

SÉRIE “Filologické vědy”

[https://doi.org/10.52058/2695-1592-2022-11\(18\)-282-290](https://doi.org/10.52058/2695-1592-2022-11(18)-282-290)

Maryana Tomenchuk

PhD in Philology, Associate Professor of the Department of Applied Linguistics, Uzhhorod National University, Uzhhorod, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2036-4616>

Marta Martynovych

Master Graduate Student of the Department of Applied Linguistics, Uzhhorod National University, Uzhhorod, Ukraine
<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3597-2355>

THE GENDER-SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS DENOTING “WOMAN”

Abstract. The study of phraseological systems of various languages, particularly English, from the gender point of view facilitates the understanding of the history, culture, psychology and the world outlook of people, thereby making communication clear and effective.

Gender is understood as a socially rather than a biologically constructed characteristic – individuals are not born with but rather learn the behaviours and attitudes relevant to their sex. Gender is a complex cultural formation, which comprises differences in roles, behavior, mental and emotional characteristics of men / women. Thus, it is considered to be an organized pattern of social relations between men and women that characterizes not only their interpersonal communication and interaction within the family, but also determines their social relationships in the main institutions of society. Phraseological system is characterized by the selective nomination, predominantly of anthropocentric orientation, thus, the study of phraseological units, which are semantically-oriented towards a person, is especially important.

The purpose of the article is to analyze gender-specific phraseological units

with a female referent as a means of verbalizing and conceptualizing the gender aspect in language.

The analysis manifests that every culture has a set of verbal and nonverbal means characterizing women, and in each individual society, they are of a specific, cultural and traditional character. The study of cultural identity of phraseological units with gender lexical components allows identifying specific characteristics of gender stereotypes in modern English.

Keywords: phraseological unit, gender-specific, definitional properties, combinatory properties.

Problem statement. Interpretation of language as an anthropocentric phenomenon is now regarded as one of the leading trends in the development of linguistics in the XXI century. This approach allows investigating and solving the general theoretical problems of “people and language” and “language and culture” in a more balanced way taking into account all aspects of the objective manifestations of a person “in language and through language”. In this regard, the most important culturally significant fragment of reflected reality is not only the image of a person but also his/her male and female hypostasis, his/her gender attribute.

Analysis of recent research and publications. Peculiarities in male and female language constitute the main object of study in gender linguistics (O. Biessonova [1], O. Bondarenko [2], N. Borysenko [3], L. Botina [4], O. Hlushchenko [5], H. Emirsuinova [6], O. Kozachyshyna [7], T. Kosmeda [8], A. Martyniuk [9], A. Neliuba [10], N. Nera [11], T. Osipova [12], D. Cameron [13], J. Coates [14], etc.). The novelty and relevance of gender studies in the theory of language is evidenced by numerous recent publications, which highlight approaches to the problem of the phenomenon, yet insufficiently explored in the linguistic aspect.

The **aim** of this study is to analyze the features of gender-specific phraseologisms denoting “woman” functioning as an important means for verbalizing and conceptualizing the gender mechanism in language.

Results and Discussions. The analysis of the phraseological units expressing the notion “woman” in English allows discriminating a set of properties that are ascribed to these notions in the English language. However, one should distinguish between two levels and, accordingly, two types of properties that are in certain hierarchical relations with each other, namely definitional and combinatory properties.

Definitional properties are believed to be the features that are singled out on the basis of dictionary definitions. Thus, the definitional property of the notion



“woman” actualized by the phraseological unit *sweetie pie* is, in fact, the aesthetic property “attractiveness”, which is singled out on the basis of the dictionary definition “an attractive woman”.

Combinatory properties are understood as the characteristics that are singled out on the basis of the combinability of lexemes – components of the phraseological units and analysis of their meanings. Thus, the combinatory property of the notion “woman” actualized by the expression *sweetie pie* is a taste property *sweet* (*sweetie*) and a gastronomic property *pie*.

Definitional Properties of the Notion “Woman” Expressed by Phraseological Units. The analysis of the dictionary definitions of phraseological units designating the notion “woman” in English allows singling out the following definitional properties:

The gender property proper – “a female person” is actualized by phraseological units characterizing a person according to her sex (*the fair sex* – *girls or women* [15, p. 318]; *Eve’s daughter* – *a female, a woman* [15, p. 518]), for example: *Though I never could understand how a man like you could turn out so ignorant of the fair sex* [16]

Physical properties are manifested by the phraseological units characterizing a woman’s physical state or appearance:

a) physical – age characteristics: “youth”, “old age” (*old girl* - *an old lady; a lively old lady* [15, p. 445]; *on the shelf* (of a woman) - *past an age when she might expect to have the opportunity to marry* [15, p. 258]), for example: *That’s my sweetheart, that’s my good old girl* [16].

