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**Asymmetrical Portrayal of Gender in Magazines for Men with Particular  
Reference to Sexuality**

**Summary**

This dissertation constitutes an academic reflection on some thought-provoking gender issues in various important and often overlapping areas, such as language, broadly understood culture and the media. In particular, it considers the spread and prominence of stereotypes in American magazines for men and their allegedly harmful effects that follow. The issue of gender is at the centre of contemporary scientific reflection, but it is also an extremely popular social topic. Not only are the matters of equality between women and men the subject of description and research, but also the problem of gender and sex-related issues have become the subject of serious media and academic discussion. However, despite the abundance of works in this field, there are still few extensive and in-depth studies devoted to the language of sex and its stereotypical entanglements. Even though, from the contemporary viewpoint, the perception of gender-determined roles seems to be anachronistic as the feminist movements, cultural transformations and customs have led to a change in the roles of both sexes and the images of women and men preserved in the minds of contemporary people, still, the picture of the sphere of sexual life is simplified in the media, what, in turn, leads to generalisations, cognitive schematicism and stereotyping. Moreover, although the thesis touches upon linguistic issues, it may also be of interest to a wider audience: representatives of many branches of the humanities and social sciences, and all those who are interested in various aspects of contemporary culture. It should be remembered that human sexuality, its forms, symptoms, features and realisations in all cultures of the world are more or less tabooed, because they are considered shameful, dangerous, controversial, sinful or immoral.

This doctoral dissertation consists of four chapters, two of which constitute its theoretical foundation of the dissertation, while the remaining two are empirical in their nature. It should be emphasised, however, that initially the author's intention was to survey the attitude of native speakers of English towards the concept of gender as well as the extent to which they

have become accustomed to linguistic sexism. Nevertheless, the enterprise appeared too demanding to handle within the assigned time span, which forced the author to limit herself to two analytical sections instead of three.

Chapter One introduces some key concepts for Cognitive Linguistics, many of which are relevant to the analytical part, such as, among others, **categorisation**, **prototype**, **stereotype**, **ICM**, **metaphor** and **metonymy**. It focuses mainly on the linguistic aspects and, to be more precise, particular attention has been paid to the fact that the aforementioned concepts have an impact on the conceptualisation of reality, which will also be presented further on. What is more, it offers some considerations regarding the fact that people should not perceive language only as a means of communication, but also as a creative reservoir. The fact that a language has a specific vocabulary and syntax means that there is a fragmentation of the world included in every human tongue.

The second chapter concerns some selected theoretical aspects of gender and its relation to language. It also takes into account the notions of **sex**, **taboo**, **euphemism**, or even **linguistic relativism** which are central to this enterprise. The issue of gender has been present in linguistic research for many years, and a relatively new science has emerged within social sciences – **gender studies** – shaped under the influence of feminist movements, which investigates cultural differences resulting from gender dissimilarities, i.e. the socio-cultural gender identity.

The main purpose of the third chapter is to propose a selective description of the language of the media, its meaning and manipulative function, which is of vital importance for the pursued research objectives. It also focuses on the description of magazines for men: “Men’s Health”, “Maxim”, “Playboy” and “Penthouse”, which constitute the research material under investigation. By examining two lexemes – *woman* and *man* – extracted from magazines published in the American lifestyle and pornographic press for men, the analysis takes into account the androcentrism reproduced in the texts, and places the concepts such as ICM, stereotype, prototype or metonymy within the context of the media discourse, providing examples of the stereotypical representation of women and men determined and contained in magazines available on the publishing market.

Finally, the fourth and last chapter is strictly empirical and it discusses metaphors and metonymies used in the magazines for men, as well as selected sex-related euphemistic expressions. In particular, it examines what images of a woman and a man in the sexual sphere are promoted by the press, which domains are used in relation to both sexes and what are the possible causes and social consequences of such a state of affair. The magazines for men are an excellent subject to study because of their popularity as self-help literature. They offer an

inestimable insight into the construction of modern male sexuality. The discovery of how men perceive and talk about sex today can be accomplished by careful examination of their language because, through various covert and overt messages, language is a powerful tool for creating norms, attitudes and behaviours. For this reason, this thesis makes an attempt to further explore the subject and focus on the lexical layer.

