

# GENDERED NEOLOGISMS BEYOND SOCIAL MEDIA: THE CURRENT USE OF *MANSPLAINING*

**MARIA SZYMAŃSKA**

University of Lodz, Poland

maria.szymanska@uni.lodz.pl

## **Abstract**

The word *mansplaining*, which is a linguistic blend of *man* and *explaining*, is one of the examples of a trend in the English language of creating *gendered neologisms* – blends and compounds that add an aspect of gender to the meaning of already existing words that originally are gender-neutral (or appear to be). So far, the linguistic research on this phenomenon has focused on analysing them in informal context of social media (see Bridges 2017, Lutzky and Lawson 2019) or crowd-sourced dictionaries (see Foubert and Lemmens 2018). Nonetheless, with the growing popularity, some gendered neologisms, including *mansplaining*, start being used in outside social media, in more formal contexts. This study presents the place of *mansplaining* in the current linguistic landscape through looking at its definitions presented in traditional dictionaries and how it is used outside of social media – in what grammatical forms and in what contexts.

**Keywords:** English, lexical change, mansplaining, gendered neologisms, sociolinguistics, language and gender

## **1. Gendered neologisms: introduction**

*Mansplaining* (the portmanteau of *man* and *explaining*) has been popularised via the Internet. It is not unusual for new words to come into existence on blogs, social media platforms or in comment sections, as the *standard speech* of the Internet is rather informal and invites the use of non-standard communication. Studies show that the individuals who respect linguistic norms in their professional relations still manifest creativity when it comes to language on social media (Napieralski 2014).

*Mansplaining* is one of the examples of creating gendered words, which this article labels as *gendered neologisms*. So far, the linguistic research on this phenomenon has focused on analysing gendered neologisms in informal context of either social media (see Bridges 2017, Lutzky and Lawson 2019) or crowd-sourced dictionaries (see Foubert and Lemmens 2018). It is not surprising because such sources provide data for the use of words that are not yet well-established, in contrast to traditional dictionaries and many corpora, which are not as flexible to

change. For example, it took 11 years since its first recorded use for the word *selfie* to appear in traditional dictionaries (Nguyen, McGillivray & Yasser 2018).

*Mansplaining* is another neologism that has survived the test of time and has been welcomed by editors of dictionaries in the midst of “real words”. It has also made its way into less informal communication and is often used by, e.g., journalists or politicians. As *mansplaining* has stopped being a complete novelty, it seems interesting to see how it is used outside of social media.

First, however, it is important to define gendered neologisms to provide more context for the analysis. The idea behind these linguistic creations is to add an aspect of gender to the meaning of already existing words that originally are gender-neutral, or rather appear to be, because one of the reasons why gendered neologisms are created is that some entities are strongly associated with one gender and, therefore, a new term is needed when using this word with referral to the other gender. For example, the use of such words as *man purse* or *man bun* indicates that purses and hair buns are predominantly seen as female attributes.

Although this article focuses on two genders, male and female, it does not presuppose that these are the only genders that can be discussed. These are simply those to which gendered neologisms refer as social benchmarks for people’s behaviour, as *male* or *female* are often imposed on people based on their potential reproductive function, which brings expectations about their behaviour or social roles.

Gendered neologisms use lexemes such as *man*, *female*, *she*, *he*, *bro*, or *girl* to coin new words from previously gender-neutral ones. The examples of gendered neologisms are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** Examples of gendered neologisms

<b>Signalling male gender</b>			
<i>man</i>	+	<i>explaining</i>	<i>mansplaining</i>
		<i>monologue</i>	<i>manologue</i>
		<i>bag</i>	<i>man bag</i>
		<i>nanny</i>	<i>manny</i>
<i>bro</i>		<i>appropriation</i>	<i>bropropriation</i>
<b>Signalling female gender</b>			
<i>woman</i>	+	<i>manager</i>	<i>womanager</i>
		<i>entrepreneur</i>	<i>womentrepreneur/womantrepreneur</i>
		<i>explaining</i>	<i>womansplaining</i>
<i>female</i>		<i>entrepreneur</i>	<i>fentrepreneur</i>
		<i>inspiration</i>	<i>femspiration</i>
<i>she</i>		<i>CEO</i>	<i>SheEO</i>
<i>girl</i>		<i>boss</i>	<i>girlboss</i>

From a morphological perspective, gendered neologisms are mostly blends and compounds. However, it could be argued that *mansplaining* and gendered neologisms that followed it (e.g., *manspreading*, *maninterrupting*) have given enough ground to see *man* as a productive prefix, similarly to *-gate*, which derives from the Watergate scandal becoming a suffix to names for political scandals, e.g., *Volgagate*, *Winegate*, *Cattlegate*, *Travelgate*, *Whitewatergate* (see Barnhart and Metcalf 1997, Joseph 2017), or *-exit* that started with *Brexit*, which gave rise to such terms as *Megxit* or *Grexit*.

