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Let her rain, she's snowing pretty good:
The use of feminine pronouns with weather verbs in colloquial English

Laure Gardelle

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Abstract: This article investigates a phenomenon which, though marginal, is important to linguistic theory: the use of feminine pronouns with weather verbs in contemporary colloquial English (e.g. *She's snowing pretty good*). Such uses, mentioned in a few studies only, with examples mostly drawn from fiction, have never been analysed in detail, despite a wide literature on the use of he/she for inanimate reference. The aim of the study is first to get a better understanding of the phenomenon, based on non-fictional utterances. It is shown that the data must be divided into two subsets: cases of anaphora, in which she signals personification, and less referential uses, in which the feminine pronoun emphasizes emotional involvement. This latter set is particularly important for gender research: it confirms that this emotional value of the feminine pronoun, which has been noted for inanimate reference, exists even when there is no clearly identifiable referent. The article then looks into the motivations behind the use of animate pronouns with weather verbs, taking into account the long-standing debate over the status of it in the same contexts in more formal registers. It proposes that in a number of cases in which she does not have a textual antecedent, the pronoun does not have an actual referent, but that owing to three converging factors, a slight degree of referentiality is projected on it.

Keywords: gender, expletive, feminine, personal pronouns, weather verbs

1 Introduction

Studies on gender have shown that in several varieties of English, she and sometimes he can be used to refer to inanimate entities. The phenomenon is alternatively called “animation” (Curme 1931; Pawley 2002; Siemund 2002, Siemund 2008; Wierzbicka 2002), “upgrading” (Mathiot and Roberts 1979) and “individuation” (Pawley 2002). It is to be distinguished from vivid personification, which involves the projection of human traits such as emotions or personality (Curme 1931: 555; Pawley 2002: 114). It is “relatively infrequent in what is commonly called ‘Standard English’ but more common in “certain varieties of English” (Siemund 2008: 2) and part of an “intimate pattern” which differs from the “normative pattern” prescribed by grammars (Mathiot and Roberts 1979). Svartengren (1927: 101) and Curme (1931: 555) describe this use of *she* and *he* as colloquial, Wierzbicka (2002: 143) as non-standard and Siemund (2008: 2) as informal and spoken.¹

Animate pronouns (i.e. masculine or feminine) are recorded not only for clearly identifiable referents but also for unidentified ones. For the latter, the reference sometimes seems to be to “the situation in general”, as in *She's fine* or *She's cool* (meaning “It doesn't matter”, Mathiot and Roberts 1979: 38) or *Whoop her up* (close to “Make things lively”, Svartengren 1928: 97). In other contexts, which are the focus of the present study, the feminine pronoun is used with a weather verb, as in (1):

¹ The notion of “standard English” is notoriously difficult to define and its existence is sometimes questioned (e.g. Bex and Watts 1999). The use of she with weather verbs can be regarded as colloquial, possibly as non-standard: it is not licensed by grammars and seems restricted to a minority of speakers.

(1) We decided to get under the wagon but it was no drier there than in the wagon with the endgate out and the wheels on the front onto two planks of wood. So we tied the tarp over the wagon box and kept the little ones dry and us olders sat under the wagon and let **her** rain. And it did, zowie, what a rain, but only wind and rain. So soon as it let up so we felt we could stir, we left. [boldface mine, as in all examples] (Autobiography, Bayer Krenz 2007: 53)

This use of animate pronouns with weather verbs deserves a specific study, not only because (to our knowledge) none exists to date but also because it raises a major theoretical question. The subjects of weather verbs² in English (e.g. *it* in *it rains*) are predominantly (though not unanimously) analysed as expletives,³ as they are for a number of other languages (e.g. French *il* in *il pleut*); in general linguistics, the pattern [SUBJECT+WEATHER VERB] is ranked among “impersonal constructions” (e.g. Malchukov and Siewierska 2011: 24). Instantiating the subject with a personal pronoun is regarded as one way for languages that require a subject with conjugated verbs - “configurational languages”⁴ - to solve a conflict between syntax and cognition: syntax imposes a [SUBJECT+VERB] pattern, while from a cognitive point of view, weather verbs make it difficult to isolate an event denoted by the verb phrase (e.g. *rain*) as well as a participant referred to by the subject (Creissels 2006: 328; Eriksen et al. 2010: 565).⁵ Yet, animate pronouns cannot be described as expletives: they are never found, in any variety of English, in expletive uses, for instance as syntactic subjects in extraposed or cleft constructions (e.g. **She’s a shame that we’ve lost the art of letter-writing*) (Gardelle 2006: 209; Siemund 2008: 28). Why, then, use animate pronouns?

The aim of the present article is twofold. First of all, it seeks to obtain a better understanding of the use of animate pronouns with weather verbs. Can all the occurrences be treated homogeneously and is the reason for the use of *she* the same as when it is used for a clearly identifiable object, e.g. a car or a prized tool? Second, the article looks for motivations behind the use of animate pronouns with weather verbs and discusses them in the light of the arguments given in the long-standing theoretical debate over the status of it in the same contexts in more formal registers.

The study focuses on weather verbs, to the exclusion of [BE + ADJECTIVE] predicates denoting weather conditions (e.g. *be windy*, *be cold*). Although *she* is attested with these as well, event composition is different: [BE + ADJECTIVE] predicates are stative (while weather verbs are dynamic), and they license full noun phrases (NPs) as subjects in standard English (e.g. *This place is windy*), which is not the case for weather verbs (e.g. **This place is raining*). [BE + ADJECTIVE] predicates would therefore require a separate study.

Section 2 gives an overview of existing analyses of animate pronouns used with weather verbs and, more generally, with inanimate reference. Sections 3 and 4 then present the methodology chosen for the study and the resulting data. They show that two subsets of feminine pronouns must be distinguished: those that have and those that do not have a textual antecedent. These subsets are studied separately (Sections 5 and 6) and shown to have largely different characteristics, motivations and degrees of referentiality. The last section focuses on feminine pronouns that are not clearly

² When the weather verbs are used literally, as opposed to metaphorical uses (e.g. *When the sky rained bombs*).

³ An expletive is defined as a pronoun with no semantic interpretation in its use and, in the case of personal pronouns, without an interpretable gender feature (Radford 2004: 295).

⁴ It has been suggested that expletives are confined to configurational languages. Consequently weather verbs used without subjects are much more common in the world’s languages than configurations with expletives (Bauer 2000: 100). Note that in Old English, the pronoun could be omitted for both *rignan* (rain) and *sniwan* (snow), especially in poetry (Ogura 1986: 42).

