

Gender Differences in the Perception and Linguistic Description of Physical Appearance

Šoša, Matea

Undergraduate thesis / Završni rad

2020

Degree Grantor / Ustanova koja je dodijelila akademski / stručni stupanj: **Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences / Sveučilište Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku, Filozofski fakultet**

Permanent link / Trajna poveznica: <https://urn.nsk.hr/urn:nbn:hr:142:406300>

Rights / Prava: [In copyright](#)/[Zaštićeno autorskim pravom.](#)

Download date / Datum preuzimanja: **2025-01-14**



Repository / Repozitorij:

[FFOS-repository - Repository of the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences Osijek](#)



Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Dvopredmetni sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i njemačkog
jezika i književnosti

Matea Šoša

Rodne razlike u poimanju i jezičnom opisivanju fizičkog izgleda

Završni rad

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Goran Milić

Osijek, 2020.

Sveučilište J.J. Strossmayera u Osijeku

Filozofski fakultet Osijek

Odsjek za engleski jezik i književnost

Studij: Dvopredmetni sveučilišni studij engleskog jezika i književnosti i
njemačkog jezika i književnosti

Matea Šoša

Rodne razlike u poimanju i jezičnom opisivanju fizičkog izgleda

Završni rad

Znanstveno područje: humanističke znanosti

Znanstveno polje: lingvistika

Znanstvena grana: anglistika

Mentor: doc. dr. sc. Goran Milić

Osijek, 2020.

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language and
Literature and German Language and Literature

Matea Šoša

**Gender Differences in the Perception and Linguistic Description of Physical
Appearance**

Bachelor's Thesis

Supervisor: Goran Milić, PhD

Osijek, 2020

J.J. Strossmayer University of Osijek
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences
Department of English

Study Programme: Double Major BA Study Programme in English Language
and Literature and German Language and Literature

Matea Šoša

**Gender Differences in the Perception and Linguistic Description of Physical
Appearance**

Bachelor's Thesis

Scientific area: humanities

Scientific field: linguistics

Scientific branch: English studies

Supervisor: Goran Milić, PhD

Osijek, 2020

IZJAVA

Izjavljujem s punom materijalnom i moralnom odgovornošću da sam ovaj rad samostalno napravila te da u njemu nema kopiranih ili prepisanih dijelova teksta tuđih radova, a da nisu označeni kao citati s napisanim izvorom odakle su preneseni.

Svojim vlastoručnim potpisom potvrđujem da sam suglasna da Filozofski fakultet Osijek trajno pohrani i javno objavi ovaj moj rad u internetskoj bazi završnih i diplomskih radova knjižnice Filozofskog fakulteta Osijek, knjižnice Sveučilišta Josipa Jurja Strossmayera u Osijeku i Nacionalne i sveučilišne knjižnice u Zagrebu.

U Osijeku, 8. rujna 2020.

Mateja Jošić, 0122226842

Ime i prezime studentice, JMBAG

Table of contents

<u>1</u>	<u>Introduction</u>	8
<u>2</u>	<u>Gender Differences in the Perception of Physical Appearance</u>	9
2.1	<u>Sex Appeal</u>	9
2.2	<u>The Body and Body Shape</u>	10
2.2.1	<u>Terminology of Body Shapes</u>	10
2.2.1.1	<u>Classification of Female Body Sizes</u>	11
2.2.2	<u>Body Shape Stereotypes</u>	12
2.3	<u>Height</u>	13
<u>3</u>	<u>Gender Differences in the Description of Physical Appearance</u>	14
3.1	<u>The Language of Men and the Language of Women</u>	14
3.2	<u>Gender-based Expressions</u>	16
3.2.1	<u>Adjectives</u>	16
<u>4</u>	<u>Research</u>	18
4.1	<u>Methodology</u>	18
4.2	<u>Participants</u>	18
4.3	<u>Questionnaire</u>	18
4.4	<u>Images used in the questionnaire</u>	19
4.5	<u>Results</u>	20
4.5.1	<u>Height</u>	20
4.5.2	<u>Weight</u>	20
4.5.3	<u>Hair</u>	21
4.5.4	<u>Complexion</u>	22
4.5.5	<u>Other Descriptions</u>	22
<u>5</u>	<u>Conclusion</u>	23
	<u>References</u>	24
	<u>Cited sources</u>	24
	<u>Appendix</u>	25

