

# On the problem of gender representation in the Russian language Can gender neutrality be achieved in Russian in the near future?

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18690/scn.16.1.35-49.2023>

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1.02 Pregledni znanstveni članek – 1.02 Review Article

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Prispevek preučuje različne vidike lingvistike spola v ruščini, in sicer zgodovino njenega razvoja v Rusiji, slovnične kategorije spola, izrazje in frazeologijo, povezano s spolom, razlike pri uporabi jezika med moškimi in ženskami, problematiko nevtralnosti spola v ruščini. Razprava temelji na najnovejših raziskavah na področju jezikoslovja, ki so v zadnjih desetletjih v Ruski federaciji in državah nekdanje Sovjetske zveze doživele hiter razvoj. Pod lingvistiko spola avtorica razume vejo jezikoslovja, ki preučuje različne odraze spola v jeziku. Preučevanje vidikov spola v ruščini osvetljuje jezikovno sliko sveta maternih govorcev in govork ter pomaga razumeti njihov pogled na svet, kulturne vrednote in družbene vloge z ozirom na spol. Avtorica izpostavlja raziskovalne perspektive na področju odražanja spola v ruščini in ocenjuje možnosti za to, da bi ruščina postala spolno nevtralen jezik.

This article is aimed at the study of different aspects of gender linguistics in the Russian language, namely the history of the evolution of gender linguistics in Russia, the grammatical category of gender, gender vocabulary and phraseology, differences between men's and women's use of the language, and the issue of gender neutrality in Russian. The study is based on the latest research work in this field of linguistics, which has developed rapidly in the Russian Federation and the former Soviet countries in recent decades. By gender linguistics we refer to a branch of linguistics that studies various aspects of gender representation in language. The study of gender aspects of the Russian language throws light on the linguistic picture of the world of the native speakers and helps us understand their worldview, cultural values and outlook on social roles in terms of gender. The author outlines the future perspectives of study in the field of gender representation in Russian and evaluates the possibilities of Russian becoming a gender neutral language.

**Ključne besede:** lingvistika spola, jezikovna slika sveta, slovnica, leksika in frazeologija, govor, spolno nevtralno besedišče

**Key words:** gender linguistics, linguistic picture of the world, grammar, vocabulary and phraseology, speech, gender neutral phrases

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## 1 Introduction

According to the *Bolshaya Rossiyskaya Encyclopedia*, gender linguistics is a branch of linguistics which studies the process of reflecting on the differences between genders in language and speech. It is necessary to note that interest in the study of gender representation in linguistics was observed as early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when researchers paid attention to differences in the linguistic behaviour of men and women for the first time. At first, the term “gender” was used in English linguistics to denote gender in grammar, and was later spread to social studies in the 1960s and 1970s, having been influenced by feminism. The term received general understanding in the 1950s in the works of John Mani: the psychologist introduced the terms “gender”, “gender identity” and “gender role”. It was because of the American psychiatrist R. Stoller, in his work “Sex and Gender”, 1968, that the term received its theoretical formation. One of the first researchers who paid attention to this term was A. Oakley in her study “Sex, Gender and Society”, 1972 (Barchunova).

The difference between the terms “sex” and “gender” is that gender refers to the social role defining the behaviour of a human in society and how this behaviour is perceived by other members of society. In psychology, the term “gender” is used in a wider sense as any psychological and behavioural peculiarities associated with masculine or feminine features. Meanwhile, the term “sex” refers to the assignment of a person to a certain biological class.

In the Russian Federation, gender linguistics has seen a rapid development in recent decades. Russian scientists A.G. Kirova (Kirova 2009), I.I. Skachkova (Skachkova 2009), A.N. Makhmutova (Makhmutova 2013), A.V. Kirilina (Kirilina 2021) and many others have turned their attention to the study of different aspects of gender linguistics in the Russian language. This article aims to examine the representation of gender differences in different aspects of the Russian language: grammar, vocabulary and speech. Its goal is to provide a clear and expanded overview of the problem. Moreover, we have noticed that in recent research, the problem of gender neutrality in Russian has not been widely studied. This work examines the existing work done on various aspects of gender linguistics and makes its own contribution to the field.

