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THE GENDER-SPECIFIC NOUNS DENOTING PROFESSION/ROLE: THE MACEDONIAN CASE

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Abstract
Resting only upon projects, manuals, reports, and recommendations, so far, the ongoing gender-neutral language debate has not attracted broader research attention in the Macedonian language. Therefore, this qualitative study aims to provide thorough information on the Macedonian gender-specific nouns denoting profession/role by analyzing their entries in the current online Macedonian Dictionary and some documents, using the general inductive approach. Indicating that the singular/plural masculine generic nouns designating profession/role in one of their meanings refer to both sexes, the research results underpin the consequences of this usage, revealing the natural/grammatical gender collision, which latently contributes to women's invisibility in society in general. The findings further suggest that some feminine derivations, which still have not been widely embraced due to the traditional values, and which perhaps sound slightly strange and even a bit humorous, do not depreciate women, and their usage should be endorsed and strongly encouraged.

Keywords: Macedonian gender-neutral language, nouns, profession/role

Introduction
The Macedonian language belongs to the Slavic group of Indo-European languages, more specifically to the subgroup of the South Slavic languages. According to the last census in 2021, it is the native language of 61,38% of the whole population in the Republic of North Macedonia. Through the course of history, the main distinguishing feature of the Macedonian language, when compared to the other Slavic languages, is that the synthetic grammatical relation expression shifts gradually into analytical. This means that cases lose their value and prepositions enforce their function, i.e. one general form replaces the old cases forms: *od more* (*from sea*), *na more* (*on sea*), *pred more* (*before sea*) (Koneski, 1986). Despite the fact that the Republic of North Macedonia is acquiring new values and norms while heading towards its membership in the European Union, it is a patriarchal society still preserving many traditional principles, and this is particularly the case when it comes to women's professions.

Up until now, extensive research worldwide confirms that not only do languages reveal/indicate their communicative aspect/role, mirror social circumstances, and affect people's perception of reality and the world that

surrounds them (Sapir, 1986), but they also serve as a mighty instrument of patriarchy (Spender, 1980) and the medium in portraying the social inequality of women and men. From the inception of the feminist movement in the 1960s, the debate of males' dominance and females' subordinate role in society, shown through language, is still prevailing, and thus, gender-neutral, gender-fair, or non-sexist language usage is encouraged for the sake of diminishing the asymmetric distribution of social power between women and men.

A few researchers try to clarify the meaning of the term sexism: Graddol and Swan (1989) (discrimination against women or men regarding sex based on irrelevant grounds); Sunderland (2006) (language that defines and degrades women and renders them as invisible); Holmes (2013) (how language carries negative attitudes to women). In the feminist view, according to Cameron (2005), languages are sexist, i.e. they present the world from a masculine aspect, and reflect the culture as sexist. In sum, these definitions are established under the assumption that the roles of women and men in society are determined by their physical differences.

As this discussion of gender-sensitive language proceeds, a great deal of research investigates how languages contribute to decreasing women's visibility, bringing down their role in society, and promoting gender inequality and discrimination. More specifically, they focus on the use of masculine generic *he*, the masculine plural forms, and the word pairs, which are used as tools for feminization and achievement of gender symmetry, especially present and productive in the Slavic gendered languages. Correspondingly, this study pioneers the point at issue in the Macedonian language, showcasing its specific features which can render wide-ranging illustrations on this subject and underpin both the significance and consequences of the usage of singular/plural masculine generic nouns for professions/roles of both females and males and their feminine correlates, thus contributing to the current sensitive language discussion.

Broader research context

Examining the language used by women, regarding vocabulary and syntactic structure, Jesperson (1923) is the first who draws attention to the language gender issues addressing their various aspects. The feminist course in the 1960s reinforces them and since then they continue to be a serious challenge for many linguists. Most of the language-sensitive gender questions refer to the masculine nouns, which are seen as neutral, generic, and unmarked – thus, positive in meaning and more frequent in use, and to feminine nouns, which are perceived as marked and sexually derogated, therefore connected with negative meanings and rare in use, situating women in unfavorable positions, lowering their rank in society, and weakening their discourse power (Hofmann, 1993; Kochman-Haładyj, 2007; Lakoff, 1973; Leech, 1974; 1975; Lyons, 1977; Richards, 1985; Spender, 1980).

