“Feminine” and “Masculine” Categories: Inputs and Perspectives

On the verge of XX-XXI centuries another change of scientific paradigms took place. The structural and systemic paradigm of language understanding as strictly organized system changes to more “humane” one. Language is considered to be a product of person’s mental activity, thus it is examined from anthropocentric point of view: a subject (speaker) is studied, not an object (language). At that time a chain of new scientific branches of science appeared (cognitive linguistics, sociolinguistics, and psycholinguistics) and they answered the purpose of a new paradigm aim, we should mention that linguistic genderology is among them. It takes one of the most dominant places within modern linguistic investigations. Gender is meant like a characteristic that helps to form speaker’s social identity.

Unfortunately, today gender researches are on the stage of formation. And as A. V. Kyrylina states “…we know a certain quantity of works dedicated to investigate typical features of masculine and feminine tongue but it does not give us a possibility to make valid conclusions concerning inherent attributes of a male and female language” [6, p. 73]. Some scientific researches, articles on linguistic genderology do not fill “lacunas”, which occur on the way of perceiving these categories. Therefore it is apparent that scientific investigations and actuality of gender has not reduced yet.

The objective of the article is to identify the state of investigations of “feminine” and “masculine” categories in linguistics.

Although “gender” notion came into scientific linguistic circulation at the end of XX century we can trace its prehistory even in philosophical ideas of the ancient China. “Book of Changes” that is ascribed to Confucius, provide the notions of “yin” and “yang” which express polarity of light and dark, solid and soft, male (spirit) and female (material) [1, p. 13-14]. In antiquity takes place awareness of natural sex category (sexus), grammatical gender (gender), symbolic and semantic concept of gender (genus). It is significant that the ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle in his work “Generation of Animals” underlines the basic difference of male and female by pith: if the first is associated with corporal, a material, then the second brings up an association with spiritual, a form [3, p. 47]. In the XVII century on the territory of India it was noticed a difference between a male and female language for the first time. It is peculiar that there were variants of pronunciation and usage of words for both sexes. Men particularly used a lot of lexemes and word combinations which were forbidden for women and they avoid using words from the female lexical dictionary. It is interesting that the male variant considered to be a
standard and the female one was understood like a deviance from the norm. They pondered that nature defines cognitive and intellectual abilities of men and women and difference between the male and female language was prearranged by a biological sex.

Well-known linguists of XIX century W. Grimm and W. von Humboldt suggested that there was a connection of a natural sex and a grammatical gender and they attached importance of the first-rate, semantics of activity, vigorousness to the male gender only. And it was attributed passivity and subordination to the female gender.

At the second half of XX century gender researches actively developed. “Gender” was used for the first time in a new connotation at the end of 60’s by an American psychoanalyst Robert Stoller to designate social and cultural aspects of sex, not to mark a grammatical gender to what it was associated long before.

Later the active development of feminism causes appearance of a vague trend – feministic linguistics, which paramount aim was to expose patriarchy, men’s domination in social and cultural aspects of life. The ideas of feminism became extremely famous on the territory of Germany owing to such bright researches as S. Trempel-Plets and L. Push. J. Kristeva, a French scientist, also contributed her mite in spreading concepts of feminism.

According to the theoreticians of feministic ideology a woman should gain her own identity for psychological, social and biological existence, should have an adequate reflection in language that is used by a certain group of people. They believe that language fixes world view from the male perspective and a female is presented as an object, “collateral” and as a result the idea of androcentrism (orientation on a man) appears [1, p. 24].

Language androcentrism and inferiority of a woman’s image in the world view was elucidated by an American learned R. Lakoff in her book “Language and Woman’s Place” (1973), which soon became the basic work in feministic linguistics. The author made a conclusion that a woman’s image was negative in most of European languages. She pondered that it was a result of a steady stereotype of feminineness that is perceived as “soft”, “submissive” and “compliant”. And disproof of language behavior stereotypes, which had been created by society, is suggested to be like breaking of the norm, and women who use a male style in writing and while speaking, perceived to be illiterate and non feminine.

At the end of 80’s a separate trend of linguistic genderology was established. It directed its scientific potential to investigate issues of masculinity (Men’s Studies). There were some scientific conferences and articles on questions of masculinity. For example, in 1993 Australian edition of the magazine “Theory and Society” was published like a special number that was dedicated to masculinity problems in modern society.
At the same time transition from patriarchship analysis and specifically women experience to analysis of gender system was outlined. We should point out that a distinction of women, feministic and gender researches mean not exact separation but inclusion to a wider context through gender system analysis. Thus a gradual transition from properly “women’s factor” to analysis of gender existence, its formation and representation in all social processes take places.

