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## GENDER MARKING BY COMPOUNDING IN ENGLISH: TERMS DENOTING FEMALE PHYSICIANS IN ENGLISH

The article investigates the usage of female occupation terms in English by discussing a sample of terms denoting female physicians attested in the COCA corpus. Differences are examined between connotations of synonymous Sex+Profession compounds, such as *woman doctor* and *lady doctor*. The issue is considered whether such N+N combinations should be treated as appositional compounds or as attributive compounds.

### 1. Gender marking in names of professions in English

Present-Day English lacks grammatical gender (in contrast to Slavonic languages, or to Old English). It can be described as having natural gender, or “notional” gender (McConnell-Ginet 2013). Consequently, most English nouns referring to people are gender-ambiguous, or rather gender-neutral, and they can have either male or female referents, e.g. *She / He was my cousin / sibling / parent, He / She was an artist / teacher / driver*. Nevertheless, English speakers have at their disposal several methods of forming gender-specific terms, such as female (or male) occupation terms (see Doleschal 2015; Hellinger 2001). The linguistic means in question include the usage of attributive adjectives (e.g. *male/female*), formation of suffixal feminine nouns (with the suffix *-ess, -ette*), or the construction of compounds, where one constituent is a gender-specific lexeme (e.g. *woman, man, lady, boy, girl*) and the second constituent denotes a profession, property or characteristic activity (Olsen 2001, 2004), e.g. *woman writer, woman driver, woman slave, boy scout, shepherd boy, lady blogger*.

As observed by Romaine (2001: 195) and indicated by Collins English Dictionary, female occupation terms which end in the suffix *-ess* (such as *doctress, inspectress, editress*) were employed at the beginning of the twentieth

century. Their usage was advocated by, among others, Fowler (1927), who assumed that it was important to indicate whether a given professional was male or female. Nowadays, suffixal feminine forms (e.g. *poetess*, *authoress*) tend to be perceived as trivialising, demeaning or undermining the professional status of women (as stated by, among others, Bauer, Lieber and Plag 2013: 243, Romaine 2001). Sex+Profession compounds, such as *woman writer* or *woman pilot*, are not pejorative, yet they are not used every time a given speaker of English refers to a female professional.

This is due to the policy of political correctness, since the usage of gender-neutral forms is one of the strategies to make languages gender-fair and to reduce gender stereotyping (Sczesny et al. 2016). As pointed out by Romaine (2001), in the nineteen seventies and the nineteen eighties many institutions in the United States recommended and implemented successfully the replacement of gender-marked forms, such as *steward* and *stewardess*, or *headmaster* and *headmistress*, by gender-neutral ones, i.e. *flight attendant* and *headteacher*. The above-mentioned recommendation implies that female-marked forms, such as *woman driver* or *lady pilot*, should be rare in the corpus data. Nevertheless, the aim of the following paper is to analyse the female-marked forms in the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), focusing on the occurrence of compounds which refer to female physicians and which contain lexical gender-specific morphemes (*woman* or *lady*).

The layout of the article is as follows. Section 2 presents selected instances of the compound *woman doctor* (or its plural form *women doctors*) culled from COCA. Their syntactic context is investigated in order to find out if female occupation terms are accompanied by contrasting male-gendered forms. Section 3 focuses on differences in the connotations of synonymous Sex+Profession compounds, such as *woman doctor* and *lady doctor*. Section 4 discusses the status of the N+N combination *woman doctor* as an appositional or attributive compound in English. Conclusions are given in section 5.

## 2. Indicating the contrast between female and male referents

I carried out a search in COCA of syntactic and morphological means employed to mark the female gender of physicians. The most common method turns out to be compounding. There are 50 examples of the compound *woman doctor* (in the singular form), and 34 cases of the plural form *women doctors* attested in the corpus.

- (1) a. He'd go to a woman doctor, too, if she were smart. COCA\_1997\_MAG\_Prevention
- b. Within the last 30 years, the number of Black women doctors has risen to over 8,000 practicing physicians (...) COCA\_2002\_MAG\_Ebony

The usage of the attributive adjective *female* with the noun *doctor* has slightly fewer attestations in COCA. I found 32 cases of the phrase *female doctor* (in the singular) and 43 instances of *female doctors*.

