

**REMARKS ON GENDER – EXPRESSING GENDER IN ENGLISH,
AND SOME OF THE MAIN ISSUES THAT LEARNERS (AND
TEACHERS) HAVE TO COPE WITH¹**

Abstract: *The present paper focuses on a number of specific issues (most of which are in fact challenges, misconceptions and rough ideas) that are subject to what is generally called the feminist approach to linguistics. It presents some (strictly marginal) contrastive notes on expressing gender in English and Romanian, among which: genderization and gender neutrality, the problems posed by the usual definitions of gender (cf. sex, etc.), the existence of the epicenes in English, the idea of neutralization of grammatical oppositions (cf. also the idea of “language economy”), the possible existence of the “0 gender” (cf. the 0 / ø article) in English. Illustrative examples are given with respect to the alleged “sexist tradition” – as perceived by feminist linguistics –, followed by a set of prominent counterexamples (amply provided mainly by lexicography), fallacies and inconsistencies. The actual existence of gender-oriented languages (vs. “gender-neutral” languages) is then addressed, as well as a group of issues relating to usage and language didactics, mainly idiosyncrasies, grammatical and miscellaneous problems.*

Keywords: *gender, genderization, gender-neutral, gender-specific, feminism, sexism, fallacy.*

The paper aims at presenting a number of specific questions that are the object of feminist approach to linguistics. It focuses on the particular ways English and Romanian use in order to express the grammatical category of gender; the contrastive remarks are, in the context, only marginal.

Genderization is usually opposed to gender neutrality. The accusations of sexism, or male chauvinism (i.e. male-biased language) have been heard for some time now, especially in the English-speaking area. As a matter of fact, “neutralization” of gender through the use of the “gender-neutral” masculine form was used even in Shakespeare’s time, e.g. “For *who* would bear the whips and scorns of time (...) When *he himself* might *his* quietus make...” (*Hamlet*, Act III, Scene I).

The gist of the present discussion lies in the following essential issues: (1) the use (and the actual existence) of the so-called *generic masculine*, e.g. “Everybody should bring *his* lunch”; “We need to hire the best *man* available”;

(2) the place of the epicene in English, as different from the so-called common gender: “*epicene* 1. having the characteristics of both sexes; hermaphroditic; 2. of neither sex; sexless; 3. effeminate. 4. *Grammar* denoting a noun that may refer to a male or a female, such as *teacher* as opposed to *businessman* or *shepherd*; 5. (in Latin, Greek, etc.) denoting a noun that retains the same grammatical gender regardless of the sex of the referent” (COLL); and “*common: Grammar*. (in certain languages) denoting or belonging to a gender of nouns, esp. one that includes both masculine and feminine referents: Latin *sacerdos* is common” (COLL).

On the other hand, the existence ought to be validated and demonstrated, in Romanian as well, of a *Common Gender* (e.g. Romanian *artist, bolnav, diabetic, infractor, jongleur, pacient, paralytic, politician, primar, reumatic, suferind*, etc.) – cf. the above English definition – (although it is self-evident – and absolutely natural – that only the forms *gravidă* / pl. *gravidele* exist). One has to remark that the epicenes are, in Romanian,

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very much as in French and other Romance languages, quite well established, being largely dependent on plural / group uses such as: “românii / francezii / belgienii au fost mereu de părere că” (not: “românii / francezii / belgienii și româncele / franțuzoaicele... etc.” (cf. “the men *and* women (in this country)...” – a pattern often used in the Romanian media, through calquing the corresponding structure specific to English; the taking over has obviously been done via diverse cases of Anglo-American public discourse. It is our contention that the existence in Romanian of the rather abundant class of the epicenes (e.g. “manualul *utilizatorului*”, “momentan, *abonatul* pe care l-ai apelat nu e disponibil”) can lead us to the idea there linguistic conventions can sometimes amount to the stature of an actual linguistic *datum* (cf. Eugeniu Coșeriu’s *datul idiomatic*), or else an expression of linguistic economicality. Unfortunately, in comparatively recent times a disproportionate attack was launched by adepts of feminist linguistics on that age-old linguistic convention, basically under the banner of democracy, although it is our firm conviction that such exaggerations and misconceptions capitalizing on gender-awareness are in actual fact the expression of sheer ideological manipulation. Such Orwellian *Newspeak* actually runs counter the tendency English, an essentially analytic language, has towards neutralizing grammatical oppositions (mainly number and gender), a tendency that engenders forms like *Swiss, Vietnamese, the Dutch / English / Irish, sheep, swine, deer, cattle, vermin, fruit, information*, etc.

We believe that it is evident enough that language itself exhibits conventions that affect both the lexicon and grammar, which, though not necessarily androcentric, are the result of (essentially unpurposed) social consensus, and were meant to facilitate linguistic expression (a conspicuous example is the traditional order *Male – Female*, observed by practically all official documents in use anywhere in the world (in forms, IDs, official declarations, etc.), without any derogatory, anti-feminine attitude meant.

