

# Márta Csire – Marju Ilves (Szombathely): How Gender is Presented in Course Books Designed for L2 Learners of Hungarian and Estonian

## Introduction

The present paper aims at discussing what social and sexual roles and images are projected in course books designed for L2 learners of Estonian and Hungarian.

To clarify the notion of gender we shall look at a definition offered by Jutta Osinski:

„Das Wort „gender“ ist am besten mit „Genus“ ins Deutsche zu übersetzen; es war ursprünglich eine grammatisch-lexikale Kategorie. Ab Mitte der 80er Jahre erschien es in amerikanischen literaturwissenschaftlichen Publikationen zur Bezeichnung des sozial und kulturell erworbenen und geprägten Geschlechts im Unterschied zum biologischen, das als „sex“ abgegrenzt wurde. [...] Das *sex/gender*-System repräsentiert dem Modell nach eine soziale Struktur, die auf der biologischen Geschlechterdifferenz aufbaut, diese aber durch Zuschreibung von „männlich“ und „weiblich“ vielfach durchkreuzen kann. [...] *Gender* bezeichnet ein bestimmtes soziales Rollenmuster, das in seinen Bedingungen, seiner Performanz und seiner Phänomenologie erfaßt werden kann.“ (Osinski 1998: 105-106)

## Gender and Sex

Gender is a grammatical category, which can occur either as a morphological class component, or as a syntactic organising principle. Different languages denote gender with different linguistic devices (e.g. the definite articles *der, die, das* in German, or the endings of nouns in Slavonic languages, etc.), while gender may also stipulate the application of different rules, such as conjugation or congruence. Gender and sex, in the majority of the cases, do not coincide; the two categories often do not even have anything in common (e.g. *das Mädchen, die Milch*). (Lengyel et al. 1996: 41.).

In Finno-Ugrian languages, gender is only possible to express by lexical-semantic means (e.g. *színész, színésznő* [actor/actress], *özvegy* [both widow and widower], *a szép özvegy* [the beautiful widow, referring only to women], etc.). (Lengyel et al. 1996: 41.; Pete 2003).

## Other differences in gender on other levels of language

Language has ample phenomena referring exclusively to either males or females. In vocabulary and phraseology, certain idioms or phrases describing females tend to have a rather pejorative connotation (*buta liba* [stupid chick, cow], etc.). There are fewer such phrases referring to males, and the ones that exist are far less offensive or less clearly sexist in their connotations as the ones used for females (e.g. *tehénbika* [cow/bull], *szuka-kan* [bitch/dog], a phenomenon often regarded as negative discrimination by feminist linguistic movements. There are, however, linguistic devices that might be considered as a positive discrimination of women (*szívem, drágám, cukorfalat* stb [sweetheart, darling, honey-bunny, etc.]), but admittedly, these also tend to have a rather patronising or unnaturally amiable connotation. (Lengyel et al. 1996: 42-43.)

The so-called linguistic panels may also express a kind of evaluation related to males or females such as language use ignoring women (mentioning them as an

'addendum'), or lists placing males before females (kedves kollégák; fiúk, lányok; [dear colleagues, boys and girls] Meier úr a feleségével; [Mr. Meier and his wife] Kissné [Mrs Kiss] (Pete 2003).

### **The language of males and females**

The difference between men and women may be captured in the way they use language. Male and female language usage is markedly different. Research has demonstrated that men, for instance, interrupt a conversation three times as often as women, while women use a larger number of emotive adjectives, exclamations and intensifiers (Crystal 21.; Reményi 2001). During discourse, women frequently employ questions seeking confirmation, and even the use of intonation patterns seems different for the two sexes (Wardhaugh 1995: 286-287.)

