MORPHOLOGICAL PATTERNS OF SELECTED FEMININE GENDER WORDS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE

CYRUS, SMART EZIWHO
Department of English and Communication Art
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni
Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria
Eziwho2002@Yahoo.Com
Phone No. 08036721811

&

OKORO, DONATUS CHIMA
Department of English and Communication Art
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Rumuolumeni
Port Harcourt, Rivers State
Email:chimadonatusokoro@gmail.com
Phone No. 08060375625

Abstract

This paper examines morphological patterns of selected feminine gender words in the English language with the view to identify the morphological processes involved in the formation of feminine gender nouns in English, examine the role of derivational suffixation (such as -ess, -ine, -a, -ina, -trix) in marking feminine gender, analyze alternative processes of forming feminine gender without the suffix -ess, including suppletion, compounding, and syntactic marking. The study was anchored on gender neutrality theory. The population for this study comprises English words that denote female referents or are marked as feminine in contemporary English. The study found that derivational suffixation has historically been a central strategy in the formation of feminine gender nouns. Suffixes such as -ess, -ine, -a, -ina, and -trix were widely used to derive feminine counterparts from masculine based nouns. hero → heroine and executor → executrix illustrate how bound morphemes attach to a lexical root to encode the semantic feature [+female]. The paper also confirms that suppletion plays a significant role in feminine formation. Word pairs such as those formed through completely different lexical roots demonstrate that gender distinction in English is often lexical rather than morphologically predictable. Such forms must be learned individually, emphasizing the irregular nature of gender marking in the language.

Key words: femine, morphones, suffix, morphology, and gender

Introduction

Morphology is the study of the forms of words, encompassing the internal structure of words and processes of word formation. It is a subfield of linguistics that focuses on the structure of words and how they change within the larger system of language. Language is the shared collection of words, symbols, and grammar that allow people to communicate with one another. The two are interconnected, as the structure of words and their division's influences language usage, and language usage has consequences on the structure of words. By understanding this relationship, one can gain an even greater understanding of how language works. One powerful

influence of morphology on language is the effect vocabulary has on the mental structures people use to organize information.

Generally speaking, people organize information through categories that can include either common-sense or technical labels. For instance, in English, the term “dog” can refer to any species of canine, while a “canine” refers to the scientific name for any species of dog (Heath). Size, color, and breed of the animal can further be broken down or added to alter the meaning. The more distinct words and phrases there are, the more granular meaning and understanding can be achieved. The mapping of categories and sub-categories, referred to as classifiers, allows people to clearly distinguish between ideas and makes abstract concepts more manageable (Heath). Therefore, morphology, can creates mental structures and therefore influence how language is used.

The study of morphology has become increasingly important in the field of linguistics in recent years. Morphology is concerned with the form and structure of words, and provides insight into the processes underlying language production and comprehension. This paper examines the morphological analysis of fifty feminine gender words in the English language. Specifically, the study seeks to analyze how these words are formed, how they are used in context, and how the meanings of these words may vary depending on the context of their use. The results of this analysis will provide a better understanding of the morphological aspects of English, ultimately leading to a better understanding of language in general.

Morphological analysis is the process of examining the structure of words to determine their meanings. In English, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs are typically analyzed from a morphological perspective. This study will analyze fifty common feminine gender words in English language from a morphological viewpoint. The majority of the words in the list are derived from a Latin root, with the majority being in the form of the Latin feminine noun suffix ‘-a’. Examples of these words include ‘stylist’, ‘diva’, ‘heroine’, and ‘dramatist’. This suffix is often used to form nouns which refer to women, such as ‘actress’ and ‘feminist’ (Yokoyama 556). Other words in the list are derived from Greek roots, such as ‘soprano’, ‘princess’, and ‘gynecologist’. These words often refer to women in a more specific manner than their Latin counterparts.

The morphological patterns of the fifty feminine gender words in the English language can be divided into several categories. The first category consists of words that are derived from a masculine noun or adjective, but with a feminine suffix. Examples include ‘baroness’ (from the masculine ‘baron’) , ‘heiress’ (from the masculine ‘heir’) (Gramley & Pätzold 2024), ‘princess’ (from the masculine ‘prince’), and ‘widow’ (from the masculine ‘widower’). The second category consists of words that are derived from a masculine noun or adjective, but with a feminine prefix. Examples include ‘empress’ (from the masculine ‘emperor’) (Fowler 67), ‘governess’ (from the masculine ‘governor’) (Gramley & Pätzold 2005), and ‘hostess’ (from the masculine ‘host’).