Besides, substantial gender-fair language studies refer to the language as sexist, associating it with the generic use of *he* which makes women invisible, and excluded when referring to occupations that are mainly considered male: *lawyer*, *pilot*, *doctor*, *judge*, *mayor*, etc., and to the development of a practice which establishes the words *woman*, *lady* or *female* before these nouns when denoting a female position holder, thus imposing the term *man* as a norm and the term *woman* as a derivate (Braun, Irmen & Sczesny, 2007; Gabriel & Gygax, 2016; Gabriel, Gygax & Kuhn, 2018; Gastil, 1990; Gibbon, 1999; Gygax & Gabriel, 2008; Gygax,

Gabriel, Lévy, Pool, Grivel & Pedrazzini, 2012; Gygax, Gabriel, Sarrasin, Oakhill & Garnham, 2008; Kaufmann & Bohner, 2014; Parks & Roberton, 1998; Stahlberg, Stout & Dasgupta, 2011; Tod-Mancillas, 1980). In addition, much of the research referring to gender-neutral language highlights the interrelation of gender and society, stressing that gender is deeply enclosed in our life and society and that through gender-sensitive language societies convey their values to the next generation (Cameron, 1998; Crawford & Unger, 2004; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013; Prewitt-Freilino, Caswell & Laakso, 2012; Puri, 2011; Stahlberg et al., 2007).

Furthermore, many language-sensitive gender inquiries point out different language elements which denote sexist languages such as the compounds containing *~man* and the *~ess* suffix added to male nouns (*poet*/*poetess*, *author*/*authoress*). This certainly imposes the idea of introducing forms that would replace the generic forms with more neutral ones, such as the singular *they* instead of *she*/*he* or the title *Ms* instead of *Miss*/*Mrs* by which women's marital status would be unrevealed by the title just as men's is not with *Mr*. All of this is undertaken with a two-fold purpose: ending this phenomenon which empowers men and downgrades women, and providing a mental representation of equality of women and men (Gabriel, 2008; Mucchi-Faina, 2005; Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser, 2016; Stahlberg et al., 2007; Sunderland, 2006). However, according to Paterson (2014), the singular *they* and *Ms* are not validated by English language dictionaries and guides. Others consider the use of word pairs or feminization, i.e. each masculine form with a feminine counterpart as a way to reduce gender bias in the language (Čmejrková, 2003; Doleschal & Schmid, 2001; Doleschal, 2015; Menegatti & Rubini, 2017; Vervecken, 2012).

Moreover, countless surveys investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of gender-fair language (García-González, Forcén & Jimenez-Sanchez, 2019; Parks & Roberton, 2004; Remigio & Talosa 2021; Rubin & Greene, 1991; Saitua-Iribar, Cerrato & Ugarteburu, 2018; Sarrasin, Gabriel & Gygax, 2012; Swim, Mallett & Stangor, 2004; Vervecken, Gygax, Gabriel, Guillod & Hannover, 2015), indicating younger female and older male and female students' more positive attitudes toward gender-fair language. Some investigate the "… females' attitudes toward systematic development of feminine morphological forms corresponding to the natural gender of people…" (Filipović, 2011). Additionally, extensive research endeavors to redefine and restructure languages, constructing them to manifest gender neutrality (Gabriel & Gygax, 2008; Lomotey, 2011; Sunderland, 2000) as well as to examine the attitudes and side effects of these activities (Gabriel et. al., 2018; Sarrasin et al., 2012). Finally, given the significant role of textbooks as a relevant part of the curriculum and students' education worldwide and of children's socialization, comprehensive exploration points to the role of education in reducing gender bias (Hodges Persell, James, Kang, Snyder & Saltzman Chafetz, 2006; Michael, 1986).

Some of these research studies recommend interventions that can promote gender-fair language and enhance women's salience via various teaching training courses (Haddad, 2009), discussions among teachers regarding the roles portrayed in the textbooks (Sunderland, Cowley, Rahim, Leontzakou & Shattuck, 2001), the use of pair forms, i.e. feminization (Vervecken, 2012), as well as giving instructions and exposing people to gender-fair language (Kuhn, 2021), mostly because

"gender-fair language is seen as an effective tool contributing to more gender-balanced perceptions" (Deutscher, 2010; Vervecken, 2012).

