## Verbal Dimensions of Gender-Equality in Contemporary Speech Forms: Issues and Opportunities

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**Abstract:** The article explores linguistic strategies for ensuring gender inclusivity in English and Ukrainian. The relevance of the work is due to the growing public demand for the use of gendersensitive language as a means of forming an inclusive environment. The purpose of the study is to analyze the features of the implementation of gender-inclusive language forms in the two languages, to identify their common and distinctive features, and to outline the sociocultural factors that influence these processes. The paper uses the comparative-descriptive method, discourse analysis, and qualitative text analysis methods. It is established that the English language demonstrates greater flexibility due to neutral forms, while feminitives are actively developing in the Ukrainian language. The article emphasizes the importance of linguistic inclusivity as a reflection of social changes and the desire for gender equality.

**Keywords:** gender inclusivity, gender-neutral language, feminitives, linguistic strategies, English language, Ukrainian language, sociocultural context.

#### Introduction

In the modern world, issues of gender inclusiveness are becoming increasingly important in various spheres of social life, in particular in linguistic communication. Language not only reflects social realities, but also shapes perceptions of gender roles, influencing social stereotypes and identity. The use of gender-neutral or gender-sensitive language tools is a relevant topic for linguistic research, since language plays a key role in ensuring equality and inclusiveness. In particular, in the Ukrainian linguistic space, the issue of adapting gender-inclusive forms is becoming increasingly important in the context of social changes and human rights initiatives.

Studying the linguistic aspects of gender inclusion allows not only to analyze existing language practices, but also to develop recommendations for their adaptation, taking into account gender equality [1]. This study is relevant due to the need to improve language policy and increase sensitivity to gender issues in different languages of the world.

Despite growing interest in gender inclusivity, many languages remain gender-marked, creating challenges to ensuring equal representation of all gender identities [2]. In the linguistic plane, this is manifested in the use of feminine pronouns, neutral forms of address, and other linguistic strategies that avoid gender discrimination. However, the introduction of gender-inclusive forms raises a number of problems: from the lack of uniform standards to the resistance of part of society to linguistic changes.

The challenge is to identify optimal linguistic approaches to gender-inclusive communication that meet both language norms and equality principles. It is necessary to investigate how different languages respond to the demands of gender inclusivity, which linguistic tools are most effective in ensuring gender neutrality, and how these changes affect language norms and social perceptions.

Thus, the question arises as to how the adaptation of linguistic structures can contribute to the formation of an inclusive society and what linguistic challenges arise in the process of implementing gender equality through language.

The purpose of the study is to analyze the linguistic aspects of gender inclusivity in modern languages, identify effective language strategies to ensure gender equality, and assess the impact of these changes on the language norm and public perceptions.

Research objectives are: to study theoretical means of guaranteeing gender equality in modern linguistics; to ascertain the main linguistic means of assuring gender neutrality in different languages; to identify the features of applying gender-neutral forms in the Ukrainian language against the background of other languages; to ascertain the main challenges and potentialities for realizing gender-neutral lexis and grammar; to refine recommendations on realizing gender-neutral language practice in scientific, official, and public speech.

#### Literature review

Language and gender research investigate various topics, including linguistic prejudice, grammatical gender, gender stereotypes, and social processes. Bailey et al. [3], for example, find a systematic association of the noun "person" with the masculine gender in internet language, which influences perceptions of gender roles. Garg et al. [4] also address the same questions, using word embeddings to examine gender and ethnic stereotypes over the past 100 years and show how stereotypes are inherent in language models and change with time. Similarly, Cirillo et al. [5] and Seaborn et al. [6] examine gender bias in natural language processing (NLP) technology, pointing out that AI algorithms not only reflect but also reinforce gender stereotypes, but at the same time offer ways of reducing them.

Psycholinguistic and cognitive processes of gender categorization are also in the limelight. Beatty-Martínez and Dussias [7] write about how masculine and feminine forms in Spanish are handled by speakers and how it is connected with cognitive information processing. Wang and Schiller [8] examine the processes of grammatical gender agreement in the speech process with the focus laid on the impact of cognitive processes on the use of gender-marked words. In turn, Gygax et al. [9] create an index of grammatical gender dimensions, which allows us to assess the influence of grammatical gender on the perception of men and women. Rogers and Gries [10] study how grammatical gender helps to distinguish syntactically similar nouns, demonstrating its role in simplifying linguistic processing. In addition, Gass et al. [11] explain how gender effects affect second language acquisition, namely on speakers' cognitive processes.

