

THE 'GRAMMAR' OF GENDER. FROM A ROBUST GRAMMATICAL CATEGORY TO A FLUID DISCOURSE CONSTRUCT

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Genul a fost investigat dintr-o varietate de perspective, fiecare oferind o perspectivă unică asupra modului în care acesta funcționează în limbaj, în societate sau la nivelul identității individuale.

Conform definiției genului, definiție care tinde să aibă cea mai largă utilizare în literatura de specialitate, genul gramatical este o caracteristică a substantivelor, reflectată asupra elementelor care se acordă cu acestea. În cazul substantivelor, genul este o categorie funcțională invariabilă care poate fi marcată sau nu în mod evident. Criteriul determinant pentru gen este acordul, respectiv „comportamentul cuvintelor asociate” (Hockett, 1958: 231). Din perspectiva analizei discursului, genul este înțeles ca entitate construită, negociată și realizată în comunicare.

Scopul nostru este de a aborda conceptul de gen ca fenomen matur, cu multiple fațete, care tinde să părăsească interpretarea sa lingvistică tradițională robustă pentru una socioculturală fluidă, nuanțată. Ne vom axa analiza pe limbile engleză, română și rusă, toate limbi indo-europene, dar aparținând unor ramuri diferite, și, luând în considerare definiția lui Hockett, vom examina acordul de gen în comportamentul a nouă astfel de cazuri de „cuvinte asociate”.

Cuvinte cheie: *gen gramatical, categorie funcțională, categorie nominală, acord, identitate de gen, analiză de discurs.*

Gender has been investigated from a variety of perspectives, each offering unique insights into how it functions in language, in society, or at the level of individual identity.

According to the definition of gender that is used most widely in literature, grammatical gender is a characteristic of nouns, reflected on elements that agree with them. In nouns, gender is an invariable functional category that may or may not be overtly marked. The determining criterion for gender is agreement, namely, “the behavior of associated words” (Hockett, 1958:231). From the perspective of **discourse analysis**, **gender** is understood as something that is **constructed, negotiated, and performed** in communication.

Our aim is to tackle the concept of gender as a mature multifaceted phenomenon which tends to leave its traditional robust linguistic interpretation for a fluid, nuanced sociocultural one. We shall focus upon English, Romanian and Russian, all Indo-European languages, but belonging to different branches within the Indo-European language family, and considering Hockett’s definition, we examine gender agreement in the behaviour of nine such instances of “associated words”.

Keywords: *grammatical gender, functional category, nominal category, agreement, gender identity, discourse analysis*

1. Grammatical Gender. Gender as a Nominal Category

The concept of gender has evolved from being perceived as a biologically and theologically determined construct to a fluid, socially and culturally mediated category. This diachronic shift is reflected not only in societal roles and identities but also in linguistic structures, where gender functions as a nominal category with both grammatical and discursive implications. Analyzing gender in language thus requires a dual perspective, acknowledging its historical foundations and its role in shaping, and being shaped by, broader socio-cultural dynamics.

Grammatical gender displays a high degree of complexity. It is “the most puzzling of the grammatical categories”, as Corbett (1991: 1) describes it. This must be due to the fact that the defining features of gender, such as noun classes and agreement, present high intricacies which can impact key aspects of language structure. Hence, gender functions as an intersectional phenomenon, producing complex systems, which are parameterized across languages in accordance with different cultural, historical, and cognitive frameworks.

Many Indo-European languages exhibit a two-gender system, typically masculine and feminine. Some languages, though, also include a neuter gender (e.g. German, Romanian). These languages often use gendered articles and adjectives that agree with the gender of nouns. For example, in Romance languages (like French, Spanish, Romanian) grammatical gender affects articles, pronouns, and adjective endings. However, some Indo-European languages, like English, have largely lost grammatical gender but still retain it in pronouns.

Afroasiatic languages (formerly Hamito-Semitic languages), such as Arabic, Hebrew, and Amharic, generally have masculine and feminine genders. This system is deeply embedded in their grammar, affecting verbs, adjectives, and noun agreements. For example, in Arabic, verbs and pronouns must agree with the gender of the noun they refer to. Modern Hebrew also retains a two-gender system, where even numbers and certain prepositions show gender distinctions.

Many Niger-Congo languages, such as Swahili, feature a more complex system of noun classes, which function similarly to gender. Swahili has over a dozen noun classes that encompass more than just masculine and feminine distinctions, including categories for animate and inanimate objects, abstract concepts, and more. In many of these languages, agreement markers for verbs and adjectives are determined by the noun class rather than a simple masculine-feminine division.

