

unresolved the problems to denote non-binary persons and personalized objects, as well as the task to make a woman more «visible». It was shown also that the feminatives with the final «-kynja» hardly comply with the Ukrainian phonology. It is proposed to recognize the general gender, which combines simple genders by means of the logical «OR» and may serve as the basis to successfully resolve all mentioned issues.

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THE PROBLEM OF GENDER IDENTITY IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

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Abstract

Gender-neutral language, also referred to as gender-sensitive language, is an umbrella term for feminist language reform efforts. Such reforms are aimed at changing the masculine, androcentric, i.e. a male-centric

structure of language that, within a patriarchal society, confers social privilege on the male and makes male the social norm. A popular option to mitigate linguistic sexism and gender neutralization are feminitives – designations for women, devoid of concomitant pejorative meanings and associations. Feminism and gender issues are gaining popularity not only in global society, but also in linguistics, and more precisely in the English language. Any language partly determines how we think and how we perceive the world. But language is a complex and clumsy system that has evolved over many centuries, and changes take root in it for a long time and do not always occur naturally.

Particularly heated debate flares up when the conversation turns to the expression of gender. By gender, we mean the socially acquired characteristics of people. If sex is given by birth from nature, then gender is socially organized and socially constructed. Norms, roles, gender expectations are all culturally determined and change over time. It concerns the traditionally “female” or “male” professions in which both are employed today, the difficulties with how to address non-binary persons (people who do not clearly define themselves as male or female) and how to account for people of different genders when addressing and many other more complex issues.

Keywords: gender identity, gender-neutral words, feminitives, non-binary person, feminist movement, sexism, feminine, masculine, English language, linguistics.

Modern world is becoming more and more gender-variant, not all people define their identity unambiguously, someone decides to abandon gender altogether, someone makes the transition from one to another. So we gradually find ourselves in a new social environment, and our own language must also be susceptible to all changes.

Critical attitudes towards gender in different languages appeared with the development of the feminist movement. The first feminist movement in Europe appeared in the late nineteenth century. It is considered to be the first wave of feminism. In general, there were 4 such conditional waves: since the 1960s, the

second has been fighting for social guarantees for women in the field of work, family, reproductive rights, women have drawn attention to inequality, domestic violence and other serious problems. The third wave occurred in the early 1990s (most of the changes in the language are associated with this period), and the fourth in the 2010s, when the “Me Too” movement gained popularity and the problem of harassment and abuse of power at work began to be actively discussed.

Language was taken up by feminist activists and linguists in the 1980s with Anne Bodine's “Androcentrism in Prescriptive Grammar” (Bodene,1975), that discussed an alternative to the usual pronouns she (she) and he (he) – the gender-neutral pronoun they (they), now it is already actively used in English. And in 1986, the book “Grammar and Gender” (Baron,1986) was published, where the author analyzes gender stereotypes entrenched in the language and suggests ways to overcome them.

Some feminists proceed from the hypothesis of linguistic relativity (the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, 1954), according to which it is believed that language determines the worldview, or at least influences, and largely determines perception. Nowadays the scientific community accepts as proven the existence of linguistic relativity in a weak, less radical version – language affects thinking along with other factors, but does not determine it completely.

Moreover, science fiction writer and linguist Suzette Haden Elgin in 1982 came up with the artificial language Laadan (Láadan) – the first female language. Elgin wanted to test the Sapir-Whorf linguistic relativity hypothesis and see if a language designed specifically to reflect women's worldview would influence culture. The writer proceeded from the hypothesis that natural European languages reflect male perception much more. Laadan was spoken by the women in Elgin's “Native Tongue” trilogy of books. The hypothesis was not confirmed – women did not actively use Laadan, although the language is still alive and being studied.

Many feminists rely on the fact that languages formed in patriarchal societies continue to reflect the same worldview and block gender equality. Most European languages still exist within these restrictions today, and the feminist movement

advocates for the conscious change of language in order to create a more gender-neutral or inclusive language environment. The first changes in the language were associated with femininities and the inclusion of women in the previously “neutral-male” fabric of the language.

