

THE ROLE OF METAPHORS, PRONOUNS, AND EVALUATIVE LANGUAGE IN GENDER CONSTRUCTION

O'rinova Zarrina Zafar qizi

Samarkand State Institute of Foreign Languages

Master's degree student

zarinaurinova87@gmail.com

Scientific supervisor: Associate Professor

Rasulov N. A

Abstract: This article sort of looks at how metaphors, pronouns, and evaluative language work as key linguistic mechanisms in the social construction of gender. It draws on feminist linguistics, cognitive semantics, and critical discourse analysis, and then it examines the ways those three language groups do more than just mirror older gender ideologies... they also actively make and strengthen gendered identities across different discourse communities. The results point to pretty consistent patterns like asymmetry, marginalization, and that “norms get reinforced” feeling, even in everyday talk and in institutional language use.

Keywords: gender construction, metaphor, pronouns, evaluative language, feminist linguistics.

Introduction. The link between language and gender has, like, been sitting right in the middle of sociolinguistics and feminist theory for quite a few decades now. Researchers coming out of critical discourse analysis and feminist linguistics have pretty consistently shown that language doesn't just “mirror” social reality, it actually helps make it, kind of construct it in real time. Gender, here, isn't treated as a biological given thing so much as something that gets done, again and again, through talk and wording. In other words, it's a socially performed and discursively produced category, and it surfaces via repeated linguistic acts that make certain setups of femininity and masculinity feel natural. In this kind of view, three language happenings seem especially meaningful: metaphor use, the way people lean on personal pronouns and generic pronouns, and the use of evaluative language. Each one works on a slightly different layer of linguistic structure, yet together they act like an interconnected setup where gender rules get encoded, passed along, and kept going through discourse. And honestly, the relevance isn't only for academic linguistics. The very language that builds gender also shapes social expectations, institutional routines, and even individual self-view, across different cultures and across historical times.

Methodology and Literature Review. The methodological foundation of this study rests on theoretical synthesis and critical textual analysis, integrating insights from feminist linguistics, cognitive metaphor theory, and critical discourse analysis. The cognitive theory of metaphor, developed most influentially by Lakoff and Johnson, provides the theoretical basis for analyzing how conceptual metaphors organize gender perception. Feminist linguistic

scholarship, particularly work by Lakoff, Cameron, and Hellinger, frames the analysis of pronouns and evaluative language within a broader concern for the ideological dimensions of everyday speech. Critical discourse analysis, as elaborated by Fairclough and van Dijk, supplies the analytical tools for understanding how linguistic choices are embedded in relations of power and social reproduction.

Within the Russian-language scholarly tradition, the study of genderlect and gender-marked language has developed through the work of Kirilina and Toms kaya, who have examined gender asymmetry in Russian lexis and discourse with particular attention to the evaluative dimensions of gendered vocabulary. Uzbek-language scholarship has increasingly engaged with these questions in the context of language policy and gender representation, examining how grammatical and lexical structures in Uzbek encode social expectations about femininity and masculinity. International scholarship has furthermore demonstrated that the mechanisms of gender construction through language are not confined to any single linguistic tradition but manifest across typologically diverse languages, suggesting that the ideological functions of metaphor, pronouns, and evaluative language reflect broader socio-cognitive processes rather than purely language-specific features. This convergence of perspectives allows the present analysis to move between linguistic levels and across cultural contexts, tracing the structural homologies that unite these three mechanisms as instruments of gender construction.

Results and Discussion. Metaphor constitutes one of the most pervasive and ideologically consequential mechanisms through which gender is constructed in discourse. Far from being ornamental figures of speech, metaphors are cognitive structures that organize perception by mapping the properties of a source domain onto a target domain, thereby shaping how speakers understand and evaluate their social world. In the domain of gender, metaphors systematically assign contrasting properties to femininity and masculinity, typically associating masculinity with strength, agency, rationality, and verticality, while femininity is mapped onto weakness, passivity, emotionality, and enclosure. These metaphorical patterns are not innocent; they carry evaluative loading that positions the masculine as norm and the feminine as deviation or deficiency.

