

The Gender Marked Phraseological Units Coding Female Intelligence in the Russian and English Languages

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ABSTRACT

The article is devoted to the gender analysis of the phraseological units of the Russian and English languages coding female intelligence. The author allocates phraseological units with an obvious gender potential, phraseological units with female semantics and the phraseological units without significant gender coloring used for verbalization of the concepts of the female intelligence in two structurally different languages. The purpose is to conduct a gender analysis of Russian and English phraseological units that code the female intelligence. The research methodology combines several methods. The main one is the descriptive method; other methods include observation, interpretation, comparison, generalization, and classification. Similarities and differences between the cultural and linguistic world images were outlined, based on philosophical analysis, comparison, and conceptual analysis of select definitions. A gender characterization of Russian and English phraseological units that code the female intelligence in the compared languages is presented. The analysis of phrases indicates a high ratio of mentally negative attributes of the female intelligence in the mind of the representatives of two structurally different languages. The practical value of this research is that its results can be used for different purposes: in follow-up linguistic researches, in studies of gender potential in phraseology.

KEYWORDS

Phraseological unit; intellectual level; linguistic picture; gender analysis; similar value

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Introduction

The real research is devoted to comparative studying of the set expressions designating female intelligence as the main lexico-semantic units reflecting a "gender" code of the Russian and English languages and cultures.

The sex, gender, gender stereotypes, gender behavior excite researchers of various branches of sciences. First of all, it reflects in psychological researches (Brandt, 1998). But recently the linguists also showed great interest in this

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issue. The gender stereotypes are investigated and come to light in literature, phraseology, lexicon, speech behavior, etc.

The relevance of the work is dictated by need of studying of phraseological units coding female intelligence, and its embodiments in two structurally-different languages. Secondly, studying of the set expressions in the gender plan possesses the considerable theoretical importance as detection of compliances and distinctions in two languages. It opens new data which can be useful both at an explanation of language identities, and at the solution of some difficulties of the translation. Besides, during an era of gender researches, studying of a phenomenon "female intelligence" and its verbalization in language signs allows to formulate rather precisely obtained linguistic data on the studied subject.

The theoretical importance of the work is in its contribution to the general theory of cognitive linguistics. It promotes further understanding and studying of the issues connected with questions of relationship of language and thinking, language and culture, mentality of various nations, a language role in the course of knowledge. Also the results of research can bear interest to the translation theory.

The practical value of the work is defined by possibility of use of the results of real research in various aims: in further researches on linguistics; when developing courses of special disciplines on studying the phraseology; in cognitive linguistics in Russian-speaking and in English-speaking audiences; and also for teaching the Russian and English languages in Russia and abroad. The results of research can find application by drawing up textbooks, manuals and reference books on a gender potential in phraseology. Besides, in modern conditions of broad integration and mutual enrichment of cultures, the question of need of an assessment of the language phenomena on the basis of the comparative analysis gets the great value.

Phraseological units of any language bear in themselves all the width of the national thought, the experience of generations that is preserved for centuries (Hellinger & Motschenbacher, 2015; Dal, 2002). This material as nothing else brightly represents the gender stereotypes put in an internal form of phraseological units. After all the gender aspect in expression of the intellectual qualities of female persons by phraseological units (in this case equivalent to the word or the phrase) is very widespread speech and cogitative phenomenon (Lapshina, 2008; Birih, 2005). The correlation of the female mind, wit, logic, stupidity remains a subject of leisure talks and gossips throughout centuries. So, the gender aspect of the intellectual activity reflects in layer of the Russian and English phraseological units where the woman as the subject of cogitative activity and as the carrier of knowledge receives some assessment (Aleksenko, 2006; Soloveva, 2014).

F. Kh. Tarasova (2012) in her monograph mentions that "the linguistic picture of the world is formed on the basis of all language means, such as the word, the phraseological unit, the proverb, the text which contain background knowledge and ways of reflection of these values in the national picture of the world".