b) physical – dimensional characteristics “being fat” (*big baby* – *an overweight female* [15, p. 34]; *Mother Bunch* - *applied to an unattractive or untidy fat woman; from the name of a noted fat woman of Elizabethan times* [15, p. 219]), for example: *That has to be one big baby, Carrie thought* [16].

a) the esthetic property proper “attractiveness” (*gorgeous Gussie* – *applied to a glamorous and beautiful young woman; from the nickname of Gertrude (‘Gussie’) Moran, US tennis player, so called because of the frilly panties she wore on court* [15, p. 70]; *belle of the ball* - *the most admired and successful woman on a particular occasion* [15, p. 21]; *easy on the eye (or ear)* - *pleasant to look at (or listen to). Easy on the eye originated in the late 19th century as a US expression describing a pretty woman, a context in which it is still often used* [15, p. 91])

b) esthetically negative property “unattractiveness” (*plane Jane* – *an unattractive girl or woman* [15, p. 155]; *old trout* - *an unattractive or bad-tempered old woman* [15, p. 298]), for instance: *The film assembles its stereotypes (the sexy exchange student, the plain Jane who’s really a fox, the jock who is only dating her for a bet) then proceeds to gunk them all with a ton of scatological prankery* [16]

Mental properties are realized by the phraseologisms that evaluate the mental abilities of a female person, namely:

a) the mental property proper “wisdom” (**woman’s wit** – female wisdom [15, p. 125]), for instance: *He was a man. She’d dazzle him with her woman’s wit and charm if necessary* [16]

b) mentally negative property “silliness” (**dumb Dora** – a stupid woman; a giddy woman [15, p. 446]; **dizzy dame** – stupid; scatterbrained woman [15, p. 306]), for instance: *They would then wait expectantly, heads cocked on one side with a sort of dumb-Dora inquisitive chuckle* [16].

Psychological properties are manifested by phraseological units designating women’s traits of character, style of behavior (**old bat** – An unpleasant or despicable female person [15, p. 226]; **dragon lady** – A domineering or belligerent woman [15, p. 283]; **Lady Bountiful** – a woman who engages in ostentatious acts of charity to impress others [15, p. 173]; **get your claws into** – enter into a possessive relationship with someone (used especially of a woman who dominates or manipulates a man) [15, p. 54]; **Lady Muck** – a haughty or socially pretentious woman [15, p. 178]; **damsel in distress** – a young woman in trouble [15, p. 72]; **hell hath no fury like a woman scorned** – a woman who has been rejected by a man can be ferociously angry and vindictive [15, p. 142]), for example: *She sat there, sipping away at her tea like Lady Muck* [15]

Sensual – sexual properties are actualized by the phraseologisms containing the appraisal of female sexuality or objectify the perception of a woman as a potential sexual partner:

a) sensual – sexual property “sexuality” (**foxy lady** – a sexually attractive woman or girl [15, p. 444]; **hot number** – an attractive or sexy girl or woman [15, p. 445]; **sex goddess** – a sexy looking female movie or television star [15, p. 445]), for instance: *Brigitte Bardot... the original sex kitten with the French charm* [16].

b) “sexual object” (**a piece of ass** – a woman regarded in sexual terms [15, p. 230]; **bit of fluff (or skirt or stuff)** – a woman regarded in sexual terms [15, p. 25]; **a bit of crackling** – an attractive woman regarded as a sexual object [15, p. 65]), for example: “You know her?” “I do, sir. Nice bit of crackling, she is” [16].

c) negative sensual – sexual property “asexuality” (**chunk of lead** – asexual woman [15, p. 230], **dead battery** – asexual woman [15, p. 230]), for instance: *I wouldn’t go with her. She is a dead battery* [16].

Ethic properties are expressed by the phraseological units characterizing a person on the basis of conformity/non-conformity to the conventional moral norms:

a) ethic property proper “virtue” (**ice queen** – a cold and haughty woman [15, p. 444]; **home girl** – a modest girl [15, p. 56]), for instance: *Beautiful and rich, the blonde ice queen was not accustomed to waiting* [16]

b) ethically negative property “sexual promiscuity” (*easy meat* – a woman who is easy to seduce or take advantage of, *alley cat* – a promiscuous woman; also, a person of loose morals [15, p. 22]; *of easy virtue* – (of a woman) promiscuous [15, p. 91]), for example: *I forced myself to look nervous, playing the part of a too young, too rich, too nerdy kid who hadn't been this close to a woman since Mommy. In other words, easy meat* [16].

