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TRANSFORMATION OF THE CONCEPT OF GENDER IN TWENTIES AND TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY PERSPECTIVES

Abstract

The concept of gender is associated with the consensus of feminist ideas and movements that emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Feminist studies aim to criticize the patriarchal consciousness of language and the inferiority of women in language and to eliminate discrimination against women in communication. They strive to correct gender inequality in language and ensure that women take their rightful place in society. Thus, the gender aspect of linguistics, which was studied in the areas of sociolinguistics and feminist linguistics, began to take shape as a separate area of linguistics in the last years of the twentieth century.

This article analyzes the evolution of gender concepts through the 20th and 21st centuries, focusing on sociocultural inflection points such as key feminist waves, global gender equality advocacy, and gender-related discourses. It explores how feminist activism and gender theory have influenced linguistic shifts, terminology, and conceptual frameworks. The analysis identifies the interaction between social movements, legal reforms, and media representation, showing how these transformations have redefined language practices, fostered inclusive vocabularies, and reshaped contemporary gender discourse.

Keywords:

Gender, gender linguistics, gender equality, gender category, feminist movements, femininities, gender neutral language

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Introduction

In the field of linguistics, areas that study linguistic phenomena based on an anthropocentric approach are rapidly developing. Gender studies, which are currently gaining increasing interest, also occupy a special place among these areas. Gender linguistics, as a branch of linguistics that studies the relationship between language and gender, studies how linguistic practices are reflected in social phenomena that determine the identities of women and men.

The fundamental concept underlying gender studies is the concept of “gender,” which summarizes the social identity of women and men in their behavior. Initially, there was an understanding of the biological differences between male and female sexes in the human mind, and gradually knowledge of masculine and feminine qualities that expressed the characteristics of these two genders was formed. Later, the term “gender”, meaning “kind, sort”, was introduced into the structure of languages where the gender category existed. This term was used to explain the

grammatical gender category (feminine, masculine, neuter) and the phonological, morphological, syntactic and semantic changes inherent to it in these languages, such as German, Russian, French.

Materials and Research Methods

The research material consists of Uzbek, English and Russian language discourse data drawn from spoken interactions, media texts, literary works, and digital communication platforms. The data were analyzed using the descriptive method to systematize gender-marked linguistic units and communicative patterns; discourse analysis to identify strategies of gender representation and identity construction; pragmatic analysis to determine interactional functions and power relations; and linguo-cultural analysis to reveal evaluative meanings and culturally embedded gender ideologies.

Results and Discussion

The emergence of the gender direction in linguistics is associated with the feminist movements that took place in the USA and Germany in the second half of the 20th century. Initially, the women's movement, which fought for their legal rights, gave rise to the emergence of "feminist criticism, which opposes the dominance of men not only in society and cultural life, but also in language", that is, feminist linguistics. Feminist linguistics representatives strongly condemned the "patriarchal consciousness" in language that supports social values, gender characteristics and stereotypes based on male supremacy, and linguistic practices that discriminate against women [Chutpulatov, 2021: 18].

In the late 1970s and 1980s, the focus of feminist scholars on other social issues related to gender somewhat diminished interest in the field of gender linguistics. However, even during this period, linguists such as Dale Spender and Deborah Tannen continued to work on how various aspects of language (for example, English) in society, such as vocabulary, grammar, and discourse processes, reflect the roles and characteristics of women and men in society. In the 1990s, the issue of gender in linguistics revived, and linguists began to study gender studies from different perspectives.

Language, as a dynamic (in constant motion and development) system, reflects historical and social realities, "socio-cultural values, discriminatory and hierarchical relations, and various asymmetries (imbalances) in society. Gender asymmetries that affect the image of women in the world language picture are among them." [Bojenko, 2022] In the late 1990s and early 2000s, gender linguistics, which rose to a new level as a separate direction in linguistics, began to take its official place in the world of science and research. The social, cultural, political, and economic realities that occurred in the 20th and 21st centuries changed views on the concept of gender. Naturally, this transformation began to be reflected in human language.