Femininities are feminine nouns referring to women, which are formed from the same root words of the masculine gender that characterize men. Femininity can mean a woman's profession or qualification, as well as various types of her hobbies, activity, occupation, location. For instance: *businesswoman* – a woman who owns a business, *authoress* – a writer, *policewoman* – a female police officer.

The appearance of femininities in the English language is directly related to the growth of feminist sentiments in society, which led to changes in gender linguistics, which we can already observe in everyday speech. So, for example, when addressing a young woman, in many English-speaking countries they began to use the neutral form *Ms* instead of the usual *Miss* or *Mrs*. Such lexical innovations were invented to avoid sexism in conversation.

In English femininities are formed by replacing or adding various suffixes to a masculine noun, as well as replacing a noun that directly indicates a man with a feminine noun.

For instance:

actor (actor) – actress (actress);

poet (poet) – poetess (poetess);

hero (hero) – heroine (heroine);

astronaut (astronaut) – astronette (female astronaut);

cosmonaut (cosmonaut) – cosmonette (woman astronaut);

progenitor (predecessor) – progenitrix (predecessor);

administrator (administrator) – administratrix (female administrator);

landlord (landlord) – landlady (landlord).

Some of the professions do not specify a specific gender. There are words such as “lawyer”. These nouns are considered neutral, as they do not affect representatives of various sexual groups. That is why it is recommended to use these types of words in conversation, especially when it comes to people whose gender is unknown for sure.

For instance:

firefighter instead of fireman (fireman);

police officer instead of policeman (policeman);

chairperson, moderator, head instead of chairman (chairman);

member of Congress, representative instead of congressman (member of congress);

people, humans instead of mankind (humanity);

mail carrier, letter carrier, post worker instead of mailman (postman);

flight attendant instead of steward/stewardess (flight attendant).

Most representatives of the English-speaking community are more inclined to use feminines or neutral words that characterize people's professions. In their opinion, such words help to crack down on the prejudiced attitude towards women in society, as well as the distribution of responsibilities. In addition, supporters of the described changes in linguistics believe that such words inspire women to achieve new heights and prospects in their careers.

In some other languages, there is no such acute problem with naming professions. For example, in German for all professions there is a male and female form (*der Lehrer* - teacher, *die Lehrerin* - teacher; using the -in suffix, you can make a female form for any profession). However, even if words have both a masculine and a feminine form, this leads to another issue - the feminine suffix is always added to the masculine form. This means that the masculine form of the word is the norm, and the feminine is always secondary to it.

English pronoun “*He*” is often used in contexts where gender is unknown or unimportant, and the word “*Man*” means both a man and a person in general. For example: *When a student comes into the room, he should pick up a handout. (When a student enters the classroom, he must take a printout).* Although it is obvious that in some contexts the supposedly neutral man is perceived unnaturally. For example: *Man breastfeeds his young. (A male/human breastfeeds his offspring).* It is a marker of a serious problem, which in feminist theory is called the "invisibility of women" – their presence and importance fades into the background, as if obscured by a male “neutral” pronoun or noun.

Nowadays the combination “He or She” or “She or He” in English was gradually fixed when it was about a person whose gender is not defined or important. Another way is to use the pronoun “*they*” in the singular of a person if his/her gender is not specified or does not matter. It will decline in the same way as the plural *they*: *their*, *them*. This form is far from new: it was used by Geoffrey Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* and William Shakespeare in *Hamlet*. In languages where there were no feminine alternatives for many words, *they* began to appear, it became the norm to mention women much more often in neutral contexts.

Gender gap (gender gap) is an attempt to make the language more inclusive. For the first time, gender gap was used in German texts, putting an underscore (_) between the word stem and the feminine suffix: *liebe Kolleg_innen*, *liebe_r Student_in* (*dear students*), etc. This is a way of showing that between male and female gender we leave space for all other possible gender identities and thus mean everyone without exception. This is a convenient practice, but the gender gap is difficult to articulate in oral speech.

We need to admit that language environment in which a person lives directly affects our cultural level of development. And with the development of the language, not only our speech changes, but also consciousness – the understanding of who we are and what our attitude to a separate person in society is. The appearance of feminitives has become a logical step in the linguistic evolution of man. After all, thanks to their emergence, we have become more respectful of people, regardless of their gender division.

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