⁵ For more details, see for instance Malchukov and Siewierska (2011).

referential to propose a hypothesis as to why the pronoun can still carry an interpretable gender feature.

2 Animate pronouns for inanimate referents: existing accounts

To our knowledge, only four studies specifically mention the use of animate pronouns with weather verbs. The earliest is Svartengren (1927: 100), which cites the following two occurrences by male speakers, collected in dialogues in American fiction:

(2) “**She**’s going to rain,” said old J.H. “The air is kind o’ holler.” (Stewart E. White, *Blazed Trail*, 1902)

(3) “Such snow! [...] Let **her** snow, an’ the reindeer will migrate.” (Zane Grey, *Last of the Plainsmen*, 1908)

Gardelle (2006: 490) mentions another three occurrences, again in American fiction and by male speakers (two of *Let’er rain* and one of *She’s going to rain*). As for non-fictional utterances, Wierzbicka (2002: 166) mentions that *she* is possible in Australian English, and Wagner (2003: 209, 2005: 313) notes uses of *he* for “the weather in general” in the dialect of Southwest England, as in *if i: idn tʃɪnən* ‘if he isn’ t raining’ or *i: wəz wɛt bʌd ə klɪə:dʒ ʌp æ:də: dɪnə:* ‘He was wet but he cleared up after dinner’.

In all four works, *he* or *she* used with weather verbs are found not to have clearly identifiable referents, and gender is accounted for along the same lines as when the pronouns refer to inanimate entities (e.g. a tool). This section therefore now turns to accounts of the use of *he* and *she* for inanimate reference in general. It is well recorded in dialectology (e.g. Marshall 1789; Barnes 1863; Elworthy 1877; Wakelin 1975, Wakelin 1986; Ihalainen 1985; Wagner 2003, Wagner 2005) and has also been studied specifically for American English (Svartengren 1927, Svartengren 1928, Svartengren 1954; Mathiot and Roberts 1979), Canadian English (Morris 1991, Morris 1997, Morris 2000) and Tasmanian Vernacular English (Pawley 2002; Wierzbicka 2002). Moreover, it is mentioned in a number of grammars, for instance Curme (1931), Quirk et al. (1972), Biber et al. (1999), and Huddleston and Pullum (2002).

The dialect of Southwest England stands out as an exception among varieties of English, for two reasons: among animate pronouns (masculine/feminine), the preferred one for inanimate reference is *he* rather than *she*; and regarding the contrast between *he/she* and *it*, down to the twentieth century the cut-off point used to follow the basic count/mass distinction⁶ (see Marshall 1789 for Gloucestershire, Elworthy 1877 for Somerset and Barnes 1863 for Dorset). For instance, a book was referred to with the masculine pronoun (and not the neuter, because it is a countable entity), as opposed to wheat (a mass, therefore referred to with the neuter pronoun). Late twentieth-century and early twenty-first-century studies (Wakelin 1975, 1986; Ihalainen 1985; Wagner 2003, 2005), however, show that *it* and *she* are now sometimes found with count nouns as well (though not as frequently as in standard English). The masculine still prevails, hence occurrences of *he* (and none of *she*) with weather verbs, such as *if he’s raining* mentioned above. But as it is now part of the system for inanimate reference, Wagner (2003: 209) concludes that the masculine with weather verbs might be motivated by emotive factors: the utterances she collected mainly concern bad weather to which the speaker is exposed.

⁶ Newfoundland Vernacular English, because it was largely shaped by immigrants from Southwest England, also follows the count (*he/she*) / mass (*it*) distinction. Paddock (1991: 33) describes an additional division into / + mobile/ (*she*) vs. /-mobile/ (*he*) elements; Wagner (2003: 29) suggests that this might reflect an influence of standard English on the inherited Southwest pattern rather than an innovation.

In other varieties of English, she is found to be much more common than he. The use of an animate pronoun is related to individuation and to « speaker attitudes and involvement» (Curzan 2003: 29).⁷ For instance, among grammarians, Curme (1931: 555) ascribes this use to “moments of vivid feeling” in “colloquial speech”. He notes that in American English she is preferred to he, which is now very uncommon except in “quaint dialect where older usage is still preserved”. Quirk et al. (1972: 191) see in the use of animate pronouns the mark of “an affectionate attitude” towards referents viewed as “higher organisms”.

For Biber et al. (1999: 317), “[p]ersonal reference expresses greater familiarity or involvement” while non-personal reference is “more detached”. Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 488) describe the use of she (they do not mention he with inanimates) as personification, with “considerable variation among speakers”.

As regards studies of gender in one given variety of English, Morris (2000: 194) defines the use of animate pronouns in Canadian English as “otherness-insameness”: when moving a table, for instance, one speaker is recorded saying Swing her over! because the referent “stands out from other experiences by virtue of its salience (otherness), probably attributable to all of the attention focused on the table during the move”. With an animate pronoun, the speaker attributes “a certain uniqueness or particular identity” to the object (1997: 160).

For Morris, she is then preferred to he when the referent’s behaviour is viewed as predictable. When the pronoun has no clearly identifiable referent, only feminine pronouns (as opposed to masculine) are found. The pronoun is then very often part of a short imperative, such as *Let ’er rip*, where it has an “attenuating effect” compared to it, which would convey an order.

For American English, Svartengren (1927: 109) concludes from his extensive data collected in works of fiction that “she (her) does not so much mark the gender of a more or less fanciful personification - though there are more than traces of such a thing - as denote the object of an emotion”. The feminine marks an “emotional interest” which corresponds to a kind of “attenuated and sublimated sexuality”, not because the referents are womanlike, but because they “take a man’s fancy, in one way or other” (1927: 110). Indeed, he finds most occurrences of the feminine for inanimates in male speech. Also drawing on data from American English, Mathiot and Roberts (1979: 38) describe the use of an animate pronoun as the result of an “upgrading” process. They also record *she* for “the weather in general”, as in *She’s blowing hard out there*.⁸ Unlike Svartengren, they consider that *she* is preferred to he when the referent corresponds to men’s representation of women, because the intimate pattern originated in male speech. Women are regarded either as beautiful, objects to be won and treasured, rewards, sources of pride and sensual pleasure, decorative creatures or, conversely, as incompetent (because they are emotional), weak, lacking intelligence or as a challenge to manhood.