From the point of view of gender, languages can be divided into three types: languages that express grammatical gender (German, Russian, French), languages that express natural gender (English, Swedish), languages that do not express gender (Uzbek, Turkish). In the first type of languages, each word belonging to the noun phrase belongs to one of the grammatical genders available in this language. When a sentence is formed with this word, some or all of the other words participating in the sentence agree with the gender of this word, that is, gender is explicitly expressed. In the two sentences given below from Russian, the possessive pronoun and the participle of the sentence agree with the possessor, that is, the noun: Наш поезд (мужской р.) пришёл вовремя; Наша команда (женский р.) выиграла матч. In the second type of languages (English, Swedish), separate pronouns are used for words denoting males (words such as Mike, William, dad, grandfather, uncle, son, boy, nephew, male teacher, policeman, and sometimes other creatures) and separate pronouns are used for words denoting females (words such as Sarah, Deborah, aunt, grandmother, aunt, daughter, female teacher, policewoman, and sometimes other creatures). In other words, words denoting only humans (sometimes other creatures) are divided

into masculine and feminine rod categories depending on their biological sex. In languages that do not express gender (Uzbek, Turkish, Kazakh, Karakalpak languages), since the rod category does not exist, other words in the sentence are also used without change in terms of gender. Such languages also have the concept of feminine and masculine gender, but this concept is expressed semantically and lexically in these languages.

Gender equality, the main idea of feminist movements in the 20th century, covered not only the social, political, economic, and legal spheres, but also practical language processes. Feminist linguists, through a thorough analysis of oral and written discourse, tried to prove that these linguistic phenomena are based on androcentrism (the practice of putting men at the center of attention). In particular, the work of the American linguist Robin Lakoff “Language and Woman’s Place” (1975) gave a great impetus to the study of gender linguistics as a separate field. This work was first published as an article in the journal *Language in Society* in 1973. Two examples from the article below show that words denoting the marital status of men and women (married or single, divorced, widowed) arose on the basis of androcentrism:

“...having discussed bachelorhood and spinsterhood, and the marital state, we arrive at widowhood. Surely a bereaved husband and a bereaved wife are equivalent: they have both undergone the loss of a mate. But in fact, linguistically at any rate this is not true. It is true that we have two words, widow and widower; but here again, widow is far commoner in use. Widows, not widowers, have their particular roles in folklore and tradition, and mourning behavior of particular sorts seems to be expected more strongly, and for a longer time, of a widow than of a widower. But there is more than this, as evidenced by the following:

(24) (a) Mary is John’s widow.

(b) *John is Mary’s widower.

Like mistress, widow commonly occurs with a possessive preceding it, the name of the woman’s late husband. Though he is dead, she is still defined by her relationship to him. But the bereaved husband is no longer defined in terms of his wife. While she is alive, he is sometimes defined as Mary’s husband (though less often, probably, than she is as ‘John’s wife’). But once she is gone, her function for him is over, linguistically speaking, anyway”. [Lakoff, 1973: 67-68].

Lakoff emphasizes that although the word widow (widower for men) means a woman or a man whose spouse has died, this word is more often used for women. According to the linguist, the use of the phrase “so-and-so’s widow” with the name of her deceased husband in relation to a woman and the non-use of such a phrase in relation to widowed men does not comply with the principle of gender equality. That is, in this case, the deceased man’s relationship to his wife is still preserved in a spiritual sense. However, if the woman has died, the man’s relationship to her is not expressed in linguistic processes, that is, it is rarely used in the form of Anna’s widow.

Lakoff draws the reader’s attention to the formal English terms Mr (for men), Miss (for unmarried girls), and Mrs (for married women), and emphasizes the lack of parallelism (equality) in these expressions. These titles do not reveal the marital status of the man, but pay special attention to whether the woman is married or not. To balance this situation, lawyer Bella Abzug, one of the leaders of the American women’s movement, proposed to the United States Congress to replace the titles Miss and Mrs with Ms (pronounced “miz”), that is, a title that does not indicate the marital status of the woman [Lakoff, 1973: 68-69].