Uralic languages (such as Finnish and Hungarian) typically lack grammatical gender entirely. Instead, they use gender-neutral terms and do not differentiate between masculine and feminine forms in pronouns or nouns, relying on contextual or semantic distinctions to indicate gender when necessary. This makes them a contrast to Indo-European languages with strong gender distinctions.

Languages from East and Southeast Asia, including Mandarin Chinese and Japanese, do not have grammatical gender. However, these languages may use classifiers or other systems to differentiate nouns. Research into classifier systems, particularly in Sino-Tibetan languages, suggests that while these systems replace gender, they still encode specific semantic information such as animacy or countability. Mandarin Chinese uses gender-neutral pronouns in spoken language, although a distinction was introduced in written form to accommodate translations of Western literature. In Japanese and Korean, noun classifiers (used for counting objects) replace the need for grammatical gender.

So, gender is not a linguistic universal. In order to exemplify how this parameterization manifests cross-linguistically, we shall focus upon English, Romanian and Russian, all Indo-European languages, but belonging to different branches within the Indo-European language family: English is part of the Germanic branch, Romanian belongs to the Romance branch, which evolved from Latin, and Russian – part of the Slavic branch.

Our comparative analysis starts from the most widely referenced definition of gender, according to which “genders are classes of nouns reflected in the behavior of associated words” (Hockett, 1958: 231).

For each of the three languages, we examine gender agreement in the behaviour of nine such instances of “associated words”, as follows:

- [1] NP-head – determiner (*indefinite article*)
- [2] NP-head – determiner (*definite article*)
- [3] NP-head – cardinal numeral: one / two / greater than two
- [4] NP-head – modifying adjective
- [5] NP-head – demonstrative adjective
- [6] Anaphoric/cataphoric personal pronouns
- [7] Subject NP – Finite verb (*present tense*)
- [8] Subject NP – Finite verb (*past tense*)
- [9] Subject NP – predicative AP / participle (*passive*)

1.1. Gender in English

English belongs to the West Germanic branch of the Indo-European language family, alongside languages such as German, Dutch, and Frisian. During the Old English period, which spanned from the arrival of Germanic tribes in England in the 5th century to the Norman Conquest in the 11th century, the language was highly inflectional, comparable, thus, to Latin and Russian. It featured strong and weak inflectional paradigms, three grammatical genders (feminine, masculine, and neuter), two numbers (singular and plural, with traces of the Indo-European dual), and four cases. Old English exhibited morphological agreement across various word classes, including adjectives, verbs, and determiners, while its pronominal system was notably complex. Grammatical relations were primarily signaled through inflections, allowing for flexible word order, although the language tended to favor a subject-verb-object (SVO) structure in main clauses and a subject-object-verb (SOV) structure in subordinate clauses. However, during the Middle English period, significant phonological reductions and merging led to the loss of many of its synthetic characteristics. As a result, grammatical relations became increasingly reliant on fixed word order and the use of function words, such as prepositions and auxiliary verbs. Following the Norman invasion, French emerged as the dominant language among the upper classes in England, leading to the integration of a substantial number of French loanwords into English. Consequently, the vocabulary of Middle English became roughly equally divided between Germanic and Romance origins. It was not until the 14th century that Middle English regained prominence, with English replacing French as the official language of the London Court. The transition from Middle English to Modern English began in the 15th century, marked by a shift from West Saxon, the cultural center of Old English, to London English, which played a pivotal role in shaping a standardized written form. Today, Modern English possesses the largest lexicon of any

language, a result of continuous borrowing from diverse languages and significant expansion during the 20th and 21st centuries to address advancements in science and technology.

While Old English originally featured three grammatical genders, feminine, masculine, and neuter, with the loss of the category by the late 14th century, primarily due to the erosion of inflectional endings and the collapse of declensional classes, modern English lacks grammatical gender altogether. The latter no longer retains morphological agreement in elements such as determiners, adjectives, and pronouns within and beyond the noun phrase. Therefore, English is no longer classified as a grammatical gender language.

The analysis below, in terms of gender agreement, clearly illustrates the fact that Modern English no longer exhibits such agreement.

[1]_{En} NP-head – determiner (*indefinite article*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	a boy	some boys
[+Feminine]	a girl	some girls
[+Neuter]	a tree	some trees

[2]_{En} NP-head – determiner (*definite article*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	the boy	the boys
[+Feminine]	the girl	the girls
[+Neuter]	the tree	the trees

[3]_{En} NP-head – cardinal numeral: one / two / greater than two

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	one boy	two boys three boys
[+Feminine]	one girl	two girls three girls
[+Neuter]	one tree	two trees three trees

[4]_{En} NP-head – modifying adjective

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	good boy	good boys
[+Feminine]	good girl	good girls
[+Neuter]	good tree	good trees