Sociocultural and historical approaches to gender and language raise questions about the interaction between gender roles, cultural norms and language practices. Lakoff [12, 13] analyses how linguistic structures reinforce gender roles, emphasizing the lesser authority of women's language. At the same time, Lawford-Smith [14] critically examines modern feminist approaches to gender, emphasizing the need to distinguish between biological sex and the social construction of gender. Scott [15] and Tilly [16] argue that gender is not only a social category, but also an analytical tool for understanding historical processes and social change. Similar ideas are developed by Nicholson [17], who emphasizes the importance of taking into account the historical variability of gender roles and social structures.

Other studies focus on diachronic and dialectal aspects of gender [18]. Berg [19, 20] investigates gender marking in linguistic paradigms, revealing inconsistencies in the use of first-person forms and testing Greenberg's universality of nominal and pronominal gender. Kraaikamp [21] analyzes historical changes in semantic gender consistency in Middle Low German. Rose [22, 23] investigates gender indexation in indigenous languages of South America, proposing a typology of languages with genderlects and grammatical gender.

Gender asymmetry and its reflection in translation and political discourse are also important areas of research. Shkvorchenko [24] analyzes the linguistic and gender features of English-language political discourse, emphasizing the masculinization of power and the devaluation of women's experiences. Syrovets [25] examines gender asymmetry in literary translation, particularly using the example of Julio Cortázar's short story, emphasizing the preservation or transformation of gender marking. Basu and Sarkar [2] explore the relationship between gender, religion, and nationalism, emphasizing the influence of gender discourses on the formation of national identity.

Considerable attention is paid to the analysis of gender identity and social interaction in digital and educational spaces. Kazemian et al. [26] examine how linguistic features construct gender identities in social media. Kitta and Cardona-Moltó [27] examine students' perceptions of gender mainstreaming in university teaching, identifying barriers related to awareness and institutional support.

Yesypenko et al. [28] examine metaphorical representation of anthropomorphic concepts in British and American fairy tales, illustrating the role of metaphors in the formation of gender identity. Newman et al. [29] examine gender

differences in the employment of language, finding that men employ objective lexemes more often, and women employ expressive devices.

Consequently, the body of research confirms the complex dynamics between language, gender, and social structures, depicting both the processes of gender categorization in terms of language as well as how they impact social representation and cultural practices.

#### Methods

The research process involves the use of a set of methods that provide a thorough exploration of the linguistic aspects of gender inclusivity. The analysis and synthesis approach is used to universalize theoretical approaches to gender inclusivity and formalize language strategies. Comparative approach is used to analyze gender-inclusive practices in Ukrainian language against other languages, which allows us to identify common features, differences and approximate the effectiveness of different language strategies. Discourse analysis is used to study the features of gender-inclusive forms usage in various types of communication (official, scientific, public). This method allows us to trace how language use reflects social reality and influences the formation of gender representation. The content analysis method is focused on studying linguistic development in texts that indicate gender inclusion. It allows us to investigate the number of times gender-inclusive forms appear and the context under which they are used both quantitatively and qualitatively.

The sample of literature sources chosen for analysis contains 35 items. At the first stage of sample formation, we applied AILYZE – AI-based software tool for grounded theory research. This allowed us to identify initial categories for further search. Harnessing the power of AI to streamline the processes of searching makes it more efficient and comprehensive. Integrating AI into grounded theory can boost the depth of analysis and contextual understanding by automating monotonous processes such as data collecting and preliminary coding. This allows researchers to focus on critical thinking and interpretation [30]. The categories obtained with the help of AILYZE were used for final search and selection of literature. This sequential combination of grounded theory and content analysis, backed by AI-based solution, contributed to eliminating internal biases in the publications. Grounded theory, thus, is used to reduce bias by focusing on data-driven insights and iteratively creating hypotheses, rather than starting with pre-existing preconceptions [31].

Moreover, the descriptive method is used to explain linguistic tools that promote gender equality and neutrality according to the collected data. Finally, the interpretive method allows us to study the impact of gender-inclusive language use on social attitudes and linguistic norms, allowing us to establish how linguistic reforms help to create an inclusive society and what issues arise in this process.

#### **Results and Discussion**

In other world languages, there are several main linguistic methods of gender neutrality, which aim to reduce or even eliminate gender marking in spoken language. One of the most common methods is the use of gender-neutral terms, when generalized forms are used instead of gender-marked terms [30]. For instance, in English "businessperson" is preferred to "businessman" or "businesswoman", and in Ukrainian "керівник" is being used more often in place of "керівник/керівниця" (manager). This practice does not attach gender unnecessarily and ensures equal mention of all genders in communication.

