

Feminine role nouns: A focus on Romanian and English

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The aim of this paper is to shed some light on the influence of gender stereotypes and the role played by the prestige of professions in evaluating the role nouns. The study looks at two languages which differ in their encoding of gender – English (a semantic gender language) and Romanian (a grammatical gender language). Four experimental studies were developed. The results confirm our main hypotheses: 1. gender stereotypes play a crucial part in evaluating role nouns; 2. the masculine form is used for more prestigious professions, while the feminine form is primarily used for stereotypically feminine, less prestigious role nouns.

Keywords: role nouns, gender stereotypes, occupational prestige, masculine, feminine

1. Introduction

In Romanian, a grammatical gender language, role nouns have both feminine and masculine forms, while in English, a semantic gender language, they are neutral with respect to gender. In both Romance and Germanic languages, the masculine form has been often used to refer to female individuals, especially in the case of prestigious professions which were inaccessible to women in the past (Mucchi-Faina 2005). The masculine form is also used as a generic form when referring to groups of individuals with mixed genders, the motivation given by linguists for this choice being that the value of this form is neutral. Several studies conducted in grammatical gender languages prove that the value of the generic masculine is, most of the times, purely masculine (Gygax and Gabriel 2008; Gygax et al. 2008; Levy et al. 2014; Richy and Burnett 2021; Zunino and Stetie 2022). Moreover, gender stereotypes, which are deeply entrenched in our contemporary society, play a major role in the choice of these forms. Gender stereotypes are defined as

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“relatively fixed, overly simplified concepts of the attitudes and behaviors considered normal and appropriate for a male or female in a particular culture” (APA Dictionary of Psychology 2015, 451). Numerous studies in the literature demonstrate that gender stereotypes are activated in people’s mental representations as soon as role nouns are encountered (Carreiras et al. 1996; Oakhill et al. 2005; Reynolds et al. 2006).

The process of stereotyping is often viewed negatively because it represents a reductive categorization of people, which leaves little room for individuality and variation (Lindvall-Östling et al. 2020, 568). Even more problematic, stereotypes are constantly perpetuated through language, which in turn favours the perpetuation of traditional gender identities. In recent years, however, according to Cameron (2014, 294), “sociolinguists have tended to emphasize speakers’ agency in using linguistic resources to construct identities, but we should not forget that their choices are constrained by the nature of the available resources”. In other words, we need an array of appropriate linguistic elements, so that we are able to construct an identity which adequately represents ourselves. This claim is particularly relevant in the case of role nouns. Individuals should not be constrained by linguistic resources when creating their identity: the feminine, masculine or neutral options should be available to one’s private and public personae equally. As we have previously claimed, gender stereotypes account for the use of the masculine form when referring to women, especially in the case of prestigious professions. This has negative consequences since gender identity, a fundamental part of one’s identity, becomes invisible at a linguistic level. So, rather than “a stable structure located primarily in the individual psyche or in fixed social categories”, identity is viewed by linguists as product of social action, and especially of language (Bucholtz and Hall 2005, 586). In this sense, language is seen by recent researchers as an identity building mechanism, which, used in inaccurate ways, can harm people, making them invisible: since their identity cannot be truthfully reflected by language, it is diminished and unrecognized. Thus, the notion of ‘(in)visibility’ is extremely relevant for gender and language research, especially when related to identity construction. Findings clearly confirm that women do not feel the sense of belonging to a group when only the masculine form is used in job advertisements/interviews: they feel reluctant to apply to the respective jobs, believing that the advertisements do not target them (Bem and Bem 1973, Stout and Dasgupta 2011). This type of invisibility leads to undermined self-confidence and self-perception, triggering feelings of inadequacy and self-doubt, what Clance and Imes (1978) define as ‘the impostor phenomenon’. Additionally, the masculine form to refer to feminine job titles does not mirror the present social realities in

which women and men should have equal job opportunities and where the boundary between female-dominated professions and male-dominated professions is not so sharply defined.

2. Language and gender

This section discusses the treatment of the grammatical category of gender in English and Romanian.

