

A linguistic approach to women discrimination in state laws: The Irish case

Abstract:

If modernity has provided a number of incredible technical advancements in the domain of gender and social gender representation, they have not succeeded in taking down all the barriers against the rigid social and familial representations of the roles of men and women and, respectively, of husbands and wives. In most societies women are assigned inferior positions, not only in work-related contexts, but also in family contexts. Whether educated or professional, modern women confront stigmata similar to those in the Inquisition, which proves that age-old beliefs stubbornly persist or, worse, are intentionally maintained.

One particular issue concerns the right to an abortion. Outside of the moral implications, which will not be discussed here, certain states criminalise abortion within their legal systems. This paper refers to the special case of Ireland that issued in 2013 a law which forbade women to have abortion unless a medical condition would endanger mother or child's safety. It provides a linguistic analysis of the 'Protection of Life during Pregnancy Bill 2013' issued by the Irish Parliament and signed by the president of the Irish Republic. This study highlights the stand of the lawmakers, the vocabulary they use in referring to mother and foetus, the manner in which the interdictions are expressed, the modal verbs used and the implications of their use, the voice of the verbs and the techniques of backgrounding and foregrounding. All these elements provide precious data as to how women are told by the Irish State what to do with their bodies.

Keywords: *Discrimination; Ireland; Women; Abortion; Ideology.*