sciendo

Land Forces Academy Review
Vol. XXVII, No 2(106), 2022

CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING THE GENDER OF PROFESSIONS IN THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE

Gabriela MIHĂILĂ LICĂ
"Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania
mihailag2001@yahoo.com

Alina Gabriela NEGOESCU
"Nicolae Bălcescu" Land Forces Academy, Sibiu, Romania
alina.negoescu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Most of known past and present societies of the world have been concerned with gender and have established fixed standards and rules in order to define the identity of a man as dissimilar from that of a woman. These standards and rules have become an integral part of and have shaped the identity of the individuals they have influenced. Since birth men and women are treated differently and are expected to differentiate themselves by means of the clothes they wear, by means of the jobs they choose, by means of the manner in which they use the language."Starting with the clothes we wear, the spaces we occupy, the jobs we do, and the languages we speak, everything is gendered. This encoding of our daily life and habits directly impacts our sociocultural and economic status in society. (...) Ironically, however, even though people practice gender in their everyday lives they feel awkward talking about it." (Husting, n.d.). This manner of thinking has given rise to numerous issues that the contemporary society wants to clarify and to solve. The present paper focuses on forms of address used for men and for women and suggests solutions that can be used in order to achieve political correctness.

KEYWORDS: gender, English language, Romanian language, feminine, professions

1. Introduction

It is our opinion that the most relevant definition for the concept of political correctness as we understand it is the one given by the *Meriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary*, which defines it as *"agreeing with the idea that people should be careful to not use language or behave in a way that could offend a particular group of people"* (Meriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary, n.d.). Throughout time the meaning of political correctness has varied from the evaluation of the administrative, juridical and grammatical correctness to the reference to those who firmly applied the communist party ideology and up to the English expression used to designate the institutional strategy intended to replace the terms and expressions that can hurt certain categories of individuals (Racovitza, n.d.). *"Today, «political correctness» is a term best associated with choice of words"* (Harvard Political Review, October 30, 2015). Political correctness should be based on the ideas of eliminating the words that could offend minorities and to replace these with others that help avoid discrimination (Racovitza, n.d.).

DOI: 10.2478/raft-2022-0016
© 2017. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial-No Derivatives 3.0 License.

2. Research Methodology

For the present study we analyzed Romanian large-circulation newspaper articles (*Adevărul*, *Scînteia*, *Jurnalul Naţional*, *Cotidianul*, *Observatorul Militar*) work correspondence and reports, televised speeches, internet job advertisements from sites like eJobs or BestJobs as well as Romanian movies from the 1980's until the present, focusing on the way in which the titles of professions for women were used. We considered these to be the best primary sources for following the subtle changes that occurred in the manner in which the gender for professions is used in the Romanian language under the influence of political and social changes, reflecting the adaptability and the flexibility of the language.

3. Grammatical Gender

When it comes to analyzing gender from the point of view of grammar, we notice that there are languages like Latin, Romanian, Italian, French, Spanish, Greek, Russian or German that have their nouns differentiated by inflections that usually categorize them into masculine, feminine, common or neuter classes) (https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/gender). Even though in many cases the grammatical gender corresponds to the biological one, they do not always coincide. Numerous specialists insist upon the idea that language influences the manner in which we think, learn and experience reality, in a word, the manner in which we see the world around us (Whorf, 1956). In an article entitled *Grammatical Gender Influences Semantic Categorization and Implicit Cognition in Polish*, Józef Maciuszek, Mateusz Polak, and Natalia Świątkowska show that *"grammatical gender is an important syntactic phenomenon which can affect the semantic level of processing and various cognitive processes"*. They demonstrate that there are strong connections between gender and cognitive processes by using experiments involving the evaluation of semantic similarity of words, measuring the implicit effects of grammatical gender on meaning and assigning male and female voices to objects: (Maciuszek, Polak & Świątkowska, 2019).