The trouble is that, for one thing, there are quite a few problems posed by the usual definitions of *gender* (cf. *sex*, etc.); such dictionary definitions, in which *sex* and *gender* are used alternatively (e.g. “the same gender = the same sex”), confuse to the same extent to which they try to clarify the readers. Here are some illustrations for the term *gender* “...2. any of the categories, such as masculine, feminine, neuter, or common, within such a set. 3. *Informal*. the state of being male, female, or neuter. 4. *Informal*. all the members of one sex: *the female gender*” (COLL). Here is a schematic, schoolbook definition of *gender* (in Shaw, Harry, *Errors in English and Ways to Correct Them*, 1993, p. 66): “The gender of nouns and pronouns is determined by sex. A noun or pronoun denoting the male sex is called *masculine*: *man, boy, lord, executor, he*. A noun or pronoun indicating the female sex is called *feminine*: *woman, girl, lady, executrix, she*. Nouns that denote no sex are referred to as *neuter*: *house, book, tree, desk, lamp, courage*. Some nouns and pronouns may be either masculine or feminine and are said to have *common gender*: *child, teacher, friend, doctor, visitor, it, they*”.

Conversely, a linguistic dictionary definition of *gender* can illuminate the reader through more clear-cut distinctions, e.g. *The Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar*, s.v. *gender*, reads: “1. A classification of nouns, pronouns, and related words, according to natural distinctions of sex (or absence of sex). 2. The property of belonging to one of such classes. In some languages *gender* is an important grammatical property of nouns and related words, marked by distinct forms. In French, for example, all nouns are either masculine (e.g. *son livre*, masculine = ‘his book’ or ‘her book’) or feminine (e.g. *sa plume*, feminine = ‘his pen’ or ‘her pen’). In these languages natural gender is usually, though not entirely, marked by the matching grammatical gender. In some languages (e.g. Latin,

German, and Old English) there is a third gender, *neuter*, which marks nouns denoting inanimate objects (although many such nouns belong to one of the other two genders). In Modern English overt grammatical gender hardly exists, except in third person singular pronouns: *he/him/his/himself* (masculine); *she/her/hers/herself* (feminine); *it/its/itself* (often called *non-personal* rather than *neuter*). Even here there can be some mismatch between natural and grammatical gender. Inanimate countries, ships, cars, etc may sometimes be referred to by masculine or feminine pronouns; a baby may be *it*; animals may be referred to by personal or non-personal pronouns. Natural gender distinctions are made covertly in many words referring to males and females. Pairs of words occasionally show a derivational relationship (e.g. *hero/heroine*, *widow/widower*), but many male and female noun pairs show no morphological connection (e.g. *brother/sister*, *duck/drake*)”.

The existence of the *epicenes* in English (which could be most profitably compared with the more obvious and frequent epicenes in Romanian) should be, we believe, paralleled to the much broader idea of *generic*; see below one of the several definitions of the term, as occurring in the same *Oxford Dictionary of English Grammar* (s.v. *generic*); in our case, it must be adapted to the concept of gender: “Some personal pronouns are used with the generic meaning of ‘people in general’ or ‘mankind’: *One* never can tell. *Man* seems to think *he* rules the planet”.

As a matter of fact, we believe that the very idea of neutralizing a grammatical opposition, which is, incidentally, common to a large number of (Indo-)European languages (cf. also the idea of “language economicality”), can be amply and convincingly illustrated, among other things, by the 3rd person plural pronouns in various languages, including English, German, Russian, e.g. *they*, *Sie*, *они* – as opposed to Romanian, Italian, French, etc. Another fit example of form simplification through neutralizing a grammatical opposition is, in Romanian, the existence of the adverbs having the same form as that of the (masculine) adjectives they come from (through conversion), e.g. *frumos / urât* (in sentences like “Ei cântă *frumos / urât*”: these are essentially masculines used as adverbs! (Cf also “Buy *American*”, or French “Achetez *français*”).

On the other hand, common school grammar books in Britain and the US tend to force gender – as an element of grammatical and formal relevance – into the boundaries of the *lexicon* (in a way very similar to the treatment of the irregular verbs in GTG): “**FEMININES** In English it is common not to use a special word or ending to distinguish the sex of a noun. Many nouns refer to both male and female: **artist, banker, cousin, friend, lawyer, neighbour, novelist, teacher, zoologist.** But it is sometimes possible to use endings to distinguish male and female:

<i>feminine</i>	<i>masculine</i>
actress	actor
duchess	duke
goddess	god
heroine	hero
princess	prince
widow	widower
businesswoman	businessman

although in many cases the distinction can be seen as parallel to that between the different words **daughter/son**, **cow/bull**, etc. It is quite possible to say **she is a good actor** or **she was the hero of the day**. If it is necessary to identify a person’s sex, use either:

a female friend **a male friend**

a female student **a male student**
or: **a woman doctor** **a man doctor**
(...) When it is not necessary or possible to distinguish or identify a person's sex it is common to use the word **person**: **a chairperson** **a salesperson** **a spokesperson**. Although some women are quite happy being called **chairmen** or being addressed as **Madam Chairman**. Use of the word **person** is becoming increasingly common, for example in job advertisements: **security person required**" (from *Harrap's English Grammar*, p. 54-55)

In the act of real communication, it is the functional-discourse dimension that ought to interest the linguist, rather than the stylistic-social dimension. Coming back to the idea of simplification and linguistic economicality, let us invoke the case of article elision in a number of English set phrases, (some of which are in fact somewhat "stylistically imbued"; e.g. *hand in hand*, *tongue in cheek* (cf. also Bill Bryson's reference to simplification, in the quotation below, e.g. *go to work / hospital* etc.). Hence we believe that the so-called "gender-neutral" form (e.g. Romanian *abonat*, *bolnav*, *locuitor*, *pacient*, *scriitor*, etc.) can be judged in this way, as well: a singular term could be extracted from the corresponding plural noun designating collectivities of beings, the sex of which / whom is immaterial to the speaker – v. the pluralization and substantivization by means of the (definite) article, e.g. *the rich*, *bogații / cei bogați*, *bogatul*, *morții / cei morți / cei muriți* (in Eminescu's *Împărat și proletar*); from an added lexicographical angle, such substantivized adjectives as *tânăr*, *om* "human being / individual" could be seen as mere masculine forms, in their dictionary treatment.

Even English-speaking linguists have perceived, through the course of time, the process of language simplification as being reflected, among other things, in the virtual loss of gender by the English language: "Above all, English is mercifully free of gender. anyone who spent much of his or her adolescence miserably trying to remember whether it is 'la plume' or 'le plume' will appreciate just what a pointless burden masculine and feminine nouns are to any language. In this regard English is a godsend to students everywhere. Not only have we discarded problems of gender with definite and indefinite articles, we have often discarded the articles themselves." (Bill Bryson, *Mother Tongue: The English Language*, 1991, p. 8). The underlying idea is, we think, that of "0 gender"; in the same context, that of simplification (i.e. dropping the articles), we believe that gender simplification can be cited as a kindred case: so, the "0 article" is fully comparable to "0 gender": "We say in English 'It is time to go to bed', where in most other European languages they must say, 'It is *the* time to go to *the* bed'" (Bryson, *ibidem*).

Some landmarks in the historical evolution of English are also worth citing (as considered by the same author): Old English was "a wondrously complex tongue. Nouns had three genders and could be inflected for up to five cases. As with modern European languages, gender was often arbitrary. *Wheat*, for example, was masculine, while *oats* was feminine and *corn* neuter..."; "Even something as basic as the definite article *the* could be masculine, feminine, or neuter" (op. cit., p. 42-43). The process of gender disappearance was lengthy but implacable: "...when the chronicle (the 12th century *Peterborough Chronicle*) resumes in 1154, the language is immeasurably simpler – gender is gone, as are many declensions and conjugations..." (op. cit., p. 49); it extended all through Middle English: "English by Chaucer's time had already undergone many consequential changes. ... Gender had disappeared in the north of England and was on its knees in the south" (op. cit., p. 53).

Consequently, the existence is fully possible of the “0 gender” (cf. the *0 / ø article*) in English. Similarly, the existence of of a *Common Gender* in Romanian, as well (e.g. *pacient, alegător* – cf. English *friend, lawyer, teacher*) is, we believe, equally provable.

The use of such gender-free / gender-neutral terms is unfortunately pestered by the (admittedly, rather recent) concept of sexism. The stakes are in fact divided between gender *neutrality* and gender *specificity* (the former attitude intends to remove the perceived subservience of the feminine vs the masculine, and the latter claims that using the feminine for terms that are traditionally masculine endows women with more social, professional, etc. prestige). Here are some illustrative examples with respect to the alleged “sexist tradition” – as perceived by feminist linguistics: “the professional *politician* is regarded as a professional liar with a strong lack of trustworthiness, but not to be corrupt or to use *his* position to amass personal wealth” (quoted from the internet); “*canoness* (‘kænənɪs) *R.C. Church*. a woman belonging to any one of several religious orders and living under a rule but not under a vow” (COLL).

