



Towards a lexicographic account of *GIRL*: forms, meanings and values

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Summary

Lexicography is basically concerned with the meaning and use of words. In recent times, lexicographers have investigated not only the meanings of words in their mutual systemic relations (e.g., synonymy, antonymy, homonymy etc.), but modern lexicographic research has extended its interest into the area of studying the way words are used and, in particular, how lexical associations are used and how various meanings linked to individual lexical items are reflected in the areas of their word-formation; phraseological and paremiological productivity of lexicography is, therefore, directly connected to phraseology because the target of both disciplines is to investigate sets of fixed expressions (idioms, phrasal verbs, etc.) and other types of multi-word lexical units. This paper makes an attempt to make an in-depth lexicographic account of the lexical item *girl* and its productivity, as evidenced in lexicographic sources. Our sample data may provide a starting point for producing an alternative reference work for non-native learners of English.

Keywords

lexicography, historical productivity, bilingual/monolingual dictionaries, lexical units, productivity, evolution

Introduction

It is hardly surprising that the intense contemporary interest in *EFL* teaching has recently fostered the development of a deep concern with language learning tools, and – in particular – lexicographic tools. With little experience in the selection and use of dictionaries, one may be tempted to seize upon voluminous reference works, being under the impression that there exists some correlation between the book size and the language input. Simultaneously, it is apparent that vocabulary-learning tools are immensely varied.

By laying open the recent achievements in *EFL* lexicography and by pointing out the areas where further changes and improvements would be welcome, the present study aims to shed some light on the issue of the way words are used and, in particular, how metaphorical associations build new senses and how various meanings linked to individual lexical items are reflected in word-formation, phraseological and paremiological productivity. Lexicography is, therefore, directly connected with phraseology because the target of both disciplines is to investigate sets of fixed expressions (idioms, phrasal verbs, etc.) and other types of multi-word lexical units. At this point, a few choice remarks would appear pertinent concerning the reason why this particular category plays such an important role. As mentioned by Jackson (1988, p. 176), “[...] language learners, like all users of language, employ language in two functions: decoding [...] and encoding”. Compilers of *EFL* dictionaries declare that special emphasis is placed on aiding the user in encoding correct and natural sentences in the target language (cf. Jackson, 1988, p. 176). Although the field of lexicography has been developing at an unprecedented pace, there still remains the problem of the indispensable requirements that any lexicographical description will have to address if it is to be somehow satisfactory (cf. Łozowski, 2014 and 2015).

This paper makes an attempt to illustrate some of the lexicographic problems that the word history of the English lexical item *girl* may pose.

1. Etymology and semantics of *girl*

When viewed from a purely diachronic perspective, one may speak about 3 lexical manifestations of *GIRL*, namely the nominal form *GIRL 1*, the central sense of which today is “girl, young woman”, and this will be the main target of our semantic and lexicographic enquiry. Secondly, there is the denominal zero-derived verbal form *GIRL 2* that is currently used in the sense “to equip, provide with girls”, and finally one must mention here yet another verbal form *GIRL 3* used in the sense “to thrill, whirl” that has apparently little to do with either female-specific human reference of the nominal form *GIRL 1* or the verbal form *GIRL 2*. To be more precise, in terms of English regional dialects, the usage of the verbal form *GIRL 3* “to thrill, whirl” is largely restricted to northern English, and thus it will be marked with the <REGIONAL LABEL: NORTHERN/SCOTTISH>. The origin of *GIRL 3* goes back to the beginning of the 19th century (1820 Ye hae gart a' my flesh *girrel*, [...] Its no deth it feirs me, but the efter-kum garis my hert *girle*. > 1894 Juist like the threshing mill at Drumsheugh scraiking and *girling* till it's fairly aff). More specifically, it is suggested in the *OED* that the etymology of the verb may have been onomatopoeic, and although there is hardly any direct proof of this hypothesis, one is justified to posit, on somewhat speculative basis, the etymological marking <ORIGIN LABEL: ONOMATOPOEIC>. However, as evidenced by the lexicographic sources of today, the semantics of *GIRL 3* seems to have been subject to the process of alteration, and although *GIRL 3* has generally disappeared from the lexico-semantic system of English, it is evidenced by Warrack's *CSDD* (2000) that in present-day Scottish English the noun *girl/girle* continues to be used in the sense “to tingle, to shrill”.

Let us now pass onto the denominal *GIRL 2* that is obviously etymologically connected with the nominal form *GIRL 1* centrally aimed at in the present account. In present-day English, the verb *to girl* may be used transitively in the sense “to provide with girl/girls,” and – employed in this sense – the verb is first documented in the mid-17th century English (*a1635* Nor hast thou in his nuptiall armes enjoy'd Barren imbraces, but wert *girl'd* and boy'd. > 1959 Gifts ranged from trinkets to Cadillacs, and on to the 'loan of a yacht, liquored, fuelled and *girded*.). The verbal sense discussed here was subject to extensions. One may speak about the development of the specialised sense of the verb that may be defined as “to provide a vessel or another workplace with female staff”, as it were a somewhat conscious and humorous alternative to the verbal form *to man*. In this sense the verb appears for the first time at the end of the 19th century, and the use is evidenced through the 20th century (1886 She oft Quite longs to '*girl* the boats'. > 1990 Both vessels were manned, or rather, boyed and *girded*, by the members of the Canadian Children's Opera Chorus.).¹