Abstract

Physical appearance has always played a major role in the perception of other people. The very appearance of a person affects the image people can create about them. In addition to the various stereotypes that may arise solely from one's appearance, the linguistic description of the same is also of great importance. This paper analyses the influence of gender in the realm of perceiving, but also describing one's physical appearance. It introduces examples of several studies which showcase how and in what way gender differences are manifested in the perception of others, more precisely their appearance. Upon that follows the analysis of the language men and women use when describing one's physical appearance combined with the analysis of a list of gender-based linguistic terms and expressions. The entire paper is finalized through a questionnaire which brings a firm conclusion on the hypotheses based on gender differences in the perception and description of physical appearance.

Key words: gender, differences, physical appearance, perception and description

1 Introduction

This paper analyses the influence of gender in the realm of perceiving and describing physical appearance. The overall analysis is divided into two main parts. In the first part, the analysis focuses on the gender differences in the perception of the physical appearance. In the second part, the non-verbal aspect is followed by the analysis of gender and its connection to the linguistic description of physical appearance.

The paper starts with the general analysis of previous studies on the perception of several features of physical appearance. It offers insight into the already collected data on how both men and women perceive one another based solely on the factor of physical appearance. The studies mentioned in this paper also bring with them a number of hypotheses that highlight stereotypes and prejudices based solely on appearance. This paper aims to determine how and in what way the perception of external appearance differs between men and women, and tries to examine whether the mentioned stereotypes and prejudices are still active in today's Croatian society.

Alongside that, this paper also discusses the topic of describing physical appearance and aims to show the notion of gender difference when doing so. In order to understand the gender difference in this area, it is necessary to analyze the 'two versions of language'¹, i.e. the language of men and the language of women. In addition, the paper offers an analysis of several examples of linguistic terms and expressions that are argued to be based solely on gender, and are therefore used to describe exclusively one gender.

The end of the paper brings a preliminary study to test the hypotheses and results of previous studies on gender differences in the perception and description of physical appearance.

¹ The term 'two versions of language' refers to the differences between the language of men and the language of women, as analyzed and described by linguist Robin Lakoff in the book *Language and Woman's Place* (1975), which will be further discussed in Section 3.1

2 Gender Differences in the Perception of Physical Appearance

Many studies have been conducted on both men and women and their attraction to a potential mate and how much physical appearance is factored in. The most important factors for our purposes will be presented in the following sections.

2.1 Sex Appeal

When talking about attractiveness, one of the first things that come to mind is the term sex appeal. Simply put together, sex appeal is what a person considers as attractive based on the individual's experiences, attitudes and preferences. The judgment of others' sex appeal is affected by factors such as (1) whether the person is known or a stranger, (2) whether the perceived chances of "success" in a sexual encounter are high or low, and (3) early love experiences (Knapp 1978).

In a 1978 survey, Eakins and Eakins asked heterosexual respondents, including both men and women, on what they first notice, i.e. what they are primarily attracted to, in the opposite sex. The results of the research yielded the following data:

What women notice first:	What men notice first:
(1) overall physique	(1) the breasts
(2) grooming and neatness of appearance	(2) the general body shape
(3) the eyes	(3) the eyes

Table 1. Results of Eakins and Eakins' study (1978) on the attraction towards the opposite sex

Women first put focus on the overall physique of a man, whereas men are primarily drawn to a specific physical asset in females, followed by several other physical characteristics. As the research suggests, both men and women are essentially drawn to the physical features.

It is also said that sex appeal is directly related to dating and marriage. Walster, Aronson, Abrahams, and Rottmann (1966) conducted a study relating attractiveness and dating behavior. Many variables such as race, height, and academic rank were considered, but physical attraction proved to be one of the most important factors. This led to an overall

conclusion that physical attractiveness is just as important for a man as for a woman (Walster et al., 1966).