Method

This qualitative study provides a thorough depiction of gender nouns denoting professions/roles in the Macedonian language in light of the current gender-neutral language discussion. Several manuals, reports, and recommendations as well as the National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2026), the Higher Education Law, and the Macedonian Monolingual Dictionary (2003–2014) as documents serve as a sample and this is in line with the view of Dörnyei (2007), Yin (2011), Gentles, Charles, Ploeg and McKibbon (2015), and Van Rijnsoever (2017) on what represents the sample. The sample determination takes into account the researcher's judgment that the selected sample will provide various and rich apprehension of the phenomenon, which is Yin's (2003) indication that discernment is extremely important. At the same time, this sample is purposeful because of Lincoln & Guba's (1985) claim that each sample is determined to achieve a certain goal. Considering the lack of scientific papers on this matter, the research sample's size allows further generalizations about the Macedonian language as stated by Gobo (2004). The data analysis and conclusion exploit the general interpretative/inductive method used by Thomas (2006), Creswell (2009), Kahlke (2014), and Harding and Whitehead (2016) which deploys the inductive way of thinking and combines various qualitative analysis approaches.

Findings and Discussion

Concerning gender, like many Slavic languages (e.g. Russian (Doleschal & Schmid, 2001), Serbian (Filipović, 2011), Czech (Čmejrková, 2003), Slovenian (Doleschal, 2015), and others), the Macedonian language also distinguishes natural and grammatical gender (Minova-Gjurkova, 2000). While natural gender is associated with the person's sex, i.e. nouns denoting living beings (females or males), grammatical gender is determined based on the suffixes designating the gender of each noun, regardless of whether the noun indicates a living being or not, thus, making it a part of the gender system which consists of three grammatical genders – feminine, masculine and neuter. This means that the gender of nouns plays a crucial role when nouns appear as syntactic units, mostly, because the form of the other syntactic units depends on the noun gender, i.e. other units have to agree with the gender of the main noun within a phrase. This concordance, according to Corbett (2014), is the very essence of grammatical gender systems worldwide.

Regarding the natural (semantic)/grammatical common animate nouns' gender, Minova-Gjurkova (2000), distinguishes a group referring to all living beings and within it, the subgroups denoting humans and animals. She further divides, the human subgroup according to the human sex:

(1) *chovek* (*human*) > *zhena* (*woman*) and *mazh* (*man*).

This is an example of gender lexical symmetry, i.e. two separate words exist to designate female and male. Hence, none of them is marked, which assumes that there is an equal power distribution between women and men in society.

Furthermore, the gender category has syntactic and semantic relevance, as well, because – as Minova-Gjurkova (2000) says, "with some elements, it reflects the world that surrounds us" alluding to the natural/grammatical gender nouns disagreement, expressed in nouns denoting profession/role, titles, etc. Considering these nouns, she introduces a second group in addition to the one in (1):

(2) *student* (*student in general*)
chovek student (*human student*) >
student (*male student*) – *mazh student* (*man student*)
studentka (*female student*) – *zhena student* (*woman student*).

Here, in (2), according to Minova-Gjurkova (2000), the profession denoting masculine noun *student* (*student*) "in one of its usage covers both sexes, under a prior condition – the existence of a profession denoting feminine correlate." Therefore, regarding female persons, both sentences, (3) and (4), are acceptable:

(3) *Maja* (f) *e student* (m) (*Maja is a student* m) (Maja is included in the human student's group),
(4) *Maja* (f) *e studentka* (f) (*Maja is a student* f) (Maja is involved in the woman student's group).

The above-stated prerequisite specifically applies to the forms *pedagog* (*pedagogue*), *psiholog* (*psychologist*), *biolog* (*biologist*) and other nouns denoting profession ending in *~log* and other consonants as well, such as *filozof* (*philosopher*), as they refer only to males since feminine forms of these nouns do not exist yet.

Correspondingly, *chovek* (*human*) and the singular masculine nouns designating profession/role are supposed to refer to both females and males. Yet, the challenge is to determine whether people perceive these nouns as nouns assigned to both sexes for studies suggest that they usually traditionally interpret them, meaning that people are prone to connect them more to men (Gygax et al., 2008; Gygax et al., 2012; Tod-Mancillas, 1980).

