The Impact of Sex Discriminative Language Upon Elt

Viktorija Petkovska

Faculty of Technical Sciences, Bitola7000 Bitola, Republic of Macedonia Tel: +38971222382
*E-mail: vpet40@yahoo.com

Abstract

In the last two decades Macedonia has been literally striving through a process of long-lasting and tiresome transition, which caused the old, statically defined, unchangeable relations to undergo numerous crucial changes reflected on almost all vital social levels, ranging from the institutionalized forms of living and all the way through to the family and personal life.

These changes have an inevitable reflection in the language as one of the most sensitive and truthful human cultural "mirrors". In spite of the fact that awareness of linguistic sex discrimination has only begun to develop gradually in Macedonia in the recent years, it is a process which is still not entirely completed but which has the potential to affect certain language teaching aspects, both in Macedonian and English. The contact with English has only reinforced this process and stressed the need to make Macedonian native speakers aware of the existence of this phenomenon and its implication upon teaching and learning English.

This paper looks into some instances of sex discriminative language in Macedonian and English and their implications in preparing prospective English language teachers to deal with them successfully thus helping English language students to develop their awareness of this phenomenon and its impact upon increasing their communicative competence.

Key words: Sex, Gender, Language, Culture, English language teaching

Introduction

The goal of this paper is two-fold. Firstly, it tries to demonstrate the reflection of the change of sex roles in contemporary Macedonian society in Macedonian language. Secondly, it attempts at diagnosing the influence that awareness of this phenomenon may have upon teaching and learning English, particularly with regard to the negative transfer from the mother tongue.

Until the World War II women in Macedonia were mainly occupied with their home, performing all the household chores and, in the rural regions, a great deal of the hard work in the fields. In addition to this, they were responsible for bringing up their children. They seldom participated in the community social life, except when accompanying their male relatives or husbands on particular occasions (such as weddings, balls, various performances and alike) to complement males' pleasure and amusement with their appearance and beauty. All the decisions concerning their personal lives were made by men, including their marriage, bearing children etc.

World War II, a point of major breakthrough in sex relations, brought about two major changes in female role. They occupied posts that became vacant because of male mobilization in the army and, even more importantly, joined the partisans, fighting shoulder to shoulder with men. The undeniable biological sex differences became almost "invisible", with females being treated as equal to men. But, immediately after the war, biological differences reemerged, placing the females closer to home and domestic chores rather than positioning them highly on the societal scale. Some of the important, decision –making positions remained almost exclusively male-represented, with only few exceptions. Even today, decades after the war, there is still a lot of evidence that female societal inclusion has not yet reached the sex equality level propagated as one of the National liberating war core values. The mere fact that we today, in the second decade of the 21st century, still focus on females' societal role and inclusion, speaks enough for itself about the real achievements in this area.

Research questions

The research questions focus on the existence of sex discriminative language in Macedonian, the awareness of Macedonians of the presence of this phenomenon and its implication in teaching and learning English, particularly considering the negative transfer from the mother tongue which would, in this case, account for the wider use of gender determined nouns and expressions, because of the existence of grammatical gender in Macedonian.

1.Natural vs. grammatical gender

One of the most striking differences between English and Macedonian is the existence of grammatical gender in Macedonian as opposed to the non-existence of such grammatical category in English. The former case accounts for the derivation of an indefinite number of feminine nouns and adjectives whereas in the latter case such a derivation appears to be irrelevant. This is why in the English-speaking world linguistic sex discrimination became widely addressed as the non-existence of grammatical gender made the reference of personal, possessive and relative pronouns and possessive adjectives somewhat ambiguous. English language speakers thus became bewildered as to which gender the following underlined pronouns/adjectives could refer:

The teacher should rely on his/her experience.

The students looked at the teacher as he/she explained the rules.

The students used their computers and the teacher used hers/his.

Similar cases in Macedonian would never need further clarification as the use of pronouns/adjectives would be unambiguously determined by the grammatical gender noun ending.

2. Linguistic reflections of contemporary societal state

2.1.Sex and gender specific lexical material

One single adjective can be seen to genuinely reflect the biological sex inequality. Namely, the adjective *pregnant* or the phrase *give birth* can never occur to describe a state of a noun in masculine. Thus, we never speak of a "pregnant man", or a one that "gave birth'. Naturally, there are also other lexemes that are highly sex/gender specific and restricted. Here, the emphasis is particularly on many sex specific body organs, which are inherent to only one particular sex. Besides, there are other gender specific lexemes that don't appear in feminine (such as for e.g. *бербер, фудбалер).*

2.2 Addressing

The concept of "comradeship" so widely introduced and insisted upon after the National liberation war, is slowly but surely fading and left behind. In other words, it belongs to history. In both formal and non-formal communication, females are today referred to by the nouns: *госпоѓа* or *госпоѓица*, depending on their marital status. In addition, females may be formally addressed by adding their second name to the above mentioned lexemes, as opposed to the commonly held, but today quite unusual practice of addressing women with the derivative of their husbands' names (such as for e.g. *Trajanica, Petrejca, Stojanica)*, which was a practice most vividly speaking of the treatment of women as men's asset and possession.