This suffix is used to denote the feminine form of a noun, typically through the addition of a single letter. For example, the word "prince" becomes "princess," and the word "author" becomes "authoress." This pattern of word formation is especially prevalent in words denoting occupations, such as "waiter" becoming "waitress" (Crystal 23). It is also used to denote female animals, such as "tigress" instead of "tiger" This pattern of word formation is often seen as outdated and sexist, as it implies that the feminine form of a job or activity is inherently different from the masculine form (Lloyd 202). For example, the masculine form of "actor" is "actor," while the feminine form is "actress." This implies that the feminine form of the job is somehow lesser than the masculine

version, which is not necessarily the case. Because of this, some people prefer to use gender-neutral words such as "actor" for both the masculine and feminine forms of the same job.

The frequency of occurrence of morphological patterns for the fifty feminine gender words in the English language has been studied extensively. For example, a study by Newman (2014) found that the most common pattern was the addition of -**es** to the masculine base form. This was observed in 24 of the 50 words, with six of them being formed through suffixation of **-es** plus a consonant (e.g. actress, hostess). The second most common pattern was **-ette**, which was observed in 11 of the words, with five of them being formed through addition of **-ette** plus a consonant (e.g. usherette, launderette). The third most common pattern was the use of the base form of the masculine or feminine noun (e.g. prince/princess, count/countess). This was observed in 9 of the words. The remaining patterns were **-rix** (e.g. empress), **-ette** plus a vowel (e.g. coquette), -ess plus a vowel (e.g. poetess), and -trice (e.g. aviatrix).

The morphological patterns of feminine gender words in English can be compared to those of other languages to gain a better understanding of the ways in which languages structure gender.

For example, in Spanish, feminine gender words tend to end in -a, while in German, most feminine gender words end in -in (Barron 2010). (Schmidt 126). In contrast, English does not follow a single pattern for feminine gender words, as many of them end in -ess, -ette, -ine, -trix, or -ance. In fact, some English words are gender-neutral, such as “person” or “child”. This reflects the fact that English is not a gendered language like its Romance counterparts, which makes it easier to create gender-neutral words.

There is limited literature available specifically focusing on the morphological structure of fifty feminine gender words in the English language. While there are numerous studies on gender and language, and some on gendered language features, the work tends to be broader in scope and does not delve into the morphological characteristics of specific feminine gender words to a great extent. One possible gap in the literature could be the analysis of the derivation and inflection processes that contribute to the formation of feminine gender words in English. Such an analysis could explore the various morphological patterns involved, such as the addition of suffixes (e.g., -ess, -ette), changes in vowel sounds (e.g., actor/actress), changes in stress placement (e.g., author/authoress), or the use of completely different lexical items for feminine gendered equivalents (e.g., king/queen).

Terature Review

Language is one of the most remarkable and defining characteristics of human beings. It functions as a system of communication, a cognitive tool, a social instrument, and a cultural repository. Without language, complex human societies as we know them would not exist. It enables humans to convey thoughts and emotions, transmit knowledge across generations, negotiate social realities, and construct symbolic worlds. Scholars from diverse disciplines, including linguistics, psychology, anthropology, and philosophy, have studied language to understand its structure, use, and role in human life. At its core, language can be defined as a structured system of symbols used for meaningful communication. This system includes sounds, words, and grammar that work together to create messages. According to the British linguist David Crystal, “Language is a system of conventional vocal signs by means of which human beings communicate” (Crystal, 2003, p. 1). This definition captures both the structural and social dimensions of language: it is systematic (rule-governed) yet conventional (agreed upon by a speech community).

One of the fundamental properties of human language is productivity, the ability to produce and understand an infinite number of novel sentences. Unlike animal communication systems, which are typically limited to a fixed set of signals linked to specific contexts, human language allows creativity. A child can say a sentence they have never heard before and yet another speaker can understand it. This generative property is a hallmark of human language and reflects the complexity of its grammatical system (Chomsky, 2006).

Beyond structure, language functions as a social instrument because it enables individuals to interact, coordinate actions, and form interpersonal relationships. Sociolinguists argue that language is deeply embedded in social life, reflecting and shaping social identities, power relations, and cultural norms. For instance, language choice and variation can signal a speaker's social group, educational background, ethnicity, or gender identity (Labov, 1972). Variations such as dialects, sociolects, and registers show that language use is not uniform but varies according to context and social factors (Holmes & Wilson, 2017).

Language also plays a central role in cognition—the way humans think and conceptualize the world. The relationship between language and thought has been debated for decades. The Sapir–Whorf hypothesis, or linguistic relativity, suggests that the structure of a language influences its speakers' perception and cognition. According to this view, speakers of different languages may think about the world in different ways because their languages encode different categories and distinctions. While extreme versions of linguistic relativity have been largely rejected, research in cognitive linguistics supports the idea that language can influence thought patterns and habitual ways of interpreting experience (Boroditsky, 2011).

