

Study of gender stereotypes based on phraseological units

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Abstract: The article describes gender stereotypes embedded in phraseological units, analyzing their role in shaping societal perceptions of gender roles. Phraseological units, as integral components of language, reflect cultural values and social norms, often reinforcing traditional gender roles and expectations. The article examines how these linguistic expressions contribute to the perpetuation of gender-based stereotypes and investigates potential shifts in their usage over time. By employing a comparative and semantic analysis of phraseological units in different languages, this study highlights the linguistic mechanisms through which gender biases are maintained. The study contribute to a deeper understanding of the intersection between language and gender perception, offering insights for linguistic studies, gender research, and discourse analysis.

Keywords: Language and gender, cultural, psychological dimensions, gender-based stereotypes, semantic analysis, cultural values and social norms.

Introduction: Gender is perceived as a socially constructed characteristic rather than a purely biological one—individuals do not inherently possess gendered behaviors and attitudes but acquire them through socialization. Gender represents a multifaceted cultural construct encompassing distinctions in roles, behaviors, and psychological as well as emotional attributes associated with men and women. Consequently, it is regarded as an established framework of social relations between genders, influencing not only interpersonal interactions within familial structures but also shaping broader societal relationships within key institutions.

The phraseological system, being inherently selective in its nominations, predominantly follows an anthropocentric orientation. Thus, the examination of phraseological units that semantically center on human attributes holds significant importance. The interpretation of language as an anthropocentric phenomenon is increasingly recognized as a dominant paradigm in contemporary linguistic studies of the 21st century. This perspective facilitates a more comprehensive exploration of fundamental theoretical issues related to “language and people” as well as “language and culture,” ensuring a holistic analysis of

the ways individuals manifest within and through language. In this context, one of the most culturally significant aspects of linguistic representation is not only the depiction of human identity but also the expression of gender attributes, highlighting both male and female dimensions within language [1].

Gender linguistics explores the ways in which language both reflects and shapes gender identities, roles, and social interactions. This study examines various linguistic elements, including lexical choices, grammatical structures, syntactic patterns, speech acts, and communicative strategies that contribute to gender differentiation in discourse. The research aims to identify the linguistic mechanisms that reinforce and perpetuate gender-related social norms and stereotypes while also offering insights into strategies for fostering a more inclusive and equitable linguistic environment. By analyzing the theoretical underpinnings of gender linguistics, this study underscores the significance of addressing gender biases in language, deconstructing stereotypes, and applying gender-sensitive linguistic approaches to mitigate social inequalities. Consequently, this work contributes to a broader understanding of how language functions as a tool in the construction and maintenance of gender perceptions within society.

METHOD

Language, as a distinctive and adaptable medium of human communication, serves not only as a reflection of social attitudes, cultural norms, and ideological frameworks but also as an active force capable of shaping and transforming them [3]. Gender linguistics, a relatively modern subfield of language studies, explores, among other aspects, the ways in which language represents men and women. This field encompasses both fundamental perspectives on language: first, it considers language as a mirror that reflects prevailing attitudes toward gender and societal roles; second, it conceptualizes gender as a sociocultural construct rather than a strictly biological binary, recognizing the role of language in both reinforcing and challenging gender biases and inequalities in society [6]. Recent efforts have focused on eliminating the gendered nature of language, driven by the belief that such linguistic reforms could contribute to dismantling ingrained gender stereotypes [4]. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that any modifications to an existing linguistic system—one that operates with a degree of autonomy—require a comprehensive understanding of its underlying structures and functions. Consequently, a primary objective of gender linguistics is to identify and analyze gender representations within language, examining not only how language is used but also how it reflects cognitive and ideological patterns [2].

The influence of social and cultural contexts on the creation and usage of figurative language, particularly idiomatic expressions, can manifest in two contrasting ways. On one hand, idioms often encapsulate and perpetuate deeply embedded societal attitudes and stereotypes, which are implicitly shared by members of a linguistic community. Cuyckens and Geeraerts [5] assert that idioms constitute “an integral part of the language that eases social interaction, enhances textual coherence, and, quite importantly, reflects fundamental patterns of human thought” (p. 698). Similarly, Kövecses [8] highlights that “many, or perhaps most, idioms are products of our conceptual system and not simply a matter of language (i.e., a matter of lexicon). An idiom is not just an expression that has a meaning that is somehow special in relation to the meanings of its constituting parts, but it arises from our more general knowledge of the world embodied in our conceptual system” (p. 201). On the other hand, as Omazić [7] suggests, “phraseology and figurative language challenge the idea of accepting things at face value and exemplify going beyond commonly accepted language boundaries” (p. 14). These perspectives indicate that idioms not only reinforce established thought patterns but also serve as

a means of questioning and redefining them.