Social properties are actualized by phraseological units revealing a woman's social role as well as her relationships with other people:

a) marital status property “wife” (*old lady and old woman* - (one's) girl-friend or wife [15, p. 444]; *ball and chain* - a wife [15, p. 385]; *better half* - one's wife, and occasionally, one's husband [15, p. 385]; *the angel in the house* - a woman who is completely devoted to her husband and family [15, p. 7]; *make an honest woman of* - marry a woman, especially to avoid scandal if she is pregnant [15, p. 147]; *her indoors* - a humorous reference to a man's wife [15, p. 142], for example: *My ball and chain is mad at me* [16]

b) marital status property “spinster” (*old maid* – a woman who has remained single beyond the conventional age for marrying [15, p. 19]; *lost hope* - a woman who has remained single, unmarried woman [17]), for example: *For all that, she was an old maid, too plainspoken and too smart to suit most men* [16]

c) informal sexual property “mistress” (*kept woman* - an adulterous woman; a woman who has an ongoing extramarital sexual relationship with a man [17]; *sweet mama* - endearment for a woman in a relationship [17]), for instance: *“I never did understand what is so wrong with being a kept woman,” she muttered* [16]

b) social status proper (*ladies who lunch* - women with the money and free time to meet for social lunches [15, p. 178]; *lady of leisure* - a person who does not need to earn a living or whose time is free from obligations to others [15, p. 183].

Professional properties are manifested by the phraseologisms characterizing a person on the basis of the kind of her professional activities. As a separate kind of professional activity there has been singled out the expressions denoting “prostitution” (*the oldest profession* - the practice of working as a prostitute, humorous [15, p. 229]; *scarlet woman* - A prostitute, an immoral woman [15, p. 909]; *lady of the night* (or evening) – a prostitute [15, p. 85]; *turn a trick* (of a prostitute) - have a session with a client [15, p. 298]; *painted woman* – a prostitute [15, p. 88]), for instance: *Somehow, she expected to see a painted scarlet woman from an exotic novel* [16]

Reproductive properties are actualized in the phraseologisms that are related to a woman's reproductive function (*in pig* – pregnant [15, p. 22]; *in the spud line* – pregnant [15, p. 21]; *have a bun in the oven* – be pregnant [15, p. 41]; *in the*

(pudding) club – pregnant [15, p. 57]; up the duff – pregnant [15, p. 88]; a gleam (or twinkle) in someone's eye – a child who has not yet been conceived, humorous [15, p. 123]; the patter of tiny feet – used to refer to the expectation of the birth of a baby [15, p. 215]; in the family way – pregnant [15, p. 540]; up the spout – (of a woman) pregnant [15, p. 273], for example: I bet she gets up the duff on their first night together! [16]

Combinatory properties of the Notion “Woman” Expressed by Phraseological Units. Phraseological units are believed to possess an integral meaning, which is a complex entity that is not confined to the formal sum of the meanings of their words-components. However, we cannot deny the existence of some connection, perceived at the psychological level, between the meaning of a phraseologism and the initial meanings of words that are its components.

The choice of certain images, objects of reality, features and processes that lie in the basis of a phraseological units is not random and is determined by their national and cultural significance. The analysis of the material allows distinguishing the following combinatory components of phraseological units denoting “woman” in English.

Animalistic properties (Lat. *animalis* – “a living being, animal”) are the characteristic features of animals, birds and insects: *slick chick – an attractive and cute girl [17]; sex kitten - a woman with enormous sexual potential [15, p. 445]; stone fox - an attractive woman; a very sexy woman [15, p. 444]; a real alley cat - this idiom transfers a stray cat that frequents alleys in search of food to a woman of easy virtue, especially a prostitute seeking customers [15, p. 22], for example: “If you like”, I said, wondering why I was saying anything serious to slick chick, except that he happened to be there, occupying the chair [16]*

Affective properties (Lat. *affectio* – influence) are the characteristics combined by the common meaning of the emotional influence on any object of the reality: *eye popper – something astonishing [15, p. 19], for instance: You’re lucky. She is a real eye popper [16]*

Vegetative properties (Lat. *vegetativus* – “vegetable”) are the characteristics that are ascribed to the species of flora: *peaches and cream - (of a girl’s complexion) of a cream colour with downy pink cheeks [15, p. 227]; juicy tomato - an attractive girl or woman [15, p. 444], for example: In a culture that worships youth and female beauty, Joanna, a woman of sixty, is “nothing”, “only woman”, “thoroughly useless”, whereas a woman of twenty is “peaches and cream” with “breasts like melons” and “breath like honey” [16].*

Object properties are the features that are attributed to inanimate things, objects, artefacts: *Barbie doll - a pretty, giddy girl or woman [15, p. 446]; haybag - applied to an unattractive woman [15, p. 219], for instance: Her legs jutted stiffly*



forward like a Barbie doll, and he pushed them down [16]

Vital properties (Lat. *vita* – “life”) are the characteristics of animate beings and are understood in a narrow sense being represented by two types:

a) vital property proper: *living doll*.

b) negatively vital property “death”: *dead meat*. For example: *But I promise you, boychik, in this case it's a pleasure, the woman is a living doll, so svelte it would break your heart [16]*.