Finally, for Tasmanian Vernacular English, an animate gender might be used for “any referent that becomes a focus of interest” (Pawley 2002: 114). It signals informality and intimacy and implies a high degree of salience of the referent, whether inherent or discourse built (e.g. topic status). As for the choice between *he* and *she*, plants, for instance, are associated with he, while “elements of the inanimate landscape” are always feminine when animated; Pawley records (of the wind) *She’s a bit keen today. Should’ve brung me fur coat* / (of a storm) *She made a mess of that crop*. Pawley initially interpreted the feminine as the trace of “(emotional) attachment (or involvement)” (2002: 123), but

⁷ Stenroos (2008: 464-467) shows that individuation was already a major factor in the reorganization of the gender system from Old English to Middle English, at least in the Southwest Midlands.

⁸ They do not provide examples with weather verbs as such (see the list in Section 3).

following objections by Wierzbicka (2002: 153), to whom the feminine reflects the idea of “being able to do something with an object” (just as women can be seen by men as potential sex objects), he concludes that neither hypothesis works for all occurrences.

Two generalizations can be drawn from this overview. First, as noted by Siemund (2008: 3), “pronominal gender in English crucially depends on the degree of individuation of the entities referred to”. Based on Sasse (1993: 659), he proposes a continuum of individuality along the following categories:⁹

proper names > humans > animals > inanimate tangible objects > abstracts > mass nouns

Different varieties will place the cut-off point between animate genders and the neuter at a different point on the continuum, but the entities to the left of that point, which are more individuated, are the only ones which can be associated with animate genders.

The second generalization, summed up by Wagner (2005: 274), concerns the choice of she over he: “In everyday, casual spoken English, possibly world-wide, the pronoun of choice when referring to an inanimate noun and wishing to add extra information is (and, as Svartengren’s studies indicate, has been for some time) a form of she. Mostly, this ‘extra’ has been identified as some sort of emotional information, either positive or negative”. As we have seen, one exception is Southwest English, which has he instead, initially with all count nouns.

The question to be answered in this study, therefore, is whether on close examination, individuation and “extra” information, possibly in the form of emotional involvement, are also significant for the subjects of weather verbs in contemporary English. The study is based on a set of non-fictional data, which are more certain to be authentic than data from fiction: in fiction, one cannot be sure that the occurrences reflect the author’s own gender system. The writer might simply have noticed such uses in the colloquial or non-standard speech of others (e.g. of plainmen for (3)) and projected in the novels his/her own understanding of those speakers’ gender system, which might, but also might not, be accurate. The focus is on contemporary English and, as he appears to be a characteristic of the dialect of Southwest England only, on feminine pronouns.

3 Data collection

The verbs selected for the study were the seven weather verbs listed by Sinclair (1992: 412): *drizzle*, *hail*, *pour*, *rain*, *sleet*, *snow* and *thunder*. The data collection process was a difficult one. The first step consisted in searching two electronic corpora of single varieties of English: the whole of the British National Corpus (BNC), whose spoken part (10%) includes informal conversations, and the Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), which includes a wide range of genres, although its spoken section contains very little colloquial English (January 2012). The search was also extended to two electronic corpora which do not focus on a single variety of English: BYU Google Books and GloWbe, the Corpus of Global Web-Based English (see Davies 2004, Davies 2008, Davies 2011, and Davies 2013).

Queries were entered using all the possible combinations of tenses and aspects. The list of basic strings is given in Table 1, exemplified for *rain*:

Table 1: Basic strings used for the corpus search – exemplified for *rain*.

⁹ This is a simplified version of the continuum; for more details, see Siemund (2008: 3).

she rains she'd been raining / had been raining
she's raining / is raining she'll rain / will rain
she rained she'll be raining / will be raining
she was raining she won't rain / will not rain
she's rained / has rained she won't be raining / will not be raining
she's been raining / has been raining let her rain
she'd rained / had rained

Additional searches were then carried out using those strings in the negative form (e.g. she doesn't rain / does not rain, she's not raining / is not raining and so on) and with auxiliary / subject inversion (e.g. does she rain). Verbal operators were also inserted: modals (for instance, for must: she must have rained / she must have been raining / she must be raining), be going to (she is going to rain, she was going to rain) and be about to (she is about to rain, she was about to rain).

Neither the BNC nor the COCA returned any hits for weather descriptions, confirming that the phenomenon is a marginal one. Google Books yielded 14 occurrences, all of them in American English and with the verb rain (9 of she rains, 4 of let her rain and 1 of she's rained), but only 1 relevant for the study - 11 were in fictional texts and 2 dated back to 1919 and 1920. GloWbe returned a single occurrence, again with rain, registered as Singapore English:

(4) My guys will speed their way to you every time – but please people, keep in mind Singapore traffic jams can be like car parks and when she rains, she pours!!! So try to be easy-going if we are a little late and about things that I can't control! (Restaurant website; <http://www.thebigsheila.com/AboutUs/ordersteps>; accessed on 24 January 2012; URL no longer valid)

Given the dearth of data, obviously related to the fact that such uses are uncommon, it was decided to carry out the same search on Google (January 2012). This returned 95 hits, 7 of which were discarded because they dated back to 1955 or earlier. In all, 88 Google attestations were retained, all from 2000 or later. At least three objections could be raised to using Google for a linguistic study.¹⁰ First, there is no guarantee that the utterances are from native English speakers. However, not a single visibly foreign utterance was found, perhaps because feminine pronouns are apparently not used with weather verbs in other languages (Creissels 2006; Malchukov and Siewierska 2011). Second, Google does not provide a balanced set of data. This does prevent statistical analyses, but it does not make the data collected less valuable; indeed, it is the particularly high number of blogs, forums and Tweets on Google (over 96% of the occurrences, see Table 4) that made collecting these occurrences possible. Third, 88 hits is a very small number compared with the massive data accessible via Google, so that they could easily be discarded as “accidents” if the phenomenon had not been noted in the literature and in works of fiction. Admittedly, a higher number of occurrences taken from a balanced corpus (allowing for quantitative analyses and replicability of the study) would have been preferable, but due to the restriction to informal English and, as shown later, to contexts of emotional involvement or personification, even existing fieldwork on gender (Mathiot and Roberts 1979; Survey of English

¹⁰ Kilgarriff (2007) adds that Google is not reliable for exact frequency counts as the search is not always sent to the same computers; that the number of authorized queries per day is also limited, as is the search syntax, and that there is no lemmatization; finally, that there might be a bias in the order in which the hits appear. For the present study, however, these objections do not make the data less reliable. All the URLs were consulted and each of them was checked individually in order to remove any irrelevant occurrences, such as *She rains on my parade*, which does not describe the weather. Furthermore, lemmatization did not prove necessary since the whole set of search strings had been previously itemized, and the overall number of queries did not exceed the number authorized by Google.

