

# Unveiling the Sociolinguistic Significance of Feminine Personal Names in Ukrainian Culture: Exploring Grammatical, Historical, and Cultural Perspectives

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## ARTICLE INFO

**Keywords:**  
*Feminative,  
Feminine Personal Names,  
Fair Language,  
Gender Inclusivity,  
Terminology Science,  
Appropriate Term,  
Non-Binary Individuals,  
Personification,  
Ukrainian Grammar*

## ABSTRACT

This study explores the grammatical, historical, cultural, semantic, and social dimensions of feminine personal names in Ukrainian, employing term theory. The analysis reveals that merely adding feminatives as direct counterparts to “masculine” nouns can result in inconsistencies, leading to violations of grammatical and phonological norms and potentially diminishing the language’s expressive potential. Furthermore, this binary opposition offers little improvement in the visibility of women while failing to accommodate the identification of non-binary individuals or the representation of personified objects. As a potential resolution, we propose adopting a generalized gender, conceptualized as a logical “OR” combining the simple genders. This category, supported by linguistic practice analysis, would involve replacing masculine nouns in their generalizing function with corresponding inclusive lexical units.

## 1. Introduction

Recent societal transformations have spurred an increased usage of feminine personal nouns. Consequently, various facets of feminatives have been scrutinized within the framework of language policy (e.g., Motschenbacher, 2014; Knisely, 2020), political correctness (e.g., Abbou, 2011; Piper, 2016; Coady, 2018; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2019a; Kirey-Sitnikova, 2021), social perception (e.g., Horvath et al., 2016; Kolek & Valdrova, 2020; Kirey-Sitnikova, 2021), gender-fair language (e.g., Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2005; Scheller-Boltz, 2014; Zimman, 2017; Formato, 2019; Hall, Levon, & Milani, 2019; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2019b; Kielkiewicz-Janowiak, 2019; Kolek & Valdrova, 2020; Lohr, 2020; Kirey-Sitnikova, 2021), non-binary linguistic strategies (e.g., Motschenbacher, 2014; Zimman, 2017; Knisely, 2020; Kotthoff, 2020; Lohr, 2020; Wehle, 2020; Kirey-Sitnikova, 2021; Kolek, 2022), word-formation models (e.g., Dembska, 2012; Grochowska & Wierzbicka, 2015; Małocha-Krupa, 2021; Piper, 2016; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2019b), and pragmatics (e.g., Karwatowska & Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2005; Małocha-Krupa, 2018), among others.

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### Cite this article as:

Vakulenko, M. (2025). Unveiling the Sociolinguistic Significance of Feminine Personal Names in Ukrainian Culture: Exploring Grammatical, Historical, and Cultural Perspectives. *Journal of Advanced Research in Women's Studies*, 3(1): 57-73.  
<https://doi.org/10.33422/jarws.v3i1.926>

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Reflecting this global trend, Ukrainian media have recently embraced an influx of newly coined feminatives. While language enrichment is generally a positive phenomenon, challenges associated with their implementation have surfaced, leading to reluctant acceptance, particularly among Ukrainian professional linguists. For instance, *Larysa Kyslyuk* highlights that “the use of masculine nouns as “title names” in the official business style is fixed in the language tradition and rules of etiquette”<sup>1</sup> (2018, pp. 456–457). *Alla Arkhangheljska* (2019) notes that even the Czech language, considered relatively receptive to feminatives, imposes significant limitations on their application. The researcher refers to a Czech grammar textbook asserting that the complete elimination of masculine forms in a generalizing function when they refer to a group of people regardless of their gender (e.g., *studenti* ‘students,’ *žáci* ‘pupils,’ *učitelé* ‘teachers’) – as promoted by feminist linguistics – risks destabilizing the language system by weakening the hierarchical structure of word formation and the lexical framework as a whole (Šticha, 2011, p. 575). She concludes that feminatives, while serving as markers of female identity, do not enhance social status, leading linguists to favour traditional masculine forms in positive contexts (2019, p. 376). Similarly, *Oleksandr Taranenko* emphasizes that linguistic androcentrism should not be misconstrued as society’s attitude toward women, envisaging that “the numerous and diverse traces of linguistic “patriarchy” in the language structures of European civilization nations, in particular in the Slavic and Romance ones are sure to remain, though in a somewhat weakened form,” and resumes that “different ways of overcoming linguistic “inequality” of females observed in modern languages and those found within gender linguistics, along with the evident upsides, impose some restrictions in realization” (2020, p. 46).

The provided citations show that academic Ukrainian linguistics generally supports the tendency to neutralize gender distinctions in naming women by using masculine nouns in generic sense, a concept potentially rooted in *Sulyma’s* perspective (Sulyma, 1928, p. 12). Nevertheless, adherence to the outdated “masculine vs. feminine” paradigm does little to address the broader issue of equitable gender representation and has, at times, prompted opponents to respond with heightened activism or even radical measures.

