

# ON SEMANTIC MEANDERINGS AND PRAGMATIC PROPERTIES OF MAID/MAIDEN IN DICTIONARY

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**Abstrakt:** Za predpokladu, že slovníkové definície priamo zohľadňujú závislosť používania jazyka od pragmatickej situácie diskurzu a od sociálnych vzťahov medzi vysielateľom a prijímateľom, slovníky sa vo veľkej miere opierajú o špecifické konvencie. Adoptovanie rozličných konvencií by nemalo byť príliš náročné pre učiaceho sa. Samozrejme, vedomosti o rozdieloch medzi sémantikou a pragmatickým významom, obzvlášť v prípade, že používateľ pochádza z inej kultúry zohrávajú dôležitú úlohu. Pokročilý študent potrebuje pri práci so slovníkom dôkladné inštrukcie o formálnom a neutrálnom používaní slova, aby sa vyhol chybám v štylizácii následkom nesprávneho výberu slov (rozumej nedorozumeniam či komunikačným nepresnostiam).

**Kľúčové slová:** štylistické príznaky, lexikografia, slovníky, pragmatický repertoár, sémantika, „maid“ a „maiden“

**Abstract:** Assuming that the information provided by dictionary definitions should indicate that language use depends on the pragmatic situation of discourse as well as the social relation between the speaker and the hearer, dictionaries frequently employ special conventions. As particularly important from the perspective of a language learner, the manner of adopting different conventions should not be too complicated for him. Obviously enough, the knowledge of the difference between semantics and pragmatic meaning, especially when the dictionary user comes from different culture seems to be of prime importance. When consulting dictionaries, the advanced foreign learner needs clear instruction in formal language use as well as neutral usage that is not informal in order to avoid the wrong style – choice consequences (here understood as miscommunication and /or misunderstanding).

**Key words:** style labels, lexicography, dictionaries, pragmatic properties, semantics, maid, maiden

## 1 INTRODUCTION

It goes without saying that accurate use of lexical items poses one of the greatest difficulties for foreign learners, as they very frequently either do not realize or realize somewhat vaguely what the usage value of a particular word is. At the same time, it needs to be stressed that an adequate command of stylistic levels of a language presupposes a native-like linguistic competence for the EFL student. Hence, language teaching materials, especially dictionaries are of prime importance.

The purpose of this article is twofold. Firstly, it aims to demonstrate the applicability of a system of notational conventions (style labels) in the design of various dictionaries whose intended user is non-native speaker of English at the proficiency level. In this respect, it is a contribution of an on-going project that aims to formulate principles of unified labelling system (e.g., Włodarczyk-Stachurska 2011; Włodarczyk-Stachurska 2012; Stachurska 2018).

Secondly, the present paper is intended to outline the semantics of the lexical item maid/maiden in the history of English, as well as its paremiological and phraseological productivity as evidenced in lexicographic sources. What is more, the pragmatic properties of the noun in question within its history will be indicated. To be more specific, in the account proposed in the following we will employ a unified labelling scheme.

## 2 STYLE LABELS IN LEXICOGRAPHY: TOWARDS A UNIFIED LABELLING SCHEME

In order to reach the goal of the paper, we shall employ a system of usage labels. To be more precise, in the account proposed in the following – in order to show the thematic area where a given noun is located – we shall employ <FIELD LABEL> which will be primarily aimed to indicate such ideographic details as <ANIMAL>, <HUMAN BEING >, etc. At the same time, we shall distinguish such labelling category as <ATTITUDE LABEL> that is meant to encode such peculiarities of lexical items and their meanings as, for example, being <OFFENSIVE>, <DISSAPPROVING > and <HUMOROUS>. Dialect peculiarities acquire the form of <REGIONAL>, as for example, <BRITISH ENGLISH>, <AMERICAN ENGLISH>. Finally, what will be referred to as <STYLE LABEL> is aimed to accommodate such peculiarities of style as, for example, <INFORMAL>, <FORMAL > or <COLLOQUIAL>. And finally, in order to mark the axiological characteristics, we propose to put to use <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL>, which is most frequently realized as <SOCIALY

NEGATIVE>, < SOCIALLY POSITIVE>, or < MORALLY NEGATIVE>, <MORALLY POSITIVE>.

In our account we have chiefly relied on the information provided by the following sources: *The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms (AHD)*, *The Hidden Histories of English Words from A to Z (HHEWAZ)*, *The Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories (ODWH)*, *The Routledge Dictionary of Modern American Slang (RDMAS)*, *The Concise New Partridge Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English (CNPDSUE)*, *The Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary Castle (MED)*, *War Slang (WS)*, *Brewers Dictionary of Phrase and Fable (BDPF)*, *A Dictionary of Rhyming Slang (DRS)*, *Online Etymology Dictionary (OED)*, *The Facts on File Encyclopedia of Word and Phrase (FFEWPO)*, *A Dictionary of the English Language (DEL)*, *American Proverbs about Women: A Reference Guide (APWRG)*, *Dictionary of American Slang (DAS)*, *Random House Historical Dictionary of American Slang (RHHDAS)*, *The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs (FFDP)*, *A Dictionary of American Proverbs (DAP)*, *Womanwords: A Dictionary of Words about Women (WDWW)*, *A Dictionary of the Underworld (DU)*, *Metaphorically Speaking: A Dictionary of 3,800 Picturesque Idiomatic Expressions (MSDPIE)*, *A Dictionary of Changes in Meaning (DCM)*, *An Etymological Dictionary of the English Language (EDEL)*, *Dictionary of American Idioms and Phrasal Verbs (DAIPV)*, *Dictionary of Contemporary Slang (DCS)*, *The Concise Scots Dialect Dictionary (CSDD)*, *An American Dictionary of the English Language (ADEL)*, *Etymological Dictionary of Modern English (EDME)*, *Thesaurus of Traditional English Metaphors (TTEM)*.

