FURTHER REMARKS ON EXPRESSING GENDER IN ENGLISH AND IN ROMANIAN. INTERRELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND SOCIETY

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Abstract. *The approach specific to the present paper is reflective rather than normative or didactic. We aim to analyze some relevant aspects of expressing grammatical gender in English and Romanian, starting from the more and more significant aspects of what, in various sociolinguistic and even ideological approaches, is called Gender. We have already approached, in other papers too, this rather uneasy position of the semantic-functional complex called Gender, caught in-between the strictness of grammar and the rigors of linguistic normalization, on the one hand, and the (often ultimatum-like) claims of feminism, or purely politically vocabularies, on the other hand – an increasing influence that is also felt globally. A sketched comparison was drawn between the situation in English and in Romanian (also adding some hints at expressing gender in French), as "poles" of Gender expression – which is often felt as a real source of pressure at the social level. This category of Gender is therefore regarded as a type of neology, as a sub-category of euphemism, but also, incidentally, as a subsidiary aspect of language standardization – warning us, as linguists, against pseudo-feminist excesses and, in general, against ideological manipulation and manipulators.*

1. Introduction: The present paper aims to revisit *gender*, seen as a marginal type of neologistic (grammatical-semantic) expression (see also Manea, 2011a; Manea 2011b; Baron; Ştefănescu), but also as a subcategorial type of euphemism, and, only incidentally, as an aspect of linguistic standardization. The more theoretical remarks are duly accompanied by a brief case study on what, in the Anglo-American terminology, is called *Gender*.

In the context of this approach, a particularly illustrative and interesting "case study" can be applied to the *gender barrier* phenomenon[1]. Discrimination on grounds of belonging to one sex or the other exists in a concrete way, and is a reality that can hardly be denied, whose negative effects are as evident at the socio-economic as well as *cultural* (and, more broadly, *spiritual*) level. However, exaggerations, exclusivist and obsessively dictatorial attitudes can lead to nothing good, in a normal society, where it is not competition or division that should prevail, but rather collaboration and mutual respect. For instance, *gender* positions that are constructive as a matter of principle can go up to distorting the logic specific to (natural language) communication, i.e. the century-old set of linguistic conventions. For example, ignorance (be it willing or

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[1] "**Gender barriers** have become less of an issue in recent years, but there is still the possibility for a man to misconstrue the words of a woman, or vice versa. Even in a workplace where women and men share equal stature, knowledge and experience, differing communication styles may prevent them from working together effectively. Gender barriers can be inherent or may be related to gender stereotypes and the ways in which men and women are taught to behave as children" (https://guides.co/g/the-seven-barriers-of-communication/37694)

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absurd) of the issue of the *epicene*[1] (or the "common gender"), plus gross (and illogical) ideologization, can be conducive to exclusivist or absolutist positions, as well as unfounded accusations: "Există *preconcepţii* [o.u.] precum că femeia trebuie să fie educatoare, învăţătoare, infirmieră, dar numai nu ministru. Până şi gramatica limbii române parcă e împotriva noastră. Cuvinte precum "deputat", "ministru" nu au echivalent feminin. De câte ori li s-a zis femeilor politicieni că au acţionat ca un adevărat bărbat! Adică dacă o femeie manifestă caracter, cunoştinţe, putere i se spune că a procedat la fel ca un bărbat, de parcă aceste calităţi pot să aparţină doar bărbaţilor" (*Vocea Romilor*, no. 221, 15 June 2015, p. 9). Be it as it may, neither observance of the right to difference, nor invoking the principle of "positive discrimination", should, naturally, lead to exclusivism (in both attitude and expression) such as (affected) jargon, even if it is feminist. In other words, we can suppose that if the common speakers tried to say only *Doamnă* ***profesor*** / *Doamna* ***profesor*** *a spus că* (…), there would appear a real danger that this model could, in the long run, analogically lead to expressions such as the *Doamna* ***învăţător***, or even *Doamna* ***educator*** – or even (God forbid) to: *Doamna* ***părinte*** (instead of *mama unui elev*), or to: *Domnii şi doamnele* ***părinţi*** *au fost invitaţi la* (…).

A very interesting aspect of language change (and a hotly debated one, especially in more recent times), it is also a good example of the way people react to the stimuli represented by the reality of the concrete world, and the reflexes of one's native language influencing one's attitude to the world, is the quite recent non-discriminatory attitude to gender: the older, or rather traditional, manner of speech is now being accused of male-centred chauvinism (i.e. masculine language that supposedly endangers equality of the sexes), and expressions like "Everyone has to do *his* best" are being replaced by "Everyone has to do *his/her* best", or even better by "Everyone has to do *their* best"; "…today the generic use of masculine forms is widely avoided in favor of gender-neutral or inclusive language" (Drout: 55).