[5]_{En} NP-head – demonstrative adjective

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	this boy that boy	these boys those boys
[+Feminine]	this girl that girl	these girls those girls
[+Neuter]	this tree that tree	these trees those trees

[6]_{En} Anaphoric/cataphoric personal pronouns

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	he	they
[+Feminine]	she	they
[+Neuter]	it	they

[7]_{En} Subject NP – Finite verb (*present tense*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	[D] boy lives	[D] boys live
[+Feminine]	[D] girl lives	[D] girls live
[+Neuter]	[D] tree lives	[D] trees live

[8]_{En} Subject NP – Finite verb (*past tense*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	[D] boy lived	[D] boys lived
[+Feminine]	[D] girl lived	[D] girls lived
[+Neuter]	[D] tree lived	[D] trees lived

[9]_{En} Subject NP – predicative AP / participle (*passive*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	[D] boy is good / taught	[D] boys are good / taught
[+Feminine]	[D] girl is good / taught	[D] girls are good / taught
[+Neuter]	[D] tree is good / cut	[D] trees are good / cut

The absence of grammatical gender in English reflects the language's historical shift from a synthetic to a more analytic structure, marked by the loss of inflectional endings and morphological agreement. This development has simplified noun phrase syntax, making English more reliant on word order and context for meaning. As a result, English has evolved into a highly flexible and accessible language, facilitating its global adoption and adaptability across diverse linguistic and cultural contexts.

1.2. Gender in Romanian

Unlike other Romance languages, Romanian features a complex synthetic inflectional system for nominal morphology. The language includes three grammatical genders: feminine, masculine, and neuter. The status of the neuter gender, however, has been long debated and remains controversial. Neuter nouns in Romanian exhibit masculine agreement in the singular and feminine agreement in the plural, distinguishing Romanian from languages such as English or Russian, where gender distinctions are neutralized in the plural (see [6]_{En} and [6]_{Ru}). This raises questions about whether the Romanian neuter represents a deviation from the Latin neuter or constitutes a novel development, contributing to its controversial nature.

Romanian human nouns typically do not belong to the neuter gender. Additionally, the neuter gender in Romanian is not used for inclusive or non-specific reference, with feminine and masculine nouns also encompassing common nouns. Most Romanian grammar texts, such as *GLR* (1966) and Avram (1997), adhere to the use of the term “neuter”. It is essential to note that Romanian neuter nouns derive their inflectional forms from both feminine and masculine paradigms, making them distinct from neuter forms in other languages.

Grammatical gender in Romanian is an inherent and immutable property of nouns, with adjectives, articles, and, to some extent, pronouns displaying morphological variation based on the gender of the noun. Adjectives, in particular, can exhibit up to four forms depending on number and gender, demonstrating agreement as shown in [4]_{Ro}. Romanian grammatical gender, therefore, is fundamentally a property of agreement, where assigning a noun to a specific gender determines how other elements in the sentence will align with it, as illustrated through the examples provided below.

[1]_{Ro} NP-head – determiner (*indefinite article*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	un băiat a.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'a boy' un copac a.MASC.SG.tree.MASC 'a tree'	niște băieți some.PL.boy.MASC.PL. 'some boys' niște copaci some.PL.tree.MASC.PL. 'some trees'
[+Feminine]	o fată a.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'a girl' o masă a.FEM.SG.table.FEM 'a table'	niște fete some.PL.girl.FEM.PL. 'some girls' niște mese some.PL.table.FEM.PL. 'some tables'
[+Neuter]	un animal a.NEUT.SG.=MASC.SG.animal.NEUT 'an animal' un drum a.NEUT.SG.=MASC.SG.road.NEUT 'a road'	niște animale some.PL.animal.NEUT.PL. 'some animals' niște drumuri some.PL.road.NEUT.PL. 'some roads'

[2]_{Ro} NP-head – determiner (*definite article*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	băiatul boy.MASC.SG.DEF.ART 'the boy' copacul tree.MASC.SG.DEF.ART 'the tree'	băieții boy.MASC.PL.DEF.ART 'the boys' copacii tree.MASC.PL.DEF.ART 'the trees'
[+Feminine]	fata girl.FEM.SG.DEF.ART 'the girl' masa table.FEM.SG.DEF.ART 'the table'	fetele girl.FEM.PL.DEF.ART 'the girls' mesele table.FEM.PL.DEF.ART 'the tables'
[+Neuter]	animalul animal.NEUT.SG.DEF.ART=MASC.SG.DEF.ART 'the animal' drumul	animalele animal.NEUT.PL.DEF.ART=FEM.PL.DEF.ART 'the animals' drumurile

	road.NEUT.SG.DEF.ART=MASC.SG.DEF.ART T 'the road'	road.NEUT.PL.DEF.ART=FEM.PL.DEF.ART T 'the roads'
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[3]_{Ro} NP-head – cardinal numeral: one / two / greater than two

