

MARKEDNESS OF LANGUAGE SIGNIFIERS AS A GENDER SENSITIVITY INDICATOR

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SAŽETAK

Neobilježene oblike u jeziku smo naviknuli percipirati kao primarne i dominantne zbog njihove uopćenosti te veće zastupljenosti unutar korpusa. Iz tog ih razloga doživljavamo kao prirodne i neutralne, dok obilježene susrećemo u konkretnijem i specifičnijem značenju. Upotreba muškog roda kao generičkog (neobilježenog) kod naziva profesija konkretizacije je diskriminirajućih društvenih stavova u prošlosti te dominantnih vrijednosti u društvu. Društvene borbe protiv diskriminacije kao izravan rezultat su imale tendenciju brisanja jezične diskriminacije, posebice u engleskom jeziku. S tim u vezi, javlja se sve veći broj neologizama koji putem medija nalaze svoj put do šire javnosti, a ona je pak ta koja neologizme prihvaća ili odbacuje za što razlozi mogu biti intrajezični i ekstrajezični. Za pretpostaviti je kako će društva s organiziranijim socio-ekonomskim sustavima biti osjetljivija na pitanja političke korektnosti na jezičnoj razini te da će bilježiti veći broj specifičnih, obilježenih termina. Premda upotreba pojedinog od njih može zaživjeti u upotrebi, njihova upotreba neće nužno

biti atestirana i u rječnicima, a mi smo odlučili provjeriti na primjeru od pedesetak „općih“ naziva zanimanja u vodećim rječnicima hrvatskog i francuskog jezika hoće li oblici ženskog roda koji su u jeziku atestirani biti i leksikografski potvrđeni. Analizom navedenog korpusa smo došli do zaključka kako hrvatski jezik poznaje više posebnih oblika za profesije i funkcije u ženskom rodu negoli francuski jezik s obzirom na leksikografsku atestiranost.

Ključne riječi: obilježenost, politička korektnost, Jakobson, leksikografija

INTRODUCTION

Communication as a primarily social practice, which can be realized in various fields of human activities, is burdened with many contradictions. They above all lie in the fact that any form of communication from verbal to non-verbal is codified with if not static, then a rather inert system of signs that we use in our attempt to deal with a very dynamic and ever-changing social reality. On the other hand, the problem is even more complex if we consider and accept a relatively recent fact in the light of cognitive linguistics that language as the most perfect form of messaging possesses not just a communicative, but also a cognitive role. Therefore, it is reasonable to assume, that such discrepancies between dynamic social reality and inert language routine are transmitted into human (sub)consciousness, where particular linguistic signifiers latently continue to support undesired language contents already overridden by social practices. This approach which has revitalized the Whorfian hypothesis of linguistic determinism, i.e., the influence of language on thoughts, has manifested itself in several directions, although its origins are not necessarily purely linguistic. It rather finds its footing in the post-modern social movements aiming at the affirmation of all, until then, marginalized or unequally represented

social groups, which, among other things, was also recognized in linguistic issues. Such an approach was primarily manifested through a prescriptivist language campaign advocating so-called political correctness, especially in feminist circles, with an attempt to remove from the English language all those petrified linguistic expressions indicating the supremacy of men as a reflection of obsolete social relations, generally not supported or justified in the current social reality. This all-American type of media campaign was primarily aimed at finding language solutions in the English language that would exclude the 'masculine' lexical forms and at replacing them with the neutral ones, equally referring to both men and women. Such a standpoint found its further justification in avoiding possible misunderstandings in employment policy as the generic masculine could have been easily and deliberately misinterpreted as specific, referring exclusively to men.

Naturally, the structural peculiarities of the English language allowed such intervention in the language primarily on the nominal level, but it was logical to expect that similar ideas would soon be taken over by normative linguists and activists in other countries who would try to adjust them to the specific features of their own languages. However, despite all the good will and compliance over value orientation, it caused resistance not only of ideological opponents, but in some cases of the language itself as such because of the multitude of its intrinsic limitations and structural differences. For example, unlike the English language which does not possess the concept of grammatical gender, the Croatian language, in most cases shows overlapping of both natural and grammatical gender in labelling human professions and it was logical that one of them, in this case, masculine gender, given the historical circumstances conditioned by the supremacy of men in the career choice, would emerge as the holder of the generic term for both sexes. Of course, it was possible only in the situations when women have reached such a level of social equality which enabled them to compete for the same jobs. These generic forms are generally considered as more frequent and 'unmarked' linguistic expressions, while those specific forms are considered less

frequent and 'marked' and as such in semiotic terms viewed as the indicators of the dominant values of a particular culture.

