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GENDER ISSUES IN LINGUISTICS

Abstract

The concept of "gender" entered the modern linguistic paradigm much later than other humanities, namely in the second half of this century. Initially, work in this area arose in the West and the first systemic descriptions of male and female characteristics of speech and language were made on the basis of languages from Germanic and Romance language groups. As for our domestic linguistics, the first regular studies on this subject began to be carried out only in the late 80s and early 90s.

Key words: gender issues, linguistics, paradigm

1. The emergence and main directions of linguistic genderology

And somewhere in the mid-90s began to develop at a rapid pace. Currently, this process has been and is happening so rapidly that now we can confidently talk about the emergence of another new branch of Russian linguistics - linguistic genderology (or gender linguistics).¹

At the present stage, a number of works have already appeared (and, first of all, this is a monograph by A.V. Kirilina *Gender: linguistic aspects*, M., 1999), where an attempt is made to systemically comprehend and describe the language in connection with the gender phenomenon, a theoretical model of gender and systematization of methodological approaches to the study of the problem of gender in linguistics is carried out. Issues related to the development of methods of linguistic research of gender, the creation of tools for gender studies, are now put at the forefront in domestic linguistics.

If we consider the current state of gender studies in the West, then there are usually three main approaches: (*Колосова О.А, 1996*)

The first approach is reduced to the interpretation of the exclusively social nature of the language of women and men and is aimed at identifying those linguistic differences that can be explained by the characteristics of the redistribution of social power in society. At the same time, "male" or "female" language is defined as a certain functional derivative of the main language, used when speech partners are at different levels of the social hierarchy.

The second - sociopsycholinguistic approach - scientifically reduces the "female" and "male" language to the peculiarities of the linguistic behavior of the sexes. For scientists working in this direction, statistical indicators or the determination of average parameters are fundamental and constitute the framework for constructing psycholinguistic theories of male and female types of speech behavior.

Representatives of the third direction generally emphasize the cognitive aspect of differences in the linguistic behavior of the sexes. For them, it turns out to be more significant not only to determine the frequency of differences and operate with its

¹ Currently, in the modern linguistic paradigm, these two terms are interchangeable concepts.

indicators, but also to create holistic linguistic models of the cognitive foundations of linguistic categories.

In the modern scientific paradigm, all three approaches are considered complementary and only in their totality do they have explanatory power.

A.V. Kirilina, conducting a more detailed and systematic analysis of the problems of linguistic genderology, identifies six main areas that can be differentiated both conceptually and from the point of view of the methodology and nature of the material studied: (Кирилина, 1999. P. 36.)

1. Sociolinguistic gender studies.
2. Feminist linguistics.
3. Actually gender studies studying the linguistic behavior of both sexes.
4. Studies of masculinity (the youngest trend that arose at the end of the 20th century).
5. Psycholinguistic research. (Within the framework of this area, work is being done in the field of neurolinguistics, the study of the ontogenesis of speech, this also includes the biodeterministic field, which studies the cognitive characteristics and differences between men and women and their manifestations in speech).
6. Cross-cultural, linguistic and cultural studies, including the hypothesis of gender subcultures. (*D.N. Maltz and R.A. Borker, 1982*)

At the same time A.V. Kirilina believes that this classification is very conditional, and all these areas have much in common, since for all the groups listed, a similar problem and object of study is characteristic.

Firstly, as a rule, the object of research is the relationship between language and gender, i.e., the question of how exactly gender is manifested in a language - a nominative system, vocabulary, syntax, category of gender, etc. The main purpose of such studies is to describe and explain how gender is manifested in a language, what ratings are attributed to men and women in the language, and in which semantic areas they are most common.

Secondly, the purpose of gender studies in a language can be the study of the speech behavior of the sexes, the allocation and description of the characteristics of male and female speech patterns. Moreover, studies are most often carried out either from the standpoint of sociocultural determinism, or within the framework of the theory of biodeterminism.

Thirdly, it should be emphasized that often gender studies in linguistics are interdisciplinary and comparative.

Fourth, almost any area of linguistics can be considered from a gender perspective.

