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CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF GENDER STUDIES IN FOREIGN LINGUISTICS

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Abstract. This paper explores the main tenets of gender studies of language developed in Western linguistics. The article contains a comparative critical analysis of deficiency framework, dominance framework, difference framework and dynamic framework and exhibits the implications of different approaches to manifestation of gender and sex in language.

Keywords: gender studies; gender in language; women's language; men's language; deficiency framework; dominance framework; difference framework; dynamic framework.

Introduction

The study of the interrelationship of language and sex had begun long before the term "gender" was introduced and the social nature of this phenomenon was understood.

The correlation of sex and language attracted the attention of philosophers as early as in ancient times, but at this stage gender in linguistics was regarded exclusively as a grammatical category and no attention was paid to its manifestation on the metalinguistic level. For example, Aristotle considers genus and species to be the parameters that determine the quality of an entity, and this quality in turn is regarded as one of ten categories [1].

However, until the early sixties of the twentieth century there was no extensive research in gender linguistics. The works devoted to the relationship of language and gender, as well as to the issues of women's place in society in the XVI-XVII centuries can hardly be called research.

There is a certain connection between biological sex and the manifestation of gender in language, but the feeble attempts to describe the markers of "male" and "female" in language and speech are no more than just forerunners of real gender studies.

The common idea of the category of "gender" began to form in the late fifties of the XX century when several articles by American psychologist and sexologist J. Money appeared in the journal "Bulletin of the Johns Hopkins Hospital" [2]. The author introduced the notion of gender, gender identity and gender roles in the modern sense. Since then, the scientists of different fields have become more and more interested in the study of gender.

Having undergone some changes in the works of various scholars, the category of gender has received a number of definitions. Gender is defined as the category that refers “to the social, cultural and psychological constructs that are imposed upon biological differences” [3], as something created by man [4], as well as “a way of construing notions of male and female” [5, 6]. From the viewpoint of A.V. Kirilina, “gender is seen as a social and cultural construct, as a conventional phenomenon and as the discourse factor of variable intensity” [6: 12].

Methodology and procedure

Deficiency framework. Deficiency framework was the first systematic approach to the study of gender. Its main point is that the scholars underestimated the quality of women’s language as compared to the “male variant”. It was believed that the language of men is a norm, while the language of women is a deviation from it, hence the term “deficiency” appeared. Language and speech of a woman were really perceived as defective, and the scientists tried to figure out what it really lacked compared with the standard variant of the male language.

The prospect of the future development of this approach becomes obvious and predictable at the beginning of the twentieth century. So, in 1906, H. James in the magazine “Harper’s Bazaar” published an article “The Speech of American Women”, in which he urged the American women to try to differentiate the various forms of speech and its tone, so that America could get rid of inappropriate national habits of speech, and thereby contribute to the rise of American culture [7]. That is, in his opinion, it is the female version of the English language that lowered its status in general.

The monograph by Danish linguist O. Jespersen “Language, its nature, development and origin” published in 1922 was one of the first important works on gender issues written within the framework of the deficiency approach. The scientist noted many defective characteristics of the “women’s language” in this book in a separate chapter devoted to this problem [8: 237-255]. For example, Jespersen points out that “women’s vocabulary is usually much less extensive as men’s” [Ibid: 248].

A more detailed analysis of gender differences start in the seventies of the twentieth century. The beginning of these studies is associated with the name of American scientist R. Lakoff and her article “Language and women’s place” published in 1973 which was followed by a monograph on gender linguistics published in 1975 under the same title. The theoretical conclusions, according to the author, were based on the data “gathered mainly by introspection” [9: 4]. We can say that this book has predetermined the appearance of all the three approaches to gender studies in the foreign linguistics: the so-called deficiency framework, dominance framework and dif-

ference framework, but, having examined Lakoff's work as a whole, we also come to the conclusion that the general assessment of the women's language is negative in comparison with the men's variant, so the men's language is taken as a pattern. In general, it seems that there is something wrong in women's speech, compared to men's, and that something is missing. For example, according to the author, the women's speech lacks confidence, that is why women use tag questions and mitigating expression more often [9]. At the same time, Lakoff also points out that the lack of confidence in women's speech can be explained by the dominance of men in conversation.

Dominance framework. The introduction of the dominance framework is connected to the development of the feminist movement in Europe and the United States in the seventies and eighties of the twentieth century. The main goal of the researchers in this area was to expose the facts of male dominance in language fixed by social and cultural tradition, as well as to influence the situation.