Another significant strategy is the creation of paired constructions, which entails the application of both masculine and feminine forms to address individuals of various genders. Here, instead of the stereotypical "student", "cmy∂eμm/cmy∂eμmκa" is used, or instead of the salutation "sirs" – "mrs and ladies". It is done for the purpose of emphasizing the presence of different gender identities and bringing both men and women into the space of the language. Here, lexical feminization is also used, which means the creation and use of feminitives – feminine forms of the names of professions and positions. In Ukrainian, this phenomenon is gradually diffusing, which is shown in the use of such words as "αεμορκα", "∂upeκμορκα", "peðaκμορκα", etc.

A major linguistic practice in encouraging gender inclusiveness is avoiding gendered pronouns. Where there are sharp gender differences in the system of pronouns in languages, a number of neutralization devices are used. In English, for example, the deployment of the pronoun "they" as a gender-neutral substitute for "he" and "she" is standard. In other contexts, passive forms or generic nouns are used to avoid gender specification.

There are languages, of course, which insert gender-neutral abbreviations and marks that help reflect gender diversity in text. German, for example, uses indicator marks such as "Student\*innen" or "Kolleg:innen" to represent inclusivity of text. Ukrainian sometimes makes use of hyphenated or slashed forms such as "учасник/учасниця" (participant) or

"працівник(-ця)" (worker). Visual approaches of this type help both sexes to be represented in one term, which is especially relevant in formal and official speech.

In addition, there are certain languages that are developing new linguistic approaches that entail the creation of new pronouns and lexical words that are not gender-marked. English, for example, has introduced new gender-neutral pronouns such as "ze" or "xe," which are used by individuals who do not identify with the gender binary. These approaches not only promote linguistic inclusivity but also enable the social acceptance of gender diversity.

And so, various linguistic ways of reaching gender neutrality are a proof of the desire of the language system to respond to the requirements of contemporary society in terms of equality and inclusiveness. Depending on the social context and the organization of the language, these ways range from the use of gender-neutral words and femininitives to the development of new pronouns and the use of novel graphic forms.

The emergence of gender-neutral forms in the Ukrainian language has a number of peculiarities, which are conditioned both by the structural characteristics of the language and the socio-cultural context. Unlike other languages, particularly English, German, and Romance languages, Ukrainian manifests certain patterns of adjustment for gender-neutral and gender-sensitive forms.

One of the key features of the Ukrainian language is the grammatical gender, which sharply splits nouns and pronouns into masculine, feminine, and neuter ones. This complicates the use of gender-neutral constructions since most professions, titles, and social roles are addressed using the masculine gender by default. Unlike English, which has universally used gender-neutral pronouns such as "they," there are no such universally accepted pronouns in Ukrainian, and therefore it is not easy to avoid gender markers in language use.

One of the most important aspects of the introduction of gender-inclusive forms in Ukrainian is active usage of feminitives. While in English and in some European languages feminitives are less common or even not used (e.g., "actor" for both men and women), in the Ukrainian language there is a developed system of feminitive endings, such as "-ka" ("θυρεκπορκα"), "-ytsia" ("noemeca"), "-ynya" ("членкиня"). The last few years have seen a vibrant revival and dissemination of feminitives in the public and official discourse, with social changes and increasing sensitivity towards issues of gender equality partly accounting for it.

One of the differences is resistance to borrowing gender-neutral forms from other languages. In English, for example, the use of neutral titles such as "Mx." has become standard in business and social life. In Ukrainian, no gender-neutral forms of address have been developed, and formal speech remains dominated by the binary "Mr." and "Ms."

Thus, gender-neutral forms in the Ukrainian language in the context of their emergence are characterized by the active development and spread of feminatives, relative use of combined constructions, but the absence of institutionalized gender-neutral pronouns or symbolic signs such as in German or English. Despite some resistance and controversies in society, the trend is the reflection of more general processes of social transformation and the striving for gender equality in the sphere of language.

Table 1 compares the use of discourse analysis to study gender-inclusive forms in different types of communication (official, scientific, public) using English and Ukrainian materials. It reflects the features of the use of inclusive vocabulary, linguistic strategies, and approaches to gender neutrality in each type of discourse.

