleept op artikel 12 van de wet van 28 maart 1952.

... that an alien that enters the country without the necessary permit and without declaring that he is a refugee is in breach of article 12 of the law of 28 March 1952.

The Minister of Justice also is referred to with masculine pronouns. This is quite obvious since there were no women ministers in Belgium in the fifties - Belgium had its first woman minister in 1965, but there has been no woman Minister of Justice until now. The male image is rather strong here since both minister and foreigner/alien are referred to with masculine personal and possessive pronouns in the same sentence.

*Niet alleen geeft de minister van justitie een toelating aan de vreemdeling om in België te komen of verblijven, maar ook heeft hij de macht om een vreemdeling die een vergunning heeft om zich in het rijk te vestigen, uit te zetten. Hij kan dit doen, wanneer zijn aanwezigheid gevaarlijk of nadelig acht voor de openbare orde of de veiligheid van het land.*

*Not only does the Minister of Justice deliver the permit to remain in Belgium, but he also has the power to expel an alien who has a permit to settle in the country. He can do so when he considers his presence to be dangerous or harmful for public order or security.*

What does the law text itself give us as information concerning gender perspective?

**Art 1.** Wordt voor de toepassing van deze wet als vreemdeling beschouwd, al wie het bewijs niet aanbrengt dat hij de Belgische nationaliteit bezit.

**Art 1.** Is considered an alien whoever cannot prove that he does not have Belgian nationality.

Art. 5 states that no decision to expel (besluit tot uitzetting) can be taken concerning

2° De vreemdeling die met een Belgische vrouw gehuwd is, bij welke ten minste één kind heeft dat uit dit huwelijk geboren is tijdens zijn verblijf in het Rijk.

2° Any alien who is married to a Belgian woman with whom he has at least one child born during his stay in the country.

And what does the law say about a foreign woman married to a Belgian man and who has a child by him? Nothing is said about her in this article 5; only something is said about

5° De vrouw die, Belg door geboorte, de Belgische nationaliteit verloren heeft door haar huwelijk of ingevolge de verkrijging van een vreemde nationaliteit door haar echtgenoot.

5° A woman who is Belgian by birth and has lost her Belgian nationality through her marriage or as a result of being granted foreign nationality by her husband.

The gender approach in the law text gives a more masculine impression than in the student paper. In the law the singular form *de vreemdeling* with masculine reference (except for the one mentioned in article 5, 5°) is
systematically used, never the more neutral plural form. Besides, through the contents of art. 5, 2° and 5 ° the gender bias becomes explicit.

2.5.2 Law of March 13th 1973 about detention on remand

In this paper we find several function and role names: verdachte = suspect, onderzoeksrechter = examining magistrate, wetgever = legislator, burger = citizen etc.

Als men aan bovenvermelde voorwaarden voldoet, kan de onderzoeksrechter …. Tegen zijn beslissing is geen beroep mogelijk. De onderzoeksrechter moet de verdachte binnen de 24 uur over de hem ten laste gelegde feiten horen.

If above-mentioned conditions are met, the examining magistrate will … No appeal can be made against his decision. The examining magistrate must hear the suspect in connection with the charges brought against him.

In a later law text (14.08.1990) about the same subject we read in chapter III, art 16, § 2:

Tenzij de verdachte voortvluchtig is of zich verbergt, moet de onderzoeksrechter alvorens een bevel tot aanhouding te verlenen, de verdachte ondervragen over de hem ten laste gelegde feiten en zijn opmerkingen horen.

Unless the suspect is on the run or in hiding, the examining magistrate (…) must question the suspect in connection with the charges brought against him and must hear his reactions.

Hij moet de verdachte eveneens meedelen dat tegen hem een aanhoudingsbevel kan worden uitgevaardigd en hij moet hem in zijn opmerkingen ter zake horen.

He must inform the suspect that a warrant for his arrest can be issued and he must hear what he has to say.

The French version of this Belgian law adopts the same male perspective:

Sauf si l’inculpé est fugitif ou latitant, le juge d’instruction doit, avant de décerner un mandat d’arrêt, interroger l’inculpé sur les faits mis à sa charge et entendre ses observations.

Il doit également informer l’inculpé sur la possibilité qu’un mandat d’arrêt soit décerné à son encontre, et l’entendre en ses observations à ce sujet.

No trace therefore of either feminine markers for names like inculpé(e) or le/la juge for instance, or feminine pronouns like il/elle.

2.5.3 The April 29th 2001 law concerning the guardianship of minors

Is there any difference in a paper on the 29th April 2001 law concerning the guardianship of minors? The most important nouns in this paper are vrederechter = Justice of the Peace, minderjarige = minor, voogd = guardian.