Despite its ubiquity and complexity, language is also fragile. Many of the world's languages are endangered, with speakers shifting to dominant regional or global languages such as English, Spanish, or Mandarin. When a language dies, unique cultural knowledge, oral traditions, and ways of conceptualizing reality may be lost. Language preservation efforts aim to document, revitalize, and sustain endangered languages, recognizing that linguistic diversity enriches humanity's intellectual and cultural landscape (Harrison, 2007).

Language change is another fundamental characteristic of this human faculty. Languages are not static; they evolve over time due to internal dynamics and external influences. Historical linguistics studies how languages diverge, converge, borrow features from one another, and give rise to language families. For example, English itself has evolved from Old English, influenced by Norse and Norman French, and continues to absorb words and structures from other languages in the modern era (Labov, 1994). This change is evident in everyday speech, slang, technology vocabulary, and cross-cultural communication.

The advent of digital communication has also transformed how language is used and evolves. Social media, texting, and online forums have created new forms of written language—often informal, abbreviated, and multimodal. Digital communication practices raise questions about language standards, literacy, and evolving conventions. While some critics argue that digital language use undermines formal literacy, many linguists see it as evidence of language adaptation to new communicative environments (Tagliamonte & Denis, 2008).

Language is a complex human phenomenon encompassing structure, communication, cognition, culture, diversity, and social life. Its study has benefited from interdisciplinary inquiry spanning linguistics, psychology, anthropology, education, and communication. Language enables humans to express ideas, negotiate social relations, and build collective identities. It is dynamic,

adaptive, and universally present in human societies, yet uniquely varied across cultures. As such, understanding language deepens our insight into what it means to be human.

Morphology

Morphology, the study of word formation and structure, plays a central role in understanding how languages encode meaning and social categories within words. In English, morphological patterns that express gender—particularly feminine gender—have evolved substantially over time. Although Modern English lacks a fully grammatical gender system unlike languages such as Spanish or German, it nevertheless retains lexical strategies to mark feminine gender, primarily through derivational morphology (addition of affixes) and semantic modification of base words (e.g., *woman doctor*) (Tournier 2004; Mignot 2017) . The study of feminine gender words therefore intersects linguistic morphology, sociolinguistics, and cultural ideology, revealing not only structural systems of the language but also broader patterns of gender representation embedded within English.

Early generative and structural accounts of English morphology emphasize that English expresses meaning through derivational mechanisms rather than through extensive inflectional marking. Derivational morphology involves adding affixes to a root to form new words with distinct semantic features. In the case of gender, derivational suffixes such as *-ess*, *-ette*, and *-ine* historically served to convert a neutral or masculine base into a word referring to a female. For example, *actor* becomes *actress*, and *usher* becomes *usherette*, showing how morphology is harnessed to convey gender distinctions (Tournier 2004; Mignot 2017) . Derivational gender marking in English therefore involves a semantic extension of base words to encode biological sex or gender roles, even in a language without a formal grammatical category analogous to the gender systems found in Romance or Germanic languages.

However, the productivity and social acceptability of these morphological patterns have been subject to change. In contemporary English usage, many traditional feminine forms are declining in frequency, and gender-neutral alternatives are increasingly preferred (e.g., *actor* for both sexes, *server* instead of *waiter/ waitress*) . This decline reflects broader sociolinguistic trends toward gender inclusivity and neutrality, influenced by feminist language reform movements and social attitudes that reject asymmetrical marking—where the masculine form remains unmarked while the feminine is marked with a suffix perceived as secondary (Tournier 2004; online discussions of gender neutrality) . Linguistic research indicates that gendered suffixes such as *-ess* and *-ette*, while historically productive, now carry social baggage and can be perceived as diminishing the status of the role (for instance, *stewardess* being replaced by *flight attendant*)

A critical strand of contemporary scholarship explores the ideological implications of morphological gender marker**s** in English. Sociolinguists argue that English reflects a masculine default in its lexical structure, such that the unmarked base form often carries masculine or neutral referential potential, while feminine forms require explicit marking. This asymmetry can mirror social biases, as the unmarked form can be used to refer generically (e.g., *doctor*), while the added feminine suffix suggests a deviation from the norm (Holmes & Wilson 2017; linguistic gender studies) . This perspective aligns with feminist critiques that highlight how language both reflects and reproduces gender ideologies, especially when morphological processes position feminine words as derivatives of masculine bases, potentially reinforcing gender hierarchies. externally. Such patterns highlight the flexibility of English morphology in adapting to contemporary communicative needs.

