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## **'Tortured', 'awkward', and 'artificial': Attitudes towards feminities in Russian**

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**‘TORTURED’, ‘AWKWARD’,  
AND ‘ARTIFICIAL’:  
ATTITUDES TOWARDS  
FEMINITIVES IN RUSSIAN**

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MA Thesis - Russian and Eurasian Studies - Leiden University

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# Introduction

Calls for language change to reflect a changing society are by no means a new phenomenon and along with such calls there reliably comes resistance. This study sets out to investigate feminist language changes in Russian, primarily femininives, whose prevalence has evolved with the changing role and status of women in Russian society and the workforce, which was most significant in Russia in the period of women's increased participation in the workforce following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. There has always been a degree of resistance, but in the 21<sup>st</sup> century there has been serious controversy on the subject of femininives. To English-speakers, feminisation (the creation of feminine forms) might sound like a backward step given the great effort being made in English to expand the use of gender-neutral terms, particularly in professional titles, such as 'flight attendant' in place of 'steward' and 'stewardess'. Calls for feminisation in Russian face widespread resistance. A large-scale survey conducted in 2021 by the Russian search engine Rambler of 164000 users, of which only 11% expressed a positive attitude towards femininives (news.rambler.ru 2021). Another poll in 2020 showed only 7% of respondents had a positive view of femininives versus 58% who had a negative view.

## Research aims

This thesis sets out to answer the question of whether non-linguistic factors such as age and gender have a bearing on people's attitudes towards femininives and other feminist language reforms in Russian, and also to ascertain the reasons why people might oppose these things. It will not encompass other variables beyond age and gender that may also have an influence, such as education level, belonging to the LGBTQ+ community, or sociopolitical views, but these would be equally worthwhile variables to study.

## Definitions

It is necessary to first clarify what exactly is meant by the term 'feminitive'. As defined by Pulijana and Stevens, a feminitive is 'an expression, most commonly a noun, which is modified so as to restrict its extension to women or girls' (Pulijana and Stevens 2023). Femininives are not limited to professional titles, but this study will focus on that category as they represent the bulk of femininives and discourse about them. In English this would include words such as 'actress' or 'policewoman'. As will be discussed in due course, several femininives have been in common use for a very long time and cause no difficulty, such as 'учительница' (female teacher), so the vast majority of the discourse and responses to this study are instead about 'neo-femininives'. Some of these have, in fact, existed for over a century, if not as long as the traditional femininives, but did not gain the same widespread usage, or fell out of use, and as such are treated by many in the same way as femininives purposefully created recently.

The second concept necessary to define is what is meant by 'language attitudes'. These are traditionally defined as 'any affective, cognitive or behavioural index of evaluative reactions towards different varieties and their speakers' (Ryan, Giles, and Sebastian 1982). This focuses on attitudes towards languages or dialects as a whole, but there is an increasing research focus on attitudes towards specific linguistic features, such as femininives (as in this study); vocal fry; or code-switching. These attitudes are not static, and can change over time as status and prestige of the language, dialect, or linguistic feature or their users also change (Garrett 2010). There is a similar concept of 'language ideology', the study of which is based more so in qualitative research, whereas language attitudes research is primarily based on quantitative research. What primarily differentiates language ideologies and language attitudes is that ideologies operate at a community level, whereas attitudes belong to individuals, based on various factors specific to that person.

## Significance of the study

Feminitives and broader feminisation within languages, particularly those with grammatical gender, has been a topic of fierce discussion for some time, but in light of more widespread discussions of women's rights and other matters of social justice, and an increased understanding of the importance of language in reflecting and shaping our views, the subject of feminisation has come to particular prominence. There are many examples of women coming under fire, even ridicule, online and in the press for using non-traditional feminitives to describe themselves. The strong resistance is remarkable in light of the fact that feminitives are increasing in their usage, as well as the fact that they 'comply with rules of word formation and are fit for their particular purpose' (Scheller-Boltz 2017). Even where feminine versions of professions' names, for example, have existed in the past and obey the language's morphological norms, the use of these words can still provoke strong backlash. Even the Supreme Court in Russia, in 2023, included feminitives in a list of attributes and activities of the 'International LGBTQ movement' which the Court condemned as an extremist organization (Moscow Times 2024).

As will be discussed in the context and literature review sections, there has been relatively little previous sociolinguistic research into feminitives, with most scholarship being based on studies of corpora and investigating feminitives through a syntax or morphology lens, or looking at trends over time. Although there has been a reasonable amount of research on this topic, there remain gaps for further research and understanding.

My initial interest in this area stemmed from being exposed to these discussions during my undergraduate degree in the context of the French language where there exists fierce opposition in some quarters to efforts to tackle linguistic questions of gender fairness, with variation in progress present across the francophone world. In the French context, feminisation of job titles (feminitives) and the broader concept of 'l'écriture inclusive' (inclusive writing) are two main means by which gender fairness is being promoted. This will be described in more detail in the following Context chapter as an example of how discussions around feminist language change and feminitives have played out in another context of a European language with grammatical gender. Since first coming across it, this topic of language reforms and gender fairness has remained of deep interest, and strongly appealed as a research topic for this thesis.

## Structure

Following this introduction chapter, further background information necessary for the discussion of feminitives and attitudes towards them will be laid out. This will cover the history and use of feminitives in Russian, as well as other languages. There will also be a brief overview of feminist linguistic theory and contemporary public discourse surrounding feminitives and broader feminist linguistic reforms and developments. The next chapter will be a review of existing literature on the subject of feminitives in Russian, which will cover the aims, methodologies and findings of previous studies of feminitives in Russian. The gaps in the existing literature which prompted this study's research will also be highlighted.

The third chapter concerns the methodology in use for this study, namely a sociolinguistic questionnaire delivered online. The remaining parts of the thesis proceed as follows: a results chapter laying out the quantitative and qualitative data collected in the survey and the results of statistical tests, and a discussion chapter where the data collection will be analysed with reference to the relevant academic literature and the research aims. Finally, a conclusion will summarise the findings of the study and answers to the research question, and the limitations of the study and potential areas for future research will be discussed.

# Context

## History of Russian feminines pre-and post-Revolution

Feminines are not a new addition to the Russian language, some feminine equivalents for masculine professional terms have existed for centuries. However, following the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution and the societal transformation that it entailed, the roles available to working women expanded greatly, and, as a result, so did the terminology to match. Whereas in the pre-Revolutionary period, the vast majority of professions were held only by men or only by women, so there were no feminine equivalents for masculine professions and vice versa (Comrie and Stone 1978). One of the few examples of pairs of masculine and feminine terms predating the Revolution is 'ткач' and 'ткачиха' meaning weaver, a profession that could equally be carried out by men and women. There were traditional terms using the suffix '-ша', such as 'генеральша', which rather than being a feminine equivalent of a general (a woman general), it refers to a general's wife. There had been some increase in women's employment in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, due to industrialisation and the mobilisation of men during the First World War, with the result that women made up 40% of industrial workers by 1917 and more feminines came into use (Comrie and Stone 1978).

It was also the case, although much less common, that professions previously reserved for women opened up to men, causing the need to create a male term, such as 'медицинский брат' (male nurse) after 'медицинская сестра' ((female) nurse), or 'дояр' which is a back-formation from 'доярка' (milk maid). In some cases, a masculine equivalent could not easily be created as the logical masculine form already held a different meaning. For example, the masculine equivalent of the feminine 'машинистка' (typist) could not be 'машинист' as one might expect since that was already used to mean 'engine-driver' or 'machine operator'. Instead, a circumlocution 'переписчик на машине' (lit. machine copyist or scribe) was required to fill the terminological gap for 'male typist'.

In the early Revolutionary Period, feminine-suffixed forms (feminines) tended to be used for the large numbers of women taking their place in occupations from which they had been restricted, with the most common suffix being '-ка', added onto the masculine form, such as 'активистка' from 'активист' (activist), or 'агентка' from 'агент' (agent). According to Comrie and Stone (1978) this option of adding the suffix '-ка', or creating a feminine form altogether, was mainly limited to low level occupations and would be considered inappropriate at their time of writing (1978) for professions of higher prestige, the example they give being 'славист' (slavist). Comrie and Stone (1978) suggest that the two main factors that affect whether a feminine form was used or not were the social prestige of a profession, and the expectation that the profession is primarily male, such as 'строитель' (construction worker), where both men and women were referred using the same term.

Several suffixes other than '-ка' exist, including '-есса', '-ша', and '-иха'. The latter was also used to mean 'wife of', but primarily in relatively low status professions, such as 'купчиха' (wife of a merchant 'купец'). The suffix '-ша' was even more restricted to its traditional use to mean 'wife of', but not exclusively as it was used for some professions without this connotation. This suffix was particularly productive in the 1920s with examples in use such as 'редакторша' (editor<sub>FEM</sub>) (Comrie and Stone 1978). In the later Soviet period, some of the feminines that came into being in the Revolutionary Period fell out of use, but some remained in colloquial use like 'секретарша' (secretary<sub>FEM</sub>). This example is of particular interest as Comrie and Stone note that this feminine would be used to refer to a woman working as a secretary in an office setting, whereas 'секретарь' would be used for both men and women who were secretaries of, for example, Communist Party committees.

Nesset et al. have tracked the frequency of some of these suffixes over time using the Russian National Corpus (RNC), which produces some very interesting data on the relative distribution of

different suffixes (Neset, Piperski, and Sokolova 2022). For example, the suffix ‘-ecca’, which made up only 5% of feminitives in the RNC between 1901 and 1950, decreased to 3% between 1951 and 2000, but increased substantially to 15% between 2001 and 2015. As will be discussed in due course, then, like now, there was and remains a degree of subjectivity and personal preference when it comes to the use of feminitives and choice of suffix.

## Current discourse in Russia

Feminitives are a perennial issue in public discourse in Russia, with social media and mainstream media backlash a common occurrence when women in the public eye use new or uncommon feminitives to refer to their profession. As an example, the theatre director Zhenya Berkovich, who in 2023 was charged with ‘justifying terrorism’ with a controversial play, but press headlines and social media commentary seemed to be drawn most of all to Berkovich’s insistence that she be referred to as a ‘режиссёрка’ (director<sub>FEM</sub>) (Gulyaeva 2023).

Feminist organisations in Russia have long argued for increased use of feminitives in pursuit of gender equality. One group created an online tool which offers options of feminine variants for a given masculine job title ("Феминизатор" 2019). For example, when given the word ‘автор’ (actor), it supplies the following possible feminitives using the main suffixes found in feminitives: ‘авторка’, ‘авторесса’, ‘авториня’, and ‘авторица’. While just a very basic program, it offers to those interested, suggestions, some more radical than others, of what terms someone could use.

In light of a wider conservative turn in Russia characterised by the reiteration of religious and traditional values, the partial decriminalisation of domestic violence, and a turning away from Europe, feminism has come to be seen in some quarters as a Western attack on Russian values. In 2019, several members of Eve’s Ribs (a St Petersburg feminist collective) were arrested on the way to a demonstration and their posters confiscated, each with a feminitive on their placard (Sperling 2019).

Recently, feminitives have become acknowledged at an altogether higher level. In early 2024, the media organisation «Свободные новости» published the Supreme Court’s decision which labelled the so-called ‘Международное движение ЛГБТ’ (International LGBT Movement) as extremist. Feminitives, along with a few examples, were listed as ‘specific language use’, which along with certain habits, lifestyles, and interests ‘unite participants of the international LGBT movement’ (Moscow Times 2024).

*‘специфический язык (использование потенциальных слов-феминитивов, таких как руководительница, директорка, авторка, психологиня)’(Meduza 2024).*

A Duma deputy, Vitaly Milonov, is quoted in the Moscow Times as declaring: ‘Феминитивы, гомосексуалитивы и прочие сатанизмы должны быть признаны экстремизмом, как минимум, в сфере грамотности’ (feminitives, homosexual job titles and other satanismisms must be recognized as extremism, at least in the sphere of literacy) (Moscow times 2024). The meaning of ‘гомосексуалитивы’, which might be translated as ‘homosexual job titles’, is unclear.