Het is de vrederechter die voortaan over de exclusieve bevoegdheid beschikt tot aanwijzing van een voogd, waarbij hij rekening dient te houden met …

It is the Justice of the Peace who has the exclusive authority to designate a guardian. In doing so, he will consider …

De minderjarige wordt zelf gehoord indien hij de leeftijd van 12 jaar heeft bereikt, evenals zijn zussen en broers …
The minor will be heard in person provided he has reached the age of 12, as will his brothers and sisters…

De vrederechter moet zich bij de toewijzing van de voogd dan ook vergewissen van zijn aanvaarding.

The Justice of the Peace, when designating the guardian, must also ascertain his acceptance.

If brothers and sisters are mentioned, why not also use hij/zij to make clear that a minderjarige (minor) is not necessarily a boy, and that a voogd (guardian) is not necessarily a man. In 2001 many vrederechters (Justices of the Peace) in Belgium were women: why is this not reflected in the language?

In the law text we find the same names and references:

Art. 396. Indien de voogd wettige redenen aanvoert, kan de vrederechter hem in de loop van de voogdij onlasten van zijn opdracht.

Art. 396. Should the guardian invoke legal reasons, the Justice of the Peace may relieve him of his duties.

Despite the publication in 1994 of the Communauté française de Belgique, Mettre au féminin, the French translation of this excerpt of the law of 2001 is:

Si le tuteur justifie de motifs légitimes, le juge de paix peut, au cours de la tutelle, le décharger de sa fonction.

Neither in French nor in Dutch is there any evolution as far as references are concerned.

2.5.4 The 14 May 1981 law concerning the right of inheritance of the surviving spouse

In the paper about the 14 May 1981 law concerning the right of inheritance of the surviving spouse the student formulates the law as Wet met betrekking tot het erfrecht van de langstlevende echtgenoot / echtgenote, i.e. including both male and female nouns, which is not the case in the title of the law itself. Later she only uses the gender neutral term echtgenoot with male pronominal reference:

De langstlevende echtgenoot is een bevoorrecht erfgenaam. … Hij heeft steeds recht op het vruchtgebruik van de helft van de nalatenschap…

The surviving spouse is a privileged heir. He is always entitled to the usufruct of half the inheritance…

De langstlevende echtgenoot kan geen aanspraak meer maken op het overlevingspensioen indien hij hertrouwt.

The surviving spouse can make no claims to the survival pension if he marries again.

As in the law:

In hetzelfde geval kan hij te allen tijde eisen dat de blote eigendom van de goederen bedoeld in §4 hem tegen geld wordt overgedragen.

Also, he can always demand that the bare ownership of the goods referred to in §4 be transformed to him in exchange for money.

The pronoun hij sounds rather strange with reference to surviving spouses who, as we know (in Belgium), are very often women.
2.5.6 The 1989 law concerning rape (indecent assault)

A similar case can be found in the 1989 law concerning rape (indecent assault). The law does no longer make any distinction on the grounds of sex, since it includes the possibility of same sex rape. In the paper we read:

\[\ldots, \text{waaruit de identiteit van het slachtoffer kan blijken, zonder diens toestemming (art.378bis Sw.).}\]

\[\ldots \text{that reveals the identity of the victim without his consent (art.378bis Penal Justice Code).}\]

\textit{Diens} points to a male victim although most victims of rape are women or children.

The different examples show no evolution in the visibility of women in these papers by law students and Belgian legal texts. Maybe there is a tendency in more recent laws to use male reference pronouns less often by repeating agent words. The visibility of women in law texts could however easily be enhanced by using double pronominal forms \textit{hij/zij, zijn/haar}.

Is the language use by students different from that used by lawyers? To investigate this, we carried out a random (sample) survey in \textit{Meesterlijke communicatie AdvocatenDossier5}, a dossier produced by lawyers and meant to modernize and improve the communication of the lawyer. A look at gender aspects in the introductory pages of each article shows that out of the nine articles the author systematically uses \textit{hij/zij} only in one; all other articles only feature \textit{hij} to refer to agent nouns.

3. What is the official point of view in Dutch?

Former Flemish Minister Grouwels in charge of Brussels Affairs and Equality Policy stated at a conference, \textit{Feminisering van beroepsnamen: een juiste keuze?}, held at Brussels University (V.U.B.) in 1998, that the \textit{Nederlandse Taalunie}, asked for advice concerning official instructions, recommended that governments should not prescribe feminization of job titles. Furthermore, the commission for language advice opposed an existing list with feminine job titles and normative prescriptions regarding pronominal references for male, female and mixed groups and persons. As a result, the committee of ministers of the \textit{Nederlandse Taalunie} decided in 1996 not to prescribe any regulations. There is general consensus about this in Flanders. In the French part of the country, however, feminization of job titles was provided for by the decree of 21st June 1993. As Delbecque (1998) shows, Romance languages have a formal structure that is more appropriate to further feminization.