We all have to admit that human language essentially means change. Linguistic expression, or common speech, finds itself under a double subordination – on the one hand, there is (natural) evolution, i.e. change, and on the other hand, there are the rules or norms of expression worked out by language experts. Moreover, there is no general agreement among language experts themselves when it comes to "correctness" or acceptability. A living, ever-changing entity, human language keeps transforming itself, as a result of reflecting the permanent changes in society. When language experts come to perceive changes as "degraded" forms or instances of careless, sloppy usage, and the official language academies (like the *Académie française*) step in to preserve the so-called "purity" and "integrity" of the national language, open conflict may arise. Furthermore, such *protectors* of the language tend to have a negative perception, mainly in English-speaking countries. The only rule there seems to be is absolute liberty of

[1] In linguistics, the adjective *epicene* is used to describe a word that has only one form for both male and female referents. In some cases, the term *common* is also used, but should not be confused with *common* or *appellative* as a contrary to *proper* (as in *proper noun*). In English, for example, the epicene (*or* common) nouns *cousin* and *violinist* can refer to a man or a woman, and so can the epicene (or *common*) pronoun *one*. The noun *stewardess* and the third-person singular pronouns *he* and *she* on the other hand are not epicene (or *common*). (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Epicene)

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change, which is seen as tantamount to the ultimate mark of language viability and vitality, as opposed to handbook-like grammaticality or (usage) acceptability.

2. Gender and the question of standardization: There has been extensive talk about establishing the *norms* of "correct speech" in English, and Gender has been no exception. The main point of the contention has been the type of gender neutralization that the "first dictionary form" (i.e. the masculine) has provided, for quite a number of centuries (following a larger, European tradition), to pronouns substituting feminine (or feminine-inclusive) nouns such as *man* "human being", *inhabitant*, *specialist*, etc., or to pronouns that are co-referential to *everybody*/*everyone*, *somebody*/*someone*, *anybody*/*anyone*. To make things worse, in sentences such as ***Everyone has*** *to buy* ***their*** *workbooks before enlisting*, the simple rules of grammatical concord point to a blatant inconsistency between the words underlined (i.e. *everyone* and *has* are marked for the singular, while *their* is a plural pronoun).

Linguists who are in favour of "political correctness" argue to the effect that, though the singular masculine form of the personal pronoun should be the grammatically correct choice (since *everybody* is singular in form – while referring to plural concepts), the basic assumption that underlies the respective grammatical choice is intrinsically (i.e. humanly) wrong. "The choice of the male pronoun *his* was based on the assumption that the male pronoun encompassed reference to females. While such an argument may be true of Latin and other languages such as Spanish or German, there is no basis for this in English. In Spanish, all nouns are either masculine or feminine. In the case of Latin or German, all nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter. The plural form, when reference is made to both sexes, is the male plural form in all of these languages. English, in contrast, does not classify its nouns according to gender, except in a few instances where they clearly refer to a specific sex such as *girl* or *father*. In addition, English plural nouns are gender neutral (*we, our, ours, you, your, yours, they, their, theirs*), unless the antecedent (preceding noun or noun phrase) specifically indicates gender. The use of "his" after such pronouns as *anyone* or *everybody* is an artificial construct of traditional grammarians, derived from early English grammarians who wrote the first grammars based on "logical" Latin. Guided by the "logic" of Latin, they concluded that since *-one* and *-body* are singular and since a male pronoun should encompass reference to all persons, *his* was the "logical" or "correct" choice. Although grammarians have insisted that speakers use "his" for centuries, the tendency has been to use the plural pronoun form *their* and to avoid any reference to gender. In fact, in the last several decades, it has become generally unacceptable in American English to use the singular male pronoun after such words as *each, everyone, somebody*. Following the rise of the feminist movement and the changes in the status of women in society, some modern grammarians, in response to the gender controversy have begun recommending the use of *he or she*, while others urge using plural nouns and pronouns in order to avoid the problem. Instead of *Everyone needs his book*, the sentence can be reworded as "all students need their books." Another strategy is the use of "a" instead of "his" as in: *Everyone needs a book*". (DeCapua: 3).

The wider debate also encompasses the very (theoretical) term *gender*: "Traditionally, *gender* has been used primarily to refer to the grammatical categories of "masculine," "feminine," and "neuter"; but in recent years the word has become well established in its use to refer to sex-based categories, as in phrases such as *gender gap* and *the politics of gender*. This usage is supported by the practice of many

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anthropologists, who reserve *sex* for reference to biological categories, while using *gender* to refer to social or cultural categories. According to this rule, one would say *The effectiveness of the medication appears to depend on the sex* (not *gender*) *of the patient,* but *In peasant societies, gender* (not *sex*) *roles are likely to be more clearly defined.* This distinction is useful in principle, but it is by no means widely observed, and considerable variation in usage occurs at all levels". (From *American Heritage Dictionary*).