However, since the Croatian language due to its complex structure and emphasised flexion transmits these differences on other morphosyntactic levels, which are much more complex than the nominal ones mainly present in the English language, it is expected that they will have to resort to other solutions, but also to recognize existing limitations. With this in mind, one can assume that there is a tendency, if not universally accepted consensus, that it is necessary at least in lexicography, i.e. in various forms of dictionaries to register not only generic, but also those specific forms for most of the existing professions. The aim of this paper was therefore to check whether there is and if so, with how much consistency such value and language preferences are implemented in Croatian and French lexicography on the examples of highly rated dictionaries, or what kind of limitations exist in both languages with respect to their own specific features.

ROMAN JAKOBSON AND MARKEDNESS

The representatives of the Prague School, Roman Jakobson and Nikolai Trubetzkoy, were the first to introduce the concept of markedness in 1930s. The opposition of markedness – unmarkedness is based on the presence, or respectively the absence of some properties in a particular linguistic form. Jakobson defines a „zero-sign“ as the unmarked form of a word, which would be the singular of nouns or the present tense of the verb in English. According to Chandler (2007: 94) marked form is more complex and includes the following features:

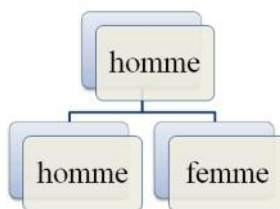
1) formal markedness: within the morphological oppositions markedness is based on the presence or absence of a certain formal feature. Marked signifier is formed by adding a distinctive feature to the unmarked signifier (for example, the marked form “unhappy” was created by adding a prefix *un-* to the unmarked signifier “happy”).

2) distributional markedness: formally marked terms are less common in frequency.

We often perceive unmarked forms as primary forms, and the marked ones as secondary for the reason of their generality in use and the consequential greater presence within the corpus. This is why the unmarked form is perceived as normal and neutral. The relationship between marked and unmarked form is double-natured: it can be symmetrical (which is very often the case with adjectives formed by prefixation, e.g. opposition *happy* – *unhappy*), but also hierarchical (e.g. the use of the noun *mačka* in Croatian as the generic gender when not specifying the sex of the member of this species). While morphological marking can often imply a negative characteristic, as in the above mentioned adjective opposition, markedness of the other forms in language does not imply them (as the example, we can mention the pairs of denomination of male and female members of an animal species: *krava* – *bik*, *jelen* – *košuta*, *svinja* – *prase*, etc.) According to Jakobson, the marked signifier is characterised by the higher precision, specificity and significant amount of additional information in comparison with the unmarked signifier.

UNMARKED FORMS AS THE REFLECTION OF DOMINANT CULTURAL VALUES

The form for masculine gender is often used when referring to a female being. Maybe the best example is the generic use of the noun *čovjek* (engl.*man*, fr.*homme*) when used apart from its specific value (man, male).



Claire Michard (1996: 34) concludes from this choice of using the masculine gender as the generic one in French, that

linguistic forms associated with the concepts of men and women within the discourse treat women as a relative, and men as an absolute human being. Binary opposition almost always outweighs in favour of the male, speaking to a certain extent that male is the standard and female is different (Chandler 2007: 98). In Croatian, English and French the category of female is mostly marked compared to the category of male. Marked forms are used in more concrete, specific and narrow sense, while unmarked forms are the reflection of dominant cultural values, of what is considered as common, normal and standard. The absolute term of profession or function is being formalised by the choice of masculine gender without referring to the sex. In contrast to this, when using the feminine form for the same profession, the meaning of sex will “violate” the meaning of the profession of function, relativize or narrow it (Michard 1996: 41). Therefore, the choice to use male form as the generic one will concretize the dominant relationships in the society.

