FURTHER ASPECTS OF GENDER MARKING IN ENGLISH AND ROMANIAN[1]

***Abstract**. The paper reverts to some of the main issues posed by the expression of the grammatical and conceptual notion of gender in English and Romanian. It revisits some aspects of defining gender and gender classes (including the epicene, common gender and neuter gender), neutralization, the idea of fuzziness in treating gender, and some of the errors and inconsistencies linked with the expression of gender in the light of the more recent linguistic approaches flawed by excessive feminism. The existence of the epicenes in the two languages compared, and the (provable) existence of a Common Gender in Romanian, as well (e.g. abonat, alegător, bolnav, creştin, pacient, zoolog) are also dealt with. A number of inconsistencies of usage, idiosyncrasies and cases of actual solecism are addressed, with illustrations inspired by the author's didactic experience.*

***Key words**: gender, neutralization of gender, epicenes, feminism, sexism, solecism, inconsistency.*

It is the aim of the present paper to dwell on some of the main issues posed by the expression of the grammatical and conceptual notion of gender in English and Romanian – in order to (more convincingly) illustrate and bring further clarifications to a number of queries relating to the definion of gender, the specificity of a number of gender classes (including the *epicene*, *common* gender and *neuter* gender), neutralization, the idea of fuzziness in gender belonging, as well as some of the errors and inconsistencies connected with gender, mainly as seen from the angle of linguistic feminism. In the present contribution, we propose to consider the situation in English, the deviations from the normative pattern, including upgrading, downgrading, literary style, the objective vs. the subjective pattern; then, compare it with the more complex situation in Romanian, in terms of form, where there are fewer *PC* conventions, due to the fact that, in Romanian, marking gender is mainly a matter of morphology. To support the thesis that gender-neutralization is a matter of pure linguistic convention, we are also trying to posit the idea that natural languages cannot – and should not – express all the shades of meaning or parameters of semantic-grammatical structure, being checked by understandable restrictions of a various nature. We would like to illustrate not only the actual existence of a *common gender* in Romanian, but also the need for *fuzziness* to be taken into account when dealing with gender marking, and the recognizable existence of what we may call "default-masculine" nouns in Romanian. It is obvious that, unlike English, Romanian tends to use *genderization*,

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be it rather sporadically. We are also aware of the fact that the growing number of epicenes in contemporary Romanian is ascribable to the numerous Anglo-American models.

We co-authored a previous paper (Manea, 2011) focusing on some of the main issues, challenges, approximations and misconceptions that the feminist approach to language deals with, while also addressing the question of the actual existence of gender-oriented languages (vs. "gender-neutral" languages). It seemed to us that the number of the languages that – by way of cultural tradition – pay more attention to marking the (essentially polite) specificity of *Gender* (or sex), is smaller than the number of those languages in which marking (and acknowledging the very existence of) gender is merely a matter of referential description. An increasing amount of disagreement is engendered by Gender neutrality, while the conventions that language itself displays, at the level of both lexicon and grammar, are long-established facts in acknowledging and securing neutrality for the masculine.

We believe that the situation in English should be carefully studied, and maybe detailed well beyond the limitations and idiosyncratic uses and subclasses established (or else, imposed) by common grammars. In actual fact, most grammar handbooks in the English-speaking area make the (grammatical-semantic) relevance of gender tantamount to the lexical units, very much in the way irregular verbs are perceived by syntactic-oriented grammars (i.e. *words* that the speakers have to learn as such) – see *Harrap's English Grammar*, p. 54-55: "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: ***feminine*** *actress*, ***masculine*** *actor* (…), although in many cases the distinction can be seen as parallel to that between the different words *daughter*/*son*, *cow*/*bull*, etc.". A rather similar definition (mainly in point of expediency) is given by the Thompson-Martinet *Practical Grammar*, while David Crystal's *Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* provides a much more comprehensive definition: "**gender**: A GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY used for the analysis of WORD-CLASSES displaying such ss as masculine/feminine/neuter, ANIMATE/inanimate, etc. Discussion of this concept in LINGUISTICS has generally focused upon the need to distinguish **natural gender**, where items refer to the sex of real-world entities, and **grammatical gender**, which has nothing to do with sex, but which has an important role in signalling grammatical relationships between words in a SENTENCE (ADJECTIVES agreeing with NOUNS, etc.). The gender SYSTEMS of French, German, Latin, etc., are grammatical, as shown by the FORM of the ARTICLE (e.g. *le* v. *la*), or of the noun (e.g. nouns ending in *-a* are feminine). Grammatical gender is not a feature of English, though some parts of the language can be analysed in such terms (e.g. the correlation between PRONOUNS, *he*/*she* co-occurring with *who*/*whose*, etc., whereas *it* co-occurs with *which*). English gender contrasts are on the whole natural, viz. *he* refers to male people, animals, etc. The

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few cases of other kinds of usage (e.g. a ship being referred to as *she*) pose interesting problems which have attracted considerable discussion in linguistics" (*op. cit.*, p. 148-9).