2.1. Grammatical gender in English

The system of present-day English is based on semantic criteria and can be regarded as a pronominal gender system, since, with the exception of a few pairs of role nouns such as ‘actor/actress’, third-person singular personal, possessive and reflexive pronouns are the only markers for gender (Corbett 1991, 12). Although the pronoun ‘he’ has been regarded as a generic one for centuries (Curzan 2003), the attitude towards the generic ‘he’ as inclusive has progressively changed as, starting with the 1960s, it was increasingly perceived as an expression of sexist bias by second-wave feminists. Its proponents vehemently rejected this use of the pronoun, arguing that it cannot be both generic and masculine at the same time (Paterson 2014, 2). The issue has received significant attention in the 21st century. Although the use of generic ‘he’ is still present in the language, neutralization is proposed as one of the strategies for gender-fair language (GFL), with the pronoun ‘they’ as an epicene pronoun. According to Mazzaggio (2024, 93), the process of neutralization “involves replacing explicitly gendered terms that default to masculine with unmarked forms that do not assume any gender”. Apart from the use of the singular pronoun ‘they’ when gender is irrelevant or unknown, attempts to achieve gender-fair language also target role nouns whose gender is encoded in the suffix ‘-man’, usually associated with male-dominated fields. Instead, gender-unmarked forms (‘police officer’ vs. ‘policeman’) are proposed (Sczensy et al. 2016, 2).

Currently, OED (Oxford English Dictionary) acknowledges the use of ‘they’ as a singular pronoun, when the antecedent is “unknown, irrelevant, or nonbinary, or where gender needs to be concealed”². In 2019, Merriam-Webster also recognized ‘they’ as a singular, non-gender-specific pronoun. Moreover, the seventh edition of the American Psychological Association guide (APA 2020) explicitly supports singular ‘they’, both for identified individuals and as a generic singular (Bradley

² <https://www.oed.com/discover/a-brief-history-of-singular-they/>

2020, 2). Sczesny et al. (2016, 3) claim that “neutralization has been recommended especially for natural gender languages and genderless languages, as it is fairly easy to avoid gender markings in these languages”. On the other hand, in grammatical gender languages such as Romanian, an important strategy proposed in the process of achieving GFL is feminization. It involves “the deliberate use of feminine forms to make female referents visible and challenge the default assumption of males as the norm” (Mazzaggio 2024, 93). Nevertheless, Vişan (2024; 2026) claims that strategies of neutralization for Romanian have also been discussed in the recent years, taking English as a model. According to the author, “Romanian linguists who act as policymakers see feminization as a ‘tendency’ of the Romanian language”, but their current attitude to neutralization and to the linguistic inclusion of non-binary forms is not a favorable one, being considered unnatural or ungrammatical (Vişan 2026, 277).

2.2. Grammatical gender in Romanian

Romanian is a grammatical gender language, with a rich morphological system visible on nouns and their modifiers, which exhibit gender agreement with the noun. Several studies (Bateman and Polinsky 2010, Croitor and Giurgea 2009) argue in favour of a two-gender system for Romanian, as in other Romance languages, contrasting opposing views and traditional analyses that recognize three genders: feminine, masculine and neuter. The main claim is that there are only two agreement patterns in the singular and plural: masculine and feminine. Neuter nouns follow the masculine pattern in the singular and the feminine pattern in the plural, they do not have their own dedicated marking, nor do they have their own agreement pattern (Bateman and Polinsky 2010, 44). What is relevant for our discussion is that in Romanian, nouns and their modifiers have different morphological inflections for masculine and feminine, which means that most job titles in Romanian have feminine and masculine forms. However, there is a preference for the use of the masculine form to refer to individual female referents and generic groups, especially in the case of prestigious occupations.

For some time now, linguists have debated the possibility of a gender-fair language reform, with feminization as a strategy to eliminate gender bias, making women more visible through language. This strategy is particularly useful in grammatical gender languages, which encode the gender on nouns (French: Gygax et al. 2008, 2012, Levy et al. 2014, Italian and German: Horvath et al. 2016). Vişan (2026, 277) discusses the tendency towards a more gender-inclusive language in Romanian, noticing an increased inclusion of feminine forms in dictionaries. The

Romanian language version of the European Parliament guidelines recommends using the feminine form whenever referring to specific female individuals and using the generic masculine as little as possible³. Suffixes such as ‘-easă’ (‘croitoreasă’ tailor.F.), ‘-iță’ (‘doctoriță’ doctor.F.), ‘-ă’ (‘avocată’ lawyer.F.) are among the most common ones used in the formation of feminine counterparts. However, the use of these suffixes is restricted for reasons which are not related to structural concerns. Such suffixes are often regarded as colloquial, pejorative or out of use (Joița 2016; Mîrzea Vasile and Dinică 2019; Pețan 2003; Ușurelu 2002). For instance, Pețan (2003, 249) notices that some nouns inflected with old suffixes such as ‘-easă’ are regarded as pejorative or cannot designate job titles because the nouns have the meaning ‘the wife of’: ‘generăleasă’ (general.F.), ‘colonelă/coloneleasă’ (colonel.F.) etc. As a consequence, many women nowadays prefer being referred to by the masculine form, believing that it adds prestige to their status, although the feminine form of most role nouns has been present in the language for decades or could be easily adopted.