A special feature of the Ukrainian language is that it is characterized by a highly developed grammatical gender mechanism that marks gender on pronouns, nouns, adjectives, and past-tense verbs, therefore possessing a rich tradition of designating women linguistically. Starting at least from the 12th century, favourable socio-economic conditions existed on the territory of modern Ukraine that contributed to the emergence of motivated female personal names. Separate provisions of the Old Rusj criminal and civil law protected the life and honour of women on an equal basis with men, as well as the property rights and dignity of a woman (Kryvoshyj 2004, pp. 10-11). Examples of respectful treatment of women in the Middle Ages can be found in folk songs and Cossack legends. *Oleksandr Kryvoshyj* explains the relative equality of a Ukrainian woman with a man by the ancient right of a woman’s personal freedom. And although during the 17th and 18th centuries the Ukrainian woman was deprived of a significant number of rights, for a long time the main factors of attitude towards her were her education and equality in managing the economy (Kryvoshyj, 2004, pp. 16-18). Compared to other European states, the position of the Ukrainian woman in the traditional society of the 19th century was characterized by her more democratic status in the family and in the community (Borysenko, 2004, pp. 21). These material prerequisites created a good background for the development of grammatical resources for the formation of Ukrainian feminatives and the consolidation of appropriate linguistic practice. Given this, there are 935 such entries documented in *Ghrinchenko’s* dictionary, first published in 1907–1909 (see *Ghrinchenko*,

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<sup>1</sup> Вживання іменників чоловічого роду як «титультних імен» в офіційно-діловому стилі закріплене мовною традицією і правилами етикету.

1958–1959) and plenty of them in the subsequent sources (see Arkhangheljska, 2019). Such evidence suggests that Ukrainian may serve as a valuable model for addressing feminine-related challenges globally.

It is worth mentioning that most of the aforementioned gender studies are heavily influenced by sociolinguistic considerations, which are often susceptible to ideological biases (Małocha-Krupa, 2021, p. 101). At the same time, there is an urgent need for clear and comprehensive guidance on which feminatives are appropriate for use and how they should be applied (Małocha-Krupa, 2021, p. 110). In light of the potential for bias and unfairness, it becomes crucial to adopt an objective, fact-based approach grounded in linguistic and historical evidence. Unfortunately, such an approach has not been widely implemented to date. It is equally essential to conduct a thorough analysis of existing grammatical resources, their semantic implications, their role in feminine formation, and the contextual relevance of resulting forms. The significance of these aspects aligns with Potebnja's linguistic framework:

*“In the word, we discern the external form, that is the articulated sound, the content, objectified with the help of sound, and the inner form, or the closest etymological meaning of the word, the way the content is expressed” (Potebnja, 1999, p. 156)<sup>2</sup>.*

This highlights that the word's meaning significantly depends on its historical forms. Notably, the inner form often exerts a greater impact on the semantics of feminatives than their external structure. An example of this influence is the meaning of *zastupnycja*, as analyzed in Ghorodensjka (2016, p. 43).

In this study, we examine the sociolinguistic aspects of feminine personal names through the lens of term theory, with a focus on Ukrainian grammar and the semantic and stylistic considerations relevant to this context. Our approach incorporates key principles of lexical designation, as informed by the semiotic triangle and criteria for well-formed names.

This work is organized as follows. The next section outlines the research methodology. Section 3 presents the findings of the terminological investigation of the dictionary of modern Ukrainian feminatives (Plachynda, 2018). In Section 4, we expand our approach to broader issues related to feminine personal nouns and provide a more general discussion. Section 5 introduces and argues for the proposed solution to the challenges discussed. Finally, the conclusions and key outcomes are summarized in Section 6.

## **2. Methodology**

The codification of feminatives represents a significant challenge for lexicography and related linguistic subfields, particularly as the boundaries of normativity continue to expand dynamically (Małocha-Krupa, 2021, p. 105). This challenge is also characteristic of terminology science, which deals with extensive terminological vocabularies comprising numerous lexical units in need of systematic development (see Vakulenko, 2014; Vakulenko, 2023, p. 27; Bussey, 2020). Accounting for the functional similarity between female personal names – especially relative ones (e.g., titles, statuses, professions) – and terms denoting occupations or roles, we adopt term theory as a framework for studying feminatives. This approach builds on the proposition that the methodological tools of terminology science can be effectively applied to linguistics more broadly (Vakulenko, 2023, p. 56).

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<sup>2</sup> В слове мы различаем: внешнюю форму, т.е. членораздельный звук, содержание, объективируемое посредством звука, и внутреннюю форму, или ближайшее этимологическое значение слова, тот способ, каким выражается содержание.

Addressing the complexities of feminine codification requires a combination of statistical and analytical methods from terminology science, which facilitate a synthesis of descriptive and prescriptive approaches (Vakulenko, 2014, pp. 20–28; Vakulenko, 2023, pp. 26, 35, 120). Terminological studies further underscore the necessity of prescriptive elements to ensure a comprehensive and scholarly grounded codification of emerging, rapidly expanding vocabularies (Mihaljević, 2017; Vakulenko, 2023, pp. 123–132).