4. Grammatical Gender of Professions

The grammatical gender has lately started to generate discussions related to its use for professions as it has come to be perceived as a means by which discrimination can be generated and perpetuated or, on the contrary, it can be eliminated or at least curtailed: *"Gendered nouns and adjectives used to denote generic experiences encourage us to view the world as mainly having relevance to men. The word 'manmade' equates the word 'man' with 'human'. The term 'postman' suggests all postal workers are men. In a gender-equal society it is important to use language that recognises that these posts can be held by women or men"* (Gender-Sensitive Communication).

Most of the major institutions in the world try to be politically correct trying to avoid *"language and behaviour that may offend particular groups of people"* (Oxford Learner's Dictionaries), women included. Nowadays one can see a language that is neutral or inclusive, referring to both women and men. These efforts started in the 80's, the main objective being that of avoiding the privileges for one gender at the expense of the other and of stopping the perpetuation of gender stereotypes (European Parliament, 2018). Specialists started to focus more intently on using language in order to improve the situation of certain discriminated categories. The language one uses, the choice of words one makes can become an extremely effective tool that can be used to change the way one perceives reality and it can even change mentalities.

In Romanian, just like in other Romance languages, the nouns have three grammatical genders: the masculine, the

feminine and the neutral. The neutral nouns are inanimate and they are masculine in the singular and feminine in the plural. The pupils and students who study Romanian are taught to find the gender of nouns by counting it. For example, in the masculine one can encounter the forms: *un copac – doi copaci (one tree – two trees)*; in the feminine: *o familie – două familii (a family – two families)*, in the neutral *un scaun – două scaune (one chair – two chairs)*. We notice here in the masculine the numerals *un – doi; o – două* in the feminine and *un – două* in the neutral. The neutral has a masculine form for the singular and a feminine form for the plural. One can look at the termination of a noun in order to identify its gender, but there are no clear rules regarding this aspect. The only rule that should be kept in mind is feminine nouns never end in a consonant, they are either masculine or neuter. The adjective that determines a noun can also give us important clues to establish its gender.

The grammatical gender of the nouns and pronouns usually corresponds to the natural gender of the reference object. In Romanian, the masculine plural form includes the feminine form, whereas the feminine plural refers to feminine or neutral nouns. It is interesting to notice that the neutral gender is used for inanimate nous (The Grammar of the Romanian Language, n.d.). In the singular they have a masculine form and in the plural a feminine one. The feminine form is usually formed from the masculine one by means of derivation, but the opposite is also possible. There are nouns that have different words for the feminine and masculine, called heteronymous and there are also nouns that have a form that includes both the feminine and the masculine, called epicene, and which, generally, represent names of animals as well as certain jobs (The Grammar of the Romanian Language, n.d.).

"Grammatical gender languages (such as German, Romance languages and Slavic languages), where every noun has a grammatical gender and the gender of personal pronouns, usually matches the reference noun. As it is almost impossible, from a lexical point of view, to create widely accepted gender-neutral forms from existing words in those languages, alternative approaches have been sought and recommended in administrative and political language. Feminisation (i.e. the use of feminine correspondents of masculine terms or the use of both terms) is an approach that has become increasingly used in these languages, in particular in professional contexts, such as job titles when referring to women" (European Parliament, 2018).

In Romanian, in the case of most professions and titles, especially in the case of those that used to be the exclusive prerogative of men, the masculine is recommended by grammarians and it is also perceived as more formal and more prestigious. The feminine is used for jobs in the field of home and family management. One has to be very careful when writing job announcements and job descriptions in order to make sure that both genders are addressed and that one can not be accused of discrimination.