GIRL 1 is the nominal form with the central sense “girl, young woman”, and this is – historically speaking – the major sense of the lexical item in question, both in terms of history of the English lexicon, as well as synchronic polysemous status in present-day word-stock. Today, the word is of totally obscure origin, much as it was at the time when Johnson's *DEL* (1785) was published,² hence one is

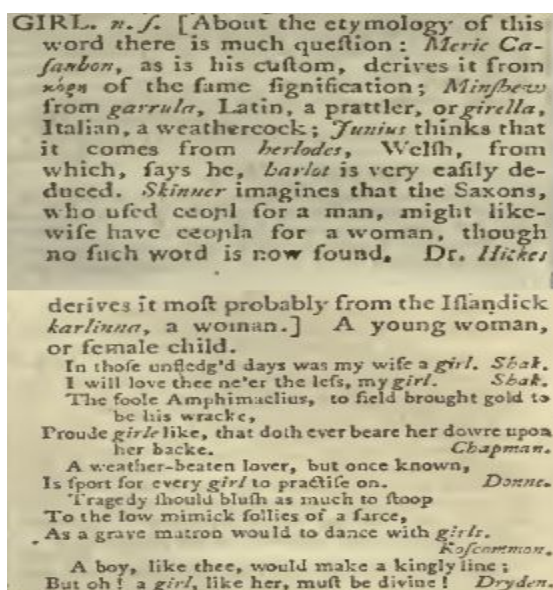
¹ Apart from the senses documented in the *OED*, there is yet another recent usage of the verb *to girl* that is itemized both in Partridge's *DSUE* (1937) and Spears' *SE* (1991). The 18th-20th sense is “to consort with women” or “to make love to women”, although in the former dictionary the sense is described as the one restricted to the Oxford University environment, and hence the use of this sense may be marked with the <STYLISTIC LABEL: UNIVERSITY LINGO>. It seems fairly obvious that this use of the verbal form may be somehow related to the earlier 19th century expression *to go girling* which is evidenced in the sense “to go looking for loose women”.

² The etymological uncertainty of early lexicographers becomes obvious when we consider the number of possible etymological paths given in Johnson's *DEL* (1785):

justified to postulate the label <ORIGIN LABEL: UNCERTAIN>. Obviously, in lexicographic historical research in particular much etymological attention has been dedicated to tracing back the roots of the word. Liberman's *ADEE* (2008) dedicates much space to tracing the origin of the noun, and the discussion offered there may be summarized by the following quote from the dictionary:

Attempts to trace *girl* to an Old English, Old Germanic, or Proto-Indo-European etymon have not yielded convincing results. *Girl* was probably borrowed into Middle English from Low German approximately when it surfaced in texts. In *GIRL I*, there is a diminutive suffix that occurs in many Germanic words that designated children, (young) animals, and all kinds of creatures considered worthless.

Reid's *DEL* (1857) argues in favour of the Latin origin of the word.³ Other more recent etymological dictionaries, such as for example Klein's *CEDEL* (1966), favour the Germanic origin of the word. According to the *OED*, the nominal form *girl* that surfaced in the history of English in the Late Middle English period may continue Anglo-Saxon unattested form **gyrela* (for which the historical equivalent in LG *gære*, "boy, girl" is found).⁴ This theory gets more grounds in view of the fact that indeed – much like in Low German *göre* "a young person" – in some Scottish dialects *girl* means either "a young male" or "a young female." Other lexicographic reference works have little to say on the etymology of the female-specific noun in question. For example, Moser's *WMH* (1986) puts it in a straightforward manner when he says that "Nothing is known of the history of *girl* before its appearance in English, and no



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**Girl, n. (L. *gerula*!) a female child;
a young woman.**

⁴ This theory – though supported by many etymologists – must be taken with a pinch of salt, as the *OED* editors want it because it involves uncertain phonological assumptions, and the late appearance *gürle* in Mid.E. (13th century), while the supposedly corresponding word in Low German is recorded only from the 17th century may make the connection between the two words even more dubious.

clearly related forms exist in any other language.” Weekley’s *EDME* (1921) takes no stand as to the roots of the word, at the same time admitting that the etymology of many human-specific nouns, such as *boy*, *lad*, *lass* lies in obscurity, and – it may be presumed – the Mod.E. meaning of many of them results from “[...] jocular transferred uses of words that had originally different meaning” (cf. Harper’s *OED*, 2001). The only truly etymological remark that is made by the famous etymologist is that the form *girl* is a diminutive form of “[...] some unknown word”. Harper’s *OED* (2001) proposes another etymological link by positing a connection between Mod.E. *girl* and Anglo-Saxon form *gierela* “garment”. Partdridge’s *WOSEDME* (1966) proposes yet another line of etymological speculations in saying that the Mid.E. words *girle/gerle/gurle* may ultimately go back to Celtic roots (cf. Ir *caile* Ga-Ir *cailin* ‘a girl’), although – as an alternative – the author admits that it is far more probable that *girl* is of Germanic origin. Likewise, in Hendrickson’s *FFEWPO* (2008) the track of Celtic ancestry is pursued, as it is suggested that one of the possibilities is to trace the roots of the word in the Anglo-Irish *girlun* and the Irish *cailin/colleen*.