3.1 What about the morphological possibilities in Dutch?

\textit{Gezocht: Functiebenamingen M/V}, i.e. approximately: “Looking for function names M/F” (de Caluwe / van Santen: 2001), written at the request of the committee of ministers of the \textit{Nederlandse Taalunie}, tries to give an overview of the possibilities and implications of both feminization and neutralization. The central question is which of both naming strategies is the least sex discriminating (ib. 14). The authors point out that even among feminists (f/m) there is no majority in favour of imposed and systematic differentiation in Dutch (ib. 17). De Caluwe / van Santen state a tendency toward spontaneous neutralisation (ib. 18). This might be explained by the fact that there are many cases where feminization of function names is not possible and/or not necessary. Several Dutch words are morphologically difficult to feminize: \textit{notaris} (notary), \textit{minister, beul} (executioner), \textit{procureur des Konings} (public prosecutor) etc. because no rule can be applied to them. Except for a very limited number - about twenty names that are specifically masculine - all Dutch non-feminine function names are indeed sex/gender neutral (de Caluwe / van Santen: 2001, 29). When all is said, feminization can

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2 Feminization of profession names: making a good choice?

3 Nederlandse Taalunie (Dutch Language Union), an official organisation with representatives from Flanders and The Netherlands, that deals with several matters common to both Flanders and The Netherlands.
be carried through with many different suffixes, but then very often the choice is not clear to the language user. Moreover several suffixes are no longer productive: -in, for example, that is still very productive in German, can no longer be used in Dutch to feminize names.

Depending on our perception of reality, sex neutral names can evoke male images, but if we use them systematically with feminine pronouns or for women, they will tend to lose this male image (ib. 74). As de Caluwe and van Santen (ib. 71), and with them many others (e.g. Lutjeharms: 1998) further indicate, systematic differentiation results in asymmetric imaging (beeldvorming). Feminine names are linked to women and feminine images, whereas non-feminine names are linked even more clearly to male images both with reference to an individual man as when used in a gender neutral way. This means that feminization indirectly tends to strengthen masculinization of gender neutral nouns. Since there are arguments both in favour, and against differentiation and neutralization, arguments in favour and against that can be different for different categories or even for different function names, it is unlikely that choosing for either one or the other in Dutch will be possible (ib. 76).

4. What about other languages?

We have already pointed out that feminization is fairly easy in Romance languages (Delbecque: 1998). Nevertheless, and despite several initiatives in France like the Circulaire relative à la féminisation des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre (1986), Jospins 1998 Circulaire, and the 1994 publication in Belgium of Mettre au féminin. Guide de féminisation des noms de métier, fonction, grade ou titre, the systematic use of feminine function names in French does not seem easy to introduce.

In German feminization with -in is almost always possible. Officially, the use of double forms is prescribed, but apart from politicians and at universities this is hardly ever done. Nowadays, however, it is no longer possible to use a masculine word for an individual woman.

Since in English most function names are generic, the presence of women can only be made clear by pronouns or other textual elements.

5. How can we avoid gender discrimination in language?

As Verbiest (1999) has shown, linguistic discrimination is not only a problem of function naming, but is also linked with perception, with points of view and with contexts. She states that if we do not wish to exclude or stereotype medemensen (our fellow men), we should not let ourselves be forced by the grammar or vocabulary of the language we use. She gives several options, examples of how to avoid the personal and possessive pronouns hij, hem, zijn (he, him, his), when we refer to persons. For the sentence “Iedereen wil begrijpen wat hij leest = Everyone wants to understand what he reads” she has eight suggestions of which several can easily be reproduced in English:

- people want to understand what they read;
- when we read, we want to understand;
- you want to understand what you read;
- I want to understand what I read;
- everyone wants to understand what he or she reads;
- we want to understand what we read.

In some cases the visibility of women can be increased by using double forms or clearly neutral forms, by using first names, or in job vacancies, for example, by addressing candidates (you will have to…) instead of using third person masculine pronouns (manager … he will have to…). In legal documents,
contracts etc. we can avoid *hij*-reference by using plural forms, or if this is not possible by using double pronominal reference *hij/zij* (see also de Caluwe / van Santen: 2001: 82-84).

6. Conclusion

Although Dutch provides many possibilities to avoid gender bias, and although the recommendations exist for French, this limited overview shows that not much has changed in recent Belgian federal law texts as to non-discriminatory language use. Further study of a larger number of laws, and maybe a comparison between laws (federal government), decrees (community governments) and ordinances (Brussels government) might provide a more accurate view of gender aspects in these texts. Federal law texts and ordinances in Belgium have to be published in French, in German and in Dutch. Parallel use therefore needs to be considered. Since this is not the case for Flemish, French and German Community decrees in Belgium different tendencies might be found.
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