- To achieve this goal, the following objectives have been set:
- To study the history of the evolution of gender linguistics in Russia and abroad.
- To distinguish the peculiarities of this subject in Russia.
- To study various aspects of gender representation in Russian: grammar, vocabulary and speech.
- To focus attention on the issue of gender neutrality in the Russian language and to reveal whether it can be achieved in the near future.

The work is conducted in a linguistic-cultural paradigm: the author believes that language is a part of culture, that language and culture are interrelated and reflected in each other. Therefore, the study of the representation of

gender in language allows us to understand how native speakers view the world, as well as which notions about different phenomena they communicate through the language.

## 2 Materials and methods

The article is based on the study of research work in the fields of cultural studies, linguistics and sociology. On the basis of this work, grammatical gender in Russian was studied, examples of lexical units and phraseology from renowned dictionaries of the Russian language were given, and differences in speech between men and women were described. The paper summarises the current state of understanding on the topic in the work of the researchers from Russia and post-Soviet countries and reveals the gaps that exist in these studies. The research turns its attention to the problem of gender neutrality in the Russian language, which has not received comprehensive analysis by researchers.

## 3 Results

### 3.1 *The history of the study of gender linguistics in the Western World*

As noted earlier in the paper, a significant role in the development of gender linguistics belongs to the feminist movement of the 1960s and 1970s, which was most active in the USA and Germany. As for linguistics, the feministic influence was observed in the criticism of language as reflecting gender asymmetry and directed at its absence.

In her study “The Evolution of Gender Studies in Linguistics”, A.G. Kirova states that the study of the interrelation between language and gender can be divided into two periods. The first one is referred to as *biological determinism*, characterised by irregular investigations of separate facts in the field, not connected to the related sciences. The second period is represented by *gender studies* and characterised by full-scale academic research works resulting from the change in perception of female and male roles in society. Some researchers distinguish a third period between the first and the second periods, which extends from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through to the middle of it, serving as a basis for future gender studies (Kirova 2009: 138).

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, interest in the study of gender aspects in linguistics received the special attention of linguists across the world. Even some well-known linguists such as E. Sapir, O. Jespersen and F. Mauthner investigated the problem. In 1921, Mauthner admitted the presence of gender differences in German and noted that the gender influence on language socialisation was uneven. Sapir turned his attention to the study of differences

in two Indian languages: nutka and koasati. As for Jespersen, he gave a broad overview of the distinctive features of gender representation in language, based on observations by missionaries of the male and female languages of indigenous people in the Caribbean (Skachkova 2009: 122).

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Western science has been characterised by a total change in the understanding of the idea of gender. From the dual sociocultural concept, it has become a marker of self-identification. Nowadays, modern tendencies coexist and compete with traditional views on gender. This fact leads to multiple discussions in the field of gender linguistics and reflects ideas that can be described by the term “postgenderism”. In postgenderism, it is common to reform the official language used in documents regarding a person’s gender status (Kirilina 2021: 114).

### **3.2 The evolution of the study of gender linguistics in Russia**

In Russia and the former Soviet countries, the study of gender linguistics appeared later than in Europe and in the USA. It was not until the 1990s that linguists turned their attention to the study of gender representation in the Russian language. One of the new terms that appeared in theoretical studies in academic literature was “gender”, along with its various collocations. This is due to the fact that in the USSR in 1917, women received the same rights as men: rights to obtain higher education and the rights to follow in traditional “male” professions. Soviet social policy was aimed at the inclusion of women in social life as well as political life within the country; therefore, the problem of gender equality was not highly debated.

Researchers claim that in the Russian language and culture, the term “gender” was at first studied within other linguistic areas. In Russia, the study of “gender” was conducted through:

- 1) psycholinguistic studies, which dealt with the peculiarities of speech of men and women, and the specifics of the perception of the language of male and female speakers.
- 2) the study of notions in terms of men and women, and the grammatical category of gender.

