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WOMEN EVALUATION IN ENGLISH MAXIMS

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Abstract

The article addresses evaluative senses in English aphorisms about women. Maxims are considered to be an important type of aphoristic texts due to their high degree of axiological markedness. In the course of the gender analysis of the 19th–21st centuries aphorisms with direct or metaphoric designations of women, the focus was made on the aphorisms' meaning, as well as their semantic volume and linguistic features, which can be accounted for by gender influence. Gender analysis is the principal research method because it enables a description of the maxims' meaning as related to the phenomenon of gender. The maxims' semantic space and their linguistic features were identified using semantic analysis. Changes in the meaning of the components of the maxims in a certain distribution were determined as a result of the contextual analysis application. It is pointed out that gender evaluation of women is frequently expressed in maxims about marriage, love, and friendship. The conclusion is made that the highest frequency value is typical of evaluating women's psychological features, social roles, appearance, and age. The correlation between gender evaluation and the cultural stereotypes of the speaking community is justified. The means of expressing evaluation are described regarding their frequency value.

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1. Introduction

The article deals with the peculiarities of actualizing evaluative meanings in English language maxims about women, for example, Women's hunch is more accurate than the men's confidence (Joseph Rudyard Kipling). An appeal to such a type of aphoristic text as a maxim is important because of its axiological markedness or evaluativeness.

Being a universal anthropocentric conceptual category, the evaluation depends on compliance with the norms, principles operating in a particular linguistic community. In ordinary consciousness, the universality of the category of evaluation is inseparable from the national specifics of the perception of the world. The evaluation is characterized by several criteria, which, being refracted through a certain national culture, acquire special value significance. The specific linguoculturological nature of the category of evaluation is found in a more complex and multidimensional structure in comparison with other categories. The category of evaluation is characterized by correlation with extra-linguistic reality, the presence of a core and periphery, hierarchy, varying degrees of semantic proximity of the units included in it, blurring of the boundaries of the periphery. Most linguistic studies on the category of evaluation describe the types of estimated values and the means of their expression (Maklakova et al., 2020; Volf, 2009), consider the relationship between evaluation and modality (Hunston, 2008), the relationship between evaluation and value (Volkova & Panchenko, 2020), features of the functioning of evaluative statements in various types of texts, in discourse (Ge et al., 2020; Hunston & Thompson, 2000; Karpenko, 2019; Mironova, 1997; Martin & White, 2005; Prihodko, 2016), a corpus approach to the study of this communicatively significant category (Hunston, 2011), the axiology of translation (Bortnikov & Bortnikova, 2020). At the same time, the category of evaluation is not sufficiently described as a systemic phenomenon in its gender aspect.

2. Problem Statement

Considering the category of evaluation from a gender perspective allows us to explore its social specifics. Gender is considered as one of the parameters of the human personality, which includes not only sex as a biological substance but also as a culturally determined mental construct, which is one of the cognitive resources of both an individual and society. Consequently, gender is a parameter of personality research from the point of view of its implementation in the process of communication. As a part of individual consciousness and collective consciousness, gender has an extra-linguistic status and is a cognitive phenomenon. It manifests itself in the social roles of the linguistic personality, associated stereotypes, and in the speech behavior of people. Gender analysis makes it possible to move away from traditional interpretations of certain phenomena, makes it possible to describe linguistic material from the point of view of ideas about the opposition "male/masculine" and "female/feminine", which are components of the culture of society and are subject to continuous changes during historical development. Currently, there is an urgent need to develop theories that would interpret the mechanisms of evaluative semantics considering gender and cognitive function, i.e., the connection of language with mental, and cognitive processes with methods of receiving, processing, fixing, storing, etc. information about the world in correlation with linguistic forms.

The methodological basis of the study was the definition of the linguistic evaluation by Kunin (1984), who considers evaluation to be an objective-subjective or subjective-objective attitude of a person to an object, expressed by linguistic means explicitly or implicitly; approach to the linguistic study of gender by Kirilina (2004).

