

## IDENTIFYING SEXISM IN LANGUAGE AS A LINGUISTIC STEREOTYPE

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**Abstract:** It goes without saying that men and women speak differently. Through the last century there has been a lot of discussion concerning language and gender. There has been focus on discourse strategies as well as conversational styles of both sexes. Sexism appeared as the discussion point in the 1960s. Although there have been the attempts to find alternatives for language that discriminated women, certain stereotypes still seem to be a part and parcel of the language system. The article intends to carry out sexist attitudes in language from two perspectives: sexism in words as well as sexism in proverbs. What is more, some key issues of linguistic stereotype will be outlined

**Key words:** sociolinguistic stereotype, sexist language, style, social marker

In the early 1960s sociolinguistic studies proved that linguistic variation may be socially significant. When linguistic variables were correlated with independent social variables, it occurred that variations are patterned and context-dependent. The term **stereotype** was introduced into variationist sociolinguistic literature in Labov's (1973) taxonomy of language forms charged with broad social meaning. The initial rudiment in his classification (indicators) were variables whose use was restricted to particular social groups, but – at the same time – whose use [...] show zero degree of social awareness and are difficult to detect for both linguist and native speakers (Labov, 2001: 197). The second category – **markers** – occur when indicators rise to the level of social consciousness. In the words of Labov (2001: 197) [...] they exhibit social recognition [...] usually in the form of social stigma. The key element discussed is that of **stereotype**. The scholar defines the concept in the following manner: *stereotypes are [...] socially marked forms, prominently labelled by society[...]referred to and talked about by members of a speech community; they may have a general label, and a characteristic phrase which serves equally well to identify them* (2001: 315). To facilitate reference to the Labovian's concept, the conceptualisation of a socially stereotyped language variety can be termed as a **sociolinguistic stereotype**. When Labov's (2001) definitions are concerned, one is tempted to assume that the concept of sociolinguistic stereotype appears to be the property of the linguistic community, that is the mental representation of how the particular group speaks.

Very frequently, the distinction between individual and cultural stereotypes may be found, when *cultural stereotypes stand for a communitywide, consensual set of beliefs* and [...] *individual stereotypes are a set of associations held by an individual about a social group* (Dovidio, Brigham, Johnson and Gaertner, 1998: 280). Note that, as explained by Stangor and Schaller (1996: 4) [...] *from one perspective stereotypes are represented within the mind of the individual person... from the other perspective, stereotypes are represented as part of a social fabric of the society, shared by the people within that culture.* It must be bore in mind that, following Devine (1989: 5) [...] *although they have some overlapping features [...] stereotypes and personal beliefs are conceptually distinct cognitive structures.* Hence, one may assume that the sociolinguistic stereotype appears to be the linguistic component of a cultural stereotype. To be more specific, the social stereotype may constitute a sociolinguistic **cultural stereotype**, while marker may prompt the representation of social groups in varying degrees for different individuals. Nevertheless, the classification of how linguistic variation might elicit the perception of social category has been proposed in the field of cognitive sociolinguistics. (Kristiansen 2001) Although the model lacks empirical background, supports the empirically verifiable idea of linguistic distinctiveness. (cf. Niedzielski 1999; Strand 1999)

The concept of stereotype has been also investigated by the Ethnolinguistic School of Lublin (henceforth ESL). As explained by Bartmiński (2009) the concept of stereotype is interdisciplinary, and although investigated in sociology, social psychology, history of literature and culture, the general idea on what the term is seems to be build on Putnam's (1975) treatment of linguistic meaning. On the basis of the analysis of the notion of stereotype carries out in ESL is the assumption that stereotypes are not restricted to knowledge and opinions about members of social groups, as they are within sociolinguistic research. The overall impression gained from the analysis carried out by Bartmiński (2009) is that stereotyping is considered as a general mechanism of organising knowledge about entities in the world. Consequently, stereotypes are regarded as a primarily cognitive phenomenon, with the evaluative function. Stereotypes are organised in aspects (while some of them are silent and others are not in linguistic activity), considered as stereotype profiles. Simultaneously, the profile is understood as a way of organisation of the stereotype knowledge (depending on a variety of factors such as a point of view, a perspective, a type of rationality and a value system) (Bartmiński and Niebrzegowska, 1998: 212-213).

W naszej definicji profilowanie jest subiektywną (tj. mającą swój podmiot) operacją językowo-pojęciową, polegającą na swoistym kształtowaniu obrazu przedmiotu poprzez ujęcie go w określonych aspektach (podkategorach, fasetach), takich jak np. pochodzenie, cechy, wygląd, funkcje, zdarzenia, przeżycia, itp., w ramach pewnego typu wiedzy i zgodnie z wymogami określonego punktu widzenia.[...] Czynniki sterujące profilowaniem są związane ze wspomnianymi już podmiotowymi kategoriami: typu racjonalności (czyjeś racjonalności) czyjejś wiedzy o świecie, czyjegoś systemu wartości i czyjegoś punktu widzenia; należą one do wysokiego poziomu organizacji języka.

