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**Developing Trainee Teachers’ Gender-Neutral Behaviour Strategies**

The topic under discussion is the phenomenon of gender-neutral language in the English-speaking world and the number of strategies which can help future English teachers to avoid problems provided by the lack of information they might have of gender-neutral speech behaviour.

The article summarizes information received from the most existing guidelines for gender-neutral or non-sexist language as well as some recommendations proposed by modern English teachers.

*Key-words:* gender, gender-neutral language, non-sexist language, sociolinguistics, sociocultural component.

In the 1970s, under the influence of the growing tendency towards political correctness in the English-speaking world, linguists and teachers of English began to focus on gender-neutral language and behaviour, first in the scientific community, and then in teaching English as a foreign language. At the same time, gender studies in Russia started to spread only in the early 1990s (Khotkina, 2000) and one of the first Russian works devoted to political correctness was a PhD research work written by A. Ostroukh in 1998.

Thus, the relevance of this article can be considered from several angles. According to the study conducted by J. Sudo in 2007, the majority of students from Russia and the CIS countries were not familiar with the concept of gender-neutral language and experienced some problems when communicating with native speakers. However, when teaching a foreign language, in this case English is considered, it is necessary to focus on the requirements of the target language culture and its sociolinguistic and sociocultural components. Since one of the main tasks of foreign language teachers is to prepare students for international communication, they, being a model for students, should avoid using gender stereotypes in speech.

As far as the study, conducted within the research paper, showed that the speech behaviour of the modern English teachers in Russia is not always gender-neutral, we suggest a list of guidelines to make it more gender-neutral. The guidelines are based on the recommendations of such authors as B. Gross-Davis, J. Sunderland, J. Pugsley, and the guidelines of APA, NCTE, UN, UNESCO, EP, University of Chicago, Princeton University et al. The proposed guidelines consist of several parts, namely, gender-neutral language, gender stereotypes, characters, biographies, precedent names, communicating with students and using coursebooks, student’s books and other materials.

**Gender-neutral language**

According to the ‘Gender-Neutral Language in the European Parliament’ guidelines, “gender-neutral language is a generic term covering the use of non-sexist language, inclusive language or gender-fair language”(EP, 2018). It is used to avoid any bias, discrimination or demeaning connected with sex and gender. ‘Guidelines for Gender-Inclusive Language in English’ point out that generally there are three basic strategies ‘to be more gender-inclusive’: use non-discriminatory language, make gender visible when it is relevant for communication and do not make gender visible when it is not relevant for communication (UN, 2018).

#### The analysis of several guidelines allowed determining two major components of gender-neutral language: grammatical and lexical. In conformity with these two components, we can speak of the corresponding gender-neutral grammatical and lexical strategies.

**Gender-neutral grammatical strategies**

As far as the English language lacks generic singular pronoun, pronouns ‘he’, ‘his’, ‘him’ have been used as common sex pronouns for a long period of time. According to the ‘Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications’, the problem with those pronouns is that they exclude women from the context (NCTE, 1975). That is why it is important to be aware of the alternative ways to avoid ‘the pervasive use of masculine pronouns’ (NCTE, 1975).

One of the approaches is to put a sentence in the plural, e.g. instead of saying *“when* ***a teacher*** *comes to the class,* ***he*** *should greet students”* it is advisable to say *“when* ***teachers*** *come to the class,* ***they*** *should greet students”.*

Sometimes it is better to use passive voice in order to avoid the use of masculine pronoun, for example, a sentence *“a teacher should be aware of the new tendencies in the language* ***he*** *is teaching”* can be more gender-neutral if the last part is reformulated the following way: *“a teacher should be aware of the new tendencies in the language* ***which is being taught****”.*

Another approach is to use imperative mood: “*a student should write* ***his*** *essay till Friday”* is a gendered sentence. When it is put into imperative mood, it becomes gender-neutral: *“please, write* ***your*** *essay till Friday”.*

One of the ways to be more gender-neutral is to use ‘who’ or ‘one’ instead of the personal pronoun ‘he’, and to use articles instead of the possessive pronoun ‘his’. For instance, the following gendered sentence *“if a student is not satisfied with* ***his*** *mark,* ***he*** *can ask for clarification”* can be recast into *“a student* ***who*** *is not satisfied with* ***the*** *mark, can ask for clarification”.*

It is necessary to mention that in some cases the personal pronoun can be omitted altogether, e.g.