Romanian, however, is not an isolated case. There are other Romance languages in which certain suffixes are regarded as pejorative. It is worth mentioning that, in a similar way, the suffix ‘-essa’ is problematic for Italian in that it is often viewed as derogatory. Experimental studies revealed that women referred to by the title ‘professoressa’ obtained less agreement than men referred to by the corresponding title and were considered less reliable than women who were referred to by the generic masculine (Mucchi-Faina and Barro 2001, in Mucchi-Faina 2005, 18). Another study by Merkel et al. (2012) compared the masculine form (MF) with traditional forms of feminization (TFF) – ‘avocatessa’ and with modern forms of feminization (ModFF) – ‘avocata’ and the results showed status loss only in the case of the TFF, even if the ModFF were considered a-grammatical (317). Ușurelu (2002) noted something similar in Romanian: since the suffixes ‘-iță’ and ‘-easă’ are often seen as colloquial, the stylistically neutral suffix ‘-ă’ has been adopted, but not all new forms are accepted by speakers. According to Pețan (2003, 250), the most resistant domains to feminization in Romanian are the military, legal and medical domains, all male-dominated fields. Reaching gender equality at a linguistic level may prove to be long and difficult, but only through a consistent and persistent use can feminine forms become familiar to people and not be regarded as outdated or pejorative.

³ https://www.europarl.europa.eu/cmsdata/288152/GNL_Guidelines_RO-original.pdf

3. Experimental studies

Considering that in Western Europe there is interest in GFL both at the political level (as shown in EU recommendations) and at the linguistic level (as illustrated by numerous studies published on this topic), it is perhaps surprising that in Romania this subject has attracted little interest in either area. In this context, I conducted four experimental studies, aiming to test two hypotheses: 1. gender stereotypes play a crucial part in evaluating role nouns; 2. the masculine form is used for more prestigious professions, while the feminine is primarily used for stereotypically feminine, less prestigious role nouns. The same role nouns were used across these experiments: 4 stereotypically feminine nouns: 'nurse', 'secretary', 'cashier', 'tailor'; 4 stereotypically masculine nouns: 'politician', 'minister', 'president', 'lawyer'; 4 stereotypically neutral nouns: 'vet', 'reporter', 'swimmer', 'employee'. The stereotypicality of these nouns was verified against a study conducted by Misersky et al. (2014) who collected norms on the gender stereotypicality of an extensive list of role nouns in several languages.

3.1. Study 1

The first study investigates gender stereotypes in English, having personal pronouns as a target. Given that in English gender is not morphologically encoded for most role nouns, background knowledge is crucial for establishing their gender. This process often mirrors gender stereotypes deeply rooted in present-day culture. The aim of this study was to test the first hypothesis and to compare the results of native English participants with those of Romanian participants. Seventy-three participants took part in this study. There were thirty-seven Romanian speakers (29F, 6M, 2OTHER), students at the English Department, University of Bucharest (proficient in English). Also, there were thirty-six native English speakers (29F, 7M) living in the UK. The participants were asked to fill in the gaps with the pronoun that first comes to their mind (the most suitable one) when reading 12 sentences which include the 12 role nouns mentioned above (see examples 1a, 1b). Moreover, there were 12 filler sentences with unambiguous kinship terms, which have the same structure as the test sentences (1c, 1d). The verbs which follow the gap always require an animate participant to clearly show that the subject of the first clause, the role noun, is the antecedent of the target pronoun. Moreover, the past tense form of the verbs in the second clause allows the insertion of any of the three pronouns ('she'/'he'/'they').

- (1) a. A politician should be allowed to speak at the meeting, even if __ arrived later than others.
b. A nurse should arrive on time when the shift starts, even if __ had personal issues at home.
c. A grandmother should regularly go for check-ups, even if __ didn't face health issues.
d. A father should not burn the scrambled eggs, even if __ rushed to an important meeting.