As we have seen there is much controversy as to the origin of the word, yet it is a historical fact that the word is first documented for the Late Middle English period in the sense “a child or young person of either sex”, and – as frequently pointed out in the etymological reference works – the noun was most frequently used in plural (see the *OED* and Room’s *DCM* 1986).⁵ The first attestations of the word in this early sense come from the end of the 13th century, but the historically original sense of the noun seems to have disappeared from the system of English already at the beginning of the Early Modern English period (c 1290 And suybe gret prece of *gurl*es and Men: comen hire al-a-boute. > c 1450 Ne delf þou neuer nose thyrlle With thombe ne fyngur, as zong *gyrle*.). Let us point to the fact that originally the gender distinction between the intended meanings of *girl* was made by means of compounding, and so while *knave girl* was used in the sense “a boy”, the formation *gay girl* was used in the sense “girl, young woman”. Obviously the gender non-specific sense of the noun is not to be heard in present-day English, and hence on is justified in postulating the relevant marking <CURRENCY LABEL: OBSOLETE>.

Interestingly enough, the semantic history of *girl* provides us with an example of what has come to be known as reverse zoosemy which takes place in the case of those lexical items that are originally used with reference to human beings (of whichever gender), and – by the mechanism of metaphor – come later to be associated with animal-specific senses (see, for example, Kleparski 1997, Kiełtyka 2008). By contrast, the phenomenon of regular zoosemy is the process of transfer of those names that are originally associated with variously perceived animals, that – through the process of animal metaphor – come to be secondarily applied with respect to people to encode various qualities of their looks, and/or behaviour and traits of character. And so, while the semantic histories of such lexical items as *mare* and *cow* are typical examples of the mechanism of regular zoosemy, the history of *girl* is a typical case of reverse zoosemy which took place very early at the close of the Early Modern English period when the human-specific *girl* developed the animal-specific sense “a roebuck in its second year” and hence – through the rise of this sense – the noun was associated for a certain period of time with the <FIELD LABEL: ANIMALS>. The evidence of its use in the animal-specific sense is restricted to the period of more or less 250 years (1486 The first yere he [the Roobucke] is a kyde. The secunde yere he is a *gerle*. The thirde yere an hemule. > 1726 *Girle* (among Hunters) a Roe-buck of 2 Years.), and this animal-specific sense of the word is obsolete today and, therefore, it must be marked as <CURRENCY

⁵ Room’s *DCM* (1986) quotes the following passage from the *Prologue* to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (1396), where the noun is used in plural and reference is to young men:

In daunger hadde he at his owne gyse

The yonge girles of the diocyse,

And knew hir counseil, and was al hir reed.

That is: He, [the Summoner, who summoned sinners to court before a church trial] had all the young fellows of the diocese in his power, and not only had all their confidences but advised them what to do.

LABEL: OLD-FASHIONED>, although – as shown by *LED Dictionary* – in present day English the noun may be used with respect to female of an animal, such as dog, cat or horse.⁶

The present-day central sense of the analyzed noun made its first appearance in the first decades of the 16th century when *girl* started to be used in a novel female-specific sense “a female child; a young unmarried woman”. Naturally, from the logical point of view one is entitled to speak here of the process of specialization (narrowing) of meaning, whereby a more general sense “a child or young person of either sex” has to do with the passage of time with respect to the parameter of gender, the phenomenon very frequent in the history of many human-specific nouns in various natural languages. The word is first documented in the novel human-and-female specific sense for the first half of the 16th century, and – with time – this very sense thread acquired the status of central sense of *girl* and has remained such till this day (1530 A *gyrle* [F. garce] havyng lauhyng eyes. > 1894 No *girl* is ever quite good enough to marry any mother's son.). In present-day English, as evidenced by many representative dictionaries of current usage *girl* is frequently used not only with reference to young women, but also – in a very much generalized sense “a woman (irrespective of age)”. Whichever the sense threads we consider as the synchronically central one, subject-wise the noun is marked with <FIELD LABEL: HUMAN BEING>.⁷ As pointed out by Spears' *DASCE* (2000) today many representatives of female kind find this usage objectionable as demeaning to women (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *A bunch of us girls got together for coffee today. // Would you girls care to come over to my house next week?*), and hence one may justifiably speak about postulating here the <USAGE LABEL: DEMEANING/DISAPPROVING> marking.

For the middle of the 17th century one may speak about the rise of two different senses, and – from the logical point of view – one is justified in speaking about the process of further semantic specialization of *girl*. To start with, one has grounds to argue for the rise of socially negatively charged sense of the word which was coupled with the formation of a specialized meaning “a maid servant”, particularly evident in the semantics of the complex formation *girl-of-all-work*. (1668 My wife is upon

⁶ Johnson and Walker's *DEL* (1828) published almost 100 years after the date of the last quotation given in the *OED* (1726) provides evidence that the animal-specific sense “a roebuck in its second year” was no longer in common usage at the time of publication of the dictionary. The relevant fragment of this early lexicographic work reads:

GIRL, (gerl) *n. s.* A young woman, or female child.
GIRLHOOD, (gerl'-hūd) *n. s.* The state of a girl.
GIRLISH, (gerl'-ish) *a.* Suiting a girl; youthful.
GIRLISHLY, (gerl'-ish-lē) *ad.* In a girlish manner.

However, one of the mid-19th century editions of Johnson's *DEL* (1853) still includes the sense “a roebuck in its second year” in the account of the semantics of *girl*.