Dialects (see Wagner 2003, Wagner 2005)), though extensive, only yielded a couple of weather descriptions with animate pronouns - and not even always with weather verbs. With this in mind, therefore, the data gathered here via Google, despite their limitations, offer a valuable insight into the use of animate pronouns with weather verbs - all the more so as the occurrences present converging characteristics. They allow for a study (to our knowledge, the first of its kind) specifically devoted to the use of *she* with weather verbs. Although such uses have been mentioned in passing in the literature, a specific study can provide a better understanding of the English gender system. Analyses are based on a total of 90 authentic occurrences: 88 from Google, 1 from Google Books (see (1)) and 1 from GloWbe (see (4)).

4 Overview of the data

Although the search was carried out for the seven weather verbs listed by Sinclair (1990), the only two verbs for which it returned hits are *rain* and *snow*. Twenty-one of the 90 occurrences of *she* have a textual antecedent (e.g. (5)), and 69 do not (e.g. (6)):

(5) The Hope Lions and Lady Lions swept a basketball doubleheader from Centre Friday night with the Hope girls pulling out a 33–30 victory and the Hope Lions finishing the night with a 51–38 victory. [...] Hope was scheduled to play host to Elyria Christian on Tuesday, Jan. 11, but Mother Nature had other ideas as she snowed on Kansas and the games have been rescheduled for Jan. 31. (Press article, 2011 http://articles.catchitkansas.com/2011-01-17/hope-girls_27034352; accessed on 5 January 2012)

(6) Let it snow... Well its late and I just found out the reason dating sites are profitable. Ah but I don't need that unless I have the money and I don't have the patience for that. And who would want to pay to talk to someone when you can do that free anyway. Well she's snowing heavy out a lot of snow means good skiing for me. Well Im going back to the jungle aka the real world.¹¹ (Blog "Daily life for a guy with a purpose", 2006; http://underdoglem.blogspot.fr/2006_02_01_archive.html; accessed on 5 January 2012; reproduced with the typos)

As shown in (6), speakers may alternate between a feminine and a neuter pronoun in the same document (Let it snow / she's snowing). This alternation was found 10 times in the corpus (always without textual antecedents), which suggests that for these speakers at least, the feminine pronoun is the result of a meaningful choice.

More specifically, the data break down as follows (Table 2):

Table 2 - data by verb

	No textual antecedent	Textual antecedent	Total
<i>rain</i>	19	17	36
<i>snow</i>	50	4	54
Total	69	21	90

¹¹ The speaker is registered as male and Canadian; the contents of the posts are compatible, though total reliability cannot be guaranteed.

Among the 90 occurrences, 28 are part of phrasemes (Table 3); in that case, they do not have textual antecedents. It is to be noted, however, that the use of feminine pronouns without an antecedent is not restricted to phrasemes, as these only make up 28 occurrences out of 69 (40.6%).

Table 3: The frequency of feminine pronouns in phrasemes.

<i>Rain</i>	<i>Snow</i>
<i>let her rain</i> 3	<i>let her snow</i> 6
<i>thar she rains</i> 2	<i>thar she snows</i> 13
	<i>there she snows</i> 4

Both subtypes of occurrences (i.e. with and without an antecedent) were found predominantly in blogs, forums and Tweets, which confirms the spoken, informal dimension of the feminine pronoun. These sources provide 96% of occurrences without antecedents and 100% of those with antecedents (Table 4).

Table 4: The distribution across genres

	No textual antecedent	Textual antecedent	Total
Blog/personal page	28	15	43
Forum	32	4	36
Twitter	1		1
Published biography	1		1
Title of canvas model	1		1

Finally, the data suggest differences in distribution of the two subtypes across the various search strings (Table 5), although this would have to be confirmed by more occurrences. When there is no textual antecedent, the present form of the verb (which in all occurrences but two is used in a specific, as opposed to a generic, context) prevails. Furthermore, in all occurrences but three (one of snowed, one of rains and one of is raining), the context of the event is either immediately perceptible in the situation (57 occurrences) or expected or dreaded in the near future (9 occurrences). On the other hand, when there is a textual antecedent, what seems to prevail is not the present; although the figures for each syntactic string are low, the highest figures are for the past tense and projections into the future. What the two subsets have in common is that the feminine pronoun was not found in interrogative clauses or with modals other than will.

The question to be answered now is whether she/ her have a clearly identifiable referent. Section 5 first addresses cases in which the pronoun has a textual antecedent.

Table 5: Distribution of pronouns with and without antecedents

	Rain			Snow	
	No textual antecedent	Textual antecedent		No textual antecedent	Textual antecedent
<i>is / 's raining</i>	11	0	<i>is / 's snowing</i>	22	0
<i>let her rain</i>	4	0	<i>thar she snows</i>	13	0
<i>thar she rains</i>	2	0	<i>let her snow</i>	5	0
<i>(Hope she) does not / doesn't rain</i>	1	0	<i>there she snows</i>	4	0
<i>rains</i> (no 'thar/there')	1	1	other occurrences of snow	2	0
<i>rained</i>	0	4	<i>snowed</i>	2	2
<i>did not/didn't rain</i>	0	3	<i>(Hope she) does not/ doesn't snow</i>	1	0
<i>will/ 'll rain</i>	0	2	<i>will/ 'll snow</i>	1	0
<i>will not/won't rain</i>	0	2	<i>was snowing</i>	0	1
<i>was raining</i>	0	2	<i>will snow / won't snow</i>	0	1
<i>did she rain (!)</i>	0	1			
<i>had rained</i>					

5 The use of feminine pronouns with a textual antecedent

The verb most commonly occurring in the data for this type is rain (17 occurrences, against 4 of snow). The antecedents are given in Table 6:

Table 6: Number of occurrences per antecedent

	Rain	Snow
<i>Mother Nature</i>	9	4
<i>Nature</i>	2	0
<i>Cyclone Ingrid</i>	1	0
<i>Hurricane Irene</i>	1	0
<i>Fay</i>	1	0
<i>Hannah</i>	1	0
<i>the Almighty</i>	1	0
<i>Mother Mountain</i>	1	0

As can be observed, the noun *Nature*, especially *Mother Nature*, is predominant. The referent is always construed as an agent, that is, as an entity wilfully instigating and carrying out the raining or snowing action (Langacker 2008: 369). Consider the following examples:

(7) Mother Nature. She didn't rain. And she'd better not pull anything on Thursday night. So, so happy our season is not over yet – an understatement. (Blog, 2011; <http://janeheller.com/confessionsblog/tag/aj-burnett/>; accessed on 21 January 2012)