Since the late 20th century, the title Ms has been widely used in both formal and informal contexts, as a term of respect that does not indicate a woman’s marital status. At the same time, the gender-neutral title Mx has also become popular in Western countries. Pronounced “Mix”, this term has emerged as an alternative to traditional titles (Mr, Miss, Mrs and Miss). This term has become especially popular among people who do not want to disclose their gender identity (transgender people, people who do not identify with either gender)” [Loodbrook, 2022].

In many cases, the gender of the person being spoken to or referred to is encoded in the word or part of the word used in spoken or written speech. For example, the word aunt (aunt, тётя) refers to a female person, while the word uncle (uncle, дядя) refers to a male person. The English pronoun he and the man part of the word businessman refer to men; the pronoun she and the woman part of

the word businesswoman refer to women. Feminist linguists have begun to pay special attention to linguistic sexism, that is, linguistic inequality that expresses the dominance of men in language. Through various means in language: lexicon, morphology, and “masculine generics” that refer to both women and men (mankind; the average man; One must watch his language.), he sharply criticized the fact that most languages in the world are built on linguistic sexism.

As a solution, linguistic markers expressing linguistic sexism have been replaced by their gender inclusive or gender neutral equivalents. The use of the words humankind instead of mankind, police officer instead of policeman/policewoman, flight attendant instead of steward/stewardess, people or individuals instead of man/woman, spouse or partner instead of husband/wife, workforce, personnel, the staff instead of manpower proves our point. When it is necessary to clarify which gender the gender-neutral words in the language refer to, the words boy/girl, man/woman, male/female are used: boyfriend (boy with a partner), girlfriend (girl with a partner, friend), businessman (businessman with a man), businesswoman (businesswoman with a woman), male teacher (male teacher), female teacher (female teacher).

Signs of androcentrism can still be observed in human speech. The following episode from the movie “Homeless to Harvard” (2003) also confirms our opinion:

“Grandad: Come on, let’s go.

Lisa: Wait a minute. There should be a service. A priest. What’s supposed to happen?

Cemetery worker: When you go, we’re gonna bury him. That’s all.

Lisa: It’s a she! It’s my mother!”[Levin, 2003]

Previously, it was customary for many people to use masculine pronouns and other words in their speech if the gender of the person being addressed was not known. In this episode, the cemetery attendant, to the question of Lisa, whose mother had died, “What if there is no religious ceremony?”, answered “When you go, we’re gonna bury him”. He used the masculine pronoun “him” to refer to the deceased woman. This suggests that the deceased did not know or did not care who had died. Then, calling her mother “him” emphasizes that the deceased is her mother and that she is a woman: “It’s a she! It’s my mother!”.

Women’s preoccupation with household chores, child rearing, and some low-level tasks in society is also more verbalized in language than men. An example of this is the following incident that happened to American actress and UN Women’s Advocate for Political Participation and Leadership Megyn Markle. M. Markle saw a television commercial for a dishwashing detergent called “Ivory Clear” by Procter & Gamble during her school years (1990s). The advertisement contained the following words:

Women’s preoccupation with housework, child rearing, and some low-level tasks in society is also more verbalized in language than men’s. An example of this is the following incident that happened to Megyn Markle, an American actress and UN Women’s Advocate for Political Participation and Leadership. M. Markle saw an advertisement on television for a dishwashing detergent called “Ivory Clear” by Procter & Gamble during her school years (1990s). The advertisement contained the following words:

“Women all over America are fighting greasy pots and pans with Ivory Clear.”

Megyn was deeply affected by these words in the advertisement and felt humiliated as a woman. She says that even the boys in her class would point to the ad and tease her, saying that women belong in the kitchen. With the help of her father, Megyn wrote letters to influential women of the time (e.g., First Lady Hillary Clinton) and to the company itself about the Procter & Gamble ad. As a result of her efforts, the word “women” in the ad was changed to the gender-neutral word “people” [YouTube]

“People all over America are fighting greasy pots and pans with Ivory Clear.” There are many doubts that this is exactly what happened, and many observers, in addition to Meghan, have sent letters of complaint to the company regarding the Ivory Clear dishwasher advertisement. However, M. Markle, now the Duchess of Sussex, often mentions this experience in various circles to emphasize that she has been a feminist since her youth and has tried to correct some discriminatory situations.