3. Research Questions

The focus of this study is such a type of aphoristic text as a maxim. The aphoristic text largely reflects the results of changes taking place in the linguocultural community. The maxim reflects the dynamics of culture: the formation, reproduction, and destruction of ideas, the presence, and replacement of some values by others. In this paper, we consider maxims, the semantics of which contains gender-significant information. Identification of gender-significant information is based on the consideration of gender as one of the parameters of the human personality, which includes not only sex as a biological substance but also as a culturally conditioned mental construct (Byessonova, 2020, p. 72). Gender is one of the cognitive resources of both an individual and a society and can be considered as a parameter of the study of a personality from the point of view of its implementation in the process of communication. Thus, gender is constructed through associations with cultural norms, stereotypes, and roles accepted in English-speaking society, verbalized in evaluative sentences. In this kind of anthropo-oriented studies of a gendered nature, it is advisable to focus on the proposed by Kirilina (2004) two-tier model consisting of the meta gender (universal) level and gender (that is, belonging to one or another sex). According to Kirilina (2005), the relationship between these levels depends on whether the corresponding linguistic units are used in a direct or metaphorical meaning, on the general context, the culture of a given linguistic community, on the structure of a given language, its characterological features, and many other factors.

Gender analysis of the maxims of the period from the 19th to the 21st centuries, containing the direct nomination of sex or its metaphorical expression, allows us to get answers to several research questions, namely: what is the topic of the English-language maxims in which the gender evaluation of women is actualized; what conceptual features are most often verbalized; whether the cultural stereotypes existing in the linguocultural community influence the gender evaluation; what is the frequency of various means of verbalizing the evaluation in the analyzed maxims.

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to describe the specifics of the axiological nature of maxims as an important type of aphoristic text, to determine their meanings, semantic volume and features as related to the phenomenon of gender.

5. Research Methods

The research material consisted of maxims of the period from the 19th to the 21st centuries, containing the direct nomination of gender (that is, the lexeme *woman*) or its metaphorical expression. When selecting maxims for the corpus of empirical material, a formal structural criterion was used, according to which the corpus of the sample includes maxims with lexemes naming a female person, for

example, *A hard-working man and a thrifty woman are the real treasures of any family* (Maria Corelli). Based on the semantic criterion, the empirical corpus also included maxims with a figurative component referring to female referents, for example, *It may be the cock that crows, but it is the hen that lays the eggs* (Margaret Thatcher). In this example, the word *hen* is used metaphorically to describe the image of a woman.

The formulated criteria allowed us to form an empirical corpus of 500 evaluative maxims selected from the English-language collections of aphorisms and wise sayings: “The Oxford Dictionary of Phrase, Saying, and Quotation” (Ratcliffe, 2006), “The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Quotations” (Ratcliffe, 2011), “1000 Reasons To Be Happy” (Baird, 2003), “Life's Instructions For Wisdom, Success, and Happiness” (Jackson Brown, 2001), “The Book of Positive Quotations” (Deger & Gibson, 2007), “The Best Advice Ever Given” (Price, 2009). The corpus incorporates texts with evaluative designations of women, texts with semantic areas, fragments of the picture of the world, correlated with women, their behavior, values, and expectations associated with them.

The main research method was gender analysis, which allows describing the meanings of maxims in connection with the phenomenon of gender. The semantic volume of maxims was identified using semantic analysis. Changes in the meaning of the components of maxims in a certain distribution were determined as a result of the application of contextual analysis. Trends in the frequency of manifestation of the characteristics under study are described using elements of quantitative analysis.

6. Findings

In linguistics, there are several aphoristic terms: “aphorism”, “maxim”, “sentence”, “apothegm”, “gnome”, “chriya”. Unlike other types of aphorisms, a maxim is the least studied and is understood as a short moral sentence based on a personal point of view. The problem with the definition of “maxim” is that all aphoristic terms are difficult to distinguish due to their proximity. Some linguists believe that the terms “aphorism”, “sentence”, “maxim” are absolute synonyms. Other linguists view “maxim” and “sentence” as different kinds of aphorism. Most linguists and literary scholars identify “aphorism” as the main and leading term denoting “a stable saying in which a generalized complete thought is expressed in a concise, figurative and easy to remember form” (Starichenok, 2008, p. 76), and believe that the terms “maxim” and “sentence” are varieties of aphorism.