(8) Of course the sympathetic ones of us could now visit our fav mountain with chisel and pick, probably at night. But Mother Mountain will rule the day she'll rain and snow, freeze and thaw your silly path. How much money are you going to spend repairing it? How many lives might your path take ...? That of the ill-equipped tourist or the volunteer rescuer ... Or both ...!! The mountain will point the way ... (Forum, 2010; <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-1292952/JANET-STREET-PORTER-A-Tarmac-path-Snowdon-How-long-Britains-covered-concrete.html>; accessed on 21 January 2012)

(9) The fires been out for days And man, my ski-doo is calling But Mother Nature – You know she just hates me She won't snow, won't snow, won't snow. (Forum, 2009; <http://community.mybb.com/thread-61635.html>; accessed on 21 January 2012)

(10) Fay's Gone. Here Comes Gustav. Well, Fay has moved on this afternoon, just leaving behind a few light showers, but boy did she rain on us last night. I don't have any numbers but if we got another 6-8" during the night it wouldn't surprise me. She knocked a big branch out of a tree onto the driveway last night, and I wish I had taken a picture before I cut it up for firewood, but I didn't, so I just thought I'd post a random picture of a bumblebee attacking a flower from earlier in the summer. (Blog, 2008; accessed on 20 January 2012)

This agentive role corresponds to the first definition of the verb rain given in the Merriam-Webster's English Dictionary ("to send down rain" , s.v. rain) and the Oxford English Dictionary ("Of the heavens, clouds, etc.: to send or pour down rain" , s.v. rain). For snow, no agentive role is recorded by either of the dictionaries for literal uses (Merriam-Webster's: "fall in or as snow, s.v. snow; OED: "fall, descend, etc., in the manner of snow" , s.v. snow), which could explain why it is not commonly used with she in textual anaphora. All the feminine pronouns used with textual antecedents have clearly identifiable referents, as shown by a number of tests - detailed here because they will clearly show the differences between these occurrences and those without antecedents, analysed in the next section. First, as with referential nominals (Huddleston and Pullum 2002: 1482), she licenses substitution with a full NP: in (7), for instance, Mother Nature didn't rain would be possible - like She didn't rain, it is uncommon, but attested on Google, again in colloquial English.¹²

Second, anaphoric chains with at least two occurrences of she clearly confirm that the pronoun is fully referential (unlike uses without textual antecedents, see Section 6): the 13 instances of anaphoric chains in the corpus occur across sentence boundaries, and in 9 of these 13 cases, she is also found with predicates that require a fully referential subject (e.g. She knocked a big branch in (10) - see also (7) and (9)). Finally, when the hurricane has a male name, the pronoun he is used, as in (11):

¹² More generally, a Google search (January 2012) for rain and snow with full NPs to denote weather conditions yields the subjects (Mother) Nature, the weather and, more rarely, (the) rain and (the) snow.

(11) Igor came; he rained; he conquered. I picture him as a schoolyard bully who, after not making any friends in Bermuda, promised to take out his wrath on the next island nation who dared cross his path. (Blog, 2010; <http://thesheds.wordpress.com/2010/09/29/from-the-trenches/>; accessed on 20 January 2012)

In sum, feminine pronouns with textual antecedents are fully referential and signal a clear personification of the natural force taken to be responsible for the weather condition described. These female personifications are in keeping with allegories of Nature, also traditionally female (see, for instance, Romaine 1997: 60).

The distinction between animation and personification mentioned in Section 1 (Svartengren 1927; Curme 1931; Pawley 2002) is not relevant here, and the notion of “emotional involvement” appears too restrictive. First, only one utterance out of 21 ((10), with the exclamation boy) shows any marks of expressivity.¹³ Further, although there is sometimes a feeling of personal defiance towards the natural force (e.g. the speaker in (7) utters a threat, She’d better not pull anything on Thursday night, as though Nature could be punished), in (8), for example, the speaker merely emphasizes the uselessness of human action. Personification stems from a wish to represent the natural element as having a life of its own, whatever the motivation for this representation.

6 The use of feminine pronouns without a textual antecedent

When a feminine pronoun has no textual antecedent, two hypotheses can be made. The first one is that the pronoun is still fully referential (i.e. has a fully identified referent). As a referential personal pronoun implies a referent in focus (e.g. Cornish 1999: 63), the lack of a textual antecedent would have to be made up for by the fact that the referent has been brought into focus through another means than the co-text. This is termed the “full referentiality hypothesis”;¹⁴ this hypothesis also requires that the tests mentioned in Section 5 apply.

Alternatively, if the conditions for full referentiality are not met, it will have to be concluded that the pronoun does not have an identifiable referent; this is termed the “lesser degree of referentiality hypothesis”.¹⁴ The two possibilities are assessed starting with the tests mentioned in Section 5.

First, substitution with an NP (e.g. Mother Nature, Mother Rain, ... or Mother x, that is, any NP that would trigger personification as a female) cannot be ruled out in most utterances, because the weather is usually in focus. Consider the instance in (12):

(12) Let her snow!!!!

Took the mower deck off, pressure washed it and put it away for the winter. Installed the snow blower on the tractor and we should be good to go!!! Let her snow!!! :-) (forum, 2007; full post; <http://homeattherange.16.forumer.com/viewtopic.php?t=6450>; accessed on 5 January 2012; URL no longer valid)

(12') Let Mother Nature snow!!!! Took the mower deck off, pressure washed it and put it away for the winter. Installed the snow blower on the tractor and we should be good to go !!! Let her snow !!!

¹³ Understood as forms expressing feeling, such as exclamation marks or interjections; see Section 6 for more examples of such marks.

¹⁴ Section 7 explains why “lesser degree of referentiality” is preferred to “non-referentiality”.

However, when the weather comment does not constitute the whole message or is not at the very beginning of it, NP substitution usually does not apply (six cases out of eight). In two extracts - (13) and (1), partially reproduced here as (14) - the anaphoric chain would become grammatically incorrect:

(13) The wind was stronger. I had to remove the railing on the patio it was rattling away and nearly drove one crazy. The lawn chairs are all stowed. The awnings are still all stowed so let her rain, blow or whatever it wants to do. (Blog, 2011; <http://www.ve1bc.com/trip2011/part130.html>; accessed on 5 January 2012)

(13') so let Mother Nature (/Mother x) rain, blow or whatever *it wants to do.

(14) [...] us olders sat under the wagon and let her rain. And it did, zowie, what a rain, but only wind and rain. So soon as it let up so we felt we could stir, we left. (Autobiography, Bayer Krenz 2007: 53)

(14') us olders sat under the wagon and let Mother Nature (/Mother x) rain. And *it did, zowie, what a rain, but only wind and rain.

