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Verbal markers of Gender Roles Expression in the English-Language Literary Discourse through Truman Capote's novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel "The Handmaid's Tale"

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Abstract

Gender identity and gender stereotypes constitute important dimensions of social communication, and their study in literary discourse contributes to understanding the mechanisms through which they are formed and represented. Examining the verbal expression of gender roles in literature makes it possible not only to trace the linguistic strategies used by authors but also to analyse their potential impact on readers. Despite growing scholarly interest in gender studies, insufficient attention has been devoted to comparative analyses of the verbal means through which gender roles are constructed in English-language literary discourse. This study addresses this gap by examining the linguistic representation of gender in selected literary works. The research employed several complementary methods: the inductive-deductive method was used to observe, describe, and classify gender characteristics in English-language literary discourse; the descriptive-analytical method supported direct analysis of linguistic features at the empirical level, followed by comparison and generalisation; and componential, contextual, and stylistic analyses were applied to describe semantic components and identify patterns of realisation in the texts. The analysis of verbal means expressing gender roles in Truman Capote's Breakfast at Tiffany's and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale demonstrates the diversity of approaches to gender representation in English-language literary discourse. The study shows that lexical, stylistic, and semantic means play a central role in shaping character images and in reflecting social norms, stereotypes, and cultural expectations. The findings and conclusions are of practical relevance for linguists and other specialists interested in gender linguistics, literary discourse, and the language-based construction of identity.

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Ключові слова

Гендерлект; Дискурсивне перформування ідентичності; Субверсія гендерних стереотипів; Прагматичне сигналізування; Лексико-семантичні нюанси; Стилістичні сигніфікатори

Анотація

Гендерна ідентичність та гендерні стереотипи є важливими складовими соціальної комунікації, а їх вивчення в художньому дискурсі сприяє розумінню механізмів їх формування та функціонування. Виокремлення вербальних засобів вираження гендерних ролей у літературних творах дає можливість не лише відстежити мовні стратегії, які використовують автори, а й проаналізувати їхній вплив на читачів. Попри зростаючий науковий інтерес до гендерних студій, недостатню увагу приділено порівняльному аналізу вербальних засобів, що використовуються для конструювання гендерних ролей в англомовному художньому дискурсі. Це дослідження спрямоване на заповнення цієї прогалини шляхом вивчення мовної репрезентації гендеру в обраних літературних творах. У процесі роботи над дослідженням було використано такі методи: індуктивно-дедуктивний метод – для спостереження, опису та класифікації гендерних характеристик у текстах англомовного художнього дискурсу; описово-аналітичний метод – для безпосереднього аналізу мовних особливостей гендеру в текстах англомовного художнього дискурсу на емпіричному рівні з подальшим порівнянням та узагальненням; компонентний, контекстуальний та стилістичний аналізи – для опису семантики компонентів у текстах англомовного художнього дискурсу та виявлення особливостей їх реалізації. Аналіз вербальних засобів вираження гендерних ролей на прикладі повісті американського письменника Трумена Капоте «Сніданок у Тіффані» та роману-антиутопії канадської письменниці Маргарет Етвуд «Оповідь служниці» демонструє різноманітність підходів до гендерної репрезентації в англомовному художньому дискурсі. Дослідження показало, що лексичні, стилістичні та семантичні засоби відіграють ключову роль у формуванні образів персонажів, відображаючи соціальні норми, стереотипи та культурні очікування. Результати дослідження, а також висновки, сформульовані на їх основі, мають практичну значущість як для лінгвістів, так і для інших фахівців, які цікавляться гендерною лінгвістикою.

1. Introduction

Gender roles are an important aspect of human society, and their linguistic expression in literary texts shapes and reproduces social perceptions of men and women. Language, as the main means of communication, not only reflects but also shapes stereotypes, reinforcing gender roles through lexical, stylistic and semantic means. In fiction, authors consciously or unconsciously use language to emphasize the gender identity of characters, which makes the study of this topic particularly relevant in the context of contemporary social change and rethinking of gender norms.