Entries in the dictionary

At first glance, the noun *chovek* (*human*), in the first two interpretations which are listed in the Monolingual Macedonian Dictionary (2014) as *living being* and *person*, looks gender neutral and refers to both females and males. So is its plural form *lugje* (*people*). However, the next three interpretations *zrel, vozrasen mazh, soprug* i *pripadnik na nacija, drzhava, politichka partija* (*grown person of a male gender, husband,* and *member of a nation, state, political party*) confirm its masculine generic use like in Slovenian (Doleschal, 2015) and Serbian (Filipović, 2011). On the other hand, the noun student (*student*) has only the meaning: *lice shto* (*person who*), and its feminine equivalent *studentka* (*female student*) is a derivation from the masculine form with the suffix *~ka*. The feminine forms are modified derivates, i.e. feminine nouns are derived from masculine nouns, and in the Macedonian language, they are identified both as a means of reinforcing the gender fair/neutral language and a marker for women's equality and involvement in social life. Although seen as second, marked, lexically asymmetric, and less significant

because they are derivations from masculine nouns (Kaufmann & Boher, 2014; Parks & Robertson, 1998; Wardhaugh, 1998), in the Macedonian language their usage is imposed and comprehended as a language norm, and as a strong mechanism that empowers the visibility and perception of women as equal to men. Thus, their usage is categorically suggested, and hence, not applying this norm is considered a deviation from the norm.

As evidenced by Koneski (1995), numerous feminine nouns describing profession/role owe their form to the suffix *~ka* added to their masculine equivalents:

(5) *studentka* (f) (*female student*) < *student* (m) (*male student*),
ministerka (f) (*female minister*) < *minister* (m) (*male minister*),
sekretarka (f) (*female secretary*) < *sekretar* (m) (*male secretary*),
vicepremierka (f) (*female deputy prime minister*) < *vicepremier* (m) (*male deputy prime minister*),
dekanka (f) (*female dean*) < *dekan* (m) (*male dean*),
direktorka (f) (*female principal*) < *director* (m) (*male principal*),
inzhenerka (f) (*female engineer*) < *inzhener* (m) (*male engineer*),
premierka (f) (*female prime minister*) < *premier* (m) (*male prime minister*),
pozharnikarka (f) (*female firefighter*) < *pozharnikar* (m) (*male firefighter*),
shoferka (f) (*female chauffeur*) < *shofer* (m) (*male chauffeur*).

Besides the fact that the listed nouns are broadly accepted in formal and informal interactions, especially after Macedonia's independence in 1991 when women in our society started to be more involved, primarily, in political life, and that gender lexical symmetry exists, the online edition of the Dictionary treats them and specifies their meanings differently. The nouns *minister* (*minister*) (m) and *dekan* (*dean*) (m) have meanings interpreted with the words *visok drzhaven funcioner* (*high official*) (m) and *chlen na vlada* (*government member*) (m), which adds to their generic usage and diminishes women's importance as carriers of these social roles. Furthermore, the online edition of the Dictionary released in 2021 renders separate feminine correlates entries only for the nouns *ministerka* (*female minister*) and *sekretarka* (*female secretary*), indicating that in the case of *ministerka* (*female minister*) the period from 1991 to 2021 is considered as more than sufficient for a feminine noun to gain its place in it and to be broadly used in formal and informal domains (*sekretarka – female secretary* was used before the independence considering that most women hold this role). This, further, proves that the growing number of women with such profession present nowadays and the increased public exposure to this word has helped in overcoming the previous resistance toward this noun and its past belittling meaning *zhena na minister* (*the wife of the minister*), which is seen in the Russian as well (Doleschal & Schmid, 2001). Furthermore, the noun *secretary* (m) has three meanings exemplified by the word *lice shto* (*person who*), yet one meaning is associated with the word *rakovoditel* (*head*). In addition, the noun *direktor* (*principal*) (m) has a meaning described with the words *rakovoditel/upravnik head*/*manager* and there is no feminine form separate entry. Finally, the noun vice-premier (*vice prime minister*) (m) does not exist in this Dictionary although Macedonia has had a female deputy prime minister. The singular/plural nouns:

(6) *inzhener/i* (*engineer/s*),
premier/i (*prime minister/s*),
pozharnikar/i (*fire fighter/s*),
vozach/i (*driver/s*),
pilot/i (*pilot/s*),
shofer/i (*chauffeur/s*),
rezhiser/i (*producer/s*),
dizajner/i (*designer/s*),
akter/i (*actor/s*),
pretpriemach/i (*entrepreneur/s*)
advokat/i (*lawyer/s*),
zemjodelec/*ci* (*agriculturist/s*)

have masculine entries, thus adding relevance to the previous research views on women's irrelevance and invisibility. Moreover, there are examples of their singular/plural feminine counterparts' usage (they are derived by adding the suffix *~ka/~ki*):

(7) *inzhenerka/ki* (*female engineer/s*),
premierka/ki (*female prime minister/s*),
pozharnikar/i (*female fire fighter/s*),
shoferка/кi (*female chauffeur/s*),
pretpriemachka/ki (*female entrepreneur/s*),
pilotka/ki (*female pilot/s*),
programerka/ki (*female programmer/s*),
analiticharka/ki (*female analyst/s*),
dizajnerka/ki (*female designer/s*),
advokatka/ki (*female layer/s*),
akterka/ki (*actress/es*),
zemjodelka/ki (*female agriculturist/s*)

in the public spoken and written practice, especially in the press language, although with distinct frequency, except for the form *vozachka* (*female driver*), owning this, primarily, to the sizeable women's engagement in these professions and the substantial public open-mindedness toward these nouns, which consequently leads to their acceptance without the disparagement nuance which is present in these cases, for instance, in Slovenian (Doleschal, 2015).

Therefore, this finding that only *ministerka* (*female minister*), and *sekretarka* (*female secretary*) have separate entries in this Dictionary is strange, especially given that some of the feminine forms listed above are used for a very long time and are connected with female professions which exist in our society for a long time, such as:

(8) *prodavachka/ki* (*female seller/s*),
slatkarka/ki (*female pastry cook/s*),
shijachka/ki (*femail tailor/s*),
akterka/ki (*actress/es*),

spiker/ki (*female presenter*/s),
advokatka/ki (*female layer*) etc.

Despite their long-standing presence in the Macedonian language, they do not have separate entries and are treated as derivations from the masculine forms. Some feminine forms connected with the growth of society, science, and technology, such as:

(9) *pilotka/ki* (*female pilot/s*),
programerka/ki (*female programmer/s*),
analiticharka (*female analyst/s*),
pretpriemachka/ki (*female entrepreneur/s*),
dizajnerka/ki (*female designer/s*),
rezhiserka/ki (*female producer/s*),
notarka/ki (*female scrivener/s*),
specijalistka/ki (*female specialist/s*),
kondukterka/ki (*female ticket collector/s*)

also do not have separate entries and are evidenced only as a derivation from the masculine form with the suffix *~ka*. On the other hand, surprisingly, the feminine singular/plural derivations:

(10) *zemjodelka/ki* (*female agriculturist/s*),
kriticharka/ki (*female critic/s*),
agjutantka/ki (*female adjutant officer/s*),
officerka/ki (*female officer/s*),
taksistka/ki (*female taxi driver/s*),
stopanstvenichka/ki (*business woman/women*),
farmerka/ki (*female stockbreeder/rancher*)

are not registered even as a derivation from the masculine nouns, i.e. they do not exist as words in the Dictionary.

The form *vozachka* in Macedonian is an adjective and is regularly used in the noun phrases *vozachka dozvola* (*driving license*) or *vozachki ispit* (*driving exam*). This applies to the noun *farmerka* (*female rancher*), especially to its plural forms, denoting *jeans* in the Macedonian language. Thus, so far, there is no acceptable feminine parallel for them. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the forms *vozachka/ki and farmerka/ki* cannot be brought to life because numerous existing words have extended their meaning, and they should be introduced in the practice and used with greater frequency. Furthermore, the meaning of the nouns (6 and the male entries in 7) is described differently in the Dictionary as *lice shto* (*person who*), *specijalist* (*specialist*), *pretsedatel* (*president*), *toj shto* (*he who*), thus providing a fruitful soil for confusion in comprehending the gender sex divergences, in particular those who are not well acquainted with the Macedonian language norm regarding this matter. Hence, this dual way of interpreting the meanings in the Dictionary indicates that it does not concern the gender-fair language and may increase the confusion among Macedonian language learners when it comes to the relationship between gender and sex. However, most of the

interpretations of the nouns denoting profession/role relate to masculine words, which complement the women's exclusion and inflict their derived role. Thus, these findings confirm the previous research insights on masculine generic nouns denoting profession/role as dominant in the Macedonian language and illustrate the asymmetric relations between the feminine and masculine nouns (Stahlberg et al., 2007; Stout & Dasgupta, 2011; Tod-Mancilas, 1980).