What is more, of a particular importance seems to be the notion of the point of view. According to the Bartmiński and Niebrzegowska (1998) it is a subjective-cultural factor governing the way of talking about the object, e.g. governing the object's categorization, the choice of onomasiological ground for creating a name, the choice of traits that the object is said to have in particular utterances or that are entrenched in the meaning.

Once we pursue the issue of female species stereotypes as emerging from English, it seems justified to shed some light on the historical development of words related to the category **FEMALE HUMAN BEING**, carried out in, among others, Schultz (1975), Mills (1989, 1993), Kleparski (1998, 1990), Kiełtyka (2005, 2006) as well as Kochman-Haładyj (2007, 2008). On the basis of the aforementioned analysis one may assume that the majority of words denoting women are descend on the evaluative scale. Mills (1989) who investigated the semantic history of the category WOMAN attributed the semantic change they undergo typically to cultural and social determinants. In his own words: [...]the term for the female is likely to become pejorative, likely to acquire negative sexual connotations, and once it is attached to the female is unlikely to be transferable to a male (Mills, 1989: xiv).

Much along similar lines is the claim advocated by, among others, Kleparski (1990) that men tend to think of women in terms of sexual availability/probable sexual act whatever the context. As a result, all words that evoke anything humanly female may become synonymous with sexual imagery. It seems justified, as there exist a number of lexemes that have no negative elements in their semantic structure, but – at the same time – they constitute parts or phrases which are of a negative connotations (e.g. queen of the night, lady of the night). The negative picture of **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** is also confirmed in a wide spectrum of proverbs and sayings where a woman is portrayed. What is more, there is a range of proverbs

that linen women to property, e.g. A little house well filled, a little field well tilled. And a little wife well willed are great riches (the conclusion that may be drawn is that a woman has suffered quite possibly the worst universal ideological abuse ever to be perpetrated on a human category).

Let us now examine several lexemes from **FEMALE HUMAN BEING** category in order to outline their stylistic value and, consequently, make an attempt to draw female species stereotypes.

The following part of the paper concentrates on the semantics and sociolinguistic status of the selected headwords. This lot includes: *babe*, *bimbo*, *dame*, *hussy*, *moll*. More specifically, first we shall be concerned with outlining the history of their semantic evolution and then concentrate on synthesizing their present-day sociolinguistic value, as evidenced by a selected body of representative *EFL* dictionaries. To be more specific, the major task set to the pages that follow is to tackle two main aspects, that is the way the analysed lexical items are (historically) semantically defined.

## 1. Babe

Let us start our historico-sociolinguistic journey into FEMALE specific terms with the word *babe*. As evidenced by major etymological sources the word *babe* has been present in English since the 14<sup>th</sup> century (see, for example, *The Oxford Dictionary of English Etymology*, 1966; henceforth: *ODEE*). According to the *OED*, at its historical beginnings the word was used in the gender neutral and unchanged sense of ‘baby’ (1393 How this *babe* all bloody cried 1967 She can recall being held up to see a sparkly tree as a *babe* in arms). Later, at the beginning of the E.Mod.E. period there developed several novel senses, that is ‘a doll’, ‘a puppet’ and ‘a childish person’ (1530 *Babe* that children play with 1962 A big ambitious novel, in which there was to be far more social criticism than the *babes-in-the-woods* theme might suggest.). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in AmE slang *babe* started to be used as a form of address to a girl or woman (1915 *Babe*, a pretty girl. 1952 Yesterday this Adair *babe* has an ad in the paper.) (see the *OED*). On closer scrutiny, both *baby* and *babe*, as indicated in *Oxford Dictionary of Word Histories* (henceforth: *ODWH*, 2002) *both of these words are probably imitative of an infant’s speech which features repetition of the sound ba [...]*. In a much similar

vein argue the editors of *Dictionary of Word Origin* (henceforth: *DWO*, 1990), claiming that [...] *babe and baby are likewise imitative of the sounds of the infant*. The *ODWH* explains that:

[...] in the U.S. in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, both babe and baby started to be heard as affectionate, casual forms of address used by men when talking to women. In latter part of the century and currently, however, they have become descriptive of sexual attractiveness in both men and women.

What is of particular interest to the present study is that *A Dictionary of Words about Women* (henceforth: *DWAW*, 1989) confirms that:

[...] although babe, or baby, are often terms of endearment used of a loved one of either sex, from the late 1890s babe, later baby, have been slang terms for a young woman of any age, specifically one considered by a male to be sexually attractive and/or available.

