INTRODUCTION OF FEMINITIVES IN SOME EUROPEAN LANGUAGES

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Abstract

This article examines the growing trends and conditions for the effective introduction of feminitives into some European languages in several countries, including Belarus, Poland, and France among others. Linguists, who are against the use of feminitives often claim that they are redundant and violate the grammatical rules of the language. They argue that the use of gender-neutral nouns and adjectives is sufficient, and that feminitives unnecessarily complicate the language. The paper highlights the efforts of the modern feminist movement and the gender approach in linguistics to promote linguistic equality by overcoming gender asymmetry in language use. It is argues that while the issue of language feminization is crucial for many languages, the peculiarities and uniqueness of noun gender distribution in different languages demonstrate that the category of gender is a specified generalized cultural experience of previous generations. Nevertheless, many occupational nouns lack female counterparts, which leads to the use of male nouns to refer to women. Thus, there is a conclusion that the category of masculine gender in some languages primarily reflects the idea of a person, rather than the idea of gender. As a result, language use can perpetuate gender stereotypes, bias, and inequality. Feminist linguists and language activists argue that language must be feminized to promote gender equality and eliminate gender asymmetry in language use.

Keywords: Feminitives, gender-neutral nouns, lexical constraints, linguistic equality approach, gender asymmetry elimination.

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INTRODUCTION

The use of feminized forms of nouns and adjectives, known as feminitives, has been a topic of debate in some European languages for decades. Some linguists (Berkutova, 2017; Guseinov, 2017) argue that feminitives are unnecessary and violate the rules of the language, while others (Zaitseva, 2015) believe that their absence reflects underlying psychological and ideological factors. Some researchers (Clarke, Losoff, Mc Cracken & Rood, 1984) state that linguistic arguments against feminitives are flawed, and that their persistence in certain styles of speech points to deeper societal and cultural issues that must be considered.

Linguists (Berryman, 1986; Poyton, 1990; Swann & Graddol, 1994), who are against the use of feminitives often claim that they are redundant and violate the grammatical rules of the language. They argue that the use of gender-neutral nouns and adjectives is sufficient, and that feminitives unnecessarily complicate the language. However, this argument is based on a narrow understanding of language and grammar, and fails to account for the complex and ever-evolving nature of language.

It has been observed several word formation trends of recent years. One of the most intensively replenished lexical semantic groups in the Belarussian and Russian languages turned out to be nouns, which designate a person (e.g. in Belarussian: дырэктарка, легкаатлетка, лекарка, пáстарка, піратэхніца, дазорніца, вучоная; in Russian: визажистка, галеристка, чиновница, айтишница, дилерша, рекламщица, клипмейкерша). For a long time in the Russian, Belarussian languages, there was a tendency to an uneven distribution of lexemes denoting female and male persons, which was explained by the androcentric approach, in which a woman was considered unable to go beyond her natural destiny and, accordingly, the private family sphere of existence (Garbatscki, 2016).

Currently, the situation has radically changed. In the light of the changed cultural situation, there is a large number of names of female persons by professional affiliation. When the lexico-semantic groups of names of female persons are characterized by professional affiliation, it should be noted that most masculine nouns with the meaning of a person correspond to certain nouns with the meaning of a female person. The number of lexemes describing individuals of the female sex as pertaining to their profession has increased significantly (Chelak, 2018).

Qualitative changes in the social life of society, the democratization of various spheres of life of citizens, and the process of comprehensive modernization of education has caused a great need for feminitives in some languages, the knowledge and efficient implementation of which allows people to adapt successfully to the drastically developing reality.

PHENOMENA OF ANDROCENTRISM IN A LANGUAGE

There are certain features of androcentrism in a language that describe the predominance of the male sex and point of view in society and culture, which affects language practices and leads to a distortion of the reality of gender relations. They point out that language reflects and supports discrimination against women and gender inequality. These signs may vary in different languages, but generally, they indicate that language has a strong influence on people's thinking and behavior regarding gender issues and social norms.

Language is a fundamental tool that helps us communicate with others and express our thoughts, ideas, and feelings. However, language is not neutral and can reflect and perpetuate social and cultural biases. Androcentrism in language is one such bias that depicts the dominance of the male sex and perspective in society and culture, which affects language practices and leads to a distortion of the reality of gender relations. We define the features of androcentrism in language and its impact on society (Efremov, 2009).

One of the most apparent characteristics of androcentrism in language is the use of male-centric language. For example, the use of masculine pronouns such as "he" or "him" to refer to both men and women, or employing "mankind" to refer to all humans, ignoring the existence of women. Another peculiarity of androcentrism in language is the use of the "generic masculine." This directs to the masculine terms or pronouns to refer to both men and women. For example, "fireman," "policeman," or "chairman" are terms that assume the person in the role is male. This can lead to the exclusion of women from certain professions or roles. Androcentric language often utilizes diminutive forms to describe women. For example, using terms like "girl" or "lady" to refer to adult women, which can diminish their status and authority. On the other hand, men are often potrayed using more powerful and positive terms like "man" or "gentleman."

