

2. THE ENGLISH NOUN IN THE FORENSIC DISCOURSE

2.1 Gender as a Category of the English Noun

By gender is generally understood “a grammatical classification of nouns, pronouns or other words in the noun phrase, according to certain meaning-related distinctions, especially a distinction related to the sex of the referent” (Biber, 1999: 314). According to Corbett (1991: 61) English has “the semantic (or natural) gender system, in which the assignment of the gender of the noun is closely tied to the biological sex of its referent”. Similarly, Greenbaum and Quirk (1990: 99) claim that “the English gender is not a feature of nouns themselves but it relates directly to their meaning, with particular reference to biological sex”. Corbett (1991: 63) considers the English gender “a covert gender” but he also admits that the gender in English “is not absolutely covert as in some cases it is marked by affixation or compounding with gender-specific elements”. Biber (1999:314) distinguishes two main gender classes: “the personal/human and non-personal/neuter (it). The personal/human category is further divided into masculine (*he*), feminine (*she*) and dual (*he, she*)”. Quirk et al. (1985: 315) defines the personal dual gender as the class of nouns, which “has who-he or she pronoun coreference”. If we want to express the gender identification in these nouns, he recommends adding “gender markers such as male or female (*a male/female student*)” to them. Biber et al. (1999: 312) admits that “gender in the English language is to some extent a matter of convention and speaker’s choice. Therefore, the differences in how masculine and feminine genders are treated at a certain point in time mirror the way men and women are viewed by the society”.

In Sunderland (1994:25) Woods clarifies it by declaring:

„If we look at grammar as purely prescriptive, then it might be true to say that the grammar itself contains the elements of sexual bias. But it is probably truer to say that grammar is a descriptor of the way language is used at any one point in time. If we take this view, then accepted lore that the indefinite pronoun is followed by the singular pronoun or possessive adjective, and that the use of the feminine instead of the masculine form indicates a marked comment, merely reflects a traditional use, which in turn reflects a traditional attitude to the roles of men and women in society. As attitudes change, the uses which now help to avoid sexual bias become more acceptable as the correct forms to use.”

Quirk et al. (1985: 314) also makes the distinction between “personal and non-personal gender”, but his classification of gender is more complex since it accounts for nine possible combinations of nouns and their pronoun co-referents.

GENDER CLASS	EXAMPLE	PRONOUN COREFERENCE
animate	personal	(a) male <i>brother</i> → <i>who – he</i>
		(b) female <i>sister</i> → <i>who – she</i>
		(c) dual <i>doctor</i> → <i>who – he/she</i>
	non-personal	(d) common <i>baby</i> → <i>who – he/she/it</i>
		<i>infant</i> → <i>which – it</i>
		(e) collective <i>family</i> → <i>which – it</i>
		<i>who – they</i>
		(f) higher male animal <i>bull</i> → <i>which – he/it</i>
		<i>(who) – he</i>
		(g) higher female animal <i>cow</i> → <i>which – she/it</i>
		<i>(who) – she</i>
(h) lower animal <i>ant</i> → <i>which – it</i>		
<i>(he/she)</i>		
inanimate	(i) inanimate <i>box</i> → <i>which – it</i>	

Fig.1: Gender classes taken from Greenbaum, Quirk et al. (1990: 100)

2.2 Pragmatic Associations: the English Noun as a Carrier of a Historical and Social Message

Morphologically, gender in English is expressed in two ways: in a morphologically marked and morphologically unmarked (semantic) way. The gender orientation of morphologically marked nouns is made either by a feminine gender inflection or in the case of masculine nouns through the zero gender inflection. A gender inflection is the primary morphological means for conveying gender orientation. Morphologically unmarked English nouns show gender through other means:

- a/ semantically - through their meaning;
- b/ through gender-oriented pronouns or
- c/ other gender identifying linguistic means (such as in *My client is pregnant.*)

that are often considered to be secondary means of gender identification.

