ФИЛОЛОГИЯ

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MALE VS. FEMALE: GENDER IN MODERN ENGLISH SLANG

[*Редкозубова Е.А.* Маскулинность vs. феминность:
гендерный аспект современного английского сленга]

The present article deals with the gender aspect of modern English slang. It reveals a certain lopsidedness or misbalance between male and female slang nominations. Modern slang as well as Standard English can be characterized as a language which depicts a male point of view. The analysis of different semantic groups proves this idea. The relevance of such kind of research is determined by its inclusion in one of the most promising areas of language learning – gender linguistics. There is the urgent necessity of theoretical reflection on several problems which – despite the intensive development of gender studies in domestic scientific discourse – have not been adequately explained.

<u>Key words</u>: English, gender, linguistics, metaphor semantic groups, slang, stereotype.

With the development of modern linguistic science anthropocentrism has become the dominant principle of many researches. Such approach reflects a tendency to put a person at the centre of all theoretical assumptions so that a person is not just involved in the analysis of certain phenomena, but also defines the prospects and goals of this analysis. Individual characteristics of linguistic identity are of particular importance in the study of human language, the most important of them is the gender which is regarded both as a process and as a result of "embedding" the individual into socially- and culturally-determined models of masculinity or feminity, accepted in a given society at a certain historical stage of its development. The relevance of the work is determined by its inclusion in one of the most promising areas of language learning – gender linguistics as there is an urgent necessity of theoretical reflection on several problems that despite the intensive development of gender studies in domestic scientific discourse have not been adequately explained yet. Slang is of particular interest in the study of masculinity and feminity as language phenomena. Being a rapidly developing and changing

language system, slang is capable to reflect the true picture of socio-group interactions and hierarchy within these groups. The analysis reveals that of 216 items a significant number of units (72%) refer to a woman. In this regard it is possible to identify which semantic fields are reflected most clearly in modern slang and what they represent. The research shows that English slang is represented by the following semantic groups: 1) appearance of women; 2) sexual relations 3) female traits of character. Here is a more detailed analysis of each group.

Female appearance

This group is divided into such subgroups as: 1) attractive woman 2) unattractive woman. This group is characterized by a specific metaphor which is according to classical and contemporary researchers one of the most productive ways of replenishing the whole non-standard English vocabulary [1; 2]. An emotionally-expressive impact is achieved in slang metaphor by complex measures of semantic transformations.

Sweet-potato-pie – an attractive woman

Coockie – a woman, esp. an attractive girl

Peach – a pretty girl

Banana – an attractive woman

The concept of "attractive woman" in modern slang can be represented by items resulting from the following metaphors: food metaphor, zoo metaphor, auto metaphor. The first type is based on the consideration of women as some means of achieving the goal (to satisfy hunger). In the second case the focus of metaphor is an animal/bird, perceived by most people as sweet, attractive, cute. Women are viewed as representatives of the animal world still evoking positive emotions and associations.

Chick – a girl, esp. an attractive one

Dove – an attractive girl

Wren – a beautiful girl. *Scanlan has… married his wren in Philadelphia.*

Within this group a case of phytometaphor is revealed:

Cassava – a young attractive woman

Another group is autometaphor. This type of transfer is associated with the male fascination with beautiful expensive cars. The prestigious brand machine is used as a synonym to something luxurious and desirable. In this case a woman is treated as an object of admiration.

Porsche – an attractive woman. *Look at that babe, dude! She`s a true Porsche!*

As for the concept of "unattractive woman" metaphor can also be observed in the course of nomination. It should be noted, however, that in this case negatively colored concepts are involved. Thus, the following two types of metaphors are distinguished: zoometaphor and tool metaphor. Certain stereotypes of thinking are reflected here: the gender stereotype of subordination of women, her little utilitarian value, etc. As a rule, nominations of animals causing a negative association are used.

Crow – a girl or woman, esp. one who is old or ugly

Cow – a woman, esp. a course or an unpleasant one

Snake – an unattractive girl

In tool metaphor the basis of comparison is a name of a tool. It stresses the consumerism-like attitude to the object of nomination and reflect an extremely pragmatic male point of view .