Taste properties are the characteristics expressing the result of the sensory perception of the real object by means of taste: *cold biscuit* – *an unattractive or unappealing female* [15, p. 33]; *bread and butter miss* – *a young girl* [15, p. 32]; *sweetie pie* - *used as a term of endearment to a woman* [15, p. 54], for instance: *Just set them up again, sweetie pie, and let me have a go [16]*

Age properties characterize the age of a described object: *old crow* – *applied to an unattractive (old) woman* [15, p. 219]; *old boot* - *applied to an unattractive and typically intransigent (old) woman* [15, p. 219], for example: *During the first two days five brown trout, one speckled trout, one ball cap, two small mouth bass, ten knotty heads, a bluegill, and one old boot were caught [16]*

Hedonistic properties (Gr. *hedone* – “satisfaction, pleasure”) characterize the object on the basis of its ability to give pleasure: *lady of pleasure, daughter of joy*, for example: *And just where do you suggest I get them? Shawna? Some daughter of joy from the mean streets of Atlanta?[16]*

Destructive properties (Lat. *destruere* – “destroy”) are the characteristics rendering the negative meaning of destruction: *heart breaker*- *a charming person who is irresponsible in emotional relationships* [17], for instance: *You didn't know our Lisel was a heart breaker,' she said [16]*

Dimensional properties (Lat. *dimensio* – “size, measure”) represent spatial characteristics of an object (length, breadth, height) as well as the volume and weight of an object: *little woman, heavy cream, light skirts, big baby*, for example: *So he did what he could. He scowled. “Light skirts and lustslaking” [16]*.

Dynamic properties are the features characterizing an object according to its speed or the character of its movement: *fast girl/ fast chick / fast girl / fast lady* – *sexually active or promiscuous woman* [17]; *speed dame* - *a sexually active or promiscuous woman* [17], for instance: *I'd done my homework: Fast chick that she was, they'd gotten married when she was five months pregnant with me in February, 1935 [16]*.

Quantitative properties (Lat. *quantitas* – “quantity”) denote a certain amount of something: *a bit of all right* - *a pleasing person or thing, especially a woman regarded sexually* [15, p. 25].

Colorative properties (Lat. *color* – “colour”) are the characteristics containing

the reference to colour of an object: **white meat** – a white person, especially a woman, contemplated as a sexual partner or as a sex object [17]; **dark velvet** – a black person, especially a woman, contemplated as a sexual partner or as a sex object [17], for example: *White meat or dark meat? Breast or thigh?* [16]

Container properties characterize an object as a container for something: **garbage can** – a low or slovenly prostitute [17]; **rag-bag** applied to a sloppily-dressed person, especially a woman; from earlier sense, motley collection [15, p. 219], for example: *Don't talk to this garbage can, she is useless* [16].

Social properties are the features denoting social categories or relationship: **loose lady** – a sexually promiscuous woman [17].

English phraseology is characterized by gender markedness in terms of content, image motivation and pragmatics. English phraseologisms and proverbs represent mainly the negative image of women. Phraseological units conveying a positive female image are not numerous.

Conclusions. The research of English idioms that represent the concept of “woman” enables the description of the notion’s characteristics as a collection of traits that appear in the language at both the definitional and combinatory levels. On the basis of dictionary definitions, it is assumed that definitional traits are the characteristics that are fixed in the dictionary entry. Combinatory properties are defined as the features that are determined based on the ability to combine lexemes, which are the building elements of phraseological units, and an examination of their meanings.

The dictionary definitions of PUs denoting the notion “woman” in English enable determining the following common definitional properties: gender property proper; physical properties; esthetic properties; mental properties; psychological properties; sensual – sexual properties; ethic properties; social properties; professional properties; reproductive properties.

The study of phraseologisms allows distinguishing the following combinatory components of idioms designating “woman” in English: animalistic properties; affective properties; vegetative properties; object properties; vital properties; taste properties; age properties; hedonistic properties; destructive properties; dimensional properties; dynamic properties; quantitative properties; colorative properties; container properties; social properties.