Androcentric language often expends male-centered metaphors, which perpetuate the idea that male experiences are universal. For example, phrases like "throw like a girl" or "man up" reinforce gender stereotypes and limit our understanding of what it means to be male or female. The androcentric language promotes gender stereotypes by limiting our understanding of gender roles and perpetuating the idea that men are the norm and women are the exception. This can result in a lack of recognition and opportunities for women in various fields. The use of male-centric language and the generic masculine can exclude women from certain professions or roles, limiting their access to education, employment, and other opportunities. This can have a significant impact on women's lives and their ability to participate fully in society. The use of diminutive forms to describe women or male-centered metaphors can undermine women's authority and status, leading to a lack of respect and recognition in various contexts (Yakovleva, 2010).

Androcentrism in language is a significant issue that affects our understanding of gender roles and relations. It reinforces gender stereotypes, excludes women from various opportunities, and undermines their authority and status. We need to be aware of these issues and work towards creating more inclusive language practices that reflect the reality of gender relations in our society. This can help create a more equitable and just society where everyone is valued and respected regardless of their gender.

PHENOMENA OF GRAMMAR MASCULINIZATION

Let us regard the phenomenon of grammar masculinization. Language tends to associate the masculine gender with universal concepts and general categories, whereas the feminine gender refers mainly to specific objects and beings. Language is one of the most fundamental aspects of human communication, and it plays a significant role in shaping our perceptions of the world around us. However, language is not a neutral tool, but loaded with cultural, social, and historical values. One of the most evident examples of this is the way that gender is encoded in language. In many languages, including English and French, nouns are divided into masculine and feminine categories. The problem arises when the masculine gender is associated with universal concepts and general categories, whereas the feminine gender refers mainly to specific objects and beings. This

phenomenon is known as the "masculinization of grammar," and it reflects the patriarchal values that have shaped our societies for centuries (Ter-Minasova, 2000).

For example, in French, the word "chair" (la chaise) is feminine, while the word "table" (la table) is also feminine. However, the word "human" (l'humain) is masculine, as well as the word "citizen" (le citoyen). This association of the masculine gender with universal concepts and general categories produces the impression that men are overestimated and that women are underestimated.

This phenomenon is also present in English. For example, the word "man" is often employed as a generic term for humanity, as in the phrase "mankind." The word "he" is also commonly used to designate a person whose gender is unknown or irrelevant. This use of the masculine gender as a default emphasizes the idea that men are the norm and that women are the exception.

In contrast to the masculinization of grammar, the feminine gender in many languages is often associated with specific objects and beings. For example, in French, the word "butterfly" (le papillon) is masculine, while the word "flower" (la fleur) is feminine. In English, the word "ship" is feminine, while the word "airplane" is masculine. This association of the feminine gender with specific objects and beings reinforces the idea that women are limited to particular roles and functions.

The masculinization of grammar has several effects on society. Firstly, it strengthens the idea that men are prioritized and that women are understated. This originates a sense of male dominance and female inferiority. Secondly, it contributes to the invisibility of women in many fields, such as science, politics, and art. When language associates the masculine gender with universal concepts and general categories, it becomes difficult for women to see themselves as part of these fields. Thirdly, it limits women's options and opportunities by associating them with specific objects and beings.

The masculinization of grammar is a significant problem that affects many languages. To address this issue, we need to set up awareness of the ways in which language can perpetuate gender inequality. We also need to work towards establishing more inclusive language, that reflects the diversity of our societies. By doing so, we can create a more equitable and just world for everyone (Bodine, 1975).

What is sexism in vocabulary? There are many words that depict a woman in a negative context, and these words have no analogues for potraying men. Language does not take into account the female experience and perspective in its expressions and constructions; the female perspective and abilities are ignored. There has been a tendency of role stereotyping. Language tends to associate certain parts and functions with gender, establishing stereotypes that infringe on women's rights and opportunities.

Sexism in vocabulary refers to the use of language that intensifies gender roles, stereotypes, and biases. Let us provide the corpus of sexist language.

Gendered Pronouns: The use of gendered pronouns, such as "he" and "she," can underline the notion that there are only two genders and that they are fixed and immutable. This can marginalize people who do not identify as male or female, or who do not conform to traditional gender roles. A non-gendered pronoun, such as "they" is a more inclusive alternative.

