THE CONCEPTS “MAN” AND “WOMAN” IN THE ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGY

N. Nasrullaeva¹

Abstract

The following article demonstrates parameters which create gender stereotypes; enlightens the main factors of the gender concepts “man” and “woman” on the material of English genderly marked phraseological units, i.e. phraseological units which contain in their structure a component denoting a man or a woman. The author gives statistic information about genderly marked phraseological units belonging to different semantic groups (appearance, social status, marital status, intellectual skills, etc.). The author has worked out the process of gender conceptualization of genderly marked phraseological units on three levels (semantic, associative and conceptual).

Keywords: gender, concept, stereotype, masculine, feminine, phraseology, genderly marked phraseological unit, lingual world view.

Language learning both in practical and theoretical aspects enriches person’s inner world. In this aspect investigation of the English phraseology gets especial significance. Being the most important aspect of lingual world view, phraseology in the meaningful structure of its units reflects a large store of various types of knowledge: cultural, cognitive, religious and historical, and this becomes very important in language learning.

Gender investigation of phraseological units (further PhU) is actual as in the centre of its attention there are cultural and social factors determining social attitude to men and women and peculiarities of using linguistics means due to belonging to a definite sex. Actual becomes also a deep investigation of the process of gender conceptualization, characterization of its layers and containing parts, finding out factors and parameters forming basic gender concepts taking into account their national-cultural, etymological and historical peculiarities. Not less actual is the comparison of masculine and feminine stereotypes in the English phraseological world view, exposure and explanation of gender asymmetries and connotations, which will create ground for lexicographical description of genderly marked phraseological units of the analyzed language and their adequate interpretation in the contexts of usage. All this ensures of the actuality of description of gender construction on the material of phraseology, demonstration of gender concepts formation, genderly meaningful information connected with traditional expectations of masculinity and femininity in the English lingual culture.

In masculine and feminine lingual consciousness the concepts of beauty and ugliness have exact borders: beauty is women’s attribute who try to possess it, for men this quality is not so important. This is proved by a number of phraseological units describing women’s beautiful appearance: (as) red as a cherry – to have rosy skin; have roses in one's cheeks – to

¹Nafisa Nasrullaeva, Ph.D., senior teacher of Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages, Uzbekistan.
have rosy cheeks; **a slick chick** – an attractive girl; **hot stuff** – young sexy woman.

In the investigated complex of English phraseological units there are many, symbolizing a man as a faithful assistant, decent, good-natured person, his advantages in comparison with a woman, braveness, willfulness, high intellect: **square John** – honest man; **knight without Fear and without Reproach** – fearless, brave man; **a gentleman of fortune** – lucky men; **clever dog** – a smart boy. In English culture man’s main activity deals with public outside sphere, which belongs to him: **lord and master**; **men in grey suits, a made man** – a person who reached high position himself. There is a universal stereotype that money and power in society also belong to men: **a man of mark** – man of high position; **a man of business** – businessman; **great lion** – powerful (about a man); **a man about town** – noble man; **the king of the castle** – leader, chef.

In English phraseology a woman is represented as a weaker sex, she fulfills existing in society stereotypical duties of wife, girlfriend, mother and possesses suitable gender qualities: **one's good lady** – wife; **Sister Ann** – faithful friend; **the softer sex** – weaker sex, women; **the weaker sex** – women. The sphere of women’s activity mostly deals with inner space, home and family. However, modern English lingual culture observes changes in stereotypical opinion that women’s interests deal only with inner space and there appear outer professions, e.g. in offices: **a hello girl** – girl-operator; **a woman of letters** – woman-writer; **a girl Friday** – reliable secretary girl. In English culture a wife, who tries to get power in family is negatively marked: **the gray mare** – a woman holding husband under her heel; **wear the breeches** – to have power in the house. A man, who gives power to his wife is also negatively marked as he doesn't fulfill his typical behavioral norms: **to be under one's heel** – to be under wife’s power; **knight of the forked order** – betrayed, altered husband.

In this way, we can conclude that the key to stereotypes comprehension exists in language function, that is responsible for storage and conveying culture, traditions, social consciousness of a definite ethnic group from generation to generation, thus creating the process of storage and conveying a definite information, repeated in an unchangeable way.

Investigation of English linguistic material containing figurative description of the concepts "man", "woman", was done from different points of view: a) age gradation; b) social status; c) behavioral activity. One of the basic procedures of analysis is precedent ideographic parameterization of the concept into its parts, reflecting all attributes of men and women: natural-physical, physiological, psychological and intellectual (age, appearance, sexuality traits of character due to belonging to a definite sex, intellectual abilities, etc.), social-status, role, etc. In gender world view masculine image is formed by the notions: courage, career, convenient life, preference of women, being father, equal spouse. Feminine image has social-biological functions of women, sexually-attractive appearance, age, love, being married, ideal wife, maternity, housekeeper, close friend, independent woman, equal partner.

As a rule, gender component in phraseological meaning can be expressed explicitly – in the aspect of expression and in the aspect of idiom’s content **(man of the moment** – influential man, important person), and implicitly, i.e. to exist in the aspect of content but to be absent in the aspect of
expression: bit of fluff (or skirt) – sexy woman, hot stuff – temperamental (about a woman). A.V. Kunin confirms that implicitness is an important means of economical usage of language means while their functioning [A.V. Kunin, 1996. P. 99].