Within the present context, discussions typically take into account the differences of signification and communication between languages, which more often than not amount to dramatic differences of complexity. Indo-European languages should by no means be favoured, since reality is perceived and semantically encoded in such a variegated manner through the world. "The structure of the Indo-European phrase transcribes an interpretation of reality in which events in the world are always the actions of an agent having a specific sex. Thus the structure necessarily consists of a masculine or feminine subject and an active verb. But there are other languages in which the structure of the phrase differs and which supposes interpretations of what is real that are very different from the Indo-European. (…) The Indo-European believed that the most important difference between 'things' was sex, and he gave every object, a bit indecently, a sexual classification. The other great division that he imposed on the world was based on the supposition that everything that existed was either an action – therefore, the verb or an agent – therefore, the noun. (…) Compared to our paltry classification of nouns-into masculine, feminine and neuter-African peoples who speak the Bantu languages offer much greater enrichment. In some of these languages there are twenty-four classifying signifiers-that is, compared to our three genders, no less than two dozen. The things that move, for example, are differentiated from the inert ones, the vegetable from the animal, etc. While one language scarcely establishes distinctions, another pours out exuberant differentiation. In Eise there are thirty-three words for expressing that many different forms of human movement, of 'going.' In Arabic there are 5,714 names for the camel. Evidently, it's not easy for a nomad of the Arabian desert and a manufacturer from Glasgow to come to an agreement about the humpbacked animal. Languages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems – in the last instance, from divergent philosophies. Not only do we speak, but we also think in a specific language, and intellectually slide along pre-established rails prescribed by our verbal destiny." (José Ortega y Gasset, apud Venuti: 58-59).

Similar sexist accusations are leveled at gender-specific nouns that designate professions and trades. Yet statistics have tended to show the picture is puzzlingly complex. "Critics have argued that sexist connotations are implicit in the use of the feminine suffix *-ess,* as found in words such as *ambassadress, sculptress, waitress, stewardess, hostess, actress,* and many others, in that the suffix implies that the denoted roles differ as performed by women and men. In some cases, as with the word *temptress,* there may be some legitimacy to such an implication of difference; and for this reason the acceptability of the suffix may depend on the individual word. In the case of most occupational terms, the suffix is widely felt to be inappropriate. Thus 65 percent of the Usage Panel rejects *sculptress* in the sentence *Georgia O'Keeffe is not as well-known as a sculptress as she is as a painter;* similarly 75 percent rejects

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ambassadress in the sentence *When the ambassadress arrives, please show her directly to my office.* With certain occupations, however, differentiation based on gender may be legitimate: acting, for example, is an occupation in which the parts one can play may in fact depend on one's sex. Thus 92 percent accepts *actress* in *There are not very many good parts available for older actresses,* though it should be noted that many women prefer to be called *actors.* In the case of most social roles, gender is felt to make a legitimate difference, and the suffix is accepted. Thus 87 percent of the Panel accepts *hostess* in the sentence *Mary Ann is such a charming hostess that her parties always go off smoothly;* similarly, 67 percent accepts *seductress* in the sentence *Mata Hari used her ability as a seductress to spy for the Germans.* When the same word may be used in different senses, one social and the other not, the acceptability of the suffix varies accordingly. Thus 93 percent accepts *heiress* in the sentence *His only hope now is to marry an heiress,* while only 34 percent accepts *heiress* in its metaphorical use to mean "successor," as in *His daughter and political heiress has returned to her country in triumph*". (From *American Heritage Dictionary*).