### 3 ETYMOLOGY AND SEMANTICS OF MAID/MAIDEN

Although both lexical items targeted here must – at least at certain points of their historical evolution be treated separately, there are good grounds to consider the semantics, compounding potential and phraseological contribution of *maid* and *maiden* into the lexico-semantic system of English under the same heading. As shown by the etymological works, the origin of *maid* is easy to determine, because the noun represents a clipped variant of *maiden* resulting from the loss of *-n*, the reduction resulting mechanism that affected a number of Anglo-Saxon words ending in *-en*. The loss of the final *-en* element from *maiden* to form *maid* is similar to the formation of *eve* from *even* (see Room's DCM, 1986). Thus, quite understandably, both *maid* and *maiden*, from the historical earliest records onwards, seem to have had the competing senses in their semantics, that is 'a young female' and 'virgin (of any age)'. Because of

this long-lasting ambiguity, in its former sense, that is ‘a young female’ both *maiden* and *maid* were frequently replaced contextually by words such as *girl*, *young lady* and *young woman*. As a consequence of this both *maiden* and *maid* were most commonly used in the sense of ‘virgin’.

According to Ayto’s *HHEWAZ* (2005) the abbreviated form appeared during the course of the 12<sup>th</sup> century. The third major sense historically linked to the word in question, that is ‘servant, attendant’ is associated with the axiological marker <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: SOCIALLY (NEG.)> which encodes the socially evaluative value which – after the process of shortening from *maiden* to *maid* was complete – was taken over by *maid*, and this socially evaluative charge is present, though frequently in a modified form, both in the abbreviated variant *maid* and in the number of compounds, such as *chambermaid*, *housemaid* and *nursemaid*. However, in contrast to *maiden*, *maid* has never developed the variety of adjectival and compound uses that are documented for *maiden*, even though the use of the uncompounded words *maiden* and *maid* shows an almost complete semantic overlap in the early period.

However, before we focus on the semantic meanderings of *maiden/maid* that forms one of the targets of our analysis, let us point to the fact that in the history of English one may speak about the existence of both verbal category *MAIDEN/MAID 2* and the nominal category *MAIDEN/MAID 1* the latter element of each pair obviously deriving from its historical base and antecedent. In fact, one could ignore both verbal categories, because they are sporadically documented in the *OED* files, and – more importantly – the senses of the verbal form had no bearing whatsoever on the history of the noun. When we scrutinize the contents of the *OED* we see that while the verb *MAIDEN 2* appears only once in the *OED* documents as the transitive verb meaning ‘to act like a virgin, to be coy’ (1597 For had I *mayden’d* it, as many vse, Loath for to graunt, but loather to refuse.), the use of verbal *MAID 2* is restricted to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century contexts, and the senses with which the verb appears in these fairly recent times are strictly related to the present-day sense of the noun *maid*, that is ‘maid, female servant’. To be more precise, the semantics of the verbal category *to maid* encodes one of the typically maid-like functions traditionally performed by maids that may be defined as ‘to wash by means of a wooden instrument’ (1882 *Maid*, the wooden instrument used by laundresses and to use the above), but also – apparently through the process of conversion – there is the sense ‘to do the work of a maid for somebody’ (1909 I must learn to *maid* you. >2006 I was *maiding* round the corner when I got the offer of this flat.).

One may say that the semantics of the verb reflects the socially charged historical sense of the noun ‘servant’ that was earlier marked with the marker

<AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: SOCIALLY (NEG.)>. Interestingly enough, the sense ‘servant, attendant’ does not form a part of the semantics of either *maiden* and *maid* when the lexical items are employed either as nominal or verbal categories in Scottish English. As evidenced by Warrack’s *CSDD* (2000), in present-day Scottish English *to maiden* is used in the whole panorama of senses the central of which is the verbal application ‘to lay a child in arms of its parent when it is presented for baptism’, while the human-specific applications of *maid* are non-existent in this regional variety of English.

As to the beginnings of the nominal category *maiden* which was originally much more frequent form than *maid* (see Skeat’s *EDEL*, 1963), etymological sources agree that one may postulate here the <REGIONAL LABEL: GERMANIC>. To be more precise, the *OED* relates the noun to Old High German *magatīn*, and possibly Gothic *magaths*, both used in the sense ‘a virgin, maid’, but also Old Frisian *mageð*, *megith*, German *Maid* used in the same sense. Weekley’s *EDME* (1921) and Harper’s *OED* (2001) suggest that all the forms found in Germanic languages go back to Proto Germanic *\*magthis* ‘young womanhood, sexually inexperienced female’, apparently a feminine variant form of the Proto Germanic *\*maguz* ‘boy’. At the Anglo-Saxon stage *maiden* that was used in the sense ‘a girl, young (unmarried) woman’, the sense that is either archaic today or restricted to regional use (OE *Puella*, *mæden* oððe geong wifman. >1991 Celtic myths, with their depiction of the ‘Triple Goddess’ of *maiden*, mother and crone.).

