

The Problems of Analyzing the Lexico-Semantic Category of Gender in the English and Uzbek Languages

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the problems of analyzing the lexico-semantic category of gender in the English and Uzbek languages, as well as the lexico-semantic comparison of gender in the English and Russian languages.

KEYWORDS: *gender, sex, grammatical gender, lexico-semantic meaning, male, female, animal, masculine, feminine, neuter gender*

The term gender refers to the socially constructed categories male and female, and *not* to such grammatical categories as 'masculine', 'feminine', 'neuter' or 'common'. The study of language in relation to gender has two main foci. First, it has been observed by many linguists that men and women speak differently; and second, it has been observed by many feminists and by some linguists that men and women are spoken about differently, and it is often claimed that the language is discriminatory against women.

Differences in male and female language use began to be noticed at least as early as the seventeenth century in the societies visited by missionaries and explorers, and the interest these differences caused often led to claims that in some societies men and women spoke completely different languages.

This, however, is an overstatement – what tends to happen to varying degrees in various societies is that the gender of a speaker will determine or increase the likelihood of choices of certain phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical forms of a language while precluding or diminishing the likelihood of certain other choices.

We shall not expect to find an exact correlation between gender and sex. Indeed sometimes we have a surprising contrast as in the French of 'the male mouse' which is *la souris mate* ('the (feminine) male mouse'), for *souris* is a feminine noun. Similarly we noted *Miidchen* and *Priulein* and *la sentinelle* in the previous section. Yet although in some cases the gender is wholly idiosyncratic, we can at other times see some regularity. The German words are neuter because all words with the diminutive ending *-chen* and *-lein* are neuter, while in French occupational names such as *sentinelle* are all feminine. The explanation then lies in historical facts, which have overruled the obvious semantic probability that male creatures will be referred to by masculine nouns and female creatures by feminine ones [1;208].

There is no real problem in English, for English has, strictly, no grammatical gender at all. It has, of course, the pronouns *he*, *she* and *it*, but these are essentially markers of sex. The first two, *he* and *she*, are used if the sex is specifically indicated or known; otherwise *it* is used [2;25]. There is,

however, one qualification. There is a difference between the use of the pronouns for animals and for humans. *it* may be used for animals, e. g. to refer to a dog, and so may *he* or *she* if the sex is known. However, with humans *it* cannot be used, even if the sex is unknown. For the indefinite unknown human the forms *they*, *them*, *their* are used in colloquial English (even for singular) as in *Has anyone lost their hat? If anyone comes tell them to go away*. This is frowned on by some grammarians, but seems to me to be a useful and wholly acceptable device for avoiding the indication of sex. For reference to a specific human whose sex is unknown, e. g. a baby, *it* is sometimes used, but it is probably wiser to ask the mother first 'Is it a boy or a girl?'

Many languages have noun classes that function grammatically like the gender classes of the Indo-European and Semitic languages. Thus, in Swahili, there are classes of animates, of small things and of big things, each class clearly indicated formally by an appropriate prefix and requiring agreement with adjectives and verbs. These are often referred to as gender -classes. If we are thinking primarily of the grammatical function, that they are classes of nouns that require agreement with adjectives and verbs, the term 'gender' is appropriate, since that is essentially the grammatical function of gender in the more familiar languages. But, of course, it may be argued that some other term that does not suggest a relation with sex should be found (though the purist might be reminded that etymologically gender is not related to sex, but merely means 'kind'). Even with noun classes of the type that are not related to sex we find that there is no precise correspondence between formal class and its meaning. Not all the nouns of the 'small things' class in Swahili are small, while Bloomfield relates that in the Algonquian languages of North America there is a grammatical distinction between animate and inanimate nouns, but that both 'kettle' and 'raspberry' belong to the class of animates, though 'strawberry' is inanimate [3;128].

We have similarly noted anomalies with number. Semantically, the question of enumeration does not seem to be a very important one. Many languages have grammatical number systems, but others in various parts of the world (e. g., South-East Asia, West Africa) do not. Moreover, it is difficult to see why SEMANTICALLY the essential distinction should be between singular ('one') and plural ('more than one'). Many languages make this distinction in their grammar, but not all. Some classical languages Sanskrit, Greek and Arabic - had, in addition, dual - referring to two objects. Other languages, e. g. Fijian and Tigre (Ethiopia), have distinctions of 'little plurals' and 'big plurals' too. If we look at the problem of counting objectively it is not at all obvious that there are any 'natural' numerical classes that

might be expected to be shown in the grammar of all or most languages.

More important, perhaps, is the need to distinguish between individual and mass. This is a distinction that English makes quite clearly, though it is often ignored in the grammar books. The category is referred to as COUNT ABILITY, with the noun classes of COUNTABLES and UNCOUNTABLES or COUNT and MASS. Examples of count nouns are *cat* and *book*, while *butter* and *petrol* are mass nouns. Formally the two classes are easily distinguished. Count nouns alone may occur in the singular with the indefinite article *a* - *a cat* (but not **a butter*), while only mass nouns may occur with no article or with the indefinite quantifier *some* (not *some* in the sense of 'some or other') - *Butter is ...*, *some butter* (but not **Cat is ...*, ** some cat*). Some nouns, e. g. *cake*, *fish* belong to both classes[4;137].