At the verification stage of terminology management (see Drewer and Ziegler, 2011, pp. 173–176; Bussey, 2020), the features of an apt term should be rigorously evaluated (Vakulenko and Meljnyk, 2014, p. 36; Vakulenko, 2023, pp. 57–61; Vakulenko, 2024, pp. 150–151). Feminatives, as specialized terms designating female persons, will be assessed based on specific criteria:

- **Exactness:** alignment between the word's meaning and its morphological structure,
- **Essentiality:** representation of key conceptual aspects without false associations,
- **Plainness:** clarity of the inner form of the name,
- **Derivativity:** ease of forming derivatives from the base term,
- **Euphony:** adherence to phonotactic rules for pleasant pronunciation,
- **Systemic coherence:** integration within the broader conceptual framework,
- **Organic nature:** compliance with linguistic norms and orthographic conventions,
- **Unambiguity:** avoidance of semantic confusion,
- **Brevity:** conciseness and efficiency in form.

Terminology theory stipulates that newly created lexical units must meet these essential criteria to ensure their functionality and suitability within the language system.

European terminologists have been applying similar language criteria for more than 30 years, using the relevant standards. For example, the German national standard DIN 2330, adopted in 1993, sets out the basic lingual requirements for names (Ger. *Grundanforderungen an Benennungen*):

- **Exactness** (Ger. *Genauigkeit*),
- **Brevity** (Ger. *Knappheit*),
- **Orientation towards accepted language usage** (Ger. *Orientierung am anerkannten Sprachgebrauch*),
- **Motivation** (Ger. *Motiviertheit*),
- **Derivability** (Ger. *Ableitbarkeit*),
- **Absence of connotations** (Ger. *Konnotationsfreiheit*),
- **Speakability** (Ger. *Sprechbarkeit*),
- **Linguistic correctness / logic** (Ger. *sprachliche Korrektheit / Logik*),
- **Clarity** (Ger. *Eindeutigkeit*) (see Drewer and Ziegler, 2011, pp. 173-175).

Note that this standard is not only about terms, but also about names as language elements in general. Therefore, extending the requirements for terms to a wider class of lexical units is a common European practice, which we will apply in this study as well.

The fact that the mentioned requirements reflect the main linguistic and even general scientific principles and trends testifies to their general language character. For example, the linguistic and general scientific principle of *economy* (see Serebrennikov, 1988, p. 86; Selivanova, 2010, p. 440) is embodied in the criterium of *brevity*. The *systemic* feature, which is one of the main principles of knowledge (see Alefirenko, 2004, p. 4), is also manifested in the corresponding requirement. The common linguistic tendency to express different meanings in different forms (Serebrennikov, 1970, pp. 240-241) is realized in the criterion of *exactness*.

At most, the science of terms is based on the so-called semiotic triangle, or the Ogden – Richards triangle, which schematizes and integrates social, mental, and linguistic aspects of the formation of names (See Figure 1). This triangle has been known since the time of Aristotle (Magoulas, 2007) and is described, in particular, in the German national terminological standard DIN 2342 (Drewer and Ziegler, 2011, pp. 158–159).

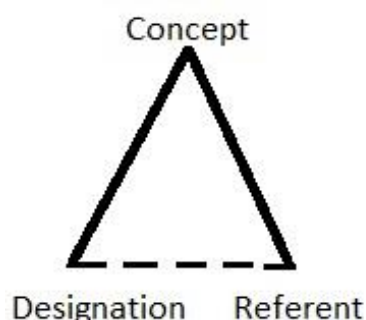


Figure 1. Semiotic triangle

In the semiotic triangle, the *object*, or *referent*, is a part of the perceived or imagined world that receives its name. The dashed line between the *referent* and its *designation* (*linguistic sign*) means that these objects are not named directly, but first conceptual categories are built – *concepts* (*thoughts of reference*) – and then names are assigned to them. So, the term (or the name) as a cognitive category encompasses a set of objects that have certain common characteristics: a concept is a unit of thinking that is formed from a set of such objects by determining the properties common to these objects using abstraction (Drewer and Ziegler, 2011, pp. 158–159).

The requirement of *essentiality* in the hallmarks for a successful term or a well-formed name expresses the conceptualization of an object according to the semiotic triangle, where the verbal designation covers the essential features of all such objects. At most, this requirement also embodies the general tendency of language evolution to merge meanings (Serebrennikov, 1970, p. 180).

The correctness of the conceptualization can be checked using the same term theory, according to which terms are created on the basis of their meanings, which contain the necessary senses that distinguish one concept from another (Drewer and Ziegler, 2011, p. 171). So, if the text remains meaningful after replacing the feminine with its definition or interpretation, the conceptualization of the object has been carried out correctly. As a rule, the definition relates the word to its hypernym, a “woman” for the feminine personal noun. Therefore, checking the correctness of the use of the feminine involves paraphrasing the corresponding text using the word “woman”.

It is important to note that, unlike terms, feminatives frequently appear in stylistically coloured contexts. As a result, the requirements for evaluating feminine personal nouns must extend beyond morphology, syntax, and semantics to include stylistic considerations, which are encompassed within the broader concept of *organic nature*.