A number of studies have also supported a *similarity hypothesis* – we tend to like those more who do not distort our own level of attractiveness. In their research, Bailey and Schreiber (1981) concluded that heterosexual college-age students tend to like the opposite-sex person who matches their own level of physical attractiveness. Abel and Kruger (2011) also studied the similarity hypothesis, but in the realm of the homosexual community. The results showed that a partner of the same level of attractiveness was important for gay men, but not as important for lesbian women (Moore et al., 2010).

2.2 The Body and Body Shape

The overall body is also an important determiner in the perception of others. Based solely on the appearance and shape of another person's body, certain prejudices about their character can be made – be they positive or negative.

2.2.1 Terminology of Body Shapes

According to Cortes and Gatti (1965)² there are three main body shape types:

- (1) the endomorph,
- (2) the mesomorph,
- (3) the ectomorph

(1) the endomorphic type tends to gain weight and keep it on; their build is a little wider than an ectomorph or mesomorph, with a thick ribcage, wide hips, and shorter limbs; they are often described as plump, short, and round

(2) the mesomorphic type is considered to be properly proportioned – wide shoulders, a narrow waist, relatively thin joints; they are often described as gaining muscle easily, very athletic, and average in height

(3) the ectomorphic type tends to be thin, and usually struggles to gain weight as either body fat or muscle; this body type is often described as being tall, thin and frail

² More information about Cortes and Gatti's "Terminology of Body Shapes" can be found in the book: *Nonverbal communication: studies and applications* (2010)

To further demonstrate these three main body types take a look at the following three pictures of these male celebrities:



(A)



(B)



(C)

Photo 1. (A), (B), and (C) – (From left to right) Jonah Hill (endomorph), Chris Hemsworth (mesomorph), and Jim Parsons (ectomorph) as representatives of the three body types

2.2.1.1 Classification of Female Body Sizes

Even though the three main body types also apply to women, a more complex classification of the female body shape has been established in the society. This classification of female body types is mainly based on factors such as bust girth, waist girth and hip girth (Jariyapunya and Musilova 2014). Regarding these factors, a categorization into five different body sizes was created: the rectangle, the V-shape, the hourglass shape, the pear, and the apple (shown in Photo 2 from left to right).

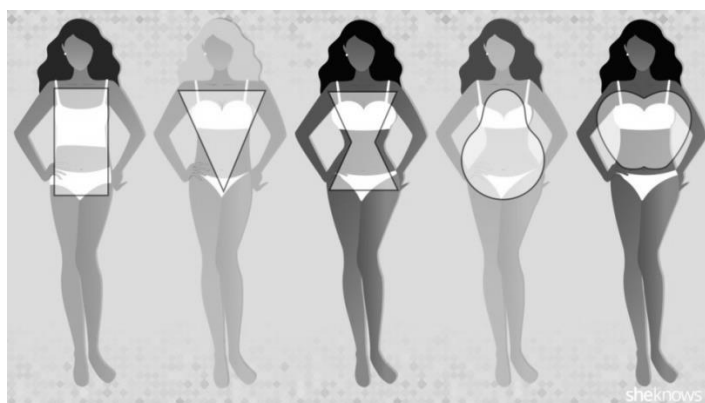


Photo 2. Classification of the five female body sizes

As presented in the picture above, the linguistic expressions used for the description of these body types are pretty much self-explanatory. If a person's waist measurements are about the same as their hip or bust, and the shoulders and hips are about the same width, they have what is called a "banana" or rectangle body type (Scully 2019). The V-shape, also referred to as the inverted triangle, is characterized by shoulders that are broader than the hips, a bigger chest and a small waist which resemble a V-shaped torso. If the hips and bust are nearly equal in size and the waist is well-defined it is called an hourglass shape (Scully 2019). With the shape of a "pear" or simply triangle, the shoulders and bust are narrower than the hips. Persons with this body shape most likely have slim arms and a fairly defined waist (Scully 2019). The so-called "apple" shape is similar to the V-shape in that the person's shoulders and bust are larger than their relatively narrow hips (Scully 2019)³.

It is important to note that some of these terms are also used to describe male body types, e.g. the V-shape which characteristic of a man's physique, but in everyday use these terms are more frequently used for women than for men.