Another characteristic feature of gender linguistics in Russia was that it was aimed at practical applicability: identification of an author’s gender, and diagnosis of the imitation of male and female speech. Grammatical and lexical aspects connected with social gender were described. And only after the collapse of the Soviet Union did the research work by Western linguists become available, and gender linguistics gradually became an independent branch of linguistics in Russia.

Nowadays in Russia there exists a variety of approaches to the study of the term “gender” and its function in language. According to M.V. Tomskaya

and L.N. Maslova, in Russian science, special attention is given to linguistic genderology, or gender linguistics – a scientific movement directed at the study of various gender aspects of language, and is in some way different from the Western study of gender representation in language. Within this movement, the main aims of gender linguistics were stated, terminological problems of the field were thoroughly studied, and the lexicographic problem of gender was described. (Tomskaya 2005: 105).

In Russia, three main tendencies of the study of gender aspects in linguistics are currently distinguished:

- 1) Socio- and psycholinguistic.
- 2) Linguistic-cultural.
- 3) Communicative-discourse.

Within the socio- and psycholinguistic movement, a Russian linguistic understanding of the world is studied via written and oral texts. The second movement – linguistic-cultural – is aimed at the study of Russian stereotypes of feminine and masculine features, gender asymmetry and gender metaphors. The third movement – communicative-discourse – studies the reconstruction of gender in the communication of men and women in different situations (Kirilina 2009: 109).

### **3.3 Grammatical gender in Russian**

Grammatical gender of nouns in Russian is divided into feminine, masculine and neuter. In Russian it is a very important grammatical category, without knowledge of which it is impossible to form correct word collocations and sentences. Masculine nouns usually end with -й, feminine nouns – with -а, or -я, as is the case in other Slavic languages.

The grammatical gender of nouns in the Russian language is distinguished according to: 1) the lexical way, when gender is indicated by the semantics of the word, for example, *мама* (mother); 2) the word-formation method, characterised by suffixation: *учитель* (a male teacher) – *учительница* (a female teacher); 3) the syntactic way, when word collocations are formed: *женщина-тренер* (a woman coach).

A grammatical category of gender is also present for adjectives, pronouns, adjective-like words, and some forms of the verbs.

### **3.4 Gender-marked vocabulary and phraseology of the Russian language**

By gender vocabulary we understand – after L.N. Kozlova and V.G. Tsareva – “feminine” and “masculine” vocabulary of the Russian language. These authors

studied the gender vocabulary described in “Tolkovyj slovar’ russkogo yazika” by V.I. Dahl, which is a dictionary containing lexical units of the Russian vocabulary of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. According to these researchers, a study of the semantics and specific features of the given vocabulary in different types of discourse within one cultural unit allows us to distinguish trends, characterising parameters of the given culture (Kozlova 2021: 167).

In their study, Kozlova and Tsareva identified 272 gender-marked lexical units in Dahl’s dictionary. They distinguished the following groups of gender-marked vocabulary:

1. Male denominations in terms of family relationships. This group of lexical units is stylistically neutral: *муж* (a husband); *брат* (a brother); *отец* (a father).
2. Male denominations in terms of professions and social roles: *бобыль* – a peasant not possessing land; *вития* – an orator, a person who has good oratory skills; *архаровец* – a police detective.
3. Male denominations characterising human behaviour: *мужлан* – a rude, ignorant person; *нахал* – about somebody who is arrogant, aggressive; *бельмес* – about someone whose level of intellect is not very high, from the Tatar language meaning to not know something.
4. Male denominations characterising human behaviour positively: *удалец*, *ухарь*, *лихач* – all three words having the similar meaning of someone who is dashing, brave.
5. Male denominations in terms of physical characteristics: *богатырь* – about someone tall, strong, with wide shoulders; *буруз* – about someone short in stature, often used to refer to children; *чахлик* – about a weak person.
6. Female denominations in terms of family relationships: *мама* (a mother); *сестра* (a sister); *тетя* (an aunt).
7. Female denominations belonging to the semantic group “Marriage”: *баба* – about a married woman; *девка* – about a woman before marriage; *бесприданница* – a woman without a bride’s dowry.
8. Female denominations in terms of social status: *дама* – a woman who belongs to the upper class; *кокетка* – a woman of loose morals; *мадам* – a foreigner, particularly of French origin.
9. Female denominations characterising negative behaviour: *бурлачка* – a rude, bad-tempered woman; *кокетка* – a flirtatious woman who wants to make a positive impression on everyone.
10. Female denominations characterising good behaviour: *носестра* – a friend.
11. Female denominations in terms of physical characteristics: *тетюха* – a stout, sometimes rude woman (Kozlova 2021).