### 3. Core Results

To be concrete, we examine the feminine set provided in (Plachynda, 2018). This dictionary was selected due to its inclusion of contemporary, and in some cases newly coined, feminine personal nouns that are characteristic of modern Ukrainian media discourse.

Using the statistical method, 13 problematic units were identified out of 257 entries, accounting for more than 5% of the analyzed dataset. The analytical method reveals the following issues.

The words *bokserka* 'female boxer,' *mašynistka* 'female machinist' *moločnycja* 'milkmaid,' *oficerka* 'female officer,' *pasičnycja* 'female beekeeper,' *zastupnycja* 'female deputy,' due to their inner form, refer also to, respectively, a T-shirt or sport shoes, female typer, thrush, an officers' mess, a beekeeper's wife, and ausiliatrice (Ghrinchenko, 1958–1959; Ghorodensjka, 2016, p. 43). This duality of meaning violates the essentiality criterion by failing to convey the intended sense unambiguously. Such semantic conflicts are typical of feminatives. For instance, *panamka* denotes a hat rather than a female citizen of Panama, *uğorka* refers to a type of plum rather than a female citizen of Hungary, *elektryčka* refers to a suburban train rather than a female electrician, and *juvelirka* means 'jewelry' rather than a 'female jeweler.' These discrepancies are a manifestation of the fundamental principle of linguistic sign asymmetry (Karcevskij, 1929), which posits that a one-to-one correspondence between a referent and its verbal representation does not always exist. Consequently, feminatives that coincide with preexisting lexemes with unrelated meanings lead to an increase in this asymmetry, increasing ambiguity.

The feminine *barmenka* 'female barista' is further problematic due to its inner form being derived from *man* 'man', highlighting a failure to meet the essentiality criterion.

Other forms, such as *členkynja* 'female member,' *mystkynja* 'female artist,' and *istorykynja* 'female historian,' incorporate a rare suffix "-ynj" preceded by a phoneme /k/, which violates the phonological rule of positional alternation in Ukrainian. According to this rule, a /k/ phoneme preceding a suffix starting with /y/ undergoes changing into /č/ (e.g., *bijka* → *bijčynja*, *mamka* → *mamčyna*, *turok* → *turčyn*, *vovk* → *vovčycja*). Ivan Vaghylevych (1965) also notes the variant *lemčynja* as a derivative of *lemko*. This indicates that exceptions to the positional alternation rule are limited to rare words that have not yet developed a standardized form. The relative infrequency of the formant "ynja" in Ukrainian suggests that its usage is influenced less by its etymology or the palatalization of velars /k ǵ x/ and more by the phonetic and phonological resemblance of corresponding contemporary morphemes. As the "-kynja" morpheme remains relatively uncommon in Ukrainian, it lacks phonological and morphological consistency. Moreover, *istorykynja*, derived from *istoryk* 'historian,' semantically suggests 'historian's wife,' contradicting the exactness criterion. Similarly, the additional suffix "-k" in *členkynja* and *mystkynja* also disrupts semantic precision.

The feminine *koležanka* 'female colleague' stems from *koleğa*, a common-gender noun, and thus violates the organic nature criterion. Notably, its Polish counterpart *koleżanka* has also been deemed linguistically implausible (Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2005, p. 43).

The term *pidpryjemnycja* 'female entrepreneur' is derived from the non-existent masculine form *\*pidpryjemnyk*, breaching the requirement of systemic coherence. Similarly, *ambasadorka* 'female ambassador' is linked to the regional synonym *ambasada*, diverging from the standard stem *posol* and the associated noun *posoljstvo* 'embassy.' As a result, this feminine personal noun fails to possess both systemic coherence and organic nature features.

In general, feminatives exhibit a limited ability to generate derivatives, further restricting their linguistic utility. The presented examples demonstrate that such units lead to the degradation of the expressing capacity of language.

#### 4. Broader Issues

Now we proceed to some more general observations.

Since feminatives are formed by adding additional suffixes and endings, they tend to be longer than their masculine counterparts, resulting in reduced brevity. Furthermore, their usage alongside “masculinitives” goes against the linguistic tendency to eliminate redundancy in expression (Serebrennikov, 1970, p. 250). As such, other criteria would need to compensate for this drawback. However, this compensation is hindered by denotation deficiencies resulting from linguistic sign asymmetry.

This asymmetry has another significant implication for feminatives: achieving a precise one-to-one correspondence between social and grammatical genders is unattainable.

Social changes bring about new linguistic challenges. For instance, how should **non-binary** individuals be addressed? And what about those who have undergone multiple gender transitions? Should these shifts be reflected in the professional section of their CV? While the use of feminine personal names aims to promote positive discrimination toward women, it does so at the expense of non-binary individuals, a group that faces even greater marginalization. This raises the question whether to create specialized forms for all non-binary identities (which is linguistically impractical) or to explore alternative, more comprehensive solutions.

Another issue arises with **personification**, a common literary technique in fairy tales. Personification assumes that any animate being or object name can acquire gender features, including non-binary ones. However, the binary paradigm of “masculinitive vs. feminative” fails to accommodate such flexibility (cf. Vakulenko, 2018).