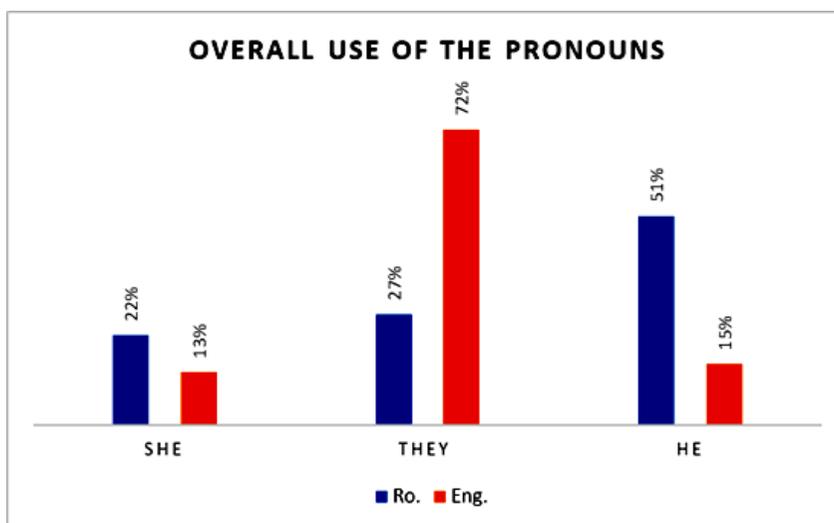


Figure 1. Study 1 – overall use of the pronouns

The results show that gender stereotypes play an important part for both groups, but not to the same extent. Native speakers prefer the neutral pronoun 'they' in the majority of cases, irrespective of the stereotypicality of the role noun (see Figure 1). This is in line with previous studies (Noll et al. 2018) and shows that the neutral pronoun is clearly present in English. The influence of gender stereotypes is more evident in the case of Romanian speakers, who are L2 speakers of English, more exposed to traditional grammars and lack the presence of a neutral pronoun in their native tongue. Thus, the Romanian participants favoured the pronoun 'he' for stereotypically masculine and neutral role nouns, while the pronoun 'she' was used for stereotypically feminine role nouns in high percentages. Moreover, the pronoun 'she' was mainly used for the role nouns 'nurse' and 'secretary' by both groups. This pattern will be observed in further studies as well.

3.2. Study 2

The second study explores gender stereotypes in translation, with English as a source language and Romanian as a target language. We have seen that, in Romanian, gender is morphologically encoded on nouns. Thus, for most role nouns, the feminine form is already present in the language. In case it is not, it could be easily adopted through feminization, a gender-fair language strategy. Nevertheless, many role nouns in Romanian resist feminization, for reasons that have to do with prestige and social status. Thus, we can assume that the unaccepted terms are in conflict with cultural stereotypes, not with language itself. The aim of the study was to test this hypothesis. Nineteen MA students (14F; 5M) from the English department, University of Bucharest, took part in this experiment. They were all Romanian speakers, proficient in English. Participants were required to translate 12 passages including the same 12 role nouns from English to Romanian. No filler sentences were included in this experiment. The pieces of text were adapted from Wikipedia or invented for the purpose of this study. The proper name of the real/fictitious character appears in the passages, as well as the pronoun 'she', to make it clear that the role noun refers to a female individual. The passages have the same structure: the first sentence has the proper name as a subject, while the second sentence has the pronoun 'she' as a subject:

- (2) a. **Olga** Coen is a cashier. **She** knows everything about our special offers.
b. **Nadia** Bergman is a reporter. **She's** working on an important investigation at the moment.
c. **Iris Xiomara** Castro is the president of Honduras. **She** inherited a deeply corrupt state apparatus.

(adapted from Wikipedia https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xiomara_Castro)

The results are in line with the hypothesis: the participants used the masculine form to translate stereotypically masculine and neutral role nouns in high percentages. With respect to stereotypically masculine role nouns, 'minister' was the most resistant to feminization (89% masculine forms), followed by 'president' (68%), 'lawyer' (53%) and 'politician' (42%) (see Figure 2). There was variation in the case of stereotypically neutral role nouns: while 'vet' was mostly translated with the masculine form (89%, the same percentage as for the noun 'minister'), 'swimmer' was translated with the feminine form by all participants.

