

## DISCURSIVE PRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN THE 2001-2002 AND 2020-2021 MEDIA TEXTS: A CORPUS BASED ANALYSIS

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*This paper is devoted to a corpus based contrastive analysis of the lemma WOMEN in "The Economist" articles published in 2001–2002 and 2020–2021. Media discourse is seen as an influential tool which, on the one hand, reflects what is going on in the world, but on the other hand, influences people's views on different subjects whether they are political or economic ones forming some specific stereotypical images. Gender stereotypes impose certain behavioural models of men and women prescribing social roles as well as outlining their activities and choices in various social and professional fields. The media in its turn is a reflection of gender marked expectations imposed on both men and women by society.*

*The SketchEngine and LancsBox have been used to process the collocates with WOMEN concentrating mostly on the following ones: empower+WOMEN; encourage+WOMEN; help+WOMEN; WOMEN+take; young+WOMEN; WOMEN+and. The corpus analysis together with critical discourse analysis have been applied to interpret the obtained results with further comparative analysis. The study proves that the way how women are depicted in the news stories have changed greatly over the period of 20 years' time. The media discourse of recent years offers images when women are empowered, encouraged and helped. Women as active agents with the verb "take" are also depicted in the latest articles. The collocates showing WOMEN's connections are similar for both corpora, which are MEN and CHILDREN. The most frequently discussed topics of the years 2020–2021 touch upon education, career prospects, relationships, defending personal dignity, becoming more independent; while the media discourse of the beginning of 21st century mostly presents fields of education and work. Young women are shown in troublesome situations in 2001–2002 newspaper articles, whereas 2020–2021 young women demonstrate a confident position in society. The further research perspectives can deal with the study of Ukrainian media discourse, which will enable a contrastive analysis of WOMEN discursive representation in British and Ukrainian newspapers.*

**Key words:** gender, WOMEN, corpus linguistics, media discourse, The Economist.

**Цапро Г. Ю., Семенюк А. А.**

**Дискурсивна презентація WOMEN у медійних текстах 2001–2002 і 2020–2021 років:  
корпусний аналіз**

*Стаття присвячена корпусному контрастивному аналізу лемі WOMEN у статтях "The Economist", опублікованих у 2001–2002 та 2020–2021 роках. Медіадискурс розглядається як впливовий інструмент, який, з одного боку, відображає те, що відбувається у світі, а з іншого, впливає на погляди людей на різноманітні теми, зокрема політичні й економічні, формуючи певні стереотипні образи. Гендерні стереотипи нав'язують чоловікам та жінкам певні поведінкові моделі, визначаючи їхні соціальні ролі й окреслюючи діяльність та вибір у різних соціальних сферах. SketchEngine і LancsBox використовувались для обробки словосполучень із WOMEN, зосереджуючись переважно на словосполученнях: empower+WOMEN; encourage+WOMEN; help+WOMEN; WOMEN+take; young+WOMEN; WOMEN+and. Корпусний аналіз разом із критичним дискурс-аналізом залучено для інтерпретації отриманих результатів. Дослідження доводить, що зображення жінок у новинних текстах сильно змінилося за 20 років. Для медійного дискурсу останніх років притаманні образи жінок, що отримують нові можливості, заохочення та допомогу в суспільстві. У нещодавніх статтях описуються жінки як активні агенти з дієсловом "take". Спостерігаємо сталість колокацій, використовуваних на позначення зв'язків жінок WOMEN and MEN/CHILDREN, однакових як у 2001–2002 роках, так й у 2020–2021. До найобговорюваніших тем 2020–2021 років належать теми освіти, кар'єрних перспектив, взаємин, захисту особистої гідності, набуття більшої незалежності. Зауважимо, що медійні дискурси початку XXI сторіччя репрезентують переважно*

галузі освіти та праці. У газетних статтях 2001–2002 років молоді жінки зображуються у доволі неприємних ситуаціях, тоді як молоді жінки 2020–2021 років демонструють впевнену суспільну позицію. Подальші дослідницькі перспективи можуть стосуватися вивчення українського медіадискурсу, що дасть змогу здійснити порівняльний аналіз дискурсивної репрезентації лем *WOMEN* / ЖІНКИ у британських та українських газетах.

**Ключові слова:** гендер, *WOMEN*, корпусна лінгвістика, медійний дискурс, *The Economist*.

## Introduction

Media has always been of a great importance and its influence on how individuals' views and opinions have been formed, shaped and altered can hardly be questioned or denied. People all over the world despite their differences whether political, economic or religious are still under the constant power of media, which is so diverse nowadays in its forms and sources of information. That is why media discourse is an interdisciplinary subject, which is studied by a number of different sciences from linguistics and sociology to psychology and geography (Talbot, 2007). The term media discourse is seen as a broad one (O'Keeffe, 2006, p. 8) referring to ways how reality is reflected by various broadcasting companies or is represented through networks.