One of the reasons for neglecting the gender-fair language in the Monolingual Macedonian Dictionary may lie in the guidelines stating that the singular/plural masculine forms refer to both males and females. However, according to Paterson (2014), many highly developed states have not listed the recommended gender-inclusive words in their dictionaries yet, which indicates that this process is complex and slow.

Anyway, although the singular masculine generic use is supposed to denote both sexes, having in mind the Macedonian society's patriarchal character and the derogatory implication when speaking of a *woman lawyer, pilot, firefighter, mayor, engineer,* etc., it seems that this usage in a covert way adds to the ostracism and obscurity of women, thus diminishing their value and social roles. When it comes to gender-fair language in the Macedonian Dictionary a lot has to be done.

The Higher Education Law (2018) provides comprehensive material to illustrate this masculine generic dominance too. While the singular masculine form *student* (*student*) is registered in 150 instances, the singular feminine noun *studentka* (*female student*) is seen in 0 cases. At the same time, the singular masculine form *professor* (*teacher*) is used in 46 sentences, and the singular feminine noun *profesorka* (*female teacher*) in 0 cases.

Parallel with the mentioned suffix *~ka,* recently a variant suffix *~ina* gains more attention and certain proponents of the gender-fair language advocate its usage:

(11) *filozofina/i* (*female philosopher/s*) < *filozof* (*male philosopher*) (Kolbe in Damchevska, 2020).

Taking into consideration that many nouns denoting profession/role such as:

(12) *hirurg* (m) (*surgeon*),
biolog (m) (*biologist*),
psiholog (m) (*psychologist*),
filozof (m) (*philosopher*),
pedagog (m) (*pedagogue*),
ortoped (m) (*orthopedist*),
ginekolog (m) (*gyanecologist*)

do not have feminine counterparts because their ending suffix blocks the feminine suffix *~ka/~ki,* apparently the suffix *~ina/~ini* assumption assists in constructing feminine nouns and solving the natural/grammatical gender clash. Still, in such form, this suffix evokes the Serbian influence, thus in the Macedonian language the form *~inka/~inki* should be used having in mind that this suffix along with the suffix *~ka* is the dominant one in deriving feminine nouns (Koneski, 1995):

(13) *hirurginka/ki* (f sing/pl) (*female surgeon/s*),
biologinka/ki (f sing/pl) (*female biologist/s*),
psihologinka/ki (f sing/pl) (*female psychologist/s*),
pedagoginka/ki (f sing/pl) (*female pedagogue/s*),
filozfinka/ki (f sing pl) (*female philosopger/s*).

Likewise, the plural masculine nouns forms are used for a group of both males and females:

(14) *Nashite nastavnici* (m f pl) *dojdoa na sostankot* (*Our teachers* m f pl *came to the meeting*).

When used with the form of the feminine noun, the masculine noun forms denote only males:

(15) *Nashite nastavnichki* (f pl) *i nastavnici* (m pl) *dojdoa na sostanokot* (*Our teachers* f pl *and teachers* m pl *come to the meeting*).

The feminine noun forms signify only females:

(16) *Nashite nastavnichki* (f pl) *dodjoa na sostanokot* (*Our teachers* f pl *came to the meeting*).

Even though many of these nouns have a plural feminine form, it seems that the plural masculine generic usage – traditionally used to denote both sexes, is the leading form. In the Higher Education Law (2018) mentioned before, the plural masculine form *students* (*students*) is registered in 137 instances, and the plural feminine nouns *studentki* (*female teachers*) only in 2 cases. At the same time, the masculine plural form *profesori* (*teachers*) is encountered in 46 examples, and the plural feminine nouns *profesorki* (*female teachers*) in 0 cases. However, if there are feminine plural forms, they should certainly be used.