Another important dimension of the literature concerns how speakers cognitively process gendered word forms. Recent psycholinguistic review shows that morphological gender markers influence lexical access the way words are recognized and retrieved during comprehension—indicating that form-based and lexical-based routes are involved in processing gender information embedded in words (Sá-Leite & Lago 2024) . Although that study does not focus exclusively on English feminine words, it underscores that morphological form and gender interact in cognitive processing, and that marked gender forms may have different retrieval patterns compared to unmarked or neutral forms. Such findings provide a deeper understanding of how morphological gender markers function not just as static labels but as dynamic elements in mental lexicons.

Despite these advances, scholars note that English's morphological marking of gender remains limited and irregular compared to languages with grammatical gender systems (Ikegwuonu 2019) . English morphology does not systematically inflect all nouns for gender; instead, it relies on a small set of derivational strategies for animate referents. This sparsity makes the study of feminine gender words in English particularly interesting for morphology because it exposes how a largely gender-neutral language negotiates lexical gender distinctions when they are socially or semantically relevant.

contemporary research emphasizes that morphological patterns cannot be fully understood without reference to broader social change**,** especially movements toward gender neutrality. The rise of gender-inclusive language practices such as adopting gender-neutral occupational terms and avoiding unnecessary feminine suffixes reflects not only linguistic evolution but also shifts in cultural values (gender neutrality in English) . This trend reverberates within morphology itself, as fewer feminine forms are coined or maintained, and formerly common suffixes like *-ess* and *-ette* become less productive or socially acceptable.

Morpheme

Language, in its richness and complexity, is constructed from smaller, meaningful units. At the heart of word structure lies the morpheme; the smallest linguistic unit that carries meaning or a grammatical function. Morphemes serve as the foundational elements through which words are formed, modified, and interpreted. Understanding morphemes is central to morphology, the branch of linguistics that examines how words are built, how they relate to one another, and how meaning is created through structure (Booij, 2020). Through morphemic analysis, linguists and language learners gain insights into the systematic patterns underpinning language and the cognitive processes involved in word recognition and production.

A morpheme may be defined as the smallest segment of language that cannot be further reduced without losing its meaning or function (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011). For example, in the English word *teachers*, we can distinguish three morphemes: *teach* (the lexical root), *-er* (an agentive suffix indicating "one who teaches"), and *-s* (a plural marker). Each of these units contributes meaning: the root provides the core concept, while the affixes signal grammatical roles (i.e., agent and number). Morphemes, therefore, are both semantic and functional units, combining to express not only lexical meaning but also grammatical relationships such as tense, number, case, and gender.

Morphemes are broadly categorized into free and bound types (Katamba, 1993; Booij, 2020). Free morphemes can stand alone as words; examples include *tree*, *run*, *book*, and *child*. These morphemes are independent units of meaning that function as words in their own right. Bound morphemes, in contrast, cannot stand alone and must attach to other morphemes to convey

meaning. Affixes such as prefixes (*un-* in *unhappy*), suffixes (*-ed* in *walked*), infixes, and circumfixes—are bound morphemes. In English, bound morphemes are primarily affixational and serve to modify the meaning of roots or to fulfill grammatical functions.

A key distinction within bound morphemes is between derivational and inflectional morphemes (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011; Plag, 2003). Derivational morphemes create new words by altering the lexical meaning or category of the base. For instance, adding *-ness* to *happy* forms *happiness*, changing an adjective into a noun. Similarly, *-er* in *teacher* changes the verb *teach* into a noun that denotes an agent. Derivational processes often result in words with distinct semantic identities and can change the grammatical category of the base morpheme.

Inflectional morphemes, on the other hand, do not produce new lexical items but instead signal grammatical contrasts. In English, inflectional morphemes mark tense (*-ed*), plural (*-s*), possessive (*'s*), comparative (*-er*), and superlative (*-est*), among others. These morphemes do not alter the core meaning of the word; they provide information about how the word relates to other elements in a sentence. For example, *walk* and *walked* share the same root meaning "to move on foot," but *-ed* conveys past tense (Booij, 2020).

The distinction between derivational and inflectional morphemes is not merely semantic but also typological. Inflectional morphemes are typically more regular, occur later in the morphological structure, and are often limited in number within a language. Derivational morphemes, in contrast, are more numerous and can lead to irregular patterns of word formation (Aronoff & Fudeman, 2011). The interaction of these morphemic types contributes to the internal complexity of words and reflects deeper structural rules within languages.

Morphemes also play a central role in typological differences among languages. Some languages, such as Turkish or Finnish, exhibit agglutinative morphology, where words are formed by stringing together a sequence of morphemes, each with a clear and relatively invariant meaning. In agglutinative languages, morphological boundaries are typically transparent, making morphemic analysis straightforward (Haspelmath & Sims, 2013). Other languages, like English, show fusional morphology, where a single morpheme may encode multiple grammatical features. For example, the English past tense suffix *-ed* encodes not only temporal information but also agreement with the subject in many contexts. Still other languages employ polysynthetic structures, where morphemes combine in highly complex ways to form what appears to be single words, often encoding entire propositions (Matthews, 1991).