Although earlier traces of the sense are found already in Old English historical documents, it was at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century that *maiden* started to be regularly used in the sense ‘a virgin’, originally most frequently applied with reference to Virgin Mary, the application that is rather infrequent in present-day English. Likewise, the clipped variant *maid* is first recorded in the sense ‘virgin’ in the first decades of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the sense that today is largely restricted to archaic and regional use (a1225 To ane mede [OE *Royal mædene*] þe was Maria ʒehaten. >1966 If you don’t get a *maid* [in marriage] you never know when a man is standing behind a tree laughing to himself because he had her first.). Therefore, for the present-day English both senses must be marked <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE> and <FIELD LABEL: REGIONAL>. However, one may say that the historically original sense ‘virgin’ lives on in various *maiden/maid*-based formations. To be more precise, many historical sources, such as, for example, Weekley’s *EDME* (1921) and the *OED* stress that both forms *maiden* and *maid* were at the beginning most frequently applied to the Holy Virgin, and the specific application of the noun (‘virgin’) lingers on in such collocations as, for example, *old maid*, *maiden aunt*, and – figuratively – *maiden over (speech)*.

As shown by the *OED* historical contexts, already at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century *maiden* was employed regularly in the male-specific sense ‘a man without experience of sexual intercourse’ the sense that has been retained in Yorkshire regional use until recent times (*a1225* Ich 3ew habbe bewedded ane were clene maiden, þat is, to Criste. // *1450* He was a munk and priour of his hows, & a clene mayden. > *1883* *Maid, maiden*, a person of a chaste life..in reference to either sex.). Likewise, during the course of Middle English the same sense was taken over by clipped variant *maid* which about a century later started to be employed in the sense ‘a man without experience of sexual intercourse’ (*c1300* In seint Iohanes warde is swete moder he tok.. þare nas non oþur of heom þat clene *mayde* was. >*1888* He was a very quiet fuller—my belief, he lived and died a *maid*.). As shown by the dictionaries of current English that have been consulted today the usage of both *maiden* and *maid* in this male-specific sense requires <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE> marking.<sup>1</sup>

Already at the Anglo-Saxon stage the lexical item *maiden* started to be used in sense ‘a girl, a young (unmarried) woman’. However, the sense is more regularly documented only from the 13<sup>th</sup> century onwards, although – as pointed out by the *OED* – it is not always distinguishable from the earlier historical senses. Today the sense discussed here is either obsolete or restricted to regional dialectal use (OE *Puella, mæden* oððe geong wifman. >*?c1200* To clippenn swa þe cnapess shapp. & toffrenn lac forr *mazzdenn* >*1991* Celtic myths, with their depiction of the ‘Triple Goddess’ of *maiden*, mother and crone.) although – as somewhat surprisingly evidenced by Spears’ *DAIPV* (2005) – *maiden* may still be used in colloquial register (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *The ugly witch changed into a lovely maiden*). Likewise, in the case of *maid*, the historical clipped variant took over the sense ‘girl, unmarried woman’ from the full variant *maiden*, and – much along the same lines of parallel development – the shortened form started to be used in the same sense from the second decade of the 13<sup>th</sup> century onward, the sense that is either obsolete or regional in present-day English (*c1275* Þa þis child was feir muche Þa luuede he a *maide*. >*1488* In tym off pes mek as a *maid* was he. >*1992* His brother has a delicate stomach, ‘Like a young *maid*, he is b’y, fair upset at the sight of all poor, dead little fish.’

<sup>1</sup> Apparently, the male-specific sense was still common in Shakespeare’s times, as the great author plays on the sense ‘male virgin’ in *Twelfth Night* (1601), in the final scene when Sebastian speaks to Olivia (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *You are betroth’d both to a maid and a man*. (He means that she is betrothed to himself, whom she had mistaken for Cesario, who was actually Viola disguised as a page when, earlier, Olivia had fallen for ‘him’!).

So – all in all – the use of *maiden* and *maid* in the sense ‘girl, unmarried woman’ must be marked with <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE> and <STYLISTIC LABEL: LITERARY> and this knowledge that emerges from the historical lexicographic works is confirmed by the corpus of dictionaries of current English that have been used for verification of present-day semantics of the words scrutinized here. As with the historical evolution of many other female-specific nouns discussed here, in the context of analyzing the historical senses of *maiden/maid* one must speak of the process of evaluative development, and – to be more precise – the process of pejoration that did not leave the semantics of the word unaffected. At the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century *maiden* underwent the process of pejorative transfer, and – to be more precise – one may speak of the mildest form of meaning pejoration that has come to be known as the social pejoration (see Kleparski 1990), that resulted in the rise of the novel socially pregnant sense ‘a female servant or attendant’, the sense that is now mostly regional, because it has been largely taken over by the clipped variant *maid*. (1325 Hire *maidens* broȝte hire clene water... Hou miȝte of an quene be a more milsfol dede? // 1596 He requyres in mariage ane of the Quenes *madnes*. >1896 Mother she looked after the *maidens* both fore and after the poor lady’s death.)<sup>2</sup> Similarly to the history of *maiden*, at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the clipped variant *maid* associated – and in the case of this lexical item one may speak of permanent association – with the sense ‘female servant, attendant’ (c1300 Heo haueȝ i-beon min hou[s]wif, mi *mayde*, and mi *norice*. >1991 She not only left her husband but she left her cook, and her chauffeur and her *maid*), the socially charged sense that has come down till present-day English.