The present paper uses Sabina Prechter's article *Woman's rights – children's games. Sexism in learners' dictionaries of English* as a reference article because some of the author's findings based on English language dictionaries may be relevant to certain course books. In her article quoted above, she claims that

- sample sentences of course books can be regarded as mirrors, patterns of similar expressions in terms of content, which help in shaping linguistic competence,
- illustrations of course books have an effect on how learners perceive reality
- sometimes a foreign student learns a language without a tutor. In this case, s/he will have to find the adequate social and linguistic context for the information offered in the course book without any assistance available (Prechter 1999: 48.).

Textbooks, and in this particular case, course books reflect a given culture, and play a pivotal role in shaping a picture in the learner's mind about a country's or people's culture and language. There is a communicative interaction between the course book and the learner, and as we are talking about two different cultures here, we can talk about intercultural communication.

### **Evaluation**

#### **The course books we looked at**

In the present study, we looked at three Estonian and two Hungarian language books. The first Estonian book was published in Estonia (*E nagu Eesti. Eesti keele õpik algajale* [*E for Estonia. Estonian for Beginners.*] Tallinn, 2000), the second one in Finland (*Kohtume Eestis* [*See you in Estonia. Estonian for Beginners.*] Helsinki, 1999), and the third one in Hungary, for Hungarian learners (*Észl nyelvkönyv* [*Estonian Textbook.*] Miskolc, 1995). When choosing the two Hungarian course books, we considered the following aspects: the first book entitled *Hungarolingua 1* was published in Hungary, and is a monolingual volume. Being the publication of the Debrecen Summer School, it is perhaps the most widely used course book with an international focus. The course book entitled *Szituációk (Situations)* was written by a Hungarian native, but was published in Austria for native speakers of German. Both volumes are well known and are popular with teachers teaching Hungarian as L2.

## Aspects of the evaluation

Considering that course books have rather specific features, we looked at the following five aspects for the evaluation of texts:

- I. occupations for men and women reflecting their role in the society
- II. activities (mostly verbs or verb phrases, in course books typically referring to work or free time)
- III. expressions and phrases labelling, or referring to men and women
- IV. male and female language use in discourse
- V. illustrations in the course books

## I. Occupations for males or females

### a)

In both Estonian course books, male characters appear far more often than female ones. Clearly, male occupations have a considerably higher prestige than female professions. Male characters are usually presented as *businessmen, lawyers with their own office, diplomats or restaurant owners*.

In the case of females, intellectual occupations requiring higher qualifications are mentioned far more seldom. Among male occupations mentioned, there is a larger number of high qualification jobs than intermediate ones. Among the jobs requiring a university degree, the higher prestige jobs are associated with males.

Occupations for males and females in Estonian course books:

#### MALES

dentist  
 book-keeper  
 doctor  
 interpreter (formerly a  
 teacher)  
 waiter  
 foreign language teacher  
 ophthalmologist  
 bus driver  
 sales manager  
 construction worker  
 electrician  
 lawyer  
 watchmaker  
 shoemaker  
 photographer  
 writer  
 journalist  
 businessman  
 policeman  
 postman  
 car mechanic  
 taxi driver  
 solicitor  
 caterer  
 diplomat

#### FEMALES

**dentist**  
 book-keeper  
 doctor  
 interpreter  
 waitress  
 teacher  
 surgeon  
 tram driver  
 shop assistant  
 cook  
 cleaner  
 hair-dresser  
 secretary  
 bank clerk  
 tour guide  
 pharmacist  
 fashion designer

estate agent  
 actor  
 politician (a Briton in Britain)  
 judge (a Briton in Britain)  
 engineer (a Briton in Britain)  
 ski trainer

### b)

In Hungarian course books, there is a dominance of females. As for occupations, it is rather curious that the book entitled *Situations* associates non-intellectual jobs only with males (shop assistant, taxi driver, car mechanic, etc.). Both sexes have teachers and engineers among their representatives. In *Hungarolingua*, however, higher prestige professions are clearly associated with males (e.g. architect, professor, businessman, etc.). In the same course book, both males and females are mentioned with non-degree professions, but jobs requiring physical power are solely related to males (e.g. *football player, sailor, car mechanic*).