On the other hand, most punctilious grammarians (who, among other things, pay good attention to the functional complexity of the various grammatical categories) concur in stating that gender in English is only a matter of syntactic marking and relevance:[1] *e.g. Fill'er up!* (*i.e. the car*). *Don't call dear Baby it!* (from an angry mother); in this latter example, one can also speak about stylistic relevance, *i.e.* upgrading through colloquial usage: *She* for cars, ships, etc. will be opposed to downgrading: *It* for a baby / a (despicable / ignorable) human being.

Referential gender is also commonly addressed: Agreement in gender is expressed through the anaphoric use of the third person singular pronoun (*he, she, it*). For the [±MALE] opposition, within the [+HUMAN] category, *he* and *she* are used, being thus opposed, in the superordinate [±HUMAN] distinction, to *it*. Hierarchically, the gender oppositions in these three personal pronouns are as follows: *he / she* are opposed to *it*, while *he* is opposed to *she* (correspondingly, human *vs.* non-human and male *vs.* female). Thus, the normative pattern is defined, *e.g.* The *bridegroom* was *handsome*; *he* also had a beautiful moustache. *Jane* was fretting, yet *she* admitted *she* could be even more nervous than that. *The hen* had just laid *its* thousandth egg, etc.; in which cases *it* is used for non-human beings and for objects while *he / she* are used for human beings. *She* is used for [+FEMALE] nouns, and *he* for [+MALE] (or [–FEMALE]) nouns. While this is the general pattern, real usage of the English language sees a number of deviations.

Deviations from the normative pattern may be explained through the speakers' attitude towards the enunciation and the pragmatic content of the utterance. There are two main contexts that do not observe the above normative pattern (which would entitle us to say that, in broad lines, gender in English is predictable), allowing for alternative patterns, in which the normal gender oppositions are reshaped: a) The informal colloquial contexts; b) Literary style.

Informal context tends to use a gender reference pattern tainted by a sense of intimacy (*i.e.* involving very close connection), sometimes in utter disregard of the strict grammatical rules (thus, an intimate pattern). In literary language, it is mainly the use of personification that accounts for the most numerous cases of infringement to the normative pattern of gender in English.

The *Intimate Pattern* is thus delineated by M. Mathiot: "the striking characteristic of the use of *he*, *she*, *it* in the intimate pattern is the speaker's disregard for the two attributes that serve as defining criteria for entities in the normative pattern: 1. human status, and 2. biological sex. In the normative pattern only non-human entities are referred to as *it*, only human females as *she*, and only human males as *he*. The intimate pattern is constituted by three types of usage, in which the rules of the normative pattern are disregarded: on the one hand, non-

[1] The presentation was largely based on I. Ştefănescu, *Morphology (2)*, T.U.B., 1988.

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human entities are personified, while human entities are denied their human status. On the other hand, there is a reversal of sex roles: women are treated as if they were men and referred to as *he*; men are treated as if they were women and referred to as *she*."

The three types of shifting from the settled rules of normative usage can be thus summarized: *(A) Personification* (known as "upgrading"); *(B) Denial of human status* (or "downgrading"); *(C) Sex-role reversal*. The colloquial character of the intimate pattern may be demonstrated through the fact that its use is restricted to a limited social (and communicational) area; mainly for group relations – outside the intimate group, the normative pattern will be resumed. Examples: I've finally fixed *her* up (in reference to a door – intimate pattern); *cf.* That door was quite a mess; *its* look was messy, too (which is the normative pattern). The "in-mate" usage is rather confusing for non-native speakers, who feel (and are, in fact) "aliens" to the group thus constituted.

(A) Upgrading[1] (or personification – Curme speaks of "animating gender"). It is used whenever entities are regarded (and named) as if they were human. The speaker will use either *he* or *she*. Assimilating an "object" to a human being indicates, generally, a certain amount of positive involvement on behalf of the speaker as far as the respective entity is concerned; that may range from mere interest in the object of the personification to a maximum of passionate / highly affectionate / enthusiastic / rapturous, etc. involvement. There are many instances of entities belonging to the "objectual" world (as opposed to the actual "human" world) that can be upgraded / personified. This almost limitless set of possible occurrences may include nearly everything in the domain of either concrete or abstract "objectual" entities, *e.g.* houses, doors, pieces of furniture, prices, teams, balls, formulas, etc., *e.g.* I'm going to have *her* (= my car) painted pink one day; *She* (= my van) is a real wonder.

In a number of contexts, personification has a certain professional smack; it can be part of a professional jargon, *e.g.* The *up train* started at 8.30, and we were among *her* passengers. In much the same way, professional people will refer to ships, boats, schooners, frigates, sails, steamers, balloons, aeroplanes, as well as other types of craft, using the personal pronouns *she*, *e.g.* We were just aboard *The White Dove* when a thunderbolt struck *her*. There are however counter-examples, cases when ships and machines are referred to by the personal pronoun *he*, not *she*: The tiny *submarine* was not fit to fight back, so the Jerries sank *him*. Plants and animals are also a favourite subject of personification, *e.g.* Did you see that gorgeous *cauliflower* in Ann's garden? No, I didn't see *him*. *The jaguar* was ceaselessly prowling in the hope to find something to feed *his* little ones.