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Communication type	English	Ukrainian language	Features of discourse analysis
Official	Use of gender-neutral forms (they/them), inclusive language policy in government documents.	The use of feminine pronouns, legislative initiatives regarding gendersensitive language.	Analysis of regulatory documents and political discourse on gender equality.
Scientific	The trend towards using gender-neutral terms in research articles.	Introduction of feminine nouns in scientific publications, recommendations for gender correctness.	Study of terminology and language practices in scientific journals.
Public	Inclusive vocabulary in the media, use of genderneutral terms.	Popularization of feminitives in the media and social networks.	Analysis of media discourse and social narratives regarding gender identity.

Table 1. Comparison of gender-inclusive forms in different types of communication

Source: developed by the authors

An analysis of the use of gender-inclusive forms in different types of communication (official, scientific, public) based on English and Ukrainian materials demonstrates significant differences in approaches to gender neutrality. Neutral pronouns and gender-inclusive vocabulary prevail in English, especially in official and academic texts [31]. The Ukrainian language, having a more rigid grammatical category of gender, uses feminatives and gender-symmetrical constructions, although these changes are being implemented more slowly in public discourse.

Official communication in both languages tends to be gender neutral, but English shows greater flexibility due to the ability to avoid gender markers. Scientific discourse in both languages is oriented towards a clear representation of gender, but Ukrainian more often uses feminines to denote female professions. In public discourse, English actively introduces gender-inclusive forms, while Ukrainian shows mixed trends, reflecting the public debate on the acceptability of such changes.

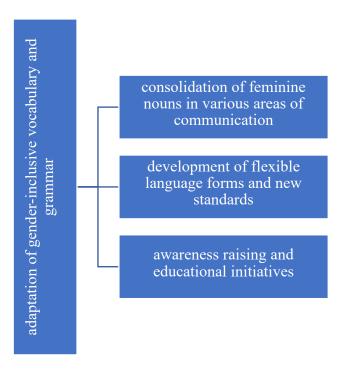
Generally, discourse analysis indicates that the English language is more time-consuming to embrace the challenge of gender inclusivity since it is structurally adaptable, while in the Ukrainian language there are adjustments made according to social needs but hampered by linguistic aspects.

The employment of gender-neutral lexis and grammar in modern languages is faced with various challenges that are specific to the linguistic system and sociocultural contexts. The main challenge includes resistance towards traditional linguistic conventions and norms. The majority of languages have standardized grammatical forms distinguishing between genders, and the introduction of new forms is seen as interference with linguistic stability. In Ukrainian, for example, dual or feminine forms may be a topic of debate on their normativity and compliance with the language norm. In addition, the lack of common rules for the formation and use of gender-inclusive forms complicates their dissemination in official and scientific speech [32].

Another significant issue is the resistance of social representations and gender stereotypes [33]. Language in most societies is traditionally seen as a reflection of reality irrespective of gender or any other marker of inequality. This makes it difficult to enjoy the way linguistic usages construct or reinforce inequality. For example, the use of feminatives will be seen at times as decentering women's professions or as an artifice that is in conflict with linguistic taste. Resistance to language evolution can be supported by political or ideological reasons, especially in cultures where issues of gender equality are controversial.

There are also technical problems. English-type languages, with their open grammar, are simple to accommodate neuter pronouns in, while languages with advanced gender agreement mechanisms, such as Ukrainian, are more complex. Translating texts based on gender-inclusive standards, for example, requires morphological and syntactic modifications, which render them difficult to implement in mechanical systems such as language translators and word processors [34, 35].

Despite all these challenges, gender-inclusive vocabulary and grammar have immense possibilities. They are schematically demonstrated in Figure 1.



**Figure 1.** Ways to adapt gender-inclusive language forms Source: developed by the authors

One of the prospects is the gradual consolidation of feminine nouns in various spheres of communication, especially in official and academic language. In some countries, feminine nouns have already become the norm in legislation and public documents, which contributes to their legitimization and widespread use. In the Ukrainian context, for example, feminine nouns are increasingly used in the state and media spheres, which contributes to their acceptance at the public level.

Another perspective is the development of flexible language forms and new standards that allow maintaining a balance between grammatical normativity and inclusivity. In some languages, such as German or Swedish, new gender-neutral pronouns and symbolic designations are being developed that emphasize inclusivity without destroying traditional grammar. In the Ukrainian language, similar experiments are also taking place, for example, through the use of combined forms, which allows avoiding gender exclusion.

An additional perspective is awareness-raising and educational initiatives that promote gender-inclusive practices. Thanks to equality campaigns and academic research that highlights the role of language in shaping social reality, society is gradually adapting to new linguistic norms.

