

GENDER AS A LINGUISTIC CATEGORY: THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS AND RESEARCH TRENDS

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Abstract: This article examines the historical development and theoretical foundations of gender studies within the field of linguistics, highlighting the emergence of a distinct scientific direction commonly referred to as *linguistic genderology*. The study traces key phases in the evolution of gender research — from early notions of biological determinism to the transitional period and the advent of direct gender studies. It evaluates how gender categories have been conceptualized in language and discusses the influence of seminal scholars such as Jespersen, Moutner, and later sociolinguistic and feminist theorists. The article also analyzes major theoretical approaches, including sociolinguistic gender research, feminist linguistics, psycholinguistic perspectives, masculinity studies, and cross-cultural linguistic investigations. Critiques of early feminist linguistic theories and the integration of gender as a category in contemporary linguistic paradigms are discussed. The study demonstrates that gender has become a central analytical category across diverse linguistic subfields, significantly enriching the understanding of language, society, and identity.

Key Words: gender and language, linguistic genderology, biological determinism, direct gender research, sociolinguistic gender studies, feminist linguistics, masculinity studies, psycholinguistic gender research, cross-cultural linguistics, androcentrism, discourse analysis, gender inequality in language

Gender has increasingly become a significant focus in linguistic research, prompting scholars to explore how language and gender interact in various social and cultural contexts. This article examines the emergence and development of gender as an analytical category within linguistics, tracing major shifts in research approaches from early theoretical concepts to more recent frameworks.

Initially, gender was often viewed through the lens of biological difference, with early scholars interpreting linguistic gender in relation to assumed natural traits of men and women. However, as linguistic theory evolved, researchers began to challenge these assumptions and consider gender as a more complex social construct. This shift laid the groundwork for the development of direct gender studies, which emphasize the social and cognitive dimensions of language use. Over time, multiple research paradigms have emerged, including sociolinguistic gender studies, feminist linguistics, psycholinguistic analyses, and investigations into masculine and cross-cultural patterns of language use. These diverse approaches reflect the multidisciplinary nature of gender research and its relevance to contemporary linguistic inquiry.



The development of gender issues within the field of linguistics and the emergence of a new scientific direction — *linguistic genderology* — has always remained a relevant and pressing concern. The gender aspect is widely applied across various subfields of linguistics and enables scholars to obtain new data on different languages, as well as to offer fresh interpretations of linguistic phenomena that were previously insufficiently studied. This concept is actively utilized in sociolinguistics, pragmatics, reference theory, psycholinguistics, language history, grammar, linguoculturology, lexicology, and discourse analysis.

Like any scientific problem, this issue also has a history of development in both foreign and national linguistics. According to many scholars, the formation of genderology as a distinct scientific direction can be divided into two main periods: “*biological determinism*” and “*direct gender research*”.¹ In addition, according to A. V. Kirillina’s research, it is appropriate to distinguish a *third “transition period”* between the first and second stages.

The stage of “*biological determinism*” is characterized by tentative and scattered observations concerning the grammatical category of gender. Even in early periods, a hypothesis emerged to explain the emergence and functioning of the gender category within language — that is, the semantic conceptualization of gender. According to this hypothesis, nouns are classified by gender in accordance with “*natural data: the existence of humans of different sexes.*”² According to Kirillina, the starting point and primary viewpoint of researchers during this period were the perceived differences in cognition and behavioral characteristics between men and women.³ Thus, the grammatical category of gender was linked to natural biological sex. Furthermore, it was also assumed that the grammatical gender category was connected to the semantic category of gender. Consequently, masculine nouns were thought to be influenced by semantics expressing activity and energy, whereas feminine nouns were perceived to be influenced by semantics of passivity and weakness. This tradition can be traced back to Aristotle, who contrasted the masculine as the active attribute and the feminine as the passive attribute. The prolonged persistence of this hypothesis in linguistics is mainly associated with the names of great German linguists such as J. Herder, J. Grimm, and W. von Humboldt.⁴ Even

¹ Кирилина, 1997а - Кирилина А.В. Категория gender в языкознании // Женщина в российском обществе. - 1997. - № 2; Кирилина, 1997 - Кирилина А. В. Женский голос в русской паремииологии // Женщина в российском обществе. - 1997. - № 3; Кирилина, 1999а - Кирилина А.В. Гендер: лингвистические аспекты. - М.: Изд-во «Институт социологии РАН», 1999.; Горошко, 1999 - Горошко Е. Пол, гендер, язык // Женщина. Гендер. Культура. - М.: МЦГИ, 1999; Горошко, Кирилина, 1999 - Горошко Е., Кирилина А. Гендерные исследования в лингвистике сегодня // Гендерные исследования: Харьковский центр гендерных исследований. - М.: «Человек & Карьера», 1999 - №2; Wodak, 1997 - Wodak R. Introduction: some important issues in the research of gender and discourse // Gender and Discourse. Sage Publications. - London. Thousand Oaks. New Delhi, 1997.