## Gender fairness in language

Language has long been the subject of calls for reform in the pursuit of gender equality across the world and in many linguistic contexts. The two main strategies used in this aim are neutralisation and feminisation, the choice of which depending on the particular language’s structure (Formanowicz et al 2013). For languages with limited gendered forms such as English, neutralisation is the strategy deployed. In this way, gendered forms are abandoned in favour of a neutral form, for example, ‘spokesman’ being replaced by ‘spokesperson’, or ‘policeman’ and ‘policewoman’ by ‘police officer’. Feminisation, on the other hand, means that feminine forms are ‘used more frequently and systemically to make female referents visible’ (Formanowicz 2013). This is deployed more often in



languages with grammatical gender. This manifests itself in feminine forms being used to refer to female job holders over a masculine used to refer to both male and female job holders (the generic masculine). For example, in French 'écrivaine' (writer<sub>FEM</sub>) to refer to a female writer rather than the generic masculine 'écrivain'. These generic masculines are also used to 'refer to both men and women, to mixed-gender groups or persons whose gender is unknown or irrelevant in a given context' (Braun et al., 2005; Horvath et al., 2016).

Masculine generics have been 'the central issue' in feminist language critique and debates around 'sexist' and 'non sexist' language. It is often argued that using a generic masculine 'emphasise a person's profession or position and not their gender', but as Scheller-Boltz argues, 'this view fails to consider the fact that the alleged generic masculine does not only represent the professions or positions of men', but is also 'used to represent the adequate masculine gender of men' with no consideration for the women, and furthermore 'masculine forms are usually associated with men', and as a result 'the masculine generic falls short of being the neutral all-inclusive default option some would like it to be' (Scheller-Boltz 2017).

Another means of inclusion other than neutralisation is 'feminine-masculine word pairs' where the masculine and feminine are both used, such as 'actors and actresses' or German '*Lehrerinnen und Lehrer*' ('teachers<sub>FEM</sub> and teachers<sub>MASC</sub>'). Some might think that such reforms to language use may hold purely symbolic power, but empirical studies have shown that gender-fair forms have impact on mental representations, such as Horvath et al., who demonstrated that the use of male-female pairs lead to a 'higher cognitive inclusion of women' (Horvath et al. 2016).

There is a wide consensus spread beyond just feminist communities that language is a reflection of society, its norms and values, and in this way maintains societal power structures like patriarchy and androcentrism (Scheller-Boltz 2017). Of course language alone has no power to discriminate or oppress in itself, but the use or manipulation of language through 'systematisation and application of evaluative criteria... for usage and language usage itself' can turn language 'into an instrument of discrimination'. Looking at the generic masculine, the norm is that it is 'gender neutral and gender inclusive' (Scheller-Boltz 2017). However, 'norms are not natural phenomena' and can instead be 'viewed as a direct implementation of ideological beliefs', 'created by institutionalized authorities within a society and according to the principle of representativeness', but most importantly: they can be altered (Scheller-Boltz 2017).

## Feminisation and language debates in French

As an example from another language context, this section will give a brief overview of the situation with respect to the French language, the discourse around feminines, feminisation, and other proposed means of promoting gender fairness through language. It will also cover governmental and institutional responses, and the situation in francophone countries beyond mainland France, such as Canada. As there is for Russian, there has also been effort to expand the use of feminines as professional titles (in French: 'la féminisation des noms de métiers et de fonctions') which has, like in the Russian context, caused backlash in some parts of the general public and institutions such as the Académie Française, the primary official body acting on issues relating to the French language in France.

As in Russian, some French feminines are established and widely used, such as 'actrice' or 'étudiante', but several feminines causing a stir today existed and were used widely in the Medieval period, prior to the French Revolution and the beginnings of standardisation of the French language. In French, typically female professionals are referred to using a generic masculine, such as 'écrivain' (writer<sub>MASC</sub>), which can be feminised by adding 'e' to make 'écrivaine' (writer<sub>FEM</sub>), or 'chercheur' (researcher<sub>MASC</sub>), which is feminised by altering the suffix to 'chercheuse' (researcher<sub>FEM</sub>). Sometimes, a term can be feminised just by changing the article to feminine, rather than altering the suffix, for example exchanging 'le juge' (the judge<sub>MASC</sub>) for 'la juge' (the judge<sub>FEM</sub>). So-called 'écriture inclusive'

(inclusive writing) aims to produce non-sexist language by not relying on a generic masculine to refer to all people, which can be done by means beyond just feminisation. Options include using both masculine and feminine variants in a pair: 'le candidat ou la candidate' (the candidate<sub>MASC</sub> or the candidate<sub>FEM</sub>), or using the 'point médian' or 'middle dot' to include the masculine and feminine suffixes, i.e. 'le candidat·e' or 'électricien·ne'. The use of the middle dot and variations on it have become widely used in job recruitment.

Recent official developments include action by the Académie Française, well known for its male dominance, conservatism, and resistance to linguistic change. In February 2019, the Académie finally voted in support of a report on feminisation of job titles and functions, presented by four members (two of whom were women and made up two out of the three female members of the Académie) (RFI 2019). This advance was by no means the end as in 2021 the French government decided to ban inclusive writing with the 'point médian' in schools, with a deputy education minister saying in a Senate debate that inclusive writing 'is a danger to [France]' and will 'sound the death knell for the use of French in the world' (FRANCE24 2021). The reasons given were that the 'point médian' represents an 'obstacle to access and learning'.

In Canada, however, the 'Office québécois de la langue française', the official body in Quebec for the French language, has been decades ahead of French official policy on feminisation. In 1979, this body put in place the first measures to promote gender fairness in job advertisements, through the use of masculine and feminine word-pairs (Arbour and de Nayves 2014). There is some divergence between Canadian formation of femintives and those in mainland France in terms of preferred suffixes, but Quebec was undoubtedly the pioneer in this area. The situation in Francophone Belgium and Switzerland also differ.

# Literature Review

## Introduction

In this chapter, the existing academic literature on the subject of feminitives in Russian will be examined. This review has been limited to scholarship looking at feminitives in the context of the Russian language, or Russian compared to another language. As discussed in the previous chapter, there is much public discussion and scholarship in this area in other language contexts, particularly for those languages with grammatical gender, but also for feminine professional terms in English.

The scholarship on the subject of Russian feminitives is relatively small, but it was still possible to collect a range of relevant sources in English and Russian for this review. The collection and selection of sources was done using the University Library catalogue as well as other search engines, followed by gathering sources from the bibliographies of those papers. Some weeding of irrelevant and inappropriate sources was necessary, such as student theses and papers focusing primarily on other languages with only limited mention of Russian. Unfortunately, there were a couple of papers referenced in other sources that were inaccessible, particularly those published in Russian journals.

There is still considerable scope for more research in this area, particularly because the Russian language is constantly developing and changes in language usage and language attitudes are ongoing and attracting comment and controversy in the public discourse. As an example, there is the case of Zhenya Berkovich reported by Meduza, who was receiving heated social media attention on her describing herself as a 'directress' (Gulyaeva 2023). The development of language feminisation seems to be slower in Russian than other Slavic languages such as Ukrainian (Shchedrina 2022), and public debate on the subject is much less apparent and widespread than in other countries like France (Uliantskaya 2020). There is little quantitative data on usage, but, as mentioned earlier, there have been two large scale polls conducted in 2020 and 2021, one of over 164,000 Russian people, with both showing that very few respondents have a positive view of feminitives, and at least a third are neutral or indifferent.

In the first section of this review, the broad themes in research on Russian feminitives will be laid out, followed by an overview of the methods used. Finally, there will be an examination of the results from the literature so far, as well as their limitations, the research gaps remaining, and the implications of this on this study.

## Themes

The publications on the subject of Russian feminitives cover a broad range of methods and research approaches. The specific methods will be discussed in the next section, but first it is necessary to isolate general themes of the research involving Russian feminitives. Firstly, the majority of papers are concerned with the linguistic factors which prompt the use of a feminine form (a feminitive) over a generic masculine, and the morphological factors which prompt the use of a specific suffix for one noun over another. There is also much work on the general prevalence and norms of the usage of feminitives, such as in Comrie's *The Russian Language since the Revolution*, which dedicates a whole chapter to issues around gender in the Russian language, although it was written in the 1970s, and so does not extend beyond the Soviet period. Some papers, particularly by Guzaenova focus on one suffix e.g. '-nitsa' and examine its prevalence in the chosen corpus (Regina R. Guzaerova 2019; 2019).

Comparative studies are also a common feature of the scholarship, where Russian usage of feminitives and trends thereof are compared to other languages such as French, Ukrainian, and Polish (Scheller-Boltz 2017; Martynyuk 1990; Dennis 2017; Shchedrina 2022). These are generally corpus-based studies and provide interesting insights into the varying speed and reach of language

changes in these different contexts. Russian seems, compared to French and other Slavic languages, to be changing in this aspect markedly slower. Shchedrina's (2022) comparative study found that feminitives in Ukrainian have become widely normalised, even appearing in dictionaries, while Russian represents a juxtaposition where feminisation is 'on hold'. A particularly interesting finding in this paper was the significance and use of feminitives in Ukraine since the Russian invasion of February 2022. Shchedrina notes that President Volodymyr Zelensky addresses the Ukrainian nation using 'Дорогі українці, дорогі українки' (Dear Ukrainians<sub>MASC</sub>, Dear Ukrainians<sub>FEM</sub>), using the plural forms of both the masculine and feminine, emphasising the inclusion of all citizens, rather than relying on a generic masculine to incorporate both men and women (Shchedrina 2022). She also notes the expansion of feminitives in Ukrainian military terminology as women take part in the military in greater numbers than before, with new feminitives appearing that do not exist in Russian, such as 'військова парамедикиня' (military paramedic<sub>FEM</sub>), or 'офіцерка' (officer<sub>FEM</sub>).

There are relatively few sociolinguistic papers after Novikov and Priestly in 1999 examining questions such as the interaction of feminitives and language attitudes, and the differences in feminitive use based on non-linguistic factors, such as education level or country of birth (Ulianskaya 2020; Novikov and Priestly 1999). This is surprising considering the public interest and strong reactions that feminisation and other feminism-related language topics provoke in public discourse. There does seem to be some change in this direction after 2019 with Ulianskaya in 2020, and Kirey-Sitnikova and Korzh et al. in 2021. Pulijana and Stevens do, to a degree, fit into this category, but focus on English feminitives and feminist philosophy on the subject, comparing the situation in English with that in Russian (Pulijana and Stevens 2023).

Ulianskaya's study compares feminisation in French and Russian, concluding that masculine forms predominate in cases where use of the feminine would be 'reasonable and logically sound', and that feminisation is a 'logical process that meets civil, political and personal needs of 21<sup>st</sup> century people', which is resisted due to 'psychological inertia' (Ulianskaya 2020). She also notes the discrepancy between conservative bodies and people who have the power to officially change linguistic norms, and the society underneath them. Korzh et al. also compare French and Russian discourse around feminitives, noting that there is not consensus, even among feminists, that feminisation is the right approach, but drawing the conclusion that as feminitives become more widely used, particularly in media, people will quickly become habituated to them.

Kirey-Sitnikova's study of feminist and LGBTQ+ communities is an outlier, which she acknowledges, and the first (and only one so far) of its kind in examining the attitudes and usage of feminitives and other innovative linguistic elements among these communities. It expands beyond just feminitives into gender-neutralisation and how transgender and non-binary Russian speakers are tackling linguistically aligning with their respective identities in private and in public. As a result, it is a very broad surface-level study, but nonetheless a welcome start leaving scope for a great deal more research.

## Methodologies

As discussed earlier, much of the scholarship in this area are on morphological and syntactical aspects of feminitives and their use, rather than on sociolinguistics, and as a result there are relatively few studies using sociolinguistic surveys as their method, as proposed for this thesis. In contrast, most of the literature makes use of corpus-based studies and other experimental means, such as directing participants in grammaticality rating or reading time studies (Magomedova and Slioussar 2021).