Furthermore, there are numerous cases where creating a feminine form is challenging or impossible due to morphological constraints. In addition to already mentioned personal nouns ending with “k”, there are generalizing units like *molodec* ‘well-doing person,’ *mrec* ‘dead person,’ *mudrec* ‘sage,’ *našadok* ‘descendant,’ *pidlitok* ‘teenager,’ and *v’jazen* ‘prisoner’ that lack clear feminine equivalents. Similar difficulties exist in other languages, including Dutch and French (Kielkiewicz-Janowiak, 2019, p. 144).

Another critical question is whether feminatives really enhance women’s **visibility**. A person’s name, rather than their professional title, is the most effective gender marker. Notably, Ukrainian women commonly retain surnames with masculine endings, such as *Fedoryšyn*, *Kuxarčyšyn*, *Ivankiv*, and *Jurkiv*. Moreover, the inability of feminatives to form consistent derivatives further limits their potential for increasing visibility. For example, a *dyrektorka* ‘female director’ would still work in a *dyrektorsjkyj kabinet* ‘director’s office,’ and a *doktorka* ‘female doctor’ would have a *doktorsjka dysertacija* ‘doctoral dissertation,’ both derived from “masculine” forms and devoid of feminine features.

The corresponding names of female animals, formed naturally, do not have such functional restrictions: *rodyna košačyx* ‘feline’ (< *kiška* ‘molly’), *kobyljače moloko* ‘mare’s milk’ (< *kobyła* ‘mare’), *vivčar* ‘shepherd’ (< *vivčja* ‘ewe’), *svynyna* ‘pork’ (< *svynja* ‘sow’), etc. Therefore, such a derivational failure of feminatives *\*dyrektorka*, *\*doktorka* and others indicates that they cannot be full “female” equivalents to “male” variants.

Such inconsistencies occur in other languages as well. For example, at Ca’ Foscari Venice University, female professors are referred to as *professoressa* (instead of the gender-neutral form *professore*), but their surnames retain endings such as “-i” and “-o,” like Cerasi, Cesiri, Masiero, Santulli, Tosi, and Turano. These endings reflect the clearly “masculine” etymology of their surnames, which is a way more apparent than the origin of *professore*. Similarly, in German, the formant *-mann* ‘man’ appears in women’s surnames and in terms such as *die*



*Mannschaft* 'team,' which is used even to describe women's teams. This "mannish" linguistic tradition is deeply rooted and unlikely to disappear, as the formant *-man* serves as the foundation for many significant concepts, including *woman* and *human*.

Feminatives are frequently perceived as less prestigious designations. A survey conducted in 2018–2019 involving 580 respondents from different regions of Ukraine revealed that a significant portion of women (38.56%) avoid using feminatives to refer to women, preferring instead traditional masculine forms like *profesor* 'professor,' *ministr* 'minister,' or *filosof* 'philosopher' (Arkhangeljsjka, 2019, pp. 234–238, 260–265). The negative perception of newly introduced feminatives as "female equivalents" of masculine nouns, reported by Arkhangeljsjka (2019, pp. 237, 256, 266–274) and corroborated by Plachynda (2018), stems from their implied semantic association with segregation, which positions women as belonging to an inferior category. This perspective is not unique to Ukrainian speakers. For instance, Karwatowska and Szpyra-Kozłowska (2005, p. 43) highlight the negative connotations of certain Polish feminatives, such as *baba*. Similarly, Polish lexicographer Małocha-Krupa (2021, p. 111) argues that it is impossible to codify feminine personal names in a completely scientific and unbiased manner. Psychological research also demonstrates that German feminatives are often perceived as suggesting a lower professional status (Horvath et al., 2016).

Historically, feminatives have been associated with professions and roles considered less prestigious, such as *plakaljnycja* 'weeper maid,' *domrobotnycja* 'female housekeeper,' *prybyraljnycja* 'female cleaner,' *dojarka* 'milking maid,' *stjuardesa* 'female flight attendant,' and *medsestra* 'nurse.' In modern usage, feminatives are predominantly applied in sports to describe female athletes who, in most cases, compete separately from men and generally achieve lower results. Examples include *plavčynja* 'female swimmer,' *bijčynja* 'female fighter,' *lyžnycja* 'female skier,' and *futbolistka* 'female soccer player.' To promote positive discrimination for female researchers who would apparently have little chance if competing with men, the European Commission offers grants exclusively for women<sup>3</sup>. This sociolinguistic tradition, deeply embedded in societal practices, cannot be disregarded.

It should be understood that attempts to introduce non-alternative "female" names as full equivalents of "male" ones are actually aimed at consolidating this lower status of women, because the majority of feminatives are formed from a stem that coincides with the "male" form. For example, the name "dyrektorka" 'headmistress' is formed from "dyrektor" 'director,' which in this paradigm indicates the dependence of the "female" name on the "male" one. And the lack of derivatives emphasizes this inequality even more, since the "dyrektorka" has to be satisfied with the "male" "dyrektorsjkyj" 'director's' office, not having a separate "\*dyrektorkivsjkyj" 'headmistress' office. This feature, which arose against the background of favourable socio-political conditions for the development of feminatives in the Ukrainian language, testifies to their limited functions.

