BEST JOURNAL OF INNOVATION IN SCIENCE, RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT
ISSN: 2835-3579
Volume:2 Issue:4|2023
www.bjisrd.com

The Problem of Identifying Gender Markers in Modern English

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***Abstract*:** *this article deals with the problem of identifying gender markers in modern English. In addition, author provides with the ideas from famous linguists who contributed in the sphere of traditional grammar.*

Key words: *gender, masculine, feminine, lexicographic sources, nomination, gender markers.*

The problem of identifying gender markers in modern English has its own rather remarkable and long history, since it is gender markers in the theory and practice of linguistic research that represent the most cognitively indicative example of structuring knowledge about the world from some minimal conceptual units correlated with the cognitive dissection of reality. In the process of linguistic evolution, the differences between female and male speech strategies are constantly examined from different positions, the conceptual and semantic parameters of gender universals in language are contrasted, the prospects for linguistic normalization of speech traditions in marking the genus of linguistic units are discussed.

The masculine gender in English is traditionally considered a sign of normativity in the use of both lexical and grammatical units, while female markers have until recently been on the periphery of research attention. This thesis can be confirmed by the arguments of the author of a treatise published in 1751 on the axiological advantages of the masculine gender in comparison with the feminine in the practice of speech communication. According to James Harris, “the Supreme Essence / Existence … in all languages, it is identified with the Masculine gender, just as belonging to the male sex is considered the highest and more perfect characteristic” [1]

Further development of the concept of “male superiority” can be found in the works of critics who hold the opposite point of view regarding the leading role of male gender characteristics in language. Dale Spender, one of the most active defenders of the feminine gender in language, believes that the

injustice of linguistic control in the form of a male marker is rooted in the parable of the creation of Eve from Adam's rib, which implies an erroneous redistribution of childbearing functions and, accordingly, incorrect nomination. In later works of researchers of gender relations in language practice, the influence of the above mythological pattern on the derivative nature of female gender characteristics in the design of linguistic units of different levels was noted.

Derived feminine forms are usually marked with a suffix or some other morphological or lexical feature that distinguishes the feminine gender from the general one and in some cases partially duplicates the form of the original masculine gender. For example, a man is a woman, the author is an authoress. Some researchers interpret's in the English feminine pronoun 'she' as a prefix that is attached to the masculine pronoun 'he', which seems to be an erroneous statement in the light of etymological data on the origin of these linguistic units. A similar erroneous interpretation is found in the correlation, at first glance, of the related English nouns 'man' and 'woman': despite the rather transparent orthographic similarity, the feminine noun is by no means derived from the masculine noun, because it came into English from the Latin 'femella', the diminutive form of the Latin corresponding noun 'femina'.

Over the past two centuries, linguists offering a pseudo-historical interpretation of the category of gender in English have insisted that the female communicative code is derived from the male and cannot serve as a role model due to its subordinate status in relation to the language of men. As an argument of "derivation", theoretical arguments were used about the original meaning of words in the English language, false etymological definitions, and statements about the excessive talkativeness of English women, reproaches for their too distinct and loud pronunciation of sounds, even accusations of excessive detail and accuracy in the choice of language units or cloying politeness. Etymological research in the field of the study of linguistic universals, which serve to designate the category of gender in the English language, confirms that the evolution of the English gender paradigm has been dominated for several centuries by studies focused on proving the advantages of the masculine gender over the feminine at various levels [2]. Similarly, the creators of artificial or philosophical languages propose to consider the range of linguistic characteristics of the feminine gender as a derivative subordinate to the markers of the masculine gender. So, since the seventeenth century, in a number of artificial languages, the system of feminine markers has acquired semantic value and integrity only in comparison, or rather, in opposition to the masculine gender.

In the system of artificially created feminine pronouns, they were considered linguistically marked in contrast to unmarked masculine pronouns, or their categorical gender signs were not recorded at all. In Esperanto, for example, its creators marked both genders with a suffix, although when referring to the feminine gender, this suffix is additionally associated with affectionate diminutive semantics: "la knabo" - boy; "la knabino" is a girl. In the works on etymology, the functions of men and women that are socially fixed by gender are quite clearly reflected. According to John Ruskin, native English words mirror objectively existing referents, and the referent of the English noun "woman" is inextricably linked with the concept of "home": "What do you think the beautiful word "wife" comes from?... This is a great word in which English and Latin are winning over French and Greek. I hope that the French will someday find a word for this instead of their terrible 'femme'. But where do you think it comes from? ...the great use of Saxon words is that they usually really mean something. Wife means 'weaver'...You have to be either house wives or moths; remember that. In a deep sense, you must either weave the destinies of people and embroider them; or feed on them and bring them to decay" [3]