Sexism itself is defined (in terms of social ideology) as “discrimination on the basis of sex, esp. the oppression of women by men” (COLL). Let us compare the above definition with the third sense (as it appears in COLL) of the term *chauvinism* (with its restrictive collocation – *male chauvinism*): “3. smug irrational belief in the superiority of one’s own race, party, sex, etc.: *male chauvinism*). There is a measure of truth in the variously expressed accusations that have been made by the supporters of feminism. Numerous linguists (not all belonging to the “fair sex”) have demonstrated that there are many fixed / set, or idiomatic phrases / expressions which present women, i.e. the female sex (or “the weaker sex”) as being somewhat – or downright – minor or ridiculous (cf. also Romanian *sexul slab*, essentially a calque from French *le sexe faible*). The principal materialization of gender discrimination and sexist language is stereotyping, which is linguistically expressed as metaphor (e.g. *chick, henpeck, bitch* – vs. *stud, macho*) or connotation and collocation: compare *spinster* and *bachelor*. It is true, for example, that convention (a largely cultural-ideological convention, to be frank) has seen to it that, in various languages (including English), the concept of *God* (*the Lord, Dieu, Dumnezeu*, etc.) is associated not only with the masculine (grammatical) gender, but also the masculine referential description; moreover, in most religions of the world, God made *man* in his own likeness – and it was only afterwards that He made woman.

The allegations of *sexism* can take support on a bulky corpus of examples, provided by thousands of sources, both old and new: ● Classical books, e.g. “Ask a great *money-maker* what *he* wants to do with *his* money – *he* never knows”. (Ruskin); ● Various textbooks and educational books, e.g. “A modern reader who works *his* way from, say, Wyatt and Surrey through Malory and Chaucer...” (*The Oxford Illustrated History of English Literature*, Editor Pat Rogers, p. 3); “Neanderthal *man* was not that different physically from modern *man*, but different enough to not be mistaken for *him*”. (*Science Trivia – from Anteaters to Zeppelins*, Charles J. Cazeau, p. 138); ● Formal, public presentations, e.g. “...indifference of the farm *owner* because *he* deals only with the contractor who delivers the people...” (in the brochure to the seminar *Four discussions about our contemporary world*, conducted by the American HRM lecturer Woodrow Sears, May 2011); ● The Internet, e.g. “No *traveller* can call *himself* well travelled without visiting Transylvania and shaking hands with a couple of sexy vampires”; “However, simplicity can be a virtue, as can the *teenager’s* whole-hearted devotion to his current passions” (<http://www.ftv.com/fashion/page.php?P=1894>); ● In foreigners’ discourse, e.g.

“What the *character* says and what *he* thinks” (in a presentation given by a Romanian lecturer), etc.

A ready source of evidence in support of the idea that, in some contexts, the feminine has systematically been disfavoured is the fact that, under the heading *Names of natural disasters*, the feminine has always been more frequent, e.g. *Climatic disasters ranked in keeping with the number of deaths caused Extreme climatic conditions (heatwaves, fog, torrential rains, etc.) ... Extreme climate/ weather* (Source: The data were extracted from Stephen J. Spignesi’s book “*The 100 greatest disasters of all time*” published by Editura Lider, Editura Cartea pentru toți, Bucharest, 2005). In the annexes to the above-mentioned book, there is an abundance of **feminine names**: *Agnes, Allison, Betsy, Beulah, Camille, Carol, Cleo, Diana, Diane, Donna, Eloise, Hattie, Hazel, Hilda* (two strong storms, in different years), *Hortense, Inez, Iris, Isabel, Janet, Jeanne, Joan, Katrina, Mahina, Mary, Nina, Rita, Thelma, Vera, Winnie*, while the **masculine names** are comparatively few: *Allen, Andrew, Cesar, Charley, David, Floyd, Georges, Gilbert, Gordon, Hugo, Ike, Ivan, Stan*. (Some of the names can be either feminine, or masculine: *Fox, Fran, Opal, Tracy*).

Contrarily, there are thousands of counterexamples, tending to prove that convention is part and parcel of the *linguistic datum*, which virtually annihilates the accusations of sexist manipulateness. Such examples are amply provided mainly by lexicography, the systematic and (typo)graphical conventions of which are essentially economical, e.g. *black* will never be glossed as “negru, neagră”. Compare, however: “*twelfth num. al doisprezecelea*”; “*twentieth al douăzecilea*”; “*twelve num. doisprezece*”, etc., on the one hand – and, on the other hand: “*typist s. 1. dactilografă. 2. dactilograf*” (in Irina Panovf’s English-Romanian dictionary), and “*twin s. 1. geamăn. 2. geamănă*” (in the same dictionary). We think no one will ever think of *dactilograf* as a natural alternative for *dactilografă*, whereas *geamănă* can be easily and safely inferred from the “masculine” (i.e. gender-neutral) form *geamăn*.

Here are some more examples of the traditional treatment of gender by lexicographers: “*Bachelor of Science* a degree conferred on a person who has successfully completed his undergraduate studies in a branch of the sciences” (COLL); “*to leave (someone) to his own devices*. to leave (someone) alone to do as he wishes” (COLL); *forfeits*: “(sometimes pl.) a game in which a player has to give up an object, perform a specified action, etc., if he commits a fault” (COLL); “*a dog in the manger* a person who keeps others from using something which he is not using himself” (Webster electronic dictionary); *as one man* simply means “unanimously”, etc.