The following confirms the natural/grammatical gender conflict in nouns denoting profession/role even more and shows the consequences of not using the proper feminine form. Consider these four examples:

(17) *Tie go* (m) *povikaa ministerot* (m) *Petrovski* (m) (*They invited minister* (m) *Petrovski* m),
(18) *Tie ja* (f) povikaa *ministerot* (m) *Petrovska* (f) (*They invited minister* (m) *Petrovska* (f),
(19) *Tie ja* (f) *povikaa ministerkata* (f) *Petrovski* (m) (*They invited minister* (f) *Petrovski* (m),
(20) *Tie ja* (f) *povikaa ministerkata* (f) *Petrovska* (f) (*They invited minister* (f) *Petrovska* (f).

Example (17) indicates gender concordance, showing that the Macedonian language's short pronoun form (*go*), the noun (*ministerot*), and the surname (*Petrovski*) have the same gender (m), and additionally, the noun signifies the minister's sex (male). Thus, this example – with the language norm accuracy, gives

no space for confusion, displaying natural/grammatical gender agreement. Example (20) demonstrates the same conformity as the short pronoun form (*ja*), the noun (*ministerkata*), and the surname (*Petrovska*) have the same gender and the noun reveals the ministers' sex (female) as well.

Conversely, case (18) points to gender disagreement, since the short pronoun form (*ja*), the noun (*ministerot*), and the *surname* (*Petrovska*) do not have the same gender. While the short pronoun form and the surname express feminine gender, the noun *minister*, which can alternately be used for both sexes, and is in this example used for the female sex, does, in its origin, designate masculine gender and the minister's sex as male. Leading to inaccuracy and statement awkwardness, so alien to the spirit of the Macedonian language, this discrepancy leads to further encouragement of the feminization process, i.e., the usage of the feminine noun: *ministerkata* (f) (*the minister*).

Example (19) attests to a recently developed practice of women adding the masculine surname form to their feminine surname form or accepting only the husband's surname in the masculine form, which adds complexity to the natural/grammatical gender conflict: *Ana* (f) *Mitrevska* (f)-*Petrovski* (m), or *Biljana* (f) *Gramatkovski* (m). This practice can further enhance the natural/grammatical conflict and is directly opposed to gender-sensitive language popular debates. However, the reasons for the masculine gender surname suffixes *~o(v)ski/~e(v)ski* acceptance instead of their feminine counterparts remains unknown, and hence, it additionally blurs the current gender-sensitive language issue in the context of the Macedonian language.

Despite many researchers' propositions to avoid language bias by using dissimilar neutral gender forms, like in the English language: *chair, splitting* (*paired nouns and pronouns*), etc., in the Macedonian language as well as in Serbian (Filipović, 2011), they are not possible because their ending consonant still designates the masculine gender. Another demonstration that some propositions are unworkable is splitting. In the Macedonian language, the past indefinite time (perfect) has forms formed by the verb *to be* in the present tense and the *l-form* of the verb. Yet, the l-form, like nouns, has separate forms for the three genders. Thus, consider the following example:

> (21) *Onoj*(m)/*Onaa*(f) *dobriot*(m)/*dobrata*(f) *student*(m)/*studentka*(f) *doshol*(m)/*doshla*(f) na sostanokot (*That* (mf) *good* (mf) *student* (mf) *has attend* (mf) *the meeting*),

the sentence is full of slashes and double forms for masculine and feminine, given that each adjective, pronoun, and the l-form, have to have identical gender with the noun.

Documents

In the Republic of North Macedonia, numerous projects, manuals, reports, and recommendations touch upon the issue of gender equality. Some of them refer to equal women's and men's rights and opportunities in all sectors: political, social, legal, and economic, regardless of one's gender by birth (Achieving Gender Equality in Macedonia, 2009; Gender Equality Strategy, 2013). Some relate to gender issue inclusion in the legal system and women's representation in the

