International Conference for International Education and Cross-cultural Communication. Problems and Solutions (IECC-2015), 09-11 June 2015, Tomsk Polytechnic University, Tomsk, Russia

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.