

**FEMININITIVES AND GENDER-SENSITIVE LANGUAGE:
PROBLEMS OF TRANSLATION AND SOCIAL PERCEPTION**

The article explores the formation and use of femininitives in contemporary Ukrainian, their historical background, and linguistic models of derivation. It examines the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of gender-sensitive language, as well as the challenges of translating Ukrainian femininitives into other languages. The paper also analyzes different dimensions of their perception in society, alongside the influence of media and state institutions on their normalization. It is emphasized that current trends reflect not only linguistic change but also a broader struggle for equality and the visibility of women in professional domains.

Keywords: *femininitives, gender-sensitive language, translation, Ukrainian language, sociolinguistics, media, gender equality.*

У статті досліджуються особливості формування та використання фемінітивів у сучасній українській мові, їхнє історичне підґрунтя та лінгвістичні моделі творення. Розглядаються соціальні, культурні та психологічні аспекти вживання гендерно-чутливої мови, а також труднощі перекладу українських фемінітивів іншими мовами. Проаналізовано різні аспекти їхнього сприйняття в суспільстві, а також вплив медіа й державних інституцій на нормалізацію їх вживання. Підкреслюється, що сучасні тенденції відображають не лише мовні зміни, а й ширший процес боротьби за рівність і видимість жінок у професійному середовищі.

Ключові слова: *фемінітиви, гендерно-чутлива мова, переклад, українська мова, соціолінгвістика, медіа, гендерна рівність.*

Language is not only a means of communication but also a tool for reflecting social reality. The way we name things, professions, and people directly influences how we perceive the world. Within this context, the issue of femininitives in contemporary Ukrainian has become particularly relevant.

Femininitives are word forms denoting women by profession, status, or social role. They represent an essential element of gender-sensitive language, intended to ensure the visibility of women in society. Many femininitives belong to the category of “potential words” (they are not found in dictionaries, but native speakers understand their meaning).

Historically, Ukrainian was not alien to femininitives. They emerged naturally and caused no resistance. Words such as *учителька* (female teacher), *дипломатка* (female diplomat), *лікарка* (female doctor), *кравчиня* (seamstress), *господиня* (hostess) coexisted organically with masculine forms and were not considered “neologisms” [5, c. 169].

However, during the Soviet period, professional nomenclature underwent an inevitable unification, where masculine forms assumed the role of “universal” designations. In official documents and public speech, it became common practice to denote representatives of both genders exclusively with masculine terms such as *лікар* (doctor), *інженер* (engineer), *професор* (professor). It was ideologically motivated by the principle of formal equality through sameness, yet it simultaneously erased women from linguistic visibility.

At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, and especially after 2014, femininitives began to revive actively. The growing societal focus on women’s rights, the rise of civic initiatives, and international influences contributed to the return of gender-sensitive language. In 2019, the National Commission on State Language Standards officially codified rules for femininitive formation, signaling a shift from discussion to regulation [2, c. 177]. Media, educational

institutions, and cultural organizations quickly adopted these changes, making new linguistic forms increasingly widespread.

From a linguistic perspective, the system of femininitives in Ukrainian is rich and flexible. The most common suffixes include:

- **-ка** (*авторка, вчителька, лікарка*),
- **-иця** (*робітниця, керівниця, учениця*),
- **-иня** (*психологиня, княгиня, хірургиня*),
- **-еса** (*поетеса, стюардеса*),
- **-ша** (*професорша, депутатша*).

The last suffix often carries a derogatory or informal connotation, illustrating how social attitudes shape linguistic variation even within the same grammatical category [4, с. 2].

At the same time, significant variability persists in usage, reflecting the ongoing search for standardized norms: for example, *мовознавиця*, *мовознавчиня*, and *мовознавка* coexist in parallel; as do *фотографка*, *фотографиня*, and *фотографеса* [5, с. 171].

Currently, the most productive suffix is **-ка**, which easily adapts to loanwords: *блогерка* (blogger), *дизайнерка* (designer), *менеджерка* (manager). However, problematic cases also arise with emerging professions: forms such as *піарниця* (PR specialist) or *стартаперка* (startup founder) remain contested, reflecting, as linguists argue, a natural “selection process” for the most convenient and acceptable variants. The study of femininitives also requires an international perspective.

