

DEFEATED FATHERHOOD EXPECTATIONS: THE SHIFT IN AMERICAN ANIMATED SERIES DISCOURSE

НЕВИПРАВДАНІ ОЧІКУВАННЯ ЩОДО БАТЬКІВСТВА: ЗМІНА В ДИСКУРСІ АМЕРИКАНСЬКИХ АНІМАЦІЙНИХ СЕРІАЛІВ

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Animated series do not only perform didactic functions but also reflect changes in our society. The article aims at analysing fatherhood representation through the onscreen discourse of the American animated television sitcoms *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy*, that feature dysfunctional working-class families with the same family structure. The study is based on the corpus analysis of Homer Simpson's and Peter Griffin's remarks within the family as well as remarks of their children directed to them that were processed via online corpus manager *Sketch Engine*. Having used such tools as the word list, key word list, KWIC and thesaurus, it has been stated that the traditional role of fathers as breadwinners has undergone a dramatic transformation in the discourse of animated series. More specifically, Homer Simpson is depicted as an incompetent father who is not respected by his son regarding the fact that he uses *Homer* instead of *dad* or *father* when he talks to him; meanwhile Peter Griffin takes a subordinate role in the family, accepting the leadership position of his wife. In the Griffin family, it is mother who is associated with the words *rule* and *control*. Interestingly, Peter Griffin's children still use diminutive word *daddy* when they talk to him, despite the fact that he does not even know who their friends are. Thus, the research shows how father's archetype, which is usually associated with power, absolute authority and control, is transformed in popular culture. Fatherhood in the above-mentioned animated series is defiled with such fathers' flaws as ignorance, their emotional non-involvement, alcoholism, and weak willingness. Homer Simpson and Peter Griffin are represented as male figures who are not respected by their children and consequently can not be role models for their offspring.

Key words: fatherhood, gender stereotypes, animated series, discourse, corpus analysis.

Анімаційні серіали виконують не лише дидактичну функцію, але й відображають зміни в нашому суспільстві. Розвідку присвячено аналізу зображення батьківства через медійний дискурс американських анімаційних телевізійних серіалів «Сім'яни» та «Сім'янин», які показують неблагонадійні родини робітничого класу з однаковою сімейною структурою. Дослідження ґрунтується на аналізі корпусу реплік Гомера Сімпсона та Пітера Гріффіна в родині, а також реплік їхніх дітей, адресованих їм, які були проаналізовані за допомогою онлайн-програми для роботи з корпусом *Sketch Engine*. Використовуючи такі інструменти, як список слів, список ключових слів, KWIC та тезаурус, було визначено, що традиційна роль батьків як годувальників зазнала кардинальної трансформації в дискурсі анімаційних серіалів. Зокрема, Гомер Сімпсон зображений некомпетентним батьком, якого не поважає син, приймаючи до уваги те, що син звертається до нього *Homer* замість *dad* або *father*, а Пітер Гріффін займає підлеглу роль у сім'ї, приймаючи керівну посаду своєї дружини. У родині Гріффінів саме мама асоціюється зі словами *rule* та *control*, а чоловік питає у неї дозволу піти на вечірку. Цікаво, що хоча й Пітер Гріффін не знає, хто є друзями його дітей та відверто ображає їх, вони все одно використовують ласкаве *daddy* у зверненнях до нього. Таким чином, дослідження показує, як у масовій культурі трансформується архетип батька, який зазвичай асоціюється з владою, абсолютним авторитетом та контролем. Батьківство у вищезгаданих мультсеріалах запламоване такими вадами батьків, як невігластво, їхня емоційна незалученість у виховання та захоплення їх дітей, алкоголізм і слабкість. Гомер Сімпсон та Пітер Гріффін представлені як чоловіки, яких не поважають їхні діти, а отже, вони не можуть бути прикладом для наслідування для своїх нащадків.

Ключові слова: батьківство, гендерні стереотипи, анімаційні серіали, дискурс, корпусний аналіз.

Introduction. The widespread popularity of animated series has marked a shift in the representation of fathers from the position of the leader in the family to a family dishonour by means of sarcasm, exaggerating, stereotyping. Their success can be explained by the fact that animated series raise controversial social and political topics in a US context [1, p. 199-220].