GIRL. *n. s.* [*karlinna*, Icelandick.] A young woman, or female child. *Shakspeare.* Among sportsmen, a roebuck of two years of age. *Chambers.*

⁷ The rise of this generalized sense is indirectly evidenced by the semantics of the formation *little girls' room* that may be used either in the sense ‘the girls' restroom’ or ‘the women's restroom’ (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *Can you please tell me where the little girls' room is? // Is there an attendant in the little girls' room?* Likewise, one may say that the semantics of the 20th century formation *call-girl* and *working girl* alludes to the generalized sense of *girl* where the noun is evidently age non-specific, and the compound makes reference to any female which is on call as a prostitute (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *The cops dragged in a whole flock of call-girls after the convention*). The semantics of *working girl* is again age non-specific as the compound is used in the sense ‘a whore, especially a streetwalker, as distinguished from a higher-class call-girl’ (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *They call themselves working girls. [...] Their work is a 'business', or even . . . a 'social service' . . . By the prostitute's code, prostitution is moral . . . 'what's immoral is giving it away free, sleeping around with anyone*).

hanging the long chamber, where the *girl* lies, with the sad stuff that was in the best chamber. > 1882, I [a landlady] must look to it myself, for I never yet see a *gurl* I could trust with a hegg. // 1883 A dirty, slipshod *girl-of-all-work* bawled at me from the area.), and hence for this meaning extension one is justified to postulate the value marker <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: SOCIALLY(NEG.)> that marks the effects of social pejoration of the historical sense along the scale proposed in Kleparsi (1990). As pointed out by Mills' WDDW (1989) the use of *girl* for a female employed as a domestic labourer continued into the 20th century when the word came to be applied to any female worker, such as secretary or shop assistant.

For the same historical period of time, one may speak about the rise of a semantically positively coloured sense "a sweetheart, lady-love", and this case of historical sense amelioration that may be marked as <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: AFFECTIONATE/ENDEARING> is documented from the middle of the 17th century till present-day times (1648 Some ask'd how Pearls did grow, and where? Then spoke I to my *Girl*, To part her lips, and shew'd them there The Quarelets of Pearl. > 1952 He even had a *girl*, although he said he wouldn't marry her until he was cleared of the murder charge.), and today it is still the means of addressing one's girlfriend or fiancée that is marked as <STYLISTIC LABEL: INFORMAL>.⁸ Let us point to the fact that, in general, the process of amelioration (the rise of positively loaded sense) is much less frequent than the development of pejoratively loaded senses, and – in particular – it is extremely infrequent in the case of female-specific words. Current historical research provides ample evidence that it is much more frequent for words that are marked as <FEMALE> to undergo the process of degeneration of meaning (on this issue see, for example, Kleparsi 1997, Kochman-Haładaj and Kleparsi 2011).

As pointed out earlier, for the middle of the 17th century one may speak about the rise of socially pejorative sense "maid, female servant", while at the beginning of the 18th century – as shown by the OED material – the semantics of the noun underwent the process of further degeneration, that has traditionally been referred to as moral pejoration with the resultant newly derived sense "a prostitute",⁹ frequently as a part of such collocations as *a girl about/of the town* and *a girl of ease* (1711 I know not whether you have ever heard of the famous *girl* about Town called Kitty: This Creature was my Mistress. > 2001 Every *girl-about-town* knows that accessories are the best way to funk up any outfit.). This pejoratively charged extension in the polysemic growth of *girl* will be marked here as <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: MORALLY(NEG.)>.¹⁰ One observes that the semantics of *girl* is a case of historically relatively dense polysemic structure, with several senses evaluatively charged in many easily conspicuous ways. When we analyse the lexicographic works of current English we come to the conclusion that many of the senses that have been discussed, though by no means all, have survived until present-day stage.¹¹ In none of the dictionaries of current English that have been used for sense

⁸ As part of the process of amelioration Mills' WDDW (1989) points to the fact that in the late 18th century *kind girl* – later abbreviated later to *girl* – was applied with reference to mistresses which, although a step down from the sense "sweetheart" was far less pejoratively loaded than the sense "prostitute". Likewise, since the 19th century *best girl* has been used in the sense "man's fiancée".

⁹ Holder's DE (1995) believes that the sense "prostitute" developed from the earlier meaning "a sweetheart", the hypothesis that has good grounds because a number of endearing terms in the history of English have – with time – shifted in the direction of moral opprobrium.

¹⁰ The existence of the morally loaded sense 'prostitute' is also testified indirectly, for example, through the rise of such idiomatic expressions as *to have been after the girls* which, starting from the 1860s, was used with reference to men who have contracted syphilis or gonorrhea through sexual contact with prostitutes.

¹¹ Apart from the main female-specific historical senses discussed in the foregoing, in the 19th century American colloquial usage there developed the sense "a black woman", the sense that is documented only for the 19th century and deserves a <CURRENCY LABEL: OBSOLETE> in present-day American English (1835 They always address them [sc. the slaves] as "boy" and "*girl*", to all under forty years of age. > 1879 You must remember that all colored women are "*girls*". Also, plural *girls* marked as <STYLISTIC LABEL: COLLOQUIAL> may be used in the sense "all girls

verification do we find the historically documented pejoratively loaded senses “female servant” or the sense “prostitute” which – with regard to the parameter of their frequency – must be marked as bearing <CURRENCY LABEL: OBSOLETE>; however, this does not mean that the senses are not contextually realized in English in day-to-day communication. As we shall see further on many *girl*-based formations are employed in slang register in various sex-related senses. Secondly, we observe that the dictionaries of present-day English that have been used for verification are far from being unanimous with respect to the semantic range of polysemous *girl* in present-day English usage. As the table below shows the dictionaries of current English vary greatly as to the number of senses, less so with respect to the definitions of individual senses. Evidently, the most detailed account of the semantics of the noun is given in LED *Dictionary*.