Generally, although the use of gender-inclusive language and grammar is faced with enormous linguistic, social, and technical challenges, the prospects for its implementation are high due to increasing public interest in gender equality, linguistic innovation, and broadening education programs.

Proposal for application of gender-inclusive language practice in science, official and everyday communication means taking into account language norms, socio-cultural situation and gender equality standards. In scientific terms, it is

more appropriate to employ gender-neutral expressions that confer equal representation on all genders. This involves using feminine pronouns actively to denote professions and titles, such as "∂οςπίθμικ" and "∂οςπίθμιμμ" (researcher). When generalization is unavoidable in writing, gender-neutral phrasing is more appropriate, such as "a person conducting research" rather than "researcher".

In official communication, adherence to the concept of visibility of different genders applying even or non-masculine language must be followed. In regulatory documents, internal conventions and public disclosures, it is recommended to avoid generalization of the masculine gender. For example, instead of "cnispoδimhuκ" (employee), it is better to use "cnispoδimhuκ/cnispoδimhuκ" or "npaцishuκ/npaцishuκ" (worker). Furthermore, addresses should take into account the gender identity of the addressee and offer alternatives to the traditional "Mr." and "Ms." when necessary. The application of inclusive forms should be formalized in official guidelines or style manuals in order to maximize consistency and systematization.

In everyday communication, preference should be given to forms that are gender-diverse and do not use discriminatory expressions. The use of female pronouns is acceptable in private and public discourse, as long as it accords with the person's self-identification. In case of doubt about gender identity, neutral constructions or questioning what form of address is acceptable to the person can be employed. Additionally, in the media and public discourse, it is advisable to strive for gender-neutral language in an effort to build a gender-sensitive public discourse.

In general, effective practice of gender-sensitive language relies on a dynamic model that reconciles adherence to linguistic norms with flexibility to adapt. School programs, the development of stylistic recommendations, and regular application of inclusive forms in different areas of communication will contribute to the shaping of gender equality and increased language sensitivity in society.

Our results validate and build upon existing work by showing pragmatic methods of reducing gender bias in language through linguistic means. Scientific investigations [3, 4] highlight the role of gender stereotypes in language use, whereas our study prescribes how to make language gender-neutral using femininitives, paired structures, and other lexical mechanisms.

The peculiarity of the Ukrainian language poses special challenges in gender-neutral form use, which vindicates the study by Cirillo et al. [5] and Seaborn et al. [6], based on English. Unlike the English-speaking context, where "they" is already established as a neutral pronoun, in Ukrainian the lack of established forms requires the search for alternative solutions.

Our analysis also shows a gradual institutionalization of femininities, consistent with historical observations by Berg [20] and Kraaikamp [21]. The use of gender-inclusive forms such as "participant" echoes the approaches described in Rose [22, 23]. At the same time, there is a certain conservatism at the level of official discourse, especially regarding binary forms of address ("Mr." and "Ms."), which correlates with the findings of Shkvorchenko [24] and Syrovets [25] on the masculinization of power.

Thus, our results not only confirm previous research, but also demonstrate the specifics of implementing gender-inclusive strategies in the language space of Ukraine.

### Conclusions

An analysis of linguistic strategies for ensuring gender inclusivity in English and Ukrainian shows that these processes reflect social changes and the desire for equality. In English, the use of gender-neutral pronouns and terms prevails, while in Ukrainian, feminitives and paired constructions are actively introduced. The grammatical structure of the Ukrainian language creates additional difficulties in the formation of neutral forms compared to English, which is more flexible.

The sociocultural context influences the adoption of inclusive forms: English adapts more quickly to changes due to fewer grammatical constraints, while in Ukrainian there are ongoing discussions about the normativity of new forms. In official and scientific communication, both languages strive for inclusivity, although Ukrainian more often uses femininitives, while English gender-neutral terms.

The sequential use of grounded theory and content analysis, supported by an AI-based solution, helped to eliminate inherent biases in the publications. Grounded theory reduces bias by focusing on data-driven insights and iteratively generating hypotheses, rather than starting with pre-existing biases.

The main challenges remain the inertia of language norms, the lack of uniform standards and social resistance. Development prospects include the consolidation of femininitives in regulatory documents, the development of

gender-neutral forms and raising awareness of the importance of language inclusion. Thus, the implementation of gender-inclusive strategies is a dynamic process that reflects both linguistic specificities and social demands for equality.

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