Even if grammar is (naturally) present in the overall complexity of the monolingual or bilingual dictionaries of the English language, gender is rarely made explicit. It is only in an exceptional manner that common monolingual dictionaries “do justice” to the feminines, by recording such gender-specific nouns as *giantess* (e.g. “*giant* (‘dʒaɪənt) Also (fem.): *giantess*” – COLL). Otherwise, lexicographic tradition unremittingly has its way, e.g. “*to send smb. flying / about his business* a trimitte pe cineva la plimbare / la treaba lui” (I. Panovf’s dictionary), and remarks like the ones below can only count as rhetorical questions or academic arguments: should we use only the gender-neutral form *său* in glossing *discreet*? (cf. the definition provided by the Bantaș English-Romanian dictionary, Teora Publishers: “*discreet* (...) la locul lui”); have the speakers of English long been sexist, since the word *husband* is glossed not only as “I. s. soț, bărbat”, but also as “II. vt. (2) a economisi” (cf. Panovf), “to manage or use (resources, finances, etc.) thriftily” (COLL)?

As authors of dictionaries ourselves, we would like to highlight some of the challenges and linguistic miseries presupposed by contrastivity, and the lexicographical (plus didactic) treatment of words in such books. For instance, the Romanian epicenes will never be made “explicit” in bilingual dictionaries, e.g. *analist, britanic, campion, proprietar, președinte*, to say nothing of terms like *elefant, insectă, veveriță*, etc., where the complexity of the *grammatical* marking is doubled by the referentiality of the *natural* gender. Things are even worse when it comes to glossing epicenes in an “impartial / politically correct” manner: should we mark such terms as the ones below as “*masc./fem. nouns*”? (e.g. *academic, accountant, ace, acquaintance, activist, addict, adept, adolescent, adult, adversary, advocate², African, agent, alien, ally, ambassador, analyst, ancestor, announcer, applicant, archaeologist, architect, artist, artiste, Asian, assassin, assistant, associate, astronaut, athlete, attendant, attorney, author, baby, baker, ballet-dancer, banker, bankrupt, barbarian, barrister, bear, beggar, beginner, better, biologist, blind, bookkeeper, boss, Briton, bureaucrat, burglar, buyer, caller, cameraman, candidate, capitalist, captive, carrier, Catholic, celebrity, champion, chancellor, character, chemist, chief, child, Chinese, citizen, civilian, civil servant, classic, cleaner, clerk, client, climber, clown, coach, colleague, collector, comic, commander, commentator, Communist, companion, competitor, composer, comrade, conductor, conqueror, Conservative, constable, constituent, consumer, consumptive, contemporary, convict, cook, correspondent, cosmonaut, councillor, counsellor, cousin, coward, creator, creditor, criminal, critic, cub, customer, cyclist, cynic, dancer, darling, dealer, debtor, defendant, defender, delegate, democrat, demon, dentist, deputy, designer, detective, dictator, diplomat, director, discoverer, doctor, donor, doorkeeper, dramatist, drawer, driver, eccentric, economist, editor, elder, electrician, employee, employer, enemy, engineer, envoy, European, exile, expert, fan, Fascist, favourite, feminist, financier, follower, fool, foreigner, forerunner, founder, friend, gambler, genius, Gipsy, graduate, grandchild, grandparent, grocer, guard, guardian, guest, gymnast, harvester, headteacher / head teacher, hearer, hiker, historian, holder, homeless, hostage, humorist, idiot, illiterate, immigrant, imperialist, incendiary, incurable, individual, infant, inhabitant, innocent, inspector, intellectual, intermediary, inspector, intruder, invader, invalid, inventor, investigator, investor, jeweller, joiner, journalist, judge, jumper, junior, keeper, kid, killer, lawyer, leader, learner, lecturer, liar, liberal, librarian, lieutenant, linguist, lodger, loser, lover, lunatic, magistrate, magnate, maker, manager, maniac, manufacturer, martyr, mason, mathematician, mayor, member, merchant, messenger, militant, millionaire, mimic, minor, monarch, monster, motorist, musician, murderer, Muslim, mystic, nationalist, native, negotiator, neighbour, newcomer, nominee, novelist, observer, occupant, oculist, offender, officer, official, onlooker, operator, opponent, optimist, organizer, original, orphan, outcast, outlaw, outsider, owner, pagan, painter, pamphleteer, parachutist, participant, partner, passenger, passer-by, patient, patriot, patron, peasant, pedestrian, peer, pensioner, performer, person, personality, pessimist, philosopher, photographer, physician, physicist, pianist, pilgrim, pilot, pioneer, planner, player, playwright, poet, polyglot, postgraduate, predecessor, premier, presenter, president, principal, prisoner, producer, professional, professor, programmer, promoter, prosecutor, Protestant, protester, provider, provincial, psychiatrist, psychologist, publisher, pupil, Puritan, receptionist, registrar, reporter, representative, republican, researcher, reviewer, rider, rival, robber, ruler, runner, sage, savage, sceptic, scholar, scientist, scout, scripwriter, sculptor, secretary, seller, senator, sentry, servant, settler, shareholder, shopkeeper, shopper, sibling, singer, slave, sleepwalker, smoker, smuggler, sneak, snob, solicitor,*

