

NEW WORDS AND GENDER EQUALITY IN SERBIAN – DOES DISCRIMINATION EXIST?¹

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Abstract: We examined the general attitude to new feminine titles, as it formed in the media in 2021, and the overall image of social feminine titles currently prevalent in the Serbian media, all by way of ascertaining the reasons for acceptance or non-acceptance of new social feminine titles that were articulated in the media. Having defined the necessary terms (*discrimination, gender equality, social feminine title* and so on) and after a brief review of the social context that made social feminine titles a hot topic in the Serbian media in 2021, we analysed the relevant media texts that present the various positions on social feminine titles. The method of qualitative content analysis was applied, as it was deemed the most fitting methodological procedure for extracting both the arguments put forward in favour of, and those against social feminine title use. The research corpus consisted of media texts and official announcements by Serbian linguistic institutions on the subject of social feminine titles, collected from January to September of 2021. The basic assumption was that the dominant attitude in the media texts would be against new feminine title use, but also that both supporters and opponents of new social feminine titles would feel discriminated against, whether the discrimination came via opposition to or, conversely, via obligatory and consistent use of these terms.

Key words: discrimination, gender-sensitive language, gender equality, social feminine titles, social masculine titles, media text, Serbian language

1. INTRODUCTION

Our present research focuses on establishing the reasons for (non)use of new feminine titles in the Serbian language, as they appeared in the media in 2021. In the first part of this paper, we define some key terms: *discrimination, gender equality,*

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gender-sensitive language, social feminine title and social masculine title. We then examine the social context which kept the issue of social feminine titles in the public eye throughout 2021. The central part of the paper consists of a thematic analysis of media texts articulating the various attitudes toward social feminine titles.

2. KEY DEFINITIONS

Following reference dictionaries and legal regulation, we define *discrimination* as unfair partiality, prejudiced conduct, or bias in treatment of persons or groups; in other words, any action that excludes or limits someone's rights in advance on various grounds. Especially relevant to our investigation is the Prohibition of Discrimination Act from 2021, where severe discrimination is defined, among other things, as acting against the principles of gender equality, which is to say acting without "respect for equal rights and freedoms of women and men in political, economic, cultural and other aspects of public, professional, private and family life" (Article 20).

The Gender Equality Act, adopted into law this year in the Serbian Assembly as one of the means of achieving gender equality in Serbian society, mandates the use of gender-sensitive language which is defined as "the language that promotes equality between women and men and a means of influencing the consciousness of those who use that language in the direction of achieving equality, including changes in opinions, attitudes and behaviour within the language used in personal and professional life" (Article 6, number 17).

The terms *socijalni maskulinitiv* [social masculine title] and *socijalni femininitiv* [social feminine title] were first used in Serbian linguistics by Predrag Piper (2013, p. 54; 2016, pp. 37–38).

The first term, *social masculine title*, denotes masculine nouns that stand for status, function or profession. These are words that denote professions, occupations, functions, titles and designations of men. Some examples are: *učitelj, upravnik, dekan, profesor* [teacher, warden, dean, professor]. *Social masculine title* also refers to a masculine noun which has the role of denoting gender-neutral forms, such as *akademik, dirigent, sudija* [academic, conductor, judge]. We use these nouns when the information regarding the person's sex is irrelevant, such as in the following examples: *Ovaj udžbenik namenjen je studentima Pravnog fakulteta* [This textbook is intended for law students], *Sastanku prisustvuju predstavnici sindikata* [Union representatives are attending the meeting], *Pre operacije obavezan je pregled anesteziologa* [An anesthesiologist's examination must be performed before the surgery], *Ona uči za lekara* [She is studying to be a doctor].

Conversely, the term *socijalni femininitiv* [social feminine title] denotes feminine nouns that stand for status, function or profession. These are words that denote professions, occupations, functions, titles and designations of women. Some examples are *vaspitačica, učiteljica, upravnica, dekanka/dekanica, profesorka/*

profesorica [female kindergarten teacher, schoolteacher, warden, dean, professor] and the like. We also have biological feminine nouns, such as *golubica*, *slonica*, *vučica* [female pigeon, female elephant, she-wolf], etc. Social feminine titles naturally grow in numbers as the role of women in society changes and the linguistic image of the world follows suit. The spread of social feminine titles in contemporary languages reflects the fact that, in a large part of the world today, women have become equal with men in a social, legal, and, to a certain extent, practical sense. The term *social feminine title* is to be distinguished from the term *femininum* which represents a form or noun of the female gender in the grammatical sense.

Before we reflect on the reactions to the law that was passed, which are closely tied to our theme here, it is worth noting that the problematization of this issue of nouns and noun derivatives of professional titles and designations of status for women started in the late 1980s, but we can safely say that the matter has culminated this year. Of the Serbian linguists who worked on this subject,³ the following names stand out: Božo Ćorić (1979, 1982, 1990, 2008), Milka Ivić (1989), Jovanka Radić (2007, 2010, 2011, 2013a, 2013b), Svenka Savić (1984, 1995, 1998, 2009), Jelena Filipović (2011a, 2011b), Živojin Stanojčić (2013, 2014), Đorđe Otašević (2021a, 2021b, 2021c), Predrag Piper (2014, pp. 145–159, 2016), Jovana Jovanović (2020a, 2020b), Dragičević and Utvić (2019), and others.⁴

Briefly, the majority of linguists agree that the feminization of language is on the rise⁵ and that the phenomenon needs to be addressed with great care. As far as the use of feminine titles in relation to masculine titles is concerned, the possibility of nouns of masculine gender indeed denoting the general gender and thus acting as nomination for the whole class is often pointed out, whereas nouns of female gender are marked in relation to these (they may only denote individuals or animals of female sex); for example, *Svečanom prijemu brucoša prisustvovali su svi studenti prve godine* [The freshman reception was attended by all new students] or *Na Tari*

³ The large number of recent works and studies on feminine forms and the use of gender-sensitive language among other Slavic nations and nationalities all speak to the relevance of this topic. Thus far, however, research based on a comparative analysis of the feminine form in Serbian versus other Slavic languages is sparse. Some examples are the comparison of the Serbian and Slovenian languages in the work of Nikola Bajić (2012), and the doctoral dissertation of Stefana Paunović Rodić, where the investigation of gender asymmetry in the free association test is presented, examining the difference in the conceptualization of four gender pairs of stimuli in the Serbian and Slovak languages (Paunović Rodić 2019, pp. 321–334). Equally infrequent are investigations of media discourse with the goal of ascertaining the frequency of feminine title use in Slavic languages. In this regard, Klaudia Stepień's Masters' thesis stands out, investigating the status and frequency of feminine title use in Polish (Stepień 2018). As well, in her Masters' thesis, Jelena Trikoš (2016) takes a look at gender sensitive language in the Serbian newspapers.

⁴ The sociolinguistic approach and critical analysis of discourse in the research of gender-sensitive language in Slavic languages (Bogetić 2022; Petrović 2022) shows all the complexity of this topic within a broader, social context.

⁵ On the process of feminization in Slavic languages, see Arhangelyska 2013.

ima medveda [There are bears on the mountain Tara]. However, denoting the general (neutral) gender may sometimes go to nouns of female gender, which primarily denote individuals of female sex, as in the example: *Ne podnosim mačke* [I can't stand cats]. But despite such examples, the situation is predominantly that of the masculine gender being the generic one, i.e. the masculine titles and feminine titles are in a relation of hyponym (superior and broader term) to hypernym (subordinate and narrower term), and the feminine titles are linguistically marked (Ćorić 1982, p. 14; Ivić 1989, p. 42; Radić 2011, p. 52, etc.).

