GENDER INTERPRETATION OF RUSSIAN LEXEME БАБА/BABA IN INTERNET DISCOURSE

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Abstract. The Internet is not only a global source of information but also a communication tool. At the present time studies of Internet communication and the language functioning as a means of electronic communication are one of the most relevant and innovative areas of linguistics. This paper considers gender specifics of the representation of the Russian lexeme баба (baba) in the Internet discourse based on messages of women's and men's forums. The gender component of the Internet discourse and ways of linguistic representation of sex in the Russian-language Internet are research objects. The study of the naming unit баба in the Russian-language Internet forums made it possible to identify and describe gender stereotypes of femininity existing in a modern culture of language, as well as to determine the role and position of this lexeme in the system of gender values of virtual environment users. The scientific novelty of the work is as follows: an analysis of the lexeme баба was carried out on the basis of Russian-language Internet forums for the first time. As a result of the research, specific functioning of the баба's lexeme in the Internet discourse was revealed and described; non-procedural and procedural characteristics of the баба's lexeme reflected in the language of the Russian-language Internet users were identified and systematized; gender symmetry / asymmetry of the баба's image was revealed by comparing the results of identification and self-identification by people of the opposite sex.

Keywords: Internet discourse, forum, gender, cognitive classifiers, cognitive signs.

1. Introduction

Studies of the image of a person in various discourses, genres and social language variants have become relevant recently [Ageeva Yu.V., 2014; Akhmerova, L.R., Gilazetdinova, G.K., 2015; Yapparova V.N., Bochina T.G., 2015; Galiulina I.R., Bochina T.G., 2016; Galeev, T.I., Solovyev, V.D., 2015; Galeev T.I., 2016].

Virtual reality studies and the functioning of language as a means of electronic communication are also becoming research objects [Khabibullina E., Savitskaya N., 2017, Martínez, Armenio Pérez, Aimara Rodríguez Fernández, and Susana Hinojosa de Aguilar. 2018]. This paper continues a series of publications on the study of gender features in representation of the men's image in electronic communication. At the same time, an original algorithm for identifying universal and specific features in the language of men and women is proposed based on comparison of messages selected at specialized male and female Internet forums [Bochina T.G., Miftakhova A.N. 2014, Bochina T.G. + et al, 2015]. Formed in the Russian-language Internet forums, a concept *баба* is of great research interest in connection with its figurative and axiological characteristics. The relevance of the paper is in insufficient knowledge of the lexeme *баба* representation in the Russian-language forums, as well as in social significance of the description of gender stereotypes of femininity existing in contemporary culture of the Russian language, including Internet communication.[Shinde, M. A. K. 2016]. The scientific novelty of the paper is that an analysis of the *баба*'s lexeme functioning has been conducted for the first time based on the male and female forums of the Russian-language Internet.

The purpose of the research is to identify and describe specifics of the *баба* lexeme functioning in the Internet discourse; to identify and systematize its non-procedural and procedural characteristics reflected in the language of the Russian-language Internet users. In furtherance of this goal, the following tasks were set: to analyze the contexts of a *баба*'s lexeme in the language of women's and men's forums of the Russian-language Internet; to describe the categorical structure, establish the role and position of this naming unit in the axiological world of women and men; to reveal the gender symmetry / asymmetry of the *баба*'s image by comparing the results of identification and self-identification of the opposite sex representatives.

2. Methodology.

The study material is 600 messages which were selected from the most popular and representative Russian women's and men's forums (the authors of the messages were divided equally, according to their sex): a) male forums: *Форум волчат* (50241 users), *Поговорим* (10742), *BestForum* (9090), *Мужской клуб* (7520), *MaxiChat* (2213); b) female forums: *Главный женский форум страны* (28321), *Точек нет* (16565), *MakeCool* (43687), *Искушение* (2726), *Wow* (2036). Cognitive processing of the contextual semantics of the naming unit *баба* was carried out in order to structure its gender image.

For the *баба*'s lexeme, cognitive signs were distinguished by division into two groups: "*Баба - What is she like*?" and "*Баба - What does she do*?" Since such division is the most informative, it let us obtain the most meaningful information about the essence of a particular object / phenomenon, to record the largest number of linguistic means which objectify the image of a person and reflect the language consciousness in the virtual environment. This division is also convenient for cognitive interpretation. The first stage in the identification of the gender representation of the *баба*'s lexeme on the Internet was a description of its categorical structure, i.e. distribution of the obtained cognitive

differential signs according to the cognitive classification criteria (classifiers) used for the conceptualization of this phenomenon. "A cognitive classification sign is a component of the concept's content that reflects one or another aspects, a categorization parameter of the corresponding object or phenomenon. It generalizes the homogeneous differential features in the structure of the concept" [Popova, 2007, 128]. Further, cognitive signs were ranked according to the degree of brightness, which was calculated as a percentage of this characteristic in the general array of objectification obtained in the cognitive content of the concept [Simanova, 2008, 131]. Then the "relevance of the classifier" and the "brightness of the classifier" were calculated. The relevance of the cognitive classifier is defined as the relative number of cognitive signs that are generalized by a certain classifier. The brightness of the cognitive classifier is defined as the relative number of language objectifications of this classifier (textual implementations).