The results of gender equality efforts have also begun to be reflected in written form in job advertisements or codes of conduct of various companies. For example, the Code of Conduct of the International RTI (Research Triangle Institute), a non-profit organization that implements large-scale projects in such areas as education, health, agriculture, security, energy and the environment around the world, states the following:

“Employment here is based solely upon individual merit and qualifications directly related to professional competence. We strictly prohibit unlawful discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, veteran status, national origin, ancestry, pregnancy status, sex, gender identity or expression, age, marital status, mental or physical disability, medical condition, sexual orientation, or any other characteristics protected by law. We also make all reasonable accommodations to meet our obligations under laws protecting the rights of the disabled” [RTI Code of Conduct].

Therefore, RTI International does not tolerate any discrimination when hiring new employees, including discrimination on the basis of gender or pregnancy. The organization emphasizes that appropriate legal measures will be taken if this situation is detected. This rule arose from cases of discrimination in hiring a woman based on her marital status (women of high fertility, having many children), pregnancy or being a woman, which are found in some organizations.

The processes of transformation from linguistic sexism to gender-neutral or gender-inclusive language can be observed not only in English, but also in other languages of the world. The women’s movement around the world and changes in its socio-political status, the expansion of the range of professions in which women work in the modern world, globalization processes, the popularity of the World Wide Web and social networks have led to the emergence of new gender-neutral words and femininities that refer to both sexes among people. Feminatives are feminine nouns made from masculine nouns denoting a certain position, profession, or social position. Feminatives are formed by forming feminine forms using pre-existing generalizing masculine words and various suffixes to words denoting newly emerging positions and professions. In the Russian language, where gender is explicitly expressed, many feminine nouns have come into use, such as пиарщица, волонтерка, авторка, финансистка, шахтёрша, коучерша, беллетристка, связистка, миллионерша, блогерша.

Although such feminine nouns are not fully included in the existing dictionary, they can be found in many places in life. For example, on the Facebook social network, a user introduced herself as “Ольга Любомирова, волонтерка, авторка материалов”. The titles of the film “Millionaire” by Alexander Sozonov, filmed in Russia in 2017, and the film “Пиарщица” filmed in the UK in 2019-2021 can also serve as examples of feminatives. However, some feminatives have a negative connotation and express disrespect and discrimination towards a woman in a profession or position. For example, we can take feminatives such as “адвокатша” (disrespect), “профессорша” (discrimination). According to Z.I. Gadizova and Ts. Lanstyа, “most feminatives are characteristic of the style of speech and are used mainly in colloquial, journalistic and artistic texts. The use of feminatives in scientific language is very rare.” [Godizova, 2022: 50]

Since there is no gender category in the Uzbek language, gender association is expressed through semantic and lexical content. Except for the service-independent pairs of lexemes (man and woman, father and mother, husband and wife, bride and groom) to express male and female gender, all cognate nouns are for both genders: teacher, leader, employee, dean, rector, lawyer, cook, cleaner, writer, seller, artist. Since the names of professions or social roles in the Uzbek language are mainly male, the gender of these words is determined by the word for woman: leader is a woman or a woman leader, a woman surgeon, a woman seller, a woman driver, a woman mechanic. The retention of these words with the word (leader is a man or a man leader, a man surgeon, a man seller, a man driver, a man mechanic) is rarely protective.

Although there are a small number of words in the Uzbek language that have feminatives, these feminatives are mainly used in colloquial, journalistic and artistic styles: poet – poetess, teacher – teacher, employee – employee. In some nouns, especially in words denoting lower-ranking professions, the feminine gender is more pronounced than the masculine. For example, we

can take cleaner, janitor, dishwasher, street sweeper, nanny. Since men have traditionally been involved in serious, high-level work, when these professions are mentioned, men are first imagined: president, politician, deputy, leader, rector, director, dean, chief physician, dentist, surgeon. As a result of feminist and gender equality movements, women have also begun to occupy certain professions and positions.