Within the animal subgroup, in which *it* constitutes the general rule (e.g. The *sheep* was grazing with *its* lamb), there are a number of "subsets" in which upgrading is usually applied, in parallel with the use of *it* as in the normative

[1] Among other things, ***to upgrade*** means "to raise (an employee) to a higher grade or rank."

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pattern (it is a case of "free variation" of the two patterns, *e.g.* The goat was with *her* two kids. When I saw that shiny big old *fly*, I felt I could crush *him*). Kruisinga makes the following observations: "Some names of animals have a personal gender without sex being thought of. This traditional personal gender is usually masculine – as for *horse, dog, elephant, lion, buffalo, fish*. The traditional feminine gender is for less frequent animals, and may be due to the usually female sex of the animal, as in the case of *cat*, perhaps also of *parrot*."

Otto Jespersen's commentary holds that: "The rule given is that *he* is used in reference to strong or big animals and *she* in reference to weak or small animals", but "the rule is absolutely wrong (when) whalers speak of whales as *she*." *e.g.* When a *trout* is beaten, you can call *him* a grill. Can you see *the cat* scratching *her* pussy? So you've really got a *parrot* and you could make *her* speak. Curme extends the idea of personality to animate non-humans "with reference to little children and small insects, when the idea of personality is little developed, we usually employ the neuter person /*it*/".

(B) Downgrading: Entities whose human status is denied are downgraded. Human status may be inherent with such entities or else attributed through convention (*viz.* previous upgrading). Downgrading is done through the use of the personal pronoun it for human beings of former "personifications". Downgrading human status will imply negative involvement from the speaker to various degrees (*i.e.* lack of interest in the downgraded entity, annoyance, contempt, up to violent deprecation). Downgrading human beings denotes (Kruisinga, 1936) that "the person is unknown or vaguely thought of, or [because] the person is considered a negligible quantity", *e.g.* You're talking about that *Jim* fellow? *That*'s a cousin of the headmaster, isn't *it*?

Downgrading expresses contempt (*i.e.* depersonalization through the disparaging use of *it*, alongside *that*, *e.g.* "What's the matter, *sweet one*? Is *it* worrying *itself* over that letter?"; "Would you like to marry Murray?" "Fancy being owned by *that*! Fancy seeing *it* everyday!"); or violent rage, *e.g.* "I can understand why *they* (= the robbers) took my silverware. But why did *it* take my piggy bank?". There are contexts in which downgrading may alternate with upgrading, *e.g.* (A man talking about his car) "Sometimes I feel like junking *it*, just tossing *it*. But then *she* comes back… I just don't know what I am going to do with *her*."

Literary style: Literary language generally uses substitution of abstract nouns by *he* or *she*. It seems that a great deal of importance in referring to such names is held by the gender their counterparts (or likes) have in Latin (or Romance languages such as French and Italian). Thus, for instance, names of countries are feminine, and rivers are masculine: "Oxford had made *her* own way into history"; "France has always known *her* arch-enemy as being England." Nouns such as *wisdom, crime, science, life, nature, fate, liberty, church, music* are feminine, *e.g.* "I love wisdom more than *she* loves me"; "Music with *her* silver sound made their hearts rejoice."

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Names of celestial bodies are either masculine or feminine, e.g. *Mars*, *Jupiter*, *the sun / the Sun* are masculine, just like *time*, *year*, etc., while *Venus*, *the moon / the Moon*, as well as the names of the seasons are feminine. Examples: "Spring with her verdure joined Nature with her lusty joy". Some [–ANIMATE] nouns can be upgraded, becoming: (A) Masculine: *the sun / Sun*, *the ocean*, *rivers, mountains, time, day, death, anger, love, discord, despair, war, murder, stone, law, the vices*, etc.; (B) Feminine: *spring, summer, the soul, virtue, night, darkness, cities, countries, arts, sciences, liberty, charity, victory, mercy, religion, ships, the earth, the world, the moon*, etc. (see Curme, 1947: 213).

Actual usage does not follow even the "norms" / rules of deviant cases: there are numerous disconcerting examples (thus, in P. Benchley thriller *Jaws*, the killer shark is referred to by the author as *it*, while the characters refer to the animal by *he*, demonstrating a deeper sense of affective attitude). Deviations from the "normative pattern" can be considered manifestations of one or several additional patterns of usage, governed by "intimacy". The transfer of a range of qualities characteristic of humans (males or females) to objects is a proof of the anthropocentrism[1] of language – here, in its "affective" manifestation. The normative-intimate switch is based on certain relationship existing between the speaker and the respective object or animal; it should be considered in a pragmatic view; moreover, it is "subjective". Therefore, in contemporary usage there are two patterns: a) objective (in keeping with it, gender distinction is predictable), *i.e.* the standard pattern; b) the subjective pattern – characterized by unpredictability and capricious gender distinctions. The "subjective" pattern takes precedence over the standard pattern in many cases displayed by actual usage.