Understanding morphemes is important not only in theoretical linguistics but also in psycholinguistics. Research in word recognition shows that speakers mentally decompose complex words into morphemic components during comprehension. Studies using lexical decision tasks and neuroimaging techniques suggest that morphemes influence how the brain processes words; words with transparent morphological structure (e.g., *teacher*) are often recognized more quickly than opaque forms (e.g., *corner*, which contains *corn* but is not semantically related) (Marslen-Wilson et al., 2013). Such findings support the idea that morphemes are psychologically real units and not merely abstract analytical constructs.

Morphemes are also relevant in the field of language acquisition. Children learning their first language appear to acquire morphemic structures systematically. Infants begin by mastering free morphemes (e.g., *mama*, *dada*), gradually internalizing bound morphemes as their linguistic competence develops. The acquisition of inflectional morphemes often follows predictable patterns, such as the "plural –s" or "past –ed" in English, though these may emerge later than lexical vocabulary due to their abstract grammatical nature (Brown, 1973; Hoff, 2014). In second

language learning, morpheme awareness supports grammatical accuracy and vocabulary development. Learners who recognize and use derivational morphemes effectively can expand their vocabulary more efficiently (Nagy & Anderson, 1984).

The study of morphemes also highlights how language change unfolds over time. New morphemes can emerge, existing morphemes may shift in meaning, and boundaries between morphemic units can blur. Loanwords from other languages often enter with attached morphemes that are adapted into the host language's system. For example, English borrowed the prefix *bio-* from Greek, now widely used in words like *biography*, *biodiversity*, and *biotechnology* (Durkin, 2014). Such morphological borrowing enriches a language's lexical resources while illustrating how morphemes are dynamic elements shaped by historical and sociocultural forces.

Contemporary computational linguistics also relies heavily on morphemic analysis. Natural language processing (NLP) systems often implement morphological parsing to break down words into their constituent morphemes, which enhances tasks such as machine translation, information retrieval, and sentiment analysis. For instance, identifying morphemes in *unbelievable* as *un-* (negative prefix), *believe* (root), and *-able* (adjectival suffix) enables algorithms to interpret its meaning more accurately (Jurafsky & Martin, 2021). Morphology thus bridges human cognitive processes and artificial language technologies.

The morpheme is a core structural and functional unit of language. It encapsulates meaning and grammatical information, forming the basis of word structure across languages. Morphemes demonstrate how languages systematize lexical and grammatical information, how speakers process words cognitively, and how learners acquire linguistic competence. From theoretical linguistics to psycholinguistics, from education to computational modeling, morphemes remain central to understanding language as a complex, dynamic human faculty.

Feminine Gender Words

Feminine gender words are lexical items that denote female persons, animals, or socially constructed feminine identities. In English, such words include *woman*, *mother*, *queen*, *actress*, *daughter*, and *lioness*. Unlike many Indo-European languages that possess grammatical gender systems, Modern English primarily operates on a system of natural gender, where gender distinctions are semantically rather than grammatically encoded (Hogg & Denison, 2006). As a result, feminine gender words in English are largely lexical and morphological phenomena rather than obligatory grammatical categories. The study of feminine gender words therefore engages morphology, semantics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics, and gender studies. Historically, Old English exhibited grammatical gender, classifying nouns as masculine, feminine, or neuter. However, during the Middle English period, inflectional endings eroded, and grammatical gender distinctions gradually disappeared. What remains in Present-Day English is a system in which gender is typically expressed through pronouns (*she*, *her*, *hers*) and certain lexical pairs (Curzan, 2003). Feminine gender words thus function primarily as semantic markers of biological sex or socially recognized gender identity rather than as grammatical agreement triggers.

From a morphological perspective, feminine gender words in English can be formed through several processes. One traditional method is derivational suffixation**,** especially through the addition of *-ess*. Words such as *actress*, *princess*, *goddess*, *hostess*, and *lioness* illustrate this pattern. The suffix *-ess*, borrowed from French after the Norman Conquest, became productive in Middle English as a feminine marker attached to masculine or neutral bases (Curzan, 2003). For example, *actor* + *-ess* yields *actress*. However, contemporary linguistic evidence shows that the productivity

of *-ess* has declined considerably. Many professional titles now prefer gender-neutral forms, such as *actor* for both men and women, reflecting changing social attitudes toward gender equality (Baker, 2010). Another morphological strategy involves suppletive pairs**,** where entirely different lexical roots encode gender distinctions. Examples include *man/woman*, *boy/girl*, *father/mother*, *brother/sister*, *king/queen*, and *husband/wife*. These pairs do not share a morphological base but represent distinct lexical items. Such suppletion demonstrates that feminine gender words are not always derived from masculine forms; instead, they may exist independently within the lexicon. These pairs often reflect deeply rooted social and kinship structures embedded in cultural systems (Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 2013).