- (2) a. I think some patients feel more comfortable with a female doctor. COCA\_2011\_NEWS\_Houston  
 b. An ambulance accompanying the protesters, carrying four female doctors, was seized by security forces and was taken away. COCA\_2011\_NEWS\_AssocPress

As observed by Hellinger (2001) in accordance with the guidelines for gender-neutral language, female marking in English should be avoided where no parallel male forms are used. Some of the examples of the compounds *women doctors/woman doctor* or the phrases *female doctor(s)* do indeed appear when there is an overt contrast with the form *male doctor(s)* or *male patient(s)*.

- (3) a. their newfound expanded activities and emotions. We are beginning to look at a woman doctor as a concept that is intrinsically different from a male doctor. COCA\_2003\_ACAD\_RoeperReview  
 b. The average score for cultural activity was 4.5 (95% CI 4.2-4.7) for women doctors and 4.1 (3.9-4.2) for male doctors. COCA\_1996\_ACAD\_Lancet  
 c. firms are pressured to supply only proper Muslim “halal” foodstuffs; women doctors are declining to examine male patients (...) COCA\_2009\_ACAD\_Humanist

In other examples, though, the contrast between male and female doctors is not overt but implicit, e.g. in sentences (4a-d), where a woman doctor can be juxtaposed with a (stereotypically) male doctor. Similarly, sentence (2a) above, i.e. *I think some patients feel more comfortable with a female doctor*, could possibly be continued *than with a male one*, in order to emphasize the difference between the sexes of the referents.

- (4) a. In 1845, a woman doctor was unheard of in America. No medical school would take female students. COCA\_2000\_MAG\_ChildLife  
 b. In the audience of doctors there was one woman doctor. COCA\_1992\_FIC\_AntiochRev  
 c. Geez; why couldn't they have a woman doctor around here? Being female should be a requirement for becoming an OB-GYN. COCA\_2008\_FIC\_ArkansasRev  
 d. Nobody much trusted women doctors in those days. COCA\_2013\_FIC\_AntiochRev

In the case of yet some other sentences, it can be stated that female gender is indicated (by compounding) when it is considered relevant for the description of a person, as in (5) below.

- (5) a. Here a young woman doctor – brilliant, beautiful and exhausted – senses something awry at her hospital. COCA\_1996\_NEWS\_SanFranChron  
 b. he had married a woman doctor he met when he was a student himself. COCA\_1990\_FIC\_LiteraryRev

Furthermore, the usage of the female-marked form *woman doctor* facilitates slightly the comprehension of example (5b), in comparison to the sentence containing a gender-unmarked form, namely *He had married a doctor when he was a student himself*, which may be more difficult to process due to gender stereotyping.

### 3. Choosing between various lexically gender-specific morphemes: *woman, lady or madam?*

As was mentioned in the previous section, the gender-specific word *woman* (or its plural form *women*) is relatively frequently attested in the combination with the lexeme *doctor*.

- (6) When I got out of college, I never saw a woman mechanic, a woman doctor. You know, we were supposed to marry our identities, not to become who we really are. COCA\_1996\_SPOK\_CNN\_Talkback

Furthermore, the element *woman* can form compounds with the noun *physician*. A COCA search reveals 7 instances of *woman physician* and 12 instances of *women physicians* (in the plural).

- (7) a. Elizabeth Blackwell was the first woman physician, a leader in medical research and a champion COCA\_1990\_NEWS\_SanFranChron  
 b. AMWA is the world's oldest and largest medical association representing women physicians and medical students. COCA\_1997\_MAG\_Ebony  
 c. And don't assume that women physicians are more empathetic than male doctors. COCA\_2000\_MAG\_Prevention

The corpus contains (though rather infrequent) examples of compounds where the lexeme *woman* stands in front of a noun denoting some subtype of physicians, e.g. *woman dentist*, *woman psychiatrist*, *woman surgeon*, and *women dermatologists*.