As the review of lexicographic sources of that time shows, the desire for the accuracy of lexicographic comments was combined by researchers with their own anti-feminist sentiments and prejudices. For example, the author of a treatise on the origin of words and their romantic biographies, Wilfred Funk, rightly noted that over time many of the terms for women have degraded, and gave an example with the noun ‘coquette’, which came from the noun ‘cock', originally in a figurative sense having a quite decent man as a referent. Other transformations of the lexical unit ‘wench’, which alternately denoted ‘a child of any sex’, ‘a young worker’, ‘a rustic, uncouth female’ and, finally, ‘a libertine’, quite convincingly confirm the statement about the degradation of the mentioned words, and on the other hand, indicate the desire of researchers to consider nouns, marked with the category of the feminine gender, from the standpoint of explicit anti-feminism. However, the mechanism of formation of the system of gender markers in the English language has been constantly improved and supplemented as a result of linguistic transformations caused not only by internal “genetic”, but also by external factors of interaction of the English language with another linguistic environment, as well as traditional poetic personification. Along with the rules for matching adjectives, pronouns and articles with animate and inanimate nouns, languages that have historically developed a common cognitive cultural space due to intensive borrowings have undoubtedly had a regulating influence on the paradigm shift of gender characteristics in English. So, the nouns ‘sea’ and ‘sword’ in the eighteenth century were associated with the masculine gender, cities, while ‘, ‘ship’, ‘tree' – with the feminine.

These associations were not caused at all by the needs of literary metaphorization, but were explained by their genetic similarity with gender markers in Latin, Greek or French, from which they were borrowed.

A special place in the creation of a cognitive gender module is occupied by feminine markers of English nouns denoting people in their professional field. First of all, in this subgroup, it should be noted the traditional suffixes that formalize nouns of the corresponding semantics: -ess, -ette, -ine. Despite the numerous variants of interpretations proposed for these suffixes, the definitions that contain a description of semantic components from the standpoint of cognitive linguistics seem to be the most convincing and reliable. Of undoubted interest in this regard is the suffix -ess, which owes its origin to the Greek language. The “transshipment points” for him were Latin and Old French, where he had the function of a familiar indicator of derived feminine names. After the Norman conquest, the English language borrowed the nouns countess, mistress, lioness, mistress, and since the fourteenth century this suffix joins the basics of the original nouns, forming a series: dancer, resident, teacher, etc. In the fifteenth century, the popularity of the "feminine" suffix increased so much that it began to be attached to nouns that already had a suffix of similar semantics: operator, interlocutor. In the XVIII century, the suffix is an essay, and in the textbooks of the XIX century. there are direct recommendations to avoid the design of nouns using this formant. However, contrary to predictions and recommendations, the suffix essay turned out to be very viable, which can be illustrated by examples of both standard and slang usage of nouns such as: adulteress, waitress, governess, murderer, actress, writer, etc [4].

The English nouns authoress and poetess deserve special comment, since they almost constantly had the correlates author and poet, respectively, which denoted representatives of both the masculine and feminine genders. It is important to emphasize that in the history of the development of literary English, cycles of the appearance, disappearance and “resurrection” of gender markers are clearly traced. An example is the English nouns nominating female persons in diplomatic circles: ambassadress, ambassadrice, ambassadrix, ambassadatrice, ambassadatrix. The fate of the generic marker in question in modern English is also determined by the geographical area. If ‘actress’ has the

highest frequency index in American English, then in the British version, the normative use allows hostess, waitress, governess, stewardess, as well as authoress, manageress, proprietress, which seems to signal the revival of this marker in English at the present stage of its development. Similar trends are found in American slang: crimestress, actress, bankeress, spyess, etc., and the need to clarify the generic affiliation in the context of works of fiction or in oral communication expands the gender range due to the parallel coexistence of the forms 'woman doctor', 'she-doctor', 'doctress', 'doctorine'. Regarding the suffix -ine, with which the last noun is formed, it should be noted that despite its high productivity in the field of names of the most diverse semantics (actorine, knitterine, mottorine, sailor, soldier), which have become quite widespread in American slang, this marker only occasionally occurs in oral colloquial speech.

The susceptibility of the American version of English to suffixes, with the help of which lexical units are created for the nomination of professions that gradually attract female staff, is explained by a number of social and psychological factors (higher educational status of women in modern society, expansion of the professional range for female representatives, increased ambitions in business, career, etc.). Examples of this kind are among the nouns with the suffix -ette: astronette, cosmonette, aviarette, farmarette, pickette – 'woman striker' (participant of protest-picketing), copette –'woman police officer' (policewoman). Similar formations are registered among the nominations in the field of show business: usherette, screenette, glamorette. Sports and military slang also offer variants of names marked with the suffix -ette, which correlate with the participation of women in a wide variety of sports and military activities: tankerette, champette, kaydette. Interestingly, it is this suffix, genetically related to the semantics of diminutive size, that is used to form nouns that serve to designate the names of things intended for women: mockinette, flatterettes, jamarettes [5].

In lexicographic practice, when discussing the status of gender markers in the English language, it is noted that lexical correlates play an important role in identifying the genus of English nouns along with explicitly expressed grammatical features. However, at present, the researchers' opinion boils down to the fact that it is inappropriate for nouns of the so-called gender-neutral status or units with zero gender marking to perform a double load, spreading their semantic influence on the cognitive domain of gender markers. Observations show that the cognitive mechanism of the formation of a system of gender markers in English is determined by the degree of their interaction with linguistic reality and with reference objects, and in modern conditions, an additional argument can be such an extralinguistic factor as the development of the feminist movement in English-speaking countries, which significantly expands the potential social and professional opportunities for women, and therefore - objective prerequisites are being created for the active use of explicitly expressed gender markers in the English language.

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