Compounding is another productive mechanism for forming feminine gender words. Terms such as *businesswoman*, *policewoman*, *chairwoman*, and *saleswoman* combine a gender-neutral occupational noun with the free morpheme *woman*. While this strategy makes gender explicit, its use has declined in favor of gender-neutral alternatives such as *businessperson*, *police officer*, and *chairperson*. Research indicates that occupational nouns explicitly marked for gender can reinforce stereotypical expectations about professional roles (Gygax et al., 2008). Consequently, institutional language policies increasingly promote neutral forms.

Semantically, feminine gender words often encode more than biological sex; they may also carry evaluative or connotative meanings. Feminist linguists have highlighted asymmetries in how feminine and masculine terms are perceived. For example, the word *spinster* historically carries negative connotations of social failure, whereas *bachelor* typically suggests independence or desirability (Mills, 2008). Similarly, feminine forms such as *mistress* have developed semantic meanings distinct from their masculine counterpart *master*, demonstrating how lexical evolution can reflect unequal gender relations. Such asymmetries underscore the importance of analyzing not only morphological formation but also semantic and pragmatic dimensions.

In addition to lexical semantics, feminine gender words interact with broader sociolinguistic patterns. Language both reflects and shapes social ideologies. According to Eckert and McConnell-Ginet (2013), linguistic forms participate in constructing gendered identities through repeated social practices. For instance, referring to adult women as *girls* may subtly diminish authority or maturity. Similarly, the persistence or avoidance of feminine suffixes can signal ideological positions regarding gender equality. Thus, feminine gender words function as markers within ongoing sociocultural negotiations.

Corpus linguistics has provided empirical insight into patterns of feminine gender word usage. Studies analyzing large English corpora reveal declining frequencies of marked feminine occupational nouns such as *stewardess* and *authoress* and increasing adoption of neutral alternatives (Baker, 2010). This shift aligns with broader feminist movements advocating non-sexist language reforms in academic, governmental, and professional settings. Style guides, including the American Psychological Association's manual, recommend avoiding unnecessary gender marking and using bias-free language (APA, 2020).

Contemporary discussions of feminine gender words must also consider developments in gender identity discourse. The increasing visibility of non-binary and transgender identities challenges binary lexical systems. English, lacking pervasive grammatical gender agreement, is relatively flexible in accommodating inclusive innovations such as singular *they* (Baron, 2020). While singular *they* is not itself a feminine marker, its acceptance reflects broader reconsiderations of how gender categories are encoded linguistically. The use of explicitly feminine forms may coexist with inclusive strategies, depending on context and speaker preference.

Educational and institutional contexts increasingly emphasize the importance of inclusive and accurate gender representation. Textbooks and curricula now often avoid unnecessary feminine suffixes unless contextually appropriate. At the same time, certain feminine gender words retain symbolic or cultural importance. Terms such as *queen*, *goddess*, *matriarch*, and *heroine* carry literary, religious, and historical significance. In some cases, explicitly feminine forms may affirm identity and representation rather than diminish status. Thus, the evaluation of feminine gender words depends on pragmatic context and speaker intention.

Language change continues to shape the future of feminine gender words. As societies renegotiate gender roles, linguistic forms adapt accordingly. Some traditional feminine markers may become archaic, while new expressions emerge to reflect contemporary identities. The dynamic interplay between morphology, semantics, and social ideology ensures that feminine gender words remain a vibrant area of linguistic inquiry. Feminine gender words in English are primarily lexical items that denote female referents through derivation, suppletion, compounding, and semantic specification. While English lacks a robust grammatical gender system, it maintains meaningful distinctions that carry social, cultural, and cognitive implications. Contemporary research highlights declining productivity of overt feminine suffixes, increasing preference for gender-neutral forms, and growing awareness of inclusive language practices. Feminine gender words thus represent not only morphological structures but also evolving social values embedded within the English lexicon.

The paper adopts the gender neutrality theory. Gender Neutrality Theory is the belief that societal norms and expectations related to gender should be eliminated to create a more equal and inclusive society. It proposes that individuals should be treated based on their skills, abilities, and merits rather than their gender. This theory challenges traditional gender roles and stereotypes, aiming to create a society where all genders are valued and given equal opportunities. One study by Cheung and Halpern (2010) examines the effects of gender neutrality on career aspirations among young adults. The researchers found that those who were exposed to gender-neutral environments expressed more diverse career aspirations compared to those in gender-stereotyped environments.