² Горошко, 1999 - Горошко Е. Пол, гендер, язык // Женщина. Гендер. Культура. - М.: МЦГИ, 1999. - С. 98-110.

³ Кирилина, 1999а - Кирилина А.В. Гендер: лингвистические аспекты. - М.: Изд-во «Институт социологии РАН», 1999 С-31.

⁴ Humboldt, W. von. (1988). *On Language: The Diversity of Human Language-Structure and its Influence on the Mental Development of Mankind* (H. Aarsleff, Trans., pp. 142–160). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press



in contemporary research, gender analysis of an individual's language behavior is often presented from the perspective of the speaker's biological sex.⁵

In the seventeenth century, the discovery of "exotic" indigenous languages — in which male and female language variants, and even distinct male and female languages, were observed — sparked interest in the gender aspect of language among scholars such as Edward Sapir, O. Jespersen⁶, and F. Moutner at the beginning of the twentieth century. From this point — that is, from the first half of the twentieth century — the "transition period" in gender research begins.

In his work, the German linguist F. Moutner emphasized that "women's language" was adopted in society at the time when women were granted the right to perform on stage in early theatre. In this way, the issue of "the influence of gender inequality on an individual's socialization" was raised for the first time.⁷ Moutner identified differences in communication between men and women. He noted that among industrial workers, men tended to use non-standard lexis. In higher social strata, he distinguished the following features:

1. Lexical characteristics — men used expressions with double meanings in place of insults and vulgarities, whereas women used such expressions only insofar as their softer meanings. Furthermore, women often used foreign loanwords, which, in the author's view, indicated that "women were less knowledgeable," as they struggled to find equivalents in their native language;
2. Men approached language creatively, whereas women were described as "reproductive," meaning that women could only accept and reproduce what was created by men.

In 1922, O. Jespersen, in his book *Language: Its Nature, Development, and Origin*, described differences in male and female speech behavior. Jespersen based his observations on missionaries' and travelers' accounts, citing examples from the languages of the Caribbean Indian peoples. Interestingly, in some of these Indian tribes, the use of "male speech forms" was forbidden for women. Additionally, he paid considerable attention to women's linguistic competence. He noted several characteristics in women's speech: the predominance of euphemistic lexis over explicit words, conservatism (in bilingual situations, women often retained the single native language due to situational factors), and a greater use of elliptical and paratactic constructions. In contrast, men preferred periodic and hypotactic constructions, which Jespersen regarded as more prestigious.⁸

⁵ Nichols, 1983 - Nichols P. Linguistic options and choices for black women in the rural South // Thom B., Kramarae Ch., Henley N. (eds), *Language, Gender and Society*. - Cambridge: Newbury House, 1983; Eckert, 1993 - Eckert P. The whole woman: sex and gender differences in variation // *Language Variation and Change*, 1993; Cameron, Coates, 1990 - Cameron D., Coates J. *Women in their Speech Communities: New Perspectives on Language and Sex*. - London: Longman, 1990

⁶ Jespersen, 1998 - Jespersen O. *The Woman* // *The Feminist Critique of Language* / Cameron D. - London, 1998.

⁷ Горошко, 1999 - Горошко Е. Пол, гендер, язык // *Женщина. Гендер. Культура*. - М.: МЦГИ, 1999. С-102

⁸ Кирилина, 1999 - Кирилина А.В. *Гендер: лингвистические аспекты*. - М.: Изд-во «Институт социологии РАН», 1999.; Горошко, 1999 - Горошко Е. Пол, гендер, язык // *Женщина. Гендер. Культура*. - М.: МЦГИ, 1999; Горошко, Кирилина, 1999 - Горошко Е., Кирилина А. *Гендерные исследования в лингвистике сегодня* // *Гендерные исследования*



Overall, according to Kirillina and Goroshko, the first and second stages of gender research are characterized by the following features: a) research was irregular and positioned at the periphery of linguistics; b) the concept of “*women’s language*” being considered weaker in comparison to “*men’s language*.”⁹

In addition, the authors note certain biased and negative evaluations by male linguists toward women’s language. This, in turn, fostered a tendency in linguistics to regard male language as the norm and women’s language as a deviation from that norm.

During the development of sociolinguistics, communicative semantics, pragmatics, and poststructuralist theory — as scholars’ attention turned to the influence of the “*human factor*” on language — a fundamental shift occurred in the reinterpretation of language–gender relations and gender research. Beginning around the mid-1960s, “*direct gender research*” emerged.