Furthermore, in a language, one and the same sense may be articulated in different ways and by different means. This is also true for what is considered gender-sensitive language. Fusional (synthetic) languages, such as Serbian and other Slavic languages, allow greater possibilities here compared to analytical languages which achieve this through use of other functional words or by syntactical means. Precisely for this reason, achieving gender equality by way of derivatives need not be insisted upon (Piper 2016, p. 19; Slijepčević Bjelivuk 2019a, p. 121).

Languages are not so simplistic as to reduce all relations to a binary system, and we ought to be very careful with artificial creation and imposition of parallel forms, as this is indeed systemically and not just politically unsustainable.⁶ One reason is linguistic economy, whereby the markedness of feminine titles is considered superfluous information or informationally redundant (Ćorić 2008, p. 207; Piper – Klajn 2014, p. 55; Piper 2016, p. 48).

Many words of foreign origin cannot have their gender counterparts, for example: *skeptik*, *agnostik*, *homofob*, *fan*, *student*, etc., which makes it impossible to insist on it (*Mlade devojke su najčešći fanovi Arijane Grande* [The fans of Ariana Grande are usually young girls]). Or take, for example, the nouns *spozoruša* [female gold digger], *prostitutka* [prostitute], *babica* [midwife], *dadilja* [nanny], *domaćica* [housewife], *sekretarica* [secretary], etc., which do not have their gender counterparts (morphological ones can be formed but not semantic ones) (Ćorić 2008, pp. 198–208).

In the 1990s, feminist linguistics start to develop in Serbia, focusing, unlike structuralist linguistics, more on the communicational possibilities of language and

⁶ This means that the degree of grammaticalization of social feminine titles cannot depend (solely) on societal movements and political climate of a certain age and society (extra-linguistic criteria), but must depend primarily on linguistic criteria – the grammatical system of a language, style in which these words are used, and also tradition, prevalence and other criteria of a language culture: “The number of social feminine titles in a language gradually grows over time in accordance with the corresponding changes in society, and this process must be neither hindered nor artificially accelerated” (Piper – Klajn 2014, p. 222); “When assessing the normative acceptability of new social feminine titles, they should be taken into consideration individually, given that the degree and form of their connection to the language system, especially the system of functional styles, is not the same in each case. Social feminine titles of recent origin, such as noun neologisms proposed and advocated by representatives of certain political views, often cannot be considered part of good literary language until they see wider use and better integration in the modern Serbian language system” (Piper – Klajn 2014, p. 56).

the application of the Speech Act theory (Savić 2008; Savić, Čanak – Mitro – Štasni 2009).⁷ The representatives of that school, the female ones in particular, start from the socio-cultural milieu that has now changed, the changes inevitably being reflected in the language (Filipović 2011a, p. 115; Filipović – Kuzmanović 2019, pp. 187–188). In the modern Serbian language, many social feminine titles have become common in speech, even in the media, yet the norm still does not reflect that. Language is a dynamic category, its norm allows for change, and Serbian is a fusional language, meaning that it has creative possibilities for building new words for women's occupations, and, over time, with more frequent use, these will no longer sound unusual (Bošković Marković 2021; Savić 1995, 1998, 2009, etc.).⁸

3. SOCIAL CONTEXT

The strongest impetus for the creation of social feminine titles in the Serbian language came in the last decades, especially the first decade of the 21st century, owing to the change in the political and ideological system. After the adoption of the Gender Equality Act⁹ in late May 2021,¹⁰ largely negative reactions of institutions in the field of linguistics followed.

Matica Srpska, the oldest Serbian literary, cultural and scientific society, was the first to react, announcing that, in cooperation with the Board of the Literature and Language Department, it sent a letter entitled “Gender-Sensitive Language, Feminine Titles and Gender Equality”¹¹ to all the top government structures in the country.

Then, on June 1st, the Serbian Language Standardization Committee¹² issued a statement entitled “The Gender Equality Act is an act against the Serbian

⁷ Svenka Savić is the major representative of this school of thought. More on the development of Serbian gender linguistics in Filipović – Kuzmanović 2019.

⁸ In his works (2021a, 2021b, 2021c, etc.), using examples from the media discourse and contemporary neological lexicography, Otašević points out the growing presence of feminine titles in the Serbian language. As he claims, both gender counterparts appear concurrently in almost all cases, and the prediction is that in the near future the number of gender pairs where both gender counterparts appear concurrently will be so large and so common that the connotation of subordinateness, characteristic of feminine titles in the past, will largely or perhaps even completely disappear.

⁹ Legal information system. Available at: <https://www.pravno-informacioni-sistem.rs/SlGlasnikPortal/eli/rep/sgrs/skupstina/zakon/2021/52/3/reg> [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹⁰ In July of the year in question, a National Strategy for gender equality for the period of 2021–2030 was adopted, with an action plan for its implementation in the period of 2021–2023. Internet source: Ministry for human and minority rights and social dialogue. Available at: <https://www.minljmpdd.gov.rs/doc/konsultacije/090821/Polazne-osnove-za-Predlog-strategije-o-RR.pdf> [cit. 12-1-2022].

¹¹ Matica Srpska. Available at: <https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/saopshtee-matitse-srpske-povodom-pitaa-o-rodno-ravnopravnosti/> [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹² The Serbian Language Standardization Committee has made announcements and publicly voiced decisions before. Previously two decisions were made, one in the years 2006/2007, entitled “How to name the occupations and titles of women” and the other in 2011, entitled “Language of gender equality” (links

language”.¹³ A day later this Committee followed up with a Decision regarding the adoption of the Gender equality Act, entitled “Violence against the Serbian language”.¹⁴

On June 10th, the Executive Board of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts held its twenty-first session, and on this occasion put its support behind all the positions the Standardization Committee had published in its Decision on the adoption of the Gender Equality Act.¹⁵

In response to the adoption of the Gender Equality Act, Matica Srpska and the Serbian Language Standardization Committee organized a large meeting¹⁶ of prominent experts in the field of Serbian language and social-humanistic disciplines, which was held on July 3rd at Matica Srpska. At the meeting, various problems with the structure and use of gender-sensitive language were discussed, as well as other, in the view of the meeting’s participants, unfavourable aspects prescribed by the Act. The roundtable took place in three sessions and is available in the video archive on the Matica Srpska website. An announcement of the meeting was published on the website of the Serbian Language Standardization Committee, together with a presentation by prof. Dr. Sreto Tanasić,¹⁷ Committee chairman, followed by the conclusions of the meeting.¹⁸

4. RESEARCH GOALS AND METHODOLOGY

Seeing that social feminine titles, as a means of introducing gender-sensitive language, have become a hot topic in the Serbian media, in this research we focused on the reasons for acceptance or non-acceptance of social feminine titles that were articulated in the media. A cursory review of the material makes it clear that the Serbian public is divided into two blocks when it comes to the attitude toward social feminine titles. There are the supporters of social feminine titles on the one hand, and the opponents on the other. We considered it important to take a research approach to this division and to extricate the reasons for and against social feminine titles, especially

are given at the end of the paper, see Internet sources), while the announcement regarding gender equality was made in 2017. Available at: <https://www.ossj.rs/odluke-i-saopstenja/o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti/> [cit. 12-01-2022].

¹³ The Serbian Language Standardization Committee. Available at: <https://www.ossj.rs/odluke-i-saopstenja/zakon-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti-je-zakon-protiv-srpskog-jezika/> [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹⁴ The Serbian Language Standardization Committee. Available at: <http://www.ossj.rs/odluke-i-saopstenja/odluka-povodom-usvajanja-zakona-o-rodnoj-ravnopravnosti/> [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹⁵ The Serbian Language Institute of SASA. Available at: http://www.isj.sanu.ac.rs/2021/07/08/sanu-podrzava-odbor-za-standardizaciju/?fbclid=IwAR2kWdFwVwe_FsrkeUjUpkjpB8gl-2sWnMm0_Jg4Y5PIBjMUP0R-TvYH0zIM [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹⁶ Matica Srpska. Available at: <https://www.maticasrpska.org.rs/polozaj-sj/> [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹⁷ The Serbian Language Standardization Committee. Available at: <http://www.ossj.rs/aktuelnosti/odrzan-skup-polozaj-srpskoga-jezika-u-savremenom-drustvu-izazovi-problemi-resenja/> [cit. 10-01-2022].