According to Room’s *DCM* (1986) the use of *maiden* for ‘servant’ became finally obsolete in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when even *maiden of honour* became *maid of honour*), and *maid* had in the meantime been established in the specialized sense ‘servant, attendant’ from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, in conjunction with *hand*, both *handmaiden* and *handmaid* are used in the sense ‘a woman attendant or servant’. Evidently, as shown in the figure 1, in Johnson’s *Dictionary* (1785) it is *maid* that is included in the macrostructure of the dictionary with the sense ‘servant’.

<sup>2</sup> Although it is the clipped variant *maid* that has come down to our times in the socially pejorative sense ‘servant, attendant’ the unabbreviated form *maiden* may be said to have recently suffered from what has been traditionally termed aesthetic pejoration in American English university/college lingo. Thorne’s *DCS* (2007) informs us that in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century *maiden* developed the sense ‘an unattractive woman’ among American college students.

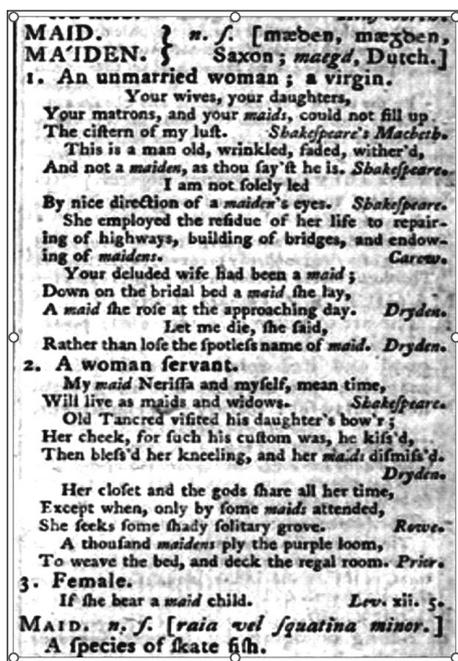


Figure 1  
Entry *maid* with the sense ‘servant’, Johnson (1785)

So in the history of both forms *maiden* and *maid* one is justified in speaking about their association with the marker <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: SOCIALLY (NEG.)> which encodes the socially pregnant sense ‘female servant, attendant’. As mentioned earlier, with time the noun has become most frequently applied with various defining words prefixed, such as, for example *bar-maid*, *chamber-maid*, *farm-maid*, *house-maid*, *nurse-maid*, *servant-maid*, *lady’s maid*, *French maid* in which the notion of social servitude was variously modified.<sup>3</sup> Of course, there are other formations with *maid* as the constitutive element that are either used synonymously or very much overlap semantically with its currently central sense. One of the most richly documented complex formations present

<sup>3</sup> One may say that in recent times pejorative evolution has taken yet another step forward in South African English. The *OED* and Dalzell and Victor’s *CNPDSUE* (2008) informs us that in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in South African English slang usage – probably under the influence of Afrikaans noun *meid* ‘black woman, female servant’ – the word acquired highly derogatory and offensive status especially when applied to black women irrespective of their social status (1962 A Non-White person..a ‘maid’, a sub-human, a member of a child race created by a benevolent Deity to serve the material interests of the superior race.)

in English since the early 19<sup>th</sup> century is *maid-of-all-work* **used in the sense** ‘female servant who does all kinds of housework (1801 *The maid of all-work’s* prayer!!) that in most recent times has also developed the inanimate sense ‘a thing (*esp.* a machine) that performs a variety of tasks’ (1985 It was the destroyer, that tough, speedy yet vulnerable *maid-of-all-work*, which played the leading part.). All in all, one has grounds to claim that the sense ‘female servant, attendant’ is the one that may be considered the main sense synchronically associated with *maid* which is evidenced not only by various pedagogical dictionaries of current English, but also by the dictionaries of idiomatic English that have been consulted, such as, for example, Spears’ *DAIPV* (2005) which illustrates the use of the noun with its central present-day sense in idiomatic context (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *I would never hire a maid, because a maid wouldn’t clean things the way I want them cleaned. Like they say: if you would be well served, serve yourself*). This does not mean, however, that the sense ‘female attendant, servant’ is central to *maid* in all varieties of English. For example, as evidenced by Delbridge’s *MED* (1985), in Australian English the sense ‘female servant’ is – somewhat surprisingly – one of the peripheral senses of *maid* while the central position in the semantics of the noun in Australian English is occupied by the sense ‘young, unmarried woman’, that – as pointed out many times in the foregoing – is either obsolete or archaic in all other regional varieties of English.

The evolution of the semantics of *maiden* proceeded well onto Early Modern English period. Namely, at the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century there was yet another semantic change that should be classified as the further semantic specialization of the female-specific lexical item. The sense that developed in the Elizabethan times is ‘a spinster’, and since that time the noun started to be almost universally used with reference to those females of mature years (?c1625 *Ye ar lyk ane old maden ye look aloft.// a1628 It is a sair lyfe, to be lang a maidin and syne a preists wyfe.* >1883 ‘I want to sue a man for breach of promise,’ said a *maiden* of the vintage of 1842, coming into a lawyer’s office.). As in the case of earlier discussed changes, simultaneously the clipped variant *maid* associated with the same sense, that is ‘spinster’ that in standard English today may be considered to be absent from the semantics of *maid*, and hence the sense thread discussed here requires <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE> marking although the sense thread ‘spinster’ is by all means retained in the collocation *old maid* and echoed as well as echoed in the semantics of the idiomatic expression *to stand on the maid* meaning ‘to remain single’ (1603 *To dye maydes too! O horrible!* >1838 *A queer broad ancient maid, farmeress who ‘makes draining-tiles’.*).

