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Gender Metaphors in Russian and English Linguocultures: a Comparative Study

Zoya I. Rezanova[a], Anastasiya L. Khlebnikova[b]*

[a]Tomsk State University, 36, Lenin Ave., Tomsk, 634050, Russia
[b]Tomsk Polytechnic University, 30, Lenin Ave., Tomsk, 643050, Russia

Abstract

The article represents the results of the comparison between gender oppositions of Russian and English linguocultures that are fixed in the system of conceptual metaphors. As the main sources of data for metaphor study dictionaries of the Russian and the English languages are used. We reveal the peculiar characteristics of a person with no respect to gender and gender-marked characteristics that are common and culture-specific for the two linguocultures. What the metaphorical nominations of a person have in common is that the aspect of gender differences is not predominant; however, they are of importance when describing a person's appearance. The distinctive feature of the metaphorical systems is a significant prevalence of metaphors characterizing women in Russian.

Keywords: Gender metaphor; gender-marked metaphor; conceptual metaphor; gender opposition; English linguoculture; Russian linguoculture.

1. Introduction

Much research on cultural stereotypes fixed in the semantics of language units as an aspect of interaction between language and culture has been conducted (Vezhbitskaya, 2001; Shmelev, 2002; Yakovleva, 1998; Poryadina, et al., 2007; Dronova, Ermolenkina L, 2005, etc.). At the same time, the solution to this problem is of applied significance. We believe that the knowledge of cultural stereotypes fixed in the language provides effective cross-cultural communication. Therefore, it has to become an integral part of foreign language teaching. In addition,

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +7 913 855 1990.
  *E-mail address:*khlebnikova@tpu.ru

that kind of linguistic marking is often implicit. This fact necessitates its consistent academic self-reflection and introduction in teaching systems. It is important to notice that the study of cultural stereotypes with regard to a person is particularly essential since interpersonal relations are the basis of communication. The aim of this article is to study the nature and the extent of the differences in the way gender oppositions are reflected when characterizing a human in the system of metaphorical nominations in Russian and English (British) linguocultures. We may specify the common problem solved in the article in a number of questions. How often is the aspect of gender differences emphasized when we name a person figuratively? What qualities are metaphorically denoted as "human" and "gender-specific" ones? Are the characteristics of man different from those of woman? Are the differences culture specific?

The study is based on modern linguistic theories of gender (Philips, 1987; Günthner, Kotthoff, 1992; Kirilina, 1997, etc.), conceptual metaphor theory (Lakoff & Johnson, 2003; Lakoff &Turner, 1989, Lakoff, 2008, etc.), figurative modelling theory (Rezanova, Mishankina & Katunin, 2003, etc.), the theory of linguistic axiology (Arutyunova, 1984; Teliya, 1986, etc.).

The ideas on objectivization of gender oppositions and stereotypes in the semantics of language units are most relevant for us in a wide range of modern linguistic theories of gender. Gender oppositions and stereotypes are objectified in grammatical categories, particularly in those of gender (Andonova, D'Amico, Devescovi & Bates, 2004; Bates, Devescovi, Pizzamiglio, D'Amico & Hernandez, 1995; Dahan, Swingley, Tanenhaus, Magnuson, 2000, etc.), in the systems of phraseological and lexical meanings (Pyykkönen, Hyönä & vanGompel, 2010; Kirilina, 1997; Tafel, 1997, etc.) and above all, in lexical metaphorical nominations (Rezanova, Komissarova, 2012; Rezanova, Nekrasova & Shilyaev, 2014, etc.).

When analyzing metaphorical nominations we rely on the cognitive theory of metaphor in which metaphor is defined as a cognitive process of understanding and interpreting various phenomena of reality through associative comparison of the phenomena of a conceptual field with that of another one. Lexical metaphors are interpreted as representatives of conceptual metaphors that are cognitive schemes of correlation between source and target domains. A conceptual metaphor is represented in a set of lexical metaphors created according to a single model that is characterized by a typical interrelation between direct meaning and figurative one.

One of the main postulates of contemporary theory of metaphor is the idea about the interaction between the interpretative modeling character of metaphorical nominations and the expression of evaluation of a reality object referred to (Vol'f, 1988; Dronova, Ermolenkina, et al., 2005, etc.).

The article considers the system of metaphorical nominations of a human as the way of linguistic marking of interpretation and evaluation of various aspects of human activity. In the totality of metaphorical nominations we contrast gender metaphors (gender-marked metaphors) with gender unmarked metaphors. Gender metaphors are viewed as nominations of men and women that serve as means of marking "typically feminine" and "typically masculine" qualities based on conformity to the phenomena of various conceptual categories (e.g. *klusha* (chicken) 'a stupid clumsy woman'; *gorilla* 'a large, strong, and brutal-looking man'). Gender unmarked metaphors are metaphors in which the target domain is a human in general without any differentiation between men and women (e.g. *lopukh* (burdock) 'a simple-minded slow-witted person'; *baboon* 'a brutish person with rude clumsy manners and little refinement') (Rezanova, 2011).