Not a long a time ago, gender issues revealing women's representation in society pictured a negative social construction of 'woman/women' and gender topics dealt mostly with discrimination based on the biological sex factor. These aspects were mirrored in the media discourse empathizing men's powerful social position: "*Men, and not women, may have recourse to specific topics, lexical style or rhetoric*" (Dijk, 1985, p. 136). Women were ignored by the serious media but when they were included in media content, their experiences and images were often stereotyped or distorted in the media discourse.

Carolyn M. Byerly (2012) in her study "The Geography of Women and Media Scholarship" reveals what is usually referred to as the 'women and media' with women occupying an inferior position not only in society but also in the news. She gives some insights about historical and current issues on the international arena. The beginning of her research goes to the 1970s when women started to object to certain imagery of women in advertisements. At the same time women's organizations were seeking to increase visibility in the news for women's political campaigns to achieve equality through legislative reforms related to rape and domestic violence, equal pay, job discrimination, and other civil rights. Women wanted their stories to be in the media. If the story is in the mainstream news it might succeed and thus women might attract society's attention to urgent gender issues.

Fighting existing gender portrayals has never been an easy task as changing people's thoughts about stereotypical men and women requires both time and effort. Social gender roles of men and women are

shaped in accordance with society's beliefs, values and expectations about individuals' roles ascribed basically on the biological sex division (Blackstone, 2003, p. 335). Gender stereotypes prescribe, limit and control men and women's activities in society outlining conventional types of behavior for men as more active members of society and women, on the contrary, more passive (Eisenchlas, 2013, p. 2). Thus, women even getting more rights still have a narrower choice than men while choosing a career (Eccles, 1986), often having to balance between 'work or family / work and family' (Pongrácz, 2006). Furthermore, boys and girls going through the process of socialization are forced to inherit their parents' social roles (Crespi, 2004), correspond to established images of masculinity or femininity, which can restrict their personal choices and deprive them of possibility of self-presentation, self-manifestation and, finally, of self-realization.

Fortunately, during the last decades some social transformations have been witnessed in society as a lot of issues connected with gender problems have undergone crucial changes, and the media have proved to be of great help in promoting and precipitating these changes.

## The research outline

The aim of the research is to interpret how the image of women has changed in the in the media texts in 20 years' time, analyzing the lemma *WOMEN* in "The Economist" articles. The object of the study is the newspaper discourse containing the lemma *WOMEN*. The subject of the study is collocations with *WOMEN* in "The Economist" articles.

"The Economist" weekly magazine (The Economist a) published in 2001–2002 and 2020–2021 has been chosen as the material for the research.

"The Encyclopedia Britannica" defines "The Economist" as *one of the world's preeminent journals of its kind. It provides wide-ranging coverage of general news and particularly of international and political developments and prospects bearing on the world's economy. The publication is known for its social-libertarian slant...* (The Economist b). Thus, images created by this influential edition producing news stories, focusing on important events, on the one hand, mirror how women were and are perceived in society, on the other hand, media portrayals of women influence readers' concepts about accepted gender models.

Two corpora were created to carry out the research. The first corpus of 2001–2002 complies





The main problems which were of a great importance in the media discourse are the following:

- relationship, marriage: *If marriage brings benefits to both men and women, it is even better for children* — the article concentrates on family issues and society's concerns about marriage, though women are mentioned in the text, they are not central figures there, which can be explained by the fact that marriages in fact involve both genders.

- work, salaries, retirement: *But within 40 years the burden will have to be borne by one worker alone, as the number of French men and women over 60... goes up from a fifth of the population to a third* — this exemplifies that problems of aging population are connected with both men and women. The syntactic structure presents the wide spread word combination when both sexes are mentioned and 'men' goes first, though the next example provides another position of 'women': *To place these restrictions on family-planning choices disempowers women and men and, crucially, undermines their efforts to extricate themselves from poverty* — the news story naming women is not about them but about

economic hardships. The article speaking about China emphasizes exactly what hazards women face: *Life for rural Chinese women can be dismal, often combining farm work, housework, abusive husbands or in-laws and forced sterilisation* — the first problems are likely to be common for women from almost all countries in the world whereas the last one mentioned is unique for the country in question.

Women prove not to be main topics of news stories, as well as geographic areas should be taken into consideration, as the mentioned above issues discussed in the 2001–2002 media discourse mostly concentrate on European countries, the US and Canada.