A cognitive view – based on the cultural significance of the data obtained through mere grammatical, normative analysis – can be taken in addition to all that was said, mainly with a view to revealing the specific, relevant way in which native speakers conceive reality (in point of gender): "The cognitive analysis of the referential gender consists in relating the semantic oppositions ascertained in the semantical analysis to the nature of the concepts involved" (Mathiot). Thus, additional insight into the functioning of the normative pattern itself may be provided. The fact that one term is marked and the other is unmarked in the two main semantic oppositions HUMAN / NON-HUMAN and MALE / FEMALE shows that, while (1) "human beings are defined on the basis of a characteristic that non-human entities do not have; (2) women are defined on the basis of a characteristic that men do not have; with regard to human beings, the entities whose human status is ambiguous give a clue as to what is the characteristic of humaneness (…) Babies and young children are a case in point. Even when they are regarded as lovable, they are generally believed to lack the faculty of reason;

[1] The adjective *anthropocentric* means "regarding man (and humankind) as the most important and central element of existence / factor in the universe, especially as opposed to God or animals." (COLL)

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this suggests that the latter faculty is the defining characteristic of humaneness. With regard to women (…) the defining characteristic is the ability to give birth. Thus the overt opposition human *vs.* non-human is covertly specified as having reason *vs*. lacking reason; the overt opposition female *vs*. male is covertly specified as able to give birth *vs* unable to give birth". (Mathiot, 1975: 11).

Only some uses of gender constitute shared usage (*i.e.* common to men and women), while there are others specific either to men or to women. They have sex-differentiated usage (Mathiot: "There are two uses: 1) those manifesting men's conception of femaleness and maleness; 2) those manifesting women's conception of femaleness and maleness"). The example Mathiot gives in point of shared usage is the system of appearance evaluation as expressed by the opposition *ugly* / *beautiful* – the first corresponding to *he*, the second to *she* – and they imply, respectively, such attributes as: dainty, delicate, slim, sleek, trim, graceful, elegant, young, clean, white / fair etc., *vs*. ungraceful, slow, bulky, large, loud, filthy, etc. A cactus will be *he*, whereas a violet – *she*. Furthermore, differentiated usage (in the intimate pattern) includes such oppositions as competent / incompetent (respectively, MALE / FEMALE); even female teachers will be designated by [+MALE] anaphoric pronouns when competence is meant.[1] On the contrary, women tend to oppose FEMALE to MALE in the evaluative pair: "mature" *vs*. "infantile, inconsequential" *e.g.* "She'll be all right" (speaking about a plant). Both patterns (the intimate and the normative ones) have the same conception of humaneness (*i.e.* humans are superior to all other entities), while having different conceptions of femaleness and maleness. The existence of an intimate pattern of usage demonstrates the speakers' awareness of sense distinctions within the normative pattern, which is to say that "grammatical" meanings can become overt, too.

The situation in Romanian seems to be more complex in point of form, yet a lot simpler as far as the (the newly acquired) *PC* conventions of usage are

[1] In keeping with (comparatively recent) tendencies to come into line with the so-called "politically correct" speech, even dictionaries try hard to avoid "sex discrimination", thus having recourse to such distortions of the (cultural and) grammatical gender-conventions in use for centuries as saying: "**self-portrait** *(noun)* a portrait that *an artist produces of themselves*". The same neutralization of the masculine-feminine opposition, when the generic sense is meant, occurs in: *Every teacher* must use *their* best skills in class. (For a more comprehensive commentary, see the *Usage note* in *The* NEW OXFORD *Dictionary OF* ENGLISH, s.v. ***they***: "The word **they** (with its counterparts **them**, **their**, and **themselves**) as a singular pronoun to refer to a person of unspecified sex has been used since at least the 16th century. In the late 20th century, as the traditional use of **he** to refer to a person of either sex came under scrutiny on the grounds of sexism, this use of **they** has become more common. It is now generally accepted in contexts where it follows an indefinite pronoun such as **anyone**, **no one**, **someone**, or **a person**, as in ***anyone*** *can join if* ***they*** *are a resident* and ***each*** *to* ***their*** *own*. In other contexts, coming after singular nouns, the use of **they** is now common, though less widely accepted, especially in formal contexts. Sentences such as *ask* ***a friend*** *if* ***they*** *could help* are still criticized for being ungrammatical. Nevertheless, in view of the growing acceptance of **they** and its obvious practical advantages, **they** is used in this dictionary in many cases where **he** would have been used formerly. See also usage at HE and SHE".

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concerned. Here is the main part of the presentation the *Academy's Grammar* (2005) makes as concerns the gramamtical category of gender: "În limba română, categoria gramaticală a genului grupează substantivele în trei clase: *masculine*, *feminine* şi *neutre*. Fiecare substantiv comportă o caracteristică fixă de gen, prin care se încadrează într-una dintre clasele morfologice reunite pe baza uneia dintre trăsăturile: [+Masculin] / [+Feminin] / [+Neutru]. Fiecare clasă de gen are flexiune proprie, caracterizată prin omonimii şi combinaţii specifice de desinenţe. La unele substantive, apartenenţa la o anumită clasă de gen are o fundamentare obiectivă, legată de exprimarea distincţiilor semantice impuse de genul natural." (*Gramatica limbii române – I – Cuvântul*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 2005: 63).[1]

The idea of semantic motivation is also addressed: "Capacitatea substantivului de a exprima, prin categoria genului, particularităţi de conţinut privitoare la deosebirile de sex (masculin / feminin) implică disocierea numelor de *animate* de numele de *inanimate*. Opoziţiile semantice [+Animat] / [–Animat], [+Sex] / [–Sex] pot motiva genul gramatical al unor substantive." (*Gramatica limbii române – I – Cuvântul*, Editura Academiei Române, Bucureşti, 2005, p. 65).[2] As one can notice, most of the intricacies appertaining to the motley semantic-stylistical usage typical of (more recent varieties of) English are absent from the gender canon in Romanian.