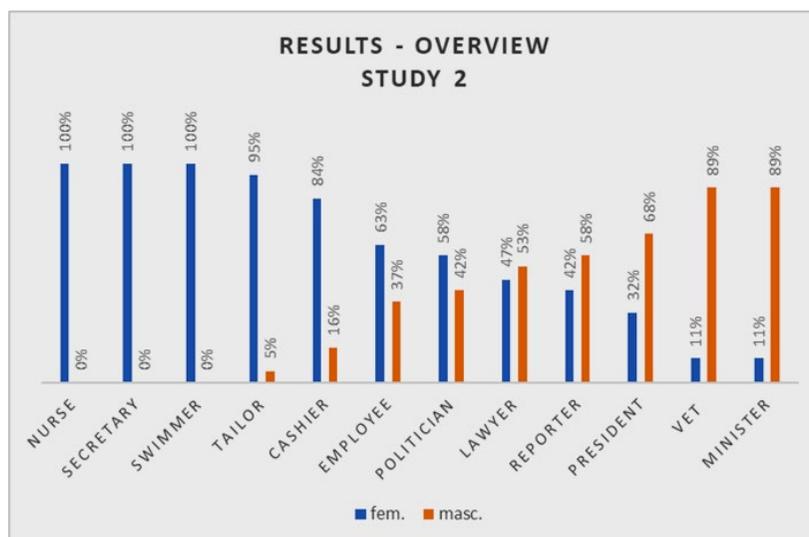


Figure 2. Results Study 2

Regarding feminine role nouns, the feminine form was used in the majority of cases (over 84%), proving that the sociocultural background plays an important part. Moreover, the nouns 'nurse' and 'secretary' were translated using the feminine by all participants, confirming previous findings and the stereotypicality scores found by Misersky et al. (2014).

3.3. Study 3

The third study is closely connected to the second one. Its aim was to investigate whether the participants' responses would be similar to those in Study 2, when the sentences are provided in Romanian from the beginning. When translating from a semantic gender language to a grammatical gender language, participants may be influenced by the lack of morphological markers on the nouns and opt for the masculine form more easily. In order to rule out this possibility and have more accurate results, the sentences were provided in Romanian. Forty-one Romanian participants took part in this experiment, native speakers of Romanian, proficient in English. The method used in this study was a multiple-choice task, in which the participants had to choose between the two variants of the target role nouns: the feminine and masculine forms. The passages were the Romanian variants of those presented in Study 2. No filler sentences were included. Again, the first part of each passage includes the proper name of the real/fictitious character. Instead of the role

noun, there is a gap. The second part of each passage includes the pronoun *ea* ('she'). Since Romanian is a pro-drop language, this pronoun could have been omitted. However, as in Study 2, we wanted to make it clear that the role noun refers to a woman occupying that position. Half of the experimental items have the feminine variant first, while the other half have the masculine variant first, to ensure that their position would not bias the participants' responses:

- (3) a. *Olga Coen este _____. Ea știe totul despre ofertele noastre speciale. (casier/casieră)*
 'Olga Coen is _____. She knows everything about our special offers. (cashier.M./cashier.F.)'
- b. *Nadia Bergman este _____. În acest moment, ea lucrează la o anchetă importantă. (reporteră/reporter)*
 'Nadia Bergman is a _____. She's working on an important investigation at the moment. (reporter.F./reporter.M.)'

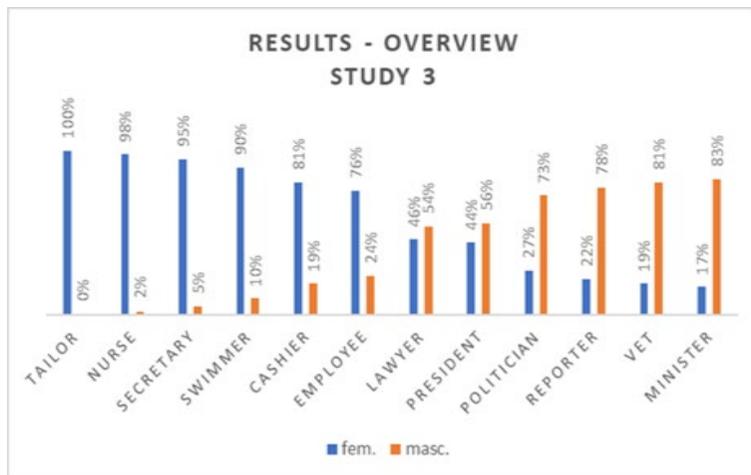


Figure 3. Results Study 3

The results are in line with Study 2 (see Figure 3). Overall, these two studies demonstrate that speakers are influenced by the sociocultural background in their translation of role nouns from English to Romanian. Moreover, the experiments show variation within categories: for instance, the stereotypically neutral role noun 'swimmer' was translated using the feminine form in high percentages, while 'vet' was the most resistant to feminization in this category (Study 2 – 89% masculine forms; Study 1 – 81% masculine forms). With respect to stereotypically masculine

role nouns, ‘lawyer’ had the highest percentage of feminine forms, while ‘minister’ had the lowest percentage in both studies. The low usage of feminine forms for these nouns notwithstanding, the fact that it is higher than 0% demonstrates that the forms are present in the language. However, not one single role noun in this category reached 50% of feminine forms. This is particularly striking when looking at the extremely high percentages of feminine forms for stereotypically feminine role nouns: this is where gender stereotypes come into play. Participants mainly used the masculine form for professions which were not accessible to women in the past, their responses reflecting traditional gender hierarchies.