POLITICAL CORRECTNESS AND SOCIAL SENSITIVITY

Political correctness is primarily a social phenomenon, which is very often manifested in the linguistic field. The topics of its concern are mostly the reflection of neoliberal understandings with the goal of recognizing marginalised and non-dominant social groups. Political correctness was incorporated in a number of social movements, especially those aimed at providing resistance to the supremacy of certain cultural and social groups. The movement of American feminists is one of the good examples how a social movement or ideology can affect the language. Their intention was to get all or at least most general expressions that are in a way sexually coloured (containing lexical parts that suggest a male person in their form) replaced by another neutral term in order to correct former illogicality, which in their opinion presented the verbal remains of discriminatory social attitudes toward women in the past (Sušac 2006: 667). This resulted in the formation of neologisms, avoidance of the pronoun *he* for masculine

singular when the sex is unknown and the introduction of neutral forms of plural, such as *them*, *they*, avoidance of the suffix *-man*, avoidance of the expressions pointing to the marital status, etc. Neologisms and language solutions of this kind through the media find their way to the general public, which accepts or refuses them. Although they can take hold in use, their use will not necessarily be attested in the dictionaries. For example, in *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française* we do not find the feminine form *un-écrivaine*, which is widely used in media, but the version *une femme écrivain* as the opposition to the noun *unécrivain*. We have the same situation with *une femme auteur*, as cited by the Academy, while in the media the noun *uneauteure* formed by suffixation is used. Insight in *Veliki rječnik hrvatskog jezika* from 2005 shows us that along with the entries for masculine forms, like *spisatelj*, *autor*, *profesor* or *liječnik*, feminine forms are orderly cited. However, the common practice in Croatian and French is to use semantically neutral forms in the masculine gender when the name of the profession is not used specifically and does not indicate the sex. At the same time, the feminine form will be marked, relativized and narrowed. Since neither Croatian nor French know the way to delete such forms of „discrimination“ by some neutral solutions, it is at least possible to register these specifically masculine or feminine forms, which is done in dictionaries (Sušac 2006: 672).

It is logical to assume that every language will not have equally elaborated terminology for professions and that in some languages certain professions still have only masculine form. Here arises the question whether this is because the individual countries and societies have different priorities influenced by their socio-economic development, i.e. whether they have reached a level of social sensitivity to matters dealt with political correctness (Sušac 2006: 671). We tend to think that societies with more coherent social systems and with more developed economies will be more conscious in terms of political correctness and that efforts to attain equality among certain social groups shall be manifested in language. In this particular case we are

talking about the use of the masculine denomination of a profession as unmarked form and about the absence of marked (feminine) form in general as the reflection of the former domination of certain professions reserved only for men, and respectively about the state of a given society. Naturally, the languages that do not possess the grammatical distinction between masculine/male and feminine/female forms are not applicable for such an observation, but they can be relevant for the examination of other cognitive conceptualizations. Namely, besides language determinism, the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis also recognizes the phenomenon of language relativism, which assumes that “people who speak languages with very different phonological, grammatical and semantic distinctions perceive and think about the world quite differently, their worldviews being shaped or determined by their languages” (Chandler 2007: 153). These issues exceed the objectives of this paper, but for the purpose of future research it will definitely be worth examining whether such languages or their common usage also demonstrate different aspects of gender related domination and social supremacy.

MASCULINE FORM AS THE UNMARKED FORM

The reasons for the use of the masculine gender as a common gender in the profession terminology are multiple. Very often in the recruitment advertising only the masculine form is cited as semantically unmarked for “practical” reasons, while the feminine form is used only specifically. A possible justification for this practice is that the working position refers to the function, not to a particular person. Primarily, we are inclined to believe that the selection of the masculine form is a relic of the former discriminatory attitude towards women when a large number of jobs were performed by men only and the habit to use the term in the masculine gender kept up to date.

If we compare the situation in French and Croatian it is evident at first glance that Croatian language recognizes more special forms of terms for professions and functions in the feminine form. However, since 1930s French grammarians and linguists

have been aware of discrimination conducted in that way so they have started to encourage the practice of the title feminization. At that time Damourette and Pichon wrote that the lightness with which the French language creates feminine forms should discourage women from using the profession in the masculine gender, because in this way they devalue their own efforts. Likewise, the most influential French grammar *Bon usage* recognises the need for feminisation, while Albert Dauzet in *Le Guide du bon usage* believes that the task of grammarians, writers and authors is to find language solutions and to inform the public. He also considers that French has all the necessary predispositions in order to make this happen (Cerquiglini 1999: 107). In fact, beside a small number of exceptions, morphological feminization is possible for all terms.

However, despite the more or less successful efforts for the feminization of professions to enter into wider use, the solutions resulted from this have encountered resistance for several reasons, very often by the members of the female sex. *Guide d'aide à la féminisation des noms de métiers, titres, grades et fonctions* (1999) published by National Institute of French Language and French National Centre for Scientific Research among others, states the following reasons for refusal resulting from language, although it should be stressed that socio-cultural reasons are also standing behind them:

1) Homonymy: A large number of female forms for professions, especially those formed by the suffix *-euse*, have the same form as the name of respective machines (for example, *balayeuse*). Feminine form of the noun *marmot* (small boy) is *marmotte*, which is also the name for *marmot* in French.