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	un băiat a.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'a/one boy'	doi băieți two.MASC.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'two boys' trei băieți three.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'three boys'
[+Feminine]	o fată a.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'a/one girl'	două fete two.FEM.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'two girls' trei fete three.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'three girls'
[+Neuter]	un animal a.NEUT.SG.=MASC.SG.animal.NEUT 'an/one animal'	două animale two.NEUT.PL.=FEM.PL.animal.NEUT.PL 'two animals' trei animale three.PL.animal.NEUT.PL 'three animals'

[4]_{Ro} NP-head – modifying adjective

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	băiat bun MASC.SG.boy. good.MASC.SG 'good boy'	băieți buni MASC.PL.boy. good.MASC.PL 'good boys'
[+Feminine]	fată bună FEM.SG.girl. good.FEM.SG 'good girl'	fete bune FEM.PL.girl. good.FEM.PL 'good girls'
[+Neuter]	animal bun NEUT.SG.animal. good.NEUT.SG=MASC.SG 'good animal'	animale bune NEUT.PL.animal. good.NEUT.PL=FEM.PL 'good animals'

[5]_{Ro} NP-head – demonstrative adjective

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	acest băiat this.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'this boy' acel băiat that.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'that boy'	acești băieți these.MASC.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'these boys' acei băieți those.MASC.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'those boys'
[+Feminine]	această fată this.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'this girl' acea fată that.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'that girl'	aceste fete these.FEM.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'these girls' acele fete those.FEM.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'those girls'
[+Neuter]	acest animal this.NEUT.SG=MASC.SG.animal.NEUT 'this animal' acel animal that.NEUT.SG=MASC.SG.animal.NEUT	aceste animale these.NEUT.PL=FEM.PL.animal.NEUT.PL 'these animals' acele animale those.NEUT.PL=FEM.PL.animal.NEUT.PL

	'that animal'	'those animals'
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[6]_{Ro} Anaphoric/cataphoric personal pronouns

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	el he.MASC.SG 'he'	ei they.MASC.PL 'they'
[+Feminine]	ea she.FEM.SG 'she'	ele they.FEM.PL 'they'
[+Neuter]	el he.NEUT.SG=MASC.SG 'it'	ele they.NEUT.PL=FEM.PL 'they'

[7]_{Ro} Subject NP – Finite verb (*present tense*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	băiatul merge boy.MASC.SG.DEF.ART.go.IND.P RS.3 rd p.SG 'the boy goes/is going'	băieții merg boy.MASC.PL.DEF.ART.go.IND.PRS.3 rd p.PL 'the boys go/are going'
[+Feminine]	fata merge girl.FEM.SG.DEF.ART.go.IND.PRS .3 rd p.SG 'the girl goes/is going'	fetele merg girl.FEM.PL.DEF.ART.go.IND.PRS.3 rd p. PL 'the girls go/are going'
[+Neuter]	animalul merge animal.NEUT.SG.DEF.ART.go.IND. PRS.3 rd p.SG 'the animal goes/is going'	animalele merg animal.NEUT.PL.DEF.ART.go.IND.PRS. 3 rd p.PL 'the animals go/are going'

[8]_{Ro} Subject NP – Finite verb (*past tense*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	băiatul a mers boy.MASC.SG.DEF.ART.go .IND.PT.3 rd p.SG 'the boy went'	băieții au mers boy.MASC.PL.DEF.ART.go.IND.PT.3 rd p.PL 'the boys went'
[+Feminine]	fata a mers girl.FEM.SG.DEF.ART.go.I ND.PT.3 rd p.SG 'the girl went'	fetele au mers girl.FEM.PL.DEF.ART.go.IND.PT.3 rd p.PL 'the girls went'
[+Neuter]	animalul a mers animal.NEUT.SG.DEF.ART. go.IND.PT.3 rd p.SG 'the animal went'	animalele au mers animal.NEUT.PL.DEF.ART.go.IND.PT.3 rd p.PL 'the animals went'