¹⁸ The Serbian Language Standardization Committee: for Meeting Conclusions, see Internet sources.

because, to our knowledge, no such research has been conducted in Serbia as yet. We begin with the assumption that the attitude present in the media texts is predominantly negative, i.e. against new feminine title use, mainly because of the reactions of the Serbian linguistic institutions to some aspects of the Gender Equality Act that was adopted into law, the ones dealing with gender-sensitive language in particular. It was also expected that both groups, supporters and opponents of new social feminine titles, will feel discriminated against, whether this discrimination arose through opposition to or through obligatory and consistent use of these terms.

The main goal of our paper is to establish the attitude to new feminine titles that formed in the media in 2021, and, more generally, to articulate the current image of social feminine titles as presented in the Serbian media, all by way of considering the reasons for their acceptance or non-acceptance, as these were presented in the media. The main research questions we asked were: 1. Why do opponents of social feminine titles feel that they should not be used, and why do proponents of social feminine titles think that they should be used? 2. As per the arguments presented in the media, is the process of realizing a greater degree of gender equality disrupted by the (non)use of these words? We believe that the findings and conclusions of this research may also be relevant to other European countries with a similar socio-political background.

The first step in the research was to form a corpus consisting of texts from the media (newspapers and TV shows) and official announcements of Serbian linguistic institutions on the topic of social feminine titles. The corpus consists of texts collected by Google News from January to September 2021.¹⁹ A total of 105 texts were excerpted, 53 of which communicate the positions of the opponents of (new) feminine titles (and of the Gender Equality Act, which regulates gender-sensitive language use), and 32 of which communicate the positions of feminine title and gender-sensitive language supporters; in the remaining 20 texts the two positions' attitudes are confronted. The texts include the opinions not only of linguists but also of experts from other scientific disciplines, including those dealing with gender-sensitive language and those from various cultural domains: journalists, columnists, translators, lawyers, politicians and representatives of the government, NGOs and Serbian Orthodox Church.

The corpus is exhaustive and representative – we tried to collect as many media publications as possible on the topic in a given period. All information media based in Serbia were taken into account, regardless of whether they are public services, privately owned media, or those in which the Republic of Serbia – or even some other, foreign

¹⁹ The reason we chose this timeframe for the corpus lies in the fact that in the media discourse this topic imposed itself as one of the main ones precisely in that period, which is also the time from the Gender Equality Act entering the adoption procedure to the final reactions after it went into force. Of course, all the views expressed in the texts that make up the corpus for this research are based on previous scientific and professional literature or else on the decisions of professional bodies, so in some places it was necessary to refer to such sources for continuity's sake, despite thereby deviating from the specified corpus timeframe.

country – has a share of the ownership (or management structure).²⁰ It should be noted, however, that the topic of social feminine titles is covered mostly in non-tabloid media (among which *Politika* and *Danas* stand out in Serbia, see Report 2015, p. 161), so it should come as no surprise that examples from such media are predominant in our corpus also. Reporting on this topic has been sensationalist and tabloid at times, especially in the headlines and subtitles, which also reflects the general profile of the newspaper itself (*Novosti* are one example). In this paper, we examine only the views of those who were invited to speak on the topic, and we did not address the way in which the media themselves use gender-sensitive language, regardless of the fact that some clearly do strive for reporting that is gender-balanced and in accordance with the recommendations for the use of gender-sensitive language (*Danas* is one example).²¹ Also, media profile, whether with respect to the style of reporting (tabloid/serious media) or cooperation with the Government of the Republic of Serbia (the relevant qualifications here are “pro-regime” or “pro-government”, versus “independent” or “free” media) played no role in the selection of texts for the corpus, and is thus not pertinent for our research. Even under the assumption that the choice of guests and interviewees, i.e. all those whose statements are to be found in the collected texts, is determined by a given media’s profile, the expertise required for such media classification calls for specialists outside the field of linguistics and a greater degree of interdisciplinarity, and is irrelevant for our purpose here.

Qualitative content analysis (thematic analysis), as suggested by Kuckartz (2014), was chosen as the method of interpreting data from this corpus. It is a research method for analyzing textual data content through a process of identifying and classifying themes in the texts studied. We approached the textual data in order to single out the main themes that speak in favour of social feminine title use on the one hand, and those against it on the other. The selected themes will be illustrated with examples from the corpus.²²

5. ANALYSIS

Four themes were identified: on the one hand, we have (1) the linguistic arguments against social feminine titles and (2) the linguistic arguments for social feminine titles,

²⁰ On the problems of non-transparency of media financing in Serbia, i.e. ownership and control of media in Serbia, see the Report on ownership structure and control of media in Serbia, produced by the Anti-Corruption Council of the Government of the Republic of Serbia in 2015. Available at: <http://www.antikorupcija-savet.gov.rs/izvestaji/cid1028-2751/izvestaj-o-vlasnickoj-strukturi-i-kontroli-medija-u-srbiji> [cit. 12-02-2023].

²¹ The use of gender-sensitive language in the Serbian media was the subject of some earlier research (Trikoš 2016), and, while the topic in Serbian studies is far from exhausted (it has been researched neither systematically nor in its entirety, but rather only fragmentarily), it is outside the scope of this paper.

²² Due to the limited space we give only the English translation of the utterances and titles of the cited articles. Examples presented in Serbian are marked with single quotation marks.

and, on the other, there are (3) the ideological arguments of the opponents of social feminine titles and (4) the ideological arguments of their proponents.²³

5.1. Linguistic arguments against new social feminine titles

We classified the linguistic arguments against social feminine titles into subcategories (formative, morphological, pragmatic, semantic and normative arguments) according to the language level they are referring to.

1. Formative arguments refer to atypical formative patterns, as in the case of the suffix *-škinja* (*virusološkinja*, *epidemiološkinja*, *psihološkinja*),²⁴ which is considered unsuitable for the formative system of Serbian (Ćorić 1982, pp. 138–141; Ćorić 2008, p. 206; Slijepčević Bjelivuk 2019a, p. 124, 2019b, p. 127).²⁵

(1) *Let's take these pairs as an example: 'filolog/filološkinja', 'sociolog/sociološkinja', 'pedagog/pedagoškinja', 'andragog/andragoškinja'²⁶... these were not formed by analogy as the formative types are not at all the same, the base is not the same. The suffix '-kinja' in the above examples is not added onto the masculine form, which is how you make a feminine title, but onto the adjectival base: 'psihološki', 'sociološki'... The formative structure of Serbian is thus violated, this is not in accordance with the derivatological norms of the language. (Politika: "An attack against an already wounded Serbian language")*

2. Morphological arguments point out the collapse of the morphological word structure. In Serbian, nouns have a fixed gender; each noun is either masculine or feminine or neuter, unlike adjectives, for example, which change by gender. When it comes to nouns, therefore, gender is a classification category (Ćorić 2008, pp. 197–199). If noun pairs were consistently constructed (from the social masculine title we make a counterpart in the form of a social feminine title), gender would become an explicit category (any such noun, as it changes cases, would also change by gender).

(2) *Noun gender in Serbian [...] is not a category based on gender forms, but is rather a classification category – i.e. some nouns are simply masculine, others feminine and still others of the middle gender; nouns do not change by gender! [...] The literalism imposed by the Act could profoundly change the Serbian language: by consistently building pairs of nouns in accordance with gender equality, the noun grammatical gender would turn from an implicit to an explicit category, formalized in the same way as case and number categories in*

²³ While our focus is on new social feminine titles, some of the arguments encompass both new and previously established feminine titles in the Serbian language.