Gendered words are an example of the bidirectional relation because they should not only be considered to be terms describing a new reality to be shared with others but also to be terms allowing to address the social issue of gender, the current depiction of gender in language, and the depiction of the social roles assigned to men and women.

Gendered neologisms reflect the stereotypes regarding male and female. The motivation behind the creation of many gendered neologisms is the ongoing discussion on gender roles in society. For example, the words *SheEO*, *girlboss* or *womentrepreneur* have been created in the spirit of female empowerment – in order to increase visibility of women in executive positions. This strategy of fostering linguistic gender fairness through explicit linguistic inclusion of women into discourse is called *feminisation*, e.g., by using paired forms, grammatically feminine with grammatically masculine, or by using abbreviated forms with slashes or after underscore (Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser 2016). Feminisation has been a recommended strategy for grammatical gender languages, such as Polish, French, or German, however, research shows that increasing women's visibility in language through feminisation can be ineffective in eliminating male bias (see Marcato & Thüne 2002, Koniuszaniec & Blaszkowa 2003, Mucchi-Faina 2005, Formanowicz et al. 2013, Sczesny, Formanowicz & Moser 2016, Lindqvist, Renström & Gustafsson Sendén 2019). Some gender-specific terms were proposed long before the emergence of *SheEO* or *girlboss*, such as *manageress* or *lady doctor*. Those attempts, however, have been rejected due to the aforementioned issues.

Because of the shortcomings of the strategy of language feminisation, another approach has been proposed instead of increasing women's visibility, namely *neutralisation*. Neutralisation is a strategy used to decrease the prominence of the division into feminine and masculine in language. This strategy calls for replacing gender-marked terms by gender-indefinite nouns (e.g., English *policeman* replaced by *police officer*) and is a recommended strategy for genderless languages and natural gender languages (including English).

Nonetheless, gendered neologisms have emerged recommendations and are widely spread, even if they go against the recommended strategy of neutralisation. Their wide use can be motivated by the belief that language not only reflects a change but can also be used to introduce it. Many of neologisms were coined in order to redefine gender roles (e.g., *manny* – man can assume a nurturing role, which is stereotypically attributed to women, *womanager* – woman can, in

professional environment, assume an executive role, which is stereotypically attributed to men) or to fight against sexist behaviours by making them salient (e.g., *mansplaining*, *manspreading*). However, it can be put into question whether such terms help in achieving gender equality or deepen harmful stereotypes regarding gender roles, as they are marked terms. The relation between marked and unmarked can be compared to the relation between figure and ground or between abnormal and normal (Battistella 1990). For example, feminine forms, such as *lady doctor*, are derivatives of man/male standard and are ascribed less prestige.

Gendered neologisms refer to the stereotypical concepts of male and female and the relations between the two genders. The study of Foubert and Lemmens (2018) focus on the man-specific neologisms (in which *mansplaining* can be included) and distinguish four motivations behind the creation of such words:

- (re)appropriation of domains which are typically associated with women (e.g., *man purse* a purse for men)
- reinforcement of differences (e.g., *man cave* a room for men only)
- confirmation of stereotypes (e.g., *man science* a branch of knowledge available to men only)
- naming undesirable male behaviours (e.g., *mansplain* man explaining things to women in a condescending way).

The last group of words is said to be created and used “mainly in attempt to change” (Foubert and Lemmens 2018: 1) the undesirable behaviours stereotypically attributed to men.

Another criterium proposed by the researchers for the taxonomy of gendered neologisms is how *man* in gendered neologisms specifies the male aspect, often in relation to the female (Foubert and Lemmens 2018). *Mansplaining* is categorised within the group of *male explanation*, i.e., neologisms naming a behaviour caused by the fact that the doer of an action is a man.

Giving names to certain concepts carves a space for them in social awareness and allows people to talk about them. This seems to be a common motivation behind creating certain gendered neologisms. For example, sexist behaviours, before named, had not been treated as a serious problem, or emphasising that a position in power is held by a woman is supposed to normalise such situations. However, not all gendered neologisms play their intended role as many of them are marked words, which may be seen as leading to deepening of gender stereotypes and gender division instead of erasing them.

## 2. Analysis

### 2.1. Aim and methodology

As it has been mentioned in the introduction, gendered neologisms are widely used in the discussions on social media platforms, such as Twitter or Facebook. For this reason, they are often analysed in this context. Yet, some of them have gained enough popularity to enter traditional dictionaries and to be used in different environment. The research's aim is to provide insight into how *mansplaining* functions outside of social media.

For this purpose, the four-part analysis has been conducted. The first two steps have been (1) to discover the origins of the word and (2) to verify and compare its definitions presented in dictionaries.