*“a teacher should give the assessment criteria to students when* ***he*** *introduces the task”* can be transformed into *“a teacher should give the assessment criteria to students when* ***introducing*** *the task”.*

If the personal pronoun cannot be omitted, it can be substituted by ‘he/she’, ‘s/he’, ‘he or she’, ‘she or he’. However, this approach should be used carefully, because some guidelines (e.g. ‘Gender-Neutral Language in the European Parliament’) claim that it affects the readability of the text and often looks awkward.

As for using ‘they’ as a third person singular pronoun, some guidelines recommend using it in spoken language, but avoiding it in writing. The Chicago Manual of Style, however, allows to use this pronoun even in academic publications (Chicago Manual of Style, 2017). We, in turn, advise to use it only in speech, and when writing an article – get acquainted carefully with the requirements of each particular magazine and publisher.

**Gender-neutral lexical strategies**

Gender-neutral lexical strategies are all about avoiding gender-specific words. According to the Guidelines for Nonsexist Use of Language in NCTE Publications’, ‘Guidelines for Nonsexist Language in APA Journals’ et al., gender-specific words can be classified into several categories: words with a generic ‘man’, words with suffixes ‘ess’ and ‘ette’, words like ‘mothering’, ‘housewife’, ‘landlord’, some gender-specific adjectives and adverbs like ‘effeminate’, ‘emasculated’, ‘manfully’, and forms of address.

Almost each gender-specific word has its gender-neutral equivalent, which can be found in the existing guidelines (one of the most comprehensive lists of words is given in the European Parliament guidelines) and dictionaries.

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| **Gender-specific word** | **Gender-neutral word** |
| Man, mankind | Person, people, humanity, human beings |
| The average man, man in the street | The average person/individual, people in general |
| Manfully | Valiantly |
| Manpower | Staff, labour, work force, employees |
| Man-made | Artificial, synthetic, machine-made |
| Brotherhood of man | Human fellowship |
| Businessman | Business person, manager, executive |
| Cameraman | Photographer, camera operator |
| Chairman | Chairperson, chair |
| Craftsman | Craftworker, artisan, craftsperson |
| Fireman | Firefighter |
| Foreman | Supervisor |
| Gentleman’s agreement | Honourable agreement |
| Layman | Layperson |
| Policeman/men | Police officer |
| Salesman/girl | Shop/sales assistant/worker, sales staff |
| Spokesman | Spokesperson |
| Sportsman | Athlete, sports person, sportsman/sportswoman |
| Actress | Actor |
| Headmistress (headmaster as well) | Headteacher |
| Stewardess | Flight-attendant |
| Housewife | Homemaker |
| Tomboy | Interpid child |
| Mothering | Parenting |
| Landlord | Owner |
| Emasculated | Weakened, enfeebled |
| Effeminate | Delicate, feeble |

However, it is worth mentioning that there is still a number of words for which one and only gender-neutral equivalent has not yet been formed, for example, words ‘waitress’ or ‘hostess’. In this case, it is better to use gender-neutral synonyms, e.g. the word ‘server’, ‘waitperson’ are gender-neutral synonyms of the word ‘waitress’.

As far as well-known official names are concerned, no changes are necessary. For instance, in the UNESCO programme name ‘The Man and the Biosphere Programme’, the word ‘man’, although used to mean ‘human’, does not change to ‘human’ or other equivalents. At the same time, the authors of the ‘Guidelines on Gender-Neutral Language’ note that it is better ‘to avoid generic ‘man’ in new titles’ (UNESCO, 1999).

As for the forms of address, it is advisable to use Ms. in order not to focus on the marital status of a woman, especially if her marital status is not known for certain. When communicating with foreign female colleagues, it is better to ask an interlocutor what type of address she prefers: Ms, Miss, Missis, or a different title corresponding to her professional status. The most proper way to address a man is Mr unless his professional status suggests a different title (Dr., Prof.).

### Gender stereotypes

The teacher should carefully ensure that he/she does not use gender stereotypes in his/her speech in the English lessons for several reasons. First, some gender stereotypes can be offensive (Talbot, 2003). Moreover, the results of several research show that gender stereotypes can demotivate students, especially female ones (Hyde, 2005; Igbo et al., 2015). In addition, teachers are considered to be responsible for ensuring gender equality in the classroom (Pugsley, 1991).