²⁴ These are the feminine forms of the nouns virologist, epidemiologist, psychologist.

²⁵ Though there are linguists who dispute neither the possibility of, nor the (potential) standardization of such forms (cf. Stanojčić 2013, 2014).

²⁶ Serbian motal pairs for philologist, sociologist, pedagogue, andragogue.

the group of nouns. This would lead to a chain reaction of multiple language changes. (Committee: “Conclusions of the meeting”)

The grammatical masculine gender is neutral with regard to sex in Serbian, it refers to persons of both sexes; nouns which denote occupations, titles and designations denote persons of both sexes – *sociolog* [sociologist] is a term for both women and men. The generic masculine gender, as Serbian linguists point out, implies awareness of the equal social value of men and women and is in accordance with the history of the language and its structure (Ćorić 1979, p. 31; Ćorić 2008, pp. 202–203). The grammars of the Serbian language in official use report that nouns that mean type, title or occupation signify beings of both sexes (Stanojčić – Popović 2016, p. 162; Piper – Klajn 2014, pp. 55–56). Social feminine titles should only be used in a referential and not in a generic sense and only in appropriate linguistic contexts – when individualization of utterance is called for.²⁷

The Serbian Language Standardization Committee has informed the public about this issue on several occasions, as the following examples show:

- (3) *The grammatical noun form is unmarked and neutral with regard to indicating gender difference.* (Committee: “How to name occupations and titles of women”)
- (4) *Gender neutrality of the generic masculine gender in the Serbian language is not an assumption but a linguistic fact: the grammatical and natural noun genders in Serbian are not identical. The grammars of Serbian in official use say that nouns meaning type, title or occupation denote beings of both sexes (man/people, dog, pigeon, writer, judge...).* (Committee: “Language of Gender Equality”)
- (5) *The male grammatical gender is a neutral category, which means that, according to the laws of the language, it semantically includes both male and female categories (e.g. Ona je odličan lekar [She is an excellent doctor], Raspisan je konkurs za jednog nastavnika [A job opening for one teacher has been announced]; Majka i otac su šetali [Mother and father walked], etc.).* (Committee: “Violence against the Serbian language”)
- (6) *Neutrality of the generic masculine gender in the Serbian language is a linguistic fact: the grammars of Serbian in official use state that nouns meaning type, title or occupation denote beings of both sexes, whether of feminine or masculine grammatical gender, so the claim that the use of generic male gender represents*

²⁷ As noted earlier, the spread of social feminine titles is pronounced in oral use but has also been observed in media language (Piper 2016, p. 51), which is understandable primarily because of the communicative and referential function of language in these styles. Milka Ivić also wrote about referentiality as a reason for the use of feminine titles (1989, p. 42).

discrimination is indeed inconsistent with the proven and convincingly reasoned position of Serbian linguistic science. (Committee: “Conclusions of the meeting”)

- (7) *When it comes to feminine titles, the female gender is marked in Serbian, we always know that it is a woman, while the male gender is unmarked and has a dual function. Depending on the communicative circumstances, it can mean men in particular, but when it comes to an occupation or title, it refers to the whole class, regardless of whether we are speaking of men or women. (Politika: “The Gender Equality Act Endangers Constitutional Freedoms”)*

3. Pragmatic and syntactic-stylistic arguments address the issue of using parallel forms in the text *Potrebno je da zakažete pregled kod svog izabranog/le lekara/ke*, [You need to make an appointment with your family doctor],²⁸ which affects the intelligibility and clarity of the text and complicates communication (Ćorić 2008, p. 207). This argument also addresses the redundancy at the grammatical level (because the grammatical male gender is neutral, adding a female gender title is superfluous), as well as the redundancy at the textual level, and encompasses both new and already established feminine titles in Serbian. Use of parallel forms in a text, which is implied by the Gender Equality Act according to linguists, would have far-reaching economic consequences as well, seeing that the texts in the public sphere already in existence would have to be redacted and printed anew.²⁹

- (8) *Using parallel forms or stating the form in the masculine gender with a mark for the feminine gender suffix unnecessarily burdens the sentence, with a very probable possibility of bringing it to absurdity (Svi prisutni/prisutne na ovoj proslavi bili/bile su nedvosmisleno razočarani/razočarane etc. [All present at this celebration were unequivocally disappointed, etc.]³⁰), and should therefore not be used. (Committee: “Language of Gender Equality”)*
- (9) *The dogmatic insistence on repetition is not new, but it is gradually intensifying. This author has repeatedly warned about the negative effects of this phenomenon*

²⁸ Feminine suffixes are added onto the generic masculine form.

²⁹ Proponents of social feminine titles also note that “some technical solutions to inclusive writing (*Indijanci/Indijanke* i *Eskimi/Eskimke*, i.e. the two forms of a name for American Indians and Eskimos) may be controversial and suggest that “other countries” positive and negative experiences with inclusive writing should be further considered. For example, the French Academy recently rejected inclusive writing as counterproductive to the goals of equalizing the position of women in society, combating domestic violence, reducing the pay gap, basing its position on the claim that inclusive writers misunderstand the correlation between grammatical gender and sex of the noun they refer to. Among other things, there are arguments that French will become more difficult to learn and that English will replace it especially in Africa, and also that such a writing system makes language learning even more difficult for people with cognitive impairment (dyslexia...).” (Danas: “Feminine nouns have their origins in Proto-Slavic language”)

³⁰ For “present”, “were”, and “disappointed”, both male and female forms are written out.

since 2005, when in his book *Language and Culture (XX Century Library)* he quoted and commented on a letter in the newspaper *Danas* dated March 25, 2004, signed by 'Aktivistkinje i Aktivisti'³¹ of the Center for Nonviolent Action Belgrade. Instead of Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo, Serbian men/Serbian women and Albanian men/Albanian women are mentioned, emphasizing that we all need to be 'svesne i svesni'³² of some things... And now even in the invitations to certain professional gatherings, 'učesnici i učesnice'³³ are greeted, 'koji/koje'³⁴ are asked to send contributions, and the like. It is even worse when "economizing" begins with monstrous shortening of words, such as 'članovi/ce, studenti/kinje, doktori/ke'³⁵, which can also often be seen (and not just in official forms), and which make a literate person's hair stand on end. [...] But difficulties arise when 'borci i borkinje, studenti i studentkinje, članovi i članice'³⁶ stand side by side, and they are always so paired, not to mention the above "abbreviations". In other words, the main problems are actually not morphological but syntactic-stylistic in nature. (*Danas*: "Borkinje"³⁷ are not the problem but rather *borci i borkinje*³⁸)

4. Semantic arguments refer to social feminine titles that cause semantic inaccuracy, for example: *Ona je najstroži profesor na našem fakultetu* [She is the strictest professor (generic masculine form) at our faculty] : *Ona je najstroža profesorka na našem fakultetu* [She is the strictest professor (feminine form) at our faculty] or *Tamara Petrović je student generacije* [Tamara Petrović is the best student (generic masculine form) in her class] : *Tamara Petrović je studentkinja generacije* [Tamara Petrović is the best student (feminine form) in her class.] The question is whether in the second version of either example the woman in question is the strictest of all female professors or the best of all female students on the one hand, or else the strictest of all professors, both male and female, or the best of all students, both male and female, on the other (Ćorić 2008, p. 205).

- (10) *When you say 'Marija je najbolja matematičarka u Srbiji'* [Marija is the best mathematician (female form) in Serbia], *this means that she is the best of all female mathematicians. But if you were to say that she is the best "matematičar"* [mathematician – generic masculine form], *it would mean that she is the best out of all men and women active in this discipline in Serbia.* (*Politika*: "The Gender Equality Act endangers constitutional freedoms")

³¹ Feminine and masculine forms of activists.