[9]_{Ro} Subject NP – predicative AP / participle (*passive*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	băiatul este bun boy.MASC.SG.DEF.ART good.MASC.SG 'the boy is good' copacul este tăiat tree.MASC.SG.DEF.ART is cut.MASC.SG 'the tree is cut'	is băieții sunt buni boy.MASC.PL.DEF.ART good.MASC.PL 'the boys are good' copacii sunt tăiați . tree.MASC.PL.DEF.ART cut.MASC.PL 'the trees are cut'
[+Feminine]	fata este bună girl.FEM.SG.DEF.ART is good.FEM.SG 'the girl is good' masa este pusă	are fetele sunt bune girl.FEM.PL.DEF.ART good.FEM.PL 'the girls are good'

	table.FEM.SG.DEF.ART is laid.FEM.SG 'the table is laid'		mesele sunt puse table.FEM.PL.DEF.ART are laid.FEM.PL 'the tables are laid'
[+Neuter]	animalul este bun animal.NEUT.SG.DEF.ART is good.NEUT.SG 'the animal is good'		animalele sunt bune animal.NEUT.PL.DEF.ART are good.NEUT.PL 'the animals are good'
	drumul este construit road.NEUT.SG.DEF.ART is built.NEUT.SG 'the road is built'		drumurile sunt construite road.NEUT.PL.DEF.ART are built.NEUT.PL 'the roads are built'

The existence of grammatical gender in Romanian reflects the language's retention of a complex inflectional system, distinguishing it from many other Romance languages. Its unique approach to the neuter gender, which combines masculine and feminine agreement patterns, highlights both its historical ties to Latin and its innovative linguistic evolution. This system reinforces syntactic cohesion through agreement across nouns, adjectives, articles, and pronouns, underscoring the integral role of gender in structuring Romanian grammar. Despite ongoing debates about the classification of the neuter, Romanian's gender system demonstrates the language's distinctive blend of historical inheritance and modern linguistic identity.

1.3. Gender in Russian

Russian belongs to the East Slavic subgroup of the Slavic branch within the Indo-European language family, alongside its closest linguistic relatives, Belarusian and Ukrainian. It is an inflecting language, characterized by affixational and fusional morphology, and features a highly productive system of word formation.

Russian verbs are inflected for tense (past, present, future), person (first, second, third), number (singular, plural), mood (indicative, imperative, subjunctive), voice (active, passive), aspect (perfective, imperfective), and gender (in the past tense and subjunctive). Nouns, adjectives, and some numerals inflect for case (nominative, genitive, dative, accusative, instrumental, locative/prepositional), number, gender, and animacy, while pronouns follow the same inflectional patterns as the word classes they substitute.

Like many European languages, Russian categorizes nouns into three grammatical genders: feminine, masculine, and neuter. Nouns referring to individuals typically align with their natural gender, with male-related nouns being masculine and female-related nouns being feminine. Russian lacks a separate grammatical category for generic human reference. Although neuter nouns theoretically could fulfill this function, their capacity to classify animate nouns has largely diminished.

The defining characteristic of grammatical gender is agreement, and the gender of a noun can be determined through its syntactic agreement with dependent elements. In Russian, gender distinctions are neutralized in the plural (with limited exceptions), as demonstrated in examples [1]_{Ru} to [9]_{Ru}. Although grammatical gender is an inherent and immutable property of nouns, the neutralization of gender agreement in the plural does not signify the elimination of the category within the noun itself. Instead, it results in a degree of ambiguity, particularly in the case of underived masculine nouns, while remaining clearly marked in derived feminine

nouns. Gender agreement is triggered in various syntactic contexts, including within noun phrases, at the clause level, and beyond the clause (anaphoric elements), as exemplified in the following illustrations.

[1]_{Ru} NP-head – determiner (*indefinite article*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	n/a	n/a
[+Feminine]	n/a	n/a
[+Neuter]	n/a	n/a

[2]_{Ru} NP-head – determiner (*definite article*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	n/a	n/a
[+Feminine]	n/a	n/a
[+Neuter]	n/a	n/a

[3]_{Ru} NP-head – cardinal numeral: one / two / greater than two

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	один мальчик one.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'one boy'	два мальчика two.MASC.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'two boys' три мальчика three.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'three boys'
[+Feminine]	одна девочка one.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'one girl'	две девочки two.FEM.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'two girls' три девочки three.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'three girls'
[+Neuter]	одно дерево one.NEUT.SG.tree.NEUT 'one tree'	два дерева two.NEUT.PL.=MASC.PL.tree.NEUT. PL 'two trees' три дерева three.PL.tree.NEUT.PL 'three trees'

[4]_{Ru} NP-head – modifying adjective

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	хороший мальчик good.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'good boy'	хорошие мальчики good.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'good boys'
[+Feminine]	хорошая девочка good.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'good girl'	хорошие девочки good.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'good girls'
[+Neuter]	хорошее дерево good.NEUT.SG.tree.NEUT 'good tree'	хорошие деревья good.PL.tree.NEUT.PL 'good trees'