Corpus studies are most common in the literature, including those based on the Russian National Corpus (Guzaerova, 2019; Ulianskaya 2020; Novikov, 1999), Russian or Soviet press (Martynyuk 1990), and 'web-as-corpus' where Internet search results are used as the data source (Magomedova and Slioussar 2021; Guzaerova 2019). The Russian National Corpus is a vital resource containing over

2 billion ‘tokens’ with detailed linguistic annotations, which facilitates data collection for analysis. Although it is possible to narrow down the corpus for a search, such as only including newspaper sources, a larger corpus is necessary to obtain a usable body of data for femininitives. An additional downside to using corpora is that much of the content is derived from edited text sources, such as published literature and journalism, meaning that use of femininitives, especially less conventional usage of femininitives would be unlikely to be present in sufficient quantities for meaningful analysis or at all. Style guides for journalists, for example, may discourage their use. A final disadvantage to using the Russian National Corpus, for example, is the lack of sufficient non-linguistic data, which is required for fulfilling the research aim of this thesis. This non-linguistic data would need to be present in the form of, for example, the ability to filter results by age and gender of writers, which is only available on some but not all of the tokens.

Using the internet as a corpus has also been a useful tool for researchers, despite its complications and the volume of data it generates. In their joint paper, Gurevich et al., despite it being a corpus-based study on syntax, the authors managed to produce a very thorough examination on the use of femininitives on the Internet (Gurevich et al. 2003). It lays a good level of groundwork for further research. The use of the Internet as a corpus has of course its complications, especially today, in light of the exponential growth of Internet use and the advent of social media since their publication in 2003. While a similar study, twenty years on, would be valuable, it would be a considerably larger and more complex operation. A newer study using ‘web-as-corpus’ is brief, but does come to some conclusions about the spread of feminism and femininitives on the Russian speaking internet versus elsewhere (Chelak 2018).

This is ultimately the reasoning behind choosing a sociolinguistic survey method for this thesis research. The Russian National Corpus, for example, lacks complete information on writers of texts in the Corpus, not to mention the contextual information required for analysing non-linguistic factors such as age and gender in feminine use, as is my research aim. Novikov and Priestly’s study of Russian immigrants to Canada has a methodology that corresponds most closely to my proposal. Although they added additional variables to their study, namely different registers of language, formal, colloquial, and neutral, it is an analysis of how usage of femininitives differs between generations.

## Results

The literature on femininitives has produced some interesting quantitative data, as well as sociological and qualitative data. It has been shown that there is still a predominance of masculine forms over feminine, ‘where using feminine grammatical gender would be reasonable and logically sound’ (Uliantskaya 2020). Femininitives can come in a range of suffixed forms, as well as, more rarely in the form ‘женщина-Х’ or ‘Х-женщина’ (Gurevich et al. 2003). In the production of suffixed femininitives, morphological factors such as stem-final consonants and stress are significant in the choice of the form the feminine takes (Nesset et al. 2022). In more grammatical terms, Magomedova discovered that oblique (non-nominative) feminine forms of femininitives are much less frequent than nominatives and are judged as marginal in terms of grammaticality by Russian speakers. The linguistic factors influencing the use of femininitives are shown to be mainly lexical (Gurevich et al. 2003), but also morphological (Nesset, Piperski, and Sokolova 2022) as certain stress patterns and stem endings dictate certain suffixes over others.

Changes over time have also been tracked, such as by Nesset, Tore et al., who found that different suffixes have come in and out of use, such as the suffix ‘-еца’, as well as the suffix ‘-ша’ which is changing in meaning from ‘wife of a professional’ to denoting a female professional (Nesset, Piperski, and Sokolova 2022). Interestingly, Martynuk considers the masculine and feminine forms practically interchangeable, with generally the former having nonnegative connotations, which is disagreed on by some such as Chelak (Chelak 2017). In comparative studies (Scheller-Boltz 2017; Martynuk 1990) it seems that the normalisation of femininitives in Russian is slow and limited in comparison to other languages, such as Ukrainian or Polish.

Looking at the sociolinguistic studies, it is clear that the changing role of women in society has an effect on the use of feminitives. The past disuse of feminine forms reflects ‘the traditional social stratification of men and women in the workplace and society’ (Mozdzierz 1999; Gurevich et al. 2006 and 2003). There are also misconceptions over the feminist movement and its linguistic aims, suggests Ulianskaya and feminisation is a logical process in order to meet the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century society (Ulianskaya 2020). Novikov and Priestly’s study of Russian-speaking immigrants to Canada showed some interesting features, namely that immigrants from Russia proper used the feminine form more than those born in other republics. Their results also indicated that younger generations use fewer feminitives than older generations, as do those educated beyond a secondary education.

Another significant paper for this study is that of Pulijana and Stevens, although it primarily discusses feminitives in English, it provides more of a synopsis of sociolinguistic factors in feminitive use (Pulijana and Stevens 2023). The reasons for resisting feminitives in Russian that they produce, along with others taken from Rudyonok’s article, form the basis of the analysis of respondents’ views later on in this thesis (Rudyonok 19.10.2021). These motivations for opposing feminitives in Russian include: negative views of feminism, ‘an ideological resistance to reforming standard language’, and ‘linguistic discomfort’.

## Gaps in the research and implications for my own study

There is a noticeable lack of sociolinguistic studies in this area, although it seems to be picking up a bit in recent years. Hopefully this will continue, with this thesis being part of it, especially considering the pertinence of the topic in light of current affairs in Russia and public debate around feminism and LGBTQ+ issues. Kirey-Sitnikova’s study was the first of its kind to examine feminisation and gender-neutral language use and attitudes in feminist and LGBTQ+ communities, and so it is, as she acknowledges, very broad and covers many different topics in a perfunctory way. This leaves a great number of avenues for future research. It is perhaps surprising that there is not more research into the real modern Russian usage of feminitives and attitudes towards them considering the volume of journalistic and social media debate on the subject. There is also relatively little literature on non-linguistic factors influencing usage of feminitives, my research topic, which is disappointing considering its pertinence to contemporary discussions of the status of women, gender non-conformity, and LGBTQ+ issues. Some papers have however fallen into a trap of allowing the researchers’ personal dislike of feminisation in Russian to appear. Such views are not ubiquitous, many other researchers see the inevitability of language change as women’s status and roles in society also shift. It is important that research in this area maintains a degree of neutrality, rooting its conclusions on data and previous studies, rather than prescriptivism.

As discussed previously, the study conducted by Novikov and Priestly in 1999 shows the closest correlation to the research aims of this thesis. It is, however, over two decades old and is primarily examining differences between generations of Russians immigrants to Canada, rather than a wider population of Russian speakers, so there is space between that study and this as well as unanswered questions. The methodology of that study also differs in that, while their study was conducted by way of in person interviews, prompting participants to read aloud sentences and supply the relevant endings for each example. Whereas this survey will concentrate on attitudes and self-reported usage of feminitives, conducted through an online questionnaire.

## Conclusion

To draw together the findings in this review of the Anglophone and Russophone scholarly literature on feminitives in the Russian language, there seems to be increasing research into the field, with some impressive and informative studies published in the last 5 years, but there remains considerable ground left to cover, and the linguistic landscape is still changing.

The subject of feminisation of language, such as feminine job titles, is a topic of debate for speakers of many languages, particularly those with grammatical gender, such as French but also in English,

which lacks grammatical gender, but where efforts are in the normalisation and spread of gender-neutral job titles where the masculine has long been the default (e.g. firefighter instead of fireman). For Russian, there has been research on the usage of feminitives from the early Soviet period, when they rapidly expanded in frequency. Recently, the use of feminitives by some women in Russia has been the subject of media attention and some backlash (Meduza 2023). However, much of the research on this topic has been corpus-based, which does offer valuable data on the changes in usage of feminitives vs the masculine form and of different suffixes, but it means that limited data has been collected around non-linguistic factors and their relation to the usage of and attitudes towards feminitives. Due to the political nature of the topic and the power of ideology in this part of language, the usage or not of feminitives cannot be explained purely by linguistic factors. With this political and social context, and the lack of research into non-linguistic factors influencing the use of feminine job titles, it is clear that the research question of this study is worthwhile, and will be a small start to filling the gap left in the research up to this point. As discussed, a sociolinguistic survey seems to be the most appropriate means of reaching my research aims since a corpus-based method would not have the non-linguistic metadata needed regarding the author of any extracts from the corpus.

# Methodology

## Choice of methodology

A sociolinguistic questionnaire was chosen as the best means of collecting data for this research. It is advantageous in that it allows for the rapid collection of large amounts of data quickly, which helps in the case of the research question which seeks to produce a generalisable result. Using a questionnaire as a research method does have some disadvantages, which will be laid out, but, if not treated uncritically and as ‘equivalent to data obtained from spontaneous speech’ it can be ‘a powerful tool’ (Boberg 2013).

One disadvantage of the survey in sociolinguistic research is what Labov described as the ‘observer’s paradox’ whereby the aim of research is to reveal how people use language when unobserved, but such data must be collected by observing (Labov 1972). Another potential confounding factor is ‘desirability bias’, which Baker defines as ‘respondents’ conscious or unconscious desire to put themselves in the best possible light by responding in a manner that is socially desirable, or at least acceptable’ (Baker 1992). This would mean that respondents may respond differently in the presence of the researcher (or other third party) based on ideas of socially acceptable or desirable language. This is avoided through the use of a web-based questionnaire rather than an in-person interview, for example. With these disadvantages in mind, it is important to mitigate such effects as much as possible through the design of the questionnaire in order to produce results relevant to the research question.

Using corpus research was also considered as a method for this research, however, the presence of the non-linguistic factors that are being investigated, such as age and gender of the samples’ authors, were not, in the case of the Russian National Corpus, available. In addition, the research aim of assessing attitudes towards feminitives would not be possible in a corpus-based study. As seen in the literature review chapter, corpus-based research has made up the majority of research on feminitives in the Russian language.

## Questionnaire design

In this section, the design of the questionnaire for this study will be explained with reference to the academic literature informing aspects of its form and structure. This questionnaire was created using the online platform Qualtrics and was shared using a link to the survey. In order to gain respondents, the questionnaire was shared via the author’s personal Russian-speaking contacts, as well through Russian-speaking social media communities in the Netherlands and further afield.

Using a web-based survey means that the survey is not limited by time or location of the respondent or researcher, particularly with the ability to access the survey on mobile telephones, for which Qualtrics offers tailored survey formats. By choosing a data collection method which can be done anonymously and remotely, like a web-based questionnaire, it eliminates the effect a researcher might have upon the respondent, such as via a social desirability bias (Kircher and Zipp 2022).

The survey was broken up into 3 main sections: biographical data, use of feminitives, and attitudes towards feminitives. Participants were first asked for their home country, age, and gender. A short explanation of feminitives in their new and traditional forms was given before the main body of the survey to ensure that participants understood the subject matter. It is important in order to avoid making assumptions of participants’ existing background knowledge, so terminology should always be explained (Kircher and Zipp 2022).



Despite the data from Rambler reporting that 28% of their survey respondents had never heard of feminitives, it seemed through the written answers later in the questionnaire that many of the respondents already had a understanding of feminitives, and had formed opinions and arguments for and against feminitives.

The first question of the main body was only shown to those respondents who had indicated that they were women earlier in the survey. For this question, the female respondents were asked whether they used a feminitives when describing themselves and their profession. They were given the choice of possible responses: Yes, Sometimes, Never. As a follow-up question, these respondents were asked to supply the job title, whether a feminitive or not, that they used when referring to their own work. In the remaining survey items, all 198 participants were offered the same.

First, the participants were supplied with 3 Statements:

**Statement 1:** *‘Феминитивы необходимы обществу’* (Feminities are necessary for society).

**Statement 2:** *‘Феминитивы являются средством борьбы с гендерной дискриминацией’* (Feminities are a means of combatting gender discrimination).

**Statement 3:** *‘Феминитивы делают вклад женщин видимым’* (Feminities make women's work visible).

These statements were adapted from feminist discussions of feminitives where arguments for and against were offered (Prorokova 2016). Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Совершенно не согласен/-на” (strongly disagree) to ‘Совершенно согласен/-на’ (strongly agree). Some advocate varying the poles for maintaining focus of participants (e.g. Schleef 2014), but when items with a scale are used to a limited degree, such as in this questionnaire, it is unnecessary.

After giving their ratings on this scale, participants were asked to reflect on their choices in an optional text box. Next, participants were given a broader question to assess their attitudes towards feminist language reforms in general. They were again allowed use a text box, if desired, to elaborate on their views. Open-ended items such as this allow respondents to freely express their views about the topic in question while avoiding potential bias arising from suggesting options (Kircher and Zipp 2022). In addition, these items are also useful as they are less likely to produce non-attitudes (opinions formed in the moment), as people will not give answers if they have nothing to add (Kircher and Zipp 2022).