3.4. Study 4

The fourth study investigated gender mismatches in partitive constructions, having as starting point other studies conducted in grammatical gender languages, such as French, German and Italian: Sleeman and Ihsane (2016), Westveer, Sleeman and Aboh (2021), Westveer (2021), Zanolli (2022). These studies distinguish between grammatical agreement and semantic agreement in partitive constructions. Grammatical agreement entails a match in gender between the partitive set and subset, as predicted by their formal grammatical properties (See example 4a.); semantic agreement entails a mismatch in gender between the partitive set and subset, because the subset’s gender agrees with the referent’s sex (4b) (Zanolli 2022, 292):

- (4) a. **Uno degli attori presenti è Elisabetta Tucci.** (grammatical agreement)
 One.M.SG. of the.M.PL. present.M.PL. actors.M.PL. is Elizabeth Tucci.
 ‘One of the present actors is Elisabetta Tucci.’
- b. **Una degli attori presenti è Elisabetta Tucci.** (semantic agreement)
 One.F.SG. of the.M.PL. present.M.PL. actors.M.PL. is Elizabeth Tucci.
 ‘One of the present actors is Elisabetta Tucci.’

(taken from Zanolli 2022, 297)

The results revealed grammatical agreement was preferred in quantified partitives, while semantic agreement in superlative partitives. These issues have been investigated in Romanian by Tănase-Dogaru (2022), who offers a classification of Romanian animate nouns, following the criteria in Sleeman and Ihsane (2016): Class A – suppletive forms (*un frate* ‘a brother’ – *o soră* ‘a sister’); Class B – alternating forms (*croitor* ‘a tailor.M.’ – *croitoreasă* ‘a tailor.F.’); Class C – epicene forms (*decan* ‘dean’); Class D – fixed-gender forms (*persoană* ‘person.F.’) (Tănase-Dogaru 2022, 9). The author’s main claim is that in Romanian, gender mismatches

are possible with class B and class C nouns, in both quantified and superlative partitive constructions (12).

The present study takes into account quantified partitives in Romanian, aiming to investigate the participants' preference for semantic/grammatical agreement. The role nouns used in this study are in class B, having alternating forms. The test sentences are split into two conditions. In Condition 1, the experimental items have three main elements: the referent, the quantifier subset and the partitive set made up of role nouns (see examples 5a, 5b). Additionally, in Condition 2, the sentences take the form of a passive, in which the past participle must agree in gender with the referent, the subject of the sentence. The quantifier subset and the partitive set are placed inside an appositive construction (5c, 5d):

(5) **Condition 1:**

referent + the quantifier subset + the partitive set (role nouns.PL)

- a. Adriana Hâncu is one of the nurses.
- b. Mara Badea is one of the lawyers.

Condition 2:

referent + the quantifier subset + the partitive set (role nouns.PL) + participle

- c. Adriana Hâncu, one of the nurses, was appreciated by the old lady.
- d. Maria Badea, one of the lawyers, was seen at the movie premiere.

Twenty-six participants (21F, 4M, 1OTHER) took part in this study. They were all native Romanian speakers, proficient in English. The method used was a translation task from English to Romanian. The participants had around 40 minutes to translate 24 test sentences, equally divided into two conditions. The test sentences contain the same role nouns as in the other experiments. Additionally, the participants were asked to translate 24 filler sentences with unambiguous kinship terms, in order to keep them blind to the purpose of the experiment. The structure of the filler sentences is the same:

(5) **Filler sentences – Condition 1:**

- e. Georgiana Hoinic is one of the mothers.
- f. Ana Moise is one of the aunts.

Filler sentences – Condition 2:

- g. Georgiana Hoinic, one of the mothers, was contacted by the teacher.
- h. Ana Moise, one of the aunts, was arrested yesterday after the trial.