- (8) a. One woman dentist from Dublin confessed, when asked why she had come to the program (...) COCA\_2001\_ACAD\_AnthropoIQ  
 b. To increase Joan's female identification, he referred her case to a woman psychiatrist, Dr. M. COCA\_1997\_MAG\_RollingStone  
 c. Have you ever seen a man knitting socks? Have you ever seen a woman surgeon or a woman conducting a symphony? COCA\_2005\_NEWS\_NYTimes  
 d. Ultimate Age-Defiers Special! Expert Choices for Younger Skin Top women dermatologists share the secrets that keep them beautiful. COCA\_2000\_MAG\_Prevention

In some Sex+Profession compounds denoting female physicians, the element denoting sex is the noun *lady*. There are 20 cases of the singular form *lady doctor* (and no instances of *lady doctors*) in COCA.

- (9) a. "I had to give him an injection," the lady doctor told Nadia, as she waited anxiously, refusing to leave his side. COCA\_1996\_FIC\_VirginiaQRev  
 b. He doesn't want a supermodel, a movie star or a high-achieving lady doctor (hello, the new Mrs. Zuckerberg). COCA\_2012\_NEWS\_USAToday  
 c. (...) my daughter was going to get married and be a mommy someday, but not before first being a "lady doctor" or owning her own haircutting store. COCA\_2001\_MAG\_USAToday

There are also single attestations of *lady physician* and *lady dentist* in the corpus.

- (10) a. The dark hair lovely complexion lady physician in the white coat snapped the x-rays onto the display (...) COCA\_1996\_FIC\_Arkansas-Rev  
 b. On the wall there was a cartoon of an old lady dentist with huge sagging breasts exultantly clasping a molar with her monkey wrench. COCA\_1995\_FIC\_LiteraryRev

There are 3 instances of *madam doctor* in COCA, all coming from the same short story<sup>1</sup>, translated from Romanian.

- (11) I saw her before me: Madam Doctor Alf – aka the mother of my amour-partner during those first Bucharest student years (...) COCA\_2012\_FIC\_Salmagundi

<sup>1</sup> It is the short story "Sentimental Education" by contemporary Romanian writer Norman Manea, translated into English by Jean Harris.

Such a usage as in (11) is uncommon, though. Combinations with *madam* tend to be employed as polite forms of address, e.g. *Madam Secretary*, *Madam Chairman*.

It seems worthwhile to mention a contrast between connotations (and emotional colouring) of potentially synonymous compounds, such as *lady doctor* and *woman doctor*. Romaine (2001) observes that *lady* originally denoted a female who would need to take no job, thus it can have a sarcastic overtone when it refers to a female professional. Lakoff (1973) argues that, at least in American English, the word *lady*, when used in job terminology, diminishes the value of the profession.

- (12) “For at least some speakers, the more demeaning the job, the more the person holding it (if female, of course) is likely to be described as a *lady*. Thus, *cleaning lady* is at least as common as *cleaning woman*, *saleslady* as *saleswoman*. But one says, normally, *woman doctor*. To say *lady doctor* is to be very condescending: it constitutes an insult.” (Lakoff 1973: 59)

More contemporary evaluative remarks on the use of female job titles containing the nouns *woman*, *female* and *lady* can be found in the 2014 article from “The New Republic”. Journalist Alice Robb quotes the following comments from (female) linguists, who recommend the avoidance of gender-marked forms.

- (13) a. “ (...) As for whether one uses “female” or “woman” – that’s interesting. I actually prefer “woman boss”, “woman MP” etc. (I’m not going to say “woman linguist” – yuck). In fact, in my own writing I avoid using “female” because it feels more like describing an animal than a person.” (Deborah Tannen)
- b. “I find both “woman doctor” and a “female doctor” equally old-fashioned but both better than “lady doctor”, which fortunately seems to have dropped out of existence. In other words, in all these cases the problem is not the use of “woman” vs. “female”, but the fact that reference to gender – female gender, that is – must be made even where it’s irrelevant.” (Robin Lakoff)

Some of the examples of *lady doctor* in COCA (e.g. those listed in 14 below) carry pejorative connotations and have an ironic or patronising tinge.