DISCUSSION

Compared to other branches of linguistics with a long history of development, the study of gender and language is relatively recent. It is widely acknowledged that this field gained prominence with R. Lakoff’s seminal work *Language and Woman’s Place* [12]. The Kazan School of Phraseology has primarily focused on comparative studies of phraseological units across different linguistic groups and families [14]. Despite phraseology being a highly promising area for gender research, the present study marks the first attempt by representatives of the Kazan School to analyze phraseological units from a gender perspective. Since phraseology reflects cultural values, it provides valuable insights into key cultural concepts such as “man” and “woman”. The publication of V. N. Telija’s monograph served as a catalyst for further research into the concepts of “woman” and “man” in the phraseologies of various languages, paving the way for a broader exploration of gender representations in linguistic and cultural contexts. E. S. Gritsenko examined gender asymmetries and stereotypes in English phraseology [13]. The researcher conducted an experiment involving native speakers, which revealed that the absence of explicit gender-specific components in the structure of a phraseological unit does not necessarily indicate its gender-neutral nature. To describe this linguistic phenomenon, Gritsenko introduced the term *hidden gender markedness*.

Additionally, several comparative studies have been conducted on gender-related peculiarities within the phraseological systems of various languages [15]. O.A. Vaskova explored the lexicographic representation of gender-specific phraseological units in English [16]. The first stage of her study involved a diachronic analysis, which identified significant shifts in the presentation and description of phraseological units in dictionaries due to socio-cultural and linguistic transformations. For instance, the rise of political correctness has influenced language usage. The second stage consisted of a synchronic analysis of lexicographic sources, leading to the classification of phraseological units into four categories: (1) phraseological units with meta-gender reference, (2) phraseological units with masculine reference, (3) phraseological units with feminine reference, and (4) phraseological doublets. I. V. Zykova also approached the study of English phraseology from a gender perspective [17], producing one of the most comprehensive works in the field. Her extensive research led to the introduction of several new terms to describe linguistic phenomena that were first identified in her study. These terms include *gender markedness* (structural and semantic; full and partial),

dual gender markedness, closed and open systems of gender oppositions, gender reference (masculine, feminine, and inter-gender; direct and indirect), gender asymmetry at morphological and conceptual levels, and phraseological gender lacunarity. Regarding the terminology used in gender-based analyses of phraseological units, it is important to note that this study primarily adopts the terms introduced by I. V. Zykova [14].

CONCLUSION

Phraseological units in the English language serve as significant linguistic markers that reflect cultural norms, social values, and underlying ideologies, including gender-based stereotypes. The examination of these linguistic expressions reveals how they contribute to the reinforcement of traditional gender roles by encoding asymmetrical power dynamics and biased representations. A comparative and semantic analysis of English phraseological units indicates a noticeable pattern of gendered attributions. For instance, idiomatic expressions referring to men often emphasize strength, intelligence, leadership, and assertiveness, such as a man of his word or strong as an ox. Conversely, phraseological units associated with women frequently highlight appearance, emotions, or submissiveness, such as as pretty as a picture or a shrinking violet. This asymmetry in representation perpetuates stereotypical gender roles, reinforcing traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity.

Moreover, the evolution of these expressions over time suggests shifts in linguistic attitudes influenced by social change. The rise of political correctness and feminist linguistic movements has contributed to a decline in the use of explicitly sexist phraseological units, while more neutral or inclusive alternatives have emerged. For example, terms like fireman and policeman have gradually been replaced by firefighter and police officer, reflecting a move towards gender-neutral language. Additionally, certain derogatory expressions related to women, such as old maid or hysterical woman, are becoming less common in contemporary discourse, indicating a gradual shift in societal perceptions. Comparatively, gendered phraseological units across different languages exhibit both universal and culture-specific characteristics. While many languages share common gendered metaphors—such as associating strength with masculinity and delicacy with femininity—there are unique cultural nuances that influence the formation and interpretation of phraseological expressions. These differences highlight the intricate relationship between language and cultural identity, illustrating how gender constructs are both globally persistent and locally adapted. The study of gendered phraseological units in

the English language reveals their significant role in shaping and perpetuating gender stereotypes. Through comparative and semantic analysis, it becomes evident that language is not merely a reflection of social norms but also a tool that reinforces and legitimizes them. The asymmetry in gender representation within idiomatic expressions underscores the deep-seated cultural biases that have historically influenced linguistic structures.

However, language is not static, and societal progress has led to a reevaluation of gendered linguistic expressions. The gradual shift towards gender-neutral and inclusive language demonstrates the dynamic nature of phraseology and its responsiveness to socio-cultural changes. While traditional gendered expressions persist in colloquial speech, their decreasing prevalence in formal and public discourse suggests an evolving linguistic landscape. Future research should continue to explore the diachronic development of gendered phraseological units across various languages, analyzing how globalization and cultural exchange influence their transformation. Additionally, further studies could examine the role of media, literature, and digital communication in shaping contemporary attitudes towards gender in phraseology. By fostering awareness of linguistic bias and promoting inclusive language practices, society can contribute to a more equitable representation of gender in communication.

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