In the early 20th century, interest in the study of the topic Language and Gender" increased largely due to the works of F. Mauthner, E. Sapir and O. Jespersen (Mauthner, 1982; Sapir, 1929; Jespersen, 1922). In his work "*Contribution to the Language Critique"*, dedicated to the critique of language, Mauthner (1982) highlights gender differences in

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language, justifying them by social and historical reasons. According to Sapir (1929), differences in linguistic forms are manifested through social identity (person implications) to which he refers gender and status. Jespersen (1922), in turn, provided a broad overview of the distinctive features of gender in language, which sparked a theoretical impulse for the emergence of gender determinism in a language from a feminist point of view. Women are communicators who adhere to hyperbolic, euphemistic expressions in contrast to men, who tend to use unconventional vocabulary, slang, and a more abrupt manner of speaking (Jespersen, 1922).

Gender is largely constructed and enacted via communication, with language playing a central role in shaping its meaning. Yet, because language itself is often ambiguous, context becomes a far more critical factor than gender in how we interpret it (Romaine, 1998).

Gender stereotypes are related to the attribution of certain characteristics to a gender category. They are defined as socially widespread assumptions about the kind of characteristics which men and women (presumably) have (the so-called descriptive norms) or should have (the so-called prescriptive norms) (Eagly, 1998; Lewis & Lupyan, 2020; Plaza-del-Arco, 2024; Tang, 2022). Gender roles in literary discourse are formed through specific linguistic constructions that reflect social norms and stereotypes (Ratanaphithayaporn & Rodrigo, 2024; Sankaran et al, 2024; Sousa, 2022; Subon, 2013; Thiele, 2023).

Gender stereotypes are cognitive schemas stored in the mind that can be automatically activated and applied. This assumption about the automatic processing of information is particularly important when new information comes to us. The schema controls the processing of new information and thus determines how much of it is perceived, how it is classified, and interpreted. Schemas are characterized by knowledge that exhibits a high degree of generalization. For this reason, cognitive schemas can also be applied to any specific examples. Information that does not match the mental schema is mostly ignored or reinterpreted. Missing information about individuals or groups is supplemented with that retrieved from the mentally stored schema. Gender stereotypes ensue as a result of this process, which are preserved for a very long time (Charlesworth et al, 2021; Dev et al, 2021; Martin & Halverson, 1981).

At the lexical level, this is manifested through the choice of words that stress certain gender characteristics (Formanowicz & Hansen, 2022; Laoli, 2021; Monzó-Nebot, 2021). Grammatical and syntactic features also play a pivotal role in moulding the speech portraits of characters (Belova, 2020; Efing & Heinemann, 2024; Goodhew et al, 2022). Stylistic devices such as metaphors, epithets and similes deepen the perception of gender roles, creating multifaceted images (Kotek et al, 2021; Subon, 2013).

Modern corpus linguistics provides tools for the systematic analysis of literary texts. The use of corpora eases the identification of trends in the use of linguistic means that reflect gender roles. This ensures the objectivity of research and opens up new vistas for studying the sociocultural processes influencing speech behavior. It's worth mentioning

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that analyzing verbal means in text corpora helps to identify not only general trends in the reflection of gender, but also the unique features of individual authors or genres (Obaidullah, 2021).

In general, the study of verbal means expression of gender roles in literary discourse is a principal step towards an enhanced understanding of the relationship between language and society, which in its turn allows to reveal the dynamics of changes in the perception of gender, reflecting the development of social values and norms.

2. Methodology

The scientific issues outlined in the article, the very span of theoretical questions, and the specificity of the material under study determined the use of appropriate research methodology. The methodology for analyzing the verbal representation of gender roles in Truman Capote's novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Margaret Atwood's dystopian novel "The Handmaid's Tale" is based on a text-centered approach. In the course of the research, the following methods were used: inductive-deductive method – for observing, describing and classifying gender characteristics in texts of the English-language literary discourse; descriptive-analytical method – for the direct analysis of the linguistic specificity of gender in texts of the English-language literary discourse at the empirical level, followed by comparison and generalization; componential, contextual and stylistic analyses – for describing the semantics of components in texts of the English-language literary discourse and identifying the features of their actualization. The method of pragmatic interpretation of the text assisted in the pinpointing and analysis of latent gender content in texts of the English-language literary discourse and the determination of its communicative-pragmatic features. The study made use of psychoanalytic analysis techniques, which were implemented to isolate those constants in the imagery system of the novels that correspond to deep mental representations of gender stereotypes and to clarify their psychological content.