soloist, somebody, sovereign, Spaniard, speaker, specialist, spectator, spokesperson, sponsor, spouse, spy, stenographer, stranger, striker, subject, subordinate, substitute, successor, suckling, sufferer, suitor, superior, supervisor, supplier, supporter, surgeon, survivor, suspect, Swede, sweetheart, swimmer, Swiss, swot, talker, taxpayer, teacher, technician, teenager, tenant, terrorist, therapist, thinker, toddler, Tory, tourist, trainer, traitor, translator, traveller, treasurer, truant, trustee, tutor, twin, umpire, undergraduate, undersecretary, vagabond, vampire, vegan, vet, veterinarian, vice(-)chancellor, vice-president, victim, victor, viewer, violinist, volunteer, voter, wanderer, warden, watchman, weaver, winner, wit (3), witness, worker, wretch, writer, zoologist etc. Sometimes, we thought it necessary to textually specify sex/gender, in the Romanian translation, e.g. *saint* (seint) *smf.* sfânt(ă), *sitter*: “sf./sm.”, or *typist*: “dactilograf(ă). It was a lot harder with nouns like *butcher, captain, colonel, craftsman, dressmaker, general, jockey, marshall, mechanic, merchant, miner, plumber, recruit, reverend, sergeant, sheriff, smuggler, soldier, spaceman* (cf. *spacewoman*, marked by MacMillan as “informal”), *superintendent, Turk, warrior, watchman*, and even harder (or, at least, highly questionable) with nouns like *barber, bishop, bodyguard, boxer, bully, elf, giant* (cf. *giantess*), *labourer, peer, pirate, porter, prince, prophet, seaman, smith, tailor, thug, vicar, youngster*. We think that the cultural dimension of gender is more than apparent in nouns like *drunkard, guardsman, miller, prophet, redeemer, sailor, shoemaker, tyrant, villain*, etc.

Feminist linguistic theories currently use the term ‘women’s language’ (Von Flotow, 1997:78, quoted by Vanessa Leonardi) in reference to the creation of a language by manipulating everyday language, considered patriarchal. There are numerous studies on the issues of alienation, according to which women are oppressed by *patriarchal* language and largely controlled by men (Cameron, 1985: 6-7), as well as attempts at exploring the phenomenon of sexism in language, and eliminating it. No doubt, the cause is worth fighting for – but such attempts at emancipation may at worst amount to throwing the child with the bathing water. Moreover, since ‘women’s language’ typically manipulates grammatical gender, mainly by frequently referring to parts of women’s body and to their sexuality (including ample use of expletives), it may grow into the perfect counterpart/equivalent of the gross language typically used by confirmed woman-haters.

It is also true that the two approaches to the problem – the *difference* approach, and the *dominance* approach – are intertwined; gender was only embedded in the language, seen as a system, to the precise extent to which convention intervenes, quite apart from the power of effective intervention of the speakers themselves. Thus, a former sexist fact (i.e. that expressions referring to women are usually subject to derogation – though there are also masculine nouns used derogatorily, e.g. Romanian *armăsar*, English *macho*; etc.) has become, over time, a mere linguistic fact. Arguing that *housewife* has undergone the semantic shift that has finally turned it into *hussy* “*Contemptuous. a shameless or promiscuous woman*” (COLL), or that *mistress* was originally the feminine counterpart of *master* – cf. “a woman who has a continuing extramarital sexual relationship with a man” (COLL), boil down to invoking flimsy etymological arguments. This type of *etymological fallacy* was perceived by some as a manifestation of feminist “paranoia”. Similarly, the use of masculine pronouns to refer to human beings in general (e.g. *every student should bring his book to class*) is, at bottom, a fact of language, not of society – although the staunch supporters of the feminist standpoint disagree, saying that “The standard linguistic forms on a static linguistic system obscured the real gender dimensions of language” (D. Cameron, *Feminism and Linguistic Theory*, 1992). Nevertheless, we think there is little use in employing other terms than *man* to refer to *humankind*, because it runs counter to a very