The third step has been (3) to analyse the progress and tendencies regarding its form in the use of the word *mansplain*. For this purpose, the Google Ngram Viewer has been used. The Google Ngram Viewer (also called Google Books Ngram Viewer) is a search engine that uses Google's text corpora to chart the frequencies of use of any string of symbols, or a set of strings, found in printed sources dated between 1500 and 2019 at the time of the analysis (Michel et al. 2010). The tool counts the appearances of the string (i.e., ngram) in books, not by counting books that host a given string. The tool does not, however, lead directly to the dataset, therefore, it does not provide the context in which the word appears.

That is why, in order to perform the fourth step, which is (4) to see how the use of the word, it has been necessary to use a corpus. The corpus chosen for the study is the News on the Web corpus (NOW), which, according to the information provided on the website, contains 12.1 billion words of data with 2.59 billion words of data from the year 2020. The articles in this corpus come from two sources: Bing News and the search on over 1 000 websites to find new articles that may have appeared every day. The corpus has been tracking the frequency of words since 2010. The NOW corpus was created by Mark Davies in 2016 as a response to the problem of corpora not reacting to linguistic change fast enough (Davies 2017). As the corpus is updated every day, it is considered a tool allowing for analysing recent linguistic creations, such as gendered neologisms. Although the search in the corpus has provided material to look at *mansplaining* in context and to describe how it is used.

### 2.2. The origins of *mansplaining*

The astonishing speed with which the neologisms are created and spread on the Internet has made it difficult to track the origins of every word. Nevertheless, the effort has been made to describe the linguistic journey of one of the most well-known gendered neologisms – *mansplain*. As Anne Curzan writes “[e]ach word, in many ways, has its own story to tell, (...) the story of one word may be revealing about more than just that word's meaning and history” (Curzan 2003). Thus, in

order to fully grasp the concept conveyed by the word and conduct an investigation of the word's meaning and usage, it is crucial to refer to its beginnings, even if the history of the word, as in this case, is not a long one.

The origins of the word *mansplain* are often linked to Rebecca Solnit's article "Men Who Explain Things" from April 13, 2008, in which the author describes an encounter with a man at a party, during which the man, upon learning that Solnit had recently published a book, proceeded to tell her about a very relevant book on the same topic. The man explained the journalist what the book was about without realizing that she was its author, even if she and her friend tried to tell him about that fact several times (see Solnit 2012). Helen Lewis writes that Solnit's essay has gained popularity because "so many women recognised an experience they have never been able to vocalise before: having their expertise instantly dismissed because of the lady-shaped package it came in" (Lewis 2014).

Although the author's personal experience of being patronized by a male friend perfectly fits the definition of *mansplain*, Solnit did not use the word explicitly in the article. The earliest recorded mention of the word is dated to May 21, 2008, when it was first used in a comment section of an article titled "Women Who Hate Dean Hating Women Hating... wait" by a LiveJournal<sup>1</sup> user (Merriam-Webster 2018). The comment read

- (1) Oh, gosh, thank you so much for mansplaining this to us!

and triggered a release of a collection of forum profile icons featuring references to *mansplaining*. On the following day, the term was used in a LiveJournal blog post titled "You're Such a Special Little Snowflake, It's a Wonder You Don't Melt in the Laundry Room..." in which the post's author describes an argument she had with another woman in the laundry room (2):

- (2) 'Maybe I'm not explaining myself well,' I swear this woman sounds like she's trying to 'mansplain' something to me, 'people who are doing more than 2 or 3 batches of clothes should leave one washer and dryer free so other people can use the machines'

The word *mansplain* continued to spread among Internet users and in April 2009 it appeared in a crowdsourced online dictionary for slang words and phrases *Urban Dictionary* defined as follows:

- (3) To explain in a patronizing manner, assuming total ignorance on the part of those listening. The mansplainer is often shocked and hurt when their mansplanation is not taken as absolute fact, criticized or even rejected altogether. Named for a behavior commonly exhibited by male newbies on internet forums frequented primarily by women. Often leads to a

---

<sup>1</sup> LiveJournal is a social networking service that allows users to keep a blog, online diary or a journal.

flounce. Either sex can be guilty of mansplaining. (Urban Dictionary 2009)

On February 4, 2011, the same website highlighted it as the Urban Word of the Day. In 2014, Oxford English Dictionary also placed it on the runner-up position for their word of the year (Steinmetz 2014). The word had been gaining more and more popularity up to the point where official dictionaries added it to their collection.