3. Results and Discussion

Discourse as a multifarious concept attracts significant attention from researchers in the field of linguistics and related disciplines. In a broad sense, it encompasses text in its communicative context, which includes cognitive, social, cultural, and historical aspects. According to Selivanova (2010), text is a static linguistic unit that captures certain content, whereas discourse is a dynamic speech process that integrates text into the context of the speaker's interaction with the environment.

Widdowson (1991) proposes considering discourse as a communicative act in which the text acquires meaning only in connection with the context of its creation and perception. This definition focuses on the interrelation between text and context, which is crucial for understanding the literary discourse. The distinction between text and discourse lies not only in their functions but also in the ways they realize the communicative goal.

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The concept of the literary discourse is inseparable from the interaction of the author, the text and the reader. As Shevchenko (2005) states, the literary discourse can be described as a multidimensional cognitive-communicative process in which the author's idea permeates a linguistic code and is reflected in the reader's mind. This highlights the importance of cognitive and socio-pragmatic components that ensure effective communication between the participants in this process.

The interaction of the writer, the text and the reader determine the specificity of the literary discourse. The semantic structure of the text is marked by a cultural and historical imprint, reflecting not only the author's individual style but also the social norms and values of a particular period. According to Searle (1989), a literary text contains an implicit message that is not always explicitly expressed but is central to communication between the author and the reader. This feature leads to the literary discourse integrating various cultural and ideological contexts.

Gender is a key concept of a literary text that can be traced in the microstructures of a work piece and forms a gender paradigm that includes components such as gender connotations, associative potential, and gender symbolism. Reproduction of gender identity takes place with the involvement of optimal lexical, syntactic, and stylistic means (Novosad et al. 2022).

Gender identity is embodied in linguistic constructions that reflect social norms and expectations (Pryzgoda & Chrisler, 2000). This dimension of language use is crucial for understanding how a language functions as a tool of social marking, reinforcing specific roles assigned to men and women (Obidovna, 2022).

The linguistic representation of the world by women and men influences societal attitudes toward both sexes and contributes to the entrenchment of gender stereotypes, which perpetuate differentiated social expectations of each gender. Such processes reinforce existing gender distinctions and hierarchies (Kikinezhdi et al., 2020). Hence, gender roles in the literary discourse constitute one of the central topics in contemporary linguistics, which explores the interaction of language and sociocultural aspects.

3.1. Lexical characteristics of gender roles expression

To analyze the lexical means used to express gender roles in literary texts, Truman Capote's novella "*Breakfast at Tiffany's"* (Capote, 2000) and Margaret Atwood's novel "*The Handmaid's Tale"* (Atwood, 1985) were selected. In Truman Capote's novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" the image of the main character, Holly Golightly, is constructed through numerous lexical markers that disclose her gender role. Portraying Holly, the author uses an ample repertoire of adjectives highlighting her versatile nature. Through lexical analysis, it was found out that Holly is mostly described as *beautiful*, *perfect*, and *different* (Capote, 2000), which creates her image as a unique yet ideal woman. This reflects the stereotype of feminine beauty and social conformity, combined with individuality.

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Holly is described as a character who simultaneously conforms to and deviates from typical feminine traits. For example, the adjective *perfect* illustrates expectations society places on a woman as an ideal, well-groomed figure: *Holly was perfect* (Capote, 2000). Such a description hints at the traditional ideal of female perfection but is simultaneously accompanied by an emphasis on her unpredictability and independence through the use of the adjective *different*: *Holly was very different* (Capote, 2000). This suggests the complexity of her character and her deviation from established gender norms.

Another intriguing lexical marker is the use of the word *child* in connection with Holly: *... child was Holly* (Capote, 2000). Such a comparison to a child not only conveys her naivety and straightforwardness but also the social immaturity often attributed to young women. In this context, Holly embodies both freedom and vivacity but also imparts a touch of dependency and need for protection.

The detailed analysis of the modifiers of the word *woman* in the text also provides insights into gender stereotypes. We identified modifiers such as *young*, *old*, *pretty*, *terrible*, which demonstrate contrasting portrayals of women. For instance, phrases like *young woman* and *pretty woman* expose youth and beauty as key characteristics of a woman in society (Capote, 2000). In contrast, negative markers like *terrible* and *fat* are often used to draw attention to the absence of these qualities: … *terrible, fat old woman* (Capote, 2000).