A fundamental notion of linguistic genderology is gender. But it has got vague interpretations in social sciences nowadays. So a philosophic dictionary [3, p. 76] defines gender in two meanings: general – difference between men and women according to anatomy; sociological – a social division that is based on the anatomic sex but it does not necessarily coincide with it. And the encyclopedic dictionary on sociology [2, p. 47] identifies gender as a notion that defines social expectations of representatives of both sexes from each other. Though in linguistics it is conceived differently. According to O. B. Moisova the abovementioned notion is a quantity of social, cultural, individual and personal identities of a person in the light of gender stratification. N. L. Pushkaryova apprehends gender as a systemic feature of social order that is unavoidable and inevitable [7, p. 170]. But we suppose that the neatest definition of gender belongs to E. I. Horoshko: “gender relationships are fixed by a language in the form of cultural conditioned stereotypes, which influence on a personality’s language behavior and tongue socialization processes” [7, p. 171]. We completely agree with such a definition and we understand gender as a cognitive pattern that was created in order to make scientific descriptions of sex problems in the language clearer and to distinct its biological, social and cultural functions. A category of gender is being formed with the help of society using the language. The language is a detector that helps to display marked gender elements and to interpret them.

One preferable question of linguistic genderology is studying a language behavior of men and women on the hypothesis of patriarch stereotypes domination in the language and their influence on processes of communication. Therefore there were already scrutinized characteristic traits of male and female’s language conduct. It is characteristic to women to use suffixes with a meaning of derogation, accuracy in the choice of lexis, a tendency to use euphemisms (for instance not to be boozy – but to be intoxicated), civility to an interlocutor; but it was noticed also that in informal situations it is also possible to make use of rough and rude lexemes even some abusive words. The latter we can explain by an effort to “heighten” a proper status, to get some weight in society because the women’s language conduct (submissiveness, diffidence) does not create an impression of competence and certitude.

Concerning men’s language conduct there were found out: a tendency to make use of abusive words, professionalisms, terms and inclination to avoid sentiments performance [2, p. 35]. A propos of this an American psychologist Ronald Levant stresses that adult men often possess
Alexithymia, emotional invalidity. It means that they cannot connect words to their emotions. A skill to identify, express, describe proper emotional conditions, particularly grief, thoughtfulness, pain or attachment, is absent for them. The scientist refers this fact to consequences of upbringing in childhood when parents do not demand a boy to display his emotions. That is considered to be even objectionable. And as a result men are inclined to verbalize and express only wrath like a manifestation of feelings. It is also interesting that while speaking men interrupt more often than women. Domination tendencies, detection of power during a process of communication explain such a verbal behavior of men [2, p. 33].

Representatives of linguistic genderology have outlined such peculiarities within language while investigating traits of androcentrism [1, p. 24-25]:

- identity of the notions “man” and “male” (man – in English, homme - in French, Mann - in German, hombre – in Spanish, чоловік – in Ukrainian, but in Russian there are a lexeme мужчина and a word человек);
- the nouns of feminine gender are formed from the nouns of masculine gender, not vice versa (for example, in Ukrainian language стюард – стюардеса, лев – левиця, актор – акторка, in English steward – stewardess, lion – lioness, actor – actress);
- using a masculine name to a female reviewer is admitted and it heightens her social status. But a man’s nomination by a womanly lexeme has quite a negative hint. For instance, in Russian the word «баба» makes not a perfect image of a man and a word-combination «свой парень» provides a woman with some additional authority;
- masculine forms are used to define any person or a mixed group of people (men and women at the same time). If they imply a schoolmistress and a teacher it is enough to say the word “teachers” or a schoolboy and a schoolgirl – schoolchildren. In French it is always used a pronoun ils that corresponds to masculine plural gender in the situation of communication of a mixed group of people. For example, Philippe et ses deux amis, Anne et Marie, decident de visiter Charles. Ils achtent le cadeau. (Philippe and his two friends, Ann and Mary, decide to visit Charles. They buy a gift.) A feminine plural pronoun elles is used only in unisexual language groups of people;
- feminine and masculine forms are roughly divided and opposed to each other in quality (positive and negative appraisal) and quantity relationships (male dominates like common to mankind). For instance, in French (quality relationships): fias (a fellow, a lad) – fiasse (a corpulent, rude damsel), courtisan (court) - courtisane (courtesane). It is interesting that in English there are two synonyms «humanity» and «mankind» to define all people in the world but a lexeme «womankind» does not exist (male dominance like common to mankind).
It is evident that common traits which are marked as “patriarch” are inherent to languages of different groups. It could prove that a stereotype of men’s dominance on women had been formed historically because for a long time a woman was considered to look after heath and a man had to be a breadwinner and his functions were essential.

Summing up the article we claim that the state of investigation of the categories “masculine” and “feminine” is at the initial stage of development despite of a long prehistory of formation of a science about gender and its active development at the end of the second millenary. The “feminine” category is somewhat better researched and worked out than “masculine” scientific investigations. We see perspectives in further thorough studies of these categories. Investigations of verbal behavior and gender stereotypes in male and female language will contribute to scientific researches of “masculine” and “feminine” concepts.