Fifth, gender issues in linguistics are clearly applied in nature, and it is within the framework of this research paradigm that the largest number of successful attempts have been made within the framework of language planning and language reform, which we will discuss later. (*Кирилина А.В., 1999, p. 36-37.*)

If we consider gender studies in the post-Soviet linguistic space, then it must be emphasized that the focus of research in Russian linguistics is clearly shifted to the second direction - quantitative socio- and psycholinguistics, although at the moment there is a tendency to increase the number of studies in the first direction (study of vocabulary, paremiology for identifying gender asymmetries and studying the degree of androcentricity, for example, the Russian language). The number of works devoted to the study of cross-cultural gender differences has also increased. (*L. Damjanowa, 1993*) The only area practically not represented in Russian linguistics is research on masculinity issues.

It should also be noted that one of the latest trends in the development of Russian linguistic genderology is the increasing number of works in the framework of the theory of postmodernism. Scientists working in this conceptual framework insist “on the application of Derridian deconstructivism, which allows revealing the relations of domination and submission, the “ phallogical centrism ”of language and public consciousness.” (*Добровольский Д.О., Кирилина А.В., 2000, p.19*) This trend is most closely associated with the ideology of feminism. One of the leitmotifs of this trend is the provision that it is impossible to talk about relations between the sexes without regard to the categories of “power”, “subordination” and “domination”.

Let us dwell in this direction in more detail.

2. The emergence of feminist linguistics

Feminist linguistics or feminist criticism of the language arose in linguistics in 60-70 years of our century. Its occurrence was due to a number of reasons, both extralinguistic and intralinguistic in nature. The first group of reasons can be attributed to a number of events, namely the development of the “New Women's Movement” in the USA and Europe, the growing popularity of the ideas of feminism in the West, the heyday of the philosophy of postmodernism and the so-called “cognitive evolution”² (Колосова О.А., 1996. p. 19)

The linguistic reasons that contribute to the emergence of feminist criticism of the language include the following. Firstly, the emergence of a number of new scientific areas in linguistics itself in the years 50-60 - psycholinguistics, quantitative sociolinguistics, pragmatics, and communication theory. Secondly, the emphasis in the history of linguistics on the study of the human factor and the problem of the relationship of language with the biosocial characteristics of a person, including his gender. Thirdly, a paradigm shift in science (the transition from structuralism to pragmatism) and the emergence of the proper methodological and scientific basis for the development of gender studies in the social sciences.

It should be noted that although feminist criticism of the language stands apart from the other areas of gender studies in linguistics because of its pronounced interdisciplinary approach, (Кирилина А.В., 1997, p. 61) at the same time, in our opinion, it is at the crossroads of gender studies of the language and actually critical linguistics, being its natural continuation.

The history of this directed totals about three decades. In 1970, Mary Rich Kay organized the first seminar on the problems of language and gender at the University of California, and then in 1975, based on the materials of this seminar, she published a book

² According to some researchers, it is believed that after women gained access to the repertoire of men's knowledge, their cognitive life became more dynamic and eventful in cognitive events. For many centuries, cognitive competence in language has remained the privilege of men. This situation is explained by the fact that men had an incomparably greater access to education and other areas of social life, where the cognitive sphere was carried out most intensively and on a large scale. The cognitive activity of women was limited to maternal and marital duties, and this was not slow to be reflected in the language.

called Male / Female Language. (*Key M.R., 1975*) The fundamental work on feminist criticism of the language was a study published in the same 1975 by Robin Lakoff *Language and the place of a woman (Lakoff R., 1975)* in English and monographs by Louise Pusch German - the language of men (*Pusch L. 1984*), and S. Tromel-Plotz *Female language - the language of change (Tromel-Plotz S., 1995)*, written on data derived from the German language. Since 1976, a special journal *Women and Language* has been published in English, where all the latest information on international and interdisciplinary research in the field of feminist criticism of the language is published. Representatives of feminist linguistics see as their main goal a criticism of patriarchal consciousness in the language and language reform aimed at eliminating the flawed representation of the image of women in the language and sexist asymmetries that exist in language and speech.