- (14) a. There was one “lady doctor,” the beautiful wife of a surgeon who was graying at the temples, but you never saw her doing any doctoring. She just cried a lot about whatever candy-striper her husband was running around with. COCA\_2002\_FIC\_AntiochRev
- b. “That’s pretty lame, even for a lady doctor,” he muttered. COCA\_2003\_FIC\_Bk:Drifter

- c. (...) like the lady doctor who did all those stupid tests on me at school (...)  
COCA\_2006\_FIC\_NewYorker
- d. He continues, in the squeaky voice of a little old lady doctor who could be Dr. Ruth's American cousin. COCA\_2003\_NEWS\_Atlanta

One more factor which should be taken into account but is not reflected by the data from COCA (confined to American English) is regional variation. Google searches confirm that compounds with the left-hand constituent *lady* are characteristic of Indian English, as is exemplified by the sentences in (15):

- (15) a. Dr. Sujata Sawhney South Delhi Lady Rheumatologists at ISICONline ...  
Professional Statement: Dr. Sujata Sawhney, Joint Disease Services  
Lady Rheumatologist in South Delhi at Indian Spinal Injuries Centre,  
New Delhi, India.  
<https://www.purplehealth.com/2634-SujataSawhney>
- b. Lady Pediatricians in Hyderabad – Instant Appointment Booking,  
View ...  
<https://www.practo.com> › Hyderabad
- c. Lady Urology Doctors Bangalore |General Physicians Bangalore on ...  
[yellowpages.sulekha.com](http://yellowpages.sulekha.com) › ... › General Physicians in Bangalore
- d. Lady Dentist Mississauga| Female Dentists in Mississauga, Toronto<sup>2</sup>  
Dr. Saima, is the best lady dentist in Mississauga GTA and Toronto  
areas. [www.drshora.com/](http://www.drshora.com/)

The occurrence of *lady doctor* or *lady dentist* in Indian English may potentially be regarded as an instance of the phenomenon which is referred to as “colonial lag” by Marckwardt (1958). The colonial lag hypothesis states that colonial varieties are linguistically more conservative than varieties spoken in the mother country. It is confirmed by the retention in American English of some forms which are no longer found in British English, e.g. the past participle *gotten*. Since the trend towards the avoidance of gender-biased language is stronger in the United States than in Great Britain (as observed by Romaine 2001), American English shows no “colonial lag” (in comparison to British English) with respect to gender-neutralization,<sup>3</sup> yet Indian English seems to do so. The usage of such expressions as *lady doctor* in Indian English may also be

<sup>2</sup> The website is in Canada, Toronto, but the female dentist is of Indian origin, as is shown by the following sentence: “Dr. Shora received a Bachelor’s Degree in Dental Surgery (BDS) from Bapuji Dental College in India in 1997.” ([www.drshora.com/](http://www.drshora.com/)).

<sup>3</sup> Both American and British dictionaries mark *lady doctor* as old-fashioned (e.g. Cambridge Dictionary). According to Collins English Dictionary, the expression *lady doctor* was most popular in BrE in the nineteen thirties. The on-line (AmE) dictionary (<http://www.dictionary.com/browse/lady>) treats *lady* in combinations such as *lady reporter* as “sometimes offensive”.

treated as indicative of cultural differences between India and Britain (or India and the United States).<sup>4</sup>

#### 4. Appositional (coordinate) or attributive compounds?

An issue which is worth discussing in this section is the place of N+N combinations, such as *woman physician* or *lady doctor*, in cross-linguistic typologies of compounds proposed by various morphologists.