There are several strategies that a teacher can use to avoid gender stereotyping.

1. It is better not to say "typically male", "typically female", "all boys like...", "all girls like...". Try to avoid any generalisations of this kind.
2. If it is impossible to avoid the using a gender stereotype (the author/poet/writer is quoted), it is necessary to draw the attention of students to the fact that this is a gender stereotype and discuss this issue with them.
3. If you cannot avoid using gender stereotypes in written speech, it should be put in quotation marks.

All the following pieces of advice are inspired by recommendations given by B. Gross Davis, J. Pugsley and J. Sunderland in their works.

### Characters, biographies, precedent names

The characters, biographies and precedent names, which are introduced by a teacher in class are of great importance. Therefore, when selecting characters, biographies or precedent names teachers should try to:

1. use the same number of examples with women and men;
2. avoid stereotypical professions and activities in order to show the diversity of women's and men's roles in society (women are not only housewives, nurses and teachers, and men are not only scientists, athletes and politicians);
3. avoid incorrect, stereotyped representation of characters (if the teacher comes up with the characters himself/herself).

We advise teachers not only to use these strategies in their speech, but also to draw students’ attention to them.

### Communicating with students

Teachers should pay attention to whether they communicate equally with female and male students, e.g.:

1. whether students of different genders are given the same amount of speaking time;
2. whether a teacher treats questions and comments from students of different genders equally;
3. whether the same language is used by a teacher to interact with students of different genders (e.g., whether a teacher does not tell female students to “stop gossiping” and male students to “stop talking”)
4. whether a teacher reacts equally to the mistakes of students of different genders.

### Using coursebooks, student’s books and other materials

If a teacher has an opportunity to choose teaching materials or a coursebook himself/herself, one should analyse it beforehand and check whether the coursebook, student’s book or other materials:

1. correspond to the principles of gender-neutral language;
2. contain gender stereotypes;
3. contain the same number of female and male precedent names, characters and biographies;
4. contain the same number of references to women and men occupying a given profession;
5. contain any references to stereotypical women’s professions (nurse, teacher, secretary, shop assistant).

If a teacher does not have an opportunity to pick up materials on his/her own, one can use the following strategies:

1. adapt the materials;
2. carry out a comparative analysis with the native language of students;
3. avoid using gender-specific language and draw students’ attention to it when encountered in coursebooks;
4. look through the vocabulary of the coursebook beforehand and, if there are any gender-specific words, discuss them with students.

**Conclusion**

This article touches upon the gender-neutral behaviour strategies for trainee teachers. As far as the study, conducted within the research paper, showed that the modern English teachers in Russia do not always use gender-neutral language and do not always act in a gender-neutral way during the lessons, we see the necessity to acquaint them with the strategies of gender-neutral speech behaviour. These strategies are based on the international guidelines for gender-neutral language as well as recommendations of some foreign English teachers. Among these strategies are: using gender-neutral grammatical means, using gender-neutral lexical means, avoiding gender stereotypes and dealing with them, choosing characters, biographies, precedent names, communicating with students and using coursebooks, student’s books and other materials.

As for using gender-neutral grammar, it is advisable to eliminate the generic use of masculine gender by using plural forms, pairing pronouns, substituting pronouns with articles or other words, ect. Gender-neutral lexical strategies, in their turn, are mainly about avoiding the generic use of the ‘man’ component, gendered suffixes and using proper forms of address. If gender stereotypes are considered, it is better not to refer to them in speech. And it is highly recommended to discuss these stereotypes with students when they are encountered. The process of choosing characters, biographies and precedent names is based on the attempt to represent women and men equally whenever possible at the lessons, showing the diversity. The most important thing in the sphere of communicating with students is to provide students of different genders with equal opportunities. Finally, using coursebooks, student’s books and other materials suggests choosing those that correspond to the principles of gender-neutrality and are free of gender stereotyping.

All in all, the article gives a comprehensive piece of advice on gender neutrality for future teachers. One of the possible future research directions could be implementation of these guidelines in the process of trainee teachers’ education, namely, creation of a course programme, devoted to gender-neutral speech behavior strategies in professional communication.

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