Thus, Kozlova and Tsareva state that there existed gender asymmetry in the Russian language in the 19<sup>th</sup> century: “masculine” vocabulary was predominant, “feminine” vocabulary often had a negative connotation. This fact was due to Russian society being considered a patriarchal society (Kozlova 2021:

172). Moreover, we can state that the majority of the above-mentioned lexical units still exist in the modern form of the Russian language with the same, or a slightly altered meaning (*баба, мадам, мужлан, богатырь, удалец, бобыль*, etc.). Therefore, trends of the 19<sup>th</sup> century characterised by gender asymmetry in language still exist in the current linguistic world picture of Russian speakers.

E.S. Pantileenko, in her article “Features of gender vocabulary functioning in language and speech”, states that in the *Bolshoi tolkovyj slovar’ russkogo yazyka pod redaktsiei S.A. Kuznetsova*, which is a dictionary of the Russian language, one can find gender-marked vocabulary, notably a significant number of lexical units denoting occupation or profession. According to Russian grammar rules, female professions are derived from the titles of male professions by suffixation: *автомобилист – автомобилистка* (male and female car drivers); *агроном – агрономша* (male and female agronomists); *аристократ – аристократка* (male and female aristocrats). At the same time, the lexical units derived by suffixation and referring to women frequently receive a “worse” meaning than the original word that referred to men, or receive a modified meaning towards a lower professional or social status: *автомобилистка* (a female driver) (Pantileenko 2018: 70).

In their study, M. Akosheva, K. Rakhimzhanov, and Z. Temirgazina consider zoonyms describing physical ugliness as gender-marked vocabulary. According to the results of their research, three zoonyms *зверь* (a beast), *горилла* (a gorilla) and *верблюд* (a camel) are used to refer to male characteristics of ugliness, while others such as *обезьяна* (a monkey), *мартышка* (a marmoset), *макака* (a macaque) and *крокодил* (a crocodile) are gender neutral. Female characteristics of ugliness were not revealed in the study (Akosheva 2022: 145).

Table 1. Professions suitable only for men, according to respondents in the Russian Federation.

<i>Шофер</i> (a driver)	14
<i>Шахтер</i> (a miner)	12
<i>Строитель</i> (a builder)	10
<i>Военный</i> (a soldier)	6
<i>Грузчик</i> (a trucker)	6
<i>Сварщик</i> (a welder)	5
<i>Комбайнер</i> (a combine operator)	5
<i>Летчик</i> (a pilot)	4
<i>Металлург</i> (a metallurgist)	4
<i>Слесарь</i> (a plumber)	4

Some lexical units referring to professions in Russian do not have a “feminine” form. The Institute of Demography at the National Research University “Vysshaya shkola ekonomiki” in 2013 conducted a survey on whether citizens of

the Russian Federation consider some professions to be suitable for men only and found the following results: 63% of the population of Russia (both men and women took part in the research) agreed that some jobs suit only men, 28% disagreed, and 8% stayed neutral. Interestingly, most of the professions mentioned by the respondents do not have a female form in Russian. Table 1 lists the top ten professions considered suitable for men based on the results of the study.