	MACMILLAN <i>Dictionary</i>	COBUILD <i>Dictionary</i>	LED <i>Dictionary</i>	CALD <i>Dictionary</i>
<i>GIRL 1</i> in dictionaries of current English	1) “a female child” 2) ‘daughter’ 3) “little girl”	1) “a female child” 2) “a daughter” 3) “a young woman” 4) <STYLISTIC LABEL: INFORMAL> “girlfriend”	1) “a female child” 2) “a daughter” 3) <USAGE LABEL: OFFENSIVE> “a woman, especially a young woman” 4) “a girlfriend” 5) <REGIONAL LABEL: AMERICAN> <STYLISTIC LABEL: INFORMAL> “female friend” 6) <CURRENCY LABEL: OLD-FASHIONED> “a young woman who works in a factory, shop, office etc.” 7) <CURRENCY: OLD-FASHIONED> “female of an animal” 8) “female of an animal: dog, cat, horse”	1) “a female child” 2) “a young woman”

2. Word formation and phraseological potential of *girl*

When we delve into the layer of the historically attested *girl*-based formations we must acknowledge a substantial variety of *girl*-based compounds, *of*-phrases and other formations both in British English and American English, but their presence is also found in other regional varieties of English, such as Australian English rhyming slang, where – as shown by Franklyn’s *DRS* (1975) – such rhyme-based formations as *girl and boy* that served to encode the sense “saveloy”, and *girl abductor* used in the sense “bus conductor” were used extensively in the 19th and 20th centuries respectively, and due to their regional character they deserve to be marked accordingly as <REGIONAL LABEL: AUSTRALIAN>. First of all, however, like in the majority of female-specific nouns analyzed in this work, *girl* has been historically relatively productive in the formation of compounds many of which – as shown by the set of examples itemized below – originated during the course of the 19th century, in most of the cases with the noun *girl* as sex indicator, though not always directly in such derivatives as *girlery* used in the sense “brothel” and *girlometer* and *girl catcher* which were colloquial synonyms for the penis that must be marked as <STYLISTIC LABEL: COLLOQUIAL> (see Mills’ *WDWW* 1989). Let us point to the fact that the

together” (1931 It would be terrible if she wanted to be *all-girls-together* with me about him. > 1961 I got her softened up. *Girls-together* stuff.).

semantics of the noun *girlery* “brothel” belongs to the same axiological sphere as the historically evidenced sense “prostitute” that was earlier marked as <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: MORALLY(NEG.)>.

Obviously, it is hardly possible to take into consideration and account for all historically documented formations featuring the noun *girl* as a constitutive element. In the American West 19th century lingo alone, there were numerous words and expressions used with reference to young women, especially those of doubtful morals such as, for example, *crib girl*, *dance-hall girl*, *girl of the night* and *girl of the line* the semantics of which naturally requires <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: MORALLY(NEG.)>. ¹² Many of the complex lexical items with the noun *girl* as a constitutive element surfaced in English during the course of the 20th century, for example the formation *le girls* used collectively in the sense “girls” specifically “chorus girls” (1938 The sceptic rut that places the objects of its curiosity on the level of *Les Girls*). ¹³ Significantly, only very few of the documented compounds go back to the earlier stages of the development of English, such as, for example, the compound *girl-boyes* (1589 **Girle-boyes*, fauouring Ganimede. // 1598 And in my place vpon this regal throne, To set that *girle-boy* wanton Gaueston.). The following set provides a representative sample of 19th-20th century material documented in the *OED*:

19th-20th century *girl*-based complex formations

- girl-bride* (1847 Young Mrs. Rochester—Fairfax Rochester's *girl-bride*.)
- girl widow* (1837 Inflamed to madness by the coquetry of the *girl-widow*.)
- girl-wife* (1857 The young girl-wife who lives there is very lovely.)
- girl-worker* (1895 The girl-workers taking their wages home.)
- girl-friend* (1859 A demure little widow, much more gay and girlish than any of her *girl-friends* when she chose to forsake her rôle.) ¹⁴
- girl-soldier* (1895 To see and listen to the wonderful *girl-soldier* [sc. Joan of Arc].)
- girl-graduate* (1847 Sweet *girl-graduates* in their golden hair.)
- girl-like* (1852 *girl-like* maiden-mother bowed down before the crib.)
- girl-mother* (1861 What art thou whispering lowly to thy babe, O wan *girl-mother*?)
- girl-nature* (1876 Was it no true, he had to admit, that he knew nothing of *girl-nature*?)
- girl-warrior* (1894 Leaders to whom the triumphs of the *girl-warrior* were a reproach.)
- girl-clerk* (1901 No redeeming feature of *girl-clerk* labour.)
- girl- girl-scout* (1909 The *girl-scout* has arrived. This writer saw six of them on Saturday—neat blue serge skirts, straw hats, haversacks, and poles.)
- girl-crazy* (1930 He was *girl crazy*, too, I guess.)
- girl-shy* (1925 He, at once girl-hungry and *girl-shy*, held himself nervously aloof.)