Olsen (2001, 2004) regards Sex+Profession compounds as a subtype of so-called “copulative compounds”, which includes such compound nouns as *bartender-psychologist*, *singer-songwriter*, *actor-director*, *learner-driver*, *dancer-spy*, *lawyer-brother*. The meaning of copulative compounds can be paraphrased as ‘XY denotes an X which is also a Y’. In other words, a copulative compound consists of two elements which describe properties of a single entity. This paraphrase can be employed to represent the meaning of *woman doctor*, *woman physician* and *woman dermatologist*, i.e. ‘both a woman and a doctor’, ‘both a woman and a physician’, ‘both a woman and a dermatologist’. A similar paraphrase may sound less felicitous in the case of *lady doctor*, i.e. ‘both a lady and a doctor’, when the following senses of *lady* are considered: ‘a courteous, decorous, or genteel woman’, ‘a woman of high social position or economic class’, ‘a woman who is refined, polite and well-spoken’ (see <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/lady>, <http://www.dictionary.com>). However, the lexeme *lady* is polysemous, and it is the sense ‘any woman, female’ which occurs in the above-mentioned compounds.

Copulative compounds are also termed “appositional compounds” (as in Spencer 1991, Haspelmath 2002), since their constituents stand in the relation of apposition. Scalise and Bisetto (2009) employ yet another term, i.e. “coordinate compounds”. Constituents of coordinate compounds can be linked with the conjunction *and*, e.g. *singer-songwriter* ‘both a singer and a songwriter’.

Fabb (1998) as well as Scalise and Bisetto (2009) recognize both constituents of copulative (i.e. coordinate) compounds as equally important semantically, thus such compounds are double-headed. A similar remark occurs in Renner (2008), who points out that in the case of coordinate compounds, such as *singer-songwriter*, we cannot talk about any dependency (or subordination) of one compounding element upon the other. The equal semantic status of the two constituents may be additionally emphasized by their potential reversibility, as

<sup>4</sup> A quick search of the Corpus of Global Web-based English (GloWbE), available at <http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe>, shows that the majority of the occurrences of the compound *lady doctor* in this database come from British English (26 examples), Pakistani English (20 instances) and Indian English (11 occurrences). In the case of Pakistani English, it is both cultural and religious factors which determine the relatively high frequency of gender-marked forms.

shown by the pairs *director-actor* vs. *actor-director*; or *bartender-psychologist* and *psychologist-bartender* (see Olsen 2001, 2004 for more examples).

As far as inflection is concerned, the right-hand constituent of copulative compounds usually functions as their morphological head (Scalise and Fábregas 2010), since it takes the plural endings, as indicated by the plural forms *singer-songwriters*, *psychologist-bartenders* or *lawyer brothers*.

Doubts against the status of the left-hand constituent in Sex+Profession compounds or Sex+Property compounds, such as *woman writer*, *manservant* or *boyfriend*, have been voiced by Renner (2008) and Bauer (2008), who regard this constituent as being a modifier which provides information only about the property of X (the head) being female or male. Consequently, *woman writer*, *manservant* or *boyfriend* are given by Bauer (2008) and Renner (2008) the status of attributive compounds (comparably to such attributive compounds as *apple pie* or *snail mail*).

I argue, in Cetnarowska (2016) and Cetnarowska (to appear), against the position taken by Renner (2008) and Bauer (2008). I recognize compounds which contain a gender-specific lexeme as appositional (coordinate) ones, hence consisting of two heads. Those co-heads are sometimes reversible: *girl pilot* – *pilot girl*, *slave woman* – *woman slave*, *manservant* – *servant man*.

It must be admitted, though, that the reversibility is restricted with the remaining Sex+Profession combinations.<sup>5</sup> This may be treated as the result of the institutionalization or entrenchment (i.e. cognitive routinization) of one word order in compound nouns. One talks about *women writers* and *women drivers* but not about *\*writers women* or *\*drivers women*.<sup>6</sup>

Another factor responsible for the lack of word order variation in combinations such as *lady doctor* or *madam chairman* (cf. *\*doctor lady* or *\*chairman madam*) is the potential recognition of the left-hand constituent as a honorific title which precedes a person's name, as in *Lady Mary* or *Madam Ashton*.