Acquaintance with publications on aphoristics testifies to the fact that in studies on this problem, encyclopedic definitions are given mainly. According to one of these definitions, a maxim or a sentence is viewed as “a kind of aphorism, as a short, universally significant saying, mainly of moral content, in an indicative or imperative form” (Nikolyukin, 2007, p. 960). According to Gasparov (2001), a maxim or a sentence (from Lat. Sentential - opinion, judgment) is a short universally significant dictum, mainly of moral content, in an indicative or imperative form (“measure is most important,” “know yourself,” the maxims of the legendary “seven Greek wise men”); often decorated with parallelism, antithesis, figures of repetition, etc. Sentence or maxim occupies an intermediate position between an unnamed folk proverb and an individualized author’s aphorism; with the strengthening of the philosophical content, it approaches the gnome, the didactic - with the maxim, and is inscribed in a specific situation, it becomes a chriya or apothegm. It was especially diligently used in the literature of antiquity, Renaissance, and

classicism to sharpen the climax, ending, etc. (p. 960). In these definitions, a sentence or a maxim is characterized as a thought of an instructive and generalizing nature, expressed in a laconic, complete figurative form, a thought that has become an independently used expression.

The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms offers the following definition of the aphorism: aphorism - a statement of some general principle, expressed memorably by condensing much wisdom into few words; maxim - a short and memorable statement of a general principle (Baldick, 2008, p. 205). In the dictionary, a sentence is considered as the Latin analog of aphorism and maxim. Therefore, we can conclude that “aphorism”, “maxim” and “sentence” are synonymous terms, denoting the same phenomenon.

After analyzing definitions from dictionaries and scientific articles, we can formulate a generalized definition of the term “sentence” - a short dictum, often of a moral character, which contains the author's opinion or view of something, for example, *I see when men love women. They give them but a little of their lives. But women when they love to give everything* (Oscar Wilde). It should be emphasized that a maxim or a sentence in a short, concise form conveys the author's vision of the picture of the world, its attitude to cultural universal and nationally specific values. In this study, a sentence, which is a kind of aphoristic text, is considered as a short and laconic saying that expresses the deep thought of the author and is characterized by significance for the linguocultural community, originality, stylistic expressiveness, and the obligatory presence of an evaluative component.

As a kind of aphoristic text, a sentence has both similarities with an aphorism and distinctive characteristics. The obligatory features of aphorisms noted in all definitions include brevity of form, informative density, and auto-semanticity. These characteristics indicate that aphorism is a broader concept than a sentence. This is also evidenced by the fact that not every aphorism is a maxim and can function in the text as a stylistic device. Signs such as authorization, implicitness, expressiveness are invariant for maxims. For aphorisms, they can be variable. The content of the aphorisms is presented by subject-logical and expressive-stylistic information. The informative richness of the aphorism is achieved through the expansion of both components of information using various means of expressiveness. The maxim is inherent in such characteristics as a synthesis of conciseness and information richness, an evaluation addressed to a wide audience, communicative expressiveness, author's originality, understood as “an emphasized uniqueness in the semantic and linguistic planes that contradicts the reader's extra-linguistic experience or linguistic tradition” (Anastasieva, 2010, p. 163-164). An important characteristic feature of the maxim is its inherent figurative modality, which makes it possible to convey the original author's assessment, one's attitude to the object of evaluation and to have an emotional impact on the reader.

Since maxims usually act as edifying sayings, they are evaluative statements that are associated with a rating scale, which represents the polar concepts of “good” – “bad”, “moral” – “immoral”, “acceptable” – “unacceptable”, “ethical” – “unethical”. The evaluation has an objective-subjective status, but the subjective component plays a more significant role in the sentence, that is, the reflection of the author's view of the object of evaluation, in this case, the image of a woman.

As a valuable aspect of meaning, evaluation is present in a variety of linguistic expressions. Volf (2009) notes that the evaluation can be limited to elements smaller than the statement (p. 12). Thus, words