In both (13) and (14), substitution with an NP such as *Mother Nature* (/Mother x) is impossible because the it that follows would be understood as co-referential due to the coordination (*or / And*), in which case Mother Nature (Mother x) would require co-referential *she*. Accordingly, the full referentiality hypothesis does not apply. On the other hand, the extracts show marks of expressivity: *rattling away* and *crazy* in (13), *zowie* and exclamative *what* in (14). The feminine pronoun, therefore, appears primarily as a means to add emotional involvement - to emphasize either defiance in the face of the expected weather condition (13) or the intensity of the rain (14).¹⁵

In the other four cases, while substitution with a full NP is grammatically acceptable, discourse pragmatics makes the full referentiality hypothesis problematic:

(15) The snow has come. All the trees are decorated with white. Plus it's great snowman snow. I had to drive to the hospital in the snow and guess at the number of my parking spot. She snowed and blowed all day. We have computers on the unit now and the nurses were checking Environment Canada and the local highway cams. Some of the nurses live in Abbotsford, about 20 minutes west through the most treacherous Sumas Prairie flats. (Blog, 2008; <http://imminentmetaphor.blogspot.fr/2008/12/natural-decorations.html>; accessed on 5 January 2012)

For she to have an identifiable referent, it would need to be the agent or a theme of the snowing and blowing process (such as Nature or the weather), which are the only two thematic roles licensed by the verbs snow and blow in intransitive uses (OED, s.v. snow, blow; Merriam-Webster, s.v. snow, blow). This agent/theme could be argued to be present in the preceding co-text, which has already mentioned the weather, and the fact that a personal pronoun is preferred to a full NP would suggest that the referent (if there is one) is in focus. However, the next sentence continues with a different subject (*we*) and temporarily a different tense (*have*), without any re-direction such as *Anyway* or a paragraph break. Besides, the alleged referent of *she* is not mentioned any more. Accordingly, *she* in *She snowed*

¹⁵ In both instances, the feminine pronoun appears in a phraseme *Let her rain*, which might make explicit emotional involvement via the feminine more readily available and acceptable to these speakers than in free discourse. In (14) in particular, the marks of expressivity occur in the sentence with it, which can be surprising at first sight. As noted above, however, phrasemes represent only 40.6% of occurrences of *she* without a textual antecedent.

and blowed all day cannot be said to lack a textual antecedent just because the referent is in focus; rather, it is not fully referential. A similar case is (16):

(16) what plug are you running? Am not running eth plug. I have 1150 clicks on it. Like I said it ran awesome last year. Changed temp sensor, fuel filter, checked clutches, pretty well all but the motor. Crazy, haven't got a clue. Dealer can't find what's up either. Thank goodness for 4yr warrenty, but she's snowing like crazy and delt with all this with my Dragon. Makes for a long 14000.oo winter (snowmobile forum, 2011; reproduced with the typos)

The "in focus" status which she would imply if there were an identifiable referent is hardly compatible with the fact that the coordinated clause has an ellipted subject, which in addition is different (I). In (15) and (16), therefore, she does not have an identifiable referent; rather, it can once again be read as a means to signal emotional involvement, here to emphasize the exceptional intensity of the snowing - see all day in (15) and like crazy in (16).

The difference in reference between a number of occurrences of *she* with no textual antecedent and those with a textual antecedent could be corroborated by differences in the characteristics of anaphoric chains. Among the 11 cases without textual antecedent, it is striking that none present cross-sentence anaphora, and only 2 a combination of the feminine pronoun with a verb other than a weather verb. One of these is (17):

(17) She came she snowed we bought all the eggs, bread and milk we could. Lets have french toast who got the syrup. (Blog, 2009; comment on a photograph of the speaker's house and street covered in snow; Full post; <http://www.myspace.com/440359512/photos/4730516#%7B%22ImageId%22%3A4730516%7D>; accessed on 5 January 2012)

The other nine cases of anaphoric chains are listed in (18), with one example in context in (19):

- (18) a. She's raining pretty good [...] and blowing pretty hard. (x1)
- b. She snowed and blowed (x2) / And she snowed, and she blowed (x1) / She snows, she blows. (x1)
- c. If she's raining tomorrow, and even thundering. (x1)
- d. She's raining and thundering hard. (x1)
- e. She's always sunny in DM Country, even when she's raining. (x1)
- f. Thar she blows! And thar she rains (x1)

(19) She's raining pretty good here kyper and blowing pretty hard at times too... (Forum, 2010; full post; <http://nsflyguy.ca/smf/index.php?topic=7.180>; accessed on 5 January 2012)

In (18) and (19), *she* is used only with weather verbs and the chains do not occur beyond two consecutive clauses. Besides, the chains all present parallel constructions - via and coordination, pretty good echoing pretty hard, repetition of *thar*, rhyming *snowed* and *blowed* (preferred to *blew*). This, together with the presence of markers of valuation (especially *pretty good*, *pretty hard*, *hard*), could suggest that *she* is primarily a way of marking emotional involvement - emphasizing such feelings as annoyance or enthusiasm - rather than a fully referential pronoun showing personification.

The idea that the feminine pronoun is then first and foremost a way of marking expressivity could be confirmed by the fact that in the corpus, feminine pronouns without textual antecedents are associated with other marks of expressivity in over half of the occurrences in the corpus (38 out of 69, Table 7) - as opposed to 1 occurrence out of 21 when the pronoun has a textual antecedent. Despite the relatively small size of the corpus, this difference between cases with and without textual antecedents seems unlikely to be due to chance. It might also imply that a higher number of occurrences of she than the few excluded by the tests above might not be fully referential.

Table 7: additional marks of expressivity¹⁶

Exclamation mark(s)	19
Manner adjunct	18
<i>(hard x4 / good and hard x1 / real hard x1;</i>	
<i>good x1 / pretty good x2;</i>	
<i>like mad x2 / like crazy x1;</i>	
<i>to beat hell x1 / to beat heck x1 / to beat the band x1;</i>	
<i>heavy x2;</i>	
<i>cats and dogs x1)</i>	
Interjection	7
<i>(woohoo x2, boy(s) x2, man x1, oh... Yikes x1, zowie x1)</i>	
Smiley	4

At any rate, it can be concluded from the study that the sequence [FEMININE PRONOUN+WEATHER VERB] without a textual antecedent cannot be treated homogeneously. Although in a number of cases, definite conclusions are difficult to draw, it can be established that she without a textual antecedent has a clearly identified referent in at least two occurrences of the corpus (e.g. (17)), and that it does not in a number of others (e.g. (13)-(16), possibly (18) and (19)). For these, the lesser degree of referentiality hypothesis applies; there is no identifiable referent, and she serves to emphasize either the exceptional intensity of the rain- or snowfall, or feelings such as enthusiasm, annoyance or defiance - all of which can be subsumed under the notion of “emotional involvement”. This second type of use follows existing analyses of the use of she with weather verbs and more generally for inanimates: she adds “extra information” in the form of emotional involvement (Wagner 2003: 209); it reflects greater involvement than it (Biber et al. 1999: 317), a high degree of interest (Pawley 2002: 114); in that sense, the weather condition is individuated, singled out as special (Siemund 2008: 3), that is, it is attributed a certain uniqueness (Morris 2000: 194).