Another important aspect is the use of lexical units to refer to Holly by her last name. Modifiers like *Miss, beautiful, twenty-year-old* add an air of youth and beauty to her image, presenting her as an idealized figure: *Miss Golightly, beautiful Holly Golightly* (Capote, 2000). However, the combination with other lexical units, such as *Doc* or *husband*, implicitly indicates the social roles and relationships that define her place within a patriarchal system: … *husband, Doc Golightly* (Capote, 2000).

Thus, the lexical means in the text not only shed light on Holly's character but also reflect societal expectations of women's roles. This confirms the fact that lexical markers serve as a tool of constructing gender stereotypes in the literary discourse.

Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale" is a powerful literary text that employs a variety of lexical tools to model gender roles and their impact on society. Gender stereotypes in the novel are reflected through detailed descriptions of male and female characters, where adjective modifiers play a crucial role in creating images and displaying their social functions.

The description of male characters in the novel forms their statuses and roles through the use of a broad range of adjectives. Men are often portrayed as either young or old, emphasizing their position in the social hierarchy. For example, in such phrases as *old man* and *young men* (Atwood, 1985), age becomes an important characteristic that determines their physical or social role. In the context of a dystopian society, where reproductive capability is crucial, age characteristics carry additional significance.

Men are also described through positive or negative traits of character and appearance. For example, adjectives *handsome* and *nice* create an image of an attractive

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and socially acceptable man *handsome Spanish man, nice young man* (Atwood, 1985). This reinforces stereotypical ideas of the ideal man as physically attractive and socially appealing. In contrast, such adjectives as *unkind* or *terrible* conjure up a negative image, bringing out cruelty or unacceptability: *unkind man, terrible man* (Atwood, 1985).

The social status and ethnic background of men in the text are also highlighted through such modifiers as *Spanish, African,* and *Italian.* These adjectives evoke a sense of multiculturalism while suggesting the social stereotypes related to origin: *tall African man, handsome Spanish man, Italian man* (Atwood, 1985). These characteristics not only outline physical traits but also allude to cultural expectations and stereotypes.

The images of female characters in the novel are formed through a rich lexical bulk. Women are often described in terms of their age, social status or physical condition. For example, adjectives *old* and *pregnant* focus one's attention on their reproductive function or age-related constraints: *old woman, pregnant woman* (Atwood, 1985). They highlight the stereotypical role of women as mothers or individuals who lose their social significance with age.

A salient characteristic of female characters is their distinction from others, expressed through adjectives such as " *different* and *unknown.* These modifiers form the image of women as mysterious, unique, or even marginalized figures in society: *different women, unknown woman* (Atwood, 1985). In the context of a dystopian society, they reinforce the idea of control and definite limits of freedom for women.

Particular attention should be paid to the use of the word *many* in phrases referring to women, such as *many old women* (Atwood, 1985). This modifier underscores the standardization of the group, pinpointing a lack of individuality among women of a certain age or social status. Thus, the images of women in the novel are both collective and individual, allowing the author to manipulate their characteristics to strengthen the central thematic ideas.

The way descriptions of men and women interact in the text comes across as another enticing feature. For instance, the modifier *other* is used for both men and women, creating a certain contrast between ordinary and marginalized characters: *other women, other men* (Atwood, 1985). This connotes a chasm between those who conform to societal expectations and those who refuse to come up to them.

Analyzing the literary texts by Truman Capote and Margaret Atwood evinces significant differences in the use of lexical means to express gender roles. Both literary works employ a broad spectrum of feminitives, masculinitives, and words that highlight social roles and stereotypical traits. However, the way these are applied and their functions differ considerably.

In "Breakfast at Tiffany's" gender roles are often defined through the use of feminitives and masculinitives, such as *Miss Golightly, Mrs. Golightly, Mr. Trawler.* These terms convey the social status of characters while also shaping their identity within a specific social structure. For example, the use of *Miss* and *Mrs.* focuses readers' attention on the marital status of women, reflecting a stereotypical gender role where women are

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evaluated based on their relationship with men: *I liked the idea of introducing Mrs. Golightly to her husband* (Capote, 2000).