The noun *man* itself, when used generically, assumes a similar complexity of sense and usage – in which etymology and (linguistic) tradition could, in our opinion, join by adding logicality and a welcome sense of historical (and hence, cultural) continuity. "Traditionally, man and words derived from it have been used generically to designate any or all of the human race irrespective of sex. In Old English this was the principal sense of *man,* which meant "a human being" regardless of sex; the words *wer* and *wyf* (or *wipman* and *wifman*) were used to refer to "a male human being" and "a female human being" respectively. But in Middle English *man* displaced *wer* as the term for "a male human being," while *wyfman* (which evolved into present-day *woman*) was retained for "a female human being." The result of these changes was an assymetrical arrangement that many criticize as sexist. Many writers have revised some of their practices accordingly. But the precise implications of the usage vary according to the context and the particular use of *man* or its derivatives. ● *Man* sometimes appears to have the sense of "person" or "people" when it is used as a count noun, as in *A man is known by the company he keeps* and *Men have long yearned to unlock the secrets of the atom,* and in phrases like *the common man* and *the man in the street.* Here the generic interpretation arises indirectly: if a man is known by the company he keeps, then so, by implication, is a woman. For this reason the generic interpretation of these uses of *man* is not possible where the applicability of the predicate varies according to the sex of the individual. Thus it would be inappropriate to say that *Men are the only animals that can conceive at any time,* since the sentence literally asserts that the ability to conceive applies to male human beings. This usage presumes that males can be taken as representatives of the species. In almost all cases, however, the words *person* and *people* can be substituted for *man* and *men,* often with a gain in clarity. ● By contrast, *man* functions more as a generic when it is used without an article in the singular to refer to the human race, as in sentences like *The capacity for language is unique to man* or in phrases like *man's inhumanity to man.* But this use of *man* is also ambiguous, since it can refer exclusively to male members of the human race. In most contexts words such as *humanity* or *humankind* will convey the generic sense of this use of *man.* ● On the whole, the Usage Panel accepts the generic use of *man,* the women members significantly less than the men. The sentence *If early man suffered from a lack of information, modern man is tyrannized by an excess of it* was acceptable to 81 percent of the Panel (including 58 percent of the women and 92 percent

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of the men). The Panel also accepted compound words derived from generic *man.* The sentence *The Great Wall is the only man-made structure visible from space* was acceptable to 86 percent (including 76 percent of the women and 91 percent of the men). (From *American Heritage Dictionary*). Here is what the dedicated usage note in the same dictionary says in connection with a noun such as *hero*, which can be read in both a masculine proper and a "gender-neutral" sense: "The word *hero* should no longer be regarded as restricted to men in the sense "a person noted for courageous action," though *heroine* is always restricted to women. The distinction between *heroine* and *hero* is still useful, however, in referring to the principal character of a fictional work, inasmuch as the virtues and qualities that become a traditional literary heroine like Elizabeth Bennet or Isabel Archer are generally quite different from those that become a traditional literary hero like Tom Jones or Huckleberry Finn".

Here is how the *American Heritage Dictionary* presents the issue of using *he*, *his*, and *him* in the traditional (would-be masculine-centric) manner, as well as various related subtleties and inconsistencies of use, and, of course, the emergence of the more recent uses that try to avoid or overcome the issue of number- and gender disagreement (including the rather awkward use of *they*, *their*, *them*): "Traditionally, English speakers have used the pronouns *he, him,* and *his* generically in contexts in which the grammatical form of the antecedent requires a singular pronoun, as in *Every member of Congress is answerable to* his *constituents; A novelist should write about what* he *knows best; No one seems to take any pride in* his *work anymore,* and so on. Beginning early in the 20th century, however, the traditional usage has come under increasing criticism for reflecting and perpetuating gender discrimination. ● Defenders of the traditional usage have argued that the masculine pronouns *he, his,* and *him* can be used generically to refer to men and women. This analysis of the generic use of *he* is linguistically doubtful. If *he* were truly a gender-neutral form, we would expect that it could be used to refer to the members of any group containing both men and women. But in fact the English masculine form is an odd choice when it refers to a female member of such a group. There is something plainly disconcerting about sentences such as *Each of the stars of* It Happened One Night [i.e., Clark Gable and Claudette Colbert] *won an Academy Award for his performance.* In this case, the use of *his* forces the reader to envision a single male who stands as the representative member of the group, a picture that is at odds with the image that comes to mind when we picture the stars of *It Happened One Night.* Thus *he* is not really a gender-neutral pronoun; rather, it refers to a male who is to be taken as the representative member of the group referred to by its antecedent. The traditional usage, then, is not simply a grammatical convention; it also suggests a particular pattern of thought. ● Many writers sidestep the problem by avoiding the relevant constructions. In place of *Every student handed in* his *assignment,* they write *All the students handed in their assignments;* in place of *A taxpayer must appear for* his *hearing in person,* they write *Taxpayers must appear for their hearings in person,* and so on. Even when using the relevant constructions, however, many writers never use masculine pronouns as generics. In a series of sample sentences such as *A patient who doesn't accurately report _ sexual history to the doctor runs the risk of misdiagnosis,* an average of 46 percent of the Usage Panel chose a coordinate form (*her/his, his or her,* and so on), 3 percent chose the plural pronoun (although the actual frequency of the plural in writing is far higher than this number would suggest), 2 percent chose the feminine pronoun, another 2 percent chose an indefinite or a definite article, and 7 percent gave no response or felt that no pronoun