In the linguistic field there are numerous researches on problems of a gender differentiation Ye. S. Gritsenko et al. (2011), N. S. Solovyova (2014), H. Motschenbacher (2010). It is quite natural, because "for all sane people the distinction between the male and the female manners, habits, estimates,

representations, about what is accepted and admissible is quite obvious" (Ilyin, 2010). Further, using and interpreting the obtained data, the linguists actively use them in different researches. Dynamics of gender stereotypes comes to light in phraseology (Solovyova, 2014), the gender in British and American lingvo-cultures is investigated (Gritsenko et al., 2011). The linguistic representation of women and men is considered by M. Hellinger & H. Motschenbacher (2015). The authors mention that "...the formal and functional manifestations of gender in the area of human reference follow general, and perhaps universal principles in the world's languages"

The real research sets as the purpose a comparative studying of gender features of the set expressions designating female intelligence in the Russian and English languages.

Methods

The work deals with the theoretical and practical researches of several scientific directions.

As the material of this research served the Russian and English phraseological units, coding the female intelligence, selected by method of continuous selection of monolingual and bilingual phraseological dictionaries, dictionaries of the Russian and English proverbs and sayings.

The technique of research represents complex use of several methods. The basic is the descriptive method including methods of supervision, interpretation, comparison, generalization and a tipologization. Also it is a method of the philosophical analysis of the chosen definitions (deductive and inductive methods), comparative method, and also the method of the conceptual analysis lighting similarities and distinctions of cultural and language pictures of the world.

Data, Analysis, and Results

Nowadays when studying the person in the linguistic picture of the world the huge importance is gained by individual characteristics of the language personality, the gender concerns to the most important of them. Men and women are identical people by their nature, but, at the same time, they can differ on the certain features called "gender features". Rather new scientific direction called "gender researches" deals with the issues of gender and sex.

The direct maintenance of the gender stereotypes in the various lingvo-cultural communities can be considered through the language structures as gender stereotypes take place at all language levels and reflect certain assessments.

M. A. Alekseenko (2006) notices that, "the gender perspective became one of the dominants of modern humanities, the specifics of male and female discourses are studied, the stereotypes of femininity and a masculinity are established, etc."

According to A. G. Fomin (2003), gender as "the psycholinguistic category represents multicomponent structure, the model of the social relations created by the main social institutes and constructed by individuals according to their gender identification which is found in the language and the speech".

There are some stereotypes so-called "gender stereotypes", they are imposed by society on the representatives of male and female sex and are accurately distinguishable in the language which, as we know, reflects the character and culture of the carriers of any language. Gender stereotypes can be characterized as cultural and social views of the traits of character and standards of behavior peculiar to the male and the female reviewers. These are certain beliefs, opinions, judgments. Different assessments can be attributed to the same features depending on what sex we give the characteristic.

"Gender", or "sex" are the concepts which assume studying of the features of the male and female thinking, mentality, behavior. According to definitions of Brandt (1998), "sex" is a set of biological, physiological, natural signs, given by nature, and "gender" is a set of the speech, behavioral, personal features distinguishing men and women in the spiritual plan who are submitted to the influence of cultures.

In recent research A. M. Chervonnyiy (2014) allocates some semantic relations which are the cornerstone of an internal form of the phraseological units among which "a sex – an intellectual level". The woman as the subject of cogitative and intellectual activity has both a positive and negative assessment.

In the analysis of the concepts "male mind" and "female mind" it is necessary to consider a number of signs:

- the ideas of personal and physical qualities of the man and the woman in the culture and society;
- the ideas of their social importance and occupation (in the society and in the family);
- the correlation with the male and female origin of the phenomena, properties and relations which aren't connected directly with sex.

In the modern world the negative assessment of an idea of the woman in general and the female intelligence prevails. The female intellect is in many cases opposed to male one, it is considered to be weak, underdeveloped, inappropriate to a normal human, and even women are sometimes accused of its absence. "Stupidity" in general is peculiar to women, not men. Such ironic relation is used in designation of the mental abilities of the woman. It becomes possible to call a phraseological unit "женская логика" (a woman's reason) (Sayings Usual and Unusual, 2007) a standard of the mental illogicality.

Though, according to M.A. Alekseenko (2009) "it is more expedient to speak not about the discrimination in language, but the extent of man's or woman's domination".