## 5. Proposition

A promising solution to the aforementioned issues seems to exist, and it applies not only to Ukrainian. Consider the presence of nouns, pronouns, and verbs (in the past tense) that lack a specific (nominative, referential, or anaphoric) gender (see Vakulenko, 2018). Examples include units such as *batjky* 'parents,' *dity* 'children,' *druzi* 'friends,' *istoty* 'beings,' *ljudy* 'people,' *molodecj* 'well-doing person,' *mrecj* 'dead,' *mudrecj* 'sage,' *pidlitok* 'teenager,' *predok* 'ancestor,' *xto* 'who,' among others. To this list, we can also add the names of animals,

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<sup>3</sup> The REWIRE Programme: REinforcing Women In Research. URL: <https://rewire.univie.ac.at/>.



insects, and other living beings, which, while assigned a specific grammatical gender, do not correspond to their biological sex: *akula* 'shark,' *komar* 'mosquito,' *krab* 'crab,' *krevetka* 'shrimp,' *linyvecj* 'sloth,' *lyčynka* 'larva,' *mavpa* 'ape,' *moljusk* 'clam,' *muxa* 'fly,' *peresmišnyk* 'mocking bird,' *ravlyk* 'snail,' *tunecj* 'tun,' *zebra* 'zebra.'

The examples of phrases displaying this phenomenon may be the following:

*nixto ne buv ġotovyj do cjoġo*

*nobody not was ready to this*

'nobody was ready for this';

*cja ľjudyna – spravŹnij faxivecj*

*this person – real specialist*

'this person is a real specialist';

*koŹen iz nas moŹe skazaty svojij polovynci: "Ty – mij skarb"*

*each of us can say their half: "You – my treasure"*

'each of us can say to our partner: "You are my treasure"';

*odnoġo z batjkiv toġo, xto ce zrobyv, proŹu pryjty do klasnoġo kerivnyka*

*one of parents of that who this did, ask come to classroom teacher*

'one of the parents of the person who has this done, is asked to come to the classroom teacher.'

What gender should be attributed to words like *nixto*, *ľjudyna*, *faxivecj*, *koŹen*, *nas*, *polovynci*, *skarb*, and *xto*, given that verbs such as *buv* and *zrobyv* and the adjective *ġotovyj* are masculine? How would this change if the subject were a girl? What gender should we assign to *odnoġo* and *batjkiv*, considering that the pronoun's ending suggests masculinity, yet it might actually refer to a mother?

These questions raise further issues. If we decide to create a feminine form like *faxivčynja* for a female specialist, does this mean we also need to introduce a masculine counterpart for *ľjudyna* (a grammatically feminine noun in Ukrainian) to refer to a male specialist? How should we address non-binary specialists? Similarly, how can we modify grammatically feminine words like *polovynka* and masculine ones like *skarb* to make them truly gender-neutral?

A particularly striking example lies in comparing two phrases: one written in the "traditional" style and another using a feminine personal noun.

1. *U nič pered ekzamenom student zdaten na te, čoġo ne navaŹuvavsja zrobyty protjaġom ciloġo semestru*

*In night before exam student able on that, what not dared do during whole semester*

'On the night before the exam, a student can do something that they did not dare to do during the whole semester.'

2. *U nič pered ekzamenom student i studentka zdatni na te, čoġo ne navaŹuvalysja zrobyty protjaġom ciloġo semestru*

*In night before exam student and studentka able on that, what not dared do during whole semester*

'On the night before the exam, a student and a *studentka* can do something that they did not dare to do during the whole semester.'

Do these two sentences mean the same thing?

A woman can say about herself:

“Koly ja bula pidlitkom, ...”

*When I was teenager*

‘When I was a teenager, ....’

This does not mean that she changed her sex later. The noun *pidlitok* ‘teenager’ is masculine, and Ukrainian grammar hardly allows the creation of a feminine equivalent for this word.

This language practice mirrors social relations that have shaped Ukrainian society over centuries. We may conclude from these examples that this practice necessitates acknowledging a **general gender** (Ukr. *zağal'nyj rid*). This *general gender* operates as a composite gender, functioning as an alternative to both the masculine and feminine forms in a generalizing role (Vakulenko, 2018). Unlike the common gender, which combines masculine and feminine elements using a logical “AND,” the general gender integrates them through a logical “OR.” The presence of a general gender in language also follows from considerations of formal and standard logic, where logical “AND” and logical “OR” are basic and equal operations. At the same time, standard logic provides a universal syntax for natural and mathematical languages (Keenan, 1973, p. 185), and thus serves as a foundation for linguistic rules. This is evidenced, in particular, by the inclusion of logical considerations as an additional factor of linguistic correctness in the German standard DIN 2330 (Drewer and Ziegler, 2011, pp. 173–176). So, if there are grammatically and lexically actualized operations “AND” and “OR” in the language and there is a category “common gender” formed with the help of logical “AND”, then there is another category formed on the basis of logical “OR”: general gender. The rise of such combined genders, which blur the boundaries between these grammatical categories, reflects the language's broader tendency for grammatical gender to disappear.