Methodology

Survey involves the study of a sample taken from a population in order to know their major characteristics which can be generalized to the whole population. Survey design was chosen for its usefulness in describing the characteristics of a large population and for its capacity to ensure a more accurate sample to gather targeted results in which conclusions and important decisions can be made. Also, its anonymity allows respondents to give more candid and valid answers and as such dependable. The population for this study comprises English words that denote female referents or are marked as feminine in contemporary English. To ensure manageability and depth of analysis, the study focuses on a sample of selected feminine gender words, selected based on their frequency of use, historical significance, and representation across semantic domains such as occupation, kinship, titles, and social roles. Examples include words like *actress*, *queen*, *mother*, *princess*, and *businesswoman*. The selection process utilized contemporary English corpora and dictionaries to ensure the sample is representative of current usage (Baker, 2010). The collected data were analyzed using morphological and semantic analysis techniques. Morphological analysis focused on identifying the structural patterns used to mark femininity, including; Derivational suffixes such as *-ess* in *actress* or *lioness*, Suppletive lexical pairs**,** such as man/woman*,* king/queen*,*

or husband/wife *and Compounding, such as* businesswoman *or* policewoman*.* The sources of data for this study are observation method (participant/non-participant), and recording (discrete/surreptitious).

Data Presentation

The frequency of occurrence of the morphological patterns for the fifty feminine gender words in the English language is an interesting subject of study. There is a wide variety of morphological patterns that are used when constructing feminine words and their frequency can be interpreted in a variety of ways. Morphology is the study of the structure and construction of words. The patterns of the structure of a given language can provide insight into the nature of the language itself.

Morphological analysis is the study of how morphemes (the smallest units of meaning in a language) combine to form words. For example, the word like cat is made up of the morpheme "cat" and the plural morpheme "-s." By breaking words down into their morphemes, we can understand how they are formed and what their meaning is. Morphological analysis is an important part of linguistics and is used to help understand how languages work. In English, there are three main morphological patterns for forming feminine gender words from masculine gender words.
Adding "ess" at the end: This is the most common pattern, and it is used for many nouns, such as
Actor → Actress

S/N	Masculine Words	Suffix	Derived Feminine word
1	Prince	-ss	princess
2	Lion	-ess	lioness
3	Tiger	-ess	tigress
4	steward	-ess	stewardess
5	Heir	-ess	heiress
6	godd	-ess	goddess
7	shepherd	-ess	shepherdess
8	Poet	-ess	poetess
9	giant	-ess	giantess
10	prophet	-ess	prophetess
11	duke	-ess	duchess
12	emperor	-ess	empress
13	mayor	-ess	mayoress
14	murderer	-ess	murderess
15	patron	-ess	patroness
16	hunter	-ess	huntress
17	conductor	-ess	conductress
18	sorcerer	-ess	sorceress
19	seer	-ess	seeress
20	priest	-ess	priestess

The most common morphological process involved the above data is the addition of a bound morpheme to the end of a base word. In this case, suffixes such as *-ess* function as derivational morphemes because they create a new lexical item from an existing one. For example, when the suffix *-ess* is added to *actor*, the result is *actress*. Here, the base word *actor* is the root,

and *-ess* is the derivational suffix that signals feminine gender. The addition changes not only the form but also the semantic feature of the word by marking it as female.

B. By Using a Completely Different Word (Suppletion). The table below shows that English forms feminine gender not only by suffixation but also through suppletion, alternative suffixes, compounding, and the use of gender markers**.**

S/N	**Masculine Words**	**Feminine word**
21	king	Queen
22	man	woman
23	boy	girl
24	father	mother
25	Cock	hen
26	husband	wife
27	Son	daughter
28	Bull	cow
29	uncle	aunt
30	brother	sister

Suppletion occurs when two related grammatical forms are represented by completely different roots rather than predictable morphological changes. In gender formation, this can be seen in pairs such as *king → queen*, *man → woman*, *boy → girl*, *father → mother*, *husband → wife*, *uncle → aunt*, *brother → sister*, and *monk → nun*. These feminine forms are not created by adding an affix to the masculine base. Instead, they are entirely separate lexical items with different historical origins. Morphologically, there is no visible derivational relationship between the forms.