In this part of the study I concentrate on morphologically marked gender-oriented nouns. A gender-oriented English noun overtly carries certain historical and social information. A noun with a morphological mark for gender, either feminine (*heiress*) or masculine (*widower*) proves that such a noun was produced historically later than its corresponding inflectionless counterpart. It is noticeable that mainly feminine nouns are made from their masculine counterparts by adding a gender inflection. It logically results in the implication that the absence of a feminine noun (both morphologically marked and morphologically unmarked) in language reflects the absence of women's social co-participation, it infers absence of woman's component in social life – the imbalance between men's and women's constituents in a society as a social unit. It may also mirror unequal social contribution of the two sexes. The absence of a feminine noun clearly denotes the absence of social requirement for a corresponding referent. All this shows that the linguistic absence equals to the absence of social requirement for a profession, a position, a role, etc. It rationally leads to the presumption that the two sexes have not been evenly socially balanced; that they have not been exactly equivalent in value. On the other side, the existence of feminine nouns may imply family and social roles of a woman in the past and may also limit the area of women's 'operational fields'. These details may suggest a historical implication: a man-woman social hierarchy with a man's dominant status.

2.3 Formal versus Semantic Correspondence

It is interesting to reveal that formal correspondence in a man-woman pair is not always a guaranty for semantic agreement. Biber et al. (1999: 315) notice that some masculine – feminine pairs are not semantically identical, that “the feminine term often denotes a lesser social role or something with a negative overtone compared with the masculine term”. The following definitions taken from dictionaries prove his stance and may serve as illustrations of a social status of men and women in the past.

Governor/governess

Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995: 614) defines *governor* as “a person in charge of a particular political unit” while *governess* (1995: 615) is defined as “a woman who lives with a family and educates the children at home”. The difference in the meaning exemplifies the traditional division of man and woman roles in society: man's public role and woman's family and household role. If the reference was made to the governor's spouse, the expressions *governor's wife* or *the wife of the governor* would be used.

Host/hostess

Longman Dictionary of the English Language (1984: 708) defines *hostess* as “a woman who entertains socially or acts as a host, a female employee on a ship, aeroplane, coach, or train who manages the provisioning of food and attends to the needs of passengers or as a woman who acts as a companion to male patrons especially in a nightclub, also as a prostitute”. Its masculine counterpart *host* (1984: 708) is defined as “an innkeeper, one who receives or entertains guests socially or officially or one who provides facilities for an event”. Both nouns denote a person whose role is to take care of guests or customers but only the feminine noun carries a sexual connotation that covertly suggests a lower status.

Master/ mistress

According to Cambridge International Dictionary of English (1995: 907) *mistress* is “a woman who is in a position of responsibility or control or a female school teacher, but also a woman who is having a sexual relationship with a married man”. The masculine form *master* (1995: 907) is defined as “a person who is very skilled in a particular job or activity; a person who controls something or someone; or the most important or influential person in a situation or organization”. The female definition may infer (in a certain context) a sexual association resulting into an inferior status of the woman.

Mayor /mayoress

According to Longman Dictionary of the English Language (1985: 907) *mayor* is “an official elected or appointed to act as the chief executive or nominal head of a city or borough” The feminine form *mayoress* (1985: 907) is defined as “the wife of a mayor; also someone fulfilling the role of hostess at mayoral functions”.

The given dictionary definitions show that the same word stem of the counterparts does not guarantee an identical meaning and that a gender inflection is not only the carrier of gender identification, but it may also reflect semantic distinction between social and/or sexual status of the two sexes.

2.4 Nouns with Feminine Gender Orientation and their Social and Historical Reference

It is apparent that the inevitability of formation of a feminine counterpart has arisen only in the cases of an urgent social requirement, often with the purpose to show the difference

between man's and woman's role in personal and social life. The following examples may give the evidence of it. They may provide a range of family, social and other roles of a woman and also limit the area of women's 'operational area'.

In English we observe both morphologically unmarked and morphologically marked (with different feminine gender inflections) feminine nouns referring to:

1. religious or earthly female sovereigns: *queen/goddess, empress, tsarina*;
2. female nobles: *dame/countess, baroness, duchess, marchioness, princess*;
3. female art persons: *actress, authoress, comedienne, heroine, poetess, tragedienne*;
4. female persons having a certain religious profession/rank: *abbess, priestess*;
5. mythological or fairy-tale female creatures:

muse - any of the nine sister goddesses in Greek mythology presiding over song and poetry and the arts and science or a woman who inspires a creative artist,

nymph - any of minor female divinities in nature,

siren - a woman who sings with bewitching sweetness or a dangerously alluring or seductive woman, a temptress,

sprite - a fairy, esp. a playful graceful one, for example a water sprite,

/temptress - a woman who tempts or entices.