[5]_{Ru} NP-head – demonstrative adjective

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	ЭТОТ мальчик this.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'this boy' ТОТ мальчик that.MASC.SG.boy.MASC 'that boy'	ЭТИ мальчики these.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'these boys' ТЕ мальчики those.PL.boy.MASC.PL 'those boys'
[+Feminine]	ЭТА девочка this.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'this girl' ТА девочка that.FEM.SG.girl.FEM 'that girl'	ЭТИ девочки these.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'these girls' ТЕ девочки those.PL.girl.FEM.PL 'those girls'
[+Neuter]	ЭТО дерево this.NEUT.SG.animal.NEUT 'this animal' ТО дерево that.NEUT.SG.animal.NEUT 'that animal'	ЭТИ деревья these.PL.tree.NEUT.PL 'these trees' ТЕ деревья those.PL.tree.NEUT.PL 'those trees'

[6]_{Ru} Anaphoric/cataphoric personal pronouns

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	он he.MASC.SG 'he'	они they.PL 'they'
[+Feminine]	она she.FEM.SG 'she'	они they.PL 'they'
[+Neuter]	оно he.NEUT.SG 'it'	они they.PL 'they'

[7]_{Ru} Subject NP – Finite verb (*present tense*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	он читает he.MASC.SG.read.IND.PRS.3 rd p.SG 'he reads/is reading'	они читают they.PL.read.IND.PRS.3 rd p.PL 'they read/are reading'
[+Feminine]	она читает she.FEM.SG.read.IND.PRS.3 rd p.SG 'she reads/is reading'	они читают they.PL.read.IND.PRS.3 rd p.PL 'they read/are reading'
[+Neuter]	оно читает it.NEUT.SG.read.IND.PRS.3 rd p.SG 'it reads/is reading'	они читают they.PL.read.IND.PRS.3 rd p.PL 'they read/are reading'

[8]_{Ru} Subject NP – Finite verb (*past tense*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	он читал he.MASC.SG.read.IND.PT.3 rd p.MASC.SG 'he read'	они читали they.PL.read.IND.PT.3 rd p.PL 'they read'
[+Feminine]	она читала she.FEM.SG.read.IND.PT.3 rd p.FEM.SG 'she read'	они читали they.PL.read.IND.PT.3 rd p.PL 'they read'
[+Neuter]	оно читало it.NEUT.SG.read.IND.PT.3 rd p.NEUT.SG 'it read'	они читали they.PL.read.IND.PT.3 rd p.PL 'they read'

[9]_{Ru} Subject NP – predicative AP / participle (*passive*)

	Sg.	Pl.
[+Masculine]	он хороший he.MASC.SG.good.MASC.SG 'he is good'	они хорошие they.PL.good.PL 'they are good'
[+Feminine]	она хорошая she.FEM.SG.good.FEM.SG 'she is good'	они хорошие they.PL.good.PL 'they are good'
[+Neuter]	оно хорошее it.NEUT.SG.good.NEUT.SG 'it is good'	они хорошие they.PL.good.PL 'they are good'

The complexities of grammatical gender in Russian reflect its intricate morphological and syntactic systems, where gender serves as a fundamental and pervasive classificatory feature. Despite the neutralization of gender distinctions in the plural, the category remains robust in singular forms and influences agreement across nouns, adjectives, pronouns, and verbs. The system's alignment with natural gender for animate nouns, coupled with the diminished role of the neuter gender for animates, highlights both historical linguistic evolution and functional adaptation. Russian's grammatical gender system not only underscores the language's rich inflectional tradition but also exemplifies its nuanced balance between inherent noun properties and syntactic agreement, maintaining a distinctive linguistic complexity.

1.4. Comparative Statistics

The comparative table presented below illustrates the frequency and nature of gender agreement across the three languages under analysis. English exhibits gender agreement in only three instances, whereas Romanian marks gender agreement in thirty-nine instances, and Russian demonstrates gender agreement in twenty-one instances.

Agreement	NP-head det.: indef. art.	NP-head det.: def. art.	NP-head card. num.			NP-head modif. adj.	NP-head dem. adj.	Anaph./ cataph. pers. pr.	Subj. NP Finite vb. (PRS)	Subj. NP Finite vb. (PT)	Subj. NP pred. AP / ptcp. (pass.)	
			one	two	>two							
ENGLISH	[+M]	Sg.	-	-	-		-	-	+	-	-	-
		Pl.	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
	[+F]	Sg.	-	-	-		-	-	+	-	-	-
		Pl.	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
	[+N]	Sg.	-	-	-		-	-	+	-	-	-
		Pl.	-	-	-		-	-	-	-	-	-
ROMANIAN	[+M]	Sg.	+	+	+		+	+	+	-	-	+
		Pl.	-	+		+	-	+	+	+	-	-
	[+F]	Sg.	+	+	+		+	+	+	-	-	+
		Pl.	-	+		+	-	+	+	+	-	-
	[+N]	Sg.	+	+	+		+	+	+	-	-	+
		Pl.	-	+		+	-	+	+	+	-	-
RUSSIAN	[+M]	Sg.	n/a	n/a	+		+	+	+	-	+	+
		Pl.	n/a	n/a		+	-	-	-	-	-	-
	[+F]	Sg.	n/a	n/a	+		+	+	+	-	+	+
		Pl.	n/a	n/a		+	-	-	-	-	-	-
	[+N]	Sg.	n/a	n/a	+		+	+	+	-	+	+
		Pl.	n/a	n/a		+	-	-	-	-	-	-