Moreover, 57% of the respondents agreed that some professions suit only “women”: among them were the professions of teacher (*учитель*), cashier (*кассир*), accountant (*бухгалтер*), hair stylist (*парикмахер*), etc. The full list of “men’s” professions contained more than 30 nominations, whereas the list of “women’s” professions was half the length (“Men’s” and “women’s” professions in the opinion of Russian citizens, 2013).

Therefore, as Russian is a language in which most word forms are formed by affixation, it has a clear gender marking, as we have shown in the example of words denoting professions or occupations. Furthermore, the form of adjectives also marks gender in the Russian language: Russian speakers say *он молодой* (he is young) about men and *она молодая* (she is young) about women. The same difference of forms for males and females is found in verbs: the verb form clearly shows who committed an action: *он прочитал* (he read) – *она прочитала* (she read).

Moreover, in Russia, surnames are typically inherited from men: women change their last names after marriage and their children are given their father’s last names. Last names for females are in most cases produced by adding the ending to the man’s last name: *Иванов* (Ivanov) and *Иванова* (Ivanova).

For these reasons, we can state that Russian is a language where gender asymmetry is observed. It is clearly not a gender-neutral language. One researcher of gender-specific vocabulary of the Russian and Chinese languages, Y. Syaoui, concludes that Russian language asymmetry was formed on the basis of the ideas of Christianity, in which the first woman, Eve, was formed from the first man, from Adam’s rib, and was always in a subordinate position to the man. For many centuries, people in Russia had a fixed perception of gender roles in society, where a man was in a superior position to a woman, and this perception influenced the formation and function of the language (Syaoui? 2022: 2059).

Another important way to uncover gender representation in the Russian language is to study its reflection in phraseology. It is impossible to acquire a foreign language without the study of phraseology, since it reflects cultural values and the cultural worldview of a nation. Phraseology helps us to recognise how representatives of a nation perceive the world, and which values and rules exist in their world (Kondrateva 2021). Some phraseological units in different languages are similar, as they are ways of reflecting key universal values: love, labour, relationships between people, and so on. As for unique phraseological units – present and functioning only in a specific language – they give a



researcher an idea of how a specific nation views the world, including ideas about men and women and their roles in society.

In the Russian language and its phraseology there still exists a view of a woman as a person with a lower level of intellect than that of a man. In Russian, such phraseological units support this idea: *женская логика* (a woman's logic) – a way of thinking which is characterised as more emotional, as opposed to the more rational way of thinking of a man; *девичья память* (a woman's memory) – a bad, short-term memory; *длинна коса, да ум короток* (the hair is long and the brain is short) – about a woman's ability to think.

Phraseology in the Russian language often creates a negative image of a woman. Women, according to Russian phraseology, are evil creatures with a bad temper; more specifically, it is evident in idioms about wives: *бился, колотился, а доброй жены не добился* (fought, pounded, but did not achieve a good wife); *злая жена – та же змея* (an evil wife is the same as a snake); *злая жена сведет мужа с ума* (an evil wife will drive her husband crazy).

Such character traits as cunning or insidiousness are also more typical of women than men in Russian culture: *бабьего вранья и на свинье не объедешь* (you cannot escape a woman's lies, even on a pig); *жена льстит – лихое норовит* (a wife flatters – desiring something bad); *кто бабе поверит – три дня не проживет* (whoever believes a woman will not live for three days) (Serebrova 2007).

Moreover, woman's beauty, her physical characteristics, are very important for Russian speakers: *красная девка в хороводе, что маков цвет в огороде* (a beautiful girl in the ring dances as poppies in the garden). At the same time, beauty does not make sense without cleverness: *красота без разума пуста* (beauty without cleverness is empty); *красота до венца, а ум до конца* (beauty is until marriage and cleverness is until the end); *красота до вечера, а ум навек* (*beauty is until the evening and cleverness is forever*). Regarding an attractive appearance, for men it is considered to be a disadvantage rather than a positive quality: *мужчина должен быть чуть красивее обезьяны* (a man should be slightly more attractive than a monkey). Women are also recognised by their talkativeness: *завел жену, забудь тишину* (got a wife, forget about silence); *три бабы базар, а семь – ярмарка* (three women are a market, seven are a fair); *женщина без разговора, что двор без забора* (a woman without conversation is like a yard without a fence). Men are usually not characterised as being talkative: *мужчина тот, кто сомкнет уста и засучит рукава* (a man is someone who will close his mouth and roll up his sleeves).