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was needed to complete the sentence. ● As a substitute for coordinate forms such as *his/her* or *her and his,* third person plural forms, such as *their,* have a good deal to recommend them: they are admirably brief and entirely colloquial and may be the only sensible choice in informal style; for example, in the radio commercial that says *"Make someone happy – give them a goose down Christmas,"* where *him* would be misleading and *her or him* would be fussy. At least one major British publisher has recently adopted this usage for its learners' dictionaries, where one may read such sentences as *If someone says they are "winging it," they mean that they are improvising their way.* But in formal style, this option is perhaps less risky for a publisher of reference books than for an individual writer, who may be misconstrued as being careless or ignorant rather than attuned to the various grammatical and political nuances of the use of the masculine pronoun as generic pronoun. What is more, this solution ignores a persistent intuition that expressions such as *everyone* and *each student* should in fact be treated as grammatically singular. Writers who are concerned about avoiding both grammatical and social problems are best advised to use coordinate forms such as *his or her.* ● Some writers see no need to use a personal pronoun implying gender unless absolutely necessary; in the sample sentence *A child who develops this sort of rash on _ hands should probably be kept at home for a couple of days,* 6 percent of the Usage Panel completed the sentence with *the.* In addition, some writers have proposed other solutions to the use of *he* as a generic pronoun, such as the introduction of wholly new gender-neutral pronouns like *s/he* or *hiser,* or the switching between feminine and masculine forms in alternating sentences, paragraphs, or chapters. ● In contrast to these innovations, many writers use the masculine pronoun as generic in all cases. For the same series of sample sentences, the average percentage of Usage Panel members who consistently completed the sentences with *his* was 37. This course is grammatically unexceptionable, but the writer who follows it must be prepared to incur the displeasure of readers who regard this pattern as a mark of insensitivity or gender discrimination.

We would like to discuss, and maybe (partly) disambiguate, some points concerning the obvious – and sometimes jarring – disagreement that occurred in English (especially in American English), opposing the linguists that had to clarify or impose some of the points of grammar which are finer or more difficult to understand. Let us start with this fragment (DeCapua: 3): "Traditional grammarians for centuries have argued that the singular male pronoun is the grammatically correct form because words such as *anyone* or *anybody* are singular, even though they refer to plural concepts. The choice of the male pronoun *his* was based on the assumption that the male pronoun encompassed reference to females. While such an argument may be true of Latin and other languages such as Spanish or German, there is no basis for this in English. In Spanish, all nouns are either masculine or feminine. In the case of Latin or German, all nouns are masculine, feminine, or neuter. The plural form, when reference is made to both sexes, is the male plural form in all of these languages".

In actual fact, the author rather passionately mixes up various concepts and levels of discussion: ● (1) The main issue here is not necessarily the existence of something "traditional", that is, "obsolete" – or something that needs to be re-analyzed, restructured, or re-expressed. So the problem that emerges is essentially the manifestation of *conventions* in natural languages – in this case, a convention through which speakers aspire to achieve *economicity* of linguistic material (see also Găitănaru: 101). Otherwise, a language like Malay – said to have only one collective term for

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'sibling' (which can also mean 'cousin'), i.e. *saudara* – should be a dictatorial, or possibly masculinocentric, type of language, while Hungarian ought to be automatically deemed a very democratic and permissive language (since in older Hungarian there were two pairs of separate words for 'elder brother' and 'younger brother', and 'elder sister' and 'younger sister', i.e. *batya*, *ocs*, *néne*, *hug*, respectively). ● (2) Actually, the discussion does not revolve precisely around *accuracy* – but rather around *convention* and language use (see also Manea, 2011b; Manea 2011c). ● (3) The reference to plurality (*his* being used for "any entity in the group …"), supposedly masculine, does not, in fact, imply the *masculine*. What we actually have here is a type of "conventional-neutral" plural. ● (4) The analysis of the binomial plurality-singularity is uncalled-for in the case of *anyone*, which actually means "any person", that is "someone / any person in a group"). ● (5) We think that even a sketchy comparison with Latin and Spanish (to which one could easily add the other Romance languages, plus virtually all Slavic languages, etc.) is practically irrelevant. The reason why it is so is because those languages can simply boast a richer morphology and afford to mark the grammatical category of gender (just like Old English[1]), to which grammatical concord was added. (The only remaining problem seems to be why, in ideological and cultural term, most of the natural languages frequently studied chose to consider, in such cases, the masculine as a "gender-neutral" form, while the feminine was considered, where appropriate, the "marked" term of the pair).

The truth is that even native speakers of English, living in more distant eras, would have judged in the selfsame manner (which is the case of Chaucer and his contemporaries), authors who we think cannot be suspected of any measure of subservience to Latin or even French (as could be suspected, for example, the authors connected with the University Wits, or Dryden, Dr. Johnson, etc.). So, Modern English simply continues a number of usage situations that existed in Old English and Middle English.