In "The Handmaid's Tale", in contrast to "Breakfast at Tiffany's", feminitives and masculinitives, such as *Handmaid, Wife, Commander* acquire an institutional stance and are resorted to so as to put into the spotlight the systemic nature of the gender hierarchy. These terms not only define the status of characters but also accentuate the repressive nature of society: *The Commander does the talking for me* (Atwood, 1985).

Lexical tools in both works also form stereotypical ideas about men and women. In Truman Capote's text, positive characteristics such as *charming* and *delicate* are often employed to describe women, creating an image of a fragile yet independent heroine: *Holly was charming, independent* (Capote, 2000). In the meantime, men are portrayed as *strong* or *reliable* which aligns with traditional notions of masculinity: *Fred stayed with us until he became a soldier* (Capote, 2000).

In Margaret Atwood's text stereotypical traits are of an ambivalent nature. Women are presented as *obedient, submissive*, emphasizing their compliance and dependence within the system. At the same time, some female characters possess *assertive* and *nurturing* qualities, suggesting an underlying resistance: *Women know that instinctively* (Atwood, 1985). As regards men, they are positioned as *powerful, dominant*, as well as *sterile* and *solitary*, what imparts a touch of vulnerability: *He's in his shirt sleeves, his shirt untucked* (Atwood, 1985).

In "*Breakfast at Tiffany's"* social roles such as *writer, bartender, actress* underscore the individuality and life ambitions of the characters. These roles serve not only as gender markers but also reveal aspects of the characters' identities and social status. In "The Handmaid's Tale" social roles are rigidly regulated and defined by the system: *"It's only for officers", he says* (Atwood, 1985). This brings to light the dehumanization and oppression of the individual.

Thereby, "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and "The Handmaid's Tale" offer two different approaches to using lexical means to reflect gender roles. In the former, gender identity is shaped through social and personal characteristics, while in the latter it is forged through the systematic assignment of roles within a totalitarian society. These differences reflect various thematic emphases and allow the authors to highlight gender issues in their own way.

3.2 Stylistic means of gender roles expression

Stylistic means play an important role in the formation of gender roles in a literary text. Let us examine the stylistic devices used in Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale", namely: metaphors, epithets, similes, irony and contextual repetitions, which contribute to the expression of gender roles.

The result of the analysis of Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" testifies to the fact that metaphors are used to create the main character's, Holly Golightly's, image as an independent yet vulnerable person. Truman Capote often compares Holly to birds,

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highlighting her desire for freedom and estrangement from social obligations. The metaphor of a bird in a cage plays up the fragile nature of the woman seeking a way to escape from restrictions. At the same time, this metaphor draws attention to the cultural notion of a woman as a being in need of protection. For example, it is mentioned in the text that Holly, like a bird, belongs to no one: *She's a wild thing. You can't cage her* (Capote, 2000). This metaphor stresses the heroine's independence and her rejection of traditional gender roles.

In her novel "The Handmaid's Tale" Margaret Atwood also uses metaphors to demonstrate the oppression of women in society. For instance, the protagonist Offred describes her body as a *vase*, which signifies the objectification of her as a reproductive instrument: *We are containers, it's only the insides of our bodies that are important* (Capote, 2000). This metaphor amplifies the idea of patriarchal power where a woman is viewed solely in terms of her biological function.

Epithets in Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" are generally used to draw attention to the appearance and disposition of the characters. For example, Holly is often shown as charming, carefree or mysterious. These epithets create the image of an idealized woman who attracts men with her inaccessibility: *Holly was the most charming girl I had ever met* (Capote, 2000). Men in this novella, particularly Paul Varjak, are described less emotionally, with a focus on their social status or profession, highlighting the traditional gender dichotomy.

Margaret Atwood, on the contrary, utilizes epithets to display the harsh reality of the world in "The Handmaid's Tale". For example, Offred describes the Commander as cold and tight, laying bare his detachment and power: *His eyes were cold, calculating* (Capote, 2000). Women who have lost their former rights are described with the epithets silent and submissive, reflecting their social role in the totalitarian society.