This comparative analysis highlights the significant presence of gender agreement in Romanian and Russian, contrasting sharply with English, which has largely lost grammatical gender. Romanian and Russian maintain complex systems of gender agreement across a range of syntactic environments, including determiners, adjectives, pronouns, and verb conjugation, while English exhibits no such agreement. These differences underline the distinct linguistic structures of these languages, with English evolving into a more analytic system, while Romanian and Russian retain inflectional complexity and grammatical gender.

2. Discourse Analysis Level. Gender as a Social Construct

From the perspective of discourse analysis, the concept of gender in English, Romanian, and Russian can be seen as a dynamic and context-dependent construct that operates not only through grammatical structures but also through social and cultural discourses. Gender in language is not merely a matter of grammatical agreement but is deeply intertwined with how identities, roles, and power relations are constructed, conveyed, and negotiated within communication.

After having examined grammatical gender in the three languages, we would expect, and hypothesize accordingly, that in English, the absence of grammatical gender shifts the focus to gendered pronouns and social discourses around identity, while Romanian and Russian, maintaining robust grammatical gender systems, reflect traditional gender roles and, to a certain extent, resist to be redefined as part of broader societal changes. Hence, we may state that linguistic gender is associated with, but not synonymous with, the biological attributes of the referent. Similarly, the concept of “gender”, as examined from a sociocultural perspective over the past three decades, is connected to, yet distinct from, the biological characteristics of an individual.

2.1. Gendered Language: Analysing Discourse in English

In English, gender is largely a discourse construct in the sense that it is predominantly expressed through pronominal forms (e.g., he, she, they) rather than through grammatical agreement. English has largely abandoned the system of grammatical gender that is found in many other languages, relying instead on lexical choices and social constructs to signal gender. For instance, the use of “he” or “she” carries socio-cultural connotations that reflect how gendered identities are socially constructed and maintained. The flexibility of English in terms of gender expression – such as the growing recognition of non-binary identities – illustrates the fluidity of gender as a discourse construct in contemporary communication. This fluidity is especially significant in public discourse, where gender is increasingly seen as a social construct open to negotiation, highlighting the performative nature of gender roles.

There has been noticed an increasing use of “*they*” as a singular, gender-neutral pronoun, reflecting a shift towards recognizing gender as a social construct that goes beyond the binary categories of male and female.

For instance, in a sentence like “*Jordan_i said they_i would attend the meeting at 2 PM.*”, where *Jordan* and *they* are referentially identical, the use of “*they*” challenges traditional notions of gender and recognizes the validity of non-binary gender identities. This exemplifies how the English language is adapting to broader societal recognition that gender is fluid and socially constructed.

Additionally, English has historically used gendered terms to describe occupations, reflecting traditional roles. However, there has been a shift towards using more gender-neutral language in professional contexts to challenge these outdated social constructs. An exemplification in this respect is the term “*firefighter*”, which is now preferred over “*fireman*” to avoid reinforcing gender stereotypes about who can perform certain jobs. This linguistic shift is a direct response to the evolving societal understanding that gender roles in professional contexts are socially constructed, not biologically determined.

2.2. Gendered Language: Analysing Discourse in Romanian

In Romanian, gender operates not only at the level of the individual word (through grammatical gender) but also as a discursive tool that reflects traditional social norms and expectations. Romanian maintains a relatively strict system of gender agreement across nouns, adjectives, and verbs, making gender a prominent feature of syntactic structures. The discourse surrounding gender in Romanian, therefore, involves both the linguistic encoding of masculinity, femininity, and neuter, as well as the culturally embedded understanding of gender roles. This grammatical gender system plays a crucial role in structuring communication, particularly in formal and written discourse. At the same time, there can be noticed an increasing use of gender-neutral language and pronouns in contemporary Romanian discourse as a reflection of shifting societal attitudes toward gender identity, suggesting that while gender in Romanian is primarily grammatically determined, it is also increasingly being redefined as a social and cultural construct within discourse.