The emancipation of the Romanian woman started in the 19th century, and it becomes more evident during the interwar period. However, this process was not accompanied by notable changes in the field of the feminization of the language. One is able now to become aware of politicians, journalists, writers that advocate for encouraging women to take professions in all the economic and scientific fields despite the overwhelmingly patriarchal society that still frowned upon and restricted women's liberties. *"The interwar period offered the Romanian women the steepest jump from the status of housewife to that of society lady, with all the privileges that kind of emancipation brought: trousers, cut hair, the possibility to do sports with men or to ride a bike"* (Ungureanu, n.d.). When it comes to

the titles used for professions, we encounter the feminine for those jobs that are considered to be easier, requiring less physical strength. The newspapers of the time, the literature and the official documents speak about *funcționare, secretare, romanciere, nuveliste* (clerks, secretaries, novelists, short story writers – the feminine form being employed in Romanian), but they mention women who work as *ingineri, fizicieni, chimiști* (engineers, physicists, chemists – the masculine forms of the nouns is employed). The opinion of most Romanians during this period with regard to women is best summarized by the literary critic George Călinescu who believes that the woman is *"a satellite of the man",* she is dominated by instincts, she is *"physical and the man, metaphysical"* (Călinescu**,** 1990).

It is interesting to mention that even though the communist ideology insisted upon making women equal to men, compelling them to get employed and take active part in the social productive labour, the situation of the women actually worsened. *"We can already see from this that to emancipate woman and make her the equal of the man is and remains an impossibility so long as the woman is shut out from social productive labour and restricted to private domestic labour. The emancipation of woman will only be possible when woman can take part in production on a large, social scale, and domestic work no longer claims anything but an insignificant amount of her time. And only now has that become possible through modern large-scale industry, which does not merely permit of the employment of female labour over a wide range, but positively demands it, while it also tends towards ending private domestic labour by changing it more and more into a public industry"* (Engels, 1884). Nevertheless, this did not lead more equality between men and women. The women were deemed comrades and life partners but they had to struggle with all sorts of shortages and to cope with a double amount of workload. Many women at that time complained, in private, that their situation had worsened, that they had acquired two jobs, one at the workplace and one at home, and that they had almost no time for themselves. Despite all the effort made to engage women in production, the titles referring to professions were mostly used in their masculine forms. The wife of Nicolae Ceaușescu, Elena, who was the ideal communist woman, had many titles and all of them were used in the masculine form, this being considered to confer more scientific prestige. Elena Ceaușescu was often referred to as *"savant (masculine) de renume mondial"*, i.e. world famous scientist, but when people wanted to joke about her with close and trusted friends, she was named *"savanta"* (feminine); the term being used in a derogatory manner and expressing her utter lack of competence in the scientific field.

The forms of address that are have been used in Romanian in order to convey politeness and respect are *"doamna/ă + title"*/*"doamna/ă +last name"* for feminine and *"domnul + title"*/*"domnule + last name"*. The profession of a woman mentioned after *"doamnă"* is most of the times in the masculine. Nowadays the form *"domnișoară"* (Miss) is rarely used.

5. The Feminization of the Language

There are many who believe that the feminization of the language is detrimental as it leads to unnecessary grammatical complications and to a negative perception of those that use in the titles the feminine versions of the jobs they have. *"Additionally, some argue that feminization may be detrimental because feminine suffixes carry negative connotations. For example, a study found that women who were referred to as professoressa were seen as less persuasive than either a man or*

women who used the title professore (Italian for the feminine and masculine forms of «professor», «respectively»)" (Mucchi Faina & Barro, 2006). Another reason feminized language may carry poor conceptions is because many efforts to feminize language are recent and therefore have not yet been accepted by the mass public. Feminized language may thus be used as a way to devalue a woman, especially a working professional (which is so often subject to feminization), (Mucchi Faina & Barro, 2006).

The negative aspects brought about by the feminization of the language have also been signalled in the case of French, Italian and Polish (Mucchi Faina & Barro, 2006).

6. Conclusion

Since Romanian is a language that is alive and is continuously changing, the rules regarding the genders of professions are also changing reflecting the changes that take place in society. We have to be aware of these changes and let the language follow its natural process of transformation, as forcing unnatural modifications would only lead to exaggerations and even to obtaining the opposite of the desired effect. We believe that encouraging the use of more and more professions in the feminine would be a good thing, but not in an exaggerated way. *"In conclusion, the more political correctness tries to correct the social inequalities, the more inequalities it creates, the more it tries to put an end to conflicts, the more conflicts it generates, the more inclusive it claims to be, the more it excludes those who oppose it, the more progressive it wants to be, the less progress it brings about"* (Scalcău, 2020).