Assembly of the Republic of North Macedonia (Gavrić et al., 2020; Making Laws Work for Women and Men, 2017). Others approach the gender issues more profoundly and – examining the way women and men are presented in the national television services' program concepts and contents, they infer dominant use of masculine nouns and adjectives which refer both to women and men are considered neutral: *member of Parliament*, *Albanian*, *senator*, *candidate*, *member*, *respected*, *mayor,* etc. (Gender in television programs, 2017). They confirm the blindness of the Free legal aid law, which encourages the masculine forms (Delevska & Danova, 2021; Ristevska, 2020), stressing out the "annulment of gender differences" and the apparent use of the feminine plural form of some nouns only in the reference "to certain professions that follow the horizontal segregation patterns, such as teachers, nurses, hygienists, textile workers." In addition, these documents recommend measures against sexism, particularly, regarding the language, i.e. using masculine and feminine title forms for addressing and promoting non-sexist language in all sectors, especially in the public and the audiovisual ones (OSCE, 2021; Recommendation of the Committee of ministers, 2017*;* Recommendation of the Committee of ministers, 2019; Sproule et al., 2019).

The National Strategy on Gender Equality (2021–2026) is a basic and strategic document, resting upon the Macedonian Constitution, which guarantees citizens' rights and freedoms, regardless of sex, race, national and religious beliefs, and social professions/roles. It promotes gender equality reinforcing the role of women and recognizes that gender equality is among the key factors of societal prosperity. It also considers many European Councils' standards, instruments, and recommendations, and analyzes women's representation in several sectors, such as economy, agriculture, politics, sport, health, education, science, etc. Concerning gender-sensitive language, this document uses feminine nouns in singular/plural forms:

(22) *koordinatorki* (*female coordinators*),
pratenichki (*female Parliament's members*),
sportistki (*female sportist*),
sovetnichki (*female councelors*),
agjutantka (*female adjutant officer*).

as well as plural masculine forms:

(23) *rabotodavachi* (*employers*).

Yet, singular masculine nouns are present:

(24) *posvoitel* (*foster parent*),

and the singular/plural form noun *zhena*/*zheni* (*woman*/*women*) is followed by the singular/plural feminine form of the masculine noun:

(25) *zhena pretsedatelka* (*woman president*)
zheni zemjodelki (*women agriculturists*),
zhenite zatvorenichki (*women prisoners*),

zhenite sportistki (*women sportists*),
zhenite penzionerki (*women retirees*).

This document contains the phrases:

(26) *zhenite kako investitorki i pretpriemachki* (*women as investors and entrepreneurs*)

and sentences like:

(27) *Na pozicija komandant ima 21 zhena* (*There is 21 women holding the position commander*);
…7 zheni oficeri… (*7 women officers*);
brojot na zheni so chin polkovnik… (*the number of women holding the rank colonel…*);

The National Strategy (2021–2026), mentions the notion of sexism when referring to textbooks that contain stereotypical information about women and discriminatory content but it does not tackle the inequality demonstrated in the language itself. However, the National Strategy does make a huge step forward by recognizing women as equal to men and displaying their potential in the use of gender-neutral language. Thus, the used feminine nouns (22) have a vital role in the consolidation of such derivation and their future use in the public discourse. Yet, masculine generic singular/plural forms (23), (24) are present although their feminine correlates exist. Furthermore, there are even models (25), (26), (*the word women + plural feminine nouns' forms*), which suggest that the Strategy draws on English materials because these models are seen as a means to boost women's visibility and are specific for non-gendered language like the English language (Gibbon, 1999). These models do not apply to gendered language as the Macedonian, which uses only the singular/plural feminine forms to denote the person's sex. Example (27) highlights that the Strategy is still not 'mature' enough concerning the gender-neutral language, failing to use their feminine correlates:

(28) *komandantki* (*female commanders*),
oficerki (*female officers*),
polkovnichki (*female colonels*).

Conclusion

The research results vigorously demonstrate that the singular masculine nouns denoting profession/role although imposed to refer to both sexes, in fact, adjunct to women's disbarring and their elimination from social life. As for the plural masculine nouns, designating profession/role obtruded to attribute females and males enforces their usage as a neutral gender form, even though feminine plural forms exist. Hence, there is a need for further elaboration on the reasons why they are not widely exploited, conscious of the fact that they assign to the lexical symmetry and dispense women's societal incorporation. Further, the findings related to the feminine derivates signifying females suggest that the offered forms, although recognized as forms that accredit women's value and yield their equal

rights with men, generate humorous and detracting nuances. Yet, their more frequent and disclosed usage will reinforce and consolidate them in people's consciousness, leading to their comprehension as forms that accompany women's identical societal encompassment as men.

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