

## Gender roles construction in the British press of the XXI century

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**Abstract:** The article deals with the study of two-component nominal word combinations containing gender markers “woman”, “female”, “lady”, “girl”, “male”, “man”, “boy” in the British newspapers of 2017-2018. The analysis of the chosen samples made it possible to trace the leading tendencies of gender role construction in modern British press. The analysis is based on the quantitative representation of the gender marked units together with some peculiarities of their usage in the context.

**Key words:** *gender roles, gender marker, two-component nominal word combinations, British press.*

**Introduction.** Gender linguistics is a comparatively new interdisciplinary branch of research focused on linguistic manifestations of gender viewed as a social rather than a biological notion. The role of language as a gender marker is manifold. Firstly, the study of male and female verbal behaviour makes it possible to gain a deeper understanding of specific verbal strategies used by the speakers to manifest their gender identity in various contexts. Secondly, the analysis of gender related language elements in different types of discourse gives important information as to the gender roles, stereotypes, and models functioning in a definite society in a definite historical period.

The given paper focuses on the second vector of gender studies, namely the analysis of gender roles reflected in the language of mass media. The choice of the **object** for the research is accounted for by the unique role media play in the shaping of public opinion, building specific attitudes to various issues including the construction of appropriate or inappropriate gender roles.

No one at present doubts the crucial importance of social factors in constructing femininity and masculinity which are formed under the influence of family, education, and to a large extent, the media. It is necessary to remember that gender relations are constructed along with all other social categories in a specific historical, linguistic, and political system and therefore have to be viewed in the definite cultural environment in which these relations have been established [2; 6].

**Publications on the topic.** The problem of media gender images has been the object of numerous scientific studies both in the cultural context [see for example 4; 6; 8; 10] and in a more generic sense [3; 5; 7; 11], to mention but a few. Nevertheless, gender roles are changeable, socially and historically dependant constructs that are invariably interesting issues for the research. Moreover, the language of mass media (press, TV, Internet, radio) functions as a kind of temporal snapshot reflecting the peculiarities of gender relations in a definite national linguistic community. Therefore the findings of the research can be used as the basis (a kind of a reference point) for the diachronic analysis of the changes in the gender relations in one community or for the comparative crosscultural studies.

**Material and methods.** The research was based on the language material taken from 100 issues of British newspapers (“Financial Times”, “London Evening Standard”, “Metro”, “South London Press”, “The Sun”, “The Sunday Times”, and “Daily Mirror”) dating 2017-2018.

The methodology relies on the approach worked out by O.Dudoladova who suggested studying gender marked language elements on morphologic-semantic, lexical-semantic and grammatical-semantic levels [1]. The given paper is centered on the lexical-semantic dimension of the analysis, namely the quantitative representation of two-component nominal word combinations with gender markers *male, man, boy* vs. *woman, female, lady, girl*.

**Findings.** Continuous sampling technique made it possible to single out 316 samples, among them 222 cases of female gender markers and 94 samples of male markers.

As the figures below illustrate the female gender markers considerably outnumber the male counterparts:

*Female* (151), *woman* (46), *lady* (13), *girl* (12) – 222

*Male* (74), *boy* (17), *man* (3) – 94.

In both groups the word combinations with the components “female” and “male” correspondingly occupy the first position as the most numerous elements used in the newspaper discourse for the sake of referents’ gender differentiation:

“*The under-representation of female artists is further evidenced by the fact that there are hardly any women on the list of the top 100 auction prices*” [BM].

“*A male artist in the room is – for women and men – cultural Viagra,” she says*” [GI].

Further analysis showed that the words with a gender marker “female” quantitatively and qualitatively prevail over the words with a marker “male” (151 vs. 74 correspondingly). On the one hand it can be seen as the evidence of a growing role of women in society, especially in the professional sphere and the attempts to make up for the lack of nouns indicating a woman referent in these spheres. That can be proved by the examples illustrating the professional range of female referents in the analysed samples: *a female artist, a female doctor, a female writer, a female singer, a female student, a female photographer, a female employer, a female employee, a female worker, a female musician, a female teacher, a female fan, a female colleague, a female partner, a female professional, a female novelist, a female rider, a female founder, a female graduate* and so on. On the other hand it can be explained by the fact that words of generic gender like *doctor, lawyer, writer etc* which are not marked morphologically or lexically are still traditionally used in reference to men and therefore were not included into the sampling.

The tendency of reflecting changes in the traditional gender images is also traced in the usage of word combinations creating the picture of a strong, powerful and competent woman: *a female wrestler, a female boxer, a female gangster, a female FBI chief, a female soldier, a female superhero, a female bullfighter, a female warrior, a female tyrant, a female killer*.

Another interesting tendency might be seen in the appearance of word combinations with a lexical-semantic gender marker (*a female steward, a female host, a female author*) replacing traditional units with a synonymous meaning where gender is indicated by a suffix (*stewardess, hostess, authoress*). This may be seen as a type of a euphemism, desire to eliminate the derogatory implication acquired by the suffix *-ess* in some gender related words.

An extreme case of this tendency can be observed in the combination “*a female barman*” which is a kind of an oxymoron – combining male and female indicators in one unit, though the words “barwoman” or “barmaid” are already traditional and fixed in the English dictionaries.