Gendered Job Titles: Many job titles are gendered, such as "fireman" or "stewardess." These titles assume that certain jobs are only suitable for one gender, and can discourage people from pursuing careers that do not fit traditional gender roles. Using gender-neutral job titles, such as "firefighter" or "flight attendant," can help to break down these barriers.

Gendered Adjectives: Adjectives such as "bossy" or "nagging" are often used to describe women who are assertive or speak their minds. These words have negative connotations and are rarely used to describe men in similar situations. Similarly, words such as "handsome" or "beautiful" are often used to describe women's appearance, while words like "strong" or "powerful" are used to describe men's appearance. These gendered adjectives perpetuate stereotypes about gender roles and can stress gender inequality.

Gendered Insults: Insults such as "bitch" or "slut" are often used to demean women and suggest that they are inferior to men. These words are rarely used to describe men, and their use reinforces the idea that women are less valuable and less deserving of respect than men. The use of sexist language can have a number of negative impacts on individuals and society as a whole. First, it can perpetuate gender stereotypes and deepen gender inequality. When people hear sexist language, they may internalize these messages and begin to believe that women are inferior to men or that certain roles are only suitable for one gender. Second, sexist language can heighten a hostile environment for women and other marginalized groups. When people are subjected to sexist language, they may feel excluded or unwelcome, which can impact their self-esteem and confidence. This can make it more difficult for these individuals to succeed in school or the workplace. The use of sexist language can contribute to a culture of harassment and violence against women. When women are routinely objectified and degraded through language, it can create a climate in which they are seen as acceptable targets for abuse and harassment (Adler, 1987).

Sexism in vocabulary is a pervasive issue that has a significant impact on society. By using more inclusive and gender-neutral language, we can help to break down gender stereotypes and build up a more equitable and inclusive society. It is important to be mindful of the words we employ and the messages they convey, and to work to design a culture in which all individuals are valued and respected, regardless of their gender identity or expression (Ashmore, 1990).

Feminism and postmodernism complement each other in understanding language and its role in creating social reality. The feminist analysis of language helps to reveal and overcome sexist tendencies in language practice, and the postmodern approach makes it possible to realize that language is not a neutral and objective tool, but a field of struggle for power and control over discourse.

Let us follow the identification of the concepts of "human" and "man". In many European languages, they are denominated by one word: man in English, homme in French, Mann in German. In German, there is another designation – Mensch, but it also etymologically goes back to the Old High German mannisco — "male", referring to a man. The word der Mensch is masculine, but ironically can be used in relation to women with a neuter article – das Mensch.

Feminine nouns are, as a rule, derived from masculine, and not vice versa. They are often accompanied by a negative evaluation. The application of a male designation to a female

refrain is permissible and increases her status. On the contrary, the nomination of a man with a female designation contains a negative assessment (Lakoff, 1973).

Masculine nouns can be used unspecified, i.e. to entitle persons of any gender. There is a mechanism of "inclusion" in the grammatical masculine gender. The language prefers masculine forms to refer to persons of any gender or a group of persons of different sexes. Thus, if teachers and female teachers are meant, it is enough to say "teachers". In most cases, the language ignores women.

The names of the same professions in male and female versions are not equal – doctor/ she-doctor, secretary/she-secretary. To name professions with low social prestige, there are often only feminine forms, e.g., needlewoman, charwoman, and maid. To designate activities with a high status there exist only male forms, e.g. city fathers, a statesman.
The syntactic agreement takes place according to the form of the grammatical gender of the corresponding part of speech, and not according to the real gender of the referent, e.g. Wer hat hier seinen Lippenstift vergessen?/ Who left his lipstick here? – although, we are talking about a woman.

Femininity and masculinity are sharply differentiated as poles and are opposed to each other; in qualitative (positive and negative assessment) and quantitative (male dominance as universal) attitudes, which leads to the formation of gender asymmetries.

PHENOMENA OF SUFFIXATION

Belarussian language is characterized by the use of suffixes that somehow change the word with the originally male gender: адвака́т - адвака́тка, актор – акторка, багатыр - багатырка, бяздзе́тнік – бяздзе́тніца, бюракрат - бюракратка. Sometimes, the creators of a new vocabulary add a gender marker to an androcentric word, and it turns out something like a "female doctor - жанчына-доктар", "madam minister – спадарыня міністр". Some concepts were originally created for women — it should be noted that at the time of their appearance, they represented originally female — in the opinion of conservatives — professions or not the most respected stratum of society: suffragists - суфражысткі, courtesans - куртызанкі, seamstresses, needlewomen - швачкі, housewives – хатнія гаспадыні. Some of the suffixes that are used in word formation are pejorative, so it is not easy for feminists developing a dictionary to come to a common agreement — some welcome the designation "author", others consider it rude and insist on "authoress" (Kulikovich, 2019).