The following methods were used at different stages of the study: computerized sampling of language data, descriptive analysis, lexical-semantic analysis, contextual analysis, lingua-cognitive approach (a description of cognitive structures through the analysis of linguistic means of their objectification), quantitative data processing.

3. Results And Discussion

"In any society, including virtual one, the attitude toward a woman reflected in the language undoubtedly demonstrates the level of culture of the nation on the whole" [Miftakhova A. N. + et al, 2017].

The authors have already analyzed the functioning of the lexeme *женщина (woman)* in forums of the Russian-language Internet [Miftakhova A. N. + et al, 2017]. It was concluded that the word *женщина (a woman)* has mainly a positive connotative meaning.

In quantitative terms, the word *баба* is more often used in male forums (319) than in female ones (283).

In the traditional folk culture the lexeme *баба* usually defines a married woman-villager, a peasant woman. As the functional analysis of this lexeme in the messages of women and men has shown, *баба* can be used as a synonym for the word *woman* and, therefore, is characterized by neutral connotation: "*It does not matter: Beethoven composed music or any **baba** gave birth to a child – they made it for themselves solely, not for the surrounding society.*" "*The word **baba** is not offensive for a normal Russian married woman*".

However, in the virtual environment the word *баба* is used predominantly in relation to women who lack intelligence, use profane language, have a scandalous character, an unattractive appearance. They are pushy, talkative, fussy: "*I do not like that all **babas** are almost like blondes from jokes about intelligence*" or "*Those rare specimens who are nibbling sunflower seeds on the street, swearing and are not above firewater - they are **BABAS**"*. "*I do not like when a girl after a wedding turns into a **baba**";* "***Babas** are **babas** because they show their dullness at any opportunity.*"

The word *баба* can have the meaning 'a Russian woman'. In this meaning the contextual use of the word can be both positively and negatively connoted. The word can have a positive connotation if it characterizes a Russian woman in general, for example: "*One can be a **baba** with an awesome health, but not physically attracted.*" This is an example of such admirable feature of Russian women as physical strength and health. The positive assessment is based on the fact that native speakers consider physical strength and health as one of the attractiveness criteria for a typical Russian woman. Such an ideal is socially conditioned: muscular physique is an indicator of physical strength and health, which, in its turn, were the necessary qualities for a simple woman who had to deal with a family and daily routine that demanded great health.

In women's forums the word *баба* consolidates only the positive characteristics such as good health, sturdy physique, an attractive appearance: "*You are a healthy, beautiful **baba**!*"

The word *баба* in the men's messages often has a positive connotation if it denotes a beautiful, intelligent, sensual woman: "*Well.... she seems to be a **beautiful baba**, Friday evening, I am sitting at the computer and chewing my heartache...*"; "*Even the most glamorous aristocrat who drinks coffee and holds a cup by sticking out a little finger coyly, will be assessed by men as "a **cool baba**"; "There is no difference between a woman and a baba, they say: the **cleverest baba. Cool baba**"; "Go after **babas** (well, you cannot say go after women)*".

In women's and men's forums the words *баба* and *woman* may be antonyms: "***Baba** is a **former woman** who, for one reason or another, has stopped to take care of herself, that is: she became stupid, uninteresting for her man (or men)*"; "*She does not work; she is a scandalmonger; she is dirty; her house is always a mess; she will feed her husband some broth cooked on the stove in a dirty pan (instead of a normal meal); she may stop brushing for a day (because she does not see the point); some **babas** also have grease under the nails; she talks only about TV series and shows such as "DOM-2", etc. She does not read books and does not watch news; she bothers her man for minor issues: he leaves his socks everywhere; he puts a plate on the wrong place! She checks his cell phone, asking, "Whose number is it? Who is Klara Vasilyevna? Why did you call her?*"

The users of women's forums use this word in relation to themselves if they focus on negative qualities: "*I hate myself for the fact that if I leave my husband I will be a **wicked baba with a terrible character**.*" "*I was a slim girl before a pregnancy, after it I have become a **ginormous baba** (I've put on 28 kg).*"