In the author's conviction the topic is not only attractive from the cognitive perspective but, above all, its subject matter seems useful in communication practice and, notwithstanding the fact that it is far from facile for social and cultural reasons, as the issue of gender still evokes ambivalent feelings in the average language user, ranging from irritation to neglect or even ignorance. Therefore, the main aims of the dissertation can be couched in the following terms:

- presentation of gender relations in the contemporary magazines for men;
- demonstration of the role of present-day media and their influence on the sense of obligation to adapt to traditional ideologies;
- examination of language used to encode sex-related aspects in the magazines for men, especially in terms of gender inequality and discrimination, i.e. its asymmetrical image;
- analysis of the relations between language and the construction of identities based upon metaphorical manifestations of sex.

The nature of the dissertation is interdisciplinary, as it applies approaches and theories from various fields of research: linguistics, sociolinguistics, psychology and media discourse. Although numerous accounts (see, among others, Kövecses 1986; Hines 1996, 1999; Murphy 2001) of sex-related metaphors have been published so far, the task undertaken here seems to be a worthy enterprise, as little has been said about metaphors that occur in the magazines for men and their influence on the readers' conceptualisation.

Methodological reflection is based on the analytical tools of Cognitive Linguistics, which enable the usage of the concepts of the Idealised Cognitive Model postulated by George Lakoff (1987) and the framework of conceptual metaphor and metonymy, originally proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980). Specifically, Chapter Three oscillates around the investigation procedure consisting in a detailed analysis of the source texts in order to isolate the lexemes of a *woman* and a *man*. It also focuses on the postulation that the **WOMEN ICM** and the **MEN ICM** are metonymic models covering a number of submodels. Chapter Four, in turn, adopts the view of conceptual metaphor and metonymy as basic tools to conceptualise the world. Moreover, some other works important from the point of view of this linguistic analysis, are the positions of researchers such as: Kövecses (2002, 2005, 2010, 2015, 2020); Kövecses

and Radden (1998); Kardela (2006); Geeraerts (2006, 2010); Geeraerts and Cuyckens (2010); Grady (2007); Taylor (1995); Cienki (2010). Being inspired by them, the author believes that the presence of the Conceptual Metaphor Theory may be evidenced in all the magazines subject to scrutiny, while its significant property of connecting human mind with the body, body with culture, language with culture and the brain cannot be underestimated. Additionally, Cognitive Linguistics is not primarily concerned with studying linguistic meaning for its own sake, but rather for what it can reveal about the nature of the human conceptual system. Its predominant focus on language is motivated by the assumption that linguistic organisation will reflect, at least partially, the nature and organisation of the conceptual system; this does not mean, however, that language directly mirrors the conceptual system.

It is by no means accidental that the entire content of the system of collective beliefs about women and men takes the form of cultural stereotypes. In a broader context, gender is a component of collective knowledge, which includes ideas, religious beliefs, tradition, scientific knowledge and language, which, in practice, translates into the principles of the functioning of social institutions, as well as the economic, political or educational systems. The omnipresence of gender categories contributes to the assumption that the division into women and men is natural, unchanging and permanent, while the consequence of this apparent dualism is exaggeration of the existing differences, putting these two categories in opposition and, consequently, the perception of women and men as completely contradictory.