On the other hand, there are languages (mainly outside the group of the Indo-European idioms) where, in the absence of a grammatical gender, marking / recording / recognizing gender is a mere (incidental) problem of referential description (cf. shape, size, colour, texture, etc.); this typically occurs in non-Indo-European languages, unlike African idioms).

Marking gender in Romanian is largely a matter of form / morphology. Hence, the following remark regarding Romanian morphology seems to us quite interesting; the late Mioara Avram wrote a book of grammar in the late 1980s containing a chapter parodically titled *Drag**e**le mele bunic**e***). It basically drew attention to the singular-plural grammatical homonymy of a number of Romanian *nomina* including the adjective *dragă* (fem. sg.) with the gender-invariable plural *drag**i*** (cf. also the plural form of such nouns as *ardei*, *pui*, or of adjectives like *gălbui*, etc.). The language's 'malice' causes someone who wants to say that, for

[1] "In Romanian, the grammatical category of gender groups nouns in three classes: *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter nouns*. Each noun assumes a fixed characteristic gender trait, through which it falls into one of the morphological classes aggregated on the basis of one of the traits [+Masculine] / [+Feminine] / [+Neuter]. Each gender class has its own inflection, characterized through homonymies and specific combinations of grammatical endings. In some nouns, belonging to a certain class is objectively grounded, connected with expressing the semantic distinctions imposed by the natural gender." (*Grammar of the Romanian Language – I – The Word*).

[2] "The capacity of the noun to express, via the grammatical category of gender, peculiarities relating to the content concerning the sex distinctions (masculine / feminine) implies dissociating the names of *animates* from the names of *inanimates*. The semantic oppositions [+Animate] / [–Animate], [+Sex] / [–Sex] can motivate the grammatical gender of certain nouns".

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instance (the example is extracted from some recent press material we have recently perused), in a foreseeable future we will all be granparents – irrespective of the sex we belong to – to have recourse to the only correct variant Romanian can provide, i.e. *bunici* (not **bunic**e***, which does not simply exist – due to the fact that the opposition expressed through the inflection is neutralized for the category of gender). So, a commonsensical conclusion is that a natural language cannot possibly express all conceivable shades of meaning or parameters of semantic-grammatical structure. The 'mischiefs' of a natural language systematically lead to numerous restrictions (of a phonetic, semantic, morphological and syntactic nature) in the way of highly nuanced expression. Conversely, one may come to ask oneself which is the extent of the speaker's need of nuance; consider the following examples: expressing gender in Thai (*sawatika* vs. *sawatikrab* – "Good afternoon" for a masculine vs. a feminine interlocutor), the idea of distributivity – as in the class of the collective nouns –, countability or partitivity and individualization (e.g. in Breton the only way to say *ant* is to use a collective-plural form loosely meaning *ants*, accompanied by a partitive, whereas the French, Russian and Italian words for *hair* / *păr* are, respectively, the plural forms *cheveux*, *volosy*, *capelli*), politeness in address or designation (how many degrees of politness are necessary? Romanian tries to manage by using three of them), degrees of proximity (distal, proximal, medium, etc.), voice as a category of the verb, ergativity, etc. Similarly, natural languages have an amazingly broad range of cases of form defectiveness, which are variously sanctioned by normative books; to take an example, why should a verb like Romanian *a aboli* be defective?

Coming back to the challenges of expressing the category of gender, where genderization vies with gender-neutrality, Romanian tends to use *genderization* (in the most positive meaning of the term) rather sporadically, e.g. **dragele mele bunice*, a hyper-grammatical form meant to achieve a superior degree of precision / lack of referential-discourse ambiguity.

Among the most significant aspects of defining gender and analyzing gender classes in Romanian, we think the class of the epicenes is paramount, with numerous instances pointing to the existence of that variety of gender type in both Romanian and English.

An interesting remark is that some of the (more recent) Romanian epicenes are calques on foreign (mainly Anglo-American) terms, which raises various problems of morphological-phonematic adaptation. Incidentally, the number of the epicenes in contemporary Romanian has been increased by the neologistic input derived from Anglo-American models (e.g. *designer*, *(top) model*, *manager*, *star*, *wrestler*, etc.), which, by virtue of their consonant ending (vs. the usual Romanian – and also most Romance – feminines, ending in vowels), seem to "assign gender" – in this case, the masculine. When the issue of agreement (in point of gender) intervenes, the relevance of the phenomenon is also valid for *gender* in English., e.g. "*Modelul suedez* Elin Nordegren a fost *întrebată* de prieteni ce a primit de Crăciun" (*Adevărul de seară*, 4 January 2010, p. 9) – cf. Eng. *model* "(…) 4. a