During the course of the 20th century there appeared a few specimens of what one may refer to as quasi-acronymic compounds that result from the combination and joint application of the mechanisms of acronymy and compounding. Chapman's *DAS* (1997) and Rawson's *DED* (1981) provide three examples of such formations, that is *V-girl/Victory girl*, *B-girl* and *D-girl*. The first one enumerated here appeared in American English during the World War 2 wartime, and it was used in the sense “a woman

¹² While the first three formations are self-explanatory the *of-* phrase that reads *girl of the line* is one of the many Western synonyms for *prostitute* who were called so because they did their business in tents lined up in cow towns, mining camps and the like [see Blevins' *DAW* 1993].

¹³ In extended use “women collectively”, frequently considered in the context of their sexual activity or availability *les girls* is used in present-day English.

¹⁴ As shown by Spears *DACE* (2000) in recent times *girlfriend* has developed a new usage as the compound may be used as a term of address between females in the sense “one's female friend” (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *Look, girlfriend, you can't let him treat you like that! // Hey, girlfriend! What's in the bag?* In American sex slang – as shown by Norris' *SASS* (1992) the compound has developed a very much specialized sexually loaded sense; one may say that *girlfriend* has specialized much more as it is used in the sense “male prisoner's sexual partner” or “female's gay male friend”.

with a fatal fondness for military uniforms”, with – by extension – the rise of the generalized sense “an amateur prostitute”. While the etymology of *V-girl* is in no way a bone of contention, the etymological roots of *B-girl* are far from being clear because some historians of English lexicon resources claim that capital *B* stands for *Bar* while others believe that it stands for *bad*. In current English the formation *B-girls* has become one of the synonyms of *prostitute* as it is used with reference to prostitutes or floozies who congregate in bars, where they often receive commissions on the drinks they manage to persuade customers to buy. (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *I seem to meet nothing but B-girls out here* (1941)). As to the nominal formation *D-girl* it is pointed that it is one of the most recent *girl*-based coinages used in the sense “a low-level female employee in a movie or television studio” (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *But every D-girl in Hollywood drove one* (see Dalzell’s *RDMAS* (2009))).

By far, however, compound formations preponderate quantitatively in the 20th century. Ammer’s *AHDI* (1997) lists a number of latest compounds that have made their appearance during the course of the 20th century the oldest of which (1910) is the complex noun *cover girl* used in the sense “an attractive woman whose photograph is featured on a magazine cover”, but also – through the mechanism of metonymy – there developed the sense ‘woman attractive enough to be so featured’ (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *All models hope to be cover girls some day, or She’s gorgeous, a real cover girl. [c. 1910]*). Another 20th century formation is *girl Friday/gal Friday*¹⁵ used in the sense “an efficient and faithful female assistant” (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *I’ll have my girl Friday get the papers together*). Obviously, formally the expression runs a variation of the theme of the earlier compound *man Friday* which was used in the sense “a name for a devoted male servant or assistant”, and – in turn – *man Friday* plays a variation tune on the name *Friday* a name of the character from Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), who became the novel’s main character’s faithful companion. Ammer’s *FFDC* (2006) suggests that some mid-twentieth-century advertising pundit coined *girl Friday/gal Friday* to describe the female clerk-of-all-work, presumably on the assumption that it lent some glamour to a low-level, poorly paid position.¹⁶ Yet another formation is *homegirl* – a term that originated in Black English as a term of address employed in the age non-specific sense “female friend, buddy” (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *She’s my homegirl, and I’d do anything for her*). One of the latest coinages is *party girl* that is used in the sense “a woman who is known to enjoy cocktail parties, dances and similar social activities.”¹⁷ Yet, one of the most intriguing formations the coinage of which was conditioned by the mechanisms of false etymology is *girlcott* which is a feminist alternative used both facetiously and seriously since the 1980s, obviously patterned on *boycott* (see Thorne’s *DCS* (1990)).

What is of special interest is the fact that a great number of recent American slang coinages reflect – in one way or another – the 18th century pejoratively loaded sense “prostitute” in the polysemic structure of *girl* which, as shown by for example Dalzell’s *RDMAS* (2009), is used in several sexually pregnant senses in present-day English slang:

girl

1. “a prostitute” (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *The street is empty except for the fire and us “girls”.*),

¹⁵ The variant form *gal* (as in *gal Friday*), appeared in the late 18th century, and its spelling represented a particular pronunciation of the time (see Chantrell’s *ODWH* (2002)).

¹⁶ In the middle of the 20th century *Friday* was applied to a male servant and then a woman secretary or clerk who works for a man. In turn, the compound *girl Friday* gained currency through being used as the title of a 1940 motion picture starring Cary Grant and Rosalind Russell, *His Girl Friday*. In the 1970s, when affirmative action came to the American labor market, the term fell into disrepute. Today, it tends to be considered condescending and, applied to a woman, sexist.

¹⁷ Ammer *FFDC* (2006) informs us that the use of the formation *party girl* that dates from the first half of the 20th century sometimes, but not always, implies involvement in sexual adventures, either for pay (as a prostitute) or not (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *He had never thought of asking himself what she was, inside of the hard shell of her disguise as the party girl who would go the limit for fun*).