with evaluative semantics form an evaluative thesaurus, which is an integral part of the vocabulary of the language and is systematized information about the subject and abstract concepts that have value for a linguistic personality (Byessonova, 2019). In the part of speech structure of the evaluative thesaurus of the English language, adjectives (37% of the total number) and nouns (36% of the total number) quantitatively prevail. Adverbs and verbs make up 15% and 12%, respectively (Byessonova, 2019). Evaluative vocabulary reveals a significant variety of semantics: *No man succeeds without a good woman behind him* (Godfrey Winn). Evaluation can be motivated not only by the semantics of the word stem but also by the semantics of the affix (for example *Everyone thinks they have the prettiest wife at home* (Howard Jacobson)). It should be emphasized that the evaluation can contain a whole statement. Thus, the maxim *Woman alone knows true loyalty of affection* (Schiller) explicitly expresses approval. A special place among evaluative statements is occupied by messages that do not contain explicit evaluative elements either in the form of words or in the form of semes in separate words, and, nevertheless, can acquire an evaluative sense based on stereotypes existing in the general picture of the world of a speaking community (Volf, 2009, p. 29). For example, *When a woman is very, very bad, she is awful, but when a man is correspondingly good, he is weird* (Minna Antrim). In this maxim, a woman is assessed negatively, which is expressed by negatively colored adjectives *bad* and *awful*. A man, in turn, is assessed rather negatively (*weird*), despite the presence of the lexeme *good*.

Logical-semantic analysis of maxims showed that they can be represented as a dichotomy based on the presence or absence of matching pairs (or constructive elements) contained in a maxim. The singular group includes maxims that do not contain pairs of oppositions and reflect the attributes of an object: qualities, properties, quantity (for example *Women speak two languages - one of which is verbal* (William Shakespeare)). A binary group is made up of maxims, which contain pairs of compared and contrasted elements that reflect the relative features of an object, its relationship with other objects (for example *You educate a man; you educate a man. You educate a woman; you educate a generation* (Brigham Young)).

An absolute array of research material is made up of evaluative maxims about a woman, which expresses her direct evaluation regardless of the topic. However, most often, gender differentiation of objects of evaluation is noted in a maxim about marriage, friendship, about love. About a third of the maxims with a gender evaluation are devoted to marriage (30% of the total: *In a happy marriage it is the wife who provides the climate, the husband the landscape* (Gerald Brenan)), maxims about love and friendship - 15% (*I see when men love women. They give them but a little of their lives. But women when they love to give everything* (Oscar Wilde)) and 7% (*Men kick friendship around like a football, but it does not seem to crack. Women treat it like glass, and it goes to pieces* (Anne Morrow Lindbergh)) respectively.

Analyzing the basis that forms the grounds of an evaluative attitude towards an object - a woman, it should be noted that most often the social roles of a woman are assessed (32% of the maxims: *It's not beauty but fine qualities, my girl, that keep a husband* (Euripides)), her psychological characteristics (22% of the maxims that made up the sample material: *If you want to know what a woman really means - which, by the way, is always a dangerous thing to do - look at her, don't listen to her* (Oscar Wilde)), appearance (18% sentences: *She that is born beauty is born married* (Somerset Maugham)), age (15%

sentences: *I like my whiskey old and my women young* (Errol Flynn)), character and behavior (13% sentences: *A woman attracts men by her charm and hold them by their vices* (Somerset Maugham)).

The diversity of the structure of the maxims should be noted. Syntactically, maxims can be expressed in a simple uncomplicated sentence (*Even the most beautiful legs end somewhere* (Len Deighton)), a simple complicated sentence (*Women are terribly curious - almost like men* (Oscar Wilde)), a compound sentence (*One wife is too much for most husbands to hear, but two at a time there's no mortal can bear* (J. Gay)), a complex sentence (*When God makes a beautiful woman, the devil opens a new register* (Ambrose Bierce)), an asyndetic sentence (*Women never lie, they just slightly embellish the truth* (Danny Kaye)). The conceptual laconicism of the maxim can be reflected in its elliptical structure. There are cases of structural reduction due to the omission of a parallel structure (*There are women created for love and to intrigue* (William Thackeray)). Cases like *Motherhood: All love begins and ends there* (Robert Browning) can be of interest, too. In this example, we see a compound sentence with asyndetic connection, with the first part being represented by the unextended one-member sentence *Motherhood*. Maxims with such a structure are quite typical of different chronological periods, for example, *Tongue, well, that is a very good thing when it ain't woman's* (Ch. Dickens); *The motto of all women: we were born to make dust from money* (Audrey Hepburn).

In most cases, the evaluative meaning of the maxim is revealed both within the intraphrasal (22%: *glamorous girl, cordial woman, young woman*) and phrasal context (69%: *Women hold up half the sky* (Mao Zedong)). Thus, the sentence is the main type of context, within which the evaluative meaning of the maxim is expressed: *When a girl marries, she exchanges the attention of many men for the inattention of one* (Helen Rowland). Less often, the evaluation can be decoded in an super-phrasal type of context (9%: *Women always show more taste in adorning others than themselves. The reason is that their persons are like their hearts - they read another is better than they can their own* (Jean Paul)).