As the discussion offered in the foregoing shows, all of the historical senses of *MAIDEN/MAID* I may be said to be variously linked to the subject area that

may be labelled as <FIELD LABEL: HUMAN BEING>.<sup>4</sup> Yet, apart from the senses discussed in the foregoing, during its course of its historical evolution *maiden* developed several senses in which reference is made to other spheres that may be seen as being organized by the <FIELD LABEL: ANIMATE OBJECTS>, as well as <FIELD LABEL: INANIMATE OBJECTS, as well <FIELD LABEL: ACTIVITIES>. The rise of non-human specific senses was exclusively restricted to various stages of the Modern English period. Among others, for the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century one may speak of the development of the sense ‘any of the several fishes of the *Stenotomus chrysops* kind’, the sense that is now restricted to dialectal usage (1555 *Dryed fysshe, as soles, maydens, playces. >1939 The Scup of New England..is..the maiden..in Chesapeake Bay.*), and hence it must be given a <FIELD LABEL: REGIONAL> marking. In most recent times one may speak of a newly developed sense that is related to the <FIELD LABEL: HORSE>. Dalzell’s *RDMAS* (2009) informs us that from the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *maiden* has been used in the sense ‘a horse that has never won a race’, and – by extension – ‘the jockey who has never won the race (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *She was on the bit, but a maiden was up and he came a cropper.*)’<sup>5</sup> One finds it somewhat intriguing to observe that although most of the major historical senses of *maid* are recorded in Johnson and Walker’s *DEL* (1828), the dictionary records merely the adjectival sense of *maiden* ‘fresh, new, unused’, while the otherwise well-documented senses ‘unmarried woman’ or ‘spinster,’ are – for reasons unknown – absent in the macrostructure of the dictionary, as the figure 2 shows. Yet, it would be risky to suppose that the status of the senses in the 1820s when the dictionary was published was <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE>, but rather one would be justified to allude to the imperfection of the early lexicographic practice; the senses ‘unmarried woman’ and ‘spinster’ were elements of the English lexico-semantic system at that time and they are well documented in the *OED*.

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<sup>4</sup> As pointed out by Evans’ *BDPF* (1992) both *maiden* and *maid* have formed part of a number of historical names, both relatable to existing people and characters as well as fictional ones, such as *Maid Marian*, the Robin Hood’s sweetheart, *Maid of Athens*, the girl immortalized in Byron’s poem, *The Maid of Butermere*, the girl character immortalized by Wordsworth, *Maid of Orleans*, an alternative name for Joan of Arc. *The Maiden King*, the alternative name of Malcolm IV of Scotland and *Maiden/Virgin Queen*, another name for Elizabeth I, Queen of England who never married.

<sup>5</sup> In turn his sense of *maiden* has formed the basis for the formation of the idiomatic expression *to break one’s maiden* that is used either of a horse or jockey in the sense ‘to win one’s first race’, as testified by Lighter’s *RHHDAS* (1994) (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *HE went to the post ten times before he finally broke his maiden*).

**MAID**, (məd) } *n. s.* An unmarried  
**MAIDEN**, (mə'-dn) } woman; a virgin; a  
 woman servant; female.  
**MAIDEN**, (mə'-dn) *a.* Consisting of virgins;  
 fresh; new; unused; unpolluted.  
**MADENHAIR**, (mə'-dn-hair) *n. s.* A plant.  
**MAIDENHEAD**, (mə'-dn-hed) } *n. s.* Vir-  
**MAIDENHOOD**, (mə'-dn-hud) } ginity;  
 virginal purity; freedom from contamina-  
 tion; newness; freshness; uncontaminated  
 state.  
**MAIDENLINESS**, (mə'-dn-le-nes) *n. s.* The  
 behaviour of a maiden; gentleness; mo-  
 desty.  
**MAIDENLIKE**, (mə'-dn-like) *a.* Like a  
 maiden; modest; decent.  
**MAIDENLY**, (mə'-dn-le) *a.* Like a maid  
 en; gentle; modest; timorous; decent.  
**MAIDHOOD**, (məd'-hud) *n. s.* Virginité.  
**MAIDSERVANT**, (məd-ser'-vənt) *n. s.* A  
 female servant.

Figure 2

The entries maiden and maid and their morphological derivatives,  
 Johnson and Walkers (1828)

