

УДК 811.111

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

**G. Tsapro**

Borys Grinchenko Kyiv University,  
18/2, Bulvarno-Kudriavska St, Kyiv, 04053  
g.tsapro@kubg.edu.ua

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0748-7531>

**A.Semeniuk**

LesyaUkrainkaVolyn National University  
13, Prospect Voli, Lutsk, 43010  
asemeniuk70@gmail.com

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4437-179X>

The paper is devoted to a corpus based contrastive analysis of the lemma *WOMEN* in The Economist articles published in 2001-2002 and 2020-2021 years. 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, 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 on men and women prescribing social roles and outlining men and women's activities and choices in various social and professional fields. The media in its turn

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.

**Keywords:** gender, WOMEN, corpus linguistics, media discourse, The Economist

**Дискурсивна презентація WOMENу медійних текстах 2001-2002 і  
2020-2021 років: корпусний аналіз**

**Цапро Г.Ю., Семенюк А.А.**

Семенюк Антоніна Афанасіївна канд. філол. наук, доцент кафедри практики англійської мови Волинський національний університет імені Лесі Українки, Україна

Стаття присвячена корпусному контрастивному аналізу леми WOMEN у статтях TheEconomist, 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 соціальні ролі та окреслюючи діяльність та вибір чоловіків та жінок 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 у суспільстві. В нещодавніх статтях описуються жінки як активні агенти з дієсловом "take". Спостерігаємо сталість колокантів, використовуваних на позначення зв'язків жінок WOMEN and MEN/CHILDREN, однакових як у 2001-2002 роках, так і 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 ситуацій, тоді як молоді жінки 2020-2021 років демонструють впевнену суспільну позицію. Подальші дослідницькі перспективи можуть стосуватися вивчення українського медіа-дискурсу, що дозволить провести порівняльний аналіз дискурсивної репрезентації лем WOMEN / ЖІНКИ у британських та українських газетах.

**Ключові слова:** гендер, WOMEN, корпусна лінгвістика, медійний дискурс, TheEconomist

**MEDIA AND GENDER.** 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 Economist weekly magazine (The Economist a) published in the years of 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 years complies 102 files, 7161287 tokens; the second one of 2020-2021 years consists of 63 files, 4278750 tokens.

Tony McEnery (2011, p.2) points out that “*the corpus data we select to explore a research question must be well matched to that research question.*” The material has been chosen with an approximately 20-year gap as a lot of changes in society

have happened during this time and consequently the image of women, questions raised by the media concerning women can have also changed.

Both the corpus analysis and critical discourse analysis have been applied. To process and investigate the corpora, LancsBox (Brezina, Weill-Tessier, McEnery, 2020) and SketchEngine (Sketch Engine) have been used. The corpus-assisted analysis demonstrates “*the role that lexical units and lexical relations play in the organization ... of discourse*” (Fuster-Márquez, Almela, 2018) while CDA contributes to interpretations of results (Mautner, 2010). The lemma WOMEN have been investigated and collocates with WOMEN have been extracted and interpreted with further comparative analysis.

**WOMEN IN ‘THE ECONOMIST’ MEDIA DISCOURSE.** The lemma WOMEN frequency is 1,338 (1.87) in 102 texts in the corpus of 2001-2002 years, and 1,275 (2.98) in 63 texts in the corpus of 2020-2021. The lemma seems to be more often used in recent years, in this way proving that news stories touch issues concerning women more often. The occurrence of the lemma WOMEN in the BE06 corpus (used as the reference corpus) is also pretty high – 4.67. It should be mentioned that the BE06 Corpus of British English presents 1million words of written, published English from various internet sources in 2003-2008. Though the BE06 does not include only newspaper texts, it still represents the tendency of women being written about.