For the data produced in response to all four prompts, a statistical test was deemed necessary in order to assess their statistical significance, and whether correlations between gender and attitudes towards feminitives were by chance or might be predicted to occur beyond the survey sample. Inferential statistics were required to ascertain the existence of a relation between age or gender and attitudes towards feminitives. The chi-square test of independence was chosen as a test designed for categorical variables (in this case age and gender), rather than numerical variables. The chi-square test of independence was conducted on the results of the 5-point Likert scale questions in order to test the hypothesis of a link existing between the gender of survey participants and their agreement or disagreement with the arguments in favour of feminitives (statements 1-3) or support for general feminist language reforms.

The chi-square test of independence uses the actual, ‘observed’ values (e.g. the number of male respondents with a positive attitude towards a statement), the expected values (e.g. the number of male respondents with a positive attitude expected if men in each category were in proportion with the gender ratio overall), and the totals of men, women, and total responses in each category.

The chi-square test of independence requires two possible hypotheses, which are defined below:

**Null Hypothesis (H<sub>0</sub>):** The two variables are not related. The gender of the respondent and agreement with the statement are not related in the population; The difference between the expected value and observed value is not statistically significant and the proportion of both genders are the same for the different levels of agreement.

**Alternative Hypothesis (H<sub>a</sub>):** The two variables are related. Gender of a respondent and agreement with the statement are related in the study population; The proportions of participants of each gender are not the same for different levels of agreement with the statement. The difference between observed and expected values is statistically significant. In this study, the alternative hypothesis would mean that gender and agreement with the statements were related, and it was not a matter of chance.

In the formula seen below,  $\chi^2$  represents the chi-square statistic,  $\Sigma$  represents the sum,  $O$  the observed value, and  $E$  the expected value.

$$\chi^2 = \Sigma((O-E)^2 / E)$$

The expected value is calculated by multiplying the total number of respondents of one gender by the total number of respondents choosing one answer, then dividing it by the total number of respondents.

i.e. the expected number of men choosing 'strongly agree' =

(the total number of male respondents x the total number of respondents choosing 'Strongly agree')/total male and female respondents

Using a contingency table to lay out the data, the formula for the test was used to produce the chi-square statistic ( $\chi^2$ ). The resulting chi-square test statistic ( $\chi^2$ ) produced enables the null hypothesis to be supported or rejected. If the chi-square value is greater than the critical value, the null hypothesis can be rejected and therefore the alternative hypothesis (that the variables are related) is supported. The critical value is calculated using a chi-square critical value table, for which it is necessary to know the significance level ( $\alpha$ ), which conventionally 0.05, and the degrees of freedom ( $df$ ). The latter value is calculated as the number of groups for variable 1 minus 1, multiplied by the number of groups for variable 2 minus 1. In this study this was (2-1)\* (3-1), therefore the degrees of freedom was 2. Using a chi-square critical value table, the critical value for all four of the tests was 5.99, therefore in order to reject the null hypothesis (that the variables are unrelated), the chi-square statistic must be greater than 5.99.

In the next section, respondents are given open-ended items, i.e. a text box, where they are free to express themselves and elaborate on the responses they have given. The written responses were analysed, with each being graded 'negative', 'positive', or 'neutral' towards the statement they were addressing. As well as this initial grading, the proportions of each category were calculated, and recurring themes within the responses were picked out, as well as illustrative quotes which would be useful to analyse on their own. The breakdown of respondents, the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey, and statistical analyses will be discussed in the following chapter, and the limitations and potential for improvement will be discussed later in the conclusion chapter.

## Results

In this chapter, the data collected in the survey will be laid out in the following order: firstly, the biographical data of the survey respondents, secondly the results of the main questions gauging attitudes towards femininives and the results of the statistical tests on those results, and lastly, the written responses to optional open-ended questions.

### Gender

By the end of the survey period, there were 203 individuals who completed the survey, of which 125 (62%) were women, 73 (36%) were men, and 5 (2%) indicated 'Other' when asked for their gender. This data can be seen in the pie chart Figure 1 and in more detail in Appendix 1.1. For the sake of the accuracy of data analysis, and due to the small number (5 participants), those who indicated a gender identity other than male or female were excluded from further analysis. As such, the data in this chapter will be based on the responses of the 198 participants who indicated a binary (male or female) gender identity. The relationship between those with non-binary or other gender nonconforming identities and femininives or and other linguistic features in Russian has been the subject of some preliminary investigation, such as that by Kirey-Sitnikova (2021), and this still represents a worthwhile area for further research; It is unfortunately beyond the scope of this survey.

### Age

Figure 2 presents the age breakdown of survey participants. The majority of the participants (62%) were aged between 25 and 44 years old, with the most common group being those aged from 35 to 44, making up 33% of participants. Around half of participants were under 35, whereas around 20% were aged 45 or over, of which only one respondent over 65. A full data table can be seen in Appendix 1.2.

### Nationality

The survey targeted native speakers of Russian, but respondents did not exclusively originate in the Russian Federation. In response to the question 'Какую страну вы считаете родной?' (What do you consider your home country?), 77% of respondents answered with the Russian Federation, 16% with other countries of the Former Soviet Union, and 7% countries outside the former Soviet Union.

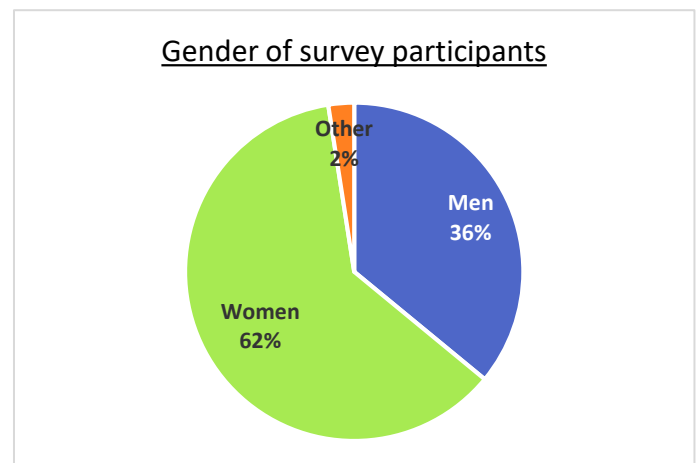


Figure 1: Pie chart showing gender breakdown of the 203 survey participants.

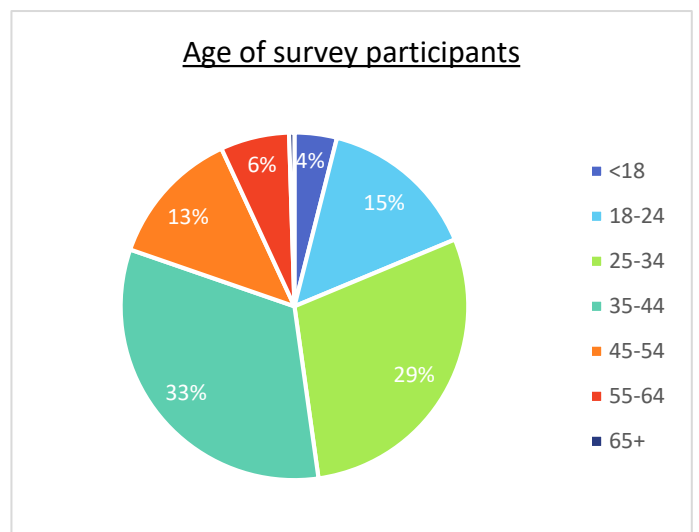


Figure 2: Pie chart showing the breakdown by age of survey participants.

Within the category of ‘Other Former Soviet countries’, the most common countries were Ukraine and Belarus, but people from Central Asia and the Baltic states also participated in the survey. This data can also be seen in the Appendix.

Following the section gathering respondents’ demographic information, the questionnaire moved onto questions to rate their attitudes and use of feminitives. First of all, a brief explanation of the concept of feminitives was given along with a few examples. It was noted that some feminitives, such as учительница ‘female teacher’ and писательница ‘female writer’ have been in common use for a long time, but more modern, so-called ‘neo - feminitives have recently become more visible.

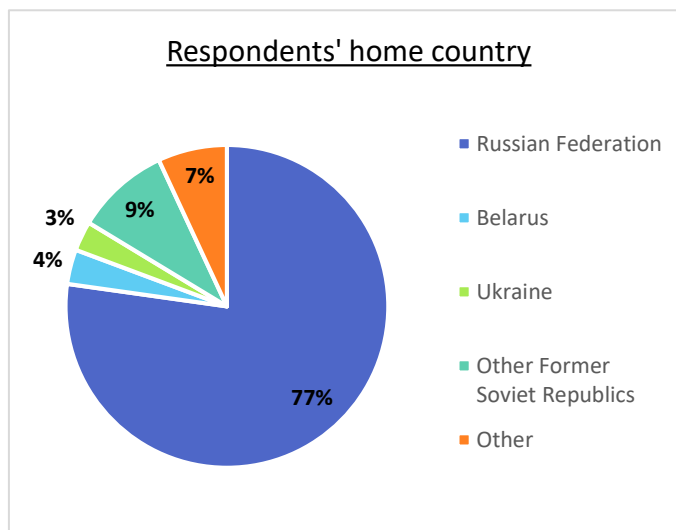


Figure 3: Pie chart showing the home country of survey participants

## Women and feminitives

The female survey respondents were asked about their use of feminitives when describing their profession. Of the women respondents, when asked, 75.2% reported that they did not use feminitives to describe themselves and their profession, 10.4% said they did, and 14.4% said they did so only sometimes.

Of those who answered that they did use a feminitives to refer to their own profession, the feminitives they used for describing themselves included: исследовательница ‘female researcher’, учительница ‘female teacher’, экономистка ‘female economist’, финансовая менеджерка ‘female financial manager’, поварка ‘female chef’.

A preliminary search of the Russian National Corpus confirmed that учительница and исследовательница are established feminitives, with учительница appearing almost 9000 times from the earliest examples in 1717 and in frequent use from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Исследовательница appeared less frequently with 165 instances, with its earliest example in the RNC in 1895, but it increased markedly in use in the 1980s and 2010s. The other examples produced very few examples in the corpus, with финансовая менеджерка not appearing at all. Экономистка appears four times in the corpus, of which three were in samples from the 1980s and the last in the 2000s. Поварка appears twice in 19<sup>th</sup> century text samples and once in a text from the 1970s. This shows that even some rare feminitives have historical precedence for their use today.

## Arguments in favour of feminitives and responses

In the next section, respondents were given three statements:

**Statement 1:** ‘Феминитивы необходимы обществу’ (Feminitives are necessary for society).

**Statement 2:** ‘Феминитивы являются средством борьбы с гендерной дискриминацией’ (Feminitives are a means of combatting gender discrimination).

**Statement 3:** ‘Феминитивы делают вклад женщин видимым’ (Feminitives make women's work visible).

As discussed previously, these statements were adapted from feminist discussions of femininities where arguments for and against were discussed. Respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement with each statement on 5-point Likert scale ranging from “Совершенно не согласен/-на” (strongly disagree) to ‘Совершенно согласен/-на’ (Strongly agree). The responses to these statements are shown in Figures 4-6 and the raw data can be seen in the Appendix.

## Overall trends

The results shown in the three charts (Figures 4-6) show a very small proportion of respondents in strong agreement with the three statements with 10% or less of respondents. Support in some form was most apparent for Statement 1, although primarily in the category ‘somewhat agree’ rather than ‘strongly agree’. As can be seen in Figures 5 and 6, the results for Statements 2 and 3 mirror one another, where 40-50% of all participants expressed strong disagreement with the statements, and the rest of the options were chosen by 10 to 20% of participants. On the whole, female respondents agreed with the statements more than their male counterparts.

## Responses to each statement

### Statement 1

As shown in Figure 4, there was not an overall majority firmly in agreement or disagreement with the statement, but 34.5% said that they agreed to a degree. In total, 19% expressed a neutral position, around 36% disagreed strongly or somewhat, and around 45% agreed strongly or to an extent. Female participants chose ‘В какой-то мере согласен/-на’ (agree somewhat) more than any other option; this exceeded all the other choices by 20%. The male participants are shown to have disagreed with Statement 1 in greater proportion than the female participants and very few (2.7%) reported being in strong agreement.