Ragmop – an unattractive woman

Flat-tire – an unpopular girl

Haybag – a woman, esp. an unattractive one. *I`ve never really known a pretty girl like you. At the training college they were all haybags.*

Food metaphor is less popular: *Pickle* – an unattractive girl

Sexual relations

This group is characterized by a distinctive androcentric approach: everything is valued from the male point of view. An attractive appearance is positively evaluated as it is of much significance for men, a pragmatic aspect is underlined.

Ass – a woman regarded as an object providing sexual gratification

Then he comes back from the Army and all he cares about is chasing ass.

The following areas are highlighted in this semantic field:

a) sexually attractive woman, who is weak intellectually. This subgroup is a reflection of the stereotypical male perception of women. A good-looking woman is associated with the low level of intelligence, she is considered to be obsessed with her appearance and popularity among the opposite sex.

Bimbo – a young woman considered sexually attractive but of limited intelligence. *Sure, a guy can meet all bimbos he wants. But the really brainy woman – they are not so easy to find.*

b) a woman viewed as an object of sexual desire

In this subgroup, dismissively-pejorative men's attitudes towards women are easily recognized. An "object-like" treatment of women reflects a tendency to underestimate women's position in society, a woman is regarded only as a tool to meet men's needs.

Crumpet – women regarded collectively as a means of sexual gratification. A bit of crumpet, a desirable woman *Ansell… watched the couples wistfully. «Plenty of crumpet here, you know. Why don`t you chance your arm?»*

c) sexually promiscuous woman

Hosebag – a sexually promiscuous woman. *What about that hosebag who ditched you? What`s her name?...Yeah, Vicki. I hated that bitch even at your wedding.*

In the above sentence *hosebag* is synonymous to *bitch*, so a sexually promiscuous woman is negatively marked in the speaker's mind.

Hoochie – a young woman, esp. a promiscuous one or one who dresses or behaves in a sexually provocative way

Tramp – sexually promiscuous woman. *You can usually tell … the nice girls from tramps.*

The example illustrates a male negative attitude to sexually promiscuous women: in the sentence they are opposed to "*the nice girls*".

Zoometaphors are distinguished in this subgroup:

Bat – a prostitute

Pig – a female whore

Alley cat – a disreputable or immoral frequenter of city streets, esp. a prostitute

Cases of food metaphor are quite rare:

Cheesecake – a display of sexually attractive females, esp. in photographs. *She had a sexy slouch like a Hollywood cheesecake queen.*

There are some cases of tool metaphor:

Total package – a girl with large breasts and large buttocks

Hot-pants – a highly sexed (young) woman. *It would help to hold off little hot-pants, and might distract him from the thought of what he was so very soon going to be to her*

d) a lesbian

Masculine appearance is opposed here to feminine. Behavior patterns are also taken into consideration and find their reflection in different nominations:

Butch – a lesbian of masculine appearance or behavior. *One of the femmes, secure in the loving protection of her butch.*

Bull-dyke – a lesbian with masculine tendencies. *On the dance-floor, too, lesbians- the masculine ones, the bulldikes- dance with hugely effeminate queens.*

Femme – a lesbian who adopts a passive, feminine role. *One of the femmes, secure in the loving protection of her butch.*

Female traits of character

It is worth mentioning that no traditional opposition of positive/negative qualities can be seen in this group. Women are represented only in terms of their negative traits such as stupidity and authoritativeness. This fact shows that men tend to perceive women as members of an "out-group". Thus the opposition "us/the rest" is realized and the representatives of the in-group (i.e. men) have a bias against out-group (women). Prejudice is revealed in stereotypes according to which negative traits of character are attributed to women.

Bimbette – stupid girl. *Serious actresses, itching to play something more demanding than bimbette and stand-by wives, love divine masochist roles Dumb dora* – stupid woman

Phlug, flug – a stupid woman.