2. "a lesbian" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *But you know, she's got that "back off" thing goin' on so I just assumed that she was one of the girls.*),
3. "a homosexual male, especially an effeminate one" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: a queen US).

In fact, one may say that – apart from *girl* itself that has been used in the sense "prostitute" from the early 18th century through modern times, during the course of the 20th century in American English slang there appeared several compounds that are – in terms of their specialized semantics – extensions of the concept of prostitution, or – to put it differently – they may be said to encode all possible nooks of the love-for-sale trade. The body of complex expressions includes the following 20th century formations (see Dalzell's SS 1989 and Dalzell's RDMAS 2009):

20th century formations: prostitution/sex industry/pornographic industry

1. *girl-girl* used in the sense "a sexual performance involving only women" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *Girl-girl has always been a thriving subgenre in porno.*),
2. *girl thing/girl stuff* "the various hygiene steps taken by a female pornography performer before a sex scene" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *You do your girl thing and then you go out and they start to shoot you.* (Quoting Jill Kelly)),
3. *bottom girl* "the pimp's favorite of the prostitutes working for him" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *It would just keep me too busy, and I wouldn't have the time to be free. That is, unless I had a top-notch bottom girl to check the traps*),
4. *gallery girl* "a woman who makes herself available sexually to professional golfers" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *Now that the fairways are roped off during a tournament, it's a lot harder for the gallery girls to make contact with a golfer*),
5. *girlie bar* "a drinking place at which 'hostesses' are available" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *At first, only the girlie bars let it all hang out*),
6. *house girl* "a prostitute working in a brothel" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *After the call-girls come the house-girls. Houses today are not the elaborate affairs that they used to be.*),
7. *Jelke girl* "a high-price, out-call prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *[T]he Jelke girls bitterly resented everyone who had anything to do with their exposure.*),
8. *joint girl* "a prostitute working in one specific disreputable establishment" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *And I've had what I call "joint girls", and I'm one of the kind of pimps*),
9. *joy girl* "a prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *I knew it had changed a great deal from the days when they had the gatehouse at the entrance and the private police force, and the gambling casino on the lake, and the fifty-dollar joy girls*),
10. *party girl* noun "a prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *Whores are now "call girls," "party girls" or "company girls." Instead of visiting them, they come to see you.*),
11. *percentage girl* "a woman who uses her sexuality to induce customers to buy drinks at a bar" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *B-girl (also called a come-on" or "percentage girl" or "drink rustler") often spends six to seven hours in a bar every evening.*),
12. *pleasure girl* "a prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *The whole state became rough on pleasure girls.*)
13. *pony girl* "an out-call prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *A call girl or "pony girl" is a prostitute who keeps individual dates with her clients at a place selected by mutual consent.*),
14. *sporting girl* "a prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *But have you ever known a pimp to take a barmaid and make a sportin' girl outta her?*),
15. *tea girl* "a quasi-prostitute in a Vietnamese bar" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *A good Saigon tea girl could keep a GI, particularly one not familiar*), with their wiles.)
16. *boom-boom girl* "a prostitute" (VERBAL ILLUSTRATION: *The rest of the day was spent in finding a boom-boom girl*).

When we turn to the phraseology of *girl* we see that – somewhat surprisingly – the noun has in no way been productive in the formation idiomatic expressions, that is to say either fixed collocations or proverbial expressions. To start with, there are very few idioms of comparison and the ones that are most frequently quoted in such authoritative collections of English phraseology as Wilkinson's *TTEM* (2002), Siefiring *ODI* (2004) and Ammer *FFDC* (2006) are *bashful as a girl*, *blush like a schoolgirl* and *like a nigger girl's left tit, neither right nor fair*. Apart from those formations there are a number of idiomatic expressions in which the noun *girl* refers to various types of human beings not necessarily of female species or young age. For example, in the first two idiomatic expressions given below the contextual sense of *girl* is that of gender unspecified "men, people", while in the case of the third idiom the referent is male, and in the last idiomatic expression itemized below the element *dancing girl* is used in the abstract sense "something entertaining" (see Wilkinson's *TTEM* 2002):

1. *diamonds are a girl's best friend* "diamonds are more reliable than men friends",
2. *a girl with cotton stockings never sees a mouse* "people do not publicize things likely to draw attention to their own shortcomings",
3. *big girl's blouse* "weak, effeminate male",
4. *bring on the dancing girls* "let us have something more entertaining than this".

Likewise, when we analyze the contents of those paremiological dictionaries that have been used for reference in this work we see that the noun *girl* has entered a limited number of proverbial expressions one of the earliest of which (1683) is *He that marries a girl, maries woman*. Below, we provide a representative selection of proverbs most of which are currently used in American English (see Mieder's *DAP* 1992):

1. Kissing a girl for the first time is like getting the first olive from a jar; after the first one, they come rolling out.
2. The more the girl runs, the harder the boy chases.
3. Nothing will ruin an interesting intellectual conversation any quicker than the arrival of a pretty girl.
4. A girl with cotton stockings never sees a mouse.
5. Boys will be boys and girls will be girls.
6. Boys seldom make passes at girls who wear glasses.
7. Don't marry a girl who wants strawberries in January.
8. The girl that thinks no man is good enough for her is right, but she's left.
9. The girl who thinks no man is good enough for her may be right, but is now often left.
10. A girl worth kissing is not easily kissed.