### Statement 2

In response to the statement ‘Феминитивы являются средством борьбы с гендерной дискриминацией’ (Femininities are a means of fighting gender discrimination), around half of those surveyed indicated that they strongly disagreed. Almost 60% men strongly disagreed, compared to 45% of women. All the other options were chosen by less than 15% of participants with proportions between men and women relatively similar. Women were, however, marginally more in agreement with the statement than men. For example, 16.8% of women indicated that they agreed somewhat with the statement, compared to 8.2% of men, and 12.8% of women reported strongly agreeing, compared to 2.7% of men.

### Statement 3

The responses to Statement 3, as seen in Figure 6, broadly follow the proportions present in the responses to Statement 2. Around 45% of participants reported strongly disagreeing with the statement ‘Феминитивы делают вклад женщин видимым’ (femininities make women’s contributions visible), with male participants slightly more likely to do so than female participants (52% men vs 52.4% women).

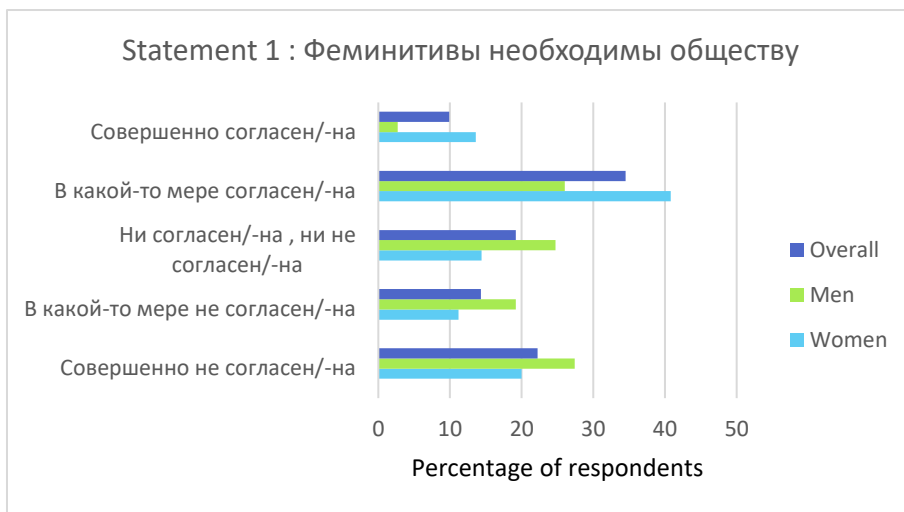


Figure 4 – A chart showing respondents' responses to Statement 1.

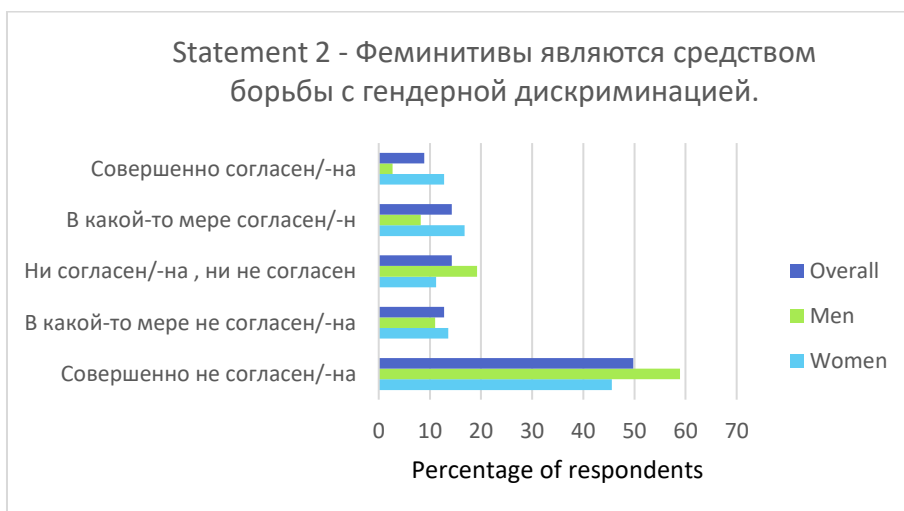


Figure 5 - A chart showing respondents' responses to Statement 2.

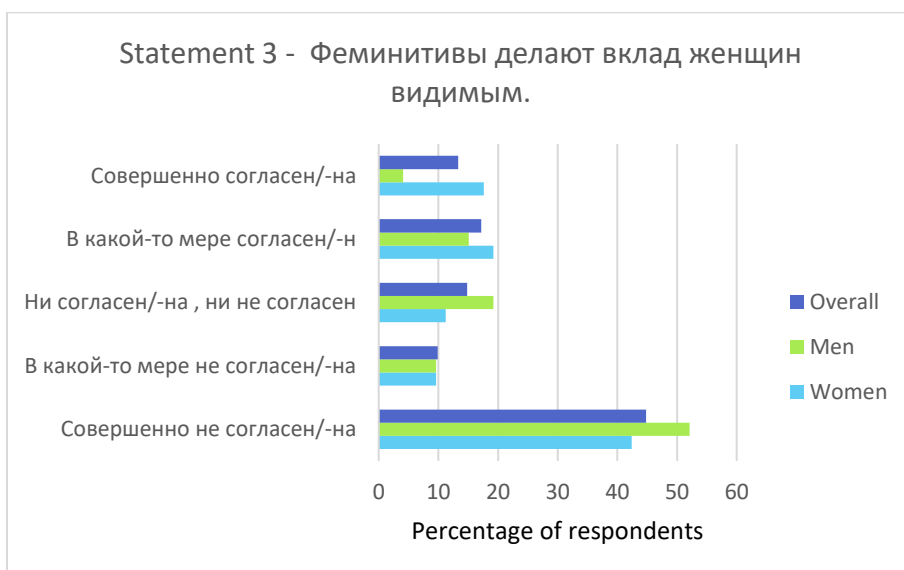


Figure 6 - A chart showing respondents' responses to Statement 3.

## Statistical analysis: the chi-square test of independence

At this point, the chi-square test of independence was applied to the response data for each of these statements. For simplification purposes, the five responses to each statement were divided into three categories: 'agree', 'neutral', and 'disagree' i.e. the responses of 'Совершенно не согласен/-на' (strongly disagree) and 'В какой-то мере не согласен/-на' (to some extent disagree) were combined into the category: 'disagree', and so on. The actual (observed) values were used, along with the 'expected' values calculated as described in the methodology chapter, to produce a  $\chi^2$  (chi-square value) for each set of data.

The results from Statement 1 produced a  $\chi^2$  (chi-square value) of 12.36, which is greater than the critical value (5.99), and the  $p$  value (0.002) is less than the significance level ( $\alpha$ ) of 0.05. This means that the difference between the observed and expected results was statistically significant, and therefore that the null hypothesis ( $H_0$ ) (that the variables of gender and response to the statements are unrelated) can be rejected. As a result, the alternative hypothesis ( $H_a$ ) is supported, so the gender of the participants is related to agreement with Statement 1.

Statement 2 produced a chi-square value of 9.95, and Statement 3 produced a chi-square value of 7.57, so the null hypothesis can be rejected for all 3 statements. This means that for all three statements, the gender of the respondents was related to their attitude to these statements around femininives, namely that female participants were more likely to report that they agree with the statements.

It had been initially planned to disaggregate this data by age as well as gender, and have the test performed to assess the relation between agreement with the statements and age. This was first done for the results of the final statement (Statement 4), but the data was in appropriate for the test. This will be laid out in more detail later on in this chapter, but it was decided that it would be sufficient to discuss gender alone as a variable and not age as well. This would, however, be a worthwhile area for further investigation beyond this study.

## Written responses to Statements 1-3

After rating their agreement with the three statements, participants were given the opportunity to elaborate on their choices. Around 80 of the participants chose to give a written answer explaining their reasoning to their previous answers. Many of the written responses to this question were thoughtful and nuanced, though mostly expressing opposition to femininives beyond the traditional uses such as 'актриса' (actress), 'учительница' (teacher<sub>FEM</sub>). Many respondents seemed to have an understanding of femininives beyond the surface level, understood that there are more common traditional forms, as well as modern so-called 'neo-femininives', and could see arguments for and against. The written responses were not in proportion to the overall trends in agreement and disagreement as seen in the quantitative data previously laid out. Those expressing opposition were overrepresented at around 75% of written answers compared to, for example, the 36% of participants who disagreed (strongly or to an extent) with Statement 1 on the necessity of femininives.

While a range of different reasoning was given for their disapproval of femininives and disagreement with Statements 1,2 and 3, there were common themes in the written answers those participants gave. These included references to femininives sounding bad, being 'Newspeak', being a Western imposition, being 'artificial' or a 'distortion' of the language, and references to historical women who rejected femininives. The responses, themes, and particular quotes will be analysed in more detail in the Discussion chapter, but a brief overview will be given here.

One of the most recurring reactions expressed was that feminitives sound bad, which was explicitly referenced by 15 respondents, who reported that feminitives are ‘hard on the ears’ (очень режит слух), sound ‘неловко’ (awkward) or ‘вымученно’ (tortured).

*‘Звучит в большинстве своём глупо и убого’ ([Femintives] mostly sound stupid and pathetic)*

Another recurrent theme was respondents regarding feminitives as a Western imposition (with 5 explicit references and several more implicit (see quote below)) or referring to them as ‘новояз’ Newspeak (5 mentions). The latter is a reference to the controlled language in the dystopic setting of George Orwell’s 1984, which is also used to describe Soviet language with its contractions, acronyms, excessive simplification, but simultaneous incomprehensibility (citation needed).

*‘Руки прочь от русского языка’ (Hands off the Russian language)*

Others referred to feminitives as a ‘distortion’ of the Russian language, using terms such as ‘издевательство’ (abuse, mockery) or ‘искривление русского языка’ (distortion of the Russian language). In milder terms, some others commented that feminitives are artificial and do not follow the rules of Russian. Lastly, another notable argument made in opposition to feminitives was the evocation of historical figures such as Anna Akhmatova and Valentina Tereshkova. Anna Akhmatova and Marina Tsvetaeva famously rejected the title of ‘поэтесса’ (poetess) in favour of the generic masculine ‘поэт’ (poet).

*‘Валентина Терешкова вошла в историю как космонавт и отсутствие суффикса ее заслуги не умаляет.’ (Valentina Tereshkova went down in history as a cosmonaut and the absence of a suffix does not diminish her merit)*

Very few of the written responses can be assessed as totally in support of feminitives, which corresponds with the data shown in Figures 4-6. Those that are in support note the positive contribution feminitives can make to progress in gender fairness, but acknowledge that they are not a primary driver of improvements, or the most important matter to attend to within women’s rights. Slightly more respondents show a neutral or more pragmatic standpoint reporting that they do not use feminitives themselves (the implication here is neo-feminitives), but do not oppose their use by others. Another common theme among those who had no opposition to feminitives in themselves was strong disagreement with any perceived ‘forced’ or ‘top-down’ imposition of feminitives, or any other linguistic innovation. The latter argument also appeared in written responses to Statement 4, which will be discussed in due course.

This echoed the views of several participants who said they were not opposed to feminitives in and of themselves, and several respondents acknowledged the evolving nature of language, but said that it was the perceived effort by feminists to introduce or popularise them that provoke resistance:

*Сопротивление возникает из-за усилий. (Resistance [to feminitives] comes from the effort [by feminists to expand them])*

There was no mention of feminitives in reference to LGBTQ issues, and no mention of the Supreme Court’s association of the use of feminitives with the ‘international LGBTQ movement’, but this is perhaps not surprising that such declarations, although reported on by Western press, does not trickle down into everyday people’s awareness.