³² Feminine and masculine forms of aware.

³³ Masculine and feminine forms of participants.

³⁴ Masculine and feminine forms of who.

³⁵ Members, students, doctors – the feminine suffixes are attached to the generic masculine form.

³⁶ Fighters, students, members – both masculine and feminine forms are written out.

³⁷ Feminine form of fighters.

³⁸ Masculine and feminine forms of fighters.

Certain social feminine titles can be semantically confusing in Serbian because they are formally identical to some other words, and can thus sound funny or have a negative connotation: the word *trenerka*³⁹ in Serbian means “track suit” as well as the new feminine title “female trainer”; *generalka* is “female general”, but also “dress rehearsal”, “general repair”, or “general cleaning”; a new feminine title for a female correspondent has appeared – *dopisnica*, a word that in Serbian also means an open letter; it is the same with the word *govornica*: it means both “a female speaker” and “a phone booth” (Ćorić 2008, pp. 206–207).

- (11) *Must we necessarily use the word ‘ministarka’ [feminine form of minister] for the woman who works as a minister, seeing that the word ‘ministarka’ means primarily a minister’s wife. This is the meaning that comes to everyone’s mind when we hear the word.* (Novosti: “Important for all women in Serbia”)
- (12) *Certain feminine forms for occupations such as ‘trenerica’ [female coach and item of clothing] are confusing because they have multiple meanings.* (Radio Slobodna Evropa: “Why is the right opposed to gender sensitive language?”)
- (13) *If I announce “‘Dopisnica’ is here”, and you ask yourself if I mean a person or an open letter.* (Politika: “Engendering of language”)

5. Normative arguments refer to feminine title use. Aside from the so-called natural feminine titles commonly used in Serbian: *učiteljica*, *vaspitačica*, *domaćica* [female teacher, kindergarten teacher, housewife], there are those that have not entered use: *trenerica*, *borkinja*, *vatrogasica* [female coach, fighter, firefighter] (Committee: “The Gender Equality Act is an act against the Serbian Language”; Committee: “Conclusions of the meeting”; Politika: “An attack against an already wounded Serbian language”; Politika: “The Gender Equality Act endangers constitutional freedoms”). Some artificially constructed feminine titles have also made an appearance. These are fabricated words such as: *ubickinja* [female murderer] (Politika: “A coup against Vuk”), *brusačica stakala* [female glass sander] (Politika: “An attack against an already wounded Serbian language”) and the like.

- (14) *The feminine forms in Serbian came into being naturally, without imposition, reflecting changes in reality. No one has the right, nor should anyone have the right to dispute the development of this part of language. Words such as queen, empress, female teacher or professor have been around for a while, while others are only starting to develop in this direction. This process ought not to be rushed or forced “from above”.* (Politika: “The Gender Equality Act endangers constitutional freedoms”)

³⁹ Regarding the word *trenerka* in the Serbian language, see the paper by Jovana Jovanović 2020b.

- (15) *Serbian already looks after gender equality, as it has long had female forms that are natural. [...] The fabrication of new concepts has become intrusive, so that some [...] insane solutions have emerged, such as 'borkinja' [feminine form of fighter] and others. "Some examples are grotesque. For example, if we were consistent, then we should say 'halfica' for a female halfback in football. She passed the ball to the 'bekica' [feminine form of fullback] who then went to the right wing. In basketball, for example, they would have a 'centrica' [female form for center (Eng. centres)]. 'Blokica' passed to the centress under the basket – utter insanity."* (Sputnik: "Violence against one's own language in the name of equality – has Serbia committed itself to this baggage").
- (16) *There are feminine nouns that have entered our thoughts, which are natural, such as 'učiteljica' or 'domaćica' [feminine form of teacher or housewife], and then there are examples where it is impossible to pull this off. [...] What gains acceptance in a language, what remains, is what's natural, and everything that they want to introduce by force, like a derived noun that feels unnatural in a language, will not stick. A mixed system of titles must remain.* (Sputnik: "Violence against one's own language in the name of equality – has Serbia committed itself to this baggage")
- (17) *Let's leave aside the made-up words in this manual, such as 'drvomodelarka', 'isporučica', 'paedodontistkinja', 'reparatorka nameštaja' [female forms of woodworker, deliveryman, children's dentist, furniture repairer]... Or, say, 'brusačica stakla' [feminine form for glass sander]. As a dear female colleague of mine put it: "I could have sworn that they were talking about a sanding machine."* (Politika: "An attack against an already wounded Serbian language")
- (18) *If the degree of a girl who studied psychology says that she is a 'psihološkinja' [feminine form of psychologist] or the degree of a girl who studied pedagogy says that she is a 'pedagoškinja' [feminine form of pedagogue], the language will not have it because the construction is clumsy, artificial and will not take root in the language.* (Novosti: "Important for all women in Serbia")

5.2. Linguistic arguments of supporters of new feminine titles

The linguistic arguments of those who support the new words include grammatical, formative and normative arguments.

1. The main grammatical argument of the proponents of new feminine titles points to the fact that with the use of social feminine titles mistakes in congruence would be avoided: *Premijer je rekla : Premijerka je rekla* (In the first instance, the generic masculine form of "Prime Minister" and the feminine form of "said" are incongruent, in the second instance both are feminine and therefore congruent). This argument applies to both new and previously established feminine titles in the Serbian language.

(19) *The arguments of “normativists” [are] inconsistent as they refuse to use feminine forms for functions and occupations performed by women, passing over in silence the problem this creates with sentence forming in the Serbian language. For example, if you were to say ‘državni sekretar je rekla’ [The Secretary of State has said],⁴⁰ this is incorrect, as the genders of subject and predicate are not in agreement [...]. (Radio Slobodna Evropa: “Why is the right opposed to gender sensitive language?”)*

(20) *When speaking of the linguists’ reactions (and linguists’ also – why not?),⁴¹ first we have to ask the following question – how is it that they do not mind breaking one of the basic rules of the Serbian language – agreement of words in a sentence by gender, number, and case? Would they consider the following correct Serbian: The President said... The Minister reminded... The Prime Minister visited... The Governor announced⁴²... Of course not! (Danas: “Occupations in the feminine gender – unnecessary noise”)*

2. The proponents of social feminine titles also argue that the **formative possibilities** of the Serbian language allow for creation of new social feminine titles (Bošković Marković 2021; Savić 1995, 1998, 2009).

(21) *[...] suffixes for creating female names (feminine suffixes) [are] inherent in our language [...]. Feminine suffixes (e.g. the suffix ‘-ica’) come from Proto-Slavic, which means that they have been around since ancient times and are an integral part of our language. (Danas: “How nouns for women’s occupations and titles have developed since ancient times”)*

(22) *Our language has always had recognizable forms of the female gender for numerous occupations: cook, maid, cleaner, dancer, teacher, actress, helper, laundress, seamstress, dentist, journalist, nurse, midwife [...] if this is allowed for old occupations, why not new ones? (Danas: “Occupations in the female gender – unnecessary noise”).*

3. **Normative arguments** refer to the use of social feminine titles. Proponents of the new feminine titles point out that some of the disputed nouns are already included in the norm, as they are found in dictionaries, while they believe some others are common in use (*psihološkinja*, *ministarka*⁴³, *premijerka* – female forms of

⁴⁰ The noun (masculine) and verb (feminine) genders are incongruent.

⁴¹ “Linguists” in the parenthesis is in the female form: *Ако говоримо о реакцијама језикословца (и језикословки – зашто да не?)...*

⁴² Here the nouns are all in their generic masculine form, and the verbs in their feminine form: *Председник је рекла... Министар је подсетила... Премијер је гостовала... Гувернер је изјавила...*

⁴³ Meaning a woman who serves as a minister.

psychologist, minister, prime minister). They believe that with the use of social feminine titles, these words will no longer sound “unnatural”, “clumsy” or “funny to the Serbian ear”, and they put forward the idea that language is a dynamic category that, as such, allows for a change in the norm.