Women are viewed positively when they are first and foremost good housekeepers: *жене один путь – от порога до печи* (a wife has one way – from the threshold to the oven); *хозяйкою дом стоит* (the house stands because of the housewife); *дом держится не на земле, а на жене* (the house is held up not on the land, but on the wife). Secondly, women are viewed positively when they are good wives: *у хорошей жены и плохой муж будет молодцом* (a good wife and a bad husband will do well); *без мужа жена всегда сирота*

(without a husband, a wife is always an orphan); *доброю женою и муж честен* (when a wife is good, a husband is honest). And thirdly, as good mothers: *птица радуется весне, а дитя матери* (the bird rejoices in spring, but the child in its mother); *при солнце тепло, а при матери добро* (the sun brings warmth, and the mother brings goodness); *нет такого дружка, как родимая матушка* (there is no friend like a dear mother).

As for men, they are viewed by speakers of Russian as brave and strong: *не робкого десятка* (not of a timid ten); *сила есть, ума не надо* (when there is strength, there is no need for cleverness); *смелость лучше богатства* (courage is better than being a bogatyr – “bogatyrs” in Russian folk tales are heroes characterised by enormous strength, committing heroic deeds of a patriotic character). In Russian, men are referred to as *сильный пол* (the strong sex), whereas women are called *слабый пол* (the weak sex). Being brave is frequently juxtaposed with being a coward: *смелый побеждает, а трус погибает* (the brave win and the coward dies). Cowardly men are compared to women: *ведет себя как баба* (behaves like a baba – “baba” is a derogatory way to address a woman in Russia). This perception is common in other Slavic cultures and languages.

Being hardworking is also considered a positive character trait: *мужику одна забота, чтобы шла путем работа* (the working man has only one concern, that the work goes well); *мужика не шуба греет, а топор* (not a fur coat warms a man, but an axe); *мужику в августе три заботы: и косить и пахать, и сеять* (in August a working man has three worries: to mow, to plough, and to sow). At the same time there are idioms which state that Russian men are sometimes lazy: *пока гром не грянет, мужик не перекрестится* (a man doesn't cross himself until he hears the thunder); *русский мужик долго запрягает, да быстро скачет* (a Russian man takes a long time to put the harness on, but rides fast) – both idioms are about the habit of starting everything late, to wait until the last moment.

Thus, we can clearly observe that, according to the phraseology of the Russian language, there is a clear distinction between the social roles of men and women: women should be good mothers and wives, men should work hard and be brave. Moreover, men and women have distinct features: some characteristics are typical for females, others, for males. When these characteristics are possessed by a representative of the opposite sex, it is considered to be a negative trait.

### **3.5 The differences between the speech of men and women**

Another aspect of the study by researchers of the role of gender in the Russian language is the difference between male and female speech. According to the results obtained by A.V. Poplevko and E.P. Nadolskaya from the State University of Belorussia, the styles of speech of men and women are revealed

at two levels: the speech itself and speech behaviour. For instance, men are more categorical, with the aim of managing the direction of the conversation, and their sentences are usually shorter. Men are inclined to use abstract nouns and adjectives, whereas women tend to use more verbs. Emotional lexical units are more typical for female speech.

Besides the speech behaviour, the authors mention the differences between male and female written speech. Men's written speech is characterised by the frequent use of linking words, slang, abstract nouns, and stylistically neutral vocabulary, whereas women's written speech contains modal constructions demonstrating uncertainty, clichés, assessing statements, euphemisms, and so on (Poplevko 2017).