Similes are also a prominent stylistic device in both works, helping the authors to highlight the contrast between gender roles. In Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" Holly is compared to precious jewels which, though appearing valuable, remain lifeless objects: *Holly, she was like a diamond: dazzling but untouchable* (Capote, 2000). This comparison singles out her beauty and inaccessibility, but also alludes to the absence of deep emotional connections.

Margaret Atwood uses similes in "The Handmaid's Tale" to highlight the dehumanization of women. For example, Offred compares her body to a product, further reinforcing the idea of women as objects: *I feel like a prize pig on display.* (Atwood, 1985). This comparison vividly demonstrates how the patriarchal society reduces women solely to their physiological function.

Irony is a powerful instrument in both works, but its functions differ significantly. In Truman Capote's novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" irony is used to strike a light comic tone, especially in scenes where Holly engages in unexpected dialogues with other characters. For example, Holly refers to herself as a mouse in a trap, while indicating that

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the trap was created by herself: *I'm a mouse, but I've built my own cage* (Capote, 2000). This ironic remark stresses both her independence and her helplessness.

In Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale" irony evinces a completely different character. The author uses it to criticize the patriarchal society in which women are given some privileges that in fact turn out to be forms of control. For example, women are greeted with fertility, though this joy is merely a means of enslavement: *Blessed be the fruit* (Atwood, 1985). Here irony serves to augment the absurdity of ideological control.

Contextual repetition plays a significant role in both works. In Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" repetition of phrases related to Holly's independence, such as *I don't belong to anyone* (Capote, 2000) reinforces the idea of her free spirit. This repetition singles out her desire to avoid any obligations to men, which is a part of the heroine's gender identity. At the same time, repetition of phrases such as *Under His Eye* in Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale" creates an atmosphere of fear and control (Atwood, 1985). This repetition becomes a reminder of the constant surveillance and curbing of women, underpinning their role as controlled subjects.

Thus, stylistic devices in the tackled texts of the literary discourse are used for different purposes: in Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" they help engender an idealized, romanticized image of women while in Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" they serve to expose the repressive system. Metaphors, epithets, similes, irony and repetition generate a unique stylistic context that allows readers to garner a deeper grasp of gender roles and their functioning in different social settings.

3.3 Semantic peculiarities of gender stereotypes

Gender stereotypes are displayed not only in terms of vocabulary or stylistics, but also in the semantic loading of key symbols and images. In the literary works of Truman Capote "Breakfast at Tiffany's" and Margaret Atwood "The Handmaid's Tale" gender stereotypes are presented through symbols of nature, colors as well as through those images that set much store by socially conditioned expectations of men and women. Symbols of nature in the works by T. Capote and M. Atwood come forth as effective in the creation of gender images. In "Breakfast at Tiffany's" by T. Capote nature is used to illustrate the fragility and emotional sensitivity of Holly Golightly. For example, the images of flowers are often associated with traditional ideas of female tenderness and beauty: *I picked flowers for her. I found a bird for her and taught it to say her name* (Capote, 2000). In the cited sequence flowers come across as a metaphor for Holly's delicate nature while attempts to teach a bird to say her name give prominence to her charisma and persistence.

Colors in literary texts often gain semantic significance, reflecting social roles and gender expectations. In Truman Capote's novella "Breakfast at Tiffany's" the color white is used to put purity and vulnerability into a sharper focus. For example, Holly is described with *a white, worried face*: *There were three Hollys in front of me, all with white, worried*

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faces (Capote, 2000). White color in this context highlights her innocence which, however, contrasts with her rebellious nature.

While in Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale" the color white is treated as a signifier of purity as well, it additionally gets to serve as a marker of the patriarchal control. For example, the brides' dresses are viewed upon as symbols of purity and subordination of brides: *All the dresses were white, with veils to match; meant to signify purity* (Atwood, 1985). Such a description demonstrates the way society controls female sexuality employing the symbols of purity as levers to keep women in subjugation.

The color red is associated with fertility and prohibition in M. Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale". The handmaids' clothing, as Atwood stresses, is red, symbolizing both their role as a kind of reproductive machines and threat to their femininity: *Scarlet and red: the colors of life and the forbidden* (Atwood, 1985). In this context red evinces a dual meaning, enhancing both handmaids' vitality and their status as banned.