2. Material and Method

The material of the study is the vocabulary that characterizes a person figuratively. It is lexicalized in the dictionaries of the Russian and English languages and was selected by using continuous sampling method: Russian Language Dictionary (1999), RAS, Institute for Linguistic Studies, A.P. Yevgen'eva (Ed.), 4th ed., 4 vol. Moscow; Dictionary of Contemporary Russian Literary Language (1950). Academy of Sciences of the USSR, Institute of the Russian language, V.I. Chernyshev (Ed.) 17[th]ed. Moscow, Leningrad; Macmillan English Dictionary for Advanced Learners (2002).Macmillan Education, 2002.

The dictionaries serve as the source of the data due to the fact that they reflect common meanings which are reproduced steadily. This is the reason why this fact is important for us to evaluate semantic oppositions revealed as characteristic of the linguocultures under study. The total number of gender metaphors identified was 409 and 520 lexemes that characterize a human from the Russian and English dictionaries, respectively.

Then the analysis of the dictionary definitions was conducted and denotation sphere of the metaphors was identified. We oppose the following nominations: with *broad denotation* - "a human being", for example *viper* 'a malicious or treacherous person' and with *narrow denotation* differentiated with respect to gender – *a man, a woman,* for instance *cuckoo* 'a man who is a stupid incompetent fool', *cow* 'an insulting word for a woman, especially one who is stupid or unkind'.

When analyzing the data, the main principle we relied on was the methodological principle of combining the techniques of structural semantic analysis of figurative lexical units and the techniques of cognitive modeling. The latter includes the identification of conceptual models, representatives of which are metaphorical lexemes with standard schemes of metaphorical mapping. First, the data of English and Russian were analyzed separately, but according to converging evidence. At the second stage we compared the character and the direction of figurative modelling of a human in the Russian and English languages with respect to gender.

3. Discussion

1. The analysis showed that in Russian, gender unmarked metaphors predominate in metaphorical nominations, which amounts to 74% of the total number of metaphors (304 units). The same trend can be observed in English, where gender unmarked metaphors account for 81% of the total (422).

In Russian, the group of strictly gender-marked metaphors numbers 105 items, which amounts to 25% of the total number of metaphors that characterize a human. It should be noted that the number of metaphors with the target domain "woman" is significantly higher than those with the target domain "man": 87 vs. 18 metaphors, which amount to 83% and 17% of the total number of strictly gender-marked metaphors, respectively. In English, there are 98 strictly gender-marked metaphors. The number of metaphors with the target domain "woman" is equal to that with the target domain "man": 49 and 49 items, which correspond to 50% of the total number of strictly gender-marked metaphors.

2. As noted above, we regard a metaphorical nomination as the way of linguistic marking of gender stereotypes. To reveal these stereotypes we identified the aspects of figurative comparison of a human with the phenomena of other conceptual fields. We believe that these aspects reflect the stereotypes.

As a result of the analysis, gender unmarked metaphors and strictly gender-marked ones were classified into groups according to common traits they interpret figuratively: for instance, **appearance** (Russian: *kheruvim (cherubim)* 'a handsome young man'; English: *giant* 'a man who is much taller and stronger than most men'); **character and behavior** (Russian: *khasanova (Casanova)* 'a man known for his amorous adventures'; English: *actress* 'a woman who puts on a false manner in order to deceive others'); **intellectual ability** (Russian: *nedorosl' (greenhorn)* 'a simple-minded inexperienced youth'; English: *doll* 'a pretty but expressionless or unintelligent woman'); **social role** (Russian: *shyshka* (fir cone) 'an influential person'; English: *cog* 'someone considered as a minor part of a large organisation'); **talents** (Russian: *zvezda* (star) 'one who is highly celebrated in a field or profession'; English: *demon* 'someone who is extremely good at something'); **physiological status** (Russian: *sova* (owl) 'a person who feels vigorous at night rather than in the morning'; English: *ruin* 'a person as a wreck of his former self').

In the following we present the results of the comparative analysis of the directions of figurative modelling in the totality of gender-marked and gender unmarked metaphors. In addition, we identify whether the trends revealed are common or different in Russian and English linguocultures.

2.1. In the totality of gender unmarked metaphors (metaphorical nominations of a human in general without any differentiation between men and women) there is a considerable degree of similarity which manifests in the predominance of a person's description with respect to his or her behavioural characteristics, personality - 57% and 51% of the total number of metaphors in Russian and English respectively (Russian: *varvar* (barbarian) 'a fierce, brutal, or cruel person'; English: *lamb* 'a sweet, mild-mannered person').

The similarity is displayed in a relative frequency of some aspects of metaphorical description. Thus, 19% and 17% of the total number of metaphors in Russian and English, respectively, characterize appearance of a person (Russian: *vereteno* (spindle) 'a tall thin person'; English: *hulk* 'someone who is very tall and heavy'), 9% of the total

number of metaphors in Russian and English, respectively, refer to his or her intellectual ability (Russian: *bolvan* (chump) 'a foolish or gullible person'; English: *brain* 'an intelligent person').