**2020–2021.** These years have witnessed a growing amount of women being in the news stories compared to the beginning of the 21st century. Several social spheres such as education, working possibilities (especially for women in Asia) are mostly discussed in the media discourse nowadays as well as traditional gender topics dealing with relationship, families, children. The given below n-grams show collocates extracted from "The Economist" demonstrating most frequent ones used in the newspaper discourse.



Figure 3. Collocations with WOMEN in 2020–2021 corpus

The general overview of modern articles sketches almost the same picture of social aspects women are involved into if compared to the years 2001–2002:

- relationship, marriage (e.g., *For decades South Korean women have had too few children to keep the population steady...; A series of campaigns and incentives to encourage women to have more children have not worked...;...so officials are instead making it easier for women to join and remain in the labour market, where they are underrepresented*);

- work, salaries, career prospects (e.g., *They (women) often choose jobs that allow more flexibility, and accept lower pay...; ...women take jobs with shorter commutes, to make time for their care responsibilities; ...estimated to explain 10–15 % of the gender pay gap*);

Speaking about women's wider possibilities to pursue a career, it actually leads to even more working hours for women fulfilling all social roles,

e.g., *If more women are working from home, they are more likely to do both work and chores.*

The new topics raised in the recent years are connected mostly with women's right in general, education, choice whether to get married and have children, health problems, e.g., *UNFPA mobilizes more than \$1 billion a year for programmes that protect the health and rights of women and girls. Our strategic plan focuses on three transformative results: to end preventable maternal deaths; end unmet need for family planning and end gender-based violence and harmful practices.*

So, we can see that the way women are represented in the media as well as and geographical diapason have been enlarged.

#### Contrastive analysis of WOMEN in 2001–2002 and 2020–2021

The comparative analysis enables to contrast two discursive images of WOMEN presented with 20-year time difference (see Table 1):

**Discursive portrait of WOMEN  
in media discourse**

Collocations with WOMEN	2001–2002	2020–2021
	spheres concerned:	
empower+WOMEN	a conned financial pyramid	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· education</li> <li>· training</li> <li>· earnings</li> </ul>
encourage+WOMEN	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· education</li> <li>· healthy relationship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· defending their dignity</li> <li>· standing up for their rights</li> <li>· being forced to do smth against their will</li> </ul>
help+WOMEN	_____	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· coming back to work               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) after having a child</li> <li>2) during pandemic turmoil</li> </ol> </li> <li>· getting a more independent position</li> <li>· psychological help</li> <li>· financial state help</li> <li>· access to education</li> </ul>
WOMEN+take	committing suicide	being an active participant in social life
young+WOMEN	unfavorable position in society	confident position in society
WOMEN+and	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>· men and women, women and child/children</li> <li>· exceptional cases</li> </ul>	

Though the collocation “empower+WOMEN” is not numerous in the two corpora, it still can demonstrate what kind of power women are supposedly given in society. Interestingly, in the 2001–2002 newspaper texts this collocate actually was used to describe a financial pyramid with a resonant name “Women Empowering Women”, e.g., *In fact, Britain’s women are being seduced into the oldest economic experience of all: being conned. “Women Empowering Women” is a pyramid scheme, which requires people to hand over money in the hope of seeing their cash multiply when new suckers are recruited.*

Thus, at the beginning of the 21st century there were no news stories about women being given more power in any social sphere. Whereas, during the years of 2020–2021 the newspaper articles have marked some social changes enabling women to get a more powerful position in society. The given examples mostly concern Asian and Latin American countries, e.g., *The residents of her village were mostly women and children. Their men had gone: killed, away fighting, or working in some other land. This gave her a fine chance to empower women, and she set to it. She knew how little they counted in Somali society, where boys were kings; Education seems a promising avenue. In the long run, it empowers women and makes them less vulnerable to abuse. But in the short run, it does not always help; Yet if it is combined with training for women, for example in traditionally female areas like children’s health, this can both empower women and soothe male worries about loss of financial control.*

The analysis of the collocation “help+WOMEN” presupposes to observe how women are helped, by whom and in what kind of social spheres. It turns out that this collocate is not present in the media

discourse of 2001–2002. Whereas, in the recent years we can observe geographical diversity together with variety of different spheres where women are offered to get help, e.g., *Kazakhstan’s foreign ministry says it helps about two women a week to escape from prostitution and return home; France is enjoying un mini baby boom. It is now fashionable for couples to have three or four children. ...wonderful kindergartens, financial aid for families, amenable school timetables and shorter working weeks that help women to keep their jobs and raise children at the same time; The expansion in Canadian education and health care has helped women, who are most of the workforce in those sectors. Mothers, who were likelier than others to stop work during the pandemic, returned when schools and day-care centres fully reopened in September; Even in Kabul, where women’s lot is probably the best in the country, girls are often harassed on their way to school. Medica Mondiale is helping women to improve their feeling of independence by learning to drive; Others have set up networks to help women during the epidemic, such as “Vaccines Against Domestic Violence”: because “the door can block covid-19, but it cannot block another virus: domestic violence”.*