Literature Overview. The father in the American animated series (*The Simpsons*, *Family Guy*) is portrayed as a deviation rather than a role model to be

followed. It is stated that "the breadwinner expectation has been attached to fathers for a number of decades, and plays out in their perceptions of fatherhood" [2, p. 525]. Meanwhile, a significant change in the portrayal of the fatherhood in film discourse has been pointed out: "back in the 1950s and 1960s, sitcom dads tended to be serious, calm and wise, if a bit detached. In a shift that media scholars have documented, only in later decades did fathers start to become foolish and incompetent" [3]. Furthermore, in contemporary TV discourse fathers' incompetence

and misgivings are often neglected as long as they love their family [4, p. 3].

Violated expectations with respect to parenting and gender roles are explained by the role strain and marital dissatisfaction after childbirth [5; 6]. These expectations are developed through different sources, such as their own family experience, conversations with friends, and media [7, p. 28]. Hence, TV discourse contributes to society's beliefs about gender roles within families.

Traditionally men have a role of a family provider and head [8], however, this tendency may have been reconsidered in TV discourse. Clueless and incompetent fathers as a specific type of comedy characters have become a common device used by scriptwriters in father-centered sitcoms. Regarding respect of family members, men are frequently ridiculed though they are portrayed as loving fathers whose love and fidelity supersede any incompetence [9].

Data and Methodology. The present corpus study is based on freely available scripts of American animated series *Family Guy* and *The Simpsons*, which were processed via a corpus tool Sketch Engine [10]. The animated series *Family Guy* features the adventures of a dysfunctional Griffin family: an ignorant, clumsy and offensive father Peter, a stereotypical housewife Lois, their three children Meg, Chris and Stewie, and a talking dog Brian. *The Simpsons*, as a family, represent a typical American working-class family, consisting of a married couple Homer and Marge and their three children Bart, Lisa and Maggie.

The corpus has been divided into several subcorpora. The first subcorpus has been compiled from 45 episodes of *Family Guy* (1999–2007) and comprises Peter Griffin's remarks addressed to his wife and children. It has a size of 35,431 words. The second subcorpus includes Homer Simpson's remarks to the family and consists of 39,543 words taken from 40 episodes of *The Simpsons* (1993–2005) and *The Simpsons Movie* (2007). Also, the subcorpus of Bart Simpson's remarks addressed to his father Homer has been compiled (15,980 words) to analyze peculiarities of child-father communication as well as Meg's (11,765 words) and Chris' (13,570 words) remarks directed to their father Peter.

Results and Discussions. Regarding Homer Simpson, a keyword analysis shall be taken into account for the reason that it demonstrates what is unique in the research corpus compared to a reference one (English Web 2018) by means of a chi-squared test that measures the significance of an observed versus and expected frequency. Table 1 reveals that the most salient phrases in Homer's idiolect are the interjections *Woo-hoo!* and *D'oh!*.

The following examples are demonstrated via Key Word In Context (KWIC): *Woo-hoo! I just got a hundred cars for free!; I got the job! Woo-hoo!* [12]. These examples give us the reason to imply that the exclamation *Woo-hoo!* is used by Homer to express joy. *D'oh!*, on the other hand, is used to comment on a foolish action often done by Homer himself. *D'oh! D'oh! Why did I suggest this?; I'm tired of fumbling with round fruit. D'oh!* [12]. Considering the fact that *D'oh!* is also included in the wordlist as one of the most frequently used words by Homer, it contributes to the image of Homer as a weak-minded father.

Furthermore, the word *Jebus* is used by Homer instead of *Jesus* when he gets into troubles. Used for comical purpose, this word reveals Homer's faithless nature. *Spider-pig* refers to Homer Simpson's pet pig that he makes it crawl on the ceiling like Spider-Man and *skittlebrau* refers to a special kind of beer that has candy in it as it is imagined by Homer. These words emphasize Homer's lack of sound mind and alcohol addiction. Such a father can hardly be considered as a role model for his children.

Tab. 1

Top 5 keywords in Homer's remarks

1.	<i>d'oh</i>	keyness 164.537
2.	<i>woo-hoo</i>	keyness 133.788
3.	<i>jebus</i>	keyness 64.719
4.	<i>spider-pig</i>	keyness 58.523
5.	<i>skittlebrau</i>	keyness 46.956

Another significant aspect of fathers' representation in the given animated series is lack of respect by their children. When Bart Simpson talks to his father, he never uses *dad* or *father*. The following extract of a conversation between Homer Simpson and his son Bart reveals lack of respect to the father figure. Teaching his son life lessons, Homer performs the role of mentor and consequently is expected to be treated with utmost respect and dignity. Instead, Bart addresses his father by his name emphasizing disrespect for the male parent.