3. Theoretical foundations of feminist linguistics

The basic concepts of critical linguistics, as well as some views of V. Humboldt and his followers, as well as the famous Sepir-Whorf hypothesis³ or the “theory of linguistic relativity”, partly stemming from the ideas of the great German linguist, served as a theoretical basis for feminist criticism of the language. So, according to Humboldt, language is a kind of expression of the national spirit, a certain “intermediate world”, standing between the thinking of man and the outside world; it is the force that turns the world into ideas, verbalizing and changing the world itself. Language not only creates a certain image of the world, but also has an effective impact on the thoughts and actions of people and on the development of society as a whole. V. von Humboldt was one of the first in linguistics to write about a circle that every language describes around its people. (Алиатов В.М., 1998.)

The very hypothesis of "linguistic relativity" as a concept arose in the thirties of the 20th century in the USA. According to this hypothesis, language is not only a product of society, but also a means of shaping its thinking and mentality. Language forms the thinking and worldview of people; this is a way of knowing the outside world. “The logical structure of thinking is also determined by language. The very nature of cognition of reality depends on the language in which the cognizing subject thinks. People divide the

³ Recently, in Western linguistics, the Sepir-Whorf hypothesis has come to be called the “Whorflan hypothesis”, because it is believed that the views of E. Sepir actually stood much closer to the ideas of the anthropologist Franz Boas, who believed that culture is mediated by language, and not vice versa.

world, organize it into concepts and distribute meanings in this way and not otherwise, since they are parties to an agreement that is valid only for that language, similar physical phenomena can create a similar picture of the universe only with the correlation of language systems. ” (*Ярцева В.Н., 1990, p. 443*)

Moreover, according to Benjamin Worff, “our linguistically determined thought world not only correlates with our cultural ideals and attitudes, but captures even our own, actually, subconscious processes in the sphere of our influence and gives them some typical features” (*Алпатов В.М., 1998, p.222*)

It should be noted that the attitude to the hypothesis of linguistic relativity in modern linguistics is extremely ambiguous. Like any, any significant phenomenon in the scientific paradigm, the hypothesis of linguistic relativism⁴ has a large number of its supporters and a large “tribe” of opponents. It was subjected to the most serious criticism in Marxist linguistics, but this is understandable. For example, opponents of this hypothesis have repeatedly pointed out that in its radical form it means that speakers of different languages perceive the world differently, they cannot understand each other and communicate with each other, which is refuted by the experience of the history of human civilization. But the whole paradox lies in the fact that B. Whorf himself never posed this question in such a radical formulation. He believed that not everything in culture is determined by language, although he did not propose a distinction between linguistic and non-linguistic factors. (*Whorf B.L., 1956*).

The fate of B. Whorf's hypothesis turned out to be rather unusual. Linguistics neither during the life of B. Whorf, nor now could and cannot prove it or refute it. For the problems raised by V. Humboldt in the XVIII century and developed by E. Sapir (Sapir E. 1970), and B. Whorf in the XX century, there is no instrumental or conceptual apparatus for comprehensive verification. (*Berthoff A.E., 1988*) They tried to verify the hypothesis of linguistic relativity experimentally, but such experiments did not give clear results in either direction. (*Алпатов, 1998, p. 219-226*) However, recently (and a lot of this has been promoted by feminist linguistics), the problems associated with the hypothesis of linguistic relativity have become much more popular than before. And in many respects this happened due to the fact that the revival of interest is not associated with the development

⁴ Another name for the hypothesis of linguistic relativity.

of any methods or experimental base, but with the appearance of similar or based on it philosophical concepts.

One of these concepts was the philosophy of postmodernism, the influence of which was experienced by feminist criticism of the language. Thus, both linguistic relativism and its philosophical “continuation” in the form of postmodernism, which affirms the linguistic concept of the reality surrounding us, became the theoretical basis for feminist linguistics. The postmodern concept claims that reality is in fact a kind of “linguistic trick” of our consciousness: what the individual perceives as reality is actually socially and linguistically constructed. Postmodernism was one of the first areas of scientific knowledge of the 20th century, which openly recognized that the text does not reflect the existing reality, but creates a new one, and these realities are independent of each other, (*Руднев В.П. 1997 p. 221-225*) and the person’s attitude to reality is mediated by discursive practice. (*Кирилина А.Б. 1999, p. 25-26*)