So, the nouns *člen* ‘member,’ *profesor* ‘professor,’ *zastupnyk* ‘deputy,’ *osoba* ‘person,’ *ljudyna* ‘human,’ *dytyna* ‘child,’ etc., when used in the generalizing sense, can be regarded as belonging to a general gender. This classification applies despite their formal grammatical alignment with either masculine or feminine genders.

The same holds true for personification. When a profession is represented by a substantive participle, such as *upovnovaženyj* ‘authorized,’ it is important to consider the implied noun that completes the original phrase. In this instance, the absent noun is *predstavnyk* ‘representative,’ which determines the grammatical gender of the profession name. Here, the masculine form serves as the default for general usage.

Therefore, the noun in the generalizing function should be associated not with the feminine or masculine, but with the general gender. This framework eliminates the conflict between “male” and “female” designations and offers a practical and achievable solution for naming non-binary individuals and personified objects. Notably, the concept of a general gender aligns with non-heteronormative language policies, which advocate for gender neutralization as an effective linguistic strategy (Motschenbacher, 2014; Zimman, 2017; Szpyra-Kozłowska, 2019b; Lohr, 2021).

Furthermore, the notion of a general gender is compatible with the semiotic triangle, which describes the relationship between a linguistic sign, a concept (thought of reference), and the referent (object of reality). Assigning a general gender facilitates the conceptualization of a living entity for which sex or gender is irrelevant – thus fulfilling the criterion of essentiality required for an effective designation.

In contrast, feminine personal nouns may be applied when the biological sex or social gender of the individual is intentionally emphasized (guiding the corresponding conceptualization), particularly within conversational or informal language registers: *avtorka* ‘a woman who

writes,' *doslidnycja* 'a woman doing research,' *filoložynja* 'a woman doing philology,' *likarka* 'a woman doing medical treatment,' *spivrobitnycja* 'a female employee,' *včyteljka* 'a woman doing teaching,' etc.

For example:

*svoju peršu včyteljku dity pam'jatymutj use žyttja*  
*their first učyteljka children will remember all life*  
'the children will remember their first *učyteljka* all their life';  
*cja avtorka ġlyboko rozkryvaje žinoče jestvo*  
*this avtorka deeply reveals feminine essence*  
'this *avtorka* deeply reveals the feminine essence';  
*ja poznajomyvsja z cikavoju filoložyneju i xoču z neju зустрічатysja*  
*I acquainted with interesting filoložynja and want with her meet*  
'I got acquainted with the interesting *filoložynja* and I want to meet her;  
*naša spivrobitnycja peremoğla na žinočomu šaxovomu turniri*  
*our spivrobitnycja won on women chess tournament*  
'our *spivrobitnycja* won the women's chess tournament.

All these feminatives can be replaced in the given contexts by descriptive constructions with the hypernym "woman": a *včyteljka* is a woman who teaches children; an *avtorka* is a woman who writes works of art; a *filoložynja* is a young lady who studies at the philological faculty; a *spivrobitnycja* is a female employee who works with us.

But:

*vona – Včytelj z velykoji litery*  
*she – Teacher with capital letter*  
'she is a Teacher with a capital letter';  
*sered našyx spivrobitnykiv lyše odna žinka*  
*among our employees only one woman*  
'there is only one woman among our employees,' etc.  
These texts cannot be meaningfully paraphrased using the word "woman".

So, the Ukrainian language offers the possibility to specify or not specify gender depending on the register of speech and the needs of conceptualization. Examples involving the combination of profession or position titles with verbs in the past tense, which display formal gender markers, are particularly noteworthy.

Consider the following sentence commonly used in a pharmacy:

"Likar vypysav meni ci liky"  
*Doctor prescribed me these medications*  
'The doctor has prescribed me this medication.'

Here, the noun *likar* 'doctor,' though formally masculine, refers to an individual of any gender, including non-binary persons. In such contexts, specifying social or biological gender is unnecessary. The verb *vypysav*, following the syntactic agreement with *likar*, adopts the grammatical gender that aligns with the concept of a "general gender" – which, in this case, exhibits formal masculine characteristics.

However, in scenarios where the doctor is specifically known to be a woman, especially in narratives or detailed descriptions, the verb may take on formal feminine grammatical markers:

"Likar vypysala meni ci liky. Vona pojasnyla, šo meni dostatnjo 10 tabletok"  
*Doctor prescribed me these medications. She explained, that me enough 10 pills*

‘The doctor has prescribed me this medication. She explained that 10 pills are enough for me.’

This is a situation of **ellipsis**, where the implied subject – a female doctor – governs the feminine form of the verb. The full phrase might read:

“Likar Aljošyna vypysala meni ci liky. Vona pojasnyla, šo meni dostatnjo 10 tabletok”

*Doctor Aljošyna prescribed me these medications. She explained, that me enough 10 pills*

‘The doctor Aljošyna has prescribed me this medication. She explained that 10 pills are enough for me.’

Such cases, where the formal grammatical agreement between subject and predicate is absent is also widely accepted in standard Polish (Małocha-Krupa, 2021, p. 104).