This paper lies on the border line of lexicography, lexicology and semantics, and it clearly continues decade-lasting interest and research in the theory and practice of lexicography, in particular in the multitude of questions related to dictionary macrostructure, dictionary typology, the tools that serve the purpose of marking of stylistic and regional peculiarities [see, among others, Włodarczyk-Stachurska (2011, 2012, 2015 a, 2015 b, 2015 c)]. More specifically, we mean to make an attempt to put to work a variety of lexicographic materials in the field of lexico-semantic analysis, both synchronic and diachronic, with the aim of accounting for semantic history and present-day status of the English lexical item that shares the element (+FEMALE) for its metaphorically transferred human-specific senses, that is, the analytical corpus consists of selected lexical items that at various stages of the history of English became associated with what has been termed thematic field FEMALE HUMAN BEING.

Naturally, various forms of lexicographic products found its way into our analysis because while engaging in the analysis of the body of female-specific words used metaphorically we resorted primarily to printed lexicographic works as well as made use of selected electronic lexicographic materials. Last

but not least, frequent reference was made to the dictionaries that are labeled as syntagmatic specialized dictionaries, such as rhyming dictionaries, etymological dictionaries, phraseological dictionaries, dialect dictionaries and dictionaries of slang.¹⁸

We believe that the analysis of the female-specific sample data may provide a starting point for producing an alternative reference work for non-native learners of English. To this end, following various suggestions made in the literature, for example Burkhanov (1998) and the earlier system proposed in Włodarczyk-Stachurska (2011, 2012) a set of information labels has been devised that are meant to determine style, register and attitude that characterize various word applications. Also, we have added new labels that are justified by the nature of the material analyzed.

To start with, in our analysis what has come to be known as attitudinal labels have acquired the form of <USAGE LABEL>, such as, for example, <USAGE LABEL: DEMEANING/DISAPPROVING> or <USAGE LABEL: DISPARAGING/ DEROGATORY>. On the other hand, those pieces of pragmatic information that may be termed stylistic have been formalized here as <STYLISTIC LABEL> with such peculiarities of style as <INFORMAL>, <REGIONAL> or <COLLOQUIAL>. In an attempt to account for this shortcoming we have postulated the category termed <FIELD LABEL> that materialized in individual case studies as, for example, <FIELD LABEL: ANIMALS> or <FIELD LABEL: MILITARY LIFE>. While analyzing language data we resorted to a number of lexicographic works that account mainly for the standard variety of English, but – at the same time – attempt was made to handle dialect differences which is by no means a strong point of the majority of the *EFL* dictionaries, though it seems that dialectal peculiarities are essential in any specialized fully-fledged analysis of any segment of the lexical system. In this work dialect peculiarities acquired the form of such labels, as for example, <REGIONAL LABEL: AUSTRALIAN/SCOTTISH> or <REGIONAL LABEL: AMERICAN>.

Finally, guided by the multitude of analytical works targeted at analyzing the axiological load present in the semantics of language material, such as Kiełtyka (2008), Kochman-Haładyj and Kleparski (2011), we have proposed a system of labels the aim of which is to formalize the evaluative charge present in the semantic content of the nouns analyzed. To this end we have proposed the construct termed here as <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL> which is most frequently realized as <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: SOCIALLY (NEG.)> or <AXIOLOGICAL LABEL: MORALLY (NEG.)>. Obviously, the labeling system that has been used in this work may be developed and refined further. However, it is our belief that such a system may successfully be employed both in language analysis and in the lexicographic theory and practice.

Although we have attempted to offer a number of refinements over the solutions proposed in lexicographic literature, we have ignored a number of points that await further attention and scholarly discussion. Among others, we have failed to develop a solid marking system for various phenomena related to idiomatic expressions and paremiological units. In particular, we have not focused on the semantic relation between idioms and proverbs and the female-specific word *girl* that form the constituents of phraseological units. In other words, we have failed to come up with adequate and justifiable notational devices that would help one formalize the relationship between nominal historical senses of lexical items and the individual phraseological units based on them.

Finally, let us observe that we have made use of a great number lexicographic works from which much illustrative material was borrowed, and this number includes a selected number of *EFL*

¹⁸ Ideally, lexicographic sources should be reinforced and/or complemented with textual evidence as well. As we argue elsewhere [Łozowski and Włodarczyk-Stachurska (2015)], the choice of the object of research affects the range of the data one needs to examine in order to approach the object, and the selection of data determines the object of research. In other words, dictionary-based research and text-based research may produce quite different pictures behind the lexemes in question. In Łozowski and Włodarczyk-Stachurska (2015), we attempt to illustrate this problem in reference to word-histories of *hussy*, *pheasant*, and *maid*, thus fostering the conviction, if not justify the necessity, of including textual data in purely lexicographically-oriented analysis. For some more criticism of systemic lexical lexicography (and semantics), see Łozowski (2014) and (2015).

dictionaries, historical dictionaries, such as the *OED*, dictionaries and collections of idioms and proverbs. It has long become obvious that most frequently one can hardly dissociate linguistic from extralinguistic knowledge, and while analyzing the data it has become fairly clear that such aspects as pragmatics, cultural allusion and encyclopedic information that are present in illustrative material can hardly be ignored. Last but not least, let us stress that our account takes into consideration only a very limited number of nouns that in the history of English have been used in the female-specific sense, and one may expect that the picture would become more complete if one attempted to analyze a larger part of data.

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