Table C Adding a Different Suffix (Not -ess)

Using a Completely Different Word (Suppletion)

S/N	Masculine Words	Suffix	Feminine word
31	Hero	-ine	heroin
32	sultan	-a	sultana
33	Czar	ina	czarina
34	Executor	-trix	executrix
35	Administrator	-trix	administratrix
36	Widow	-er	widower
37	Landlord	Lady	landlady

The above table C shows another important morphological process is derivational suffixation using alternative feminine markers. Although the suffix *-ess* is the most familiar feminine marker, English also employs other suffixes such as *-ine*, *-a*, *-ina*, and *-trix*. These suffixes are bound morphemes added to a base word to derive a new lexical item that carries the semantic feature [+female]. For example, *hero → heroine* involves the suffix *-ine*. Similarly, *sultan → sultana* uses *-a*, and *czar → czarina* uses *-ina*. In legal and formal registers, Latin-derived suffixes appear in pairs such as *executor → executrix*, *administrator → administratrix*, and *testator → testatrix*, where the suffix *-trix* signals feminine gender.

Findings

One major finding of the study is that derivational suffixation has historically been a central strategy in the formation of feminine gender nouns. Suffixes such as *-ess, -ine, -a, -ina,* and *-trix* were widely used to derive feminine counterparts from masculine base nouns. For example, forms like *hero → heroine* and *executor → executrix* illustrate how bound morphemes attach to a lexical root to encode the semantic feature [+female]. This confirms that feminine marking in English is primarily derivational rather than inflectional. The addition of these suffixes results in new lexical items rather than grammatical variants of the same word. However, the findings also show that the productivity of these suffixes has declined significantly in modern English. Many of the forms are now considered archaic, formal, or stylistically marked.

Another important finding is the prominence of **suppletion** in gender formation. Pairs such as *king → queen*, *man → woman*, *father → mother*, and *monk → nun* demonstrate that English often uses entirely different lexical roots to express gender distinctions. This indicates that not all feminine forms are morphologically predictable. Suppletive pairs must be learned individually because there is no structural rule linking the masculine and feminine forms. The study therefore highlights the irregular and lexicalized nature of many gender distinctions in English. Unlike languages with systematic gender morphology, English relies heavily on historically established word pairs.

The findings further reveal the role **of** compounding and lexical modification. Examples such as *peacock → peahen* and *landlord → landlady* show that English sometimes forms feminine nouns by combining free morphemes. In such cases, the feminine marker (*hen*, *lady*) functions as a lexical element rather than a bound suffix. This process illustrates the analytic tendency of English morphology, where separate words combine to express meaning instead of relying solely on affixation. Compounding thus provides an alternative structural strategy for gender marking. In addition, the study identifies the increasing use of syntactic gender marking through modifiers such as *male* and *female*. Instead of forming separate feminine nouns, contemporary English often retains a single gender-neutral noun and specifies gender at the phrase level (e.g., *female doctor*, *male nurse*). This reflects a broader linguistic shift toward gender neutrality and inclusivity. The findings suggest that modern English favors analytic constructions over derivational gender marking. As a result, traditional feminine suffixes are losing productivity and social relevance. Another significant observation is the phenomenon of semantic specialization. In some cases, the feminine form develops a meaning that diverges from the masculine base. For instance, certain feminine derivatives historically acquired narrower or socially specific meanings. This indicates that morphological derivation can lead to semantic change over time. The study therefore shows that gender marking is not purely structural but also influenced by cultural and social factors.

Furthermore, the findings showed that historical language contact has shaped feminine morphology in English. Many feminine suffixes originated from French and Latin, introduced during periods of linguistic borrowing. This historical influence explains why certain feminine forms follow Romance morphological patterns rather than native Germanic structures. The coexistence of Germanic suppletive pairs and Romance-derived suffixes demonstrates the hybrid nature of English morphology.

The study establishes that the morphological processes involved in forming feminine gender nouns are varied and historically layered. The decline in productive feminine suffixation and the rise of gender-neutral forms suggest an ongoing evolution in English morphology. This shift reflects

broader societal changes and highlights the dynamic relationship between language structure and social context.

Conclusion

The study has shown that the formation of feminine gender nouns in English is not governed by a single, uniform morphological rule. Instead, it involves a combination of processes, including derivational suffixation, suppletion, compounding, internal modification, and syntactic marking. These processes reflect both the historical development of the English language and contemporary linguistic trends. Derivational suffixation—through markers such as *-ess, -ine, -a, -ina,* and *-trix*—has historically been a prominent method of forming feminine nouns. However, the study reveals that many of these suffixes have become less productive in modern English. While they remain part of the language, their usage is often limited to traditional, literary, or formal contexts. This decline highlights a shift away from overt morphological gender marking.

The study also confirms that suppletion plays a significant role in feminine formation. Word pairs such as those formed through completely different lexical roots demonstrate that gender distinction in English is often lexical rather than morphologically predictable. Such forms must be learned individually, emphasizing the irregular nature of gender marking in the language.

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