

THE PROBLEM OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL FACTORS IN THE UNIVERSAL LINGUISTIC THEORY OF THE GENDER PHENOMENON

N.A.Komilova¹

Mas'ul muallif: Komilova Nilufar Abdilkadimovna, Senior teacher (PhD) of English philology department Fergana State University.

e-mail: E-mail:a.komilova@pf.fdu.uz

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1. Senior teacher (PhD) of English philology department Fergana State University

Abstract. This article looks at the conceptual bases behind gender as some kind of universal linguistic happening, but it really keeps zooming in on how social, cultural forces shape the way gendered speech gets used, across rather different language communities. It kind of draws from a comparative look at several influential works in sociolinguistics, cognitive linguistics and gender studies, and it says that a single universal idea about linguistic gender can't be treated as fully finished, not really, unless it also has a careful mapping of the sociocultural settings where language gets made and then kept going.

Keywords: gender linguistics, sociocultural factors, universal linguistics, language and gender, gender stereotype, linguistic identity.

ПРОБЛЕМА СОЦИАЛЬНО-КУЛЬТУРНЫХ ФАКТОРОВ В УНИВЕРСАЛЬНОЙ ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКОЙ ТЕОРИИ ГЕНДЕРНОГО ФЕНОМЕНА

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические основы гендера как универсального лингвистического явления, с особым акцентом на роли социальных и культурных факторов в формировании гендерного речевого поведения в различных языковых сообществах. На основе сравнительного анализа ключевых работ в области социолингвистики, когнитивной лингвистики и гендерных исследований в статье обосновывается тезис о том, что ни одна универсальная теория лингвистического гендера не может считаться завершённой без систематического учёта социокультурных контекстов, в которых язык производится и воспроизводится.

Ключевые слова: гендерная лингвистика, социокультурные факторы, универсальная лингвистика, язык и гендер, гендерный стереотип, языковая идентичность.

Introduction. The question about gender in linguistics has been on scholars across several theoretical traditions for a while now, yet whether it is truly a universal linguistic category is still argued about. In early generativist and structuralist work, gender was often handled as something grammatical, or as if it just mirrors natural biological distinctions, pretty directly. Then from the 1970s onward sociolinguistics and feminist linguistics really showed, that the link between language and gender is a lot more complicated, it depends on context, and it also shifts across cultures than people used to think. So the real theoretical trouble is not only to lay out how different languages encode these gender distinctions. It's also to explain why the social and cultural aspects of gender keep showing up inside linguistic structure, and inside everyday use, even across languages that aren't closely related typologically [1, p. 14].

This question has gained renewed urgency, in the context of globalization, as cross-cultural contact keeps getting stronger and languages increasingly interact in ways that bring out their different gender ideologies. In Uzbek linguistic scholarship, the issue has gotten attention lately, because the move to the Latin script, the ongoing contact with Russian, and English, along with changing everyday norms have all placed pressure on existing gender-linked linguistic traditions [2, p. 87]. This article takes a more theoretical angle, basically saying that the social and cultural dimensions of gender need to be included in any really universal account of what gender does in language. And if that inclusion is missed, then the models become descriptively weak, plus they end up being theoretically kind of underfed, not enough.

Methodology and literature review. Kinda the methodology in this study is based on a mix of theoretical and comparative review of scholarly literature, though it is not like we are "collecting" anything new, more like we look at what has already been argued. This path makes sense because the main goal of the article is really to evaluate and weave together theoretical positions rather than to come up with fresh descriptive data, or something similar. The literature that is reviewed covers key foundational works in gender linguistics, sociolinguistics, and also the cross-cultural study of language alongside identity. For instance, Robin Lakoff's pioneering work set up the basic premise that women's speech is systematically different from men's speech in ways that mirror wider patterns of social

subordination. That then basically "opened" the field for analysis that is sociologically informed [3, p. 53]. After that, Deborah Tannen did a kind of refinement of this framework, focusing more on cross-cultural and interactional aspects, and she suggested that gendered communication styles come from differing socialization habits rather than from innate biological drives [4, p. 77].