It is important to note that the authoritativeness as such cannot be perceived as a negative characteristics. However, the context of the analyzed slang words demonstrates that men find this feature negative:

Battleaxe – a dominating woman. *Do I look like a female novelist? I thought they were all battleaxes*

Ball-breaker – a dominating woman who destroys the self-confidence of a man. *Tom told me about that wife of his. A real ball-breaker, isn`t she?*

Slang words, naming men constitute 28%. These examples can be divided into the following semantic groups: 1) sexual relations; 2) male character; 3) male appearance.

Sexual relations

The most numerous among the dedicated semantic fields is the subject of sexual relations. According to a more detailed analysis the scope of sexual relations is divided into several areas:

a) lady's man.

Male (unlike female) activity in sexual terms is considered to be acceptable and normal.

Poodle-faker – someone who cultivates female society, esp. for professional advancement; a lady's man

Lover-boy – a lover, an attractive man, a woman-chaser. *Out on the prowl tonight, lover-boy?*

Stud – a man of great sexual prowess; womanizer. *A notorious seducer; a lady's- man; a cuckolder of the rich; in short, a stud*

Skirt-chaser – a man who obsessively pursues women.

b) sexually aggressive man

Some cases of zoometaphor are interesting:

Ram – a virile or sexually aggressive man; a lecher. *«Yes, it's the Chalk all right» Willie said. «The old ram! » he added, happily.*

Wolf – a sexually aggressive man, a habitual would-be seducer of women

Dog – sexually-aggressive man

Hunk – sexually attractive man

Lad – a lively (young) man, esp. a highly sexed one. *Bit of lad is Alan Clark.... running round fancy-free for years*

c) a promiscuous man

Chaser – a promiscuous man

Lounge lizard – a man who frequents fashionable parties, bars, etc., <u>esp. in</u> search of a wealthy patroness. *The £50 a week contract which ...lets her keep her lounge lizard husband, Queckett, in the manner to which he is accustomed, lacks conviction*

Rooster – promiscuous male

d) a homosexual

A certain age differentiation is reflected in the following examples:

bum-boy – a young male homosexual. *A ringed and dainty gesture copied from some famous cosmopolitan bum-boy*;

aunt – an elderly homosexual.

Male character

This group is represented by the opposition of positive and negative properties. This fact proves the idea that social position of men, their value and significance are much higher than women's. According to male stereotypes female character does not imply the existence of positive qualities as such.

Negative qualities are reflected in such nominations as ' indecisive/weak man':

Wimp – a person, usually a male, who is both weak and indecisive

Wuss – a person, usually a male, who is neither dependable nor effective

Pussy – a cowardly weak man; an effeminate man

Stupid man:

Musclehead – a well-built but stupid person, usually a man

Joe Soap – a foolish or gullible person, a mug; also more generally. *Who do think I am moosh? Joe Soap?*

Generosity is positively marked in slang:

Butter-and-egg man – a wealthy unsophisticated man who spends money freely. *The «butter-and-egg» man who startles the foreign lecturer with blunt questions*

Gold-mine – a young man willing to spend money

Jack-full-of-money – a rich and easy spending man, esp. young

Full-guy – a man, esp. if young, with plenty of money and wish to spend it on his girls

Male appearance

This group is the least representative. In the structure of the semantic field of "looks" there are two subgroups: attractive man and twink.

Heart-throb – a male that many females find attractive

Hotty – an all-around attractive guy

Able gable – attractive man

Interesting is the fact that these sub-groups are opposed to each other. Thus, the notion of "twink" is equated with "unsavory man." The analysis confirms the assumption that neutral female qualities are viewed negatively when applied to men while male characteristics applied to women are considered flattering and positive.

In conclusion, the analysis undertaken in the present article reveals the following: the semantics of modern English slang reflects androcentric point of view; most modern slang is created and used by males; English slang refers to male behavior and interests; slang words applied to women's appearance, character and behavior in general are felt to be created by men the opposition 'male vs. female' is closely connected with the 'us/the rest' opposition; gender opposition is often realized with the help of metaphor patterns.

R E F E R E N C E S

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