

# **Gender-inclusive or not?**

## **Covert gender patterns in Georgian**

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The communication of gender as a socio-cultural phenomenon has been characterized by both universal and unique properties across languages and their communities. One of the universal traits pertaining to the relationship of language and gender is its almost ubiquitous association with a division of labour. Indeed, in both gendered and genderless languages one is likely to detect at least some representation of this kind of division.

The paper seeks to find out whether various occupational terms are gender-inclusive or not and, hence, whether and how the gendered division of labour is reflected in Georgian as a genderless language. As for genderless languages, that is, having no grammatical gender (such as Georgian, Finnish, Turkish, etc.), we may speak about cover gender. The approach assumes that a referent of a generic animate noun, denoting a human species, and related semantic markers may be regularly associated with only (or mainly) either a male or a female person; some linguistic dimensions of a gendered division of labour and gender-inclusiveness of respective linguistic items may thus be identified.

With respect to some preceding investigations of cover gender patterns in genderless languages (for instance, Braun 1998, 1999; Engelberg 2002), I conducted a pilot study based on a questionnaire including twenty stimulus terms (occupational terms with neither a word-formation nor semantic clues to disclose to a possible gender of a referent).

As a cover story, subjects were told that the occupational terms were from a screenplay and that they were to first-name its characters. First names enabled me to find out which gender a term was associated with by a subject. Along the stimulus terms, there were two columns for Variant 1 and Variant 2 in order to allow both male and female interpretations.

I briefly contrast my results with data from other genderless languages, for instance, Turkish (Braun 1999), to explore to what extent speaker choices are reflective of a gendered division of labour and gender-inclusiveness in respective communities.

The three principal conclusions inferable from the present study are the following: (1) a genderless grammar does not necessarily provide for gender-neutrality in the perception of personal nouns, particularly, of occupational terms, as far as there always may be some gender-based division of labour in society and this finds some reflection in a respective language; (2) male and female interpretations of the stimulus terms have demonstrated whether and how gender-inclusive they are; (3) languages may be similar in terms of having genderless grammars; however, this does not imply that words of these languages, with identical referential meanings, will be readily associated with one and the same gender and will or will not be gender-inclusive.

## **References**

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