Let us now turn our attention to the present sociolinguistic status of the word *babe*. In the modern sense the word is evidenced in all the four dictionaries that have been consulted as representative dictionaries intended for *EFL* learners. For the sake of comparison, apart from the four modern dictionaries we shall also consider the semantic and the sociolinguistic information of the relevant entries in the much outdated – from the point of view of a modern English dictionary – titled *New English Dictionary* (henceforth: *NED*, 1932). What we find there is the following definition of the lexical item *babe*: [...] *a young child, a baby; a foolish or childish person*. As far as the entries provided by the representative sample of *EFL* lexicographic works, they are as follows:

<b>LDCE</b> <b>babe</b> 1 < <i>LITERARY</i> > a baby: babe in arms (=one that has to be carried) 2 < <i>SPOKEN INFORMAL</i> > a word for an attractive young woman 3 < <i>SPOKEN INFORMAL</i> > a way of speaking to a young woman. often considered offensive 4 <i>spoken</i> a way of speaking to someone you love, especially your wife or husband 5 <b>babe in the woods</b> < <i>AmE</i> >someone who can, be easily deceived; He was like a babe in the woods when he first came to New York.
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<b>CCAD</b> <b>babe</b> 1. Some people use <b>babe</b> as an affectionate way of addressing someone they love. < <i>AM</i> >, < <i>INFORMAL</i> >.
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**CALD babe** 1. <LITERARY> a small baby: *a newborn babe* 2. <INFORMAL> a word you can use when you are talking to your wife, husband, lover, etc.: *It's up to you, babe. I'll do whatever you say.* 3. <INFORMAL> a sexually attractive young person: He's a **total** babe.

**OALD babe** 1 <OLD USE> a baby 2 <SLANG> a word used to address a young woman, or your wife, husband or lover, usually expressing affection but sometimes considered offensive if used by a man to a woman, he does not know: *What are you doing tonight, babe?* 3 <INFORMAL> an attractive young woman IDM a babe in arms <OLD-FASHIONED> a very small baby that cannot yet walk—more at MOUTH n.

As to the selected definitions given by the representative items of the body of *EFL* lexicographic sources, they are basically very much similar and alike, although one may gain the overriding impression that the sociolinguistic account provided by the *LDCE* could be qualified as the most explicit of them all. Note that, apart from certain minor differences in determining sociolinguistic value of the word in question, one seems to obtain substantial differences as to the very semantics of the lexical entry *babe*. Thus, our enquiry shows that the *LDCE* specifies five current meanings of the word, while *OALD* and *CALD* provide merely three senses of the word in question while – somewhat surprisingly – *CCAD* provides one and the only sense: [...] as an affectionate way of addressing someone they love. The stylistic labels that are employed to reflect the hearer's interpretation of a tone or attitude at present are (in case of the dictionaries in question) as follows:

- *LDCE* – <LITERARY> (*babe* = one that has to be carried); <SPOKEN INFORMAL>; <SPOKEN>
- *OALD* – <OLD-USE>; <SLANG>; <INFORMAL>; <OLD-FASHIONED>
- *CCAD* – <INFORMAL>; <LITERARY>
- *CALD* – <INFORMAL>

The observation that may readily be formulated is that in the above collection of data a striking contrast between the values encoded in the respective stylistic labels can be observed. In particular, the *LDCE* entry of the lexical item in question qualifies the term as <OLD-USE> and <OLD-FASHIONED>, which may rarely be found in all other remaining lexicographic reference works that have been consulted. Interestingly enough, there is no attitudinal label in case of *NED*. When we investigate the status of the word in other regional varieties of English we see that in the majority of dictionaries of AmE the word *babe* is used in the sense 'girl, young woman', chiefly as a slang term (see, for example, *The American Heritage Dictionary of*

*the English Language*, 1969 (henceforth: AHDEL). Interestingly enough, both AmE and in Au.E. – as evidenced by AHDEL and *The Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary*, 1995 (henceforth: MED) – the word *babe* used in the sense ‘a girl’ is qualified as slang and colloquial respectively and, as to its semantics, it is also used in the sense ‘inexperienced, innocent person’, especially in the collocation *babe in the woods*. It is worth stressing at this point that, as pointed out by *The Dictionary of American Slang* (henceforth: DAS, 2003) *baby* tends to be used with the negative patriarchal connotations of [...] *anything which is the object of one's special attention, interest or masculine admiration or affection; anything that gives a man pride or a feeling of power to possess, create or build; that with which familiarity or association gives a men a feeling of masculine pride or power*. This state of affairs seems to have been given much support in recent studies on sexism, and – in particular – sexism in language, such as for example Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005).