Now here are some examples of absurdity in the "(mis)understanding" of the phenomenon of convention in people's lives: driving on the right side of the road, words like *a îmbărbăta* (when applied to a woman or girl), saying *doamnă director / profesor* (but never saying *doamnă învăţător*), etc. It is a fact that, by means of convention, all Slavic languages (with the only exception of Serbo-Croatian) specify the female gender in usual proper names, i.e. *Sharapova*, *Azarenka*, etc. So there is a cultural tradition of feminine family names (names like *Graciova*, *Putina*, *Radwanska*, etc. belonging to women, as well as patronymics like *Maria Vasilievna* – established in keeping with someone's father's name – in this case, *Vasili*). On the other hand, a proposal to generalize this system in Slovakia led to conflict between the Slovak majority and the ethnic Hungarians living in the south; something very similar happened in southern Bulgaria with the Turkish minority. Interestingly, in Icelandic, typical surnames differ according to the sex of their bearer: if it is a boy or a man, the name will end in *-son*, and if it is a girl or a woman – in *-dotir*.

Conversely, in France a tough and intransigent battle is waged against the *epicenes*, in other words for the clear splitting of nouns according to grammatical

[1] The gender of Old English nouns was arbitrary rather than determined by the sex or gender appurtenance of the thing named, so they could (generally) be distinguished as having s number of specific endings (see also Fernández: 68).

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gender. For instance, the feminine form *cheffe* is at stake (which is defined, as a motto for a newspaper column on the importance of the holiday of 8 March: "Personne qui commande, qui exerce une autorité, une influence déterminante"), and feminist activists are cultivating the form of address "Bonjour à *toutes* et à *tous*" (instead of simply saying *tous*). Unfortunately, faced with the increasing Anglicization of French, the government tried to prohibit the adoption of foreign words into French. Anyway, some English loans pose problems of usage especially in point of gender agreement, e.g. *le*/*la star* (used for both *chanteurs* and *chanteuses*).

At this point, a brief comparison (we think, an instructive one) could be made with such English nouns as *professor*, *author*, *poet*, artist, *writer*, etc., or with the form *Ms* (used in parallel with, and also apart from both *Mistress*, and *Miss*). It is, admittedly, a dilemmatic situation, which brings together the two contradictory trends or concerns of a moral and social origin: on the one hand, the differentiation, the recognition as such of the *feminine*, illustrating the stance of social recognition and respect for women, and on the other hand, the almost obsessive concern to cultivate a non-discriminatory behaviour – also in terms of speech and language use – and so encourage equal treatment of people irrespective of sex.

Thus, we find that, with the French, the phenomenon of euphemistically boosting equality according to gender seems to be manifesting itself in an essentially reverse sense than it is in Romanian (where it is "politically correct" to say, in cases such as the above, for example, *doamnă director*, *doamnă inspector*, *doamnă primar*, *doamnă procuror* or *doamnă deputat*). Anyway, one should admit that the fierce opposition of most French-speaking linguists to the class of epicenes unfortunately gives the impression of a theoretical and ideological attempt to fictize reality; after all, there are plenty of ladies that, in Romanian, are called *sudoriţe*, *macaragiţe*, *poliţiste*, *pictoriţe*, *taximetriste*, *avocate*, *notăriţe*, *dăscăliţe*, *şoferiţe*, *militante*, *activiste*, and a *hangiţă* may also be the owner or manager, i.e. *manager* (or… *managerul*) of an inn, but how many *dogăriţe* or *mineriţe*, *tractoriste*, *acăriţe*, *caporale*, *amirale*, *colonele*(*se*), *someliere* or *majordome* can one actually come across – and feel the need to name in *actual* / *real-life* Romanian? Just as there is no *military midwife* (just to quote Mitică, Caragiale's typical character), or *lustragiu-femeie* (or *lustragioaică*), there no perfect, literal masculine equivalent of *soră medical* or *educatoare*, either. Romanian nouns such as *military* or *soldat* cannot, despite the (more recent) objective social reality, take a masculine form.

Similarly, people commonly say "*soldaţii* noştri", "*militarii* români din contingentul…", or "*muncitorii* români detaşaţi în…" (although, in actual reality, there are many *women* among them); likewise, we say only "*accidentaţi* (în urma coliziunii a două trenuri)", "*morţi şi răniţi* (după un accident sau în operaţiuni militare)", etc. It can be noticed, therefore, how the *rule* (or *convention*) concerning the "neutral" sense (cf. Eng. "common gender") of the masculine, which is also the basis of the use of epicenes (such as Rom. *fotomodel*), is consistently applied to adjectives, by virtue of the principle of economy in language. And then why would it not apply, in an equally consistent manner, to Romanian nouns in the same situation? It is true that the "typical roles" corresponding to the natural gender, i.e. to sex, are defined very clearly, though we talk about a really negligible minority: *argat*, *grăjdar*, *rândaş* vs. *doică*, *moaşă*, *mulgătoare*.