2) Euphony: common reason for refusal of neologisms is that „it doesn't sound good“ to the speakers of a certain language. *Guide d'aide à la féminisation* mentions following examples: *sapeuse-pompière*, *directrice*, *provisieuse*...

3) Devalorisation: another reason for rejection of neologisms is that women themselves believe that the feminization of profession calls degrades them. Feminine forms such as *pharmacienne* were for a long time used to denote the wives of holder of a specific

profession or function and this is why they have pejorative connotations and are hard to accept. The fact that women themselves are more prone to this complaint further reduces the likelihood that language solutions will be used widely. "A key argument in the choice and success of individual language options is the one which says that it should be accepted by the population to which it relates. When it comes to racial sensitivity in early 80s in Croatia emerged a reaction to ethnonym *Cigani* which has taken on a pejorative connotation and this is why it was replaced by more neutral expression *Romi* which was confirmed in linguistic practice and it can be seen as the classical example of political correctness" (Sušac 2006: 671).

CORPUS ANALYSIS

The objective was to check the extent to which the Croatian and French language dictionaries have registered various professions in the feminine gender. For comparison, 50 presumably most common (usual) occupations and professions were chosen and their existence checked in Vladimir Anić's Croatian dictionary *Veliki rječnik hrvatskog jezika* and the online version of the French dictionary *Dictionnaire de l'Académie française*.

	Fr. masc.	Fr. fem.	Cro. masc.	Cro. fem.
1	acteur	actrice	glumac	glumica
2	agriculteur	agricultrice	poljoprivrednik	poljoprivrednica
3	architecte		arhitekt	arhitektica
4	artiste	artiste	umjetnik	umjetnica
5	artisan		obrtnik	obrtnica
6	avocat	avocate	odvjetnik	odvjetnica
7	banquier	banquière	bankar	
8	basketteur	basketteuse	košarkaš	košarkašica
9	berger	bergère	pastir	pastirica
10	bijoutier	bijoutière	draguljar	
11	biologiste	biologiste	biolog	biologinja
12	boucher	bouchère	mesar	

13	boulangier	boulangère	pekar	pekarica
14	cardiologue		kardiolog	
15	chanteur	chanteuse	pjevač	pjevačica
16	chauffeur	chauffeur	vozač	vozačica
17	chimiste	chimiste	kemičar	kemičarka
18	chirurgien		kirurg	kirurginja
19	coiffeur	coiffeuse	frizer	
20	comptable	comptable	računovođa	računovotkinja
21	constructeur	constructrice	graditelj	graditeljica
22	dentiste		zubar	zubarica
23	dermatologue		dermatolog	dermatologinja
24	économiste		ekonomist	ekonomistkinja
25	ethnologue		etnolog	etnologinja
26	fermier	fermière	farmer	farmerica
27	footballeur	footbaleuse	nogometaš	nogometašica
28	forestier	forestière	šumar	šumarica
29	gardien	gardienne	čuvar	čuvarica
30	géographe		geograf	
31	guide	guide	vodič	
32	gynécologue		ginekolog	ginekologinja
33	historien	historienne	povjesničar	povjesničarka
34	informaticien	informaticienne	informatičar	informatičarka
35	inspecteur	inspectrice	inspektor	inspektorica
36	instituteur	institutrice	učitelj	učiteljica
37	journaliste		novinar	novinarka
38	médecin	femme médecin	liječnik	liječnica
39	organisateur	organisatrice	organizator	organizatorica
40	pâtissier	pâtissière	slastičar	slastičarka
41	pédiatre		pedijatar	pedijatrica
42	pharmacien	pharmacienne	ljekarnik	ljekarnica
43	photographe		fotograf	fotografkinja
44	pilote		pilot	pilotkinja
45	plombier		vodoinstalater	
46	poète		pjesnik	pjesnikinja
47	politicien	politicienne	političar	političarka

48	professeur	professeur	profesor	profesorica
49	psychiatre		psihijatar	psihijatrica
50	réalisateur	réalisatrice	redatelj	redateljica

The results show that the Academy's dictionary does not record 17, and Anić's 8 occupational titles in the feminine gender. With this the assumption that societies with more organized socio-economic systems will be more sensitive to issues of political correctness on the linguistic level has been invalidated, at least in the example of lexicographical incorporation of specific professions and occupations in the feminine gender.