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person who poses for a sculptor, painter, or photographer; 5. a person who wears clothes to display them to prospective buyers; mannequin" (COLL). Similarly, the form of the epicene *baby-sitter*, which also ends in a consonant, is clearly perceived by the common speaker as being "masculine";[1] we wonder whether there are people who would even think of using a feminine counterpart (something like **o baby-sitter*, or even **o baby-sitteră* / **o baby-sitteriţă*)…

The (provable) existence of a *common gender* in Romanian, as well (e.g. *abonat*, *alegător, biolog*, *bolnav*, *creştin*, *pacient, zoolog*, cf. Eng. *pilot* "a person who is qualified to operate an aircraft or spacecraft in flight" – COLL) should also be dealt with in the present context. Although Romanian grammars never mention the existence of a *common gender*, the idea is worth taking into account (cf. 'motionless' nouns like *elefant*, *insectă*, *inspector*, *peşte* etc., and the calss of the neuter nouns proper). Yet, within the category of the nouns allegedly belonging to the "common gender", the idea of fuzziness[2] could be profitably made use of: to what extent are "common" (i.e. "masculine-cum-feminine") such nouns as *artist*, *copil*, *diplomat*, *păstor*, *tânăr*, *tractorist*? (What about *boxer*? To what extent are some of these nouns, e.g. *călău*, *măcelar*, *proxenet*, *pirat*, etc., "more-masculine-than-common-or-feminine", hence part of a subset?). We have to say though that the Romanian Academy's Grammar does not reference to that acceptation of *common gender* / *gen comun*: v. p. *Gramatica Academiei*, vol. I. p. 65: "Ocurenţa unor substantive în contextele adjectivale specifice atât genului masc (c), cât şi genului feminin (b) indică apartenenţa lor la o subclasă de interferenţă a masculinului cu femininul, numită gen *comun*"; the excerpt strictly refers to such invariable compound nouns as *încurcă-lume*, *gură-cască*, so to something essentially different from the *common gender* in English.

The gender-neutral uses in Romanian are, as a matter of priciple, on a par with their English counterparts: any speaker of Romanian earnestly uses *cetăţean*, *român* (cf. "Deşteaptă-te, *române*"), *coleg*, *locuitor*, *participant*, *tânăr*, etc., without feeling embarrassed about not also implying the feminine (*cetăţene*, *românce*, etc.), because that meaning is (traditionally/conventionally) included. Similarly, we say: "Fraţi [şi surori] mai ai?"; "Accesul în peşteri permis numai însoţit de ghid" (on a notice posted near the Cheia chalet, in Vâlcea); "Am venit adineauri de la un mort" (i.e. de la bunica nevestei)", "A fost un incendiu teribil la internatul de *fete* din Negreni; au fost 10 morţi şi răniţi din rândul elevelor". Sometimes, though, special marks triggering gender-specificity are used, however inconsistently: "*Stimate coleg/ă!*" (in a medical letter). Or should we talk about such nouns as *călău*, *santinelă*, *iscoadă* being defective for the opposite gender –

[1] Starting from the criterion of form, we think that the concept of „masculine-epicene" could be tentatively proposed, in this limited context – and thus many of the inconveniences caused by gender-neutral usage would be removed.

[2] Cf. the following definition of the adj. *fuzzy*: „*Maths*. of or relating to a form of set theory in which set membership depends on a likelihood function: *fuzzy set*; *fuzzy logic*" (COLL).

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while nouns like *paiaţă* or *oaspete* should be considered as belonging to the "common gender"? (Although we can come across such form-related – apparent – inconsistencies as "*Sarah* Bernhardt a fost *oaspetele* meu" – *Magazin istoric*, febr. 2011, p. 36).

On the other hand, one may speculate that a gender-neutral (or feminine-inclusive) plural term like *(toţi) cetăţenii* implies gender-neutrality, or gender-implicitness in a quite natural manner. (In an earlier contribution we have even proposed that such terms as *Briton*; *the French*, *the rich*, *the dead* / *dying* should be labelled "default-masculine" (instances of) nouns).

Here are a few more remarks and specific questions related to usage. "O să-i întreb eu pe domnii profesori" (although the majority of the teachers are ladies). Similarly, nobody will say "purtătoare de cuvânt", but "purtător de cuvânt" (although the overwhelming majority of the *spokespersons* in the administration are… women). Nobody has ever used (other than in purely jocular contexts) the feminine form **copilaşă*, though everybody says "Ce *copilaş* / *copil* frumos!". Anyway, *copilă* sounds rather old-fashioned, or possibly literary, or else – jocular and – pejorative; at any rate, it is heavily coloured in a stylistic manner).

That gender-neutralization is a matter of pure linguistic convention can be perceived, we think, by merely examining such examples (mainly illustrative of agreement) as „Bărbatul şi femeia *înşişi*". Similarly, there are lots of challenges relating to form, e.g. „Ministrul însăşi a venit la ceremonie"; as well as idiosyncrasies, which naturally belong to the the system of the language itself, e.g. "Tânără arhitect şi designer de interior" – where it could be argued that the syntactic structure lacks common-sense (or logical) consistency, and also tentatively asseverate that, from a grammatical and ideological point of view, languages like English, Russian and German are strongly "male-chauvinistic / sexist", e.g. *they*, *они*, *Sie*, all meaning "they-masc. + they-fem.".