4.   Summary

The specific of gender verbalization of the *баба*'s image is determined by an analysis of the categorical structure. First of all, let us analyze cognitive signs that have been revealed in answer to the question "*Baba-what is she like*?" Cognitive classifiers are more diverse in the messages of women (14 - in women's forums, 10 - in men's forums), while the number of cognitive signs is almost the same (49 and 46, respectively). The markers of general cognitive

consciousness are classifiers "Character and temperament" (18/32 - relevance index / brightness index in women's forums and 18/20 in men's forums, respectively) and "Impression" (9/20 and 11/13). It should be noted that the brightness index of cognitive signs of these classifiers is higher in women's forums. As a result of the identification of common cognitive signs (9 signs) one can make a portrait of *баба* in opinion of the network users. It is a female who can be both attractive (*beautiful* - 3 references in women's messages /2 - in men's messages) and unattractive (*ugly* 1/2); obese (10/1 *fat*); with such negative qualities as envy (*envious* 7/1), a long tongue and contentious temper (a *fishwife* 4/1); of a certain age (*young* 1/2) and nationality (*Russian* 5/1); having a husband (*married* 1/2); an expectant mother (*pregnant* 1/1); perfect by different parameters (*typical* 5/8). Quantitative discrepancies in the number of general cognitive signs allow for a conclusion that the users of women's forums focus on a nationality, obesity of women and such a human negative quality as envy. At the same time, quantitative discrepancies in cognitive classifiers are insignificant that confirms stability and consistence of the concept in cognitive and linguistic consciousness of the Internet users along with its significance for cognitive consciousness as a whole.

Gender asymmetry in the conceptualization of the *баба*'s image is revealed as the follows: only female users discuss her height (*short*), relationships with men (*in the search for a permanent partner*, *obsessed with relationships*), appearance (*healthy, strong*), inwardness (*happy*), the feelings she causes (*wicked*).

The female users conceptualize negative traits of character (*pushy* 5, *fishwife* 4, *agile* 2), an ability to evoke love (*beloved* 7), and good health (*healthy* 4).

It is more important for the male users to discuss the level of education and culture of a *баба* (*ill-bred, uneducated, ill-mannered*), hair color (*black-haired*). In the men's messages a bad character (*wicked* 2), an appearance (*ugly* 2, *beautiful* 2), an age (*young* 2), a social status (*married* 2) are conceptualized, too.

An analysis of the cognitive signs that indicate the actions of a *баба* in answer to the question "*What does she do?"* has also revealed the markers of female and male cognitive consciousness which demonstrate similarity and difference in perception of the image. The most relevant and bright classifiers are "Characteristic activity" (48/50), "Relationships with men" (9/21) which are markers of the general cognitive consciousness. The cognitive signs of these classifiers are mostly negative. Quantitative indicators show that the users of men's forums emphasize the relationship of the *баба* with the opposite sex. It is remarkable that men's forums (90 cognitive signs) contain 27 cognitive signs more than women's forums (63 cognitive signs). Members of men's and women's forums equally discuss the appearance of *баба (she is not physically attracted)*, her reproductive functions *(baba gives birth only for her own sake; she goes forth the lowest class of society)*, relationships with the family, children and a husband *(she shows off a child every now and then; she is yelling at kids)*, intellectual qualities *(she becomes stupid; she is feeble-minded; she does not use her gray matter much)*. Gender asymmetry in the representation of the *баба's* image is observed in the fact that general procedural cognitive signs were not found in the messages of women and men. Moreover, the analysis of these cognitive signs has not revealed bright cognitive features since the number of the cognitive signs and the number of their usage is the same. Only the users of men's forums discuss the attitude of the *баба* to material values (*she earns money*), clothes (*she wears sagging pants*), bad habits (she *drinks, smokes, gets drunk as an animal*), age (*she has grown old)*. The users of men's forums note that the word *баба* sounds positive if the subject of speech and evaluation is a man. However, as men understand that women assess the word *баба* negatively, they prefer not to use it as an address to women.

5. Conclusions. The image of a female person who can be called *баба* is generally stereotyped in men's and women's forums. The word *баба* has a predominantly negative connotation for the users of both men's and women's forums.

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Table 1. Gender Interpretation of Баба image

	Attributive combinations *БАБА – WHAT IS SHE LIKE*?		Predicative combinations *БАБА – WHAT DOES SHE DO*?	
	Female forums	Male forums	Female forums	Male forums
A number of cognitive signs	49	46	63	90
A number of classifiers	14	10	7	10
The most relevant classifiers	«Character and Temperament» (18), «Impression» (9), "Relationships with men" (4), "Appearance", "Uniqueness of an object", "Age" (3)	"Character and Temperament" (18), "Impression" (11)	"Characteristic activity" (48), "Relationships with men" (9)	"Characteristic activity" (50), "Relationships with men" (21) "Habits" (5)
The brightest classifiers	"Character and Temperament" (32), "Impression" (20), "Relationships with men" (12), "Appearance" (7), "Nationality", "Uniqueness of an object", "Perfection of an object" (5)	"Character and Temperament" (20), "Impression" (13), "Perfection of an object" (9), "Education, level of culture" (5)	"Characteristic activity" (48), "Relationships with men" (9)	"Characteristic activity" (50), "Relationships with men" (21), "Habits" (5)
Bright cognitive signs	fat (10,4%), envious, beloved (7,2%), too pushy, Russian, normal (5,2%), healthy, fishwife (4,1%), typical, beautiful, loving (3,1%)	Normal (13, 3%), wicked, abstemious, ugly, beautiful, modern, young, married (3, 3%)	-	-