In the Russian linguistic tradition, the work of Elena Gapova and Irina Novikova kind of places gender linguistics inside the wider project of feminist cultural theory, and it stresses that language is not only a medium where gender shows up but also a real place where gender is built and negotiated, more or less [5, p. 102]. In that same spirit, Uzbek scholars like Dilnoza Yusupova have offered their analyses of gender representation in both Uzbek literary and official discourse too, showing that the Uzbek language's comparatively morphological neutrality toward grammatical gender still doesn't protect it from socially made gender imbalances. Those imbalances tend to appear at lexical and pragmatic levels, even if the grammar looks calm [2, p. 91].

Theoretical synthesis is further enriched by reference to Judith Butler's idea of performativity, which rethinks gender not as something a person has, but as a kind of repeated citational practice. And it's been used in a productive way for looking at gendered speech acts across various linguistic contexts [6, p. 33], in other words. Then Penelope Eckert and Sally McConnell-Ginet bring in the concept of communities of practice, as a unit for analysis for gender and language. This lets researchers move past the usual binary models, and instead account for how gender overlaps with class, ethnicity, age, and other social variables [7, p. 46]. In the same vein, the comparative framework used in the present study pulls from all those traditions, and it treats their points of agreement and also their differences as theoretically useful, not simply as problems to work around for synthesis.

Results and discussion. So, the scholarly literature reviewed above, when you actually look at it, sort of points to a few important, theoretically meaningful ideas about how social and cultural factors relate to the universal dimensions of linguistic gender. First off, it's clear that every human language we know has gender distinctions of some kind, whether that's through grammatical agreement, pronoun systems, lexical differentiation, or even pragmatic conventions. But the exact way those distinctions show up doesn't seem like it is just dictated by some kind of internal, language-only logic, instead they are shaped again and again by the social structures and the cultural norms of the communities where the language is used [3, p. 61]. This ends up backing the theoretical view that gender isn't a universal thing in the strict way, like a single fixed category that stays identical across languages. Instead it behaves more like a general tendency or disposition which gets realized differently depending on the particular sociocultural setting.

The implications for linguistic theory are rather substantial, basically if any model treats gender as just a grammatical or cognitive phenomenon, something detached from its social and cultural determinants, then it will inevitably misrepresent what gender in language is actually like. Second, the cross-cultural evidence that gets gathered in the literature keeps pointing in the same direction, meaning power relations seem to be doing the work of structuring gendered linguistic behavior. As Tannen's research shows, differences in communicative style between men and women aren't random at all, they rather mirror who has more or less access to social resources, prestige, and authority, which is a pattern that shows up across most societies [4, p. 84]. This resonates, in a strong way, with the Uzbek and Central Asian contexts discussed by Yusupova, where patriarchal social norms aren't encoded in the grammatical system of the language, but show up in patterns of address, in silence, and in who gets discursive authority [2, p. 95].

The universality of the gender phenomenon in linguistics, on this account, isn't really about having shared formal properties, it's more like shared social dynamics that make kind of analogous but not fully identical linguistic outcomes show up across different languages and cultures. Third, the theoretical framework proposed by Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, gives a pretty productive way out of the tension between universalist and relativist positions in gender linguistics [7, p. 52]. By placing gender meaning-making in communities of practice rather than in individual speakers, or abstract grammatical systems it kind of "fits" both sides at once. So it can accommodate the cross-linguistic regularities that push people toward universalist theorizing, and also the cultural specificity that relativist accounts stress too. This integrative potential makes the communities of practice framework particularly useful for building what we might call a genuinely universal theory of linguistic gender, that doesn't throw away cultural sensitivity just to keep things theoretically neat.