In conversational contexts, the use of a feminine personal name (if grammatically permissible) accompanied by a verb in syntactic agreement with its grammatical gender is common:

“Likarka vypysala meni ci liky”

*Likarka prescribed me these medications*

‘The *likarka* prescribed me this medication.’

The Polish equivalent *lekarka* is also possible in similar situations, and it is also described as colloquial (Małocha-Krupa, 2021, p. 105).

This distinct syntactic agreement between nouns and past-tense verbs often occurs for professions or positions associated with personal names, which are typically gender-specific. However, it does not apply to other nouns like *dytyna* ‘child,’ *pidlitok* ‘teenager,’ *ljudyna* ‘human,’ or *osoba* ‘person.’ For instance, a mother might say of her son:

This special syntactic agreement between nouns and past-tense verbs often occurs for professions or positions associated with the person’s proper name which is typically gender-specific. However, it does not apply to other nouns like *dytyna* ‘child,’ *pidlitok* ‘teenager,’ *ljudyna* ‘human,’ *osoba* ‘person,’ etc. For instance, a mother might say of her son:

“Moja dytyna zaxvorila”

*My child sicked*

‘My child is sick,’

- using a noun and a verb of formal feminine gender that acts here as the general gender. Conversely, one might describe a young lady as:

“Cej pidlitok zasmutyvsja”

*This teenager upseted*

‘This teenager is upset,’

- where the verb *zasmutyvsja* agrees in the grammatical gender with the noun *pidlitok*. This is the general gender that formally reflects masculine grammatical features.

## 6. Conclusion

By applying a terminological approach, we examined the grammatical and social aspects of feminine personal nouns in Ukrainian and other languages, offering insights into their usage and broader implications. It was demonstrated that the unrestricted use of feminatives as full “female equivalents” to traditional “masculine” personal nouns contradicts the requirements for a successful name – which leads, in turn, to a decrease in the communicative function of the language. From a semiotics perspective, the appearance of such names indicates a lack of

the necessary conceptualization of the object, which breaks the logical connections between language and thinking.

The limitations associated with the use of Ukrainian feminatives may be summarized as follows.

- 1. Morphological restrictions according to the criteria of *exactness* and *derivativity*:**
  - morphological inability of some Ukrainian nouns to build a feminine counterpart, such as *molodecj* 'well-doing person,' *mrecj* 'dead,' *mudrecj* 'sage,' *našadok* 'descendant,' *pidlitok* 'teenager,' *predok* 'ancestor,' *v'jazenj* 'prisoner,' etc.;
  - significant morphological challenges in creating gender-specific variants for most common nouns required for personification;
  - morphological difficulties to form a gender-specific variant for *člen* 'member,' *istoryk* 'historian,' *mytecj* 'artist,' and other nouns;
- 2. Phonological restrictions according to the criteria of *organicity* and *euphony* :**
  - strong phonological tendency to change the phoneme /k/ into the /č/ when preceding suffixes that begin with "y," making the feminatives ending with "-kynja" unnatural;
- 3. Semantic restrictions according to the criteria of *essentiality* and *plainness*:**
  - violation of logical-semantic relations between the object of reality (referent), concept and language sign, when the object of reality receives its name directly, without undergoing the stage of conceptualization;
  - false associations with distant concepts due to the strong semantic influence of the inner form of some feminine personal names: *elektryčka* '\*female electrician' – 'suburban train,' *juvelirka* '\*female jeweler' – 'jewelry,' *panamka* '\*female citizen of Panama' – 'open hat,' etc.;
- 4. Stylistic restrictions according to the criterium of *essentiality*:**
  - the necessity to use words in the generalized sense where biological sex or social gender is irrelevant;
- 5. Social restrictions according to the criteria of *exactness*, *plainness*, and *organicity*:**
  - fundamental inability of gender-oriented language to encompass the full spectrum of non-binary identities adequately.

Morphological, phonological, and semantic restrictions are language-specific and vary according to the grammar of the given language. However, the mechanism of creating names according to the semantic triangle is universal and applies to all languages. So do stylistic and social restrictions.

Feminatives provide limited assistance in improving women's "visibility" in all languages, as proper names serve as the primary gender markers, not professional titles or positions.

The female personal names are appropriate in cases where a text with a feminine can be meaningfully paraphrased using the hypernym "woman," which applies to all languages.

As a potential solution, it is suggested to recognize the concept of a general gender, which combines simple genders using the logical "OR." This approach applies to all languages having grammatical genders and offers a promising foundation for implementing an inclusive and gender-fair linguistic framework globally without undermining the grammatical or communicative functions of the language.

A generalizing noun for a group of people of different sexes or genders should be considered a noun of not masculine or feminine, but general gender. This makes it possible to avoid, on the one hand, "historical gender injustice" associated with insufficient communicative representation of women, and on the other, stylistically and semantically unjustified duplication of a generalizing name with a special "female" counterpart. In addition, the use of such a generic noun takes into account the possible presence of non-binary persons. At the same time, it is important that the practical embodiment of the concept of the general gender corresponds to the common language principle to form the name of the object according to the semiotic triangle.

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