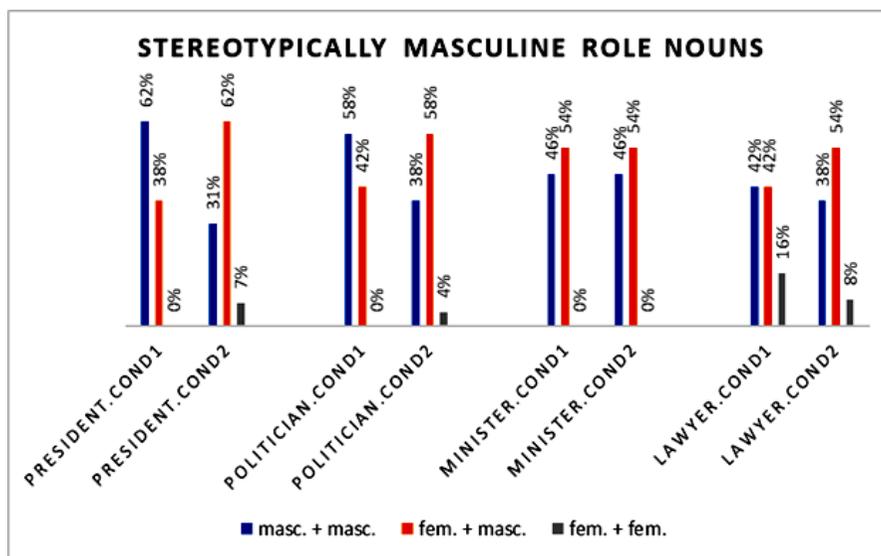


Figure 4. Results Study 4 – stereotypically masculine role nouns

With respect to stereotypically masculine role nouns, the nouns in the partitive sets were mainly translated using the masculine plural form. For Condition 1, the participants preferred the masculine form of the quantifier subset, which agrees in gender with the partitive set, resulting in grammatical agreement. The highest percentage of masculine forms was observed with the noun ‘president’ – 62%, followed by ‘politician’ (58%), ‘minister’ (46%) and ‘lawyer’ (42%). However, it is worth noticing that the feminine form of the quantifier subset was also significantly used (see Figure 4).

An increase in these feminine forms was observed in Condition 2, when the participle was also present in the sentences, favouring semantic agreement: for all four nouns, the feminine form was used by more than half of the participants: ‘president’ (62%), ‘politician’ (58%), ‘minister’ (54%), ‘lawyer’ (54%). Out of these four role nouns, ‘lawyer’ deserves some special attention: it was the only noun whose partitive set was translated using the feminine plural form in both conditions, in addition to using the feminine form of the quantifier subset, resulting in both grammatical and semantic agreement. Although the percentages were not high, this is in line with the Studies 2 and 3, proving once again that the feminine form of the noun ‘lawyer’ is consistently present in Romanian:

- (6) ***Maria Badea este una dintre avocate.*** (grammatical + semantic agreement)
 Maria Badea is one.F.SG. of the lawyers.F.PL.
 ‘Maria Badea is one of the lawyers.’

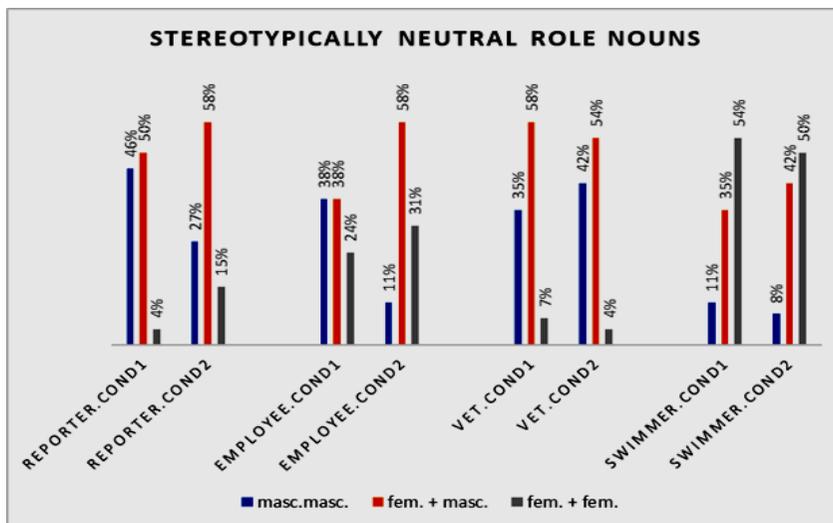


Figure 5. Results Study 4 – stereotypically neutral role nouns

The participants' responses varied in their treatment of stereotypically neutral role nouns. Again, there was an increase of feminine forms of the quantifier subset in Condition 2 for the majority of role nouns, an exception being 'vet' (see Figure 5). Overall, semantic agreement was favoured in both conditions. Moreover, the feminine plural form of stereotypically neutral role nouns was used to translate the partitive set, although not to the same extent. Not surprisingly, the partitive set was translated using the feminine plural form of the noun 'swimmer' by more than half of the participants in both conditions. The nouns 'reporter' and 'vet' had the highest percentages of masculine forms of the quantifier subset, as well as the lowest percentages of feminine forms of the partitive set. These results are in line with the findings in Studies 2 and 3.