<sup>5</sup> While *woman doctor* is an institutionalised compound, a COCA search returns a single hit for the compound *doctor woman*:

(i) The witch doctor woman lives in a trailer, so I don't imagine she's hanging out with too many Einsteins. COCA\_2008\_FIC\_Bk: Fortune Teller

<sup>6</sup> I am grateful to the reviewer for pointing out to me that the contrast between the well-formedness of *women writers* and the ill-formedness of *\*writers women* stems also from the difference between the acceptability of irregular and regular plurals as left-hand constituents of English compounds. As is noted by Gordon (1985), while English children produce compounds containing irregular plurals as modifiers, e.g. *mice-eater*, they do not use regular plural forms as left-hand compound constituents, such as *\*rats-eater*. This difference is predictable in the model of Lexical Phonology (Kiparsky 1982), where irregular inflection is a level 1 operation in English whereas compounding and regular inflection belong to level 2 morphological processes. However, as is observed by Selkirk (1982), regular plural marker can occasionally occur on the left-hand constituent of English compounds, e.g. *arms race*, *parks commissioner*, *sales receipt*.

For compounds which contain the lexeme *woman*, e.g. *woman physician*, *woman doctor*, or *woman dermatologist*, an additional piece of evidence supporting the equal status of the two heads is that both constituents are inflected, as shown by the plural forms *women physicians*, *women doctors*, or *women dermatologists*.

Let us, however, note the occasional occurrence of forms such as *woman physicians* in COCA.<sup>7</sup>

- (16) When you discuss what the patient means by “feeling like a woman,” you often get a sex stereotype in return – something that woman physicians note immediately is a male caricature of women’s attitudes and interests. COCA\_1992\_ACAD\_AmerScholar

There are also two occurrences of the plural form *woman writers* in COCA.

- (17) a. Genlis’s *De l’Influence des femmes* opens with a praise of male writers, seen in general to be superior to woman writers. COCA\_1996\_ACAD\_Symposium  
 b. Our goal is to delineate childhood traits and conditions of notable woman writers to enable educators and parents to identify and promote accomplishment in future generations. COCA\_1995\_ACAD\_Roeper-Review

One could treat the plural forms in (16)-(17) as used erroneously instead of the expected forms *women writers* and *women physicians*. Yet they occur in academic texts. Further examples are provided by website searches<sup>8</sup> (also by on-line newspapers, cf. Robb 2014).

<sup>7</sup> A COCA search reveals two instances of *woman doctors*, yet they are not relevant here.

(i) No one understood why Lynda Johnson took in a woman doctors had written off. COCA\_1999\_MAG\_Essence

(ii) “Start the day with a few deep breaths to relax tense muscles in your face that create frown lines and a haggard look,” suggests dermatologist Wilma Bergfeld, M.D., author of *A Woman Doctors Guide to Skin Care* COCA\_1997\_MAG\_Parenting

The nouns *woman* and *doctors* belong to different noun phrases in (i), since the lexeme *doctors* introduces a relative clause. The title of the book “*A Woman Doctors Guide to Skin Care*” in (ii) appears elsewhere on the web as “*A Woman Doctor’s Guide to Skin Care*”, with –s being the genitive marker.

<sup>8</sup> See, for instance, the following sentences found as a result of web searches:

(i) Young caucasian man or young asian woman doctors or nurses in medical scrubs. (www.shutterstock.com/.../stock-photo-medical-professionals-standi)

(ii) Top 10 WOMAN DRIVERS OF THE YEAR – Funtoosh.com (www.funtoosh.com/jokes/men\_women/362).

The forms *woman physicians* or *woman doctors* could alternatively be interpreted as plurals of subordinate compounds, in which the left-hand constituent functions as a complement to the right-hand head, i.e. ‘physicians who treat women’.<sup>9</sup> Such a reanalysis is not likely, though, for *woman writers* or *woman drivers* (which do not call for the paraphrases ‘authors of books for women’ and ‘drivers who take female passengers only’).

Yet another probable reason for the occurrence of the unexpected plurals *woman physicians* or *woman writers* is implied by the title of Robb’s (2014) article, i.e. “Woman doctors, woman writers ... Is using ‘woman’ as an adjective demeaning?”. If *woman* appears in compounds as an adjective, it cannot take the plural marker. However, there seems to be no conversion of the noun *woman* into an adjective taking place here. The lexeme *woman* does not show comparative or superlative degree forms, i.e. *\*more woman* or *\*most woman*. Secondly, it cannot be used with the pro-form *one*, as is expected of adjectives such as *female* or *young*.