2.2.2 Body Shape Stereotypes

People tend to associate certain personality traits solely on the basis of body shape. Considering the three main body types, each body shape encourages stereotyping by people in interpersonal situations. (Moore et al., 2010).

- 1) The endomorph is perceived to be older, more old-fashioned, lazier, physically weaker, more good-natured, more agreeable and more dependent on others (Lamb, Jackson, Cassiday, and Priest 1993).
- 2) The mesomorph is perceived as self-reliant, strong, better-looking, adventurous, taller, etc. (Lamb et al., 1993).
- 3) The ectomorph is perceived to be younger, nervous, more suspicious of others, pessimistic, and quieter (Lamb et al., 1993).

As can be seen, endomorphs and ectomorphs tend to elicit negative reactions and teasing, whereas mesomorphs receive positive reinforcement and are typically considered to be more attractive.

³ More information on the female body shapes and sizes: <https://www.healthline.com/health/women-body-shapes>

2.3 Height

Alongside the body shape, height seems to be another decisive factor of attractiveness. Not only does the factor of height influence the level of a person's attractiveness, it is also perceived as an important determinant of extroversion, self-esteem, status and power (Moore et al., 2010).

For example, Elman's study (1977) supports the above mentioned theory. In the study (Elman 1977), college students were asked to assign trait ratings for a male college student on the basis of information in an application he purportedly filled out. When the form indicated that the male college student was tall, he was rated as more extroverted and attractive than when it was indicated that he was shorter.

In a study by Lechelt (1975) the correlation between physical height and personal esteem was tested. The results showed that males' ratings of physical height and personal esteem were highly positively correlated, meaning men who were taller rated their self-esteem instantly as higher. This may have come as no surprise, since the expected "norm" for a man is to be essentially taller (Lechelt 1975).

In another study among nursing students, Henley (1977) also concluded that there is a relationship between height and power (Henley 1977). In the study, students were asked to estimate heights of known faculty and student members in their classes. The results of this research showed that the heights of staff members were overestimated, whereas the heights of students were underestimated. Although a better job status may indicate that a man is instantly perceived as taller, Egolf and Corder (1991) determined that males are perceived to be taller than women, regardless of job status (Moore et al., 2010).

3 Gender Differences in the Description of Physical Appearance

Since there are a great number of studies that support gender differences in the perception of other people's appearance, the same gender difference should also be explored in the realm of the linguistic description of it. To understand the gender differences in the description of physical appearance, the overall relationship between language and gender is to be analyzed.

3.1 The Language of Men and the Language of Women

Linguists have long recognized that women and men arrange their words differently. Numerous studies have been conducted to point out the differences between male and female language, but the book that actually started the entire scientific discussion is Robin Lakoff's *Language and Woman's Place*. In her book, Lakoff discusses the similarities, or rather differences, between the language used by men and the language used by women. Lakoff lists various examples and ways in which differences between these two versions of language are manifested. One of the examples being that women are much more likely to use adjectives such as "adorable", "sweet" and "divine", also known as "empty adjectives"⁴. Another characteristic of the language of women is frequent use of euphemisms, and being "unable to speak precisely or to express herself forcefully"⁵. Women are also more likely to make a polite indirect request than issue a straightforward command, eg.: "Would you mind...?" or "Would it be ok if...?". Alongside all the above mentioned examples, women also tend to use less swear words than men. According to Lakoff (1975: 50) "the 'stronger' expletives are reserved for men, and the 'weaker' ones for women".

In less formal spoken context, Cholifah, Heriyanto, and Citraesmana (2013) examined the *expletive attributives*, *empty adjectives*, and *tag questions* used by the two genders in the television series "F.R.I.E.N.D.S". The results of their research showed that there is no clear distinction in the speech between men and women, but rather in the form that they express their feelings – through the usage of different linguistic features. In their study, they found that 'strong' *expletive attributives* are used by both men and women when

⁴ defined by Robin Lakoff as "adjectives that seem devoid of all but a vague positive emotive sense"

⁵ (Lakoff 1975: 47); The authoress also adds that the upbringing of a child and the way in which the child expresses itself from an early age depends on gender and thus has consequences when the child (girls especially) grows up

addressing men. On the other hand, *empty adjectives* are used only by women when addressing either of the two genders, while it is only used by men when communicating with women. What can be concluded from this research is the fact that the same linguistic features are used by both genders, yet the difference in their usage lies in the gender of the addressee.