D. Spender developed the dominance framework introduced by Lakoff and strengthened its position in the range of gender paradigms in her book "Man Made Language" [10]. However, D. Spender did more than her predecessor: she does not only speak of sexism as a phenomenon, she also does not accept the domination of masculine grammatical forms. Her views may be described as radical feminism. She argues that "it has been the dominant group - in this case males - who have created the world, invented the categories, constructed sexism and its justification and developed a language trap which is in their interest" [Ibid: 142]. The extreme points of the feminist interpretation of this framework can be seen in such views, when a scientist becomes an adept of social conspiracy theory, the existence of which is hard to imagine.

C. West and D. Zimmerman [11] also speak about the problems of gender domination in language. In the beginning, West and Zimmerman found out that men interrupt each other much less often than women. According to their data, 96% of interruptions in conversations were made by males to females. In a more recent study the scientists described an experiment, in which unacquainted students took part. Men interrupted women three times more often [12]. Since the interruption of speech is a violation of the natural course of conversation, West and Zimmerman conclude that interruption is "in other words, a way of 'doing' power in face-to-face interaction" [Ibid: 111].

The works "What do couples talk about when they're alone?" and "Interaction: the work women do" by P. Fishman [13] may be also mentioned as the significant studies carried out in the framework of dominance approach. She came to the conclusion that communication breakdowns occur not because of some inherent characteristics of women's speech, but due to the dominance of men, their reaction or its absence.

Difference framework. As time went by, it became clear that the problem of gender determination in language is not disclosed fully neither within the deficiency framework supported by such prominent scientists as O. Jespersen and R. Lakoff, nor within the dominance framework, which was so popular in the first decades of the feminist movement. The difference framework developed in the late eighties - early nineties of the XX century became an alternative.

The fact that women's speech is different from men's variant was acknowledged by many linguists, including Labov, Lakoff, Jespersen and their predecessors. The fact that gender determination in linguistics has become the subject of studies is already the recognition of the fact that these differences are important for the linguistic science, not to mention the understanding that such differences really exist. However, the essence of the "difference approach" is not so much in the acknowledgment of the inherent characteristics determining "the women's language", as in the admitting that these differences (not domination or "inferiority") play the leading role in the description and the resolution of the problems that gender linguistics faces.

Men and women are given an equal role within the "difference approach" but they are regarded as communicants belonging to different subcultures. The differences in subcultures are considered to be the cause of the differences that arise in the process of communication. As early as in 1982 D. Maltz and R. Borker stated in the article "A cultural approach to male-female miscommunication" that men and women in America belong to different sociolinguistic subcultures and learn different tactics of communication, so "when they attempt to carry on conversations with one another, even if both parties are attempting to treat one another as equals, cultural miscommunication results" [14: 200].

Thus, Maltz and Borker come to the conclusion that the problems arise primarily due to cultural differences. On the other hand, the authors abstracted away from identifying the causes of such differences in the subcultures of men and women, and, from our point of view these causes may be rooted exactly in the social principle of male dominance.

The "difference approach" also had its followers. The most prominent adept of this approach is American scientist D. Tannen. The author didn't deny the fact that men often dominate women in life and conversation, but she does not consider dominance to be a single cause of all differences, "It is not sufficient to account for everything that happens to women and men in conversations" [15: 18].

After D. Tannen's works had been published, several other popular science works written in the framework of the "difference approach" were issued. They are "Men are from Mars, women are from Venus" [16] by J. Gray and the book "Why Men don't listen and women can't read maps" by A. Pease and B. Pease and others. J. Gray believes that the root of the differ-

ences is that men and women apply different evaluation systems to gender relations. For example, a man can give a certain act 20 or 40 points, and women “add one”. This may lead to misunderstanding in the end [16].

Allan and Barbara Pease, in their turn, did more and put up a wall between men and women. As the authors pointed out in the book “why men don’t listen and women can’t read maps”, men and women “live in different worlds, with different values and according to quite different sets of rules” [17: 20], and the reasons for these differences are rooted in the different psyche structure. There are various reasons for the differences in the works of the adepts of this framework, but it does not affect the foundations of the approach - the “difference approach”.