- (18) Which physician did you talk to?
- The young one.
  - \*The woman one
  - The female one

Thirdly, the lexeme *woman* cannot (normally)<sup>10</sup> be coordinated with adjectives. One does not say *?The victim was young and woman*. The adjective *female* can be used in such a context, as shown in (19).

- (19) a. Fulgi determined, among other things, the victim was young and female, and African-American. COCA\_2007\_SPOK\_NBC\_Dateline  
 b. So new clients would swallow my competence before getting turned off by how short and young and female I was. COCA\_1999\_FIC\_Analog

Thus, instead of saying that *woman* is an adjective in (*\*)woman writers* or (*\*)woman physicians*, it could be said that *woman* is a noun used here attribu-

<sup>9</sup> According to Urban dictionary ([www.urbandictionary.com](http://www.urbandictionary.com)), *lady doctor* is an old fashioned term for an obstetrician/gynecologist, often used in a humorous manner, as in the example *She went to the ‘lady doctor’ to get her parts checked*. Moreover, discussions on internet fora indicate that some speakers of English interpret *woman doctor* as referring to a doctor who specializes in treating women. (<https://forum.wordreference.com/threads/doctress-lady-doctor-woman-doctor-female-doctor.784344/>)

<sup>10</sup> There is an instance of the coordination of *woman* or *male* in COCA, yet it appears in spoken English and it is corrected by the speaker as *male* or *female*.

(i) (...) I don’t think you need four policemen to arrest one young reporter – woman or male -- male or a female. COCA\_1997\_SPOK\_Ind\_NewsForum.

tively, i.e. it is a premodifier of the head *writers* or *physicians*. The reinterpretation of *woman* as a premodifier, instead of a co-head, in (\*)*woman writers* or (\*)*woman physicians* could result from the treatment of the above-mentioned compounds as equivalents of the phrases *male writers* and *male physicians* which contain attributive adjectives.

## 5. Conclusions

Although the strategy of making languages gender-neutral results in the avoidance of female occupation terms in English, the search in COCA reveals a sizeable number of cases when female-marked forms are used to refer to physicians. They include not only noun phrases containing the attributive adjective *female* (as in *female doctors*), but also compound nouns, such as *woman doctor*, *woman physician* or *lady physician*. The corpus data show that female occupation terms are employed when they stand in overt or implicit contrast to male forms (e.g. *women doctors and male patients*), or when the property of being female is treated as a part of the description of a given person (on a par with some other features, such as youth or physical attractiveness). Although the compounds *woman doctor* and *lady doctor* are synonymous, they carry different connotations in American English: the compound with the lexeme *lady* is often treated as derogatory, as is indicated by selected examples from COCA. Additional web searches suggest that the usage of Sex+Profession compounds with *lady* as the left-hand constituent is different in other varieties of English. This is shown for Indian English, where *lady doctor* is a neutral term, preferred over the compound *woman doctor*.

As far as the place of Sex+Profession English compounds is concerned in cross-linguistic compound typologies, *woman doctor*, *lady doctor* and *woman physician* can be treated as appositional (i.e. coordinate) compounds. This is implied by the semantic paraphrase ‘both X and Y’, which can be employed in their case. Furthermore, the plural form *women doctors* and *women physicians* indicate that both constituents of such compounds are heads. However, for some speakers the left-hand constituent of *woman doctor* or *woman physician* may have the status of a premodifier (rather than a head). This may be due to the juxtaposition of such female-marked compounds with noun phrases containing attributive adjectives (e.g. *male doctors*, *male physicians*). A potential consequence of such a reinterpretation of appositional compounds as attributive compounds is the usage of non-established plural forms *woman physicians* (and *woman writers*), attested in the COCA corpus.

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- GloWbE = Corpus of Global Web-based English. Available at [corpus.byu.edu/glowbe](http://corpus.byu.edu/glowbe)
- Collins English Dictionary. Available at <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english>
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