The semantic difference between these two classes is clear enough. The count nouns 'individuate' - they indicate individual specimens, while the mass nouns refer to a quantity that is not individuated in this way. But the distinction does not correspond closely to any semantic distinction in the world of experience, and this should be no cause for surprise. It is true that liquids are always referred to by mass nouns because they cannot be individuated. There is no obvious object that can be described as **a water*.

But there is no explanation in semantic terms why *butter* is a mass noun while *jelly* is count as well as mass; there is no semantic reason why we can refer to a single mass of jelly as *a jelly* but not to a mass of butter as **a butter*. On the other hand, while *cake* is count as well as mass, for the obvious reason that individual cakes can be recognised, *bread* is only mass we cannot talk of **a bread*, but have to use a different word, *loaf*. A foreigner could not guess, then, whether such words as *soap*, *trifle*, *cheese* would be count nouns in English. He has, moreover, to learn the 'individuating' nouns *loaf of bread*, *cake of soap*, *pat of butter*.

The count mass distinction is a fairly clear one - it classifies English nouns, though some, e. g. *fish*, belong to both classes. But mass nouns can, nevertheless, function as count nouns. Two obvious functions are, first, the use of such expressions as *a butter*, *a petrol* to mean 'a kind of butter' or 'a kind of petrol', and secondly *a coffee*, *a beer* to mean 'a cup of coffee' and 'a glass of beer'. It is best to treat these nouns as 'basically' mass nouns and these functions as types of individuation that can be applied to them for specific purposes - to indicate kinds and, with liquids, familiar quantities. Similarly, count nouns that refer to creatures may function as mass nouns to indicate the meat; we find not merely familiar usages such as *chicken*, *rabbit*, *fish* but can also freely form mass nouns *elephant*, *crocodile* and even *dog* (*The Chinese eat dog*) to refer to the meat. (But we have, of course, the specific words *befif*, *mutton*, *pork*, *venison* for the flesh of cattle, sheep, pigs and deer.)

Semantically, mass nouns are nearer to plurals than to singular forms of count nouns. This accounts for the anomaly of *oats* and *wheat* - there is little difference, unless it is clearly specified, between a large number of grains and a mass of them. In some languages liquids are not mass nouns, but plurals, e. g. in Bilin the word for 'water'.

The term 'count' is relevant to the fact that most count nouns can be counted - *one book*, *two/three/four books*. But there are two reservations. First, English has the words *scissors*,

trousers, *shears*, *tongs*, etc., which are formally plural, but cannot be enumerated except by using another noun *a pair of* -; this is formally like the individuating forms of the mass nouns, *a cake of soap*, *a pat of butter*. Secondly, although English uses the plural form with numbers above one, not all languages do. In Welsh, for instance, 'four dogs' is *pedwar ci*, though 'dog' is *ci* and 'dogs' *cwn*. In Tigre there are many mass nouns which have a singulative (individuating) form made by a suffix, e. g. *nahab* 'bees', but *nahbat* 'a bee'. But the singulative form is the form used with all numerals - not merely 'one' *hatte nahbat* 'one bee', *satas nahbat* 'three bees', etc. What seems to be important here is not plurality, but individuation.

The problems of gender as a lexico-semantic category in Uzbek appear in comparing words in three languages:

English: *mother*, *sister*, *girl*, *lady*, *woman*, *Helen*, *poetess*, *directress*, *aunt*, *hen*, *cow*.

Uzbek: *она*, *она*, *қиз*, *аёл*, *хоним*, *Ҳалима*, *шоира*, *раққоса*, *артистка*, *бия*, *хола*

Russian: *мать*, *девушка*, *женщина*, *сестра*, *Катя*, *поэтесса*, *сударыня*, *балерина*, *учительница*, *тетя*, *корова*, *курица*.

Uzbek nouns denoting male and female sex are of no grammatical significance in contrast to English and Russian ones. The grammatical significance of English nouns denoting male and female sex is observed when they are replaced by the pronouns *he* and *she*: [5;25]

I have a brother. He is a doctor. I have a sister. She is a teacher.

Some of the nouns denoting living beings do not express sex:

1. human beings: *doctor*, *friend*, *cousin*, *teacher*, *stranger*, *neighbour*, *student*, *clerk*, etc.
2. animals: *wolf*, *dog*, *bear*, *eagle*, *ass*, *goat*, *elephant*, etc.