In Romanian, professions and titles are often gendered, reflecting the cultural expectation that certain jobs are for men or women. However, this practice is increasingly challenged by movements advocating for gender-neutral language. For instance, “*inginer*” (engineer) is traditionally masculine, while “*ingineră*” is the feminine form. In many modern Romanian institutions, there is a growing preference for using “*inginer*” regardless of the person’s gender, emphasizing that profession is not inherently tied to gender. This shift in language use shows how gendered professional titles in Romanian are socially constructed and changing in response to evolving gender norms.

However, the social construction of gender roles is evident in the way family roles are often assigned based on gender expectations. For instance, women are often expected to take on nurturing roles, while men are seen as providers, thus, reinforcing traditional gender roles, where women are positioned as caregivers and men as financial providers. To explain this fact, we should consider the specific political situation of Romania as a post-communist country. While true that under communism women had the same rights as men, in terms of working and voting, their burden was actually tripled as they had to go to work, do the housework, and nurture children.

There is an emerging trend in Romania towards more inclusive language, particularly in professional and academic contexts, to challenge the deeply entrenched gendered discourse. The term “*persoană*” (person) is increasingly used instead of gendered terms like “*bărbat*” (man) or “*femeie*” (woman) in official documents or discussions. This shift illustrates the effort to break away from traditional binary gender categories and adopt a more inclusive approach, recognizing that gender is socially constructed and not inherently tied to certain

terms, though there is an obvious resistance to it, which as mentioned above, is to be traced back to Romania's years of "silence" under the communist regime.

2.3. Gendered Language: Analysing Discourse in Russian

In Russian, gender is deeply embedded in grammar and less embedded in discourse, serving as a marker of identity and social role. Like Romanian, Russian features a highly inflected system where gender agreement is integral to the structure of noun phrases, pronouns, adjectives, and verbs. The gendered nature of Russian grammatical structures reinforces traditional gender roles, as masculine and feminine forms are used not only for animate nouns but also for inanimate objects in some cases, reflecting cultural understandings of gender. Russian, however, also presents a complex dynamic in how gender is discoursed in relation to natural gender versus grammatical gender. For instance, masculine and feminine categories are often explicitly aligned with social constructs of biological sex, while the neuter gender has become less associated with animate entities, thereby contributing to the social construction of gender.

Russian gendered discourse in public life can reflect the societal expectation that men are dominant in public spaces, while women are often relegated to the private sphere. For instance, the phrase "*мужчина-руководитель*" (male leader) is often used in the media to describe leadership roles, emphasizing the idea that leadership is traditionally a masculine role in Russian society. This reinforces the social construct of masculinity as linked to power and leadership, which is reflected in language and perpetuated through media and public discourse.

The issue of language and gender has a longstanding history in Soviet linguistics, although it has not been examined from a feminist perspective. Soviet ideology assumed the realization of equality, and as a result, concerns regarding the unequal treatment of women and men within the linguistic structure were not raised. The primary focus centered on the use of female occupational terms and semantic agreement when referring to women. Normative approaches advocate for the use of masculine nouns with masculine agreement when referring to women, but in informal contexts, gender marking (i.e., female) can be sufficiently achieved through word formation and agreement, and the use of female forms is acceptable.

The concept of gender identity in Russian remains a complex and evolving issue. While traditional linguistic structures reflect a rigid gender dichotomy, there is limited recognition of the fluidity and diversity of gender identity within both the language and public discourse. The prevailing linguistic framework tends to reinforce binary gender norms, with little institutional support for gender-neutral or inclusive language practices. Although feminist and gender studies in Russia have begun to address these issues, the linguistic community's response has been largely dismissive, and efforts to reform the language to reflect broader understandings of gender are still in their nascent stages. Consequently, the development of gender identity in Russian discourse is still largely shaped by entrenched societal and cultural norms, with minimal space for non-binary or progressive gender expressions.

3. Conclusions

Gender in English, Romanian, and Russian manifests differently, its ‘grammar’ being different not only at the morphological and syntactic level, but also at the level of social discourse.

In the three analysed languages, it operates on both grammatical and discursive levels, reflecting divergent linguistic structures and socio-cultural evolutions. English, largely devoid of grammatical gender beyond pronouns, enables greater syntactic neutrality and has increasingly embraced inclusive language, particularly through singular “they” and gender-neutral terminology. Romanian and Russian, by contrast, retain complex three-gender systems that govern noun, adjective, and verb agreement, embedding binary gender distinctions deeply into their grammatical frameworks. Romanian’s neuter gender adds morphological nuance, while Russian exhibits gender neutralization in plural forms. In terms of social discourse, English leads in linguistic adaptability to gender diversity, whereas Romanian and Russian reflect more traditional gender binaries, with growing but limited efforts toward inclusivity. These contrasts underscore how grammatical structures intersect with cultural, political, and historical contexts to shape each language’s approach to gender identity and expression.

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