Likewise, the above mentioned features of the two versions of language can be distinguished in the process of describing the physical appearance of others. In their research, Al Qaisiya (2017)⁶ examined the language used for describing the physical appearance, as an attempt to investigate the relationship between gender differences and the language of description. The study found that the adjectives linked to height were used by both men and women, but only when describing the opposite gender. To be more precise, women used empty adjectives with positive connotation to describe both short and tall individuals, whereas men used adjectives with positive connotation when presented with pictures of tall men/women, but were rather straightforward when describing short individuals, especially other men.

Regarding weight, all of the participants, both male and female, clearly stated the feature of being overweight when presented with pictures of an overweight individual. However, an interesting remark is that adjectives and phrases with negative connotations were used by men to describe another overweight male (such as “fat” or “he has to go on a diet”), whereas neutral adjectives were used to describe the weight of a woman (such as “overweight”). When presented with pictures of underweight individuals, female participants primarily used neutral adjectives to describe the underweight male/female, whilst the majority of male participants would negatively describe the appearance of the underweight individual. Al Qaisiya (2017) added that describing the weight in a neutral way may indicate that the subject of weight is a sensitive issue for women. Consequently, the female participants were more careful with the words they used than the male participants.

Regarding the colour of the hair, Al Qaisiya (2017) found that only female participants were the ones who would point out the colour of the hair. On the other hand, the male participants did not describe the colour of the hair of the two genders at all. This may be linked to the fact that men are said to be able to distinguish between several basic colours,

⁶ More details about the study: Al Qaisiya (2017) “Language and Gender in Describing Physical Appearance“ http://ijllnet.com/journals/Vol_4_No_1_March_2017/7.pdf

whereas women possess a much more elaborate vocabulary in that sphere (Lakoff, 1975 as cited in Al Qaisiya, 2017).

Al Qaisiya (2017) concludes that the language of describing physical appearance is affected by gender and the features to be described. The authoress continues by adding that empty adjectives are found as a characteristic of the descriptive language for both genders in the description of certain features. For example, this study concluded that both males and females use similar descriptions for features such as height, weight and the colour of the eyes. Moreover, the majority of the participants from both genders were more likely to highlight these features on the persons of the opposite gender. For other features, for instance the colour of hair and complexion, women were found to highlight them more accurately than men.⁷ What can be added to this conclusion is that women are also more likely to state their opinion in an excessively polite manner, whereas men tend to express themselves rather straightforward.

3.2 Gender-based Expressions

When describing a person's physical appearance, the gender of the person being described also plays a major role in the English language. Based on a person's gender, certain adjectives and linguistic expressions are used precisely to target the gender difference. Some of these expressions may even have been gender-neutral at first, but over time have become established as expressions associated predominantly with one gender only.

3.2.1 Adjectives

Sometimes in English different adjectives are used to describe the same feature in men and women. For example, regarding weight and body shape, it is common that different adjectives are used to describe the body of a man, and that of a woman. If a woman and man both share the feature of a muscular physique, the adjective *muscular* is much more likely to be used to describe the body of a man, whereas the female body is more likely to be described with adjectives such as *toned*, or *athletic*. This may be linked to the fact, that some traits, such

⁷ As already mentioned above, this goes with Lakoff's assumption that men are said to be able to distinguish between less colours than women

as being strong and muscular, are considered by society as traits that are much more typical of a man than a woman.

Alongside that, oftentimes the same adjective can take two different forms, to purposely highlight gender difference. A popular example of such kind would be the adjective *blond(e)*. This adjective used to describe “pale yellow or golden colour of hair”⁸, usually occurs in two different grammatical forms: *blond* and *blonde*⁹. *Blond* and *blonde* essentially mean the same thing, but the two different grammatical forms are used to express gender difference when describing the hair colour of a man/woman:

He has natural *blond* hair.

Her sister has a mass of *blonde* curls.