If we desire to indicate the sex of what is expressed by those nouns, a word denoting the sex is added to them: *boy-friend*, *girl friend*; *man-servant*, *maid-servant*; *man-doctor*, *woman-doctor*; *male elephant*, *female elephant*; *he-dog*, *she-dog*; *male (tom-, he-) cat*, *female- (pussy- she-) cat*; *he- (billy-) goat*, *she- (nanny-) goat*; *dog- (he-) wolf*, *she-wolf*, etc.

In Spoken English there is a tendency to associate the names of animals with the female or male sex.

1. When the noun indicates the sex of the animal it is generally spoken of as **he** (*lion*, *tiger*, *bull*, etc) or **she** (*lioness*, *tigress*, *cow*, etc.);

The tiger approached the camp: his dreadful roar made us shudder.

The bull lowered his head.

Our dog is called Jenny; she is of a very good breed.

2. When the sex of the animal is not indicated by the noun, nouns denoting the larger and bolder animals are generally associated with the male sex (*elephant*, *horse*, *dog*, *eagle*, etc), while nouns denoting the smaller and weaker ones with the female (*cat*, *hare*, *parrot*, etc):

The elephant lifted his mighty trunk.

The cat has upset her milk.

In English inanimate things or abstract notions are usually personified and the nouns denoting them are referred to as

belonging to those of the male or female sex. Here are some traditional associations:

1. The things and notions expressed by the noun *sun* and by the nouns expressing such ideas as **strength**, **fierceness** (*anger, death, fear, war, etc*) are associated with the male sex:

It is pleasant to watch the sun in his chariot of gold, and the moon in her chariot of pearl. (Wilde)

... it seemed as if death were raging round this floating prison seeking for his prey. (Irving.)

2. The things and notions expressed by the nouns *moon* and *earth*, by the names of *vessels* (ship, boat, steamer, etc), *vehicles* (car, carriage, coach, etc), countries and by the nouns expressing such ideas as *gentleness, beauty* (kindness, spring, peace, dawn, etc) are associated with the female sex:

The Moon was behind the clouds but an hour later we saw her in full.

She is a good car.

She was a good boat.

France sent **her** representative to the conference.

It is necessary to distinguish sex and gender in Russian. Sex is a logical semantic category which reflects biological characteristic (sex) of living beings. This category is formed by the nouns denoting male and female sex.

Gender is a formal grammatical category which is represented by a system of three-member opposition: masculine, feminine and neuter:

| Masculine gender | Feminine gender | Neuter gender |
|------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| Стол | парта | окно |
| Зал | станция | поле |
| Певец | мать | перо |
| Танкист | женщина | пальто |
| Цветок | кобра | озеро |
| Сарай | метель | собрание |

The formal grammatical category of gender of inanimate nouns does not reflect biological characteristic (sex) of things. For example, the noun *стол* does not denote sex, but it is a noun of masculine gender.

In the nouns denoting male and female living beings sex and gender coincide:

- сын* (male sex, masculine gender)
- дочь* (female sex, feminine gender)
- конь* (male sex, masculine gender)
- курица* (female sex, feminine gender)

The grammatical significance of Russian nouns denoting sex is observed when replacing them with the pronouns *он* and *она* find choosing forms for adjectives, pronouns, verbs and nouns:

- У меня есть друг. Он спортсмен.*
- У меня есть подруга. Она учительница.*
- Хороший мальчик. Хорошая девочка.*
- Этот мальчик. Эта девушка.*
- Мальчик пришел. Девушка пришла.*
- Виджу мальчика. Виджу девушку.*

English nouns denoting sex cause more interferences when English is spoken by Uzbeks, than by Russians. Uzbek students usually make mistakes when replacing them with the pronouns he or she. It is difficult for Uzbeks and Russians to express sex in English when the means of expressing it differ.

RENDERING OF THE ENGLISH NOUNS DENOTING SEX IN UZBEK

| English | Uzbek |
|----------------------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. | |
| N denoting male sex | N denoting male sex |
| <i>father</i> | <i>ота</i> |
| <i>son</i> | <i>ўғил</i> |
| <i>uncle</i> | <i>тоға</i> |
| <i>cock</i> | <i>хўроз</i> |
| <i>bull</i> | <i>хўкиз</i> |
| 2. | |
| N denoting male sex | N which does not denote sex |
| <i>boy</i> | <i>бола</i> |
| <i>nephew</i> | <i>жиян</i> |
| <i>buck</i> | <i>кийик, қуён, антилопа</i> |
| <i>lion</i> | <i>шер</i> |
| 3. | |
| N denoting male sex | эркак N |
| <i>buck</i> | <i>эркак кийик, қуён, антилопа</i> |
| <i>lion</i> | <i>эркак шер</i> |

Summing up the problem of gender in Modern English, it is important to say that:

1. gender is the grammatical distinction between; masculine, feminine and neuter;
2. the lexical - grammatical category of gender existed only in the OE period but in ME (middle English) this category has been lost;
3. in Modern English we find only lexical-semantic meanings of gender, that is, the gender distinction is based on the semantic principle;
4. English has certain lexical and syntactic means to express a real biological sex.

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