N.V. Belaya in her study, "On the display of gender differences in language", states that women's use of vocabulary is "narrower", while men tend to use more neologisms, professional words, special terms and archaisms. The aim of communication for women is to maintain relationships or find friends; men consider speech as a way to communicate facts. In Russia, men do not regard women as equal partners in communication; their phrases frequently start with the pronoun "I", since, in Russian culture, men cannot be viewed as weak and dependent. Thus, the study of gender representation in language allows us to take into account the human factor in language and throw light upon the gender stereotypes fixed in language (Belaya 2009).

In some languages, male speech is significantly different to female speech, and therefore, it is possible to refer to male and female speech as different dialects, known as genderlects. Russian is one such language. A 1999 study published in the Cambridge journal "Language in Society" showed that the speech of Russian men and women is different at different linguistic levels, starting from phonetics. For example, men in Russia tend to average out the vowel sounds. Russian women use suffixation more often to produce diminutive-hypocoristic forms of the words: for example, instead of *подарок* (a gift), we get the diminutive-hypocoristic form, *подарочек*. Even the use of metaphors is different: women use metaphors connected with household chores, while men use those from traditionally male activities (hunting, war, etc.) (Sokolenko 2021).

From the above facts we can conclude that both historically and in the present day, the Russian language is characterised by a noticeable difference in the speech and speech behaviour of men and women. These differences are observed at different levels: phonetics, phonology and lexis.

### **3.6 Gender neutrality of the Russian language**

As we have shown on the basis of examples from the Russian language, Russian is a language with gender asymmetry. Nevertheless, in the present globalised world, gender neutrality is becoming common in many countries. These changes

occur mostly at the level of official documents and official public speech. The aim of gender neutrality is to avoid any kind of discrimination.

For example, the Russian Federation is a permanent member of many international organisations, including the United Nations. The United Nations charter reveals ways to achieve gender neutrality in Russian to help employees of this organisation take into consideration the gender aspect of the Russian language.

Since in Russian grammar the category of gender exists, the masculine gender form is considered a neutral form, as it is in many Slavic languages. When talking about a group of people of different sexes, employees of the UN must use words of masculine gender in plural form, for example: *студенты* (students). To denote people in terms of profession, the masculine gender form should be used: *министр* (a minister). When interpreting gender neutral phrases from English, such as *a flight attendant, a chairperson, a firefighter, etc.*, interpreters should adequately transfer the meaning and adapt these phrases to the system of the Russian language, which often lacks direct compliance.

UN employees should observe the following principles in written and oral speech: 1) to avoid discriminating statements; 2) if, based on the context, there is a need to identify sex, refer to it distinctly; 3) if, based on the context, the sex is insignificant, avoid mentioning it (the UN's guidance on taking into account gender specifics in written and oral communication).

Yu.I. Sheremeta states that the names of professions can serve as gender neutral words in Russian. These words should have the masculine form of the noun, but can refer to a woman, for example: *врач* (a doctor). This is due to the fact that, in the past, only men could be representatives of most professions. Political correctness is a recent phenomenon in Russia, and politically correct and gender neutral words are similar to euphemisms (Sheremeta 2018: 187).

Another way of achieving gender neutrality is the use of *they* instead of *he* or *she* in Russian; however this can also be regarded as grammatically inaccurate. Such tendencies initially appeared on the internet. Researchers Yu.S. Bozhenko, L.S. Em and E.A. Kalinovskaya give examples from tiktok: *Я уже говорила о том, что я требовательный ребенок* (I have already said that I am a demanding child), where *I* is used in a singular pronoun form and *said* is a past plural form of the verb. The authors view the internet as a platform for future research, as it was the place where gender neutral linguistic structures appeared in the Russian language for the first time (Bozhenko 2022: 1546).

Having studied the works of Russian linguists regarding gender neutrality in the Russian language, we can conclude that the existing research work is mostly based on a comparison between the neutrality of English and Russian. Examples from the English language predominate in these works, whereas examples from the Russian language are few. Therefore, gender neutrality in Russian is a prospective area for future research; however, in Russia, the problem of gender neutrality is not discussed at a governmental level.