- (23) [a comment on a columnist’s remark, stating that *psihološkinja* (female psychologist) is a hideous term, as it brings *riffraff* to mind – *ološkinja* is the feminine singular form of *riffraff*].

If the problem is with the words themselves, he’d find adjectives such as ‘filološki’, ‘ekološki’, ‘antropološki’, ‘muzikološki’ [philological, ecological, anthropological, musicological] equally hideous – because they would “smack of riffraff”. [...] A common objection raised against words such as [the female forms of] engineer, architect, manager, lecturer, Germanist – is that they sound clumsy. Then what about ‘drnč’, ‘džandrljiv’, ‘škrbav’, ‘Popokatepetl’, ‘Čibutkovića’, ‘otolaringologija’, ‘paralelopiped’, ‘dodekaedar’, ‘čvoruga’, ‘poslastičarnica’, ‘šćućuriti se’, ‘čokanjčić’, ‘žandarmerija’, ‘žižljivost ili ždrkljaj’? [all hard to pronounce, strange or exotic-sounding Serbian words] Or – ‘rukometašica’, ‘odbojkašica’, ‘teniserka’, ‘džudistkinja’, ‘košarkašica’? [female forms of handball player, volleyball player, tennis player, judoka, basketball player]. Had we grown up with these words, they would all sound equally natural; the question of their naturalness would never be raised. The words such as [female forms of] teacher, professor, make-up artist, cashier, kindergarten teacher, were also new at some point in time, and they may well have sounded strange to people upon hearing them for the first time. Over time, though, everyone got used to them. Even some old words can sound strange to us. (Al-Jazeera: “Why can a woman be a housewife, but not a [female form] diplomat?”)

- (24) *Some examples of nouns that the Committee cites in its letter as unacceptable exist in the Dictionary of the Serbian Language from 2011: ‘dopisnica’ is a noun that has two meanings 1. postcard 2. female correspondent (p. 292). Other examples cited by the Committee existed in the Dictionary of Serbo-Croatian Literary Language, and everyone can check that the first volume of that book from 1967 includes a noun ‘govornica’ meaning ‘female speaker’ (p. 517, confirmation found in Belgrade in 1937!). Also, in Volume 6 of that 1976 book, there are nouns: ‘filozofkinja’ meaning ‘female philosopher’ (p. 671), as well as ‘trenerka’ and ‘trenerica’ meaning ‘female coach’ (p. 275). The Committee also cites that the noun ‘virološkinja’ [female virologist] is unacceptable, the very word that prof. Dr. Marina Nikolić and Dr. Svetlana Slijepčević Bjelivuk included in the new Dictionary of Terms from the Covid pandemic period, which was created as a special project of the Standard Language Department of the Serbian Language Institute of SASA. How is it*

possible that the Committee does not use the dictionaries published by Matica Srpska or by one of the institutions that established the Serbian Language Standardization Committee? (Danas: “The Committee’s recommendations are not founded on science”)

5.3. Ideological arguments of the opponents of new feminine titles

It should be noted that the ideological arguments of the opponents of new social feminine titles are closely related to the Gender Equality Act, which prescribes the obligation to use gender-sensitive language, which is mostly interpreted by the professional public as obligatoriness in the use of social feminine titles.

1. The first subtheme in this category is the following: New social feminine titles are not in accordance with the Serbian tradition but arise under the pressure from the West:⁴⁴

(25) *[The ongoing reform] is not the result of spontaneous, natural language development but of ill-conceived and therefore reckless adoption of the ideological matrix of modern Western, mostly de-Christianized or post-Christian culture and civilization.* (Novosti: “The living language of the living people will outlive decrees!”).

(26) *The Act in question was undoubtedly fashioned under the influence of Brussels.* (Committee: “The Gender Equality Act is an act against the Serbian language”).

(27) *It is interesting that the impetus for the Act came from the European Union [...] Therefore, it is reasonable to expect that, if the EU was indeed the cause of this Act, the current EU attitude towards gender-sensitive language will be the cause for its withdrawal.* (Committee: “Violence against the Serbian language”)⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Some examples point out that the United Nations and the European Union do not have guidelines that would impose the use of inclusive language: “The directions provided by the United Nations for gender inclusive use of the English language give certain recommendations, they say that such language may be applied, not that it must be. It is stated that gender should be made visible when it is relevant for communication, with the advice to ‘not overdo it because it can distract readers, especially in narrative texts’, and that ‘it can lead to inconsistencies and ambiguities, for example, in legal texts’. The document titled “Gender-Neutral Language” in the European Parliament states, for example, that the goal is to encourage administrative services to pay attention to gender sensitivity in a language. Which is fine. It is a matter of recommendations and encouragement, not something that is to be imposed.” (Politika: “The Gender Equality Act endangers constitutional freedoms”); “Brussels does not interfere in local legislation, much less language issues in such a way. No EU country has a legal obligation to use the language of gender equality. There are recommendations by the left-wing European governments but no obligations. Only domestic buyers of European principles could convince those who do not understand the spirit of EU principles that such an obligation exists. Moreover, “inclusive spelling” is banned in schools in France by decree of the Minister of Education, May 7, 2021.” (Politika: “A coup against Vuk”)

⁴⁵ The fact that the European Union has not passed any law on gender-sensitive language has been

2. The next subtheme The use of new social feminine titles threatens the national and cultural identity of the people is illustrated by the following examples:

(28) *This violence against our language is committed by those who know nothing about its structure and laws of functioning or else they do know, but are working on the destruction of the Serbian language as one of the pillars of Serbian national and cultural identity. [...] The effort to protect equality is just a front for the destruction of language and national and cultural identity, and not just Serbian, but also the language of minority peoples and their culture. (Politika: “We have public support, but the state will not listen to us”)*

(29) *Artificial changes to the grammatical structure of Serbian or any other language in the Republic of Serbia destroy the main bearer of cultural identity that makes Serbs Serbs, but also humans human – and that’s language. (Committee: “Conclusions of the meeting”).*

3. Within the subtheme Social feminine titles are a means of discrimination several subcategories can be identified:⁴⁶

stated on several occasions: “You do not have such laws anywhere in Europe” (Sputnik: “This does not exist in Europe: Strange ideological violence against the Serbian language is at work”); “The legal imposition of “gender-sensitive language” is not part of European regulations and values”, [as testified by] “the GENDER-NEUTRAL LANGUAGE ordinances in the European Parliament, which state that the use of gender-sensitive language is recommended to the extent that it does not disturb the structure of a given language, with special attention paid to respecting the attitude of each individual regarding how they wish to be identified. Also, in the European Commission’s 2019 report on legislation related to gender equality in Europe and the transposition of European rules into national law, which provides a detailed overview of the situation in 28 European Union countries, Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway and four candidate countries – language is not mentioned at all as a field of achieving gender equality that should be regulated by law” (Committee: “Conclusions of the meeting”). Proponents of feminine titles point out that the “legislation of the countries in our region prescribes consistent use of both masculine and feminine genders in the designation of occupations, and in Montenegro, for example, there are even penal provisions.” An example from Slovenia shows that the Gender Equality Act influenced changes in language use because in the 1980s only four percent of job advertisements were in the female gender, climbing to 3540 percent by 2010” (Politika: “What do we say for women in gender-sensitive language – borci or borkinje” (masculine and feminine forms of fighters). See Markežić 2019, pp. 1618, for the official documents of the European Union on gender equality, and pages 2528 on the use of gender-sensitive language in English, French and German.