References:

1. Biessonova, O.L. (2003). Otsinny tezaurus anhliyskoyi movy: kohnityvny i henderny aspekty [Evaluative thesaurus of English: cognitive and gender aspects]. *Extended abstract of candidate's thesis*. Kyiv: T. Shevchenko Kyiv National University [in Ukrainian].
2. Bindarenko, O.S. (2005) Kontsepty «chолоvik» i «zhinka» v ukrayinskiy ta anhliyskiy movnykh kartynakh svitu [Concepts “man: and “woman” in Ukrainian and English language worldviews]. *Extended abstract of candidate's thesis*. Donetsk [in Ukrainian].



3. Botina, L. Yo. (2010). Pro doslidzhennia gendernykh osoblyvostei movlenievoyi komunikatsiyi u naukovomu tovarystvi [On the study of gender features of speech communication in the scientific community]. *Naukovi zapysky In-tu psykholohiyi imeni H.S. Kostiuka APN Ukrainy - Scientific Bulletin of the Institute of Psychology named after H.S. Kostiuk of the APS of Ukraine*, 38. (pp. 97-104). Kyiv: Nika-Tsentr [in Ukrainian].

4. Hlushchenko, O.O. (2007). Vychennia gendernykh osoblyvostei movlennia v istorychnomu aspekti [Study of gender peculiarities of speech in historical aspect]. *Naukovi pratsi - Scientific papers, Vol. 70 Philology*, 57, pp. 108–111 [in Ukrainian].

5. Emirsuinova, H.I. (2003). Leksykon suchasnoho feminizmu (na materiali anhliiskoi movy) [Lexicon of modern feminism (based on the English language)]. *Extended abstract of candidate's thesis*. Kyiv [in Ukrainian].

6. Kozachyshyna, O.L. (2003). Lnhvistychni proiavy hendernykh kharakterystyk anhlmovnykh khudozhnykh tekstiv (na materiali amerykanskoj prozy XX storichchia) [Linguistic manifestations of gender characteristics of English-language literary texts (on the material of American prose of the XX century)]. *Candidate's thesis*. Kyiv: Kyiv National Linguistic University [in Ukrainian].

7. Kosmeda, T. A., Karpenko, N.A., Osipova, T.F., Salionovych, L.M., & Khaliman, O.V. (2014). *Henderna lnhvistyka v Ukraini : istoriia, teoretychni zasady, dyskursyvna praktyka [Gender linguistics in Ukraine: history, theoretical foundations, discursive practice.]*. Drohobuch: Kolo [in Ukrainian].

8. Martyniuk, A. P. (2006). Rehuliatyvna funktsiia genderno markovanykh odynyts movy (na materiali suchasnoho anhlmovnoho publitsystychnoho dyskursu) [Regulatory function of gender-marked language units (based on the material of modern English-language journalistic discourse)]. *Extended abstract of candidate's thesis*. Kyiv [in Ukrainian].

9. Neliuba, A. M. (2011). Genderna lnhvistyka i maloproduktyvni slovotvorchi zasoby [Gender linguistics and unproductive word-formation means]. *Lnhvistyka – Linguistics*, 1 (22). P. 2. pp. 137–146. Luhansk [in Ukrainian].

10. Nera, N. Ya. (2013). Movna osobystist kriz henderni linzy [Linguistic personality through gender lenses]. *Naukovi zapysky [Nats. un-tu «Ostrozka akademiia»] - Scientific Bulletin [National University "Ostroh Academy"]*, 38. pp. 207–210. [in Ukrainian].

11. Osipova, T.F. (2012). Gendernyi aspekt komunikatyvnoyi povedinky liudyny: parametry verbalnoi i neverbalnoi komunikatsii [Gender aspect of human communicative behavior: parameters of verbal and non-verbal communication]. *Filolohichni studiyi - Philological studies*. journal.kdpu.edu.ua. Retrieved from journal.kdpu.edu.ua/filstd/article/download/375/317 [in Ukrainian].

12. Cameron, D. (1990). Introduction: Why is language a feminist issue? *The Feminist Critique of Language*. London: Routledge, P. 1-21.

13. Coates, J. (1996). *Woman talk: conversation between women friends*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.

14. The American Heritage Dictionary of Idioms / ed. by Christine Ammer. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997. 1191 p.

15. Corpus of Contemporary American English. Retrieved from [https:// www.english-corpora.org/coca/](https://www.english-corpora.org/coca/)

16. One World Action Glossary. Retrieved from <http://owa.netextra.net/indepth/project.jsp?project>