old linguistic tradition / convention established in most natural languages (languages genetically as far apart as Latin, Romanian, French, German, Arabic and Hungarian commonly use the equivalent of *man* for designating “any human being”, viz. *homo*, *om*, *homme*, *Mann*, *embér*). Similarly, using *he* in reference to *he* or *she* (a procedure and an attitude that were styled as ‘pronoun envy’) seems rather ludicrous, mainly in light of the historical evolution of languages, where (grammatical) form and meaning are closely interrelated, while cultural and social data were part of the respective nation’s lore; so, far from being manipulative, the system evolved according to its own multi-faceted, multi-essence intricacy. (See F. Fernandez, *Historia de la Lengua Inglesa*, Madrid, 1986: Old English had *three genders* – Masculine, Feminine and Neuter. From the point of view of their form, they could (generally) be distinguished as having the endings: *a*. The Masculine: ended in *-a*, *-oþ*, *-dom*, *-els*, *-ere*, *-had*, *-scipe* (e.g. *se mona*, *se fiscop*, *se cynedom*, etc.). The names of males, containing the semantic features (+human) or (-human), were naturally masculine, e.g. *se faeder*, *se mearh* ‘the horse / stallion’. *b*. The feminine nouns: ended in *-u*, *-ung*, *-nes(s)*, *-en(n)*, *-ett*, *-estre*, *-reden*, e.g. *seo efnung* ‘the evening’, *seo byrdhenn* ‘the burden’, etc. (the names which designated female persons or adult female animals naturally belonged to the feminine gender), e.g. *seo modor*, *seo cu* ‘the cow’, etc.). *c*. The neuter gender included nouns ending in *-lac*, *-en*, e.g. *witelac* ‘penalty; pain’, *maiden / maeden* ‘maiden, young lady; girl’. Also neuter were the nouns naming young beings, be they persons (so, (+human) nouns) or animals (cf. today’s use of the personal pronoun *it* as a substitute for *child* or *infant / baby*). Then, there was the system of the personal pronoun: III. (masc.) Nom *he* ‘he’, Accus *hine*, Gen *his*, Dat *him*, (fem.) Nom *heo* ‘she’, Accus *hi*, *hie*, Gen *hire*, *hiora*, Dat *hire*, (neut.) Nom *hit* ‘it’, Accus *hit*, Gen *his*, Dat *him*, (plur., masc. and fem.) Nom *hi*, *hie*, *heo* ‘they’, Accus *hi*, *hie*, *heo*, Gen *hira*, *heora*, Dat *him*, *heom*. In Middle English, grammatical gender was expressed either by means of noun and pronoun inflection, or by means of the strong declension of the adjective, or by the demonstratives. Moreover, grammatical gender became actually manifest under the influence of the various noun borrowings taken from either French or Latin, e.g. *mone / moyn* ‘moon’, which became feminine, like *flesh / flesch(e)* ‘flesh, meat’. The personal pronoun reduced its cases to two (the Nominative was a “subject”, while the “object” was expressed by the Accusative and the Dative). The forms of the personal pronoun were: *ik / ich / I* (or *Y (i:)*), *us*, *theo*, as well as *yu* (the weak form), *eu / ou* and *eure / oure*, plus *iow / you*, *he / ha / a*. The Dative form *him* became general, to the detriment of the Accusative form *hine / hin*. The neuter singular form was *hit*. The feminine singular form was *ha / a* (the weak form), which began to be mistaken for the masculine form, consequently the form *sche* or *scho* (whose origin is rather vague) was substituted to them. The plural forms were: *hi / hy*, *heo / he / ho*. They would be replaced by the Scandinavian forms *ðei; thai / thay* ‘they’, with the Dative and Accusative forms *ðaim / thaim*; the process started in the North).

Gender neutrality is, in the context, seen as an ideological / political threat, and explicitly opposed to the idea of *affirmative* attitude: “Some argue that even in a language like English, which does not have the gender agreement dilemma¹ created by grammatical gender, there are dangers in the discourse strategy of neutralizing references and moving away from genderization towards gender neutrality.” The author gives the example of

¹ Cf. Romanian (*un*) *model*, the referent of which is... feminine; the problems of adjective agreement are all the more difficult – mainly if we compare the term with its Italian counterpart (in which case, the feminine form of the Italian adjective is possible, and currently used).

police officer being replaced by *policewoman*, which, she says, is preferable, since it suggests social success in a profession formerly considered exclusively masculine. (op. cit., p. 273).

Another significant point of the present discussion is the various ways in which the grammar of current English (and, incidentally, also Romanian) usage is negatively influenced by this – let us admit it – “gender dilemma”: (1) Problems relating to the explicit social and cultural status, e.g. «Doamnă *secretar* (de primărie)», vs. «Doamnă *secretară*» (cf. *dactilografă, bibliotecară, plasatoare*, etc.); (2) Cases involving attempts to put up with both the pressure of politically correct speech, and the grammatical-lexicographic convention (by using explicit glossing means), e.g. “to put *someone* in *his* (or *her*) place. to humble someone who is arrogant, conceited, forward, etc.” (COLL); (3) Cases of grammatical incongruity, e.g. “*Gemini* – Latin genitive *Geminorum*”, or “*Pisces* – Latin genitive *Piscium*” (COLL), etc.; so, as many cases of mismatching of etymology and referent;¹ (4) Problems triggered by the epicenes, in Romanian, as well, e.g. “*Abwehr*-ul avea și el puține idei despre modul...” (*Spionaj*, Ernest Volkman, Editura *RAO International*; 2008, translated by George Salomie, p. 111): a case when the consonant-ending form of the proper name (hence, sounding just like a masculine noun) influences gender assignation; one may wonder why *Abwehr* should not be thought of as a feminine name, since it was an espionage organisation (cf. Romanian *organizație*, a feminine noun, after all).²