Interestingly, *blond(e)* is not the only gendered hair colour. The word *brunette* is actually the feminine form of the same word *brunet*. Like *blond(e)*, these words are French in origin. Technically, a *brunette* is a “brown-haired female” while a *brunet* is a male one. But, this distinction has largely fallen out of fashion, unlike *blond* and *blonde*¹⁰.

There are also adjectives which do not imply an explicit gender, but have become established as adjectives that are strongly associated with only one gender. Rarely do the definitions of such adjectives mention gender at all. Indeed, the adjective would appear to be gender neutral, until a closer look is given to the example sentences offered by dictionaries. For example, you will rarely hear a person describe a man as *pretty*, just as odd as it would be to describe a woman as *handsome*. Both adjectives, *handsome* and *pretty* are actually synonyms which refer to a person’s attractiveness. The main difference between the two adjectives is that each is predominantly used to describe the appearance of either just men (*handsome*), or women (*pretty*).

Therefore, it is clear that gender has a strong impact on the use of certain adjectives and expressions when describing other people’s appearance. The vast majority of the above mentioned adjectives have become a normal part of our speech, which is why we rarely acknowledge this connection between gender and language usage.

⁸ Definition of the adjective *blond(e)* according to the Cambridge Dictionary:

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blonde>

⁹ The adjective *blond* is typically used to describe men with pale/yellow hair, whereas the adj. *blonde* is used to describe women of that same hair colour pattern

¹⁰ Information on the differences between *blond* and *blonde* and words that follow this pattern are taken from the following site: <https://www.dictionary.com/e/blond-vs-blonde/>

4 Research

To finalize the entire paper a preliminary study was conducted with the aim of testing the hypotheses and results of a previous study.

As there is already a vast amount of research and results in the realm of perceiving physical appearance, this following research will put the focus on the linguistic description of the same. This preliminary study is based on the research of Al Qaisiya (2017) with the aim of achieving even more reliable results, as their study was conducted only among twenty people. This preliminary study will use the exact same methodology as the already conducted research, so that its results could be compared with those already collected.

4.1 Methodology

This study is a descriptive qualitative piece of research concerned with the description and the analysis of words and phrases. Thus, the language used for describing the physical appearance would be analyzed in an attempt to investigate the relationship between gender differences and the language of description. Up to this purpose, the data is collected by means of a questionnaire submitted by participants of both genders.¹¹

4.2 Participants

The participants of this study were males and females who ranged in age from 17 to 26 years. There were a total of 80 participants, consisting of 35 males and 45 females.

4.3 Questionnaire

This study was conducted in the form of a questionnaire. Participants in this study were presented with fourteen images of men and women and the main task was to briefly describe the physical appearance of the persons depicted in the presented images. Each of the images used in this study aimed to focus on a specific feature of the physical appearance such as height, weight and body shape. The images used in this study are randomly selected from 'Google Images'. The set of the fourteen images used in this study will be presented in the following section.

¹¹ The methodology of this study will base itself on the already conducted research of Al Qaisiya (2017), so that its results could be compared with those already collected

4.4 Images used in the questionnaire

The following fourteen images were used to conduct this preliminary study:

Image 1



Image 2



Image 3



Image 4



Image 5



Image 6



Image 7



Image 8



Image 9



Image 10



Image 11



Image 12



Image 13



Image 14



As already mentioned in section 4.2, each of these images were aimed to target certain features of the physical appearance. Images 1-4 were aimed to focus on the height of the person presented, whereas Images 5-8 put the focus on weight and body shape of both men and women. The rest of the images, 9-14, aimed to target the description of facial features, as well as skin complexion, hair styles, hair colours and other details.

4.5 Results

4.5.1 Height

Regarding height, the majority of both men and women were more likely to highlight this feature on the opposite gender. Just like in Al Qaisiya's study, the results of this research showed that both genders used empty adjectives when describing the height of the individuals presented in the pictures. Women were more likely to use certain empty adjectives and phrases like "petite", "a model", "[having] long legs" when describing the image of the tall woman, and adjectives such as "cute" and "adorable" when describing the short woman. What can be noted here is that all of the adjectives that women used, whether to describe males or females, had positive connotations. Men, on the other hand, were likely to use empty adjectives with positive connotation to describe other tall men ("strong", "handsome" "manly"), just like both tall and short women. Interestingly enough, when presented with images of a short male, their descriptions were rather straightforward ("short", "short for a man"). To sum up, women used empty adjectives with positive connotation to describe both short and tall individuals, whereas men used adjectives with positive connotation when describing tall men/women and short women, but were rather straightforward when describing short men.