Judith Bridges writes:

*Mansplain* comes from the realities of women consistently feeling they are interrupted by and talked down to by men. Clearly, a shared frustration of women who feel their abilities, voices, and ideas are eclipsed, disregarded – or even stolen and accredited to a man, as described by another gendered portmanteau, *bropropriation* (*bro* + *appropriation*) – has amassed enough cyber voices to collaboratively craft and circulate new vocabulary to describe these experiences and how it shapes women's lives and careers. *Mansplain* and other similar wordplay such as *maninterrupt*, *manspread*, and *manologue* expediently and cleverly compress the meaning of two words into one, providing a label for which these gendered social phenomena can be called. (Bridges 2017: 95)

It functions both as a verb *to mansplain* and as a noun *mansplaining*, and also has its derivatives, such as *mansplainer* denoting the doer of the action. The word *mansplain* has been popularised through the mainstream media and has been used in the context of online discussions about feminism and gender politics until the present day.

It is noteworthy that the word *man* in neologisms such as *mansplaining* carries more than just information about gender — a person who *mansplains* something pertains to a socially privileged group, which motivates his (or her, as it is the case in the example sentence (2)) condescending behaviour.

Interestingly, the root word *-splaining* also made its way into online debates concerning racial relations and identity politics at large through its derivative terms, e.g., *whitesplaining*, *ablesplaining*, *femsplaining/womansplaining*. *Splaining* can be defined as a form of condescension in which a member of a privileged group explains something to a member of a marginalised group, as if the former knew more about it than the latter. Thus, in the context of racial relations, *whitesplaining* would hold a meaning of the act of a Caucasian person explaining to audiences of colour things in a patronizing way, most likely connected to sociopolitical events or the nature of racism.

### 2.3. The meaning of *mansplaining*

The analysis of gendered words and their use in texts and in the metadiscourse about what these words mean in dictionaries can give rise to the considerations on what these words reveal about speakers' attitudes about genders (Curzan 2003). That is why in a linguistic analysis of vocabulary items, it is advisable to consider

both the word's default meaning, which can be understood as its dictionary meaning, abstracted from any context of use, and the meaning(s) that such a word gains when used in an actual utterance.

Merriam-Webster dictionary defines the word *mansplain* as:

- (1) to explain something to a woman in a condescending way that assumes she has no knowledge about the topic (Merriam-Webster 2020)

In Cambridge English Dictionary one can find the following definition:

- (2) to explain something to someone in a way that suggests that they are stupid; used especially when a man explains something to a woman that she already understands (Cambridge English Dictionary 2020)

Macmillan explains that it shows disapproval and is used:

- (3) when a man mansplains something, he explains it to someone, usually a woman, in a way that shows he believes he knows more about it than she does just because he is a man (Macmillan Dictionary 2020)

Other dictionary definitions that can be found are the following:

- (4) (of a man) to explain (something) to a woman in a patronizing or condescending way (Collins English Dictionary 2020)

and

- (5) (of a man) explain (something) to someone, typically a woman, in a manner regarded as condescending or patronizing (Oxford University Press 2020)

The definitions cited above refer to the gender of interlocutors and this was indeed included in the preliminary meaning of the word – that *mansplaining* is an action performed typically by men. Nowadays, however, after the word has been in use for some time, the distinction that this behaviour is typical for men only towards women is not that clear. In other words, the behaviour behind this word is not constrained by sex and therefore is not only used to refer to how men behave.

The dictionaries, however, agree on the word's informal nature and that *mansplaining* does not suit formal context, as it has not yet detached from its origins and is still considered as a word of the internet slang.

As for February 2021, the word has 43 definitions on *Urban Dictionary*, of which the most popular one, i.e., the one that has received the biggest number of votes from the website users, is:



- (6) Essentially when a man assumes a woman (sometimes a man) lacks knowledge in an area where she (or he) is known to be an expert (Urban Dictionary 2021)

The newest definition (6) takes into account the fact that *mansplaining* is not only restricted to gender. It is more about power relations between people, condescending behaviour and lack of acknowledgement of someone's expertise.

The root word of this neologism, namely *-splaining*, also made its way into online debates concerning racial relations and identity politics at large through its derivative terms, e.g., *whitesplaining*, *ablesplaining*, *femsplaining/womansplaining*. *Splaining* can be defined as a form of condescension in which a member of a privileged group explains something to a member of a marginalised group, as if the former knew more about it than the latter. Thus, in the context of racial relations, *whitesplaining* would hold a meaning of the act of a Caucasian person explaining to audiences of colour things in a patronizing way, most likely connected to sociopolitical events or the nature of racism.