If individuation concerns the weather condition as a whole, why is emotional involvement marked specifically in the pronoun - rather than in another element of the clause - especially if the pronoun has no identifiable referent? Section 7 addresses this issue.

7 The nature of individuation in cases of lesser referentiality

In cases of lesser referentiality, as seen above, the hypothesis proposed is that the pronoun has no actual referent, but that a slight degree of referentiality is added to it. In this section, I propose that this projection is due to three converging factors and that as a result, the pronoun constitutes the most appropriate locus for the expression of emotional involvement.

¹⁶ The overall number of marks of expressivity is 48, but 10 utterances combine two marks.

The first factor is a syntactic one. Although the subject of a weather verb is originally a syntactic dummy, the construction [INTRSBJ + INTRVERB] has prototypical semantics associated with it: in agentive interpretations, the subject denotes both an agent and a theme (e.g. He walked), and in non-agentive ones, a theme (e.g. It broke) (Langacker 2008: 374).¹⁷ Consequently, in a clause such as It rains, an agent or a theme role might be projected on the pronoun, even if it does not actually have a referent, just because it is a syntactic subject. This is what Huddleston and Pullum (2002: 1482n) propose for the sentence It's trying to rain: in this individual case, it is assigned an agent role "by virtue of being the subject of try" - though it is impossible to identify a referent for it.

A second, related factor lies in the semantics of weather verbs: rain and snow can be used figuratively with full NPs as subjects, again organizing the semantic roles of agent or theme: for instance, *Air-raids rained bombs on Barcelona* (agent) and *The intense thunder-balls which are raining from heaven* (theme) (OED, s.v. rain). These metaphorical uses with referential subjects could facilitate a slight projection of referentiality on the subject pronoun in weather descriptions.

The third factor relates to speakers' experience of the weather. *She* is used in contexts in which the weather is construed as affecting the speaker. Prototypically, someone is affected by something (or someone), that is, by an entity referred to by a nominal; this could again favour the projection of a slight degree of referentiality on the nominal (here, the pronoun), which would therefore be the element of the clause most apt to express a speaker's emotional involvement.

From these factors, it follows that the subject pronoun can be glossed, if need be, as "some agent or theme involved in the raining or the snowing", but that there is no actual referent: no identified participant is isolated from the process of raining or snowing. In the remainder of this section, I would like to propose that this interpretation of *she* when it is the subject of a weather verb is more convincing than other arguments in favour of referentiality given in the literature for the standard [IT+WEATHER VERB] pattern.¹⁸

First of all, it is impossible to identify a more specific referent for *she* (outside cases of fully fledged personifications). For instance, about standard *it*, Darden (1973: 523) proposes that *It rained* and *It snowed* are based on *Rain rained* and *Snow snowed*, because although no NP can substitute for it, informants accept sentences such as *It rained and turned the road into a quagmire*. This approach, however, cannot apply to cases in which *she* is used as the subject of coordinated verbs, such as *She's raining pretty good [...] and blowing pretty hard*: it cannot be the rain that blows. Moreover, although (the) rain and (the) snow are attested as subjects of rain and snow on Google, they prevail when the speaker focuses specifically on the rain or the snow, often in a series of parallel clauses such as *The sun shines and The wind blows*.¹⁹ In the data collected here, the concern is with the weather condition in general; it is therefore highly unlikely that for most occurrences at least, the feminine pronoun refers specifically to the rain or the snow. Moreover, the present hypothesis (a lack of identifiable referent

¹⁷ In Langacker's terminology, theme is close to the macro-role of undergoer in Role & Reference grammar. It subsumes a number of "passive" semantic roles, mainly patient, mover, experiencer and zero (Langacker 2008: 366). The zero role is defined as the minimal "passive" role: it is "that of a participant which exhibits a property, occupies a location, or is simply there" (Langacker 2008: 367).

¹⁸ A number of objections to these arguments have been put forward for standard *it* (see, for instance, Paykin 2003 for a full overview for both English and French); the present study presents additional arguments resulting from the study of *she* and *her*.

¹⁹ Consider the following example by Diana Vreeland, American columnist and editor: "I think when you're young you should be a lot with yourself and your sufferings. Then one day you get out where the sun shines and the rain rains and the snow snows and it all comes together." (<http://www.thefashionspot.com/life/327765-inspirational-quotes-from-fashion-icons-dianavreeland-coco-chanel-vera-wang/>, accessed 12 July 2015).

for she, yet a slight projection of “some agent or theme involved in the raining or the snowing”) appears to me more convincing in light of the data than other maximalist approaches proposed for standard it. This is what is addressed now.

First, for Langacker (2000, 2008, 2009), the subject of weather verbs is “maximally nonspecific in its reference”: it is best described “(admittedly impressionistically) as designating the ‘scope of awareness’ invoked as the basis for what follows” (2008: 390). In a sentence such as *It’s raining big drops*, the clause reflects a “zooming-in” strategy, in which it introduces a broad presentational frame, which can be glossed as “any aspect of the conceptualizer’s global awareness that might be deemed relevant” (2008: 390). This presentational frame is not an element of the scene, but it plays a role in its

representation, and the reference of it varies with the semantics of the verb (Langacker 2009: 137). In the data collected for the present study, there are no occurrences of she/her with weather-related full NPs after the verb (e.g. she’s raining big drops), but the zooming-in strategy can be assessed with sentences containing a place adjunct, such as (20):

(20) Sled: Freeride for a yr. Well, she’s snowing like mad here in S’ville, and it’s supposed to do so right until tomorrow. After that, sunny days right until next week. (<http://lewishillbillies.com/phpbb/viewtopic.php?f=6&t=16841>; accessed on 5 January 2012)

It is difficult to explain why she in (20) should be preferred to it if the pronoun acted only as a presentational frame: enthusiasm, annoyance and so on seem to be conveyed specifically in relation to the weather condition described rather than to a more general frame. The analysis proposed at the beginning of this section therefore seems more appropriate.