## II. Activities characteristic of males and females

### a)

According to the Estonian course books we are evaluating, it is natural for both Estonian males and females *to do housework, go dancing, meet friends, go to the cinema, concert, theatre, or go shopping*. Women are not labelled as typical housewives: working in the kitchen, such as *preparing jam* appears only once. Sports also differ between the two sexes: males tend to pursue expensive, elite sports, which aims to give the impression that they are more courageous and adventurous.

In the table below, we have collected activities related to males and females done during weekdays and in their free time.

### MALES

listen to music  
 go to theatre / are not theatre-goers  
 go to the cinema  
 go to a concert  
 play tennis  
 learn languages  
 read, read newspapers  
 watch TV (especially sport programmes)  
 work in the garden, mow the lawn, plant flowers, dig the garden, etc.  
 go to a fitness club  
 go to disco  
 travel  
 ride a bicycle

### FEMALES

listen to music  
 go to theatre / are not theatre-goers  
 go to the cinema  
 go to a concert  
 play tennis  
 learn languages  
 read, read newspapers  
 watch TV  
 work in the garden  
 go to a fitness club  
 go to disco  
 travel  
 ride a bicycle

pick mushroom and berries	pick mushroom and berries
visit friends, eat, drink, chat	visit friends, eat, drink, chat
go skiing	go skiing / do not like skiing
clean house	clean house
go shopping and cook (though have a wife)	go shopping and cook
play football	do shopping and make bottled fruits
play basketball	jog
play volleyball	ride a horse
play chess	sing in a choir
go fishing	play the piano
train	visit exhibitions
swim	take a walk in the city
go hiking	
go bowling	
go sailing	
do roller-skating	
play golf, pools	
do folk-dancing	
listen to radio	

**b)**

According to Hungarian course books, in an average Hungarian family it is the females who do the shopping while males are responsible for more important matters e.g. *go to a bank, change money*, etc. Doing housework and raising the children are almost exclusively the tasks of the females. Free time activities also show a marked difference between the two sexes: men tend to pursue more intellectual activities such as *reading or doing arts*. The only exception is the Hungarian male's attribute: *watching football on TV*. In *Hungarolingua*, females *go to a café, buy cosmetics and new clothes* but they do not spend their spare time with any more intellectual activities.

Activities related to males and females in *Hungarolingua*:

## FEMALES

*Weekdays:*

check in at a hotel  
read in the library  
go to the greengrocer's  
go to a bookshop  
cook dinner

*Free time:*

go to a restaurant  
go to a party/cinema  
have a chat in a café  
go to a snack bar  
go swimming

*(When moving):*

## MALES

check in at a hotel  
change money  
travel to Debrecen  
buy train tickets  
go to a bank

go to a restaurant  
read a periodical on Hungarian history  
paint a nude figure  
read a sports magazine  
play tennis or football  
watch football on TV

carry bags

carry heavy suitcases and boxes filled with books

The following table shows phrases related to activities done by females presented in the course book entitled *Situations*.

<b>An average day for Csilla Molnár</b> (a young single female, a teacher):	<b>An average day for Mrs. Nagy</b> (her first name is not known, only her husband's surname) (married with two children)
gets up has breakfast goes to work spends time with work has lunch goes shopping cleans the house studies goes walking cooks dinner has dinner with her boyfriend watches TV reads goes to bed	gets up has breakfast with kids goes to work  has lunch with a (female) colleague  goes on working goes shopping plays with the kids or helps them do the homework  her husband (!) cooks dinner watches TV read chats with her husband

### III. Phrases and expressions related to males and females

#### a)

In the Estonian course book entitled “*E nagu Eesti*”, one can come across so-called ‘telling names’: the main male character of the book, *Toomas Tark*, (Tom Clever) is a clearly positive evaluation, while the female figure *Piret Valge*, (Piret White) may be regarded as neutral. In this book, women are never mentioned as an “addendum” or having a secondary role, in fact they are always placed first in lists e.g. *mother-father*, *grandmother-grandfather*, etc. This, however, may be put down to the nature of Estonian language usage. In the above course book, there is only one instance for addressing a woman in a rather sexist way.