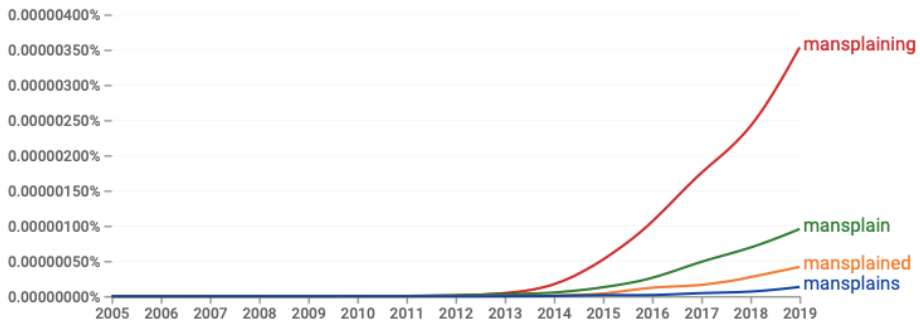
The words *femsplaining* and *womansplaining* have probably been a direct answer to the concept of *mansplaining* and refer to a reversed situation in which it is a woman who mistakenly believes that she knows more about a certain topic and explains to a man the things that he already knows. These words, however, have not been as widely spread as *mansplaining* because the prevailing stereotype is that it is men who are more assertive. Johnson argues that even if possible, "it is psychologically tricky for a woman to mansplain" (Johnson 2020, 3). Moreover, the meanings of *femsplaining* and *womansplaining* are in contrast with the newly gained dimension of *mansplain* as a word which goes beyond describing stereotypical practices of men.

Although the meaning of *mansplain* is typically used by women talking to or about men, its meaning has expanded, and the word can be used in a variety of contexts (Bridges 2017). Men evaluate the word as unnecessary and hostile, but some of them use it to show that they are aware of the problem and want to manage their behaviour (Birdges 2017). On the other hand, women use the word to challenge the stereotype of women knowing less than men. Bridges (2017), who studies the use of *mansplaining* on social media, argues that *mansplaining* plays another social role of prompting reflexive discussions on the topic of the pragmatics of their own and others' language, together with stipulating the discussion on the topic of existence of sexism and normative gender roles. Another study on the use of *mansplaining* on social media is the one focused on its use in a form of a hashtag. This type of use is primarily intended to function as a means of policing gendered behaviour (Lutzky and Lawson 2019).

### 3.4. The use of mansplaining

#### 3.4.1. Progress and tendencies

For this part of the study, the Google Ngram Viewer has been used to analyse the progress and tendencies in the use of the word *mansplain*. The search for *mansplain* and its inflections shows that the most popular form by far is *mansplaining*, with *mansplain* being on the second position, and *mansplained* and *mansplains* being on the third and fourth position consecutively (Figure 1).

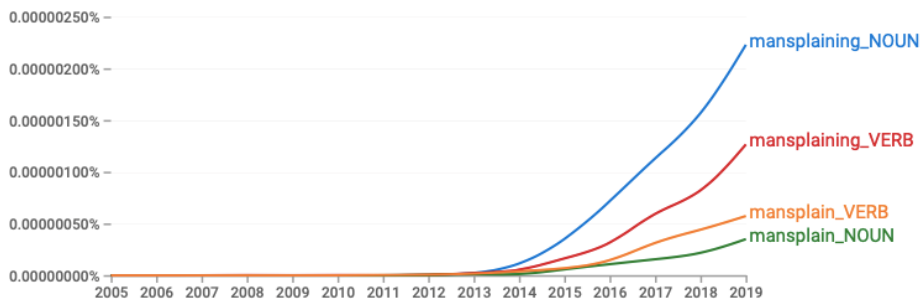


**Figure 1:** The frequency of appearance of the word *mansplain* with its inflected forms.



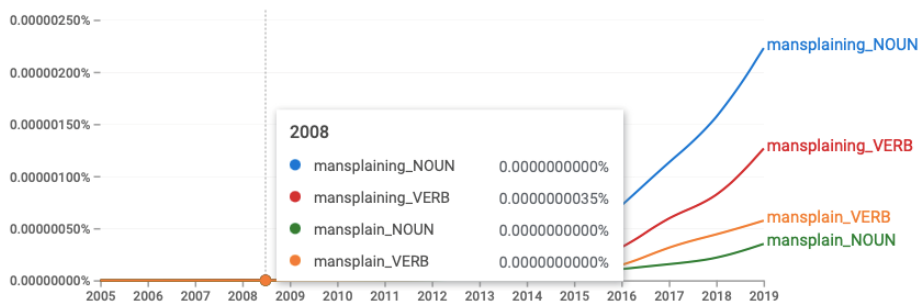
**Figure 2:** The first appearance of the word *mansplaining* in the Google corpora.

The first appearance of the word *mansplaining* was registered in 2008 (Figure 2). The graph also shows that *mansplain* appeared in the corpus later, in 2011. The first use of *mansplained* was recorded two years later, in 2013, and the first use of *mansplains* two years after that, in 2015.