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Among the more recent clear manifestations of pseudo-feminism there has been (since 2013), in the Western world (i.e. the United States, Great Britain, Canada), but also in other countries, such as Turkey, the critical attitude and the open campaign (using the virtual space) against what in English is called *man-spreading* or *man-sitting*, that is the habit of sitting with the legs spread, in public transport, thus occupying more than the seating room allowed by a single seat. The new term is defined by prestigious dictionaries of English such as *Oxford English Dictionary* ("The practice whereby a man, especially one travelling on public transport, adopts a sitting position with his legs wide apart, in such a way as to encroach on an adjacent seat or seats"), or www.collinsdictionary.com ("a male passenger in a bus or train splaying his legs and denying space to the passenger sitting next to him"), but that campaign merely highlights the trivial, totally insignificant nature of such "critical positions" concerning "male-centric excesses". Unfortunately, the result was, among other things, a counter-campaign called *she-bagging* (i.e. a woman travelling with more bags, and occupying two seats).

In real fact, a natural language creates and operates with *hyperonyms*, which are constitutive part of the lexical and grammatical system – for example, *om* stands for both *bărbat* and *femeie* (i.e. *man* and *woman*), e.g. "*dăscăliţa* Aglaia Bujor se trezi leoarcă de sudori, gemând şi bâiguind ca *un om* bolnav" (Rebreanu); likewise, *părinte* is the hyperonym for both *tată* and *mamă*. The situation can be compared, based on a cultural perspective, with the existence of the term *English* – used also for the language –, applicable to populations or nations (such as the Scots, the Irish, etc.) for whom the notion of *English* does not involve anything very pleasant or desirable; in fact, *not all* of these people living in Britain (or the United Kingdom) are *English*, but *British* – so they are Britons – and most importantly, they speak *English*.

In the field of gender (cf. Eng. *Gender*), does the existence of expressions such as Rom. "a *o* lua la fugă / la sănătoasa", "a *o* lua razna", "a *o* lua după ceafă", "a *o* face de oaie", "Las-*o* baltă!" or "*Asta* e culmea!", "*Asta* mai lipsea!", on the one hand – and, on the other hand, the existence, in French, of the so-called *le neutre* and *le explétif*, or the Spanish pronoun *lo* (e.g. *Lo importante es amar*) automatically match the voluntary manifestation of feminine-centrism, respectively of masculine-centrism (subsequently taken over in the cultural sphere, as a language convention)?

There also appears to exist a traditional "feminine-centric" linguistic convention – exemplified, for instance, by Slavic names such as *Polevaia*, *Koroleva*, *Repina*, *Kaczinska*, or by Scandinavian names, especially Icelandic ones (like *Jóhanna Sigurðardóttir*), which were based on matronymics (vs. *Jon Einarsson*, which originated in a patronymic), or even Romanian surnames like *Amariei*, *Aelenei*, *Acatrinei*, *Aeftincăi*; one can also mention the feminine origin of some of the Roman names designating the *gens* (e.g. *Iulia*, *Claudia*, *Flavia*). Similarly, in Latin there were nouns designating fruit trees, such as *malus*, *pirus*, *cerasus*, *prunus*, which belonged to the second declension, while being feminine (while nouns like *lupus*, *porcus* were masculine); the truth is that the existence of such forms appertaining to the female gender is motivated by "natural" criteria (such as the idea of fertility, procreation, natural membership or biological filiation, etc.), which have come down through socially determined symbolic and axiological filters; in other words, they also represent social-historical conventions.

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The situation of relative confusion between form and meaning, which is generated by the regularities, nuances and implications of *gender* membership (be it grammatical or natural) and, respectively, to a particular *sex* class, or *biological* gender (for animated entities), can be illustrated by a few examples – such as the following ones (which we have selected virtually randomly from the media): "*candidatul* democrat" (speaking of *Hillary Clinton*), "Ce mesaje îi dădea fostul rugbyst George Kay *acestui fotomodel*", "Camelia Potec – *campion* olimpic", "*Istoricul* suedez *Ellen Oredsson* a explicat această particularitate", "*Katherine Hepburn* face parte din categoria *celor* foarte *puţini* care (…)" (*Mituri şi legende din lumea filmului*, Lazăr Cassvan, Ed. Eminescu, 1976), "*Locotenentul Maria Bocikariova* este *executată* la Krasnoiarsk cu un glonţ în ceafă, ca *trădătoare* de patrie" (*Magazin istoric*, Feb. 2016, p. 57), "*victimele* făceau (…) şi *toate* aveau în jur de 20 de ani" (the TV news referred to *soldiers*).