#### 4 Conclusion

Despite the fact that gender linguistics is a relatively new branch of linguistics in Russia and the former Soviet countries, it has received a lot of attention from researchers and has developed its own terminology, paths and academic apparatus. The results of the study clearly show that Russian is a language with noticeable gender asymmetry and lack of gender neutrality. There are a number of different reasons for this. Firstly, in the grammatical structure of Russian (as well as the other Slavic languages), masculine, feminine and neuter gender forms of nouns and other parts of speech exist. Secondly, Russian society has been a patriarchal society for a long time, and this fact is reflected in the language: the examples of lexical units and phraseology given in the article support this idea. Moreover, differences in the speech of Russian males and females exist on different levels: phonetics, phonology and lexis. All these features of the Russian language make Russian a rather difficult language to use and interpret in terms of gender neutrality. The problem of gender neutrality in the Russian language has not received special attention at governmental and academic levels. We can state that the Russian language has not entered the era of postgenderism, in which official languages are being reformed. Based on the results of the study, we can hypothesise that changes in Russian in terms of gender neutrality are not likely to occur soon. Nevertheless, since nowadays the world is globalised, all languages encounter new social phenomena and have a tendency to change, and the internet can become a venue for the first use of gender neutral phrases in the Russian language. Therefore, this sphere can become a prospective source for future research works.

Acknowledgements. The research was supported by Kazan Federal (Volga region) University.

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## PROBLEMATIKA REPREZENTACIJE SPOLA V RUŠČINI

### ALI JE V RUŠČINI V BLIŽNJI PRIHODNOSTI MOŽNO DOSEČI SPOLNO NEVTRALNOST?

Prispevek je posvečen preučevanju vidikov spola ruskega jezika, kar je v Rusiji in nekdanjih sovjetskih državah hitro razvijajoče se raziskovalno področje. Avtorica najprej na kratko oriše zgodovino raziskovanja spola v Rusiji in zahodnih državah. Pri tem ugotavlja, da je lingvistika spola postala raziskovalni trend šele po razpadu Sovjetske zveze, pred tem pa se o problematiki enakosti spolov ni veliko razpravljalo. Avtorica nato obravnava slovnični spol samostalnikov in drugih besednih vrst v ruščini (omenja moški, ženski in srednji spol). Naslednji del raziskave je posvečen preučevanju spolno zaznamovanega besedja, tudi frazemov, ki kaže, da je ruščina jezik z jasno spolno asimetrijo. Skozi mnoga stoletja se je namreč dojemanje vloge spolov v družbi fiksiralo (moški je bil v nadrejenem položaju in to se odraža tudi v jeziku). Opozarja, da obstajajo razlike v govoru moških in žensk, ki so prisotne na različnih jezikovnih ravneh (npr. v fonetiki, fonologiji in leksiki). Zadnji del prispevka govori o problematiki spolne nevtralnosti ruskega jezika. Avtorica ugotavlja, da ruščina še ni vstopila v obdobje t. i. postgenderizma in se ne reformira na uradni ravni, problematika spola tudi ni deležna večje pozornosti ruskih raziskovalcev in raziskovalk jezika ter kulture. Izpostavlja, da je ruščino v smislu nevtralnosti spola težko uporabljati in razlagati. Omenja, da so bile za delavce Organizacije združenih narodov izdelane posebne smernice o tem, kako doseči spolno nevtralnost v ruščini, in podaja temeljne določbe tega dokumenta. Avtorica zaključuje, da je raziskav, posvečenih preučevanju spolne nevtralnosti, v ruščini malo. Večinoma gre za primerjalne razprave, ki jezikovno rabo primerjajo z drugimi jeziki. Kljub temu se v današnjem globaliziranem svetu tudi v Rusiji soočajo s spremembami v dojemanju spola. Ker se te spremembe pogosto najprej pojavijo na spletu, je lahko spletno okolje perspektivno tudi za proučevanje spolno nevtralnega izražanja v ruščini.