**Figure 3:** The use of *mansplain* and *mansplaining* – part of speech comparison.

There are no records of *mansplain* being used as a different part of speech than a noun or a verb. The graph presented in Fig. 4 shows that the word is more frequently used as a noun than a verb. It is exactly the opposite for *mansplaining* – it is more commonly used as a verb than a noun. From this graph one can also conclude that *mansplaining* was first used in 2008 as a verb (Figure 4).



**Figure 4:** The first use of *mansplaining* - part of speech.

### 3.4.1. Examples of use in the corpus

For the analysis of the use of the word, the corpus has been searched for the word *mansplaining* and its derivatives. In the period from January 2018 to June 2021, *mansplain* appeared in the corpus 185 times, *mansplaining* 837 times, *mansplained* 147 times and *mansplains* 65 times.

After the analysis of the corpus entries, similar conclusions can be drawn regarding the use of all forms of the neologism, unless explicitly stated. The examples are direct quotations from the corpus with the original spelling.

One context in which *mansplain* often appears is discussions on language and new words, e.g.:

- (1) Speaker Bob Wanner cautioned members about using the term. But Wednesday, noting that different circumstances can warrant different rulings, Wanner gave Notley an effective pass. "I would, however, caution all members about characterizing language and their responses such as saying 'mansplain,'" Wanner said. "I also caution members on the tone of their questions."
- (2) Most years, a lot of the fun of Oxford's shortlist comes from portmanteaus, or blend words, like "mansplain" or "broflake." But this year, even the neologisms were a bit downbeat. For every "covidiot" and "Blursday," there was a "twindemic" (the concurrence of two epidemics) and an "infodemic" (an anxiety-arousing explosion of pandemic-related information).

The way in which *mansplain* is used in the examples (1) and (2) can be interpreted as an indication of the word's well-established position in the English language. In the example (1) the word is used in a quotation of what had been said about the word and its use and in the example (2) in the context of new words entering English. Another aspect that supports this claim is that in neither of these examples the meaning of the word is explained. Furthermore, in (2) the word *mansplain* is used as an example of a well-known linguistic blend to add context to the discussion on other, more current, linguistic novelties that appeared during the COVID pandemic.

Nonetheless, the word appears more frequently outside of the metalinguistic context. Using the word is often a form of expressing criticism towards discussed behaviours, sometimes adding an ironic nuance, e.g.:

- (3) Paul Ryan seems genuinely upset that AOC wouldn't let him mansplain being in Congress to her. Probably had to rush straight to his gym to explain to a female bodybuilder how she was lifting incorrectly.
- (4) Because you just tried to mansplain female friendships to the females.
- (5) So he mansplains it to her – domestic life is boring, active parenting is the distracting privilege of the middle class. He reenforces a pressure to

limit the lifestyles a woman can feel comfortable displaying in their careers.

The act of explaining can refer to matters connected to “female domain” - examples (4) and (5), but also to matters that are obvious to the person to which things are explained (3).

It does not mean, however, that the word *mansplain* is strictly gendered, i.e., the act of mansplaining is not only understood as behaviour directed explicitly towards women.

(6) Does the vice president want to mansplain why despite India's growing economy, the country's female labour force participation remains the lowest in the world? While numerous studies have suggested that concerns for personal safety and oppressive social norms are among other causes of decreasing participation, a take on " others " protecting these women should be interesting.

(7) Bauer: “Good to see South Africa has medical experts to mansplain [sic] to the whining political class and WhatsApp group experts.”

As the examples show, the word can be used regardless of gender of the interlocutors. The meaning carried is of explaining something, often in a condescending way, to someone who is well-familiar with the topic.

The word *mansplain* has also been used, although only once within the analysed period, as a noun modifier (8).

(8) On Fox News, pundit Jesse Watters went into full mansplain mode, issuing a condescending lecture about how “the women are not helping their case for equal pay by their behavior” and predicting that people “aren't going to watch” the team if they continue to “disparage the president and... act in unpatriotic ways and then complain about not getting paid equally.”

As shown in the examples (9), (10), (11) and (12) the word is used to describe an omnipresent defect of patriarchal society and is placed within the same category as bullying or sexual harassment (11).

(9) To be held this year on October 7 at the Lalit Ashok Hotel in Bangalore, We The Women, in its own words, is “a participatory, open-to-all, forum for women” that aims to “build an annual space that - in a world of continued mansplaining - will give women a space for unfettered

expression, great conversation, forging bonds, mentoring and networking and ultimately a wide community of friends.”