Markers pointing at the explicit character of expression of gender component in PhU are nouns, pronouns and proper names pointing at masculinity or femininity: man, boy, girl, woman, lady, he, she, Jack, Tom, Mary, etc. It’s easy to create image, meant in the semantics of phraseological unit because the component itself points at gender belonging: a man for all seasons – helpful person; a girl Friday – reliable clerk (about girl-secretary); brother in arms – brothers in army. The largest is a group of phraseological units with explicit character of expression. The least is the group of implicit aspect of expression where gender component “veiled” in the structure of PhU: skirt chaser – a man “chasing” women. In this phrase there interact two implicitly expressed components – skirt, i.e. a woman and chaser, i.e. a man. Age is differently expressed by implicit phraseological units: a dolly bird – young naïve girl; old trout – old woman; a bit of fluff – very young girlie. Among explicitly expressed phraseological units the most popular are those which have components pointing at professional activity of men and women: a boy in buttons – a boy working in hotel; a Jack of all trades – a man of various occupations; a confidence man – swindler, dishonest; a hello girl – girl-operator; a woman of letters – woman-writer.

Speaking about peculiarities of phraseological units having gender component in their structure, we can conclude that due to their representativeness they are able to be revealed on all levels of language system; gender reflects lingual reality, national culture of a language.


In the process of investigation there were found the following semantic groups, expressing subjective-objective marks:

1) phraseological units with component of femininity, characterizing a woman from negative side, contemptuously, disapprovingly, except PhU relating to mother, sister, woman-heroine: a woman of the streets – a street woman, light-minded woman – negatively; Sister Ann – a faithful friend – positively.

2) phraseological units with component of masculinity, characterizing a man by various marks, but mostly dominate positive and neutral marks: a hen-pecked husband – a man who is managed by his wife – negatively; a man of letters – a man-writer – neutrally; square John – an honest, decent man – positively; a man of his word – a man who keeps his promise – positively.

3) phraseological units with component of femininity for characterizing a man, mostly negatively marked: old woman – a shy, coward man – negatively; a girl’s blouse – a scandalous man – negatively.

4) phraseological units with component of masculinity for characterizing a woman, mostly negatively marked: a tom-boy – hyperactive girl behaving like a boy – negatively; man-eater – a woman who uses men only for sexual relations – negatively.
5) phraseological units with component of femininity relating to both sexes, mostly dominates negative mark: mother's darling – mother’s beloved son or daughter – negative; a weak sister – an unreliable person – negative.

All analyzed phrases with gender component are divided into PhU: 1) with positive mark; 2) with negative mark; 3) with neutral mark. The largest group due to volume is the group of PhU with negative mark – 1384 units, which make 56% from the total number of 2472 analyzed genderly marked phraseological units. 792 of these units positively characterize men and women, this number makes 32% from the total number of genderly marked phraseological units. The smallest became the group of PhU with neutral mark – 296 phrases, in percentage – 12% from total number.

For realization of its content gender component passes three levels of conceptualization:

1) Semantic level, revealing gender component in the semantics of PhU. This component can be expressed explicitly and implicitly: a back-room boy – scientific researcher of secret laboratory; a bachelor girl – single, unmarried girl; the old man of the sea – annoying, sticking man; the old lady in Threadneedle Street – English bank.

2) Associative level – the whole meaning of phraseological unit is actualized with the help of other components which together with gender component create some associative perception, connected with realization of meaning of gender component and its being added by meanings of other components in the structure of PhU: a back-room (from PhU a back-room boy) – laboratory, secret room; bachelor (from PhU a bachelor girl) – single; PhU the old man of the sea – from the tale «One thousand one night», which retells how Sinbad-sailor couldn’t avoid the old man who sat on his shoulders; Threadneedle Street (from PhU the old lady in Threadneedle Street) – the street, where there was caricature of prime-minister William Pitt Junior. The sign under this caricature announces: Political Ravishment, or the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street in Danger!

3) Conceptual level, where takes place formation of definite characteristics of men/women, new gender meanings, gender stereotypes and gender concepts «man» и «woman»: a back-room boy – a boy who works in laboratory, i.e. scientific researcher of secret laboratory, expert, specialist; a bachelor girl – a single girl, unmarried girl who lives lonely; a the old man of the sea – a man who is difficulty got rid of; the old lady in Threadneedle Street – i.e. English bank.

In phraseological units of modern English there is a high estimation of a woman, positive attitude to a woman, importance of her appearance, high value of maternity and such qualities as love, selflessness, self-sacrifice. In nominations of feminine images there are dominating moral marks, interconnection of genders is weakly demonstrated, maternity is highly estimated. Negative mark is presented by PhUs about women’s behavior, wife’s character (scolding, unsatisfied), women’s intellectual abilities and their emotional instability.

In analysis of English idiomatic dictionaries there were made out 12 semantic groups of PhUs: nominations of men, nominations of women, negative characteristics of men, negative characteristics of women, positive characteristics of men, positive characteristics of women, general masculine nominations, general feminine nominations, men’s labour, women’s labour, men’s appearance, women’s appearance.
Nominations of women: one's better half – wife; one's old Dutch – wife. Women in marriage are described positively or neutrally: A sister of mercy – an assisting merciful woman; Mother Superior – a kind adviser. Nominations of men: the good man of the house – master of house; a man about town – a man of high position. Men also have negative connotations: knight of the forked order – a betrayed husband; knight of industry – a swindler.

It should be mentioned that a larger part of PhUs nominate men without their relation to marital status and have positive connotations in opposition of PhUs nominating women. A married woman is positively estimated, marital status is not so important for men. Comparative analysis shows gender asymmetries in men’s advantage despite quantitative domination of men’s negative characteristics, while there is only one woman’s positive characteristics. The results of investigation prove the fact that represented image of a woman in the English phraseology is more negative than the image of a man.

References