4.5.2 Weight

Regarding weight, 95% of the participants from both genders clearly stated the feature of being overweight in the two pictures of the overweight male and female. In Al Qaisiya's study it was found that adjectives and phrases with negative connotation were used by men to describe another overweight male, whereas neutral adjectives were used to describe the weight of a woman. However, in this study, the majority of men and women were rather careful with their words, and used euphemisms such as "slightly overweight", "bigger size"

and “chubby” when describing the overweight male, and terms such as “curvy” and “plus size” to describe the overweight woman. Alongside that, women also used neutral adjectives when describing underweight individuals, such as “lean” and “slim”. Men on the other hand, were more likely to use empty adjectives with negative connotation such as “tired-looking” and “unhealthy” to point out the issue of weight of the underweight persons. This goes along with Al Qaisiya’s assumption that describing the weight in a neutral way may indicate that the subject of weight is a sensitive issue for women. Consequently, the female participants in both studies were more careful when describing weight of the people presented in the images.

4.5.3 Hair

Regarding the colour of the hair, this study found that almost all female participants (93%) described the colours of the hair, whereas only 20% of the male participants put the focus on hair colour. Interestingly enough, the female participants were more specific when pointing out the hair colour (“dark blond hair”, “ginger hair”, “dyed blonde hair colour”), whereas the males, which mentioned the hair colour, were rather brief with the descriptions (“blond hair”, “brown hair”, “dark hair”). This may be linked to the fact that men are said to be able to distinguish between several basic colours, whereas women possess a much more elaborate vocabulary in that sphere (Lakoff, 1975 as cited in Al Qaisiya, 2017).

Regarding the length of the hair, this study found that neither male of female participants described hair length of the males with short hair. The only picture where both genders indicated the length and style of a man’s hair was on Image 11, where it was described with adjectives such as “long” and “curly”. This may be linked to the fact that it is stereotypically ‘expected’ of men to have short hairstyles, and the reason as to why the majority of the participants did not mention the hair length until it was something ‘unexpected’. Regarding women’s hair, only female participants used adjectives to indicate long hair in a woman (“long, wavy hair”, “long, thick hair”). However, the majority of both male and female participants, almost 90%, indicated that the woman presented in Image 12 had a “short”, “tomboy” or “pixie” haircut. Again, since longer hair is something that is ‘expected’ in women, a shorter hairstyle is more likely to bring attention. What can also be added to the description of hair length and style is that empty adjectives with positive connotation such as “amazing hair” and “beautiful hair” were only used by female participants.

4.5.4 Complexion

Regarding skin complexion, it was found that both males and females described the complexion colour of both genders. The most commonly used adjectives and phrases were “man/woman of colour”, “pale” and “tan”. However, an interesting remark is that only several female participants used adjectives such as “olive” and “mocha” to compliment a person’s skin complexion. This again goes with Lakoff’s assumption that women are able to distinguish between a greater variety of colours than men (Lakoff, 1975 as cited in Al Qaisiya, 2017).

4.5.5 Other Descriptions

This study also found that some of the male and female participants mentioned the eye colour of the individuals presented in the images. However, both male and female participants only highlighted the feature of eye colour when presented with individuals with either green or blue eyes. What is more, both genders were more likely to highlight this feature on the opposite gender.

Another interesting remark is that several participants of both genders described the character of some individuals based solely on their appearance. The majority of assumptions about someone’s character were given under Image 6, where several people indicated that the overweight male “seems nice”¹².

¹² According to Moore et. al (2010), people tend to associate certain stereotypical personality traits solely on the basis of body shape, which is the reason why the endomorph presented in Image 6 is perceived as ‘good-natured’

5 Conclusion

The main aim of this paper was to analyze the influence of gender in the realm of perceiving and describing physical appearance.