Mees [*husband*]: **Naine!** Ma ei leia oma vihmavarju.

Minu vihmavari on kadunud. Väljas sajab!

[*Husband*     **Wife!** *I can't find my umbrella.*

*It is gone. It is raining outside!*

(*E nagu Eesti*: 157)

Adjectives related to male characters reflect their attractive look and powerful intellect, while adjectives used with females are more typically linked to their appearance, with no reference to their inner qualities.

**b)**

The mention of females as an addendum does occur in Hungarian course books, although not very frequently. Names sounding so bizarre to the foreign ear such as *Nagyné* (Mrs. Nagy) also appear in texts without revealing the woman's first name. In *Hungarolingua*, there is a tendency to describe female characters in contexts and with connotations that can be very derogatory, as in the text below.

“Gábor Ferenczy, 35, works at Kossuth University. [...] Being a great teacher and a nice fellow, he is very popular with the students. **His wife**, Mária Kovács works as a librarian at the county library”.

In this particular excerpt, only after giving a positive evaluation of the husband's personal qualities is the wife mentioned, and only very briefly.

#### IV. Gender roles in dialogues

**a)**

Estonian course books employ letters (e.g. A, B) to designate those involved in a dialogue. Therefore, the label A or B does not imply whether the speaker is male, or female but even if we know the sex of the speaker, there is no marked difference in the language use. There are a few dialogues when a proposal is made; then it is clearly related to the male character.

**b)**

As for Hungarian textbooks, roles assigned for certain characters in the dialogues can also be considered neutral (asking for direction, asking for information, etc.). In the following examples, however, one gets a clear picture whether it is a male or a female person speaking.

The dialogue has been taken from the course book *Situations*, and is presented with illustrations. (The husband is seated in an armchair, watching football on TV, while the wife, wearing a kerchief, is busy doing housework.) Note the sharp contrast of roles in the dialogue:

- Darling, got any beer at home?
- No.
- I'm, sure we've got a bottle of wine, then.
- No, we haven't got any wine either.
- But we must have some coke left.
- No coke either.
- What about some mineral water? We must have some water at least!
- No.
- OK, then, I'll go and do the shopping.
- Thank God!

(*Szituációk*: 39)

*Hungarolingua* offers a similar dialogue between the members of the Ferenczy family:

Mother is cooking in the kitchen; father and kids are sitting in the room watching TV. While doing the work she is involved in, the rest of the family obviously expects mother to serve them.

Sára: It's cartoon-time!  
 Gábor: Which one is on tonight?  
 Sára: Tom and Jerry.  
 Gábor: I'll watch that!  
 Zoli: Daddy, I want some juice!  
 Gábor: Sára, you want some, too?  
 Sára: Yes please.  
 Gábor: Mommy, the kids want some juice!  
 Mária: Dinner is ready in a moment.  
 Zoli: But I'm thirsty!  
 Mária: Ok, Ok, but I am doing the cooking! Gábor, come and get it for the kids. The juice is in the fridge

(*Hungarolingua* 1: 110)

In *Hungarolingua*, females are often presented in the role of the housewife, and the mother of the children. Typically, they are shown as those ready to subordinate their interests to their family, especially to male members of the family:

I'll buy a litre of milk, this is what your daddy drinks too.. (*Hungarolingua* 1: 160)

How much is this ham?

360 Ft a kilo.

Really? That's very expensive! Anyway, I'll have 20 dkg. You know, my husband adores ham.

I'll have some sausage as well. You see, I have a big family. My son is 17 and eats like a horse. (...)