## 2. Bimbo

The next female-specific lexical item under scrutiny is *bimbo*. The *OED* (2009) labels the word as <*DEROGATORY*>, standing for ‘a young woman considered to be sexually attractive, but for limited intelligence’ (1976 Sure, a guy can meet all the *bimbos* he wants. But the really brainy women – they’re not so easy to find. 2002 [...] gets points for the most gratuitous jiggle of the year as *bimbo* perfect Daniella Evangelista flees the killer dressed fetchingly in a Hawaiian luau outfit.). Other meanings provided in the *OED* are ‘a fellow’ (1919 Nothing but the most heroic measures will save the poor *bimbo* 1947 *Bimbos* who went about the place making passes at innocent girls after discarding their wives), and ‘a whore’ (1929 *Bimbo*, a woman 1952 Not that you were just a *bimbo* to me...I’ve discovered that I’m a little in love with you, too). When we resort to other lexicographic sources, we see that, for example, in *A History of English in Its Own Words* (henceforth: HEIOW, 1991) one may discover that the word appeared in English in 1919 as denoting a woman, especially of loose morals. Soon afterwards (1935) the word started to be qualified as <*SLANG*>. When we consult the *ODWH* (2002), the lexical item *bimbo* is defined as:

[...] [early 20<sup>th</sup> century] A bimbo was originally a contemptuous word for ‘fellow, chap’ and is derived from a masculine Italian form, whose literal meaning was ‘little child’; the use was

transferred to females in the late 1920s and came to describe 'an attractive woman perceived as unintelligent or frivolous'. In the 1980s bimbette entered the vocabulary to describe a young 'adolescent bimbo'.

In Merriam-Webster Book of Word Histories (henceforth: MWBWH, 1998) we find out that:

[...] bimbo became something of a vogue word in the 1980s. With public figures having their careers destroyed as a result of indiscreet romantic liaisons, the word received a lot of 'press'. [...] There is no doubt that the word bimbo is disparaging regardless of the context in which it appears. Typically it is used now for women whose sexual practices are regarded as less than respectable. Rarely would a man with a reputation for lascivious behavior be called a bimbo [...]. Originally, bimbo was a term of disparagement that applied to members of both sexes. As early as 1919, the term was used to describe a fellow who was unimportant or undistinguished. [...] The use of the word to mean a sexually promiscuous woman or 'tramp' goes back to around 1929 but did not really catch on in popular usage until the advent of the 1930s detective novel, which helped perpetuate the stereotype of the beautiful but dumb blonde who is taken out for a night on the town in exchange for sexual favors. As usage has increased in the latter half of the twentieth century, the term has taken on a more general notion of a beautiful woman viewed solely as a sex object.

As to the present-day sociolinguistic status of the word, it is defined in *MED* (1995) as [...] *<COLLOQUIAL> 1. Orig. U.S. an attractive but empty-headed young woman. 2. A homosexual.* Rather surprisingly, the wording of much earlier edition of *NED* (1932) accounts for the sense of *bimbo* as [...] *a kind of punch made with cognac.* Yet, the lexical item found in *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* (henceforth: *WNNCD*, 1989) is labelled as *<SLANG>* term used for [...] *man, women- used esp. as a generalized term of disparagement [...]; also: TRAMP.* When we resort to other sources we see that the definitions of the lexical item discussed here found in our set of *EFL* lexicographic products are as follows:

<b>LDCE bimbo</b> <INFORMAL> an insulting word for an attractive but unintelligent young woman: <i>He picked up some bimbo at the club.</i>
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<b>OALD bimbo</b> <INFORMAL>, <DISAPPROVING> a young person, usually a woman, who is sexually attractive but not very intelligent: <i>He's going out with an empty-headed bimbo half his age.</i>
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**CCAD bimbo** If someone calls a young woman a **bimbo**, they think that although she is pretty she is rather stupid. <INFORMAL>, <DISAPPROVAL>

**CALD bimbo** <SLANG DISAPPROVING> a young woman considered to be attractive but not intelligent: *He went out with a succession of blond bimbos.*

To conclude, one may say that in case of *bimbo* the *EFL* dictionaries that have been consulted define the lexical item much along the same semantic and stylistic lines, as [...] *an insulting word for an attractive but unintelligent young woman* *LDCE* (2005). More specifically, in case of *LDCE*, *OALD* and *CCAD* the lexical item is defined as belonging to the same stylistic category <INFORMAL>, <DISAPPROVING> whilst *CALD* defines the sociolinguistic value of the word as <SLANG DISAPPROVING>. It is worth stressing at the same time that *Conceptual Networks of English Bawdy Euphemisms and Dysphemisms* (henceforth: *CNEBED*, 2004), also shows that the term has been chiefly used as an AmE slang word both for ‘a prostitute’, as well as a derogatory term for ‘a sexy, attractive but unintelligent young woman’. A *Dictionary of Slang and Euphemism* (henceforth: *DSE*, 1991) goes that *bimbo* denotes [...]1. *A young woman or a girl. [U.S. slang, 1900s]* 2. *A sexually loose woman. [U.S. slang, early 1900s]* 3. *The female genitals. Probably a variant of BUMBO (sense 1). [British, mid 1900s, Dictionary of Slang and Unconventional English]* 4. *A woman considered sexually. [British and U.S., 1900s]* 5. *A tramp’s catamite.* As to the female-specific use, the *Historical Dictionary of American Slang* (henceforth: *HDAS*, 1994) defines *bimbo* as [...] *a young woman, esp. one who is promiscuous or unintelligent; FLOOZIE.* Note that *The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang* (henceforth: *DCS*, 1990) describes *bimbo* as [...] *a silly, empty-headed or frivolous woman. This is the sense of the word in vogue in the late 1980s, imported to Britain and Australia from the USA.* The sense of the word is also explained in *Sex Slang* (2008) as: [...] *well-built, attractive, somewhat dim woman.* Consequently, it should be noted that stylistic labels that are employed to reflect the hearer’s interpretation of tone and/or attitude, in case of *bimbo*, are equivalent only in case of *CALD*.