- (10) And of course, there is a lot of mansplaining as well. Because at the end of the day it is unfortunately a patriarchal society and politics is mostly full of men.
- (11) It is saddening, however, that sexism remains deeply entrenched in what used to be a male-dominated profession. Even if I am equally capable as my male counterparts, I sometimes feel that I need to work doubly hard to get halfway through. I tend to be described by older male colleagues more often as a “pretty lady lawyer” than as a “good lawyer”. I have experienced being “mansplained” and not taken seriously.
- (12) Rachel Thompson, insights director at GfK South Africa comments on the recent Gillette “We Believe” campaign that urges men to be their best and leave behind toxic behaviours like mansplaining, bullying and sexual harassment...

Nonetheless, *mansplaining* is also used regardless of the gender of interlocutors, or the connection of the topic discussed to the matters of female gender, as in the example (13).

- (13) “I’m a Marine Corps grunt. Everything from my military experience is viewed through that lens,” Bell says. “I shouldn’t be the one mansplaining different aspects of military service to other people.”

On the other side of the spectrum, *mansplaining* also appears in texts written by men who do not wish to hear this word being used and find it offensive highly biased against male gender. In the example (14), the speaker feels offended by the use of the word towards his behaviour, but interestingly, because what he had said was not his opinion but the opinion of his female partner (not because he objects to the term itself).

- (14) In an incredibly abusive and slanderous response to my initial mail it was suggested that I was “mansplaining” (despite conveying how my GIRLfriend felt about the matter). If it helps, I can call upon more female takes on what happened.

Such examples as (14) attest the existence of the word in English even though the person does not like the word.

Another context in which the word *mansplaining* appears is the critique of the incorrect use of the word, e.g.:

- (15) None of these interactions seem to have much in common, other than they involve conversations between women and men – and that they’ve been labeled “mansplaining,” despite not actually fitting the original definition of the term, coined out of an essay by feminist writer Rebecca Solnit over a decade ago.
- (16) When Schumer accused Ernst of being “afraid of the NRA,” which opposes closing the loophole, she had “mansplaining” at the ready.
- (17) By accusing him of mansplaining to her, a rape survivor, she had a quick way to emphasize her solidarity with other survivors in the most superficial and duplicitous of terms.

The use of the word is presented by some as a disingenuous strategy to gain advantage in a discussion as a part of loaded language.

Next, looking at collocations in which the word appears frequently can also shed the light on its use. There have been 17 instances in which the word appeared together with *accused of*, as in the example (17). Other verbs that appear with *mansplaining* are, e.g., *suffer* (18) or *endure* (19).

- (18) This is especially true for women, who have suffered from mansplaining, have been subjected to the male gaze, and misrepresentation. Women's bodies and faces, and their general attractiveness, it so seems, has always existed to cater to men.
- (19) And in order to further prove just how prevalent this practice is, "Another Round" co-host Tracy Clayton recently took to Twitter to ask her followers to share the worst examples of mansplaining they've ever endured.

The analysis of the corpus entries containing the word *mansplain* and its forms has unveiled certain patterns of use of this neologism. The contexts in which *mansplaining* is used are principally discussions on sexism in society and labelling specific instances of unwanted behaviour. The neologism appears often in the articles on the world of politics but sometimes also on finance, music industry or law – these domains are ones that are considered male dominated. Initially the word was gendered and referred to female-male power imbalance in discussion, however, there has been a shift in the meaning and the word is starting to be used regardless of gender. Some see the word as a *loaded term* and that it has been “weaponized” by people to gain advantage in conversation.

## 5. Conclusions

The analysis has shown that the most popular form by far is *mansplaining*, more often used as a noun than as a verb, opposite to *mansplain*, which is more commonly used as a verb than as a noun. The results indicate that *mansplaining* is predominantly used in online articles in discussions on sexism in society and labelling specific instances of unwanted behaviour. The neologism appears often in the articles on the world of politics but sometimes also on finance, music industry or law – areas dominated by men.

As for the meaning, *mansplaining* has started as one of the neologisms that describe unwanted (initially considered as typically male) behaviour, a word which has given women the opportunity to describe their experience of patronizing and belittling someone's intelligence due to their gender. From this point of view, it can be compared to the word *sexism*. The question that remains is: is *mansplain* about gender? If we look at women as a group which is generally given less power in patriarchal world than men the answer is: yes. However, it does not mean that in specific cases it will be a woman who patronizes another woman (or a man). Therefore, the meaning of the word *mansplain* in specific cases can be used regardless of gender. The reference to men in this neologism is rather a reference to stereotypical relations between genders, female-male power imbalance in discussion and more privileged position of men in society. Those who oppose such generalisation are offered a gender-neutral linguistic blend *condesplain* (*condescending* + *explaining*), which in more literal way portrays the intended meaning. Although being commonly used, the word (and its use) is still perceived negatively by some – *mansplaining* and other *splaining* words are sometimes accused of being loaded terms used to gain advantage in a discussion.