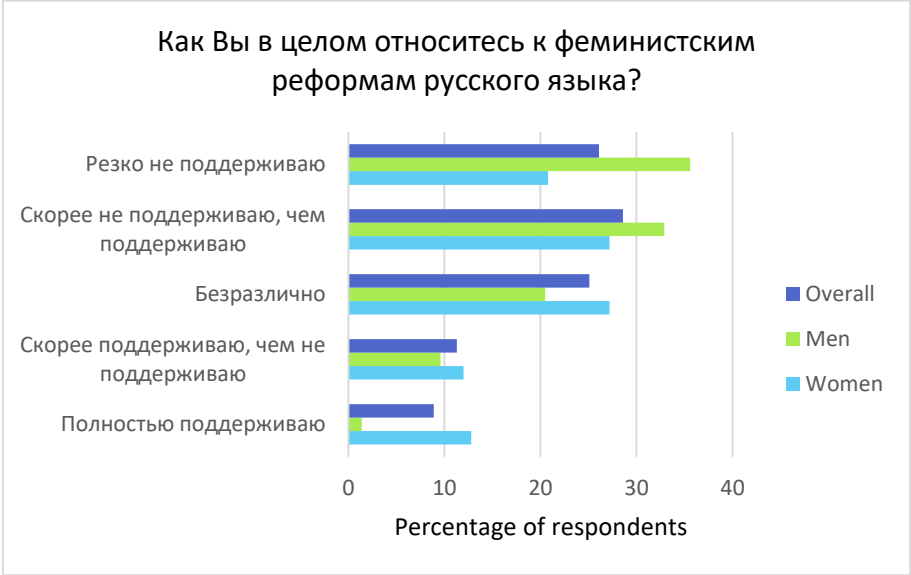
## Statement 4 – feminist language reforms

In the final part of the survey, respondents were asked a final broader question:

*‘Как Вы в целом относитесь к феминистским реформам русского языка?’ (What is your general attitude towards feminist reforms to the Russian language?).*



The choice of five responses ranged from ‘Полностью поддерживаю’ (I am strongly in support) to ‘Резко не поддерживаю’ (I strongly disapprove). The overall results, show over half of participants responding in the negative, either saying that they strongly disapprove, or they disapprove more than they support the statement. Around a quarter express indifference to feminist linguistic reforms, and just under 20% of participants support them totally, or to an extent. Men were more likely to report that they strongly disapprove (35.6%), compared to 20.8% of women. At the other extreme, only 1 male participant (1.4%) expressed strong support for feminist language reforms, compared to 12.8% of women participants.



This set of data was also put through the chi-square test of independence. Again simplifying by reducing the five options to positive, negative, and neither positive nor negative, the chi-square value for the responses to this question was 8.8 (greater than the critical value of 5.99). This again means this was statistically significant and allows for the rejection of the null hypothesis, meaning that gender, once again, was related to support of feminist reforms to the Russian language.

The results for this questions were also disaggregated by age, but the chi-square test for independence was unsuitable for this dataset since the test cannot be used when there are categories with less than 5 observations i.e. a small number of participants in an age category. This would have been exacerbated if then also disaggregated by gender within each age category. With a larger survey population, this would be a possible and worthwhile investigation to see where how the two factors of age and gender both relate to support or opposition to feministic or broader debates on feminist language reform.

As with the previous three statements, after this final more general question, respondents were able, if they wished, to explain their choice, whereupon 41 participants contributed their opinion.

### Written responses to Statement 4

Participants were asked to explain their choices in a text box. This was not compulsory, 41 respondents (20%) chose to elaborate. Comments were broadly consistent with the previous set of comments, with the overwhelming majority expressing their opposition to feminist language reforms.

Out of the written responses, common themes among the written responses included opposition to any political intervention in language matters, belief in the evolving nature of language, the

unimportance of linguistic debates in gender equality discussion, and the risk of backlash to these discussions.

Several participants commented to express their opposition to political intervention into the language of any kind as shown in the following extracts:

*‘Я против попыток внедрить в язык что-то сверху, независимо от того, каким мотивом это прикрывается.’ (I am against attempts to introduce something from above into language, no matter what the motive behind it.)*

*‘Почему определять как людям говорить должна политика, но не сами носители языка?’ (Why should politics, but not native speakers themselves, determine how people should speak?)*

Several acknowledged that language change is natural and that languages are ‘self-regulating’, and so expressed hesitancy towards perceived ‘forced’ or ‘aggressive’ changes.

*‘Язык саморегулирует, ненужные практики со временем отпадают сами.’ (Language is self-regulating; unnecessary practices fall away on their own over time.)*

Some felt that this understanding of language as evolving and self-regulating means that feminist changes to language, such as the expansion in use of feminitives would happen gradually over generations, while others came to the conclusion that linguistic forms, such as feminitives, would already be in place if they were necessary and superfluous forms would have become obsolete.

*‘Язык - это живой организм, который постоянно трансформируется и в этом нет ничего плохого.’ (Language is a living organism that is constantly transforming and there is nothing wrong with that’.*

Lastly, several respondents commented that linguistic questions are unimportant in comparison to other aspects of gender equality, and represent a distraction from more basic issues. These respondents, along with others bring up the backlash that feminist linguistic developments can and do cause, which alienates potential supporters of feminist ideas.

*‘Их навязывание приведёт только к их отторжению и преследованию их последователей.’ (Their imposition will only lead to their rejection and persecution of their followers.)*

## Chapter summary

In summary, the majority of the around 200 respondents to the survey were largely against feminitives beyond established forms, though more nuanced perspectives were represented through the optional written answers. Women who participated in the survey for the most part reported that they did not use feminitives when describing themselves and their profession. 10.4% do use a feminitive, 14.4% do so sometimes, and 75.2% never use feminitives when describing themselves.

Level of agreement with Statements 1 – 3 was next assessed with a 5-point Likert scale with responses ranging from ‘Strongly agree’ to ‘Strongly disagree’. The results of the chi-square test on the data produced allowed for the null hypothesis to be rejected for all 3 sets of results and for Statement 4. This means that the difference between the actual and expected values is statistically significant, not by chance. Therefore it is shown that the gender of survey participants and their agreement with the statements are related. In this case, it is shown that female respondents, while still broadly unfavourable towards the statements, tended to agree more with the statement than male respondents.

In the following chapter, these results will be discussed further and analysed with reference to relevant scholarly literature and context included in earlier chapters

## Discussion

This study was designed to determine the attitudes of Russian-speaking survey participants towards feminitives and broader feminist language reforms in the Russian language, assessing the importance of participants' age and gender in these attitudes, and discovering people's reasons for opposition to feminitives and feminist language reforms. In this chapter, the results described in the previous chapter will be discussed with reference to the academic literature covered in the first half of this thesis and research aims and questions.

### Summary of key findings

The results of this study show that overall support for feminitives and feminist language reform generally is low, although it was proven that women were more likely to approve than men. Women who participated in the survey for the most part (75.2%) reported that they did not use feminitives when describing themselves and their own profession, with only 10.4% saying that they do use one, and 14.4% that they do so sometimes. The main part of the questionnaire, which gauged support for Statements 1-4 using a scale from 'Strongly agree' to 'Strongly disagree' showed, by means of the chi-square test of independence, that the difference between the actual and expected values was statistically significant, not by chance. Therefore, it was possible to prove that there exists a relation, in this dataset, between respondents' gender and their level of agreement with each of the statements. In all four cases women were more likely than men to agree with the statements, although support was low even among women. Following these items, respondents were given the opportunity to express their opinions and the reasoning behind their choices in open-ended text-box items, which revealed several themes among those opposing feminist language reform and feminitives, such as believing that these are Western impositions, or are 'ruining the Russian language', or sound 'artificial' or 'tortured'.

### Analysis of quantitative results

Before proceeding to examine the themes found in written responses to the open-ended items in the survey, it is necessary to analyse the quantitative data gathered in the survey in light of the research question and previous scholarship. While these polls did not pose quite the same questions as this survey, in comparison to the polling data from *Rambler* and *Общественное мнение*, it is reassuring that the general proportion of opinions seems to be similar in this survey's 198 respondents as in the much larger sample population from the polls. The finding in this study that only 9.9% of respondents strongly agreed with the statement 'Feminitives are necessary for society' and that only 8.9% strongly support feminist language reform seems to be consistent with the data from the two polls from 2020 and 2021. The two polls showed 7% and 11% of their respondents had a positive view of feminitives, which does seem to correspond to the 9.9% and 8.9% figures from this survey. Unfortunately this poll data was not disaggregated by sex, so a closer comparison with the data from this survey cannot be done.

There was also no data from the two polls about women using feminitives for themselves and their professions, but the 2021 *Rambler* poll did find that 37% of their 164,000 respondents try to use feminitives in speech, despite only 11% reporting a positive view of feminitives. Given the level of resistance and noisy public discourse on feminitives in Russian, it is understandable that someone would be unwilling to insist upon referring to themselves in that way unless they have a profession with an accepted and established feminitive.

Returning to the research question, the quantitative results of this study demonstrate that the gender of respondents does relate to their attitude towards feminitives and agreement with arguments in favour of feminitives. It is however, at this point, not possible to prove a causal link between a respondent being a woman and therefore having a more positive view of feminist

language change. It could conceivably be hypothesised that the greater degree of support for feminitives (as shown in this study by agreement with Statements 1-3) and feminist language reform (as shown by support for Statement 4) among women respondents might be due to a greater awareness and acknowledgment of issues around gender inequality and women's place in the professional world, which would in turn suggest support for measures that could address this. On the other side of this, the greater degree of negative views of male respondents could be attributed to a general antipathy towards modern feminism and a belief, as explicitly mentioned by at least one participant, that society is now skewed in favour of women. This could be broadly defined as anti-feminist backlash, conceptualised by Ana Jordan as being 'explicitly hostile to feminism either because they believe that '(1) gender equality is not a desirable goal or (2) although gender equality is a worthy aim, feminism actually works against equality by privileging women over men'(Jordan 2016). In this case, the latter seems to be more prevalent among respondents than the former.

Having discussed the quantitative results and possible causes of overall dislike and resistance towards feminist language change in terms of reflecting an antifeminist backlash, particularly acute among men, the next section will discuss the written samples from respondents with reference to academic literature specific to resistance to feminitives.

## Causes of resistance

Turning now to consider the written contributions of participants, which offer a rich and varied sample of expanded opinions of feminitives and feminist language reforms. There were several common themes of these written statements, particularly those opposed to feminitives and feminist linguistic reform more generally. These themes included: disliking the way feminitives sound, calling feminitives 'Newspeak' or a Western imposition, and calling feminitives a 'distortion' or 'abuse' of Russian language. In this section, these themes and some illustrative comments given by survey participants will be compared to the reasons for opposing feminitives as described by Rudyonok (Rudyonok 2021) in her article and by Pulijana and Stevens in their work . Rudyonok's narrows down the reasons for disliking or opposing feminitives to the following: linguistic discomfort, standard language ideology, a negative view of feminism, and a fear of the new. Stevens and Pulijana add to those four reasons with: not wanting to draw unnecessary attention towards the gender of a professional; the belief that thought influences language not vice versa; and the perception that the suffix '-ka' in some feminitives adds a diminutive and therefore condescending tone.

Before covering the presence, or absence of these reasons, it is necessary to mention that respondents' written contributions were often nuanced and multi-layered, and there were often several of these factors for opposition in combination and not clearly delineated.

## Linguistic discomfort

The theme most commonly found in the written responses to the two open-ended items in the survey was participants expressing dislike or opposition to feminitives on the grounds that they are 'hard on the ears' or sound 'stupid'. This finding can be interpreted as in line with that which Rudyonok defines as 'linguistic discomfort', a feeling that may be caused by the unfamiliarity of a word or linguistic feature and a cognitive resistance to acquiring new habits.

*'в гармонию языка не укладывается'.*

*([feminitives do] not fit into the harmony of the language.)*

The vast majority of feminitives follow the morphological norms of Russian, and therefore would not feature any new or unusual phonology for the Russian language. Is it probable, therefore, that

complaints about the sound, 'harmony' (гармония), or 'euphony' (благозвучие) of a feminine is likely based in a subjective view, can be ascribed to a respondent's linguistic 'discomfort', and could resolve upon habituation. Another extract from one respondent's written contribution further illustrates the phenomenon:

*‘Феминитивы - это искривление русского языка и не более.... Также большинство феминитивов звучит ужасно с точки зрения произношения и выглядит как издевательство над нашим языком.’*

*(Femininitives are a distortion of the Russian language and nothing more... Also, most femininitives sound terrible in terms of pronunciation and look like a mockery of our language.)*

This extract demonstrates the respondent's linguistic discomfort caused by the sound and look of femininitives. The first part of the quotation also suggests the influence of standard language ideology, which will be discussed in the following section. In contrast, One respondent reported using femininitives and masculine generics 'randomly', depending on what sounds best in the specific context.