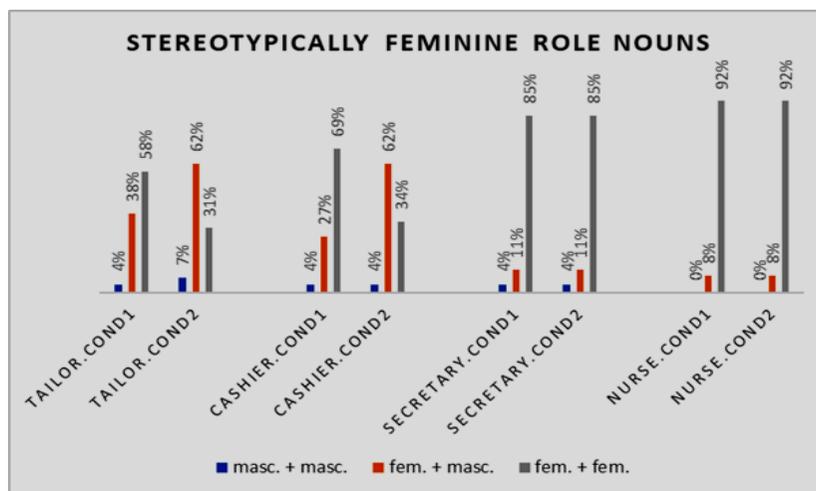


Figure 6. Results Study 4 – stereotypically feminine role nouns

The use of the masculine form of the quantifier subset was minimal across all stereotypically feminine role nouns: the feminine form was used in almost every instance, irrespective of the condition. Moreover, the feminine form of the partitive set was used in the majority of cases, across all four role nouns, resulting in both grammatical and semantic agreement (see Figure 6). The most representative examples are ‘nurse’ (92%) and ‘secretary’ (85%). These results are in line with previous findings.

Overall, the study shows that gender mismatches are possible in quantified partitive constructions in Romanian. Moreover, the prestige of role nouns plays an important part when translating the quantifier subset associated with them. The participants’ use of the masculine form of the quantifier subset and of the partitive set was primarily observed with stereotypically masculine role nouns, as well as with some stereotypically neutral role nouns, more resistant to feminization (‘vet’, ‘reporter’). The use of the feminine form increased in Condition 2, due to the additional cues present in the sentences. The findings also demonstrate that the influence of gender stereotypes is particularly pronounced in the case of stereotypically feminine role nouns, to the extent that the feminine plural form is employed to refer to a group of individuals, even when the masculine plural form is the default option, and is regarded as inclusive of both the feminine and masculine forms. Influenced by gender stereotypes, the participants likely assumed that the entire group was composed of female individuals, which resulted in both grammatical and semantic agreement. For further research, it would be interesting to investigate gender mismatches in superlative partitives in Romanian and

compare results with Sleeman and Ihsane (2016), Westveer, Sleeman and Aboh (2021), Westveer (2021).

4. Final remarks

The experiments presented in this paper validate the two main hypotheses that we set out to investigate: 1. gender stereotypes play a significant role in evaluating role nouns; 2. the masculine form is used for more prestigious professions, while the feminine form is primarily used for stereotypically feminine, less prestigious role nouns. The findings in Study 1 reveal that, when the gender of the fictitious character is not known, speakers are influenced by gender stereotypes in their choice of pronouns. This influence was noted in the responses of both native and non-native speakers, although not to the same extent; it was more evident in the case of Romanian speakers. The findings in Study 2 show that speakers are influenced by the sociocultural background in their translation of role nouns from English to Romanian. These findings are confirmed by Study 3, in which participants had to choose between the two forms, provided in Romanian. These tendencies are also confirmed by the findings in Study 4. Gender stereotypes and the prestige of role nouns played an important part in participants' translations of both the quantifier subset and the partitive set. The masculine form was predominantly used in both cases for stereotypically masculine role nouns. The feminine form was used in high percentages for stereotypically feminine role nouns, even when translating the partitive set, to the point of disregarding the default masculine plural form used for referring to groups of individuals.

The studies discussed in this article show that speakers' evaluation of role nouns is unconsciously influenced by gender stereotypes. In other words, our expectations regarding how women and men should behave or speak are shaped by gender stereotypes, which, in turn, influence our ideas about what careers these individuals should pursue. Moreover, the studies investigating Romanian, a grammatical gender language, show that the feminine form is indeed present in the language, but its use is restricted for reasons of prestige. If this form were not "natural" to the language, its presence would be insignificant across all categories of role nouns, irrespective of their stereotypicality. However, the high prevalence of feminine forms of stereotypically feminine role nouns suggests that it is not restricted by the linguistic system itself or structural concerns, but rather by gender stereotypes and sociocultural factors.

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