### 3. Dame

According to the *OED*, the word appeared in English at the beginning of the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Originally, it meant ‘a female ruler’ or ‘superior or head’ (1225 ...iue ure *dame* his grace, so lengre so more 1908 *The Irish Dames of Ypres*, being a history of the Royal Irish Abbey of

Ypres). In turn, at the beginning of the 14<sup>th</sup> century the word started to be used in the sense ‘the lady of the house’, ‘the mistress of the household’, ‘the housewife’ (1330 At Londone anoberkyng gan wone... Saberk ban was his name, Dame Rytula highte his *dame* 1855 My *deem*, my mistress, my wife. An aud *deeam*: an old woman). At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the word started to be used in the meaning ‘a girl’, ‘a woman’ in AmE slang (1902 Look to de frowsy *dames* erbout us 1962 I’ve never set eyes on the *dame*). Additionally, the *OED* relates the word to ‘a form of address originally used to a lady of rank, or a woman of position’ (1225 Hu nu, *dame*, dotestu? Cwen, acangestu nu? 1722 How much was it, *dame*?), ‘the legal title prefixed to the name and surname of the wife of a knight or baronet, for which Lady prefixed to the surname is in common use’ (1611 Quod uxores.. gaudeant hac appellation, videlicet Anglice, Lady, Madame, et *Dame* respective, secundum usum loquendi 1793 *Dame* Sidney Hawkins [relict of a knight] died the 18<sup>th</sup>), ‘the wife or a daughter of a lord’, ‘a woman of rank’, ‘a lady’ (1530 *Dame*, a lady, *dame* 1856 She had the low voice of your English *dames*).

As argued by DWAW (1989) the word was adopted from Old French in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century. Ultimately, it originated [...] in the Latin *domina*, meaning LADY or MISTRESS of the house, the feminine of *dominus*, meaning lord or master, from which dominate derives. Originally, the term was used [...] to express relation or function in the sense of a female ruler, superior or head, synonymous with lady, the feminine equivalent of lord. What is more, at a very beginning of its usage in English the word served as a form of address to a lady of rank or woman of high position. In the course of 14<sup>th</sup> century *dame* extended downwards and lost all implications of high rank or noble birth denoting since that time a woman of insignificant power (DWAW, 1989).

*ODEE* (1966) states that *dame* stands for [...] female head or superior; as a form of address or title; mother, *dam* (XIII); (arch., dial.) lady of the house XIV and *NED* (1932), offers the following wording of the semantics of the lexical item: [...] a lady; (Law) a title of honour (now applied to the widows of knights and baronets); the mistress of a house; a woman advanced in years. *CDD* (1967) confirms that *dame* stands for [...] 1. An elderly woman. 2. Slang. Woman. 3. In Great Britain, a. a title given to a woman who has received an honorable rank corresponding to that of knight, b. the legal title of the wife or widow of a knight or baronet. In modern sense the word can be found in all EFL lexicographic works in question.

<b>OALD dame</b> <b>1 Dame</b> (in Britain) a title given to a woman as a special honour because of the work she has done: <i>Dame Maggie Smith</i> <b>2 &lt;OLD-FASHIONED&gt; &lt;NAME,&gt; &lt;INFORMAL&gt;</b> a woman <b>3 =</b> pantomime dame.
<b>CCAD dame</b> <b>1 Dame</b> is a title given to a woman as a special honour because of important service or work that she has done. <i>&lt;BRIT&gt;...Dame Judi Dench.</i> <b>2 A dame</b> is a woman. This use could cause offence. <i>&lt;AM&gt;, &lt;INFORMAL&gt;, &lt;OLD-FASHIONED&gt; Who does that dame think she is?</i>
<b>CALD dame</b> woman <b>1 &lt;US&gt;, &lt;OLD-FASHIONED&gt;, &lt;SLANG&gt;</b> a woman character <b>2 &lt;UK&gt;</b> the funny character of an older woman in a pantomime (= musical play for children) who is usually played by a man.