Bart: You make me sick, Homer. You're the one that told me I could do anything if I just put my mind to it.

Homer: Well now that you're a little bit older I can tell you that's a crock. No matter how good you are at something, there's always about a million people better than you.

Bart: Gotcha. Can't win, don't try [12].

Peter Griffin's children, on the contrary, call their father *dad* and *daddy* that can be clearly seen in Table 2. However, further analysis of children-father communication shall be done. For instance, when Chris

tells his father that he wants to quit boy scouts, Peter does not pay attention to his son's intentions and behaves like a mentally retarded man:

Chris: Dad, what if I told you I didn't want to be in the Scouts anymore?

Peter: I'd say 'come again?'. Then I'd laugh because I said 'come' [11].

Tab. 2

Top 5 keywords in the corpus of Meg and Chris' remarks addressed to their father

1.	<i>dad</i>
2.	<i>daddy</i>
3.	<i>homey</i>
4.	<i>player-hater</i>
5.	<i>outcast</i>

Another excerpt of the dialogue between Peter Griffin and his son Chris supports the image of an indifferent father with no emotional support:

Peter: Chris, how are all your friends at school?

Chris: What do you care, you don't even know who my friends are.

Peter: Sure I do... Chandler... Fonzy... and Remington Steele?

Chris: You got lucky, dad [11].

When Chris tries to point out the low level of father's involvement in his life, Peter comes up with names of fictional characters from American sitcoms. In this way, the father makes fun of his son and makes him feel ashamed.

Wife-husband communication shall also be taken into account. When searching for *Lois*, the name of Peter's wife, in the corpus of Peter's remarks we come across the following lines: *Now Lois, I work hard all week to provide for this family. I am the man of the house. And as the man, I order you to give me permission to go to this party.* In a humorous way, the matriarchy in the Griffin family is emphasized despite the stereotypical expectations that men are the leading figures in the family. The situation ends up with the words *Lois, honey, I promise. Not a drop of alcohol is gonna touch these lips tonight. That I wouldn't drink at the stag party*, that seem to be the action of begging where the final decision is made by the woman.

Turning to the thesaurus in Sketch Engine (see fig. 1) that automatically generates a list of words belonging to the same category of the given word, we observe the word *rule* that proclaims authority of the mother. When looking at the concordance line of this word, the following phrase said by Peter shall be taken into

consideration: *I don't make the rules, honey.* Saying this phrase, the father admits that it is the mother who has authority over family members indeed.

In addition to this tendency, the word *mother* focuses our attention on the fact that Lois takes control of her husband's actions:

Peter: Chris, this is a big day for you, the day you become the man of the house, because when we get home, your mother is going to kill me [11].

In such a way, the father is trying to teach his son about manhood, though accepting a leader position of the woman in their family. In the Griffin family, it is the mother who is a disciplinarian, not the father.

	Word	Frequency ?
1	look	17 ...
2	honey	82 ...
3	rule	9 ...
4	Meg	147 ...
5	mother	30 ...

Fig. 1. Collocations with the word Lois in the corpus of Peter Griffin's remarks

Conclusion. Contrary to expectations, fathers in the popular American animated series *The Simpsons* and *Family Guy* are not exposed to gender stereotypes. The provider archetype has been reimaged in the representation of fatherhood that undermines father's authority and turns a male parent into a disrespected family member who is unlikely to become a role model for his children. In particular, Homer Simpson is humiliated by his son when he calls his father by his name and Homer's idiolect reveals his low intellectual ability. Peter Griffin's leadership position in the family, on the other hand, is suppressed in another way. His son Chris doubts his emotional involvement in his life while Peter intentionally emphasizes his wife's authority, who has the last word in the family.

The present research has provided empirical support to gender studies in TV discourse. Further research will be aimed at compiling corpora of fathers' remarks in other American family-centered animated series, e.g. *King of the Hill*, *F Is for Family*, *American Dad!* for more representative results and comparing them to mothers' remarks to analyze female stereotypes inside family.

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