Functional and stylistic analysis of English maxims enables to trace a variety of stylistic means that express the evaluative meaning. Especially often such lexical stylistic devices as metaphor, simile, epithet, irony are used in the maxims under analysis. The highest frequency value is characteristic of metaphors (*Woman is the only creature in nature that hunts down its hunters and devours the prey alive* (George Abram Miller)). The epithets are almost as frequent (*An ideal wife remains faithful to you but tries to be just as charming as if she were not* (Sacha Guitry)). Less often, there are cases of expressing evaluation by means of simile (*Speaking very generally, I find that women are spiritually, emotionally, and often physically stronger than men* (Gary Oldman)), irony (*In normal female biography - the chronology is to thirty years, mythology is after thirty years* (John Halliburton)). Cases of the use of metonymy are rare (*As a matter of biology, if something bites you it is probably female* (S.M. Kruse)). The following syntactic stylistic devices are frequent: parallelism, detachment, rhetorical questions, for example: *What should be done with an old wife, but make gunpowder of her?* (H.L. Mencken). The combination of several means enhances the stylistic and pragmatic effect. So, in the maxim *Look like a girl, act like a lady, think like a man, and work like a dog* (Caroline K. Simon), we observe the author's use of the stylistic device of simile, as indicated by the word *like*, and the parallel constructions V + like + N realized by the verbs *look, act, think, work* in the imperative mood.

7. Conclusion

As the study has shown, in a broad sense, a maxim is a short didactic utterance expressing the author's opinion about something. In the context of this study, a maxim or a sentence, being a kind of aphoristic text, is considered as a laconic saying that expresses the deep thought of the author and is characterized by significance for the linguocultural community, originality, stylistic expressiveness, and the obligatory presence of an evaluative component. Some maxims contain the author's value judgment about the object of evaluation, which can be a man or a woman. In this case, we can talk about gender evaluation. Gender evaluation carries the features and norms of a particular culture and indicates the social status and position of men and women in this culture. In this study, evaluation is defined as the speaker's judgment, positive or negative attitude of the author to the content of speech. The evaluative component can be part of both the denotative component of the meaning of linguistic units and the component of connotation. In the semantics of linguistic units, evaluation often interacts with the emotive component.

Maxims, which actualize the gender evaluation of women, are usually about marriage, love, friendship. Also, in English language maxims about women, psychological characteristics of a woman, her social roles, an evaluation of female appearance, age are verbalized. Thus, gender evaluation is conditioned by cultural stereotypes existing in the linguocultural community, which, in turn, have an evaluative aspect that reflects the nature of the evaluation - positive or negative. Maxims express the subjective attitude of the author to a particular subject. Social factors influence the formation of certain judgments in the author. Consequently, the maxim can reflect the era, norms, and judgments of society, the rules of behavior characteristic of a particular time, mentality, national features of a linguocultural community.

The analysis of the features of the implementation of the estimated value allows us to note that the main means of its expression are most often implemented in such a speech segment as a word. From the point of view of the part-of-speech criterion, the main way of expressing the evaluation in a maxim is adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. The most common means of verbalizing evaluation in maxims are metaphors, epithets, rhetorical questions, parallel constructions, and detachment. The evaluative component of a maxim can often be expressed by such stylistic devices as antithesis, metaphor, simile, contrast, irony, pun. In most sentences, the so-called dictionary evaluation is implemented, but in context, the nature of the evaluative base can be changed, for example, in case of a subjunctive mood construction or certain lexical units. In gender maxims, the evaluation is more often expressed explicitly than implicitly.

It can be assumed that the views about women in the conceptual picture of the world are undergoing changes, which are associated with different gender stereotypes that are actualized in different time periods. Presumably, the means of expressing a value judgment in a maxim remains unchanged in different periods, which indicates the stable nature of the linguistic picture of the world. It can also be assumed that it is the conceptual picture of the world that will be transformed, especially the fragment of it that is associated with the value ideas about a woman. However, these assumptions require verification on linguistic material illustrating different periods.

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