*‘Выбор случаен, может, в зависимости от того, как будет удобнее (благозвучнее) сказать в конкретный момент.’*

*(The choice is random, maybe depending on how it's more convenient (euphonious) to say at a particular moment.)*

In hand with linguistic discomfort, a large proportion of the negative opinions of femininitives display resistance to changes to so-called standard language.

## Standard language ideology

A considerable proportion of the negative views of femininitives expressed in both open-ended items in the survey can be attributed to what Pulijana and Stevens (2023) describe as 'an ideological resistance to reforming standard language', which is also mentioned by Rudyonok as a cause of opposition to femininitives. This has a certain amount of overlap with the previous section's 'linguistic discomfort'. Standard language ideology is defined by Cushing (2021) as 'the belief that a language has fixed, easily identifiable forms with a clear delineation between 'standard' and 'non-standard' or by Oliva Walsh (2021) as 'the belief that one particular form of language is the 'most correct' or the 'best' form and that all other forms of language are 'incorrect' or somehow less valid.' This concept links to the discussion of linguistic norms and power from the Context chapter, where it was noted that norms or 'standard' language are not natural phenomena and not capable of oppression in and of themselves, but rather a 'direct implementation of ideological beliefs' capable of manipulating language into an 'instrument of discrimination' through systematisation (or standardisation) and the application of value judgements (Scheller-Boltz 2017). This ideology, and the strength of feeling with which it is often expressed, is by no means limited to femininitives or other discussions of language and gender, but can manifest itself in response to any number of perceived changes, trends, or 'non-standard' linguistic features in language around us.

*‘Являются отвратительным насилием над языком и звучат неестественно’*

*(They are a disgusting violence against the language and sound artificial)*

The extract above and those quoted in the previous section hinted at a perceived breaking of 'standard' Russian language, but the following respondent does so explicitly:

*‘Есть сложившиеся правила русского языка в отношении наименования профессий и если исторически название профессии не имеет феминитива, то придумывание его в угоду моды я считаю ошибочным.’*

*(There are established rules of the Russian language with regard to the naming of professions, and if historically the name of a profession does not have a feminitive, then I think it is wrong to invent one for the sake of fashion.)*

This respondent can be seen as expressing standard language ideology, referring to the established rules or standard language of Russian and criticising new feminitives as ‘wrong’. This is in opposition to the idea that linguistic norms or ‘standard’ language are not natural phenomena, and are instead manufactured in the way that new terms are, at times, also manufactured.

## Negative view of modern feminism

The next factor contributing to resistance towards feminitives is people’s negative view towards feminism. This reason was mentioned by several respondents and is in line with generalised anti-feminist backlash amid a conservation and religious turn in Russia, reinforcement of traditional gender roles, and the partial decriminalisation of domestic violence, all of which is underlaid with an opposition to so-called Western values, under which feminism is categorised. Some respondents drew attention in their written comments to substantial progress in gender equality and women’s rights in the Soviet Union (contrasting it to other countries), and concluded that feminism is unnecessary these days, or has even gone too far, as shown in the extract below:

*В Русском обществе итак есть перекоc в сторону женщин, на кой его делать еще сильнее?*

*Russian society is already skewed towards women, why make it more so?*

This reasoning around negative perception of feminism even appeared in the answers of some respondents who expressed a neutral or even positive view of feminitives, where they suggested that the broad negative view of feminist politics in Russian society means that the present and potential backlash against feminitives is significant enough that progress for women and acceptance of feminist values in general would be at risk. Finally, in light of the negative views of feminism, a related factor in resistance towards feminitives is that use of non-traditional feminitives may betray the user’s political opinions in public, causing unwanted social friction or potential public backlash, making them all the more uncomfortable to use.

## Unwanted attention to a professional’s gender

The next factor in opposing feminitives is the desire not to draw unwanted attention to the gender of a person or professional, making gender the primary factor in their identity, which, as some would see it, deprives a woman of the status as a person and professional when their gender is highlighted. In the following extract, a respondent expresses this disinterest in the gender of a professional. This idea corresponds to initiatives in English-speaking countries, for example, to find gender neutral terms for professions, such as firefighter in place of fireman or firewoman, or police officer in place of policeman or policewoman (or the much more old-fashioned ‘lady policeman’).

*‘Когда я обращаюсь к профессионалу, меня интересуют только профессиональные навыки человека, а не его половая принадлежность.’*

*When I refer to a professional, I am only interested in the professional skills of the person, not their gender identity.*

This quote encapsulates this idea well in describing the resistance to feminitives due to not wanting to emphasise a woman’s gender ahead of her professional position. This could be seen as echoing the arguments in English-speaking societies regarding gender-neutral terms, so that a professional’s gender is not highlighted before other factors of their identity. This is of course difficult with a language with grammatical gender, where a person’s gender can be revealed otherwise, such as through a verb ending or adjectival agreement. As mentioned in the results chapter, one respondent

made reference to Valentina Tereshkova who ‘went down in history as a cosmonaut’ (‘вошла в историю как космонавт’), arguing that her being referred to as ‘космонавт’ (cosmonaut<sub>MASC</sub>) did not diminish her remarkability as the first woman in space. This is of course true and the use of as ‘космонавтка’ (cosmonaut<sub>FEM</sub>) would likely have put her in a separate category to her male colleagues. It might equally be argued that as the first female cosmonaut and with the attention which that fact produced, she was, already differentiated from her male counterparts. Finally, it is worth mentioning that the argument against feminitives for drawing attention to a professional’s gender can be undermined somewhat by its lack of acknowledgment of the potential cognitive bias caused by the use of a generic masculine, which has been proven to create, among many, the expectation of a man in the role (Horvath 2016).

## Thought influences language

One of the most interesting and nuanced factors in the dislike of feminitives, as conceptualised by Pulijana and Stevens (2023) is the dislike stemming from the belief that thought influences language, not the other way around, and so inequality of gender remains in the language because it reflects the equality in society beyond just language. Adding to this is the idea that if feminitives or other feminist language changes became mainstream or were enforced, there would be an illusion of equality and one would be less able to truthfully analyse the disparities that exist. One respondent dismisses any possible improvement that language change might produce:

*Феминитивы никак не повлияют на «видимость» женщин, так как язык, вопреки распространённому заблуждению, никак не влияет на мышление.*

*Feminitives will have no effect on women's "visibility" because language, contrary to popular misconception, has no effect on thinking.*

The following extract from another respondent who is not against feminitives in principle, but emphasises their being just a ‘band-aid’, masking large inequalities which remain to be dealt with. They cite the need for material issues to change before consciousness to be changed, and then language, rather than the other way around.

*‘Разбираться с гендерным неравенством нужно, начиная с базиса, а не суперструктуры вроде языка....Я не защищаю какую-то мнимую целостность языка; но именно как инструмент социального прогресса мне они кажутся абсолютно бесполезными, потому что для того, чтобы изменился язык, нужно менять сознание, а для того, чтобы менять сознание, нужно менять материальное бытие.’*

*Gender inequality must be tackled starting from the base, not a superstructure like language....I am not defending some imaginary integrity of language; but as an instrument of social progress they seem to me absolutely useless, because in order for language to change, consciousness has to change, and in order to change consciousness, material existence has to change.*

This respondent emphasises that they are not aligned with standard language ideology (‘some imaginary integrity of language’), and so one can infer that they are not opposed to language change in principle. Nevertheless, they concur with the idea that changing thoughts and real-life inequalities must be the priority before linguistic matters.

## Other factors

There were several other factors in the resistance towards feminitives mentioned in the literature, some of which did not seem to be significant to the survey respondents. These included a ‘fear of the new’ and the diminutive character of the suffix ‘-ка’. The relation of feminitives with the suffix ‘-ка’ with diminutives with the same suffix did not come up in the comments, but there was a sense in several comments that feminitives had a derogatory or condescending connotation, which may be

linked to this. The final factor, 'fear of the new' is not explicitly referenced in either set of written responses, but could be inferred in resistant views explained earlier in the sections on standard language ideology and linguistic discomfort as these three overlap considerably. It is worth noting, as mentioned earlier in this thesis, that many, if not the vast majority, of feminitives are not newly arrived in the Russian language, except, of course, for professions that have only recently come into existence, but have been around since at least the early Soviet Union, if not before.

Some findings from the survey results did not appear in Rudyonok or Stevens' writing on resistance towards feminitives. One factor in particular not mentioned in the literature, but which did appear several times in the written responses, was opposition to any kind of top-down reform, regulation or insistence on changes to the language. It came across that this view was not be specific to feminitives for those respondents, since several reported that they were neutral or in favour of feminitives in and of themselves. Some suggested that feminitives would likely become more widely used naturally over time, but others said that their lack of popularity (besides established forms) meant that they were obsolete.

## Complications

Before giving a summary of this discussion, it is worth noting the complications of such an analysis, namely the inconsistencies, overlap, and other nuances of participants' views, which do not neatly fit the different labels. Not only do respondents have differing views of traditional and non-traditional (neo-)feminitives, but there is also individuals' caveats for certain suffixes, or even specific examples, as in the quote below:

*'Это звучит не только нелепо, но и презрительно по отношению к особам, наделённым такими должностями. Другие же феминитивы, к примеру психологиня, намного более приятны с эстетической стороны'*

*(It sounds not only ridiculous, but also contemptuous of the persons who are endowed with such positions. Other feminitives, for example, 'pschologinja' [psychologist<sub>FEM</sub>], are much more aesthetically pleasing).*

This respondent's comment could be assessed as displaying signs several of the factors discussed previously, while also expressing a degree of exception for some in particular. There might be potential for future research into resistance to feminitives that might take these factors, and assess each of their commonness or degree of importance in a more systematic way, perhaps by having them inform the design of the survey, rather than used as a framework for analysis as was the case here.

## Chapter summary

To conclude this chapter, the results of the survey conducted showed that this study supports evidence from previous observations in large-scale surveys from *Rambler* and *Общественное мнение*, which showed a small minority of respondents reporting a positive view of feminitives.

While this study echoes the results of those previous studies, through the open-ended items, it was possible to gain a great deal more information on the reasoning behind the negative views. The themes drawn out of the written samples as seen in the previous chapter are broadly consistent with the pre-existing literature. The four reasons for resisting feminitives as laid out in Rudyonok's online article are all expressed in the survey responses, but there is some doubt as to whether some of the additional factors listed by Pulijana and Stevens were represented in the dataset.

One aspect not previously mentioned was a view expressed by several respondents largely neutral towards feminitives, such that they believe that such things are likely to provoke backlash and



alienate wider society from broader progress in gender equality and women's rights, and therefore should not be insisted upon for fear of limiting public progress in gender equality beyond language questions. Secondly, and related to the previous standpoint is the belief that linguistic discussions are not useful nor a significant issue compared to more basic issues that ought to be the priority in moves towards social progress, such as violence against women, or economic inequality between the genders.

Returning to the objectives of this study, it was possible to prove a link between gender of participants and their views on femininities and feminist language reform, but unfortunately it was not possible to do so with the age of the participants. For the second research objective, to assess the reasons for resistance to femininities, the written responses to open-ended items were analysed using those reasons defined by Rudyonok and Pulijana and Stevens. Some of which were shown to be present in large proportions, others very little or not at all. In addition, some key reasoning expressed in the dataset had not been mentioned in the literature at all.

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to gain a snapshot of attitudes and usage of femininives, particularly the newer, non-traditional examples, and to answer the question of whether age and gender have any relationship with people's view of femininives and feminist linguistic reform, and why people are opposed to these.

### Key findings

This study has found that there is a general negative view of femininives and feminist language changes with only small numbers of respondents expressing strong support, which echoes data from large-scale surveys which reported that only 7% and 11 % of the respondents had a positive view of femininives. Gauging the level of agreement with the four specific statements, it shows that very small proportion were in support, with only 9.9% strongly agreeing that femininives are necessary. Along these lines 75.2% of the women taking part in the survey said that they used a femininive when referring to themselves and their job title.