This logically implies one of the basic tenets of feminist criticism of the language about the dominance of a patriarchal society and the imposition of a patriarchal system of values through texts and discursive practices, that the value system and view of the world are made from the perspective of “European white men”, or, in other words, that “The whole consciousness of modern man is saturated with the ideas and values of male ideology with its priority of masculinity, logic, rationality and objectivity of women” in this picture of the world. “Just as an Eskimo needs a lot of words to describe different types of snow, so sexist society needs a wide vocabulary to blacken the image of a woman by hook or by crook.” (*Swarm J. and Graddol D., 1994, p.138*)

Another philosophical trend that significantly influenced the conceptual basis of feminist linguistics was poststructuralism. The goal of poststructuralism is “to comprehend everything“ non-structural in structure ”, to identify paradoxes that arise when trying to cognize a person and the world around him with the help of language structures, to overcome reductionism, to build new reading practices (*Руднев В.П. 1997 p. 225*).” In poststructuralism, there is a criticism of metaphysics with its logo-centrism - behind all cultural products and mental schemes is the language of power and the power of language. Logo-centrism is opposed by the idea of difference and multiplicity. In this regard, we would like to mention two ideas of poststructuralism, which are most clearly reflected in

feminist linguistics. The first touches upon the significance of the context in determining the role of speech acts and texts, the second emphasizes the structural features of the relationship of language with the consciousness and thinking of a person. (*Hellinger M., 1991, pp. 25-37*)

As for critical linguistics, its main goal - the analysis of both implicit and transparent structural relations of dominance, discrimination, power and control, expressed in the language - literally coincides with the problems of feminist linguistics proper. Many scholars working in this direction share the opinion of J. Habermas that “language is a means of dominance and social power. It serves to legislatively consolidate the relations of organized power. As far as legislatively fixed (legitimate) relations of power are not expressed, the language is ideologized.” (*Bodak P. 1997, p. 7*)

From this it can be concluded that feminist criticism of the language is theoretically closer to the conceptual framework of critical linguistics than to gender studies. The research interest of critical linguistics - the exposure of inequality and injustice - in the framework of feminist criticism of the language articulates the problem of gender, that is, the “linguistic” inequality of women and men. The object of study both in critical linguistics and in feminist linguistics is linguistic behavior in natural speech situations of social importance (public institutions, the media, etc.). Researchers who deal with the problems of feminist criticism of the language cannot be “unbiased”; they are forced to take one or another position. “In empirical studies, subjects of study can no longer be regarded as objects. Research “affects” the subject and should ultimately help them as much as possible.” Almost all the work carried out in this direction is aimed at socio-political practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we emphasize the importance that feminist linguistics has had on both gender in linguistics and the development of linguistics in general.

Firstly, the desire of feminist linguistics to change the norms of the language and the language system itself caused a wide resonance and interdisciplinary discussion. And

this, in turn, contributed to the development of both gender studies and the emergence of male studies

Secondly, conscious rationing of the language in some applied areas, such as political discourse, the style of business writing and communication, is certainly quite justified and necessary.

Thirdly, feminist criticism of the language contributed to the improvement of discursive analysis methods, it introduced a lot of new and significantly supplemented the theory of speech acts of Austin-Searle, initiated the creation of new discursive practices, which greatly facilitated the solution of a number of problems of intercultural and intergroup communication, so significant for post-Soviet culture.

Fourth, feminist linguistics introduced a number of new linguistic concepts and expanded the interpretation of the traditional concepts of “linguistic behavior” and “meaning”. The study of gender asymmetries of the language contributed to a deeper study of the word-formation and nominative systems of the language, as well as cultural stereotypes of femininity and masculinity in general.

Fifth, feminist linguistics has improved and purely linguistic tools, “polished” introspection methods, techniques for the study of communicative interaction, quantitative statistical socio- and psycholinguistic methods.

Sixth, feminist linguistics in its methodological apparatus draws data from a number of other disciplines (anthropology, sociology, philosophy), which helps to strengthen the interdisciplinarity of all humanitarian knowledge as a whole.

And finally, this discipline allowed women to “see themselves differently” through the language, express themselves differently in the language, and just be heard. And this, probably, is one of her greatest achievements.

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