Sometimes, Romanian faces us with instances (not only / always / necessarily reflections of translation from Anglo-American texts) where one is expected to specify the gender of the nouns in question – if one wants to sound *politically correct* (if not, one should stick to the masculine pronominal substitute, *el*): "Concurentul are dreptul la a doua încercare în timpul manşei de calificare a concursului, dacă prima încercare s-a încheiat, iar el / ea n-a prins…" – cf. "The competitor is allowed to have a second attempt during qualification (open) round of a competition, if the first attempt was terminated, and he/she didn`t clip (unclip) the first quickdraw". To make things worse, one can come across situations entirely opposed to the *PC* stances that we usually encounter, e.g. "Combinaţia şi raportul între ele le face fiecare gospodină (sau gospodar), după preferinţă" (*Bucătărie pentru toţi*, Dumitru Enache, Editura Tehnică, 1990, p. 405). At other times, confusion can strike in top-ranking positions in the administration, e.g. Daniel Funeriu, the minister of the Board of Education, said in one of the Deputy Chamber meetings (in June 2011) that the noun *coleg* is neuter and has no feminine form

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(according to the DEX[2], as he claimed); what he really meant to say was that coleg should be, mainly in its plural-collective use, *gender-neutral*.

Actually, the number of the (real or apparent) inconsistencies that actual usage faces us with, in both languages, is quite significant. In English, the neutralization of the gender opposition through the use of the plural form of the substitues and verbs tends to become the absolute (politically correct) norm. Here are some random examples: "Planificaţi-*vă* ziua, dar păstraţi-*vă* puţin timp liber şi pentru ceva neprevăzut, *conştient* fiind că nu totul depinde de *dvs*." (from the internet); "Can a *person* under hypnosis be forced to do sth against *his* will?"; "If a *person* sincerely believed that *he* or *she* saw a UFO, the polygraph would indicate that the witness was responding honestly." (*Science Trivia – from Anteaters to Zeppelins*, Charles J. Cazeau, p. 179 and, p. 212, respectively); „They [the books] passed freely between friends if one of them had privileged access through their job"; "You don't hire an assistant just because they're cute!"; „What 'L' is someone who throws rubbish where they shouldn't?" (in "*BLOCKBUSTERS QUIZ BOOK 11"*); „Your child has created an account on ourWorld.com, a virtual world where they can chat, socialize, play games, and dress up their character. Since your child has indicated that they are under 13, all the communications they send and receive are carefully filtered" (from the net); „Encourage your child to keep a diary. In this they are likely to write about their day at school. By writing down their thoughts a child will consolidate their feelings about the stress education in classroom and understand them better.

This will provide them with a facility to develop better coping mechanisms" (http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/uk_news/education/558196.stm).

Here are some other miscellaneous aspects of the basic inconsistencies and paradoxes involved by the ardent, single-minded attempt to stay *politically correct* in matters of gender: "Jane Austen was the first real artist to devote herself to the novel" (where the referent, a female, is clearly mentioned in the context, alongside the gender-neutral / common-gender noun *artist* – in *The Oxford Illustrated History of Literature*, p. 318); "Words can not describe," Rochette said through a spokesperson…" (Cf., in another article from the net, referring to the selfsame incident: „A SeaWorld spokesman says a killer whale that attacked and killed a trainer in Orlando is the same one involved in two other deaths"). Even jocular uses can be cited of the various *PC* ways of circumventing the 'gender dilemma': "Always speaking for him slash her" (a jocular pronunciation of the Masc./Fem., or gender-neutral binomial – in the film series *Gray's Anatomy*).

Carrying too far the implementation of the (feminist) precepts of political correctness in gender marking can lead the speakers to various types of fallacy, solecisms, or unneeded (over)scrupulousness. Here is a concrete example, culled from the CAE manual *Prospects. Super Advanced*, authored by Ken Wilson at alii, and published by MacMillan, p. 62, exercise 6: "The following words refer specifically to men and women. Is this necessary? Are similar words in your language gender specific?" – followed by instances such as *mandkind*, *prehistoric*

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man, *man-made*, *statesman*, *chairman*, *businessman*, *cameraman, salesman*, *fireman*, *policeman*, *manageress*, *waitress*, *actress*. To begin with, the premise the authors started from in 'indicting' the use of *man* is false: here, *man* does not, in the large majority of the cases illustrated, mean "a male" / Romanian "bărbat" v. the first 8 senses of *man* in COLLINS "1. adult male human being, as distinguished from a woman; 2. (modifier) male; masculine: *a man child*. 3. a human being regardless of sex or age, considered as a representative of mankind; a person; 4. (sometimes cap.) human beings collectively; mankind: the development of man. 5. Also called: *modern man* a. a member of any of the living races of Homo sapiens, characterized by erect bipedal posture, a highly developed brain, and powers of articulate speech, abstract reasoning, and imagination. b. any extinct member of the species Homo sapiens, such as Cro-Magnon man. 6. a member of any of the extinct species of the genus Homo, such as Java man, Heidelberg man, and Solo man. 7. an adult male human being with qualities associated with the male, such as courage or virility: *be a man*. 8. manly qualities or virtues: the man in him was outraged". Similarly, Romanian *om* as glossed by DEX[2] refers to the same general meaning ("fiinţă superioară, socială…; persoană", with only one meaning reading "bărbat"). Let us compare *om* with Romanian *fiu*, Spanish *hijo*, Italian *figlio* (in such contexts as „Ion şi Ioana, *fii* ai satului Lunca", „Toţi *fiii* patriei trebuie să ajute la nevoie", etc.).

