


GENDER CONCEPTS IN THE SEMANTICS OF ENGLISH PHRASEOLOGICAL UNITS

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The article investigates English phraseological units which have gender component in the structure and thus create gender stereotypes of man and woman on the material of English phraseology. Moreover, such notions as appearance, social status, age, intellectual abilities are analyzed as elements forming the gender concepts “man” and “woman”.

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Gender investigations are becoming more and more important in the English linguistics. This has two main reasons: first – English is the language of international communication, and second - it has no vivid expression of gender in all parts of speech as it occurs in some other languages. Investigation of the gender factor makes it necessary to study the English phraseological units and proverbs from the gender standpoint.

Gender stereotypes are essential notions in gender investigation, and they are based on masculine and feminine characteristics and ways of their behavior. Gender stereotypes contain special qualities depending on affiliation with the certain biological sex. A language system focuses and reflects gender stereotypes of a definite culture.

The lexical and phraseological levels are considered to be the brightest indicator of gender relations. They describe exact positive and negative experience of interrelation of men and women in the society. That’s why every language contains cultural and national peculiarities of people. Phraseological units and proverbs have the richest potential of such gender relations.

While analyzing the English phraseological system from the standpoint of gender linguistics, it should be noted that it’s divided into two main groups: gender-marked and gender-neutral. We are interested in the gender-marked ones which enlighten the notions “masculine” and “feminine” and all the associations connected with them.

The investigation of concepts “Man” and “Woman” was made from different angles:

- a) age gradation;
- b) social status;
- c) behavioral activity

Moreover, there are also partial

containers of gender concepts, as: naturally-physiological, physical-anatomic, psychological and intellectual, appearance, character, roles depending on affiliation with the certain sex.

In gender representation of the English society the concept of “Man” is based on such items as: braveness, career, prosperous life, taking care of women, being father and equal right spouse.

Feminine notion takes such traits as: social-biological functions of women, sexually-attractive appearance, age, love, marriage, perfect wife, housewife, a good friend, independent woman, equal right partner.

An interesting fact is when words related to men are used for women - they bring positiveness, and vice versa when words related to women and used for men - they give negative characteristics.

The gender notions of an English woman are a bit different because of the social process and the women’s success in making career and leadership. Because of changes in social roles, feminine characteristics of English women are supplemented with confidence, self-sureness, equal right spouse; masculine characteristics of English men - with father, taking care of children and husband, helping to his wife in household duties [1. p.54].

English phraseological units perfectly reflect a number of characteristics belonging to men and women.

1. Appearance.

It’s the colour of face: *red as a poppy; turn red as a poppy; white as a lily.*

2. Health.

If a person feels good, he/she has a fresh face: *fresh as a rose, fresh as a daisy; fresh as a flower; fresh as flowers in May.*

3. Character.

Pureness and innocence of young people are opened in these phraseological units: *as pure as a lily; as innocent as a new-born.*

In the English language the notion “Woman” is also close to words “wife” and “maid”. The notion “Man” is presented only by one word “man”.

In the English language system men need women; it’s obvious in the following proverb: *“A man without a woman is like a ship without a sail”*. But men sometimes suffer from wicked wives: *“Three things drive a man out of his house: smoke, dropping of rain and wicked wives”*.

Many English proverbs describing gender stereotypes compare masculine and feminine notions, and feminine are often met with negative mark.

“Man, woman and devil are the three degrees of comparison” – this proverb reminds of three degrees of comparison: bad – worse – the worst. As we see women are worse than men.

“Deeds are males, and words are females” – we again can feel the hint on women’s chattering and wasting time. Another proverb proves this: *“A sieve will hold water better than a woman’s mouth a secret”*.

Though most of English proverbs characterize women as stupid and having little mind, like *“Women have long hair and short brains”*, there are still some of them which highly mark women’s intellect: *“Women’s instinct is often truer than men’s reasoning”*. Or another proverb – *“Women on mischief are wiser than men”*.

A number of proverbs give positive characteristics to women’s role of wife, mother and a housekeeper which make men more responsible for their family [2. p. 164]. *“The wife is the key of the*

house” – is a vivid example. Or “*He that has a wife and children must not sit with his fingers in his mouth. Men make houses, women make homes*”.

Some proverbs describe women as self-assured and willful, having own point of view. In this case men are lead to negativeness: “*The most masters wear no breeches. Where the mistress is the master the parsley grows the faster*”.

The role of a woman as a mother-in-law has a strong negative mark and leaves an impression of a wicked, capricious and gloomy woman: “*She is well married who has neither mother-in-law nor sister-in-law by her*”. “*Happy is she who marries the son of dead mother*”.

Women are also depicted as partners of the devil: “*Women are the devil's nets*” [3]. Women take more care of their appearance than intelligence: “*Women are wacky, women are vain; they'd rather be pretty than have a good brain*”.

There are few proverbs describing men, most of them are related to appearance and relations with women. As for the phraseological units, there are many of them forming the concept of “Man”: *ladies' man, mother's darling, the master of one's destiny (fate)*.

Phraseological units describing men's appearance are met with both positive and negative mark: *bald as a coot* (negative), *admiral of the red* (negative); *blue-eyed boy* (positive) [4].

Phraseological units showing men's character: *(as) gentle as a lamb; mamma's darling; a heart of oak* (=brave); *a tough nut* (=strict, firm); *of the bull-dog breed* (=strong); *also ran* (=unlucky); *Jack among the maids* (=women's lover); *wild and woolly* (=awkward, rude) [4].

In family the position of men is higher; absence of it has negative mark: *John Thomson's man* (=man who is under his wife's shoe); *like father, like a son*.

There are some phraseological units which depict men's various social status: *a back room boy* - a good specialist, *a man of rank* - a man of high position; *a broken man* - a bad man. Phraseological units describing men's behavior: *a rough customer, fighting cock*. Men's intellect mostly has a positive mark in the English phraseology: *clever dog*.

Thus, the English phraseological units and proverbs possess a rich potential of masculine and feminine characteristic and give basis to gender-related investigation of national peculiarities of

the concepts of “Man” and “Woman”. As the analysis has shown, women have more negative characteristics than men in the English phraseological system.

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