In the case of the headword *dame* we see that the wording of the definition in *EFL* dictionaries taken into consideration is limited to female-specific terms. Nevertheless, the stylistic labels tend to differ greatly, as in case of *LDCE*, *OALD*, *CCAD* the lexical item is marked as *<OLD-FASHIONED> <INFORMAL>*, while *CALD* specifies the word as *<OLD-FASHIONED> <SLANG>*. Although the word is certainly negatively loaded, the only dictionary that encodes the axiological element is *CCAD*, stating that [...] *this use could cause offence*. Note that the present-day sense of the term *dame* is determined by *A Dictionary of Invective* (1989) in the following way: [...] *today, the implication generally is that the dame is a rough-and-ready sort of the lower classes, e.g., 'Women aren't women [in the 1935 novel Decoy by Michael Morgan], they're dames, babes, skirts, tamales, dolls, floozies, chippies, and trollops'* (Bill Pronzini, *Gun in Cheek*, 1982). Also, *The Dictionary of Scottish Slang* (2006) interprets *dame* as: [...]1. *The mistress of the house.* 2. *A farmer's wife.* 3.a *mother.* 4.a *young unmarried woman.* 5. *A damsel.*

#### 4. Hussy

As the *OED* historical material shows the word *hussy* is clearly a phonetic reduction of *housewife*. The semantic history of *hussy* depicted in the *OED* shows that initially the lexical item in question was employed in the sense ‘the mistress of a household’ or ‘a thrifty woman’ (1530 Na seruandis [shall] tak vther clathis than masteries and *hussies* and thar hous~hlidis clathis to wesche. 1800 His loud *hussy*, in her cobbled suit..Screams through the village.). Later, the word associated with behaviourally negative axiological elements denoting ‘a rustic, rude, opprobrious, or playfully rude mode of addressing a woman (1650 [To a mare] You are mistaken *Hussy*. 1853 Meg, ye idle *hizzy..your pat is no on yet.*). In the middle of the 17<sup>th</sup> century the word started to denote ‘a strong, country woman, a female of the lower orders’

and – with the progression of pejoration – ‘a woman of low or improper behaviour, or light or worthless character’, as well as ‘an ill-behaved, pert, or mischievous girl’ (1647 Such another *hussy* as this was dame Alice Pierce, a concubine to our Edward III. 1899 *That bonnetless, bold hussey round that corner.*). DWAW (1989) clarifies that originally, *hussy*:

[...] denoted the MISTRESS or female manager of a household (1530-1800). Pejoration accompanied the diminishing status of a housewife as political matters and affairs passed from individual family household to centralized governments of nation states and, later, as paid productive labour passed out of the household and into the factory. [...] By the mid C-17<sup>th</sup>, hussy denoted a rustic woman. In some rural districts it was used as a friendly synonym for WOMAN or LASS. It degenerated to mean a [...] pert or mischievous young woman, a synonym of MINX. At first used jocularly, hussy later became a more opprobrious way of addressing a woman. [...] In 1755 Samuel Johnson defined hussy as ‘a sorry or bad woman; a worthless WENCH. Although it retained its earlier connotations of sauciness, by the late C19th the degeneration of hussy reached its nadir: it denoted a lewd, or brazen woman, a PROSTITUTE OR JADE.

Likewise, *Word Mysteries and Histories* (1986) seems to follow other sources when it says that:

[...] hussy and housewife were originally synonyms, both meaning ‘mistress of a household’. The word hussy, illustrates a normal phonetic development of the Middle English compound huswif, which is also the ancestor of our Modern English word housewife. [...] As hussy acquired its pejorative semantic baggage, housewife became restricted in meaning to the original sense of the word.

In his in-depth account of the history of the word *hussy* Kleparski (1990) explains that the lexical item was recorded for the first time in the first half of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (as a phonetic reduction of *housewife*). The author throws some light on the nature of pejoration, claiming that [...] like many other gender-specific (-MALE) lexical item *hussy* started off as a term with, if not evaluatively positive, then at least neutral elements, which were gradually replaced by evaluatively negative ones. Following the analysis given in Kleparski (1990) we observe that [...] with the further evolution of *hussy*, the pejorative element grew stronger and the word, originally in nominal phrases such as *light hussy*, *worthless hussy*, came eventually to be used in the

*meaning unchaste, disreputable woman.* However, when we consider the data provided in *NED* (1932), we find out that the lexical item was used in the sense [...] *a pert, forward girl; a worthless woman; a housewife.* Still, a relatively recent edition of *WNNCD* (1989) affirms that *hussy* stands either for [...] 1. *a lewd or brazen woman* or 2. *A saucy or mischievous girl.* In the case of the four *EFL* lexicographic works, the semantic and stylistic value of the lexical item *hussy* is defined as follows:

<b>LDCE hussy</b> <OLD-FASHIONED> a woman who is sexually immoral.
<b>OALD hussy</b> <OLD-FASHIONED>, <DISAPPROVING> a girl or woman who behaves in a way that is considered shocking or morally wrong.
<b>CCAD hussy</b> If someone refers to a girl or woman as a <b>hussy</b> , they are criticizing her for behaving in a shocking or immoral way <HUMOROUS>, <OLD-FASHIONED>, <DISAPPROVAL>.
<b>CALD hussy</b> <HUMOROUS> a woman or girl who is sexually immoral: "You asked him out? Oh, you <i>brazen/shameless hussy, you!</i> "

The four representatives of *EFL* dictionaries that have been employed here as the present-day English lexicographic works use the following stylistic labels to shed some sociolinguistic light on the attitude of the speaker towards the person denoted by the item in question, namely: *LDCE* – <OLD-FASHIONED>; *OALD* – <OLD-FASHIONED>, <DISAPPROVING>; *CCAD* – <HUMOROUS>, <OLD-FASHIONED>, <DISAPPROVAL>; *CALD* – <HUMOROUS>. As regards the labelling of the word, that may be qualified as being offensive, there is no relevant qualification within the body of the *EFL* lexicographic works. It is worth noticing that the lexical item *hussy*, as evidenced by *MED* (1995) is nowadays predominantly used in the behaviourally charged sense 'an ill-behaved girl and 'a lewd woman'. A *Dictionary of Euphemisms* (1995) provides the following denotation for the lexical item *hussy* - *a woman who habitually copulates casually.* Also *AHDEL* (1969) shows that the word, morally tinted, is employed in the sense of 'a saucy or flippant girl', 'a strumpet, trollop'. Moreover, *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* (1992) positions the semantics of the word as [...] *nowadays implying an ill-balanced girl, a 'jade' or 'minx'.*

## 5. Moll

The next lexical item the semantics and sociolinguistic value of which is to be discussed is that of *moll*. As far as the semantic history of the word is concerned, the roots of the word go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. According to the *OED* the word appeared in the first decade of the century in the three female-specific senses ‘a girl’, ‘a woman’, ‘a prostitute’ (1604 None of these common *Molls* neyther, but disconnected and vnfortunate Gentlewomen. 1923 In the vocabulary of modern youth, chivalry is dead... A girl is a jane, a dame, a *moll* [etc.]). The new meanings appear at the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century – when the word started to be used with a positively loaded senses ‘a girlfriend’, ‘a sweetheart’, but also with a negatively charged sense ‘the girlfriend or female accomplice of a gangster or criminal’, as well as ‘a female pickpocket or thief’ (1823 *Molls* are the female companions of low thieves, at bed, board, and business. 1995 We are finally admitted..and head downstairs to a lavish ballroom full of aged pornsters and their youngster *molls*.). Also the recently published *ODWH* (2002) confirms that the etymological roots of *moll* go back to the 17<sup>th</sup> century. [...] *Moll as in a gangster's moll is a pet form of the given name Mary*. According to the editors of *DWAW* (1989), both *moll* and *molly* are the familiar pet forms of the personal name *Mary*. Like many pet forms they were especially popular among the labouring class and travelled the same path of degeneration as did many such names, for example *Kitty*, *Dolly*, *Biddy*, etc.

<b>LDCE</b> <i>moll</i> especially <AmE>, <INFORMAL> a criminal’s girlfriend: a gangster’s moll.
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<b>OALD</b> <i>moll</i> <OLD-FASHIONED>, <SLANG> the female friend of a criminal.
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<b>CCAD entry missing</b>
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<b>CALD</b> <i>moll</i> 1 <US>, <SLANG> a female companion of a gangster (= violent criminal) 2. <AUSTRALIAN> a female companion of a member of a group of people who ride motorcycles or surf together.
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Since the 17th century *moll* has been applied contemptuously to a wench, lass, harlot and a prostitute. Hence, the documented mid-19<sup>th</sup> century term *moll-shop* to stand for a brothel, and the late-19<sup>th</sup> century slang use of *moll* for vagina. In the early 19<sup>th</sup> century *moll* showed some signs of amelioration because it was first a slang term for ‘a girl’ and, from 1890, it was used as a slang term for a sweetheart. Since 1820 *moll* has also been used to denote an unmarried female companion of a criminal or a tramp. *Moll* has also pejorated, but somewhat differently because since the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century *molly* or a *Miss Molly* has denoted an