Except for the last example (*temptress*) none of the feminine nouns mentioned in point 5. has its male counterpart.

6. female marital status: *spinster, maid* (an unmarried girl or woman; also a female virgin or a female servant), *maiden* (an unmarried girl, a virgin; also about a female animal who has never been mated) *fiancée, divorcée*;
7. female individuals who can foresee the future or perform a magic by using the power of evil spirits: *witch/sorceress*;
8. a woman as a member of the oldest profession in the world: *prostitute* (if a man - then a male prostitute), *whore, strumpet*;
9. woman's appearance: *blonde*
10. derogatively to a woman: *crone, virago*;
11. professions performed originally by women: *nanny, nurse, model/ seamstress, waitress, stewardess*;

Very often the female gender identity in jobs is demonstrated by compounding:

-**woman**: *needlewoman, scarletwoman, washerwoman*;

-**wife**: *housewife, midwife* (origin. a woman who helps a woman when she is giving birth to a child);

-maid/maid-: *barmaid, bridesmaid, housemaid* or *maidservant*;

lady- *lady-in-waiting*.

Lady, however, was used as a title that referred to a woman who had authority or rights to property, esp. as a feudal superior.

In the animal world the female nouns have been created (morphologically or by compounding - in the case of *she-wolf*) only in the animals that are considered to be rulers of the forest: *lioness, tigress/ she-wolf*.

2.5 Historical and Social Inference of Nouns with Masculine Gender Orientation (compounding with -man)

All the examples in 2.4 reflect that a woman was primarily considered to be a skilful worker in the household or an educator at primary schools, kindergartens, nursery schools since she had experience to educate her own children. It also reveals that women entered social life much later than men. Almost always a feminine gender inflection is added to a masculine noun. In general there are two commonly used nouns that have a masculine gender indicator: *widower* (the inflection *-er*) and *bride-groom* (made by compounding; now the compound noun is rarely used; it is replaced with the noun *groom*). All this supports my belief that feminine nouns were created later than masculine ones as there had not been any need for their existence.

A small number of compound nouns with a masculine gender element *-man* are found. Their definitions show a status of a man in society, particularly in the 'law field'.

<i>assemblyman</i>	<i>a member of an assembly</i>
<i>bondsman</i>	<i>a person who has stood surety for another person</i> <i>made from an adjective, the same form for singular and plural</i>
<i>exciseman</i>	<i>person who works in the Excise Department</i>
<i>foreman of the jury</i>	<i>a person elected by the other jurors, who chair the meetings of a jury, and pronounces the verdict in court afterwards</i>
<i>gunman</i>	<i>a person who carries and uses a gun</i>
<i>juryman</i>	<i>a member of a jury</i>
<i>lawman</i>	<i>an official (e.g. a sheriff or a police officer) who enforces the law (AmE)</i>
<i>layman</i>	<i>a person who does not belong to the legal profession</i>
<i>marksman</i>	<i>a person who cannot write and has to put 'x' in place of a signature</i>

<i>ombudsman</i>	<i>e.g., Local Ombudsman – a person who investigates complaints against local authorities</i>
<i>statesman</i>	<i>an important political leader or a representative of a country</i>

It is, however, evident there are still more spokesmen, chairmen, businessmen, congressmen than spokeswomen, chairwomen, businesswomen congresswomen. Masculine terms are used more often than feminine nouns. Longman Grammar (1999:317) confirms that

“the difference in the distribution of present-day masculine and feminine terms reflects a continuing sex-bias in English language use and society. It reflects the present state in the society where men hold more positions in power and authority. Formal writings authors have recently been particularly aware of need to avoid gender bias. The compounding with -person/-people is used to express dual reference. Such nouns are used as neutral-gender alternatives to both -man and -woman nouns. The results of our research show that in the language of the law this tendency has not been obvious: the use of masculine form (ending in -man) is used in a dual gender function”.