Social status proves a reliable indicator of gender stereotypes in both works. In particular, the female characters are often defined by their social status in Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's". For example, Holly is described as a socialite, whose status is determined by her independence and connections with wealthy men: *She chose an old black and white horse for me. Don't worry, she said. She's very safe* (Capote, 2000). This quote highlights her control over her own life, but also points to her dependence on men.

Social roles of women in Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" become determined by the political system. Thus, the term "*angels*" is used to describe the servants of the patriarchal order, revealing their duality as both instruments of control and victims: *We were the fallen angels, cast out but still beholden to the laws of this world* (Atwood, 1985). This symbolism stresses the idea that they remain subjugated even in their "high" roles.

In summary, both literary works demonstrate semantic tools' potential to reflect gender stereotypes. In Truman Capote's "Breakfast at Tiffany's" these tools act to create a romanticized image of women, while in Margaret Atwood's "The Handmaid's Tale" semantic means are resorted to with a view to criticizing a society that controls women. The symbolism of nature, colors and social statuses promotes the exploration of different aspects of gender identity and their functioning in various contexts.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The results of the research of verbal markers expressing gender roles in the texts of the English-language literary discourse demonstrate that lexical, stylistic, and semantic means take the lead in the formation of gender images which, depending on the author's intent, can either reinforce set stereotypes or deconstruct them. Literary discourse functions not only as a means of reflecting reality but also as an instrument for influencing readers' perception, modeling complex social and gender relationships.

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Lexical analysis revealed that gender roles in literary texts are often maintained through specific verbal markers that accentuate stereotypical traits of men and women. While women are usually described with lexis that highlights their beauty, emotionality or social dependency, men are characterized by traits associated with strength, power and rationality. However, these markers can vary depending on the context, creating more multifaceted and contradictory images.

Stylistic means such as metaphors, epithets, similes and irony allow the authors to tap a deeper emotional and semantic layer, which either strengthens or reinterprets gender roles. The use of these means contributes to creating multidimensional images of characters, their inner worlds, and social roles. In particular, irony often serves as a tool of criticism of traditional gender perceptions, while metaphors and epithets enhance the artistic influence on the reader.

Due to the semantic analysis, it was found out that gender stereotypes are often embodied through symbols of nature, colors and various social roles in the literary discourse. These symbols carry a significant cultural undertone and are conducive to forming the reader's lasting associations, either supporting or challenging the established notions of gender. In particular, such colors as red and white encompass the symbolic meanings in texts that are often linked to feminine purity, fertility or social restrictions.

The results of the study prove the importance of verbal means as the primary mechanism for constructing gender roles in the literary discourse. Moreover, the verbal markers indicate that the literary fiction is capable of not only mirroring social norms but also serving as a powerful instrument for their transformation, facilitating the rethinking of gender roles within a cultural context.

In the future, it is possible to focus on the use of corpus technologies, in particular such a tool as Sketch Engine, for a deeper and more objective analysis of the texts under study, since corpus methods allow us to identify the contextual use of key lexical and stylistic means, which significantly increases the reliability of the conclusions.

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Larysa Shchyhlo from Sumy State University led the conceptualization of the research and played a key role in shaping the theoretical foundation of the study. She was involved in data collection, formal analysis, and the preparation of the original draft of the manuscript, ensuring the coherence between the theoretical framework and the empirical findings.
Diana Movchan from Sumy State University contributed to the study's conceptualization and participated in the formal analysis alongside the other authors. She was directly involved in the development of the research methodology and the empirical investigation, particularly in the linguistic analysis and interpretation of the data. She also contributed to the validation of the research findings and co-authored the original draft, with a particular focus on the methodological framework and the discussion of the results.
Svitlana Aleksenko from Sumy State Pedagogical University named after A.S. Makarenko was involved in the methodological refinement and validation of the research results. She participated in evaluating the reliability and consistency of the findings and provided substantial support in the interpretation of the obtained results. In addition, she contributed to the critical revision of the manuscript, ensuring the overall academic quality, logical coherence, and linguistic precision of the study.
Anna Rohulia from Sumy State University contributed to data collection and the empirical analysis of linguistic material. She participated in the interpretation of the results and assisted in drafting and organizing the manuscript, particularly in relation to the analysis of gender representation in literary discourse.

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