effeminate man or boy. Interestingly, *ACEDEL* (1966) suggests that the semantic spectrum of the lexical item *moll* is restricted to pejoratively loaded ‘a female companion of a gangster’, as well as slang specific ‘a prostitute’. Let us now concentrate solely on the present-day sociolinguistic status of *moll*. The labelling in *CDD* (1967) is on pair with the information provided by *ACEDEL* (1966), that informs us that *moll* is a slang term standing for [...]1. A *female companion of a criminal or vagrant*. 2. *Prostitute*. Also *AHOEL* (1969) specifies that *moll* is a *slang* term denoting: 1. *A female companion of a thief or gangster*. 2. *A prostitute*. In a much earlier edition of *NED* (1932) one reads that *moll* is a slang term for [...] *a wench, a prostitute*. In a likewise manner, note that in the 1995 edition of *MED*, *moll* is labelled as <COLLOQUIAL>, meaning: 1. *the girlfriend or mistress of a gangster, thief, etc.* 2. *tart*. 3. *prostitute*. Let us now turn to the definitions given by the representative body of *EFL* lexicographic works used for reference here.

It goes without saying that a close study of the term *moll* discloses certain marked inconsistency as far as the sociolinguistic labellings in the four dictionaries concerned. To start with, note that there is no headword provided in case of *CCAD*. Semantically, as we can see in case of the words analysed here, the definitions of sense threads tend to differ only in particular details. Conversely, the style labels linked to the word in various lexicographic works indicate diverse attitudes. *LDCE* qualifies the word as <FORMAL>, *OALD* as <OLD-FASHIONED>, <SLANG>, while *CALD* labels *moll* as <SLANG>. It is worth noting that the word is also evidenced in *HDAS* (1970) as slang term for [...] *a woman who is herself a criminal or the mistress or willing accomplice of a criminal*. Therefore, *The Dictionary of Contemporary Slang* (1990) explains that in AmE the word [...] stands for a woman, specifically a female companion. This sense of the word, familiar from its use in crime fiction as gun moll or gangster’s moll is now outdated. In Au.E., the word is used with highly derogatory sense ‘a prostitute’. Moll, a short form of Molly (itself a familiar version of Mary) has been used to denote a woman of ‘easy virtue’. When we analyse the relevant entry in *A Dictionary of Slang and Euphemisms* (1991), we find there the following explanation of the semantics of *moll* 1. *a girl*. 2. *a thief accomplice*. 3. *a prostitute*. 4. *one’s girlfriend*. In the case of *WNND* (1989), the semantics of the lexical item is explained as including the senses 1. *Prostitute*. 2. A: *Doll* B: *Gangster’s girlfriend*. Unfortunately, the editors have failed to provide any stylistic label for this entry. For the sake of comparison, when we resort to Au.E., *The Macquarie Encyclopedic Dictionary*

(1995), we see that the word is labelled as <COLLOQUIAL>, standing for [...] 1. *The girlfriend or mistress of a gangster, thief, etc.* 2. *Tart.* 3. *Prostitute.* 4. *The girlfriend of a surfer, biker, etc.* Hence, it is clear that there exists a striking contrast between the values encoded in the stylistic labels provided by various lexicographic reference works.

Schultz (1975: 134) who investigated the naming of women in the course of history, stated as follows:

[...] there is no doubt [...] that a language reflects thoughts, attitudes, and culture of those who make it and use it. [...] To this extend, at least, analysis of a language tells us a great deal about the interests, achievements, obsessions, hopes, fears, and prejudices of the people who created the language. Who are the people who created English? Largely men – at least at present generation. [...] A woman's life has been largely restricted to the home and family, while men have lived in a large world [...]. That men are the primary role they have traditionally played in English – speaking cultures. [...] An analysis of the language used by men to discuss and describe women reveals something about male attitudes, fears, and prejudices concerning the female sex.

Let us embark by saying that the selected female-specific lexical items that have been subject to scrutiny have not been chosen without good reasons, primarily because the lexical items, the semantics and sociolinguistic value of which have been examined, belong to different stylistic categories. Note that the collection of female-specific terms analysed in are of various etymological roots and come from various historical periods of English. For example, the etymological roots of *babe* go back to at least Shakespearean times, while the word *bimbo* originated in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One common feature that the female specific terms have is diametrically varying parameters with respect to their stylistic value (e.g. *dame, moll*). One of the general observations that emerge from the above analysis is that the words designating women were originally neutral in both meaning and sex reference, but took on negative sexual connotations in the course of language development (cf. Schultz, 1975).

As language reflects the beliefs, ideas, and stereotypes of a particular culture, one can conclude that female species stereotype emerging from the above lexicographic analysis advocates subordinate places for women in society. It seems that on the basis of our exemplary analysis one may feel justified to advocate the following explanation:

Prejudice [...] that is fear, based on a supposed threat to the power of the male. [...] Power

becomes a question because the male is biologically inferior to the female in several respects. [...] Man's fear of women is basically sexual, which is perhaps the reason why so many of the derogatory terms for women take on sexual connotations (Cameron, 1990:143).

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