⁴⁶ Another two subcategories that appear are Discrimination against males in the use of feminine titles and Discrimination of that part of the population that declares itself neither male nor female but only with single confirmation within the same text: 1) “if we speak of ‘gender-sensitive language’, then the question of potential discrimination against males arises: are they discriminated against if they are referred to as *stranke, mušterije, pristanice* [parties, customers, supporters] because these are all feminine nouns?”; 2) “The phrase *Građani i građanke* (the two gender forms of citizens) is discrimination. This does not include the neuter gender; it does not include those who do not feel they belong in either category. The so-

a. Social feminine titles reveal the individual's sex, while social masculine title use does not:

- (30) *Intrusion into one's intimacy – by insisting on the disclosure of an individual's sexuality (even when one does not want to declare it oneself) – violates one's personal dignity and ridicules society as a whole because it is fundamentally contrary to traditional morality, on which the existing society is built. (Committee: "Conclusions of the meeting")*
- (31) *Gender equality is (in fact) ensured through the use of gender-neutral forms, while insisting on gender labeling in a context in which this information is irrelevant may result in discrimination. (Committee: "Language of Gender Equality")*

b. Forcing the use of social feminine titles discriminates against persons of both sexes who do not wish to use them:

- (32) *Under the guise of anti-discrimination, the law discriminates against a part of the population of the Republic of Serbia, by all indications the majority (the part that does not wish to identify as, for example, 'nosačica', 'govornica', 'rukovoditeljka', 'farmerka', 'padobranka', 'geodetkinja', etc. [feminine forms of carrier, speaker, manager, farmer, parachutist, surveyor]. (Committee: "Conclusions of the meeting")*
- (33) *The attitude of a large number of people living in the Republic of Serbia is not taken into account, namely all those who do not find it discriminatory to use grammatical masculine nouns to denote females. It is important to note that among them there are many female persons. [...] This is why the question arises: How is this democratic? If democracy is reflected in the law through efforts toward the acceptance of gender-sensitive language, why insist on its consistent use even among those Serbian speakers who do not share this opinion? (Matica Srpska: "Statement of Matica Srpska on the issue of gender equality")*
- (34) *The key problem with the law is that, in the name of exercising the rights of the part of the population that feels discriminated against unless feminine titles are used, it promotes inequality of those who do not feel this way, both linguists and speakers of Serbian, and not only Serbian. Those who are against the forced use of feminine titles are branded as conservatives, and women are labeled as not being actually aware that they are slaves to patriarchal patterns. In other*

called general noun ought to be used – *građani* (generic masculine form). Everything else is, in fact, discrimination and mere politics." (Politika: "Linguistics between Legal and Gender Equality").

words, I am now in need of someone to raise the level of my awareness. Discrimination is carried out in the name of anti-discrimination. (Politika: “The Gender Equality Act endangers Constitutional Freedoms”)

- (35) *We have a diminishment or exclusion of already-existing rights that an entire nation possesses in terms of language use. It is being imposed that all females, including those who do not want this, must have (the feminine forms of) “doctor”, “professor”, “engineer” written on their degrees... Excuse me, how is this freedom? What happened to democratic choice? All that remains is legal coercion. And behind it all is an ideology, which is healthy neither for human thought, nor for human relations. (Politika: “An attack against an already wounded Serbian language”)*

c. Discrimination against Serbian speakers, in case the Act does not apply to minority languages in Serbia:

- (36) *Does this law apply to all official languages in our country or only to Serbian? If it refers to all the languages that have official status, then the following question arises: where does someone get the right to intervene in the language structure of Hungarian, Romanian, Albanian or any other language that has official status in the Republic of Serbia, and whose home territory is outside its borders? And if the Act refers only to the Serbian language, then it is quite clear that we are talking about discrimination. (Politika: “An attack against an already wounded Serbian language”)*
- (37) *It is not specified which language “gender-sensitivity”, prescribed by law, refers to. In the case of all official languages in the country, the question arises of the right to change a language whose motherland is outside the borders of the Republic of Serbia, and whose official language policy either is not consistent application of “gender-sensitive language” or this is not even possible due to language structure (as in the case of Hungarian). [...] If the Act, however, refers only to the Serbian language, then it is a matter of discrimination. What applies to minority languages must also apply to the majority language, which in the case of the Republic of Serbia is – Serbian. (Committee: “Conclusions of the meeting”)*
- (38) *I OWE it to my readers to parenthesize here and explain what I mean when I speak of the discrimination of an entire ethnic group in our homeland. I am speaking of our fellow Hungarian citizens. There is no notion of masculine, feminine or middle grammatical gender in their grammar and speaking practice. Consequently, Hungarians, be they ever the most loyal citizens of Serbia, must necessarily violate this grand law and everyone, every day, can be*

prosecuted as a criminal. They simply cannot, in addition to the nouns 'lovac', 'sudija', 'sociolog' [generic masculine forms of hunter, judge, sociologist] and others ending in '-log', make "gender-correct" nouns 'lovkinja', 'sutkinja' or 'sudijka', 'sociološkinja' and other '-ološkinje', recently invented. Here, someone might object that the law applies only to citizens who speak Serbian. Such an objection, however, would only be a poor and wily excuse. The reason being that, in every normal and orderly country, every law applies to all its citizens. (Novosti: "The living language of the living people will outlive decrees!")

d. The use or non-use of feminine titles cannot affect the equality or discrimination of women:

(39) *The grammatical category of the female gender is not the only means of ensuring the **visibility of women** in Serbian or any other language, nor can it affect discrimination or equality of women. [...] Even with the consistent use of the grammatical category of the female gender, discriminatory attitudes towards women can be expressed (e.g. **female politicians** ('političarke') are incapable of performing responsible duties). On the other hand, texts that do not use the grammatical category of the feminine gender may contain views that affirm gender equality. (Committee: "Language of Gender Equality")*

4. Language does not affect society – this subtheme articulates the idea that we cannot improve social reality with changes to the language. In this case, this is to say that gender equality is not to be realized in this way:

(40) *This Act starts out with the idea that language use affects the speakers' consciousness. There have been various hypotheses in the history of linguistics, but the hypothesis that the structure of language determines our opinion, understanding of reality and attitudes, in its "strict form", is, to say the least, disputable. Language use is a different matter where by modeling statements by way of normatively accepted means, you can influence what kind of message your interlocutor will receive. (Politika: "The Gender Equality Act endangers constitutional freedoms")*

5. Language reflects societal changes. Reality affects language:

(41) *The Serbian language should be left to respond to changes in society with its own creative mechanisms, which may well mean the emergence of a large number of social feminine titles. (Politika: "We have public support, but the state will not listen to us")*

(42) *Language is the human image of the world. Reality, as we see it, affects what we express through language as crucial and important. Language changes the way our perceptual reality changes. That is how feminine titles in the Serbian language came about, naturally, without imposition, reflecting changes in reality.* (Politika: “The Gender Equality Act endangers constitutional freedoms”).