Regarding the perception of physical appearance, this paper examined how and in what way gender influences the perception of other people solely on the basis appearance. When discussing attraction towards a potential partner, one of the researches suggested that women first put focus on the overall physique and neatness of a man's appearance, whereas men are primarily drawn to specific physical assets in females. In short, both men and women are shown to be essentially drawn to the physical aspect. But the factor of physical appearance is also argued to play an important role in judging other people. As previous research has shown, both genders easily create stereotypical prejudices about the character of other individuals solely on the basis of appearance. For example, in this paper it was presented that a feature such as body shape can lead to both positive and negative preconceptions about other people. What can be drawn as an overall conclusion is that gender, combined with stereotypes, plays an essential role in the perception of other people.

Regarding the linguistic description of physical appearance, this paper showed that just like in everyday language, gender differences can also be found in the language of description. As shown in the conducted research, the language of describing physical appearance is affected by gender and the features to be described. Empty adjectives are found as a characteristic of the descriptive language for both genders, but the usage of the same showed to be different. For example, the preliminary study concluded that males were more likely to use empty adjectives with positive connotation when describing a tall man, whereas none were used to describe the short man. Women on the other hand were shown to be excessively polite with the usage of empty adjectives and worded their phrases more carefully than men. Moreover, the majority of the participants from both genders were more likely to highlight features such as height and eye colour on the persons of the opposite gender. For other features, for instance hair colour and skin complexion, women were found to highlight them more accurately than men. What is more, women were also more likely to supply longer and more detailed descriptions, whereas men were rather brief with their descriptions.

Overall, it can be concluded that the notion of gender has a huge impact on the perception and description of physical appearance. In some ways, both genders seem to elucidate similar characteristics, but yet again, even in those similarities, certain differences can be noted.

References

Al Qaisiya, F. (2017). Language and Gender in Describing Physical Appearance. *International Journal of Language and Linguistics*. Vol. 4, No. 1. Accessed on July 29 2020.

Cholifah, Y. W., Heriyanto, & Citraresmana, E. (2013). Strong Expletives, Empty Adjectives and Tag Questions Usage as a Gender Marker in a Serial Film "F.R.I.E.N.D.S". *International Journal of Language Learning and Applied Linguistics World* 4, 403-417. Accessed on July 29 2020.

Eakins, B. W., & Eakins, R. G. (1978). *Sex differences in human communication*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin. Accessed on June 14, 2020.

Henley, N. M. (1977). Power, Sex, and Nonverbal Communication. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology*, 1973–1974. Accessed on June 14 2020.

Knapp, M. L. (1978). *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. New York : Holt, Rinehart and Winston. Accessed on June 14 2020.

Jariyapunya, N., Musilova B. (2014). Analysis Of Female Body Measurements In Comparison With International Standard Sizing Systems. *Technical University of Liberec, Czech Republic*. Accessed on June 14 2020.

Lakoff, R. (1973) Language and Woman's Place. *Language in Society*, Vol. 2, No.1, pp. 45-80, <http://WWW.jstor.org/stable/4166707>. Accessed 25 July 2020.

Lechelt, Eugene C. (1975). *Occupational Affiliation and Ratings of Physical Height and Personal Esteem*. *Psychological Reports*, 1975. Accessed on June 14 2020.

Moore, N-J., Hickson, M., Stacks, D. W. (2010). *Nonverbal communication: studies and applications*. New York/Oxford : Oxford University Press. Accessed on June 14 2020.

Walster E., Aronson V., Abrahams D., Rottmann L. (1966). Importance of Physical Attraction in Dating Behavior. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 1966, Vol. 4, No. 5, 508-5. Accessed on June 14 2020.

Google images

Cited sources

<https://www.healthline.com/health/women-body-shapes>

<https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/blonde>

<https://www.dictionary.com/e/blond-vs-blonde/>

<https://forms.gle/m1mLSJ25JWw7LBpaA>

Appendix

Supply a short description (approx. 20 words) of the physical features of the person in Picture No. 'X' *Note for the participants: Focus on what you see and be realistic (describe it using adjectives and phrases you normally would). Don't feel pressured to give "expected descriptions".	Picture No.
	1
	2
	3
	4
	5
	6
	7
	8
	9
	10
	11
	12
	13
	14