## References

- Barnhart, D. K. & Metcalf, A. A. (1997). *America in So Many Words: Words That Have Shaped America*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin.
- Battistella, E. (1990). *Markedness: The Evaluative Superstructure of Language*. Albany: SUNY Press.
- Bridges, J. (2017). Gendering metapragmatics in online discourse: "Mansplaining man gonna mansplain...". *Discourse, Context & Media*, 20, 94-102. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.dcm.2017.09.010>
- Cambridge English Dictionary. (2020). Mansplain. In: Cambridge Advanced Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus. Retrieved from <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/pl/dictionary/english/mansplain>
- Collins English Dictionary. (2020). In: Collins English Dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/mansplain>
- Curzan, A. (2003). *Gender Shifts in the History of English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511486913>
- Davies, M. (2017). The new 4.3 billion word NOW corpus, with 4–5 million words of data added every day. In *The 9th International Corpus Linguistics Conference*.



- Formanowicz, M., Bedynska, S., Cislak, A., Braun, F., & Sczesny, S. (2013). Side effects of gender-fair language: how feminine job titles influence the evaluation of female applicants. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 43, 62–71. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.1924>
- Johnson, C. R. (2020). Mansplaining and illocutionary force. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly*, 6(4). Article 3. Retrieved from <https://ojs.lib.uwo.ca/index.php/fpq/article/view/8168/11031>
- Joseph, B. D. (2017). Diachronic Morphology. In: A. Spencer & A. M. Zwicky (eds.), *The Handbook of Morphology*, 349-373. Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781405166348.ch18>
- Koniuszaniec, G., & Blaszkowa, H. (2003). Language and gender in Polish. In: M. Hellinger & H. Bußmann (eds.), *Gender Across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, vol. 3, 259-285. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.11.15kon>
- Lewis, H. (2014, July 4). Mansplainers anonymous: Men explain things to Me by Rebecca Solnit. *New Statesman*. Retrieved from <https://www.newstatesman.com/culture/2014/06/mansplainers-anonymous-men-explain-things-me-rebecca-solnit>
- Lindqvist, A., Renström, E. A., & Gustafsson Sendén, M. (2019). Reducing a Male Bias in Language? Establishing the Efficiency of Three Different Gender-Fair Language Strategies. *Sex Roles*, 81, 109-117. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-0974-9>
- Lutzky, U., & Lawson, R. (2019). Gender Politics and Discourses of #mansplaining, #manspreading, and #maninterruption on Twitter. *Social Media + Society*, 4, 1-12. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2056305119861807>
- Marcato, G., & Thüne, E. M. (2002). Gender and female visibility in Italian. In: M. Hellinger & H. Bußmann (eds.), *Gender Across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*, vol. 2, 187-217. Amsterdam: John Benjamins Publishing Company. <https://doi.org/10.1075/impact.10.14mar>
- Merriam-Webster. (2018). Words we're watching: Mansplaining. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/words-at-play/mansplaining-definition-history>
- Merriam-Webster. (2020). Mansplain. In: Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/mansplain>
- Michel, J.-B. et al. (2010). Quantitative Analysis of Culture Using Millions of Digitized Books. *Science* (Published online ahead of print: 12/16/2010). <https://doi.org/10.1126/science.1199644>
- Mucchi-Faina, A. (2005). Visible or influential? Language reforms and gender (in)equality. *Social Science Information*, 44, 189–215. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0539018405050466>
- Napieralski, A. (2014). Les néologismes anglais sur les réseaux sociaux – analyse des verbes empruntés dans le langage polonais courant. *e-Scripta Romanica*, 1, 17-29. <https://doi.org/10.18778/2392-0718.01.03>
- Nguyen, D., McGillivray, B., & Yasseri, T. (2018). Emo, love and god: making sense of Urban Dictionary, a crowd-sourced online dictionary. *Royal Society Open Science*, 5(5). <https://doi.org/10.1098/rsos.172320>
- Oxford University Press. (2020). In: [lexico.com](https://www.lexico.com/definition/mansplain). Retrieved from <https://www.lexico.com/definition/mansplain>
- Sczesny, S., Formanowicz, M., & Moser, F. (2016). Can gender-fair language reduce gender stereotyping and discrimination?. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 7, online. Retrieved from <https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00025/full#B97> <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2016.00025>
- Solnit, R. (2012, August 20). Men explaining things to me. Guernica. Retrieved <https://www.guernicamag.com/rebecca-solnit-men-explain-things-to-me/>
- Steinmetz, K. (2014). Clickbait, normcore, mansplain: Runners-up for Oxford's word of the year. *Time*. Retrieved from <https://time.com/3590980/clickbait-normcore-mansplain-oxford-word-runners-up/>

- Urban Dictionary. (2009). Mansplain. Retrieved from  
<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=Mansplain&page=2>
- Urban Dictionary. (2021). Mansplain. Retrieved from  
<https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=mansplain>