In this regard, many images of the feminine and masculine gender popularised by the media perpetuate unrealistic, stereotypical, and limiting perceptions, and the ICMs presented do not actually have a complicated structure. The analysis undertaken in this account demonstrates that the popular magazines such as “Men’s Health”, “Maxim”, “Penthouse” and “Playboy” popularise one kind of man based mostly on the submodels such as **LOVE AND SEX** (“Men’s Health” – 67 excerpts; “Maxim” – 7 excerpts; “Playboy” – 61 excerpts; “Penthouse” – 116 excerpts; with the most productive aspect concerning ‘sexual techniques and behaviours’), **PSYCHOLOGICAL FEATURES AND PROCESSES** (“Men’s Health” – 143 excerpts; “Maxim” – 24 excerpts; “Playboy” – 99 excerpts; “Penthouse” – 67 excerpts; with the most prolific aspects regarding: ‘activity, resourcefulness, strength’; ‘feeling of freedom, independence, emancipation’; ‘violence, aggression’) and **PHYSICAL PROCESSES AND ACTIVITIES** (“Men’s Health” – 87 excerpts; “Playboy” – 12 excerpts; “Penthouse” – 32 excerpts), which gain dominance over the others and lead to discriminatory assumptions and generalisations. In the case of women, the most productive submodels are: **LOVE AND SEX** (“Men’s Health” – 79 excerpts; “Maxim” – 9 excerpts; “Playboy” – 81 excerpts; “Penthouse”

– 122 excerpts), **FAMILY LIFE** (“Men’s Health” – 37 excerpts; “Maxim” – 5 excerpts; “Playboy” – 59 excerpts; “Penthouse” – 45 excerpts), **PSYCHOLOGICAL FEATURES AND PROCESSES** (“Men’s Health” – 36 excerpts; “Maxim” – 15 excerpts; “Playboy” – 121 excerpts; “Penthouse” – 109 excerpts) and **PHYSICAL TRAITS** (“Men’s Health” – 32 excerpts; “Maxim” – 24 excerpts; “Playboy” – 47 excerpts; “Penthouse” – 66 excerpts).

The data mentioned above illustrate the components of the stereotype of a woman, which can be further elaborated in the following way:

- a woman is a servant to a man, ranking lower in the biological and social ladder;
- a woman is submissive and subordinated;
- a woman is limited to the obligation to bear and raise children;
- a woman is defined through her attractiveness and beauty;
- a woman is worthy of attention when she meets certain (imposed) social norms;
- a woman is an ‘individual’ with practical advantages;
- a woman is a sexually promiscuous, beautiful and alluring person, an object of male sexual desire;
- a woman is irrational, instable, possessing low self-esteem and a complicated nature;
- a woman is a separate entity, complex in terms of personality, emotionality, perceptiveness and thoughtfulness;
- a woman is an active, resourceful and independent person in various spheres of her life, including career.

The stereotype of a man, in turn, contains the following components:

- a man is a person who relies on his own strength, has greater self-confidence, shows a tendency to competition and aggression;
- a man is an active, determined and consistent individual who enjoys challenges;
- a man is a typical macho: he is emotionally cool and inaccessible;
- a man is a person who cares about the appearance;
- a man is violent, dominant, sexually promiscuous;
- a man possesses a hedonistic lifestyle with short-term acquaintances, active in the sexual sphere;
- a man puts emphasis on the socio-economic position;
- a man is a person who can be uncertain at times: he needs to confirm his masculinity at every turn.

Taking everything into account, stereotypical beliefs about women and men are characterised by durability and an astonishing lack of susceptibility to changes despite progressing social and cultural changes. The stereotypes of femininity and masculinity are not equivalent to each other. The data prove that the stereotype of masculinity is generally more internally coherent and better assessed – it has more positive undertones. This might be due to the fact that masculinity is a social norm – a man is treated as a prototype of a person, while a woman is perceived as a deviation from this norm, and, therefore, the stereotype of femininity appears to be more negative, unstable, and undefined.