Now, let us have a closer look at the *maiden/maid* related developments that may be proved to have taken place outside the sphere marked as <FIELD LABEL: ANIMALTES>. To start with, at about the same time *maiden* developed the sense 'an instrument, similar to the guillotine, used in Edinburgh for beheading criminals of higher social status' (1565-6 For the bering of dailles and pouncheonis..with the gibbett and *madin*, to mak ane scaffald. >1902 Up to 1710 the *maiden*, which had been made in 1565, was used.) which in present-day English is a lexical item restricted in use to those occasions when we talk about the past, that is it must be marked as <STYLE LABEL: HISTORICISM>. Again, in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century *maiden* is first recorded in the sense 'the device that supports the spindle of the spinning wheel', that sense that – for obvious extralinguistic conditionings requires the same usage marking, that is <ATTITUDE LABEL: HISTORICISM> (1688 *The Maidens* or Damsels, the two Stands in which the Spindle turns. >1973 The spindle [of a spinning wheel] was a steel spike, held loosely in a horizontal position by two leather loops from small wooden posts called maidens.). Finally, let us mention a very specialized sense thread documented first for the first half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century that may be defined as 'the last handful of corn cut in the field shaped into a figure of a girl and hung up in the house' (1734 *Bottles of Whiskie* to the shearers when they got his Graces *Maiden*. >1962 *The Maiden* was plaited and hung on the

kitchen ceiling) that today for extralinguistic reasons must be linked to the marking <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE>. The table given here provides a survey of current senses of *maiden/maid* based on the corpus of lexicographic works of current English that have been selected to meet the synchronic end of our account of selected female-specific vocabulary in the history of English:

	<i>MED</i>	<i>CCAD</i>	<i>LDCE</i>	<i>CALD</i>
<i>MAID</i>	1) 'woman whose job is to clean rooms, serve meals in a hotel' 2) 'a woman whose job is to clean rooms in a hotel' 3) <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE> 'a girl or young woman who is not married'	1) 'a woman who works as a servant in a hotel or private house'	1) a female servant, especially in a large house or hotel: a kitchen maid' 2) <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE>> 'a woman or girl who is not married'	1) 'a woman who works as a servant in a hotel or in someone's home'
<i>MAIDEN</i>	1) <ATTITUDE LABEL: OBSOLETE> 'girl or young woman who is not married'	1) <STYLISTIC LABEL: LITERARY> 'a young girl or woman' 2) adjectival use. 'first, fresh'	1) <STYLISTIC LABEL: LITERARY> 'a young girl, or a woman who is not married' 2) adjectival use 'of or about the first of its type', as in <i>maiden flight/voyage</i>	1) <STYLISTIC LABEL: LITERARY> 'a young girl, or a woman', 2) adjectival use 'of or about the first of its type'

#### 4 WORD FORMATION AND PHRASEOLOGICAL POTENTIAL OF *MAIDEN/MAID*

Like many other female-specific lexical items they have become constitutive elements of numerous complex formations, although it is not always easy to draw a line of distinction between those formations that are genuine compounds

and those that should be labelled as syntactic combinations. Let us stress at this point that many of the formations that are evidenced here are either attributive or / and similitive. One of the characteristic features of the English formations targeted here is that the noun *maiden* has been historically very productive in the formation of various plant names at various stages of the history of English, the oldest of which are *maiden mercury* the name that is obsolete today, but back at the close of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (1578) when it was coined it was used with reference to a species of mercury. Another plant name from that period (1589) is *maiden lips* that is the name of a European plant *Lappula squarrosa*. There is obviously a handful of much more recently coined compounds, such as mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1861) *maiden-blush rose* and *maiden's wreath* that is the name for Chilean plant *Francoa sonchifolia*.

However, the compound formations discussed above are not the earliest complex coinages that are evidenced in the history of English. As documented in the OED the first maiden/maid based products of the process of compounding go back to the later stage of the Middle English period. Significantly the formations are almost exceptionlessly related to human beings with maiden Mary '*the Virgin Mary*' that opens the list of the earliest coinages (*c*1300 I-bore he was of þe *maydene* Marie.) and *maid woman* employed in the sense 'virgin, young woman' (*c*1330 And bouthe þe finde me *maide* wimman. Send me aȝen to me fon.). As shown by the lexicographic material given in the OED from the very beginnings some of these formations were historically restricted to regional usage. And so, for example, the beginning of the 15<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the rise of the compound *maiden bairn* employed in northern English and Scottish English in the sense 'a female child, daughter' (*a*1400 þe knau barns. þai suld.. sla, þe *maiden* barns þai suld lat ga.).

The compounding productivity of *maiden* and *maid* is by and large unequal, and the reasons behind this inequality of compounding potential are by no means easy to pinpoint. In particular, as pointed out by the editors of the OED *maiden* has entered a by far larger variety of compound and adjectival uses than *maid* which has mainly taken over the sense 'servant' with which it has been documented particularly frequently in the history of English. This may be at least partially explained because of the large number of compounds that have been formed upon the clipped variant *maid* (*chambermaid*, *housemaid*, *nursemaid*). This view is also upheld by Chantrell's *ODWH* (2002) which argues that the formation of a number of compounds may have led to the common sense 'servant' becoming more associated with the abbreviated form *maid* than with the historically primary form *maiden*.

One may say that the period that truly abounded in the formation of a variety of compound formations was the period of 16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries that

yielded such *maiden*-based formations as, for example, *maiden faced*, *maiden-gem*, *maiden-blush*, *maiden name*, *maiden speech*, *maiden name*, *maiden slave*, *maiden lady*, *maiden servant*, *maiden of honour*. Although the fate of some of the formations was anything else but fleeting, many of the compounds that surfaced at that time have come down to our times. For example, one may mention here the formation *maiden/maid of honour* that comes from the early 15<sup>th</sup> century (a1450–1509 The kyngys douztyr lay in her bour, Wiþ here *maydenys off honour*.), and has come down to the third millennium, as testified by the *OED* historical material (2011 Lily of the valley..tiaras of it for the bridesmaids and bunches for the little *maidens of honour*.), and so has the early 17<sup>th</sup> century formation *maiden lady* (1628 Astraea, the *Mayden-Lady* Iustice.) with the most recently attested historical context of use from the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2005 While confirmed bachelors made Provincetown into an accepting place by appearing in public in particularly campy or flamboyant clothes, *maiden ladies* did the same by striking out on their own, donning equally festive attire.).