2.3.Feminatives

Theoreticians have still not reached a full agreement over the use of feminatives in Macedonian, particularly those used to designate functions. On the one hand, it is believed that these derivatives are not natural, but on the other, it is argued that it is through their use that a better grammatical concordance of sentence parts is easily achieved. It is even recommended that these forms should be used to prevent the likelihood of female "invisibility". A number of functions and positions occupied by female representatives have, however, still not been lexicalized. So, in spite of forms such as *ректорка, деканка, директорка, менаџерка, шефица, раководителка, судика, докторка, професорка, презентерка,* feminine counter pairs for *хирург, гинеколог, пилот, механичар,сервисер,* etc have as yet not been lexicalized. Part of the reason for this is that these nouns refer to occupations that are still occupied only by male representatives, but even when they are not, the lexicalization could have interfered with other grammatical rules, or it simply hasn't occurred because of other linguistic reasons. The case of the noun *секретарка* (feminine of *секретар*) should also be pointed out. Namely, the feminine form refers to the occupation of a secretary to the director, manager, dean etc. whereas the masculine form refers to secretary general in a firm, organization, institution etc. This form is used to refer to a secretary general of both sexes without taking into account the sentence grammatical concordance. Thus, sentences such as: *Генералниот секретар на универзитетот, г-ѓа Трајковска, укажала на потребата од донесување нови акти..* are common and acceptable in spite of the fact that the subject is in masculine and the verb has a suffix used to denote feminine.

Methodology

For the purposes of this paper, an interview was conducted to observe the sex discrimination awareness, approach and attitude towards this phenomenon in various interviewees and to collect relevant data that could shed some light on this issue.

Participants

There were 20 participants in this interview. They were chosen to represent adequately and genuinely several categories of citizens regarding age, education, occupation, marital status and place of living. The following parameters were represented by the interviewees:

Age

The sample consisted of 20 males aged between 25-60 years. (Table 1).

Table 1: Age groups

	25-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years
Interviewees	10	5	2	3
%	50%	25%	10%	15%

Education

The sample included interviewees with various levels of education. (Table 2).

Table 2: Education

	University degree	%	Not graduated	%	Master's degree	%
25-30 years	5	25%	5	25%		
31-40 years	2	10%			3	15%
41-50 years	2	10%				
51-60 years	3	15%				

Occupation

The sample varied in relation to occupation. (Table 3).

Table 3: Occupation

	University degree				Not graduated				Master's degree				
	25-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	25-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	25-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years	
Primary teacher	50% (3)												
Secondary teacher	20% (2)												
Unemployed		20% (1)			50% (5)								
Administration		20% (1)								60% (3)			
University teacher			20% (1)										
Retired			20% (1)										

Marital status

Only three of the interviewees had never married, whereas seven are divorced. The rest of them are currently married.

Table 4: Marital status

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years		%
Single	3	15%							
Divorced	2	10%	3	15%			2		10%
Married	10	50%	5	25%	2	10%	3		15%

Place of living

Three interviewees live in rural areas. The rest of them live in urban places.

Table 5: Place of living

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years	%
Rural area	2	10%					1	5%
Urban places	10	50%	5	25%	2	10%	3	15%

3. Interview

The interview consisted of the following questions:

1.When you need to refer to an unknown woman, which criterion is decisive in deciding which title (Mrs, Miss, or Ms) you would use:

a) her physical appearance;   b) her age;   c) her social status (if known)

All of the participants agreed that they would base their decision on the age criterion; only one of them mentioned that however, social status would also be important.

Table 6: When you need to refer to an unknown woman, which criterion is decisive in deciding which title (Mrs, Miss, or Ms) you would use:

	25-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years
Primary teacher	Physical appearance			
Secondary teacher				
Unemployed				
Administration				
University teacher				
Retired				Social status

2. When referring to a familiar married female, which name you would prefer:

a) her first name;   b) her second name;   c) a derivative from her husband's name (such as for e.g.
Trajanica, Petrejca, Dimejca etc.)

15 of the interviewees would use the first name (8 in the first group- 80%, 3 in the second- 60%, and 2 in each of the remaining groups-40%).

Table 7: When referring to a familiar married female, which name you would prefer:

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years	%
No	8	80%	3	60%	2	40%	2	40%

3. Do you consider feminine derivations of nouns representing occupations should always be used (to refer to female representatives) rather than nouns in masculine (e.g. *dekanka, ministerka, parlamentarka, sudika,*).

a) yes   b) no   c) not certain

All 20 interviewees answered positively.

Table 8: Do you consider feminine derivations of nouns representing occupations should always be used (to refer to female representatives) rather than nouns in masculine

	Yes	No
Interviewees	20	
%	100%	

4. Does Macedonian phrase *секој човек* comprise female representatives as well?

a)yes   b)no   c) not certain

Only two of the employed participants were not certain (2 in the second group-40%).

Table 9: Does Macedonian phrase *секој човек* comprise female representatives as well?