In view of morphological differences, the analysis shows the examples of the feminine form formation in the French language by adding the suffixes *-trice*, *-e*, *-ière*, *-euse*, *-ienne*. The Academy's dictionary also registers the feminine forms that are completely identical with masculine forms, but they are cited in dictionaries with determinants, in example: *la guide*, *une artiste*, which, of course, is impossible in Croatian given its dominantly inflective or fusional structure.

Interesting is the fact that the Croatian dictionary does not register a common attested feminine form *frizerka*. It is possible that this was a random omission, especially due to the fact that it is a profession that is mostly practiced by members of the female sex. Furthermore, the Croatian dictionary does not cite attested forms in language like *mesarica* or *bankarica*, as it can be seen in the above table.

CONCLUSION

It is evident that the phenomenon of markedness as an indicator of masculine social domination can be recognized and observed only in the languages that intrinsically possess such morphological qualities to a higher or lesser extent. English, French and Croatian as the languages with different structural levels of grammatical gender formation have proven to be a good basis for such an analysis. Propelled by the political correctness

campaign, the English language, with the lowest level of structural inflectiveness, has largely eliminated the distinction of marked and unmarked forms by excluding a rather reduced nominal suffixation related to specific genders or by finding various neutral forms as alternatives. French and Croatian, on the contrary, cannot follow the same pattern of language normativism because of their grammatical genders, although being manifested in not completely identical forms. The French language possesses a higher level of gender grammaticalization compared to Croatian due to its possibility of attributing genders to nouns by both suffixation and articles. However, as a way of showing gender related sensitivity, the lexicographers in both languages have demonstrated a rather high tendency of registering specific and consequently marked forms related to job occupations in their latest dictionaries. Surprisingly, the Croatian dictionary, although with fewer structural possibilities, show larger consistency in registering feminine forms for most frequent professions. The discrepancy between a wider choice of grammatical possibilities and a smaller number of registered specific forms in French is further emphasised by the fact that such forms have already been verified in the language corpora, mostly in online newspaper articles, which can be easily verified by simple online word search. The reasons for such discrepancies can be manifold. Obviously, longer democratic tradition and presumably consequent gender sensitivity could not be confirmed through the analysis of chosen dictionaries in the observed languages. A higher opposition of French lexicographers towards registering gender related word formation in dictionaries might be explained as a higher sensitivity against all sorts of English language and culture influences, but it is just an assumption that can hardly be proven.

It is still unclear whether registering and thus emphasizing specific and mostly female/feminine gender forms are still needed for the sake of 'equality', because it can also enhance the awareness of them as marked and therefore 'second-rated'. Although it may sound controversial, in a different kind of prescriptivist campaign one could suggest eliminating all kinds

of specific forms and insisting only on generic ones both in lexicography and usage, without regard to their grammatical gender. Can they in such a way stop being conceptualized as feminine and masculine, if our minds and cognition are primarily at stake? The whole discourse of markedness seems to have found more prolific discourse in the domain of semiotics through the analysis of visual signifiers. Paradoxically, the world of advertising is abundant with examples where female signifiers prevail as unmarked and therefore indicating the (ab)use of female body as dominant and natural in our consumers' culture. Such 'values' can definitely be questioned without limitations imposed by linguistic features of verbal signs.

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SUMMARY

We are used to perceive the unmarked forms as primary and dominant ones due to their generality and bigger presence within a corpus. That is why we understand them as natural and neutral, while the marked forms are present within a concrete and specific meaning. The use of masculine gender as generic (unmarked) in names of professions is a realisation of dominant social attitudes during the past and of dominant values in a society. Social movements against the discrimination had the tendency of linguistic discrimination effacement as a direct result, especially in English. Related to that, the high number of neologism appears. They find their way to the broader public through the media, while the public is the one who choose whether to accept or reject them. Reasons for this can be intralingual and extra lingual. We can assume that the societies with higher level of socio-economic development will be more sensitive with regard to political correctness in language and that they will record a bigger number of specific, marked terms. Although the use of each of them can be accepted by broader public, their use do not necessarily have to be registered in dictionaries. We decided to analyse the corpus of 50 „common“ profession names to see whether the feminine gender forms used by public will be registered in dictionaries. The analysis has shown that Croatian recognises more specific forms for professions and functions in feminine gender in comparison to French in regard to their presence in dictionaries.

Keywords: markedness, political correctness, Jakobson, lexicography