So, in the English and Russian phraseological units of the analyzed field we revealed the following correlations:

- phraseological units with an obvious gender potential (one reviewer – the woman), according to the nomination of the female person;
- the phraseological units with the female semantics using feminine lexics;
- the phraseological units without significant gender coloring applied to persons of both sex.

It can be illustrated with the analysis of the phraseological units. As it was mentioned above, the lexeme "баба" (woman) is a widespread lexeme of the Russian language that is used to concern female persons, that's why is gender

marked. The phraseological combination “базарная баба” (a noisy woman) (Solovieva, 2014), for example, characterizes the female intellectual properties in a negative way as points to inability of women to behave adequately in public. It derides the female simplicity and narrow-mindedness. In the English language the equivalent expression wasn't revealed and the phraseological unit, similar on value, isn't presented. It can be explained by the uniqueness of an origin of phraseological units in each separate mentality.

The lexeme mentioned above “баба” (woman) is also presented at the level of phraseological combinations “бабье царство” (a woman's kingdom) and “бабье сословие” (woman's estate) (Lapshina, 2008). The first expression means a group, or a congestion of the women united, for example, by the general occupation, therefore, is gender marked. The second expression, according to O.G. Lapshina (2008), is multiple-valued: in the old meaning “женщины” (women) forms a synonymic row with the phraseological units “слабый пол” (a weaker sex), “нежный пол” (a gentle sex), “прекрасный пол” (a fair sex), “Евино племя” (Eva's tribe), etc. with a general meaning of “женщины” (women); in the second meaning the phraseological unit “бабье сословие” (woman's estate) – ‘the women of low, unprivileged estate’ forms external synonyms with the lexemes “бабы” (women), “простолюдинки” (simple women), “крестьянки” (peasants). Both expressions, however, impose to women the weak intelligence due to the use of the lexeme “баба” (woman) that itself already creates an image of the rough and uneducated woman. Contrary to the mentioned phraseological unit the expression “дамское сословие” (ladies' estate) is presented. The women belonging to elite, aristocratical sectors of society (Lapshina, 2008). In the English phraseological sphere we revealed the expression petticoat government (the domination of a skirt), equivalent to the Russian expression “бабье царство” (a woman's kingdom) that, undoubtedly, points to the gender potential of this phraseological unit.

The same concerns the expression “слабый пол” (the weaker sex), according to Ye.F. Arsenyeva (1999) the fair/weaker/gentle sex as an English equivalent of the phraseological unit the weaker vessel. In our opinion the property ‘weak’ is attributed not only according to physical but also intellectual characteristics.

The following group of the phraseological units of the Russian language is united by using of the lexeme “дура” (a silly woman) in their structure. These are the expressions like: “дура душой” (Birikh, Mokiyeenko, & Stepanova, 1996); “дура набитая”; “петая (отпетая) дура” (a silly woman in both meanings). As it follows from the connotation of all the expressions mentioned the female persons lack the intelligence, they are silly, dull, stupid, etc. Here we can observe the strong gender indication, because “дура” (a silly woman) is the female person in Russian. To compare it is possible to take the expression “дурья голова” (a silly head) that in our opinion doesn't bear any gender coloring as it can be used in relation to persons of both sex. In the English phraseological fund it is possible to state the absence of such type of expressions as the word 'a fool' doesn't have any sexual difference.

Considering the Russian phraseological units regarding the gender features, it is impossible to avoid the expressions with the lexeme “курица” (chicken/a hen). For example, “умница”, как пестрая курица” (clear head as motley chicken) or “умница, как попова курица” (clear head as he priest's chicken). Both the expressions are gender marked as they use the lexemes