The collocate “encourage+WOMEN” is probably the most provocative one as it actually reflects what actions women are urged to take. For the years 2001–2002 the occurrence is very low, dealing mostly with promoting education and healthy relationships, e.g., *The UAE encourages education, and more and more women are enrolling for college and university. Yet custom encourages women to marry young, often to a cousin. At one and the same time, the Emirates wants girls to follow the traditions of their parents and*

*the country to have the benefit of educated women; An explicit radio programme called "Straight Talk" encouraged women to protect themselves by taking responsibility for their health and their relations with men.*

This collocate in the 2020–2021 years is more frequent. The most of recent cases with "encourage" call women to stand up for their rights in different aspects of social life, e.g., *To encourage more women to come forward, their cases should be dealt with more sensitively. In Britain nearly half of women who report rape now pull out during investigations, in part because they find the process so unpleasant; In 2015 officials in Purwakarta, a county in West Java, announced that unmarried couples caught together after 9pm would be required to marry or break up. Mr Ode would surely approve. His organisation, which encourages women to defer to their male relatives and refrain from arousing male lust, has come under heavy criticism from feminists; Joint taxation of married couples, free co-insurance for spouses and tax breaks for "mini jobs", or low-hours contracts, probably did little to encourage women in the west to up their hours, and put those in the east off full-time work.*

The collocate "encourage+WOMEN" can also demonstrate how women are forced to take actions against their will. Such examples usually concern Asian societies, e.g., *Mr Kim says that everyone taking leave can come back to the same job at the end of it — a legal requirement which companies in South Korea have tended to flout, in practice encouraging women to quit once they get pregnant.*

Women as active agents are presented through the collocate "WOMEN+take". The verbal portraits of women at the beginning of the 21st century almost do not give such collocations except few examples which describe tragic situation connected with financial crisis in China, e.g., *People kill themselves everywhere in the world, but in China, unlike anywhere else, more women take their own lives than men. According to the WHO, suicide is now a leading cause of death for young women in rural China.*

The pictures of recent years present women as active participants in different societies, e.g., *It is part of a Latin American wave. Last year, after police abused women who took part in demonstrations against inequality, price rises and election-rigging in several countries, women held protests against sexism; "Promising Young Woman" is the latest in a spate of recent films, plays and television series that depict women taking revenge for wrongs committed against them.*

The collocate "WOMEN+and" is a stable one for both corpora, which is not surprising as personal relationship of women have remained almost

the same through the long run of history — men, children, family. However, both corpora include some exceptional examples when women are separated as a specific class together with representatives of minorities or religious/aging groups or non-whites, e.g., *Women and blacks were not admitted as members until the early 1990s. "It was not my space," says Ms Thompson; They were already unpopular for harbouring the world's most-wanted terrorist, Osama bin Laden, who may have masterminded bomb attacks on American targets, and for their abysmal treatment of women and non-Muslims; Then the crisis waned and the picture drastically improved. Unemployment has fallen by 40%, from more than 26m in the EU to just shy of 16m. Remarkably, the recovery has taken place even as more women and older people entered the workforce.*

The collocate "young +WOMEN" is of the special interest as it mirrors not possibilities for women in society but simultaneously reflects what kinds of changes societies have undergone offering young women decent choices.

The 2001–2002 media discourse present unfavourable position of young women mostly speaking about troublesome aspects of some societies, e.g., *What does flood through the province is a river of young women from Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria and Ukraine, lured by offers of fictitious jobs in Western Europe and then sold into sex-slavery; Young women reared to believe that a career is their birth right have done better in the job market than the marriage market; Democrats said they would give more cash to crisis centres and support groups for young women seeking to avoid arranged marriages or to leave violent partners.*

The latest issues demonstrate the confident position of young women in many countries, e.g., *Indeed in much of the rich world the share of young women with a college degree is now above that of men; Ms Kim says she only realised she had not been at fault when she met Yang Ji-hye, a bubbly 22-year-old who heads up a group of young women battling sexism in schools; Young women are far more vocal than previous generations in challenging the conservative social mores that hold them back.*

### **Conclusion**

Summing up, it is necessary to mention that the offered study has proved that significant changes are seen in the media discourse presenting women in society. Hopefully, more changes will be presented in recent years ahead.

Further research can address women's representation in Ukrainian media discourse with comparative analysis with the results obtained in the given paper.



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