Furthermore, there are numerous problems about expressing gender, which more often than not impinge on usage, acceptability, and didactic matters. Here are some examples: “Everybody working on Sunday or a holiday will have their pay doubled” (Shaw, Harry, *Errors in English and Ways to Correct Them*, 1993, p. 79) is said to be erroneous in point of “agreement of pronoun and antecedent”. Such usage notes literally abound: “**Usage.** Some users object to the word *chairman* since they feel it is inappropriate and sexually discriminatory when applied to a woman. *Chairperson* has come to be widely used as an alternative to either *chairman* or *chairwoman*, since it has no gender bias. Other users, however, consider *chairperson* unacceptable on the grounds that it is unwieldy. Possible alternatives are the use of *chair*, accepting the pair *chairman* /*chairwoman*, or using *president*” (COLL); “**Usage.** Where the pronoun *one* is repeated, as in one might think one would be unwise to say that, he is sometimes substituted: *one might think he would be unwise to say that*. Careful writers avoid *one* followed by *he*, however, because of possible ambiguity: *he* in this case could refer either to the same person as *one* or to some other person” (COLL); “**Words that may cause offence.** **He, him, his** and **himself** are sometimes used for referring to a person of either sex, for example in writing about something that may apply to a man or to a woman. However, many people think that this use suggests that women are not included, or that men are more important than women. To avoid causing offence, you can use expressions such as **he or she, he / she, s/he, him/her**, or **him/herself** in writing. In conversation, many people say **they, them, their**, and **themselves** to refer to a person without mentioning whether the person is male or female”. (*MacMillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners – International Student Edition*, 2002, p. 657).

¹ In much the same way, when one says *Are you (a) Pisces / Gemini?* there is lack of congruity, i.e. syntactic disagreement, since the Latin noun is (etymologically and formally) a plural.

² On the other hand, there are (Germanic) feminine names ending in a consonant, which are declined like all common feminine nouns, e.g. *Gudrun* – Gen., Dat. *Gudrunei*.

Sometimes, such challenges and special issues generate awkward or odd, even ludicrous expressions, in both English and Romanian, e.g. "...fiecare *membru* a fost convins că soluția *lui* sau a *ei* era cea corectă" (*Cutia cu bomboane otrăvite*, Anthony Berkeley, translated by Constantin Badea, p. 237); the context really required gender differentiation – cf. the literality of the text translated); "Ashton Kutcher, în tandrețuri cu un fotomodel brazilian" (*Magazin*, 23 June 2011).

Be it as it may, in English as well as in Romanian, some feminine forms "depart" from the linguistic norm (or from the more general structural "parallelism" or "functional symmetry"), determining a more intricate general picture; they are either (stylistically, etc.) specialized, or irregular / "blocked" variants: for instance, in Romanian there is virtually no other term apart from the feminine *nemțoaică* (there is no **germancă*, although we do say *rusoaică*, *canadiancă*, while the possibility of saying *o germană* is rather restricted); cf. Engl. **Jewess*, **Negress*, etc. (unadvisable terms).

To conclude, the pressure of the things political, no less than the diversion sometimes provided by trivial, inconsequential things, can add, in this specific area too, a lot to the overall picture of the aggregate made up by politically correct speech, political pressure in matters relating to language, mass manipulation, etc. In some contexts (grammaticalized, vs. referential and ideologically sociologizing), the Masc. // Fem. distinction is utterly irrelevant. (A Romanian linguistic joke would be the best illustration of the purport of that distinction: "Cum deosebim o broască țestoasă femelă de un mascul? Răspuns: Gâdilăm broșcuța pe burtă și, dacă e *vesel*, e mascul, dacă e *veselă*, e femelă").¹

Being a *genderlect* (i.e. a kind of broader *idiolect* – "the variety or form of a language used by an individual"), 'feminine language', a social variety of the language, should no doubt be researched carefully and patiently. Yet, far from persecuting or discouraging it, the aspects connected with the existence and the scope of that variety should not be considered in an absolute or adulatory manner, nor should the attitude of "unveiling" (or "debunking") such linguistic aspects be encouraged. A comparison between two dissimilar enough languages (such as English and Romanian) may reveal significant aspects relevant of the different shades of conformity to the *gender-oriented* linguistic model (as opposed to the *gender-neutral* one).

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¹ „How can one tell apart a male tortoise from a female tortoise? Answer: One tickles the tortoise's belly and, if *he* is happy, then it's a male, if *she* is happy, it's a female”.

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