Through the chi-square test of independence, it was shown that the variables of gender and attitude towards the statements provided were related. Testing of the results from the four 5-point Likert scale items disaggregated by gender produced, each time, a chi square value greater than the critical value, meaning that the difference between the actual (observed) values and the expected values were statistically significant. This allowed for the null hypothesis, which stated that there was no relation between gender and agreement with the statements, to be rejected in favour of the alternative hypothesis that there is a relation. This means that women in the survey population were more likely to express more support for the statements. Unfortunately, it was not possible to demonstrate a relation using the variable of age instead of gender since the test requires a value of over 5 in each category.

The other significant set of data was the comments offered by respondents in response to optional open-ended items where they could express their views. The respondents' written contributions were broadly thoughtful and nuanced, though strong, in some cases angry reactions were evident. The negative responses tended to follow themes of describing femininives as unnecessary, ugly sounding, or a Western imposition on the Russian language. These were compared with reasons for opposing femininives outlined in academic literature, which the respondents' contributions matched on several points. Some themes of the comments, such as an opposition to any non-organic language change, were not previously mentioned as possible reasons for opposition.

### Research questions

Returning to the primary research aims of this study, to understand whether gender and age has a relation on people's attitudes towards femininives in Russian, the results have given evidence for the former, though the dataset for the latter was unsuitable for the test, and so a conclusion on that variable's impact will have to be answered in a future study. It was proven that gender does affect an individual's support for feminisation and other feminist language reform, with the result that women who completed the questionnaire were, on the whole, in agreement with the four statements more so than the men participating. With regard to language attitudes around feminisation, it was shown that the respondents opposed to femininives and feminist language reform did so due to several factors, which often overlapped. These included: being subscribed to 'standard language ideology'; having a negative view of feminism, and not wanting to draw unnecessary attention to a person's gender, among other reasons.

## Implications and significance of the results

In light of the controversy that femininives and other feminist attempts at language change provokes in Russian society, this study contributes to the existing body of research on femininives and offers a more detailed look at ordinary people's views. This study has gone some way towards enhancing our understanding of reasons people reject feminisation, which corresponds to previous academic work on the subject, but also adds a degree of nuance that is missed from simple polling data on the proportions of positive, negative, and neutral views of femininives.

The findings of this study suggest that there is a strong argument for campaigners to concentrate on more material issues rather than linguistic change with the risk of alienation of potential supporters that comes with it. It might in turn be argued that backlash and discomfort ought not to get in the way of advocating for improvement in women's standing in society. This is supported by the 71% of the *Rambler* survey participants who said they were 'sure that femininives will be used everywhere in the Russian language in the near future'. This study has raised important questions about the nature of actively calling for linguistic changes and the almost inevitable backlash against it. The quantitative results show the level of acceptance of arguments in favour of femininives and the qualitative data in the form of written contributions give a detailed overview at the range of opinions and reasons of opposition to femininives, which might represent an interesting starting point for future research.

## Limitations

As laid out in the previous chapters, notwithstanding the relatively limited sample, this work offers valuable insights into attitudes towards femininives in Russian. However, with a relatively small sample size, caution must be applied, as the findings might not be representative of wider Russian or Russian-speaking population, though the big-picture findings do resemble the large-scale survey data gathered in 2020 and 2021 (news.rambler.ru 2021; Общественное мнение 2020).

This current study is limited by the fact that it received only 203 complete responses, of that mainly Russian-speaking expats living abroad and other online communities. While being a large enough sample to produce statistically significant results, the relatively small pool of respondents does pose issues. As a result of the distribution of the survey online, particularly strong or aggressive reactions (as seen in the written answers to open-ended items) may have been overrepresented in these Russian-speaking online communities compared to wider Russian or Russian-speaking society. In the two sets of large-scale polling data previously cited in this study, 41% and 33% respectively expressed a neutral stance on femininives. This cannot be directly compared to the results of this study, since different questions were posed to participants, but nevertheless, this study did show a smaller proportion of respondents choosing to express an indifferent or neutral opinion. It is also worth considering the self-selection that may have taken place as, when this survey was being distributed, the potential participants were informed of the subject (femininives). As a result, it is possible that those with strong views on either side of the debate (though more likely those opposing) were motivated to take part in greater proportion than those who had neutral or less strong opinions, or were unsure of the meaning of femininives.

On the latter point, although an explanation of femininives and several examples were given and there seemed to be a high level of awareness and developed opinions among those who contributed a written response to the open-ended items, it might have been useful to include a question like in the *Rambler* survey to assess the level of awareness and understanding of femininives, and other debates around gender and language among all the participants. One issue that came up with conducting the survey and discussing the results was the need for clarity and differentiation between established femininives and non-traditional (neo-)femininives. Many respondents explicitly made a distinction in their opinions for well established, commonly used femininives versus what they

considered modern feminitives (even though some had been in use in the past). A decision was made to use the term 'feminitive' for the vast majority of the discussion as the respondents did so and because almost all of the discussion was around neo-feminitives except when explicitly mentioned.

It is unfortunate that the study did not include those who reported a gender identity beyond the binary, but due to the very small proportion of respondents belonging to that category (5 respondents out of 203), it would have been disruptive to include this small sample in the analysis. In addition, the chi-square test of independence would not have been able to be applied since it requires a value of at least 5 in each category.

It was disappointing that it was not possible with the relatively small sample size to find out the relation of age and attitudes to feminitives, and gender breakdown within age ranges. It would be of great interest to ascertain which groups (i.e. women aged 25-35; men aged 65+) expressed the most opposition or most support for feminitives. This was planned as part of this survey initially, but number of respondents in each age range was too low, so it would require a larger set of respondents in order to make the results statistically significant. Survey participants were ultimately self-selecting, so a future survey would also benefit from effort to produce more representative distribution, such that it reached respondents of all age ranges.

With regard to the survey design, one major aspect worth reflecting on is the number of unfinished questionnaires which had to be eliminated from the dataset, although 203 completed was not a bad result. A future study might benefit from changes such as further testing and feedback before publication; better explanation of the survey before participation so that potential respondents might have a clearer idea of what was involved; a progress tracker so participants knew how much of the questionnaire remained; and removal of items or questions superfluous to answering the research objectives. Due to the self-reported nature of the first question regarding use of feminitives among women, further research is required to ascertain whether these results represent real-world usage. This is difficult to do due in part to the observer's paradox and desirability bias, but might be done via other methods than a sociolinguistic questionnaire.

Finally, it would have been of interest to have a greater representation of those in favour of feminitives in the written samples, which instead had negative views in greater proportion than the quantitative data implied in the survey population. In that way, it might have been possible to gain a deeper understanding of why people use or believe in the expansion of feminitives in the face of considerable, often vocal opposition, although this was not a research aim of this study. It might be possible that a certain level of self-selection took place, with those actively hostile towards feminitives more motivated to take part in a survey on the subject than those who are neutral or somewhat in favour.

## Future research

Considering the limited amount of sociolinguistic research on feminitives in Russian, there is a great deal of scope for future research. Subsequent studies could choose other aspects of participants' demographic information to analyse, such as level of education, country of birth or other languages spoken. The latter would be of particular interest given the variation in success of feminitives in other Slavic languages, such as Ukrainian, which might influence the usage and attitudes towards feminitives in Russian-speaking respondents from former Soviet republics outside the Russian Federation.

Research questions might include: To what extent does level of education influence use of and/or attitudes towards feminitives? How have attitudes towards feminism and feminitives in Russian changed in the Post-Soviet period?

As mentioned previously, a worthwhile study could be done to assess the significance of a range of factors causing opposition to feminitives, which could be done in a more direct manner, rather than by analysis of open-ended questions.

Further corpus-based studies would also be a fruitful area for further work. Subject to selecting an appropriate corpus, this method would represent a better means of gathering data on the real-life usage of feminitives, rather than self-reported usage or attitudes towards them. This would rely on the presence of detail on the authors of corpus samples, including but not limited to age and gender. This would be limited by the nature of the corpus, as many are based on media publications, which would often be subject to editing and style guidelines, and thus not completely representative of real-world language use, and likely to use 'standard' terms such as generic masculine professional titles.

As started by Kirey-Sitnikova in her questionnaire-based study (Kirey-Sitnikova 2021), there is also considerable scope to investigate questions around non-binary, transgender, or other LGBTQ+ individuals' use of and attitudes towards feminitives and other aspect of feminist language development. There would, of course, need to be a lot of care taken in such an investigation that any survey was conducted with care and discretion, bearing in mind the worsening situation for LGBTQ+ people in Russia.

This study has been a preliminary snapshot of opposition to feminist language change in the Russian language, particularly feminitives, concluding that men are more resistant than women, and demonstrating the multi-layered and varied reasons people hold these views. As discussed, there is plenty of research remaining to be done in this area and it continues to be of significance, in light of active public discourse and controversy on the subject, and the socio-political context in Russia.

# Appendix

## 1.1 Gender of respondents

Gender	Number of respondents	Percentage
Male	73	36.0%
Female	125	61.5%
Other	5	2.5%

## 1.2 Age of respondents

Age range	Number of respondents	Percentage
<18	8	3.9%
18-24	30	14.8%
25-34	59	29.1%
35-44	66	32.5%
45-54	26	12.8%
55-64	13	6.4%
65+	1	0.5%

## 1.3 Frequency table of respondents' home country

Country	Number of respondents	Percentage
Russian Federation	156	77%
Belarus	7	4%
Ukraine	6	3%
Other (former USSR)	19	9%
Other (non USSR)	14	7%

## 2 Women respondents' use of feminitives

Response to: 'Используете ли Вы феминитив для описания Вашей должности?'	Actual Value	Percentage of women respondents
No	94	75.2%
Yes	13	10.4%
Sometimes	18	14.4%
Total	125	100%

### 3.1 Agreement with Statement 1 – Raw data

Response to Statement 1: 'Феминитивы необходимы обществу'	Overall respondents (Men and Women)	Overall (Men and Women) - %	Women	Respondents (Women) - %	Men-Values	Men - %
Совершенно не согласен/-на	45	22.2	25	20	20	27.4
В какой-то мере не согласен/-на	29	14.3	14	11.2	14	19.2
Ни согласен/-на , ни не согласен/-на	39	19.2	18	14.4	18	24.7
В какой-то мере согласен/-на	70	34.5	51	40.8	19	26.0
Совершенно согласен/-на	20	9.9	17	13.6	2	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>

### Agreement with Statement 2

Response to Statement 2: 'Феминитивы являются средством борьбы с гендерной дискриминацией'	Overall respondents (Men and Women)	Overall (Men and Women) - %	Women	Respondents (Women) - %	Men-Values	Men - %
Совершенно не согласен/-на	101	49.8	57	45.6	43	58.9
В какой-то мере не согласен/-на	26	12.8	17	13.6	8	11
Ни согласен/-на , ни не согласен/-на	29	14.3	14	11.2	14	19.2
В какой-то мере согласен/-на	29	14.3	21	16.8	6	8.2
Совершенно согласен/-на	18	8.9	16	12.8	2	2.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>

### Agreement with Statement 3

Response to Statement 3: 'Феминитивы делают вклад женщин видимым.'	Overall respondents (Men and Women)	Overall (Men and Women) - %	Women	Respondents (Women) - %	Men- Values	Men - %
Совершенно не согласен/-на	91	44.8	53	42.4	38	52.1
В какой-то мере не согласен/-на	20	9.9	12	9.6	7	9.6
Ни согласен/-на , ни не согласен/-на	30	14.8	14	11.2	14	19.2
В какой-то мере согласен/-на	35	17.2	24	19.2	11	15.1
Совершенно согласен/-на	27	13.3	22	17.6	4	4.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>

### Agreement with Statement 4

Response to Statement 4: 'Как Вы в целом относитесь к феминистским реформам русского языка?'	Overall respondents (Men and Women)	Overall (Men and Women) - %	Women	Respondents (Women) - %	Men- Values	Men - %
Полностью поддерживаю	18	8.9	16	12.8	1	1.4
Скорее поддерживаю, чем не поддерживаю	23	11.3	15	12.0	7	9.6
Безразлично	51	25.1	34	27.2	15	20.5
Скорее не поддерживаю, чем поддерживаю	58	28.6	34	27.2	24	32.9
Резко не поддерживаю	53	26.1	26	20.8	26	35.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>125</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>100</b>



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