In studying the characteristics of male and female oral behavior, three main approaches are distinguished:

1. Interpreting language as a social phenomenon and identifying mechanisms of social pressure based on social power and the hierarchy of communicative partners;
2. Reducing “*male*” and “*female*” languages to variants of oral behavior for the construction of psycholinguistic theories based on statistical data;
3. Highlighting the cognitive aspects that determine differences in “*male*” and “*female*” language.¹⁰

These approaches have shaped several subfields within linguistics:

1. Sociolinguistic gender research;
2. Feminist linguistics;
3. Direct gender studies;
4. Masculinity studies — which emerged in the early 1990s as a new direction in gender research;
5. Psycholinguistic studies of gender;
6. Cross-cultural and linguocultural research (including the hypothesis of gender subcultures).

Sociolinguistic gender research refers to studies that analyze language while taking into account extralinguistic factors (such as occupation, age, gender, group membership, class, region, etc.) and that gather statistical data across different social groups. In the field of genderology, this direction has been advanced by scholars such as Labov (1971), Trudgill (1972, 1974), Philips (1987), Kotthoff (1992), Nichols (1983), and Coates (1986). The main

⁹ Кирилина, 19996 - Кирилина А.В. Русская фразеология с точки зрения гендерной лингвистики // Гендерные отношения в России: история, современное состояние, перспективы. Материалы международной научной конференции. - Иваново, 27 - 28 мая 1999. С-36

¹⁰ Горошко, 1999 - Горошко Е. Пол, гендер, язык // Женщина. Гендер. Культура. - М.: МЦГИ, 1999; Горошко, Кирилина, 1999 - Горошко Е., Кирилина А. Гендерные исследования в лингвистике сегодня // Гендерные исследования



achievement of sociolinguistic gender research is that it has demonstrated the necessity of more deeply considering extralinguistic factors, especially gender and other social differences, in the study of language and has shown that language use varies depending on situational context.

Feminist linguistics has developed primarily based on the works of researchers in the United States and France (for example: *Language, Gender and Society*, 1983; *The Feminist Critique of Language*, 1998; D. Cameron, 1992; *Anthology of Feminist Texts*, translations, 2000). This direction grew out of the women's movement in the United States — feminism. Its aim is to challenge and rethink social stereotypes that exist in patriarchal society, including those related to language. In a patriarchal society (male-centered), male dominance is observed in all areas of life. Similar to the term **racism**, the term **sexism** refers to discrimination in the social system on the basis of sex: in Eastern cultures and other social systems, the two sexes (female and male) are viewed in a binary opposition (Ryabova, 2001). The relationship between these two categories is unequal: “man” or “male” is treated as the norm, while “woman” or “female” is portrayed as the “other” or “non-normal.”¹¹

R. Lakoff — one of the theorists of feminist linguistics — in his work “Language and Women's Place”¹² characterized the English language as androcentric and noted the inadequacy of women's representation in the language's worldview. Thus, many of the core concepts of feminist linguistics are connected with the principles of critical linguistics or critical discourse analysis.¹³ For example, feminist linguistics identifies markers of androcentrism in a number of languages, especially English and German — for instance, where the concepts of “human” and “man” are often treated as synonymous with the word “man.”¹⁴ The theoretical approaches of feminist linguistics — especially in their early stages — have been subject to serious criticism. To this day, debates continue surrounding many of the ideas within this field.¹⁵ For example, scholars such as E. A. Zemsкая, M. A. Kitaygorodskaya, and N. N. Rozanova critically analyzed the works of early feminist theorists — including Z. Trömel-Plötz (*Feminism and Linguistics*), R. Lakoff (Lakoff, 1973), and other American and French female scholars. Their main critique centers on the lack of objectivity in the research, its heavy political and ideological underpinnings, and the resulting invalidity of the conclusions drawn.

“Feminist linguistics enriches Austin-Searle's speech act theory with important insights for interpretation: it reconfigures expressions of dominance, redefines the conditions of Grice's cooperative principles, expands notions of communicative breakdown... — all of which are valuable for discourse analysis.”¹⁶

It is evident that today the category of “gender” has entered many major scientific paradigms, including contemporary linguistic analyses, and is widely studied among linguists.

¹¹ Crawford, 1995 - Crawford M. *Talking Difference: on Gender and Language*. London: Sage, 1995; Coats, 1993 - Coats J. *Women, Men and Language*. London: longman, 1993

¹² Lakoff, 1973 - Lakoff R. *Language and women's Place // Language in Society*, 1973. - № 2.

¹³ Fairlough, Wodak, 1997 - Fairlough N., Wodak R. *Critical discourse analysis: an overview // Dijk T. van (ed.) Discourse and Interaction*. London: Sage, 1997

¹⁴ Кирилина, 1999а - Кирилина А.В. *Гендер: лингвистические аспекты*. - М.: Изд-во «Институт социологии РАН», 1999. С-40

¹⁵ Gal, 1989 - Gal S. *Between speech and silence: The problematic of research on language and gender//Papers in Pragmatics*, 1989

¹⁶ Кирилина, 1999а - Кирилина А.В. *Гендер: лингвистические аспекты*. - М.: Изд-во «Институт социологии РАН», 1999

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