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years	%
Not certain			2	40%				

5.Can you derive nouns in feminine for the following borrowings:

Masculine (машки род)	feminine (женски род)
Бизнисмен	_____
Брокер	_____
Портпарол	_____
Бармен	_____
Полицаец	_____
Скипер	_____
Фудбалер	_____
Агент	_____
Дилер	_____
пироман	_____

Seven participants could not derive nouns in feminine for some of the above borrowings (5 in the first group- 50 %, 1 in the second-20% and one in the last group-20%).

Table 10: Can you derive Macedonian nouns in feminine for the following borrowings

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years	%
Deriving nouns in feminine for given borrowings	5	50%	1	20%			1	20%

6. How do you feel when your superior is a female?

None of the participants thinks this is problematic.

Table 11: How do you feel when your superior is a female?

25-30 years	31-40 years	41-50 years	51-60 years
The interviewees do not consider female superior as an issue.			

7. Is your highest criterion to judge females only based on their physical appearance? If not, what other criteria do you apply?

Seven of the participants (5 in the second-100% and 2 in the third group- 40%) said they tend to judge the females by their looks. For the rest of them, factors such as: intelligence, communication skills and honesty were more important.

Table 12: Is your highest criterion to judge females only based on their physical appearance? If not, what other criteria do you apply?

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years	%
Judging females by their physical appearance			5	100%	2	40%		

8. Circle the phrase you'd tend to commonly use:

А)дами и господа   б)господа и дами

А)колеги и колешки   б)колешки и колеги

А) тој и таа   б)таа и тој

А)Георги и Мира   б) Мира и Георги

А)мажи и жени   б)жени и мажи

А)машко и женско   б)женско и машко

А)момче и девојка   б)девојка и момче

А)татко и мајка   б)мајка и татко

Only 8 participants (in the first group- 80%) said they would always use the noun in feminine first.

Table 13: Circle the phrase you'd tend to commonly use:

	25-30 years	%	31-40 years	%	41-50 years	%	51-60 years	%
Always use the noun in feminine first	8	80%						
Could use the noun in masculine first			2	40%				

9. What is your opinion about men wearing "typically"female jewelry, accessories etc…

In the first age group this was not a problematic issue, whereas for the rest of the age groups this was not justified

Table 14: What is your opinion about men wearing "typically"female jewelry, accessories etc…

	25-30 years	31-40 years	42-50 years	51-60 years
Not a problematic issue	✓			
It's not justified for men to wear female jewelry, accessories etc…		✓	✓	✓

10. Circle the sentences in which females are included in the noun functioning as an object:

1. Се молат гледачите да влезат во салата.

2.Се известуваат пациентите со себе да носат здравствена картичка.

3.Се известуваат студентите дека професорот ќе доцни.

4.Се молат кандидатите да ги исклучат своите мобилни телефони.

5.Се известуваат учениците дека часот започнува во 7.30

6.Се повикуваат членовите да ја платат членарината.

7.Се известуваат станарите дека утре ќе има прекин во снабдувањерто со електрична енергија.

8. Се бараат волонтери.

9. Се повикуваат спортистите да земат учество на оваа манифестација.

10. Се бараат архитекти.

All participants thought all nouns functioning as objects included female representatives.

The interview clearly points out that linguistic sex discriminative awareness is in direct proportion to the age, degree of education and employment, whereas factors such as the place of living and marital status seem to have little or no influence upon this phenomenon. It goes without saying that the number of interviewees is quite restricted and that the findings would probably be different with varied parameters and numbers of participants.

Findings and discussion

The conducted interview leads to a conclusion that the male population is aware of the existence of linguistic sex discrimination and that in most cases participants have established a sound understanding of it and try to take a fair approach towards the female population and their societal participation. More importantly, they are aware of the necessity to apply non-sex based criteria in recognizing and evaluating female social and professional

accomplishments.

Implications in ELT

The first step towards raising linguistic sex discrimination awareness in EL students is the adequate preparation of prospective El teachers. In order to achieve this important goal, teacher educators should:

-point out and discuss the need for balanced societal sex relations and make an attempt to detect the degree to which this need is met in Macedonian society;

-observe cases of linguistic sex discrimination in Macedonian;

-raise students' awareness of linguistic sex discrimination in English and compare it to their native language;

-point out and discuss possibilities for avoiding use of sex discriminative language;

-find/devise language teaching techniques that prevent the use of sex discriminative language;

-train prospective teachers to develop a high degree sensibility towards assessing linguistic sex discriminative nuances present in language teaching materials and

-teach them how to cope with sex discriminative language in existing teaching materials and create their own teaching materials in which such language is maximally reduced or, whenever possible, entirely avoided.

Conclusion

In spite of the undeniable fact that sex relations are undergoing positive changes in the contemporary Macedonian society, some burning open issues still present a serious hindrance to their advancement.

Linguistic reflections of sex roles and relations in Macedonian language currently point to the nonexistence of equality and in some cases, to female 'invisibility ". But, as it always happens in all languages, balancing the sex roles and relations will certainly result in newly lexicalized language material that will accurately reflect this balance.

It is of great importance that teacher educators raise prospective English language teachers' awareness of these issues and communicate relevant knowledge about coping with them successfully in the EL classroom.

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