Proceeding further, it is hard to deny the statement that both women and men possess some socially established images of the representatives of a category female and male respectively. Those images are also shaped by the media through a set of common thought patterns, symbols, and language structures, which, in turn, reflects the existing cultural and political ideology related to gender. In the analysed magazines, one can find different types of sex-related expressions, including euphemisms and dysphemisms, profanity, as well as conceptual metaphors and metonymies, which are enormously effective in conveying cognitive-emotional content, because they have a significant impact on the information processing procedure. In this regard, the study conducted in Chapter Four demonstrates that a significant number of sex-related metaphors included in the magazines for men belong to the source domains such as WAR, PUNISHMENT and FIGHT. The American magazines examined in this thesis contain a plethora of figurative expressions coming from the aforementioned domains (battlefield area seems to be the most productive), which should not be astounding, as WAR has always been attributed to men as an act of power and dominance. The other most prolific sources are those of FOOD and ANIMALS, whereas the domains of EXPLOSION, ERUPTION and PHYSICAL FORCES rank further. What is more, the conceptualisations of sex prevailing in the magazines for men have also their origins in domains such as FIRE, DEATH, SPORT, GAME, WORK, BUSINESS, JOURNEY, PLANTS, DANCE and SUPERNATURAL CREATURES. Some of them clearly depict sex as a disordered, chaotic and violent phenomenon which contributes to discrimination and domination of one side over the other. Others are embedded in cultural contexts, where sex is compared to consumption, gaming, work, and a business deal. Yet some other, less numerous, emphasise the enjoyable aspects of sexual intercourse and focus around emotions and deep feelings. Nonetheless, what all of them have in common is the fact that they are mental structures which influence readers' thinking, often unconsciously. Also, euphemisms that can be detected in the analysed magazines can be perceived as an instrument of ideological framing.

Even though one can find some examples with positive associations (e.g. *HER BIG O*, *lovemaking*, *Magic Wand*), there are some others, which have the potential to activate less favourable overtones (e.g. *a sprint to a marathon*, *shaft*, *get nasty*, *screw*). In short, language is a vast reservoir of knowledge about the reality in which a given community exists and a complex of various social experiences accumulated over the centuries. In other words, everything that appears, functions, and is socially significant, becomes imprinted in language. On the other hand, by mastering a given code, an average language user acquires a specific collective approach to the world and an axiological-normative system respected by the members. Thus, metaphors are not only instrumental in terms of self-reflection, prediction and communication, but they also have a cognitive function because they influence the knowledge of oneself and the surrounding reality.

In summary, sexuality is an inalienable attribute of every human being and, therefore, it acquires a special meaning for every individual in everyday life. For this simple reason, it cannot be treated as a purely biological category. It is a complex and multi-level phenomenon, identified also on the psychological and socio-cultural levels, while the understanding of the concept of sex depends on the adopted context. On the one hand, people need sex for the perpetuation of the species, and, on the other – they are entangled in its cultural aspects. Historically, sexual intercourse was confined to the sphere of morality and customs. Moreover, in the ongoing dispute over the nature of sexuality, be it psychological or biological, it is frequently forgotten that the biological body is, among others, an instrument for sexual activities. On the other hand, when thinking about the physiology of sexuality, established over generations stereotypes effectively defend the view of one's sexuality as an essential element of physiology, where sex is perceived as a physiological activity that can exist without feelings or emotions.

Finally, as mentioned before, the dissertation is of an interdisciplinary nature. In the field of linguistics it belongs to the scope of cognitive semantics; it also represents the genre of gender studies, hence, it can constitute an attractive position not only from the point of view of broadly understood linguistics, but also in relation to everyday life, of which the language of sex is an essential and sometimes indispensable element. What is more, the influence of the media cannot be disregarded here, as it is inevitable and irrefutable. People have the tendency to learn from the various social situations they engage themselves in, but also from the interactions with models and characters encountered in the media such as the Internet, magazines, and television. What is more, stereotyping, which is omnipresent in male press, is a feature of language because it is based on simplification, generalisation and evaluation. Along

with numerous prejudices associated with them, stereotypes lead to exacerbation of social conflicts, contribute to unfair treatment of individuals or groups, and their exclusion. Lastly, the analyses included in this study do not exhaust the topic of stereotypical entanglements of women and men in the media, further research will certainly bring many stimulating observations and significant conclusions.

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