In the Ukrainian language, although it belongs to the same group, as Belarusian and the processes in it are similar, feminitives formed with the help of suffixes have taken root. Some philologists state that almost all Ukrainian media use gender nominations, which use the suffix -k-: expert - экспертка, journalist - журналістка. It is mentioned that it is at least indecent to call a woman a word that is not colored by a gender designation. Moreover, media also meet Ukrainian media personalities; they use feminitives if a guest asks to address herself in this way (Selivanova, 2008).

In the Polish language, the situation is also similar to the Belarusian one, but the issue is not discussed so massively. Philologists say that in Polish, much more initially "masculine" designations have a "feminine" analogue: autor/autorka, scenograf/scenografka, scenarzysta/scenarzystka, historyk/historyczka. In addition, in the 19th century, feminitives were treated much more loyally than in the Russian Empire: there were doctors, professors, and editors — they used these words everywhere. At the

same time, there are also enough problems — many women consider the suffix -ka offensive and disparaging, and after the 50s of the 20th century, the opinion arose that male nominations sound much more solid. Therefore, the idea appeared to designate women with the word "pani": pani professor instead of professor, pani director instead of director. In addition, there is another significant nuance. There is a tendency for depersonalization using pronouns. There are two third- person plural pronouns in Polish - oni and one. The first denotes a group where there is at least one man, and the second — all the others: women, children, animals, objects. There are no ideas on how to change this situation yet (Kondracka, 2000).

The French language native speakers resort to creating feminitives by adding the suffix -ice to the word, as in the case of sénateur/sénatrice, or adding the ending "e" — turning un président into une présidente.

Changes in language are regulated by the French Academy, an ancient institution that maintains the purity of speech. Not so long ago, it opposed the use of feminitives, considering them superfluous and stupid. However, at the beginning of 2019, Academy members voted for them and recognized gender nominations as a useful extension for society.
However, their decisions initially had no administrative force: the French National Assembly decided to indicate all the posts held by women using feminitives only. Thus, in 2014, a French deputy was fined almost 1,400 euros for addressing the chairwoman of Madame le président (Madam President) during the session, although it was necessary to use the phrase Madame la présidente (Madam President).

In addition, at the state level, they refused to address "Mademoiselle". Researchers note that the change is due to social norms: the expression indicates the marital status of a woman — "madame" means married, and "mademoiselle" – unmarried, while such a rule does not apply to men. At the same time, the change caused a wave of indignation: some feminists explain that women liked the appeal (Nikolaeva, 2010).

Another problem related to the situation in the French language is the use of gender— colored pronouns. The words elles — they – or toutes – all – are used to refer to a group of women, and ils or tous — for a group of people where there is at least one man. This norm has existed since the XVII century. The French grammarian of the 18th century N. Beauzee postulated masculine gender to be nobler than the feminine, due to the superiority of a man over a woman.

CONCLUSION

Feminist movements across the globe have been pushing for equal rights and opportunities for women for several decades. Language has been a crucial tool in this fight as it reflects and shapes the way we think about gender roles and relations. The usage of feminized forms of words, or feminitives, has been a topic of debate in various cultures, including French, Polish, Russian, and Belarusian.

Feminitives refer to the usage of feminine forms of words to address women or groups of women, instead of using masculine forms, which are considered gender-neutral. In Russian and Belarusian, the masculine form is the default form, and its usage is often considered gender-inclusive. However, this practice has been criticized for being sexist and discriminatory towards women, as it perpetuates the notion that men are the norm, and women are the exception. The usage of feminitives has been suggested as a way to

address this problem and promote gender equality. To delve into this phenomena a researcher is encouraged to expose a set of some peculiar dimentions that have not been discussed in the paper.

The contemporary Internet discourse has become an essential and indispensable platform for communication and expression, and its impact on language and culture is evident. In contemporary Russian and Belarusian Internet discourse, the usage of feminitives has been a subject of heated debate. Proponents of feminitives argue that the usage of gender-neutral language perpetuates gender stereotypes and hinders progress towards gender equality. They argue that using feminitives is a necessary step towards creating an inclusive and equal society(Jorgensen & Phillips, 2013).

Opponents of feminitives argue that the usage of masculine forms is already gender-inclusive and that the usage of feminitives is unnecessary and can even be seen as divisive. They argue that the usage of feminitives can create confusion and hinder communication, especially in written communication, where the pronunciation of the words is not evident(Ashmore,1990).

The usage of feminitives can be seen as a significant step towards promoting gender equality. It acknowledges the fact that women are not the exception, but an integral part of society. It promotes the visibility and inclusion of women in all spheres of life, including language. The usage of feminitives also challenges the traditional gender roles and norms that have been perpetuated by language and culture for centuries. It is an important step towards creating an inclusive and equal society.

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