If we persisted along the hard lines of censuring (alleged) linguistic sexism, a number of utterly absurd questions would have to be raised in all earnestness. For instance, why should we use the lexical intensifier *the father of* „*Informal*. a very large, severe, etc., example of a specified kind: *the father of a whipping*" (COLL), and not *a mother of…* (cf. Romanian *o mamă de bătaie*)? On the other hand, should we consider the occurrence of *mother* in various compound words as a case of (reverse) sexism / chauvinistic feminism? (E.g. *motherboard* "(in an electronic system) a printed circuit board through which signals between all other boards are routed", *Mother Carey's chicken* ("another name for storm petrel"), *mother country* ("the original country of colonists or settlers; 2. another term for *fatherland*"), *motherland*, *mother tongue*, *mother-of-pearl*, *mother of the chapel* (" (in British trade unions in the publishing and printing industries) a woman shop steward. Abbrev.: *MoC*"), *mother-of-thousands* ("1. a S European perennial creeping plant, Linaria cymbalaria, having small pale blue or lilac flowers. 2. a saxifragaceous plant, Saxifraga sarmentosa or S. stolonifera, having white flowers and creeping red runners"), *mother ship* ("a ship providing facilities and supplies for a number of small vessels"), *mother superior* , *mother wit*, *motherwort*, etc. So, why should such terms be "politically correct / honourable", while those including the nouns *man*, *father*, and even *woman* are considered gender-biased; (in fact, the only derogatory term in the dictionary series generated by *mother* is *mother-in-law's tongue* – Rom. "limba soacrei": "*sansevieria* (ˌsænsi'viəriə) any herbaceous perennial plant of the liliaceous genus Sansevieria, of Old World tropical regions. Some are cultivated as house plants for their erect bayonet-like fleshy leaves of

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variegated green (mother-in-law's tongue)" (COLL). Similarly, do we actually betray the etymology (of the Latin word *vir* „man") if we use *people* in its general / loose sense, as in „What 'T' is three people sharing power? – Answer: *triumvirate*" (in "*BLOCKBUSTERS QUIZ BOOK 11"*). Some other cases seem to run counter mere logicality, e.g. why do we say in Romanian a *îmbărbăta*? Is it not rather offensive to *women* (since its application to feminine referents is a matter of common linguistic usage)? Or the lexicographical recording of the verb *a naşte* in a Romanian-English dictionary will also resort to the (obsolete) variant *to father*, *to be* (*the*) *father of*… So what? Similarly, usual dictionaries gloss the phrase *in smb.'s birthday suit* translating it as "în costumul lui Adam" (to the exclusion of the feminine referents, in which case "în costumul Evei" would have been the right choice…).

Finally, some remarks concerning the activity of linguistic 'ecology' and norm-establishing in this country would be in order. Unfortunately, only few normative / didactic books provide (clear, edifying) examples and normative sidelights regarding the Romanian epicenes and neutres, as well as their usage. One of those (indisputably useful) books is N. Forăscu and M. Popescu's, *Dicţionar de cuvinte „buclucaşe". Dificultăţi de pronunţare şi scriere*, BIC ALL Publishers, 2005 (where only the epicenic terms *ambasador*, *avocat*, *cercetător*, *doctor* (alongside of *doctoriţă*) and *ministru* are glossed), and the other book that we cannot but commend is Ilie-Ştefan Rădulescu's *Să vorbim şi să scriem corect. Erori frecvente în limbajul cotidian*, Niculescu Publishers, 2005; for the category of the epicenes, the author lists a number of neuters „with masculine forms" (p. 97-100): *arbitru*, *arhivar*, *bijutier*, *cameraman*, *cancelar*, *cenzor*, *chirurg*, *comandant*, *comisar*, *consul*, *cronicar*, *dispecer*, *docent*, *doctor*, *dramaturg*, *fochist*, *forjor*, *gardian*, *geamgiu*, *guvernator*, *jandarm*, *librar*, *maistru*, *manager*, *medic*, *mecanizator*, *meşteşugar*, *ministru*, *pădurar*, *pilot*, *prefect*, *rector*, *sectorist*, *vameş*, and for the class of the neutres, some solecistic plural variants are given, e.g. *fitiluri*, not **fitile*, *profiluri*, not **profile*, *feonuri*, not **feoane*, *chibrituri*, not **chibrite*, etc. (p. 103-110).

Concluding, we believe that much more should be done, mainly in Romanian linguistics and didactics, to explicate and untangle such cases of confusion in the field of marking gender, while trying to mitigate, in a way or another, the negative effects of the genuine flood of exaggerated, far-fetched attempts to 'de-patriarchalize' language, which are in fact as many cases of the outgrowth of feminist linguistics in the English-speaking cultural area.

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