Obviously, the formation of compounds continued uninterrupted until fairly recent times, and this holds true for both British and American varieties of English. What is interesting to point out is that the clipped variant *maid* has been particularly active in the formation of compounds during the course of the last two centuries of the development of English, with a few innovations from the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Dalzell and Victor's *CNPDSUE* (2008) provide samples of the latest *maid*-based formations, and these are such items as *maid training* used in the sense 'the process of instructing and conditioning the behaviour of a sexual submissive'. Let us add that in practice the submissive's menial service becomes part of a sexual relationship, and the complex noun discussed here is used in a dominant prostitute's advertising matter. Another recent formation singled out in Kipfer and Chapman's *DAS* (2010) is *ice maiden* that appeared in the 1970s employed in the sense 'a very cool and composed woman, a chilly woman' (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *Margaret Thatcher, the Ice Maiden, branded the conservative Gorsuch "the Ice Queen"/Ms Stone plays Sally, a powerful woman, another ice queen whose roiling emotions remain contained*).<sup>6</sup> Below we provide a representative selection of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> century formations with *maiden/maid* as the constitutive element. Let us point to the fact that many of the late compounds contain the conceptual element of service or attendance, and this

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<sup>6</sup> Kipfer and Chapman's *DAS* (2010) conjecture that the formation may have been modeled upon on the title of Hans Christian Andersen's tale *The Snow Queen*.

is especially true of those that are formed with the aid of *maid* as the main constitutive element.<sup>7</sup>

*maiden bark* (1831 *Tiller*, or *Tellar*, a shoot selected for its superior strength and healthy habit from those produced by a coppice-stool to stand for a timber-tree, or for *maiden bark*, if an oak, to stand for the space of two or three falls.),  
*maid-mother* (1832 The *maidmother*..sat smiling, babe in arm.),  
*maid-attendant* (1896 *Maid-Attendant* to an elderly or invalid lady),  
*maiden nut* (1884 *Maiden nut*, the inner one of two nuts on the same screw; the outer is the jam-nut.),  
*maid nurse* (1895 Mrs. H. wishes to recommend her maid..as *Maid-Nurse*.),  
*maid service* (1951 Shamrock apartment hotel... *Maid service*.),  
*maid outfit* (1989 The Mexican-looking lady in the *maid outfit* put the shrimp down.).

When we take another look at the history of the historically primary form *maiden*, it should come as hardly surprising that the majority of *maiden*-based compounds are almost inevitably associated with one of the earliest sense threads of the noun in question, that is the notion of virginity, and this number includes such formations as *maiden fortcastle* ‘one never captured’, *maiden town* ‘a town never taken by the enemy’,<sup>8</sup>*maiden over* ‘an over in cricket off in which no runs are scored’, *maiden speech* ‘a member’s first speech in Parliament’, *maiden sword* ‘one that has drawn no blood’, *maiden tide* ‘a tide on which no ships either enter or leave harbour’, *maiden tree* ‘one as yet unlopped’, *maiden flight* ‘the first flight of an airplane/spaceship’, *maiden voyage* ‘a ship’s first voyage’, *maiden run* ‘the first sea voyage’, but also – we are informed by Dickson’s *WS* (1994) – the other sense of this complex noun is ‘the first date with a woman’. As to the formation of *maiden voyage*, Ammer’s *AHDI* (1997) provides evidence that the compound *maiden voyage* has in recent times widened its application. Although this compound was originally used in the sense ‘the first voyage of a ship’ (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *The liner sank on its maiden voyage.*//im

<sup>7</sup> As shown by Franklyn’s *DRS* (1975) and Partridge’s *DU* (1949) the use of the nominal category *maid* has also penetrated the structure of Cockney vocabulary with the formation *maids adorning* used in the sense ‘morning’ still current in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century on the Pacific Coast.

<sup>8</sup> Evans’ *BDPF* (1992) points out that the formation *maiden town* has been specifically used with reference to Edinburgh, from the tradition that the maiden daughters of a Pictish king were sent there for protection during an intestine war.

*is taking his yacht on its maiden voyage*),<sup>9</sup> yet the application of *maiden* to be used in the sense ‘the first time’ dates from the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century, and hence in present-day English it is frequently employed in a much extended sense ‘the first experience in a given sector of life’ (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *This tennis tournament is my maiden voyage in statewide competition.*).

Apart from being productive in the formation of the whole array of compounds both nouns have contributed to the enlargement of the stock of English phraseological riches. In general, when one analyses the idiomatics of *maiden/maid* one finds grounds to conclude that both the historically primary form *maiden* and the historically secondary *maid* have been variously productive in the formation of phraseological units and proverbs. To be more specific, one observes that the number of *maiden*-based idiomatic expressions slightly preponderates over the number of those historically formed upon the clipped variant *maid*. The phraseological data outlined in the following has been based on Hendrickson’s *FFEWPO* (2008), Dalzell and Victor’s *CNPDSUE* (2008), Wilkinson’s *TTEM* (2002) and Renton’s *MSDPIE* (1990).