Striving for political correctness, exaggerating and changing the language in unnatural ways does not change the feelings of people, does not change their capabilities and their physical characteristics, it does not lead to equality. Men and women are different and what we have to struggle for is equal rights for everyone. Ana Scalcău reminds us of the communist period when liberties were limited and people wore similar clothes, drove similar cars and bought similar products. Nevertheless, this uniformity led to an absence of meritocracy. She warns that *"the other scenario is possible as well: a lot of freedom and too little equality; such a society is characterized by a high level of crime (because of impunity) and of poverty"*. (Scalcău, 2020). Developing an idea of Patapievici, she also cautions the readers that too much freedom can lead to anarchy and that the desired goal should not be the achievement of absolute freedom, but *"a balanced coexistence of the two"* (Scalcău, 2020).

REFERENCES

A Phrase in Flux: The History of Political Correctness. (2015). *Harvard Political Review*, available at: https://harvardpolitics.com/phrase-flux-history-political-correctness/, accessed on 11 February 2022.

Călinescu, G. (1990). *Pagini de estetică*. Bucharest: Albatros.

Engels, F. (1884). *Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. Hottingen-Zurich, available at: https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/origin_family.pdf, accessed on 22 February 2022.

European Parliament. (2018). *Limbajul neutru din perspectiva genului în Parlamentul European.* Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/187109/GNL_Guidelines_RO-original.pdf, accessed on 11 February 2022.

Gender-Sensitive Communication. (n.d.). Available at: https://eige.europa.eu/publications/gender-sensitive-communication/challenges/invisibility-and-omission/do-not-use-gender-biased-nouns-refer-groups-people, accessed on 11 February 2022.

Husting, V. (n.d.). *Why Study Gender from the Director's Desk*. Available at: https://www.boisestate.edu/genderstudies/why-gender-studies/, accessed on 10 February 2022.

Maciuszek, J., Polak, M., & Świątkowska, N. (2019). *Grammatical Gender Influences Semantic Categorization and Implicit Cognition in Polish*. Available at: https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6787279/, accessed on 14 February 2022.

Meriam-Webster Learner's Dictionary. (n.d.). Available at: https://www.learnersdictionary.com/definition/politically%20correct, accessed on 11 February 2022.

Mucchi Faina, A., & Barro, M. (2006). Il caso di "professoressa": espressioni marcate per genere e persuasione. *Psicologia Sociale, Vol. 3*, 517-530, available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feminization_of_language#cite_note-8, accessed on 15 February 2022.

Political correctness and the right to freedom of speech. Available at: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corectitudine_politic%C4%83#cite_note-3, accessed on 11 February 2022.

Racovitza, Ș. (n.d.). *Corectitudinea politică azi*. Available at: https://ro.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corectitudine_politic%C4%83#cite_note-3, accessed on 11 February 2022.

Scalcău, A. (2020). *The Paradoxes of Political Correctness*. Available at: http://www.um.ase.ro/no154/4.pdf, accessed on 15 February 2022.

The Grammar of the Romanian Language. (n.d.). Available at: https://gramaticalimbiiromane.ro/morfologia/parti-vorbire-flexibile/substantivul/#Genurile_substantivelor, accessed on 23 February 2022.

Ungureanu, L. (n.d.). *Portretul femeii în presa interbelică. Nicolae Iorga: "Ciorapii acopăr picioarele lipsite de baie"*. Available at: https://www.historia.ro/sectiune/general/articol/portretul-femeii-in-presa-interbelica-nicolae-iorga-ciorapii-acopar-picioarele-lipsite-de-baie, accessed on 22 February 2022.

Whorf, B.L. (1956). *Language, Thought, and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, available at: https://books.google.ro/books?hl=ro&lr=&id=ZdDMAgAAQBAJ&oi=fnd&pg=PR5&ots=aQ4HWGn8TW&sig=zb0qp4UF5lls4qDUtEFPSp3ZvJo&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false, accessed on 14 February 2022.

https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/gender.