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### Gender-Neutral Language

To begin with, language is usually considered as a significantly stable and, at the same time, actively and constantly changing phenomenon. This ambiguous impression is caused by the fact that the main vocabulary used by people on a regular basis tends to be the same for years, but, at the same time, it is constantly supplemented and enriched by new words that appear in response to new inventions and meaningful changes in social life and other spheres. As follows, despite potential doubts, language follows significant trends in the life of the human community and transforms in order to correspond to the needs of society. Notably, gender-neutral language appears as a bright example of this phenomenon being introduced in response to the feminist movement and, in particular, the requirement to use vocabulary that does not exclude any gender. Even though this principle may seem simple, the gender neutrality of language depends on a number of critical factors, such as grammatical peculiarities and applications in various specific fields and languages.

#### **The Background of the Gender-Neutral Language Phenomenon**

Although the question of gender-neutral language has become significantly popular and widely discussed in modern times, the concept can be traced back to the end of the past century when it started attracting public attention. One of the best known attempts to introduce gender neutrality in the English language took place in the 1970s when Miller and Swift published *The Handbook of Nonsexist Writing* aimed at pointing out sexism in everyday and academic writing in English

and offering ways to avoid it (Isele). It should be added that in the 21st century, the issue of gender-neutral language has gained a new dimension that relates to the definition and lexical coverage of transgender people and individuals of other types of gender, such as the non-binary one. As follows, the problem has become even more complex and complicated because there is a need to find vocabulary that would suit and cover all of the genders rather than only two of them.

The troublesome aspect is that even though the human community may be ready and eager to introduce and accept this change, the technical aspect of this linguistic transformation is notably complicated. While some languages, like English for example, are initially gender-neutral in their grammar, there are numerous other ones that are grammatically gendered. This means that they “have both semantic and formal (grammatical) gender, which is reflected not only in nouns, but in the adjectives, adverbs, and articles that accompany them” (Hord). In such languages, it is much more complicated to transfer to gender neutrality because this transformation would require a significant number of small and big linguistic changes.

### **Gender-Neutral Language and Grammar**

Without any doubt, the gender neutrality of a language directly depends on its grammar, as the endings of words and articles may not only perform a function of defining singularity or plurality and the tense of a word, but also its gender. As it was already noted, one of the main points of gender-neutral language is the fact that there are languages that are grammatically gendered and, in other words, have numerous elements that define human gender in linguistics. The examples of such languages are German and French, which have specific endings and articles for feminine and masculine genders. This factor can be observed in phrases like “**ein** wunderbarer Mann” and “**eine** wunderbare Frau” (“a wonderful man” and “a wonderful woman” in German) and “**elle** est mon amie” and “il est mon ami” (“she is my friend” and “he is my friend” in French) (Hord).

What is more, these languages also have certain words that belong to one—usually masculine—gender but are used for all genders; often, this type of vocabulary is related to the titles of professions. For example, “médecin” means “a doctor” in French and is of a masculine generic that does not change if a described person is of a different gender (Hord). In addition, it should be highlighted that in the French language, people talk about themselves initially defining their gender, as they use the corresponding adjectives that tend to have various feminine and masculine forms: “Je suis heureux (m.) /heureuse (f.)” both mean “I am happy” (Hord).

As it was pointed out, in such languages as German and French that have numerous elements that define genders, it is significantly difficult to introduce the gender-neutral option. The complication is caused by the fact that in order to make the corresponding change, it is necessary to transform the entire mechanism of inclination, verb forms, adjective forms, articles (the articles *der*, *die*, and *das* that stand for the masculine, feminine, and the neuter genders in German are used with most nouns, and the neuter form usually relates to inanimate objects), and numerous other details. To add more, it is also necessary to transform a significant part of such languages’ vocabulary, and in particular, nouns that are initially gendered and, as it was mentioned previously, usually masculine.

In fact, it should be noted that even though English is considered as a “natural” gender language that is much more suitable to the conception of gender neutrality due to the lack of the elements addressed previously, it still cannot be considered as fully gender-neutral. One of the main obstacles in the way to the desired linguistic form is the fact that it has numerous words that belong to a certain gender (Bjørnson 12). Commonly, such words are nouns that define professions or refer to people generally, and they appear as masculine. In particular, the examples of this problematic vocabulary are such words as “mankind,” “policeman,” “freshman,”

“congressman” and the ones that are divided into genders such as “actor” and “actress” and “steward” and “stewardess.” Now, all of these words have gender-neutral alternatives that are “humankind,” “police officer,” “first-year student,” “congressional representative,” and “flight attendant” (“Gender-Inclusive Language”).

### **The Social Perspective on Gender-Neutral Language**

It is critical to note that the issue of gender-neutral language should not be observed only from the linguistic perspective. It is tightly connected with the social life of the human community, and in particular, to the factors of equality and inclusiveness that are recognized as two of the key principles of modern society. Naturally, this topic is often observed in relation to the critical themes of feminism and gender equality that highlight the need for women and representatives of other genders being covered in the linguistic field similarly to males. In fact, this claim is the central principle of the movement for gender-neutral language, and this tendency has continued since the very beginning of this movement, when women actively protested against the exclusiveness of the language that, even in official documents, used only the male gender. This approach was proclaimed as unacceptable, because it disregarded the input of females and representatives of other genders and failed to recognize their gender as well.

Today, the issue of the gender neutrality of languages appears even more critical with the wide recognition of people with different, non-binary, or non-defined genders. In this case, it is not enough to use only masculine and feminine words and forms, but there is a lack of universal alternatives that would not exclude representatives of any gender from the English language. What is more, the issue of gender defining the attitude a person has is also widely disputable today. It can be observed that people initially define their gender in speech by using corresponding forms of adjectives. Countless modern people stand against this tendency, as they

state that their gender should not define them as personalities and their social positions, and in this case, gender-neutral language is also necessary.

### **Conclusion**

All in all, gender-neutral language is recognized as necessary in modern society, because it solves issues of linguistic gender inequality and the underrepresentation of females and queers. Significantly, this topic is tightly connected with the feminist movement, as it also supports the equality of all people and social inclusiveness. Yet, it is necessary to recognize that there are numerous complications and potential obstacles to the gender neutrality of a language that are caused by the fact that some languages are grammatically gendered and, as follows, include numerous gendered elements that cannot be changed easily.

## Works Cited

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