Conclusion

In summary, the transformation of the gender concept over the 20th and 21st centuries has been substantial, reflecting broader societal changes. Gender has shifted from rigid, binary categories toward more fluid and inclusive understandings. Influenced by feminist movements, legal reforms, and evolving cultural attitudes, language and discourse have adapted, fostering greater inclusivity. This evolution is evident in both policy and everyday communication. Ultimately, the gender concept today is more nuanced, reflecting diverse identities and signaling a continued trajectory of change.

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ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯ КОНЦЕПЦИИ ГЕНДЕРА В ПЕРСПЕКТИВАХ XX И XXI ВЕКОВ

Аннотация. Понятие гендера связано с консенсусом феминистских идей и движений, сформировавшихся в середине XX века. Феминистские исследования направлены на критику

патриархального сознания, отражённого в языке, выявление проявлений неравного представления женщин в языковой системе и устранение дискриминации женщин в коммуникации. Они стремятся преодолеть гендерное неравенство в языке и обеспечить женщинам достойное место в обществе. Таким образом, гендерный аспект лингвистики, первоначально изучавшийся в рамках социолингвистики и феминистской лингвистики, в последние десятилетия XX века начал оформляться как самостоятельное направление языковедческих исследований.

В статье анализируется эволюция концепции гендера в XX и XXI веках с акцентом на социокультурные поворотные моменты, включая ключевые волны феминизма, глобальные инициативы по обеспечению гендерного равенства и развитие гендерного дискурса. Рассматривается влияние феминистского активизма и гендерной теории на языковые изменения, терминологические трансформации и формирование новых концептуальных рамок. Анализ выявляет взаимосвязь между социальными движениями, правовыми реформами и медийной репрезентацией, демонстрируя, как данные процессы способствовали переосмыслению языковых практик, формированию инклюзивной лексики и трансформации современного гендерного дискурса.

Ключевые слова: Гендер, гендерная лингвистика, гендерное равенство, гендерная категория, феминистские движения, феминитивы, гендерно-нейтральный язык.

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XX ЖӘНЕ XXI ҒАСЫРЛАРДАҒЫ ГЕНДЕР ҰҒЫМЫНЫҢ ТРАНСФОРМАЦИЯСЫ

Андатпа. Гендер ұғымы XX ғасырдың ортасында қалыптасқан феминистік идеялар мен қозғалыстардың консенсусымен тығыз байланысты. Феминистік зерттеулер патриархалдық сананы сынға алуға, оның тілде көрініс табуын талдауға, тілдік жүйеде әйелдердің тең емес түрде бейнеленуін анықтауға және коммуникациядағы әйелдерге қатысты кемсітушілікті жоюға бағытталған. Олар тілдегі гендерлік теңсіздікті еңсеріп, әйелдердің қоғамдағы лайықты орнын қамтамасыз етуді мақсат етеді. Осылайша, бастапқыда социолингвистика мен феминистік лингвистика аясында зерттелген гендерлік аспект XX ғасырдың соңғы онжылдықтарында тіл білімінің дербес ғылыми бағыты ретінде қалыптаса бастады.

Мақалада гендер концепциясының XX және XXI ғасырлардағы эволюциясы социомәдени маңызды кезеңдер тұрғысынан талданады. Оның ішінде феминизмнің негізгі толқындары, гендерлік теңдікті қамтамасыз етуге бағытталған жаһандық бастамалар және гендерлік дискурстың дамуы қарастырылады. Сондай-ақ феминистік белсенділік пен гендерлік теорияның тілдік өзгерістерге, терминологиялық трансформацияларға және жаңа концептуалдық негіздердің қалыптасуына әсері зерттеледі. Талдау әлеуметтік қозғалыстар, құқықтық реформалар және медиа өкілдіктер арасындағы өзара байланысты анықтап, бұл үдерістердің тілдік тәжірибені қайта қарауға, инклюзивті лексиканың қалыптасуына және қазіргі гендерлік дискурстың трансформациясына қалай ықпал еткенін көрсетеді.

Тірек сөздер: Гендер, гендерлік лингвистика, гендерлік теңдік, гендерлік категория, феминистік қозғалыстар, феминитивтер (әйел атаулары), гендерлік бейтарап тіл.

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