(*Hungarolingua* 1: 160)

## V. Illustrations of course books

### a)

Among the Estonian books evaluated in the present study, the ones titled *Estonian Textbook* and *Kohtume Eestis* have relatively few illustrations, and they are rather schematic, leaving very little room for drawing adequate conclusions. The course book *E nagu Eesti* may be mentioned as an exception but both males and females are represented as caricatures, which is far from reflecting reality. (*E nagu Eesti*: 80, 122, 177)

### b)

As for illustrations in the textbooks, criticism may be levelled at both Hungarian course books. *Hungarolingua 1* depicts females especially negatively. The illustrations are sexist, and visually suggest that there are two Hungarian female prototypes: the housewife overstrained in housework, (a dragon awaiting her husband with a rolling-pin) and the shallow-minded blonde only interested in fashion and cosmetics. (*Hungarolingua* 1: 120., 134., 160.)



## Summary

Teaching Estonian as L2 experienced a revival a decade ago, after Estonia regained its independence. Consequently, textbooks teaching Estonian as L2 do not have a long history. During the Soviet regime aiming to uniform society, gender roles were not clearly defined or separated. Being a man or a woman did not suppose an extra social role, it was just one of the personal properties someone had. In present-day Estonian society, the borderline between males' and females' social role is not a sharp one either but for a different reason: opportunities once available and evident for males only are now there for females to grab as well. (Nevertheless, males and females having the same social position are judged and accepted differently.) A woman is primarily a woman in the eye of the society, and her position, skills and aptitude are only secondary (Pilvre 2003).

The more important and prestigious professions are associated with males, as verified by the numerical male dominance in the textbooks. Women are independent, have jobs, and do not typically play the role of a housewife, or a mother. Men take their share in the housework. When describing women, they are presented with an emphasis on their feminine properties while with men it is their inner qualities being stressed. There are no sharp differences in how the two sexes use language.

There is no controversy between the male and female roles of present-day Estonian society and the roles presented in the course books. The fact that male roles are more elaborate than female roles may be blamed upon the writers of these books. As learners receive a lesser amount of information about female roles, we can say that these descriptions are incomplete. Therefore, when preparing a course book, writers should pay more attention to putting an equal amount of emphasis on both males and females (a positive example is Kitsnik, Mare-Kingisepp, Leelo: *Avatud ukсед. Eesti keele õppekomplekt kesk- ja kõrgtasemele*. Tallinn: TEA 2002.).

In contrast with the Estonian example, there is some discrepancy between gender roles related to contemporary Hungarian society and roles presented in Hungarian course books. In the books, women are shown as much less independent, and according to their social roles, they are principally mothers and wives. Their outer characteristics are more accented, while their inner features are of secondary importance, and stay in the background. Significant positions are filled by men; they govern, and exercise power over women.

The male and female characters of Hungarian course books are rather stereotypical. This phenomenon is very much prevalent in course books in general, and through a stereotypical presentation, sexual stereotypes can be reinforced (Crystal 1987: 46).

In conclusion, male and female roles presented in Hungarian course books could do with a carefully considered remodelling, while stereotypical presentations should also be banished from course book writing strategies.

## Course books evaluated

Hoffmann István és Maticsák Sándor (ed.): *Hungarolingua 1. Magyar nyelvkönyv*. Debreceni Nyári Egyetem. Debrecen, 1996

Kippasto Anu-Nagy Judit: *Ész nyelvkönyv*. Miskolc. Bíbor, 1995

Pesti, Mall-Ahi, Helve: *E nagu Eesti. Eesti keele õpik algajaile*. Tallinn. TEA, 2000

Sander, Klarika: *Kohtume Eestis*. Helsinki. Finn Lektura, 1999

Silló Ágnes: *Szituációk. Ein Ungarischlehrwerk für Anfänger*. Ismaning. Max Hueber Verlag, 1995

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