Search women		Occurrences 466 (4.67)	Texts 132/500	▼ Corpus BE06	▼ Context 7
Index	File	Left	Node	Right	
1	BE_A06.bt.en	in binge drinking among young people, especially	women	under 25, who are being admitted to	
2	BE_A07.bt.en	though Jenan al-Obeidy, one of the senior	women	in the Supreme Council for the Islamic	
3	BE_A08.bt.en	the reality for hundreds of thousands of	women	every year." The campaign includes po:	
4	BE_A08.bt.en	clientele- in Wakeley's case, willowy west London	women	and celebrities such as Natasha Richa	
5	BE_A23.bt.en	are rare in the city. The two	women	suffered life-shattering injuries when a	
3	BE_A24.bt.en	me. I'm in better shape than most	women	15 years younger. "So many women go	
7	BE_A24.bt.en	most women 15 years younger. "So many	women	go through this as they leave it	
3	BE_A25.bt.en	90,000 gap between the number of children	women	want and those born. However the repc	
3	BE_A28.bt.en	for the guys Men as well as	women	take an interest in their appearance the	
10	BE_A28.bt.en	a long way for both men and	women.	If you're a man who is new	

**Fig. 1.** The occurrence of the lemma WOMEN in BE06 corpus

The collocates with WOMEN extracted from the two corpora sketch a picture how women are described verbally, what is their representation in the news stories. Despite a great variety of collocates obtained, the special attention has been paid to



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 YEARS.** These years have witnessed a growing amount of women being in the news stories compared to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> 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





*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 YEARS.** The comparative analysis enables to contrast two discursive images of WOMEN presented with 20-year time difference.

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 21<sup>st</sup> 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. MedicaMondiale 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 womentaking 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.*

Summarizing the mentioned above, the following discursive portrait of women can be created:

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 1) after having a child, 2) during pandemic turmoil</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>	

**Tab. 1.** Discursive portrait of WOMEN in media discourse

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.

The further research can be devoted to women's representation in Ukrainian media discourse with comparative analysis with the results obtained in the given paper.

### References

1. Blackstone, A. M. (2003). Gender Roles and Society. In: J. R. Miller, R. M. Lerner, L. B. Schiamberg (Eds.) *An Encyclopedia of Children, Families, Communities, and Environments*. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 335-338.
2. Brezina, V., Weill-Tessier, P., and McEnery, A. (2020). #LancsBox v. 5.x. [software]. Available at: <http://corpora.lancs.ac.uk/lancsbox>

3. Byerly C. M. (2012). The Geography of Women and Media Scholarship. In: K. Ross (Ed.) *The Handbook of Gender, Sex, and Media*. John Wiley & Sons Ltd, 3-20.
4. Crespi, I. (2004) Socialization and gender roles within the family: A study on adolescents and their parents in Great Britain. *MCFA Annals*.3, 1–8.
5. Eccles, J. (1986). Gender-Roles and Women's Achievement. *Educational Researcher*,15 (6), 15-19. Available at: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/1175495>
6. Eisenclas, S. A. (2013). Gender Roles and Expectations: Any Changes Online? *Sage Open*. 3 (4), 1-13.
7. Fuster-Márquez, M., and Almela, M. (2018). Words, Corpus and Back to Words: From Language to Discourse. *Quaderns de Filologia - Estudis Lingüístics*. 22, 9-12.
8. Mautner, G. (2010). Checks and balances. How corpus linguistics can contribute to CDA. In: R. Wodak, M. Meyer, (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis*. London, Sage, 122-143.
9. McEnery, T., and Hardie, A. (2011). *Corpus Linguistics: Method, Theory and Practice*. Cambridge University Press, 1-25.
10. O’Keeffe, A. (2006). *Investigating Media Discourse*. Routledge.
11. Pongrácz, M. (2006). Opinions on Gender Roles. In: I. Nagy, M. Pongrácz, I. G. Tóth (Eds.) *Changing Roles: Report on the Situation of Women and Men in Hungary 2005*. Budapest: TÁRKI Social Research Institute, 71-84.
12. Ryan, F. (2018). From Blair’s babes to TV ladettes, the 2000s was the emperor’s new clothes era of feminism. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2018/jan/31/2000s-frances-ryan-illusion-equality-achieved-ladette>
13. Sketch Engine. Available at: <https://www.sketchengine.eu/>
14. Talbot, M. (2007). *Media Discourse Representation and Interaction*, Edinburg: Edinburg University Press.
15. The BE06 Corpus. Available at <https://cqpweb.lancs.ac.uk/>
16. The Economist. (a) Available at: <https://www.economist.com/>
17. The Economist. (b) Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-Economist>
18. Van Dijk, T.A. (1995). Ideological discourse analysis. In: E. Ventola, A. Solin (Eds). *Interdisciplinary approaches to discourse analysis*. The new courant. 4. University of Helsinki, Department of English, 135-161.