“умница” (clear head – in Russian it refers to a woman) and “курица” (chicken/ a hen) of a feminine gender. The combination of the mentioned lexemes, in our opinion, gives a certain shade of irony to the phraseological unit. These expressions are usually used concerning the female persons with low intellect who make the silly acts, regarding them to be correct. But, the Russian phraseological unit “слепая курица” (blind mole) (Arsentyeva, 1999), despite of the existence of the same lexeme of a feminine gender, isn't in our opinion gender marked. In such a way we can call the person who sees badly, or didn't make anything out though it is more often used concerning women and it is connected with the simplicity and narrow-mindedness. In English the similar expressions were not revealed. Though, in our opinion the phraseological unit “куриные мозги” (a birdbrain) that is a full semantic-syntactical equivalent of chicken's mind, possesses female semantics, is widely used in designation of the female stupidity, narrow-mindedness, infantilism. According to Thalia (1996), this phraseological unit 'is applicable not to any 'weak-mind', but usually to the infantile mind, that is mostly considered to be female mind'. However, it isn't necessary to approve its gender coloring as the expression can be applicable to the persons of both sex. The same, in our opinion, is observed in the expression “курья голова” (chicken's head).

The expression “синий чулок” (Arsentyeva, 1999) the full English equivalent of which is a blue stocking, though doesn't comprise feminine lexicon, nevertheless possesses an obvious gender potential. It is applied to the female pedant involved in science, who isn't interested in traditionally female things such as family, children, etc. The expression designates certain contempt to the female reviewer.

The similar value is observed through and in the phraseological unit “генерал в юбке” (the general in a skirt), according to Ye. F. Arsentyeva (1999) ‘a woman who is engaged in some men's business’ (the woman who is engaged in man's affairs). It is usually applied in ironical designation of the woman having a domineering character, considering herself to be cleverer than men, trying to command them.

Very often gender marked phraseological units comprise female proper names that is traced in both languages. For example, the Russian expression “бесполденная Арина” (silly Arina) (Birikh, 2005) means the confused woman. The English expressions like dumb Dora (Kunin, 2000) (the silly girl), giddy Gertie (thoughtless Gertie) are also used to concern the simple, silly, confused woman. The irony in relation to the female intelligence is peculiar to many similar expressions: “как умная Маша” (as clever Masha) (Birikh, 2005).

The phraseological unit “женская логика” (a female logic) which coincides with the English expression woman's reason (Fergusson, 1995) is by right considered ‘a standard of thinking illogically’ (Thalia, 1996). Here it is possible to refer also to the expression “девичья память” (a poor memory, in Russian the girl's one) (Dahl, 2002), pointing to the female forgetfulness. In our opinion, these phraseological units possess the bright gender coloring though according to Thalia (1996), ‘these combinations are used for designation of 'inferiority' of both female, and male intelligence’.

Some phraseological units can be parts of the proverbs. For example, the expression “ум короток” (the mind is short) (Birikh, Mokiyeenko, & Stepanova, 1996), is at first sight gender neutral, but as a part of a saying “волос долог, да

ум короток” (long hair and short wit) (Dal, 2002) is gender marked as contains the lexical component of hair that in the figurative plan means a feminine.

The using of the feminine lexicon in the structure is peculiar to the following expressions though they cannot always possess gender potential: “под каблук” (be/under smb's thumb) (Arsentyeva, 1999), “глуп, как бабий пуп” (as silly as a woman's navel) (Birih, 2005). Nevertheless, the female orientation is peculiar to the first expression as the heel is associated with the woman, means domination, the power of the woman over the man, his certain suppression. The second expression is gender neutral; it can be used in relation to persons of both sex with the change of a syntactic shape of a person.

The Russian expressions “глупа, как гусыня” (silly as a goose), “вумная, как вутка” (clever as a duck) (Birih, 1996), “тупая, как овца” (stupid as sheep), “умна, как попова свинья” (clever as a priest's pig) without any doubt belong to gender marked units owing to the use of the corresponding terminations of adjectives. But there are also similar expressions which aren't possessing obvious gender potential though are more often used in relation to female persons: как овца круговая (as a circular sheep), “как пробка” (as stopper), “балда осиновая” (head aspen), “доходит как до утки – на пятые сутки” (reaches as a duck – for the fifth days) (Birih, 1996).

The English set expression a woman of the world (to be a woman of the world) (Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms, 2002) doesn't refer to the male reviewer as it uses the lexeme 'woman', but the masculine orientation possesses the expression a man of the world (to be a man of the world) with the similar value of the person grown wise life experience.