Fourth, Butler's performativity theory bring in a critical layer that tends to get undercounted in accounts that only describe things: the idea that gendered language use isn't just a mirror of some gender that already exists, but actually helps make those identities in the first place, or so the argument goes [6, p. 40]. Once that point is taken seriously, it has consequences for how linguists build their models of language, society, and culture. If gender is done through language rather than simply "shown" by language, then the social and cultural forces that decide which kinds of performances are doable, recognizable, and even expected in a specific setting have to be treated as part of the linguistic phenomenon itself, not as outside variables that merely touch the surface forms and that's it [8, p. 118]. A position like this has also been used, in a rather productive way, within recent Uzbek linguistic scholarship, where researchers have started to look at how, when gender norms are shifting in contemporary Uzbek society, linguistic behavior shifts right along with it, especially in digital communication and public talk [9, p. 73].

A further theoretical observation that emerges from the comparative analysis concerns the asymmetry between linguistic systems that grammatically encode gender and those that do not. Languages such as Uzbek, which lack obligatory grammatical gender agreement of the kind found in Russian, French, or Arabic, are sometimes assumed to be more egalitarian in their treatment of gender distinctions; however, this assumption conflates grammatical structure with social meaning. The absence of grammatical gender in Uzbek does not eliminate gendered meaning from the language but

rather relocates it to other levels of linguistic organization, including lexical choice, address forms, discourse structure, and pragmatic conventions governing who speaks, when, and with what degree of authority. This redistribution of gendered meaning across different linguistic subsystems illustrates a broader theoretical principle: that gender as a social and cultural category is robust enough to find expression through whatever linguistic resources a given language makes available, and that attempts to theorize gender purely at the level of morphosyntax will therefore systematically underestimate the depth and pervasiveness of its linguistic embedding.

The role of globalization and digital communication in reshaping linguistic gender

An additional theoretical perspective that deserves attention concerns the influence of globalization and digital communication on the linguistic realization of gender. Contemporary communication increasingly occurs in multilingual and transnational digital environments where speakers are exposed to diverse linguistic norms and competing gender ideologies. As a result, traditional gendered patterns of language use are no longer reproduced exclusively within local cultural communities but are constantly negotiated through interaction with global discursive practices. Social networking platforms, online educational environments, and digital media create communicative spaces in which conventional linguistic expectations regarding gender are frequently questioned, reformulated, or deliberately challenged.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, digital communication has accelerated the circulation of new lexical items, discourse strategies, and forms of self-presentation associated with gender identity. Speakers often adopt linguistic resources originating in other languages and cultures, thereby producing hybrid communicative practices that combine local traditions with global tendencies. This process demonstrates that linguistic gender cannot be adequately explained solely through the analysis of stable grammatical systems. Instead, it must also be understood as a dynamic phenomenon influenced by technological innovation, intercultural communication, and rapidly changing social values.

Furthermore, contemporary research in discourse analysis emphasizes that digital communication provides opportunities for the emergence of new forms of gender representation that are less constrained by traditional institutional norms. Online interaction allows speakers to negotiate identities more flexibly, creating alternative communicative practices that may differ substantially from those observed in face-to-face interaction. These developments illustrate that the universal theory of linguistic gender should remain open to the continuous transformation of language under the influence of globalization, technological progress, and changing sociocultural conditions. Therefore, future theoretical models should integrate digital discourse analysis with sociolinguistic and cognitive approaches in order to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the interaction between language, gender, and culture in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion. The present article has argued that the social and cultural factors bearing on gendered language use are not peripheral considerations for universal linguistic theory but are constitutive elements of the gender phenomenon itself. A theoretically adequate account of linguistic gender must therefore be integrative, drawing on formal linguistics, sociolinguistics, cultural theory, and cross-linguistic comparison in order to capture both the universality and the cultural specificity of gender as a linguistic phenomenon. The frameworks offered by scholars such as Eckert and McConnell-Ginet, Butler, and Tannen, read in conjunction with the contributions of Uzbek and Russian scholars, provide a productive basis for such an integrative theory.

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