One more interesting example is the usage of the word combinations like “*a female person*” or “*female people*” instead of *a woman* or *women*:

*“I understand that a great many otherwise decent human beings believe that more rights for black, brown and female people means fewer rights for ‘ordinary people’, by which they mean white people” [BI].*

The combinations with the word “woman” occupy the second numerical position (46 ex.) and in most cases have the same function as the word combinations with “female”. However, they help to expand the possibilities of word-building and stylistic variability: *a woman publisher, a woman archer, a woman shooter, a woman leader, a woman president, a woman veteran, a woman subscriber, a woman artist, a woman MP, a woman pal, a woman climber, a woman shopworker, a woman director, a woman cricketer, a woman athlete*.

Word combinations with the element “male” for denoting a representative of a male sex are similar to the phrases with a “female” component and mainly serve for distinguishing one gender from the other, especially in the name of a profession devoid of explicit gender markers: *a male teacher, a male judge, a male director, a male screenwriter*. This can be also viewed as the reflection of changes in gender roles: women have gained parity with men in a professional sphere; they have started to take up the same positions as men, hence the necessity to use language units to stress the gender of the referent.

Some of such combinations describe new realities of the 21<sup>st</sup> century: *a male cross-dresser, a male couple, a male transgender*. These examples prove that a man’s gender role is also undergoing some changes: media being quick in reacting to social changes represent a new type of a man possessing the features that are traditionally associated with women: weakness, overemotionality, submissiveness, interest in appearance and clothes.

*“What might be ideal as housing for male couple causes problem” [QC].*

Word combinations like *a male child, a male teenager* and *a male peer* are used in their primary function of gender distinction without any obvious gender bias.

The combinations with the element “man” instead of “male” are not very numerous (3 ex.) and their role is comparable to that of the element “woman” considered above.

*“Fleeing the scene: CCTV image of the man detectives want to speak to” [DLMT].*

Other gender distinctive elements used for showing female referents are *girl* (12 ex.) and *lady* (13 ex.). What is peculiar about the usage of the component *lady* especially in professional contexts is the slight ironical and frivolous implication. This peculiarity that was noticed and accurately described by Robin Lakoff [9, p. 19-24] finds its proof in the examples below:

*“The portrait of Austen in A Secret Sisterhood could not be further from the genteel lady novelist described by her early biographers” [PJ].*

"I watched a lady boxer, Chantelle Cameron, win the world lightweight title recently" [LS].

"Many thanks to the kind lady bus driver who reversed her no.47 bus so my mum could retrieve some of her shopping when it rolled under it as she boarded" [GDF].

The word *girl* in some cases contains a sexual implication:

"In the documentary the pervert brags about his sex symbol status in the 1970s and is seen grabbing a girl fan's bottom" [LJ].

Its gender counterpart *boy* (17 ex.) in the analysed samples is devoid of this connotation and is typically used in neutral contexts indicating solely the age and gender of the person:

"The prime minister told eight-year olds at Nishkam primary in Birmingham that she had read the JK Rowling books about the boy wizard" [LP].

"A boy genius devises a plan to save a classmate from abuse" [MBG].

"Sporting a more muscular, powerful physique, Polunin the boy wonder of dance is now very much a man — and a dancer at the top of his game" [WK].

**Conclusions.** The analysis of the chosen samples from the British Press of 2017-2018 showed that on the whole both genders are given balanced attention to and are inscribed in the language of the analyzed media. The most noticeable tendency is a considerable number of nominations for the professions with a female referent which can be seen as the evidence of the growing role of women in the modern world, especially in the professional sphere. Though there are still some traces of the discriminatory gender stereotyping the British mass media are striving to depict the changes in the traditional gender images and to ensure women and men occupy equal roles in the newsroom. The importance of mass media in this respect is enormous as they are really quick in reflecting social changes on the one hand and helping to raise public awareness on the other. Fair gender portrayal greatly promotes and speeds up the changes in society. The system of viewing the world and gender relations provides the lens through which people, in particular the new generation, view the society and its norms.

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BI = Berwick Isabel. Breaking the silence. *Financial Times UK*. 15 July 2017. P. 93.

BM = Balshaw Maria. We still need to make the work of women artists equally visible. *London Evening Standard*. 5 October 2017. P. 17.

DLMT = De La Mare Tess. Running from horror. *Metro UK*. 29 January 2018. P. 9.

GDF = Good deed feed. *Metro UK*. 12 January 2018. P. 17.  
GJ = Ganesh Janan. I never wanted to be old but I couldn't stop it. *Financial Times UK*. 15 July 2017. P. 88.  
LJ = Lucas John. Amazon refuse to drop sick Glitter vid. *The Sun UK*. 18 March 2018. P. 27.  
LP = Lister Sam. PM reveals: I love all the Potter books. *Metro UK*. 17 May 2017. P. 4.  
LS = Lougher Sharon. 60 seconds with Frank Bruno. *Metro UK*. 20 December 2017. P. 14.  
MBG = Murray Brown Griselda. Critic's choice. *Financial Times UK*. 24 June 2017. P. 112.  
QC = The question of the crossword. *Financial Times UK*. 18 May 2017. P. 12.  
PJ = Pascal Julia. Close to greatness. *Financial Times UK*. 26 August 2017. P. 85.  
WK = Watson Keith. Polunin's got pulling power as his talent takes flight. *Metro UK*. 8 December 2017. p. 29.

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