Another maximalist argument is that of “ambience it”, initially introduced by Chafe for time and weather constructions (e.g. *It’s late*, *It’s hot*). For Chafe (1970: 101), it is semantically empty (“it need not reflect anything at all in the semantic structure”); it is the clause as a whole, for instance, *It’s snowing*, that denotes an “all-encompassing event”. But Bolinger (1977: 78) applies the notion of ambience to the subject: “If ambience is proper to it, then it does not belong to the verb”. In his opinion, it is not a dummy, but refers to the environment that is central to the situation. It is close to things, but more general, so that in *It’s so hot that it’s giving me a headache*, the two occurrences of it are said to be coreferential. In the present data with she/her, however, the fact that no NP substitution is possible sometimes (including “the environment that is central to the situation”) strongly suggests that there is in fact no referent; this fact can be easily accommodated by the hypothesis proposed at the beginning of this section (no actual referent, but a slight projection of the idea of “some agent or theme involved in the raining or the snowing”), while at the same time the slight degree of referentiality that is felt to be present in it could be accounted for.

The position taken in the present study is closer to that of Pesetsky (1995: 111). Like Bolinger, he regards weather it as having a “semantic value”, which is “global” (“ambient”); more specifically, “[a]t a first approximation, it refers to the forces in the world that are the proximate causes of weather”, “beyond the control of the individual”. Unlike Bolinger, Pesetsky does not propose coreferential analyses (e.g. *It’s so hot that it’s giving me a headache* above). I would diverge from Pesetsky’s position, however, in three respects. First, I would not say that the pronoun “refers to the forces...”: although a slight degree of referentiality may be projected on it, I would like to argue that it does not mark an actual referent, in the sense that there is no participant distinct from the raining/snowing/ etc. Second, I would add the role of theme to that of agent or “cause”, especially as snow, in its intransitive construction, does not usually assign the thematic role of agent, and as rain assigns both roles. Finally, while I would consider that the slight projection of referentiality (“some

agent or theme involved in the raining or the snowing”) concerns all uses of she that do not have an actual referent, I would not claim that all uses of it with weather verbs are ambient: given that the use of personal pronouns with weather verbs seems to stem from a need for syntactic subjects in configurational languages, the status of expletive seems likely, at least in a number of cases.

8 Conclusion

Although this study is based on a relatively low number of occurrences collected from Google (mainly blogs, forums and Tweets), it is hoped that it has contributed to a better understanding of the use of she with weather verbs. First of all, while this use had been noted mostly in fiction (Svartengren 1927; Gardelle 2006), the data confirm that it is also used in non-fictional discourse, though sparingly and maybe only for rain and snow (among weather verbs). It also shows that such uses are to be found in the twenty-first century and that they are not restricted to fossilized phrasemes.

Second, the study shows that the occurrences of the feminine pronoun do not form a homogeneous set. When used with a textual antecedent, they have a clearly identified referent, mostly Nature. The personification stems from a representation of the referent as having a life of its own, over which humans have no real power. The second type of use, which is the more common in the data, does not involve an antecedent. Personification still applies to a number of occurrences, but for others, the pronoun has no identifiable referent. Such cases are perhaps more directly interesting for linguistic theory: as stated in the introduction, they can be related to other uses (not involving weather verbs) of the feminine pronoun with no clearly identifiable referent (e.g. whoop her up). A major finding, although not an unexpected one perhaps, is that even when the feminine pronoun does not have a clearly identifiable referent, the selection criterion for the feminine is the same as for clearly identified inanimates: the pronoun conveys high individuation and “extra” information in the form of emotional involvement. This was noted by Svartengren (1927) for fictional uses, but fictional reproductions of rare instances of colloquial register might not have reflected actual usage.

Based on these results, the study sought to answer an additional, theoretical question: why is a gendered pronoun possible in a syntactic function (subject of weather verbs) that is commonly regarded as being instantiated by an expletive (it)? The conclusion proposed here is that it is no coincidence that speaker involvement is expressed specifically in the personal pronoun rather than in another element of the clause. The syntactic function of the pronoun, the syntax and semantics of weather verbs and speakers’ experience of the weather all converge towards allowing a slight degree of referentiality to be projected on the pronoun. As a result, the subject can be glossed at best as “an agent or theme involved in the weather condition (e.g. in the raining)”, but there is no actual referent. I would suggest that this apparent paradox is not only valid for she, but might also reconcile diverging views on the status of it (expletive vs. referential) with weather verbs in more standard English: it is not incompatible to say, on the one hand, that the pronoun is an expletive and, on the other hand, that in some cases (e.g. It tried to rain / After PRO_i snowing, it_i began to rain), it is not an expletive, although it has no referent either.

One question which the study did not address is why the gender of the pronoun is feminine rather than masculine; the reason is that it is impossible to establish this with any certainty today. It seems unlikely that she should be used by analogy with the weather or Nature, which, too, is associated with the feminine in English (e.g. Romaine 1997: 60). Such a hypothesis appears too restrictive: it does not explain why idioms such as Whoop her up only show up with feminine gender as well, as do many references to inanimate objects. Some linguists, for instance, Mathiot and Roberts (1979), propose other hypotheses, based on (social) gender: she is used because the referent is construed as having

feminine features: an object to be won or treasured, a reward, a source of pride and sensual pleasure, something beautiful, decorative, incompetent, weak, lacking intelligence, or a challenge to manhood. But the data collected for the present study do not present such features. One more likely possibility, though, would be to consider that emotions are the feminine part of human beings or, as suggested by Svartengren (1927), that such uses originate in male language and that they express some sort of attenuated sexuality. This, however, cannot be ascertained. Finally, some linguists have put forward hypotheses that are not gender-related. One particularly interesting one is proposed by Joly (1976: 239): he shows that in modern English, the default animate gender for inanimates is the feminine, while for animals it is the masculine. Feminine pronouns used with weather verbs (and with inanimate reference in general) might therefore be partly related to this fundamental trend. Alternatively, Stenroos (2008: 448-449) shows that in Middle English, he came to be closely associated with human beings, while she became related to high individuation and came to be more freely used for both humans and non-humans. She concludes: "It might be noted that some of the traditional uses of she for inanimates surviving to the present day would perhaps make better sense if viewed in terms of non-human individuality rather than resemblance to human females" (2008: 469). This, however, would not explain why animals (of unknown sex) are typically associated with he rather than she. Further research in that specific area is therefore called for.

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