Dynamic framework. The so-called dynamic framework is the newest approach in the foreign gender linguistics. Within this paradigm gender differences are considered to be not immanent innate qualities, but socially determined characteristics. At the same time gender is seen as a dynamic category. According to J. Coates, “what has changed is linguists’ sense that gender is not a static, add-on characteristics of speakers, but is something that is accomplished in talk every time we speak” [18: 7]. According to the “dynamic approach” the speech of a communicant of either sex can have both feminine and masculine traits, and therefore, gender is seen not as something that people have, but as something they create. Hence the concept of doing gender appeared.

Such ideas were significantly promoted by C. West and D. Zimmerman and their later work “Doing gender”, in which they proposed and settled “ethnomethodologically informed, and therefore distinctively sociological, understanding of gender as a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment” [4: 126]. Therefore, according to J. Coates, scientists today analyze the data of oral and written language with the aim of understanding the dynamics of the gender formation. In addition, they are interested in the role played by language in the creation and fixation of traits attributed to men and women [18].

Rejecting both the “deficiency framework” and the “dominance framework”, Coates said that the language of a woman is neither defective nor dominated, and the use of questions and other linguistic forms associated with courtesy matches the main purpose of a woman’s talk because “its main aim is to maintain good social relationships” [19: 98].

British sociolinguist D. Cameron also rejects both the “deficiency framework” and the “dominance framework”. In her work “Rethinking language and gender studies” Cameron points out that “both dominance and difference represented particular moments in feminism: dominance was the moment of feminist outrage, of bearing witness to oppression in all aspects of women’s lives, while difference was the moment of feminist celebration, reclaiming and revaluing women’s distinctive cultural traditions” [20: 39].

Cameron also thinks that there is no reason to put insurmountable linguistic barriers between men and women. In the work “The myth of Mars and Venus: do men and women really speak different languages?” Cameron step by step strives to refute the stereotypes about men’s and women’s language, such as for example, the belief that women speak more or that they’re more polite, or more sensitive relying on the fact that there is no possibility to prove such claims undisputedly and once and for all on the empirical basis. Why do these stereotypes still exist? According to the author, this happens because “the idea that men and women “speak different languages” has itself become a dogma, treated not as a hypothesis to be investigated... but as an unquestioned article of faith” [21: 3].

In this case, there is a risk of underestimating the importance of stereotypes in identifying gender differences. Of course, the term “stereotype” bears certain negative connotation. It is associated with stagnation and prejudice. But not all stereotypes are biased. The fact that stereotypes do not appear out of nowhere also speaks against the radical rejection of stereotypes. Generalizing statements fixed in the language and culture deserves to be taken into account, even if their role must not be overestimated.

Discussion

Each of the approaches described above has its advantages and disadvantages. Certain results are achieved within each approach and they can’t be ignored. Even the deficiency framework, however unreasonable and prejudiced its followers may seem to be from the modern point of view, has an advantage over other approaches in exposing possible weaknesses that women’s speech in general may have been compared with the men’s variant: stronger inconsistency of statements and possible lack of confidence.

Among the reasonable postulates of the dominance framework one may mention the statement that the long period of social dominance of men over women could not but influence the structure of women’s linguistic behavior, though, probably due to the partial emancipation the traces of this influence, it will be less obvious over time. Some cases of radicalism may be considered a weakness of the dominance approach (though the same is true to all the other approaches). So, according to Talbot, a weak point of the dominance approach is the universalization of the concept of dominance, because “all men are not in a position to dominate all women” [22: 134].

The disadvantage of the “difference approach”, in our opinion, is the exaggeration of the role of gender differences in linguistics, and sometimes even their absolutization. On the other hand, it is the exaggeration that made it possible to determine the boundaries of gender differences most clearly. It appears to be necessary at that stage of research.

Conclusion

The dynamic approach is the most acceptable today despite the rejection of some conclusions made by the representatives of the previous approaches that we consider to be fair. At present, according to one of the key supporters of this approach D. Cameron, “conceptions of gender as categorical, fixed and static have increasingly been abandoned in favour of more constructivist and dynamic ones” [23: 86].

The article is devoted to the critical analysis of the approaches to gender studies developed in foreign linguistics, but it is also worth mentioning that such studies are also taking place in Russian linguistics and they are quite fruitful. The approaches to gender studies developed in Russian linguistics are represented quite thoroughly in our work “Cognitive perspective of gender studies” [24]. The results of the application of these approaches in the practical study of gender are also described in our works, for example, in the article The means of expression of the conceptual-cognitive frame “Woman” [25] and “Erotization as the basis of female metaphor in the English language” [26].

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