In **English**, professional designations are predominantly gender-neutral (*doctor, teacher, student*). As a result, Ukrainian femininitives often lose gender markers in translation. For clarity, translators may resort to additional descriptors, e.g., *female doctor*. Similarly, *журналістка* is typically rendered as simply *journalist*, altering how the social role of female figures is represented in text [3, с. 882].

By contrast, **German** systematically differentiates professions by gender: *Lehrer – Lehrerin, Student – Studentin*. It brings it closer to Ukrainian. At the same time, modern German is experimenting with forms that capture broader gender identities, e.g., through the “gender star” (*Lehrerinnen**). Thus, the translation of femininitives extends far beyond grammar, touching on more profound cultural and social differences.

A particularly pressing issue concerns **gender bias in machine translation**. One of the most frequent errors is the distorted insertion of gender markers where none exist in the source text. For instance, machine translations often introduce stereotypical pronouns: female for childcare, male for technical professions. To address this, researchers propose strategies such as:

- the use of algorithms for gender-ambiguous rewriting;
- the development of corpora such as **GATE X-E (Gender-Ambiguous Translation Examples)**, containing sentences with multiple possible gender interpretations.

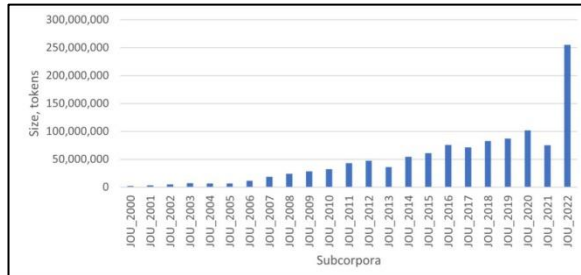
Scholars argue that assigning gender stereotypically affects not only translation quality but also reinforces cultural notions of gender roles. Tackling this issue is therefore not merely technical, but also socio-cultural [1, с. 2].

The social and psychological perception of femininitives remains polarized. Supporters view them as a tool of equality that ensures women’s linguistic representation in their professional spheres. Opponents, however, claim that some new forms sound “artificial” or even “comic.” These debates are particularly vivid on social media, where neologisms become targets of humor and memes.

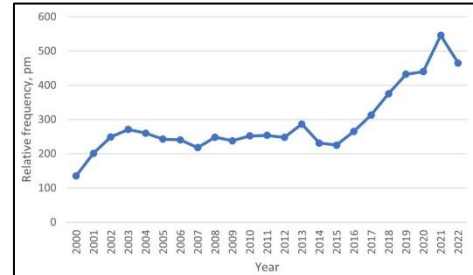
Despite official codification, a degree of resistance persists. Factors include perceptions of unfamiliarity, lack of dictionary recognition, form variability, and aesthetic rejection by some speakers. The influence of Russian also plays a role, as femininitives there are primarily restricted to colloquial speech and excluded from the literary standard. This contrasts sharply with West Slavic languages, where feminine forms are widely and regularly used.

Corpus studies indicate a sharp rise in femininitive usage after 2014, associated with the Revolution of Dignity and the onset of war. A second wave occurred in 2022, when Russia's full-scale invasion normalized the use of femininitives for women in professional and military roles [pic. 1] [4, c. 4].

Ukrainian media have also become a key driver of femininitive adoption. Leading outlets now systematically employ feminine forms of professional titles, fostering familiarity among readers. Similar practices are observed in state documents, where femininitives are recommended for addressing women directly [2, c. 177].



Picture 1. Sizes of the journalism subcorpora in GRAC, 2000-2022



Picture 2. Dynamics of 744 feminine occupational titles in newspaper texts in GRAC

Corpus-based research (using GRAC) confirms that the number of femininitives in the press has steadily increased since 2015, with annual growth of 15–24%. By 2022, the variety of forms had expanded dramatically [pic. 2] [4, c. 8].

In public discourse, responses remain mixed: support and positive attitudes coexist with criticism, though the latter is gradually diminishing. Sociological surveys suggest that, over time, most people come to accept femininitives neutrally or positively, particularly when referring to common professions.

Femininitives are not a fleeting linguistic trend but rather a restoration of tradition and a step toward modernity. Despite resistance from certain groups, their consolidation in the Ukrainian language appears irreversible. International experience demonstrates that similar processes have already occurred or are underway in other languages, situating Ukrainian within a global movement toward gender-sensitive communication. Over time, femininitives will become a natural and indispensable part of linguistic norms, striking a balance between historical heritage and the needs of contemporary society.

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