So one can ask oneself – if you say, "*Exploatator* sau *asupritor* este *unul* / *cel* care îţi face ţie ceea ce, dacă ai putea, cu mare drag i-ai face tu *lui*", does that mean that you are anti-feminist and sexist or macho / masculinocentric? Or if you say: "*Îl* vezi pe câte *unul*… ce mai fasoane! Dar, ce să-i faci, dacă atât poate şi *el*, atâta *îl* duce şi pe *el* capul…", is this a case of politically incorrect speech? How should one have said, as a *PC* speaker? Maybe it would have been more correct to say: "*Îl* / *o* vezi pe câte *unul* / *una*… ce mai fasoane! Dar, ce să-i faci, dacă atât poate şi *el*/*ea*, atâta *îl* / *o* duce şi pe *el* / *ea* capul…"? Or: "iar tu o să fii iarăşi *tu însuţi*", referring to an unspecified person (including sex appurtenance), does it seem "politically inappropriate"? Although, in much the same terms, we can think and formulate things like this: "(*consumatorul*) va fi *acelaşi* ca mai înainte". Or, finally, in order to be a true *PC* speaker, should one say, instead of "atunci când îţi dai *like* ţie *însuţi*", something like "atunci când îţi dai *like* ţie *însuţi* / *însăţi*"? Similarly, in the following sentences: "Dacă *cineva* este în culmea furiei, degeaba *îl* mai enervezi" (compared with "Dacă o *persoană* este în culmea furiei, degeaba *o* mai enervezi"), which of the two possible "negative attitudes" is more censurable, *masculinization* or *feminization*? Sometimes there occur even cases of *political hypercorrectness*, expressed lexically: "Fiul (…) regelui George al V-lea şi al *reginei consort* Mary…" (*Magazin*, 11 Dec. 2014, p. 4).

As far as some Romanian nouns are concerned, which belong to the same class as *cătană*, *santinelă*, *iscoadă*, *iudă*, *huidumă*, *vlădică*, *urâtanie*, *băboi*, etc., it can be noticed, quite frequently, that the common speaker is faced with odd inconsistencies in point of grammatical agreement, e.g. "*Beizadelele amatoare* de "liniuţe" şi "drifturi" au fost *amendaţi* de Poliţia Locală" (*Jurnalul de Argeş*, no. 1099, p. 5). There is, however, a set of rules of the Romanian language which postulate the fact that, in both the set of the adjectives and the pronouns, the masculine form prevails over the feminine one (e.g. "*Călătorii* şi *mărfurile* erau *transportaţi* mai repede cu trenul"), exactly in the same manner in which, for instance, in the personal pronoun system, the first person takes precedence over the third person.

3. To conclude, we can say that (too) rigidly observing the restrictive patterns imposed by political correctness in the field of gender agreement is an (ideological and institutionalized) effort that is too great, and really disproportionate for a cause that is anyway rather small and trivial, in the current social, economic and cultural context – and, to be frank, also in a more general human context. If the gradient of compliance with

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the said gender norms encompasses practical cases like "O *româncă inginer* a descoperit o problemă a automobilelor Tesla şi a fost *dată* afară imediat de celebrul Elon Musk", which, at least upon a superficial analysis, can be said to be at loggerheads with instances like "Are doar 19 ani *această extremă*" (the handball player in question was a young man; cf. *acest vlădică*, *o pacoste* (de om), etc.), then sentences like "*O* pot asigura pe *Maiestatea Sa* că…" can be considered real challenges (and somewhat illogical, given the fact the referent is a man), and communication instances like *"Fiţi cu *toţii* şi cu *toate(le) atenţi* şi *atente*!" would imply either over-consciousness of gender issues, or a kind of rather equivocally absurd humour. We believe that the supreme test of availability for gender concord would be to make a survey – grounded on statistical computation, if possible – of the manner of verbal expression, in terms of gender agreement (a. of a male teacher, b. of a female teacher), speaking in front of a collective / group / class formed only of girls. What would he or she say? ❶ "Aveţi cu *toţii*…", "Fiţi *conştienţi* că…" ❷ "Aveţi cu *toatele*…", "Fiţi *conştiente* că…" ❸ "Aveţi cu *toţii* / *cu toatele*…", "Fiţi *conştienţi* / *conştiente* că…", ❹ "Aveţi cu *toatele* / *cu toţii*…", "Fiţi *conştiente* / *conştienţi* că…" Anyway, it seems that the ultimate test regarding the economicality of a natural language (in our case, English and Romanian) is counting the adjectives and nouns that are motional in terms of marking gender (as they appear in various dictionaries, glossaries, thematic lists, etc.).

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