

THE XXVI ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL ACADEMIC CONFERENCE, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE, 27–30 October 2015

Gender-Marked Metaphors: Influence of Grammatical Gender and Frequency on Referential Choice of Metaphorical Name of the Person in the Russian Language

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Abstract

The paper aims to discuss the results of the experimental research into the correlation between the influence of language (the gender of the noun) and speech (frequency of using words in speech) on the referential choice of a metaphorical name of a person. As a result, we prove a significant influence of grammatical gender on solving the problem of figurative reference to the name of a man or woman. The interaction between linguistic factors (the grammatical gender) and speech (frequency) is manifested in the fact that the frequency factor is significant in functionally weak areas where there is a conflict between the problem being solved and grammatical gender of the word (for example, the problem to determine the reference of feminine words to a male).

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Peer-review under responsibility of National Research Tomsk State University.

Keywords: gender-marked metaphor; grammatical gender; word frequency; experimental study

1. Introduction

This study is grounded on the following theories:

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1. Theory of gender: gender is a cultural reflection of human sex differentiation (Goffman, 1994; Fuko, 1996; Ushakin, 1999, etc.).
2. Linguistic theory of gender: language and speech as semiotic systems of marking gender differentiation. In linguistic gender theory there are three significant directions of analysis: the difference between men's and women's speech (Philips, 1987; Günthner & Kotthoff, 1992, etc.), gender opposition in the semantics of linguistic units and categories, for example the correlation between the grammatical gender and the semantic category of sex (Borneman, 1991), gender stereotypes in lingual consciousness (Tafel, 1997; Kirilina, 1997).
3. Cognitive Theory of Gender: A system of ideas about the cognitive processing of various stimuli by men and women as gender actualization of hidden gender meanings and stereotypes (Pyykkönen, Hyönä, & van Gompel, 2010). We believe that this issue needs a comprehensive development. It is necessary to identify the types of cognitive tasks, in doing which men and women will differ most of all. The problem of cognitive processing the grammatical category of gender in different languages (Bulgarian, Italian, French, etc.) is relevant and actively discussed (Andonova, D'Amico, Devescovi, & Bates, 2004; Janyan, & Vergilova, 2011; Dahan, Swingley, Tanenhaus and Magnuson, 2000). We consider it important to address the impact of concealed semantic bases of grammatical gender on the tasks associated with the actualization of other types of gender semantics. To such meanings, interacting with the grammatical category of gender, in our opinion, belong those that are formed by conceptual metaphors.
4. The cognitive theory in which the metaphor is interpreted as a way of understanding various phenomena of the reality (Lakoff, & Johnson, 2003).

This paper is focused on the problem of the cognitive processing of gender metaphors by men and women, and the dependence of this process on the grammatical gender factor and the factor word frequency. The gender metaphor is metaphorical nomination limited in reference, which does not refer to a person in general, but to a male or a female. This restriction is not absolute, but a trend. The semantic component fixing gender restriction of metaphorical nomination of a person has the status of weak semantics in this case. Weak semantics is the meaning actualized in a limited number of contexts.

The units with gender restriction of references were identified based on the data from the Russian National Corpus (RNC); (Rezanova, 2011; Rezanova, & Komissarova, 2012). We explore the influence of linguistic and extra-linguistic factors on the gender restriction of metaphorical name reference in the Russian language in a series of experiments. The non-linguistic factors involved into the experiment are the sex of a subject and the task they are to fulfill – assigning a name to a male or female.

The linguistic factors are:

- a) the systemic linguistic factor- the grammatical gender;
- b) the speech factor – the frequency of the name in the modern Russian speech.

In a previous study we revealed the mutual influence of the factors of the grammatical gender and animateness on the solution of the problem of gender references. The gender of the name seems to directly affect fulfilling a task: figurative names of the female grammatical gender refer to women more often than masculine names, and vice versa, the subjects gave a much higher percentage of positive solutions for the names of the male grammatical gender, fulfilling the task of determining the possibility of naming the man. The significance of the subjects' sex factor was also revealed as the main effect of interactions was obtained in the women's reactions (Rezanova, Nekrasova, & Shilyaev, 2014).

In this article we present the results of the studies of changes in the significance of the category of gender and frequency in doing the tasks of gender references of metaphorical nomination of a human under the influence of a changing word frequency. We also solve the problem whether these factors have different influence on fulfilling the tasks by men and women. The experiment is aimed at testing the hypothesis that the influence of the grammatical gender on the referential choice of a figurative name may depend on its frequency, and this dependence may occur to various extent in men's and women's fulfilling the task.

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