To begin with, the number of comparative phrases formed upon both female-specific nouns is inconspicuous. Wilkinson’s *TTEM* (2002) provides several instances of comparative phrases that are used with reference to people, one of the oldest of which are *merry as the maids* and *gentle/mute as a maid* that were coined during the course of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but there are other idioms of comparison that are used with more general sense, frequently with reference to inanimate objects, such as *cold as a maid’s knee* or *mild as maiden’s water* the latter of which is in current English often used either of weak liquor or innocuous talk. Note that a somewhat extended idiom of comparison that mocks the image of a young woman getting married to an old man is *a young maid married to an old man is like a new house thatched with old straw*. Kerschen’s *APWRG* (1998) draws our attention to the fact that – somewhat unsurprisingly – the comparative phrases with the complex noun *old maid* are almost universally negatively loaded, such as idioms of comparison *as particular as an old maid* or *as peevish as an old maid*.<sup>10</sup> Along somewhat feministic lines Mills’ *WDWW* (1989) argues that crucial to the concept associated with *old maid* is the notion that sexual intercourse which is fundamentally vital to the good

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<sup>9</sup> Illustrative context taken from Spears’ *DAIPV* (2005).

<sup>10</sup> Kerschen’s *APWRG* (1998) continues that evidence of this ridicule can be found in a widely played card game that trains little minds early to be afraid of ending up as the *Old Maid*. Old maids are rejects (*Always a bridesmaid, but never a bride*); Whether they were not chosen for marriage partners because they were ill-natured or whether they become ill-natured because of being an old maid is not clear, but another proverb has it that *old maids lead apes in hell*.

health of a woman, otherwise – when without it – the woman is best useless (that is not a mother), and at worst hysterical and even dangerous (because untamed). Hendrickson's *FFEWPO* (2008) discusses the semantics of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century idiom of comparison *like looking for maidenheads*, the sense of which may be defined as 'looking for something either unprocurable, or – at least – exceedingly scarce', and adds another – what he calls "unprocurable version" that reads *looking for maidenheads in a whore house*.

As far as the body of *maiden/maid* idiomatic expressions is concerned, it stands out that many phraseologisms both those coined in the past and those current at present are of regional etymology and/or are restricted now to regional use, and – in particular – a number of them are of Scottish provenance. One of the oldest idiomatic expressions that comes to one's mind is *old maids lead apes in hell* that was popularized by William Shakespeare in his *Much Ado about Nothing* that has been used in the sense 'women who die unmarried are doomed to share the company of apes in the afterworld'<sup>11</sup> As to other idiomatic expressions coined in the 18<sup>th</sup>-19<sup>th</sup> centuries, there is a Scottish regional idiom *it's far to seek and ill to find, like Meg's maidenhead* that is used with reference to something which is lost beyond recall. Another idiomatic expression of northern origin is *a's no gowd that glitters, nor maidens that wear their hair* that makes reference to the Scottish custom that only a maiden might wear her hair in a cockernonie and snood.

The number of proverbs that the *maiden/maid* pair has entered is by no means astounding. In particular, the paremiological material that has been collected shows that both *maiden* and *maid* have yielded a number of proverbial expressions many of which surfaced during the Early Modern English period, although the roots of some of them go back to the Middle English period. To take one of the representative samples, the proverb *a maid should be seen but not heard* was, according to Manser's *FFDP* (2002), first recorded at the close of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, though when it started to be applied with reference to children from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onward the form of the proverb was altered to *children should be seen and not heard*, the semantics of which is to interpreted as saying that in the company of adults, children should not speak until they are spoken to. The following 16<sup>th</sup>–18<sup>th</sup> centuries selection of proverbs is quoted after Mieder's *DAP* (1992):

*if one will not, another will, so are all maidens wed* (1546),  
*old maids fancy nobody knows how to bring up children but them* (1546),

<sup>11</sup> Let us quote the great master: Get you to heaven, Beatrice, get you to heaven; here's no place for you maids: so deliver I up my apes (William Shakespeare, *Much Ado about Nothing*, 2:1).

*maids want nothing but good husbands, and when they have them they want everything* (1678)<sup>12</sup>,  
*maidens should be mild and meek, swift to hear and slow to speak* (1721).

In fact, this does not exhaust the number of proverbs that have been based on *maiden/maid* as the head element. Many of the paremiological units that have been found are much younger, such as, for example, the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century proverb *While the tall maid is stooping the little one has swept the house* (1866), and the proverb *always a maiden, never a wife*, where the noun *maiden* is used in the sense ‘bridal attendant’ in this context, the proverb being first recorded in 1882 (see Manser’s *FFDP*, 2002).

## 5 CONCLUSION

The analysis of the semantic meandering of the lexical item *maid/maiden* excerpted from various lexicographic works shows its pragmatic properties through the development of the English language. In our opinion sociolinguistic hints should be mirrored and coded in dictionaries. Although this present study is a kind of proposal to the ongoing lexicographic discussion, it should be stressed that the unified labelling scheme is intended to help learners understand and use the language correctly and appropriately.

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<sup>12</sup> Kerschen’s *APWRG* (1998) points to the fact that this proverb forms a part of a large whole that the author frames in the following manner: “[...] All women are good; good for something or good for nothing) unless they are prime goods on the market (A simple maiden in her flower is worth a hundred coats-of-arms [referring to virginity]). A man had better hurry, though, before the prize is spoiled since «Maids are drawn to pleasure as moths to the flame.» Even then, the prize may not be worth the price because «Maids want nothing but husbands, and then they want everything.»”

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