The analyzed phraseological units of the English language as it appeared, don't possess clear gender potential, the majority of such expressions are gender neutral though are more often used concerning the female persons. For example, the expression as stupid as a pig is possible to compare with “умна, как попова свинья” (clever as a priest's pig); as light as a butterfly is more peculiar to a feminine because it uses a lexeme "butterfly"; weak in the head, or be (up) in the clouds, or have one's head in the clouds, or from a different world or living in a different world is also more often exists in the description of women. Though similar expressions are often presented in reference books in concrete gender: in a world of her own, in her (infinite) of wisdom (Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms, 2002) that shows their gender potential. The obviously neutral expressions in gender aspect can be considered the phraseological units like: crazy as a fox, a queer bird, a queer duck, a queer fish, a strange bird, a strange fish, an odd bird, an odd fish, etc.

Thus, the gender analysis of the Russian and English phraseological units coding the female intelligence showed:

- the gender aspect of the language finds its verbalization in the phraseological units of the Russian and English languages;
- the phraseological units with the obvious gender coloring prevail in the Russian language due to the existence of a wide range of the nominations of the silly woman (“дура”, “баба”, “блондинка”, “курица”, etc.);
- the most part of the phraseological units of the English language designates the silly person in general, that is doesn't bear the obvious gender asymmetry.

Nevertheless, the question of a gender potential of the language remains open as the majority of researches incline to the conclusion that the main part of phraseological units is neutral. So, O.Yu. Suraleva & T.I. Skorobogatova (2010) in their research of the French phraseological units characterizing an intellectual potential didn't find the obvious gender asymmetry, and came to the conclusion that "the vast majority of the considered phraseological units doesn't show accurate distinction on sex, illustrating metaphorically rethought characteristics of the general person's intelligence, i.e. the internal form of the majority of the phraseological units can be correlated equally to persons of both sex".

Discussions

According to M. Hellinger & H. Motschenbacher (2015) the gender plays an important role at the translation of many texts from one language to another, in the correct use of idioms, proverbs, the set expressions relating to this or that language. The question on this subject still remains open and actual. Considering gender aspect in studying of language and culture, it is necessary to mention that such concepts as "male" and "female" are very ambiguous. They have not only essential distinctions in these or those cultures, but also correlate and change according to the history course or changes in society. By the way, it must be kept in mind that gender distinctions aren't given and not established by the nature. They are defined by the person and are part of culture, changing together with it in the process of the social development.

In the real research the gender characteristic of the Russian and English phraseological units, coding the concept of female intelligence of the compared languages is submitted.

The set expressions designating female intelligence are widely presented in the studied languages, the developed ideas of female mind – are international.

From the point of view of lexico-semantic features, the presented material represents a lexical field where the set expressions designating female intelligence can be allocated in a separate class of units of modern Russian and English languages thanks to the signs and communications defined for this class.

The complex analysis of the Russian and English phraseological units regarding gender was presented in this paper. The prevalence in the fund of set expressions with the feminine orientation speaks about the importance of the woman in various spheres of activity. Interest in a female image from society is peculiar to the modern Russian and English languages. In the material under study the negative intellectual characteristics prevail. The analysis of set expressions testifies a high share of mentally negative signs of female intelligence in the consciousness of the representatives of two structurally-different languages.

Conclusion

Set expressions that denote female intelligence are widespread in the studied languages; existing ideas of the female mind are international. From the

perspective of lexical-semantic peculiarities, the presented material is a lexical field, wherein a set of expressions that denote the female intelligence can be distinguished as a separate class of units in the modern Russian and English language, due to signs and communications, specific to this class. The analysis of phrases indicates a high ratio of mentally negative attributes of the female intelligence in the mind of the representatives of two structurally different languages.

The practical value of this research is that its results can be used for different purposes: in follow-up linguistic researches, in studies of gender potential in phraseology. In addition, under current extensive integration and mutual enrichment of cultures, the necessity of assessing linguistic phenomena, based on a comparative analysis, becomes practically important. Public interest in the female image is typical of the modern Russian and English language. Negative intellectual characteristics prevail in the studied material.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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