At the same time, in English the metaphorical nomination of a person in the aspect of his or her social role is represented by the number of metaphors, which is twice as large as the number of those in Russian: 3% vs. 7% of the total number of metaphors in Russian and English, respectively: (Russian: *ptenets* (baby bird) 'somebody's child, foster child or pupil'; English: *vassal* 'a person in a subordinate dependent position relative to another'). It is to be noted that evaluative metaphorical nominations are more productive in English as well: 7% and 12% of the total number of metaphors in Russian and English, respectively, (Russian: *krysa* (rat) 'a repulsive person'; English: *peach* 'a particularly admirable or pleasing person').

2.2. As far as gender-marked metaphors are concerned, there is considerable variation between the two linguocultures according to the dictionaries. in English the equal number of metaphors that characterize a man and a woman is identified, whereas in Russian the number of metaphorical nominations of a woman is 5 times higher than that of a man (87 and 18 units, respectively): for instance, *god* 'a man who is extremely attractive', *roza* (rose) 'a pretty, vigorous girl or woman'.

The comparison between the aspects characterizing men and women in the two linguocultures revealed the following. In English linguoculture when describing both men and women, the following features are of great significance: character and behavior (18 and 18 units: *caveman* 'a man who behaves in a violent rough way', *harpy* 'a malicious woman with a fierce temper'); appearance (16 and 17 units respectively: *Samson* 'a man of outstanding physical strength', *nymph* "a sexually mature and attractive young woman'). The characteristic of intellectual ability proves to be of little consequence; however, a man and a woman are not opposed with respect to the frequency of a nomination: 4 and 3 metaphors respectively (*gorilla* 'a big man who seems stupid', *cow* 'a stupid woman').

The differences in the aspects characterizing men and women are represented by a small number of metaphors. Women are evaluated metaphorically more often than men (7 vs. 0), for example, *harpy* 'an insulting word for a woman you consider unpleasant', *princess* 'a woman regarded as having the status or qualities of a princess'. Men are 3 times more likely to be described in terms of their social characteristics (6 vs 2): *nabob* 'a rich powerful or important man', *empress* 'a woman of great power and influence'.

In Russian linguoculture we discover that even though the number of metaphorical nominations characterizing women prevails, there is little significant difference in the correlation and the proportion of aspects of characteristics in the totality of metaphors describing men and women. Thus, 10 metaphors that describe men's behaviour account for 55.6% of the total number of metaphorical nominations of men; 49 metaphors that characterize women in the aspect of their behavior represent 48.3 % of the total number of metaphorical nominations of women: *baba* (woman) 'a man who is weak or easily afraid', *gazel'* (gazelle) 'a graceful slim girl' (see Table 1).

Table 1. The aspects of characteristics of a human, a man and a woman. The quantitative data.

Languages	English						Russian					
The target domain of metaphorical modelling	person		man		woman		person		man		woman	
Total number	**422**		**49**		**49**		**304**		**18**		**87**	
Groups	Number	% of the number of the group	Number	% of the number of the group	Number	% of the number of the group	Number	% of the number of the group	Number	% of the number of the group	Number	% of the number of the group
Aspects Character, behaviour	229	54,3%	18	36,7%	18	36,7%	183	60,1%	10	55,6%	42	48,3%

Appearance	55	13,0%	16	32,6%	17	34,7%	38	12,5%	6	33,3%	33	37,9%
Intellectual ability	40	9,7%	4	8,2%	3	6,1%	33	10,9%	1	5,6%	5	5,7%
Evaluation	55	12,4%	0		7	14,3%	21	6,9%	1	5,6%	7	8,04%
Social role	30	7,1%	6	12,2%	2	4,1%	12	3,9%	0		0	
Talents	7	1,7%	2	4,1%	0		11	3,6%	0		0	
Physiological status	3	0,7%	0		0		7	2,3%	0		0	

4. Conclusion

Gender is not the basic aspect when characterizing a human figuratively, the evaluation is not connected with gender predominates. Metaphorical characteristic of a human, with no respect to gender is marked by quantitative predominance as well as by larger number of particular aspects of description in comparison with gender-marked metaphors. In other words, these trends are not culture-specific.

The comparison of gender-marked and gender-unmarked metaphors in the two languages reveals two more common aspects. Firstly, metaphorical nominations that emphasize the aspects of character and behavior are dominant both in the groups of gender unmarked metaphors and gender-marked ones. These aspects are not fixed as gender-specific.

Secondly, it is the characteristic of appearance that contrasts gender unmarked metaphors and gender-marked ones. The results show that when referring to gender differences, appearance is of more importance than when describing a human, with no respect to gender.

Thirdly, the comparison between gender-marked nominations of men and women reveals the prevalence of common features in the aspects of characteristics and the proportion inside the group alike. There is a large degree of distinctions in the totality of evaluative nominations: they predominate when naming a woman while in English the prevalence is more prominent.

Finally, the most significant difference between the two linguocultures was found in the group of gender-marked metaphors. In the totality of Russian gender-marked metaphors we observe significant predominance of metaphorical nominations of women, whereas in English the number of metaphors naming women is equal to that of men.

Acknowledgments

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