5.4. Ideological arguments of the proponents of social feminine titles

The ideological arguments of the proponents of social feminine titles include the following subthemes:

1. Non-existence of social feminine titles is a reflection of a patriarchal system:

(43) *The absence of the female gender in a language is a consequence of a patriarchal cultural model. For centuries, women traditionally belonged to the family circle and the private sphere, whereas the public sphere had been exclusive to men.* (Radio Slobodna Evropa: “The place of ‘girls’ in the gender sensitive language of Serbia”)

(44) *By using gender-sensitive language and addressing women in all occupations and positions in the female gender, we are deconstructing the patriarchal model deeply ingrained in our society.* (Danas: “Women’s occupations – unnecessary noise”)

(45) *There are many words in our language, especially names of occupations, which are now traditionally expressed in the feminine gender. Such words are ‘čistačica’, ‘kuvarica’, ‘kasirka’, ‘vaspitačica’ [cleaner, cook, cashier, kindergarten teacher], and they are mostly names for occupations that are less paid and less appreciated. Why, then, do the words ‘direktorka’, ‘predsednica’, ‘sutkinja’, ‘inžinjerka’ [feminine forms of director, president, judge, engineer] “hurt the ears” and “do damage” to our language? Is this really about the nature of language or rather about patriarchal patterns that do not allow women to be recognized and present in positions of power and influence?* (Politika: “If the word ‘maid’ is fine, what’s wrong with the word ‘engineer’ (female form of engineer)”)

2. New social feminine titles are a projection of new social circumstances:

(46) *Times are changing, women have entered all spheres of social and public life, they have the opportunity to study and pursue all professions, and have become ‘advokatkinje’, ‘pilotknije’, ‘astronautkinje’, but also ‘predsednice’, ‘ministarke’, ‘rektorke’ and ‘poslanice’ [lawyers, pilots, astronauts, presidents, ministers, rectors and MPs. – all feminine forms].* (Danas: “Women’s occupations – unnecessary noise”)

(47) [Through daily use of gender-sensitive language] *we encourage positive change in the sphere of gender equality at the societal level in order to create space for girls and women to be empowered and given equal opportunities to advance in all spheres of professional and private life. And the only society that can move forward is a society in which both women and men have equal opportunities and conditions to live, work, and develop.* (Politika: “If the word ‘maid’ is fine, what’s wrong with the word ‘engineer’”)

(48) *Language is a living thing that changes in accordance with social needs. I think that language changes through education, culture, public discourse, and media.* (Radio Slobodna Evropa: “The place of ‘girls’ in the gender-sensitive language of Serbia”)

3. Non-use of social feminine titles is discrimination against women. This subtheme suggests that use of social feminine titles promotes equality of men and women and improves the standing of women in society (by improving the visibility of female professions and of women who hold highly respectable positions in society):

(49) *Linguistic discrimination in our society is mostly seen precisely in the professional sphere, where it is still the “standard” to use male gender names for occupations that involve leading, such as director, boss, president, manager. This underlines the unequal position of men and women, and it needs to be changed if we are to become a society of equal opportunities for all. The use of gender-discriminatory language leaves an impression that certain occupations are “reserved” only for women or only for men and this really is unacceptable.* (Politika: “If the word ‘maid’ is fine, what’s wrong with the word ‘engineer’”)

(50) *Language is very much soaked in ideology, and with certain language practices, the dominant ideology is reproduced and imposed on society, preserving the existing stereotypes, perception and power relations. And this does not apply only to discrimination against women, which is obvious and easily verifiable. If there is nothing disparaging in the use of the masculine gender for women’s occupations and status if it is ideologically neutral, what would happen if the situation was reversed?* (Al-Jazeera: “Why can a woman be a housewife, but not a [female form] diplomat?”)

4. Language affects society – proponents of social feminine titles are of the opinion that language is a means of achieving gender equality and a reflection of societal reality. This position is supported by the Gender Equality Act (Ar. 6, number 17), in which gender-sensitive language is explicitly defined as “a tool by means of which the awareness of those who use it is affected”:

- (51) *Language shapes awareness, language creates thoughts and attitudes, language makes people, events and phenomena visible; The use of gender-sensitive language is not a question of language structure but of the power of those who want to create the awareness of public opinion. (Danas: “Women’s occupations – unnecessary noise”)*
- (52) *The use of gender-sensitive language is one of the ways to incorporate and respect the principles of equality and equal rights in our daily lives; [...] In reality, the use of such language raises awareness of the importance of equality between women and men; By using it, we encourage positive change in the field of gender equality at the level of the entire society in order to create space for girls and women to be empowered and given equal opportunities to advance in all spheres of professional and private life; The language we use is a faithful reflection of the social patterns and society in which we live. (Politika: “If the word ‘maid’ is fine, what’s wrong with the word ‘engineer’ ”)*

6. CONCLUSION

With this paper, we wanted to present a linguistic phenomenon that is now current in the Serbian public space, and to extricate the reasons pro and contra social feminine titles. Media content analysis showed that there are linguistic reasons against the use of these words – the linguists implore that 1) new words not be invented and forcibly created where there is no need for them, 2) that social feminine titles that are not in accordance with the norm not be used, the normative norm in particular or those that have negative connotations and/or have double meanings (*pušačica*, *trenerka* – feminine forms of smoker, coach), 3) that social feminine titles which are in accordance with the norm and established in use be used only referentially, when the context demands that sex be made known. The more frequent use of social masculine titles in relation to social feminine titles in Slavic languages is caused by a larger semantic range of the generic form in those languages (see Klčová 2009, pp. 9–10). On the other hand, there are also valid linguistic reasons of the proponents of social feminine titles, which primarily concern the norm, formation and use of these words: 1) many of the new social feminine titles are common in speech, 2) over time, with use, social feminine titles will no longer sound “unnatural” or “clumsy”, 3) language is a dynamic category that allows changes in the norm and introduction of new formative patterns.

What is interesting is that both the opponents and the proponents of social feminine titles speak of discrimination. Proponents of social feminine titles see discrimination in the use of gender-neutral terms and advocate the idea that social feminine titles are a way of realizing gender equality – that the use of these words improves the position of women in society by increasing their visibility at various

functions. On the other hand, opponents of social feminine titles see discrimination in the very use of these words, as forcing their use is discrimination against all those who do not wish to use them; also, they maintain that gender equality is ensured when gender-neutral forms are used – occupation titles of the grammatical masculine gender.

It is expected that the positions on social feminine titles presented in the media will have an effect on the attitudes Serbian speakers form toward new feminine titles and toward feminine titles in general and that our research will act as the first step in investigating the attitudes of Serbian speakers regarding feminine title use. It would be notable to compare results of such research to similar research conducted in other Slavic languages.⁴⁷

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⁴⁷ According to Jarosz 2021, for example, 40% of Polish respondents believe use of parallel forms (both feminine and masculine terms) is important for suppressing gender discrimination, while 28% of respondents maintain the chances of proposed means actually lowering gender discrimination are slim (Jarosz 2021, p. 1001).

⁴⁸ Serbian titles are given in transliteration into Latin.

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Resumé

NEOLOGIZMY A RODOVÁ ROVNOSTĚ V SRBČINE – DOCHÁDZA K DISKRIMINÁCIÍ?

Skúmali sme všeobecné postoje k novým ženským pomenovaniám, ako sa vyskytovali v médiách v roku 2021, a celkový obraz spoločenských ženských pomenovaní v súčasnosti rozšírených v srbských médiách, vždy s konštatovaním dôvodov pre akceptovanie alebo neakceptovanie nových spoločenských ženských pomenovaní, ako boli artikulované v médiách. Po definovaní potrebných pojmov (diskriminácia, rodová rovnosť, spoločenské ženské pomenovania a pod.) a po krátkom prehľade spoločenského kontextu, ktorý spravil zo spoločenských ženských pomenovaní v srbských médiách v roku 2021 horúcu tému, sme analyzovali relevantné mediálne texty, ktoré predstavujú rozličné pozície v súvislosti so spoločenskými ženskými pomenovaniami. Použili sme metódu kvalitatívnej obsahovej analýzy, pretože sme ju považovali za najvhodnejšiu metodologickú procedúru na extrakciu argumentov za a proti používaniu spoločenských ženských pomenovaní. Výskumný korpus pozostával z mediálnych textov a oficiálnych stanovísk srbských jazykovedných inštitúcií na tému spoločenských ženských pomenovaní, zozbieraných za obdobie od januára do septembra 2021. Základným predpokladom bolo, že dominantným postojom v médiách bude ten proti používaniu ženských pomenovaní, ale tiež, že obe skupiny (podporujúci aj oponujúci používanie nových ženských pomenovaní) sa budú cítiť diskriminovaní, či už diskriminácia prichádza skrz vymedzovanie sa alebo naopak skrz povinné a konzistentné používanie týchto výrazov.