The conceptual metaphor WOMAN IS A VESSEL, for instance, has been identified across multiple cultural and linguistic traditions, linking female identity to containment, receptivity, and biological function in ways that constrain the discursive space available for representations of female agency. Similarly, the metaphorical construction of public life and professional achievement in masculine terms effectively codes female participation in these domains as marked, anomalous, or requiring special explanation. Kirilina's analysis of Russian-language data shows that gendered metaphors operate through both explicit lexical choices and implicit conceptual mappings, making their ideological effects difficult to contest precisely because they appear natural and self-evident. The cognitive entrenchment of these metaphors means that they function as default frames through which new information about gender is interpreted, reinforcing existing stereotypes even when surface-level discourse

appears neutral or progressive.

Pronouns represent a second and structurally distinct mechanism of gender construction, operating at the grammatical level of language organization. The generic masculine pronoun, used across English, Russian, German, and many other languages to refer to persons of unspecified sex, has been extensively studied as a device that installs masculine identity as the unmarked human default. Psychological research reviewed by Hellinger and Bußmann demonstrates that generic masculine forms activate masculine mental representations in readers and listeners, effectively rendering women invisible within the conceptual space of generic humanity. In Uzbek, the absence of grammatical gender in the pronoun system has sometimes been cited as evidence that the language is inherently more gender-neutral; however, Uzbek-language scholarship has shown that lexical and contextual factors produce comparable effects of gender invisibility and asymmetry even in the absence of grammatical gender marking.

The emergence of gender-neutral pronoun practices in English and other languages, including the singular "they," represents an active site of contestation in which competing ideologies of gender and linguistic normativity are negotiated through pronoun choice. The ideological stakes of pronoun use extend to institutional contexts, where the consistent use of masculine generics in legal, administrative, and academic documents has been shown to reproduce assumptions about the default gender of professionals, citizens, and intellectuals, with material consequences for how women perceive their belonging in these domains [5]. The pronoun system thus functions not merely as a grammatical convenience but as a site where the social category of gender is continuously reproduced and contested.

Evaluative language constitutes the third major mechanism under analysis, encompassing the lexical, pragmatic, and prosodic resources through which speakers assign positive or negative value to persons, behaviors, and qualities in gendered ways. A foundational observation in feminist linguistics is that the vocabulary available for describing women and men is systematically asymmetric: terms applied to women carry more frequent negative, sexualized, or diminutive connotations than their masculine counterparts, a phenomenon sometimes described as semantic derogation. The asymmetry is not merely lexical but extends to the pragmatic dimension of evaluation, as identical behaviors are assessed differently depending on the perceived gender of the actor. Assertiveness in male speakers is typically evaluated positively through terms such as "decisive," "confident," and "authoritative," while the same behavior in female speakers is encoded through negatively loaded evaluations such as "aggressive," "strident," or "bossy". This double standard in evaluative language reflects and reinforces a deeper normative structure in which gendered behavior is assessed against masculine norms, and deviation from those norms is linguistically penalized.

In the Russian linguistic tradition, Tomskaya's analysis of evaluative vocabulary demonstrates that gendered asymmetry in evaluative language is particularly pronounced in domains associated with professional competence and moral character, where the feminine

suffix itself can introduce a diminutive or ironic connotation absent from the base masculine form. Critical discourse analysis frameworks developed by Fairclough situate these patterns of evaluative asymmetry within broader structures of institutional power, arguing that the language of evaluation in media, political, and educational discourse reproduces gender hierarchies by naturalizing differential standards of assessment. The cumulative effect of evaluative asymmetry across discourse domains is the discursive construction of a gender order in which masculine qualities are indexed as valuable and feminine qualities as secondary or problematic, regardless of the explicit intentions of individual speakers.

Conclusion. This article has demonstrated that metaphors, pronouns, and evaluative language function as primary and interrelated mechanisms through which gender is discursively constructed and reproduced. Metaphors provide the cognitive frames that naturalize gender hierarchy by mapping contrasting values onto masculine and feminine categories. Pronoun systems install the masculine as the unmarked human default, rendering women and gender-nonconforming persons structurally invisible within generic reference. Evaluative language enforces differential standards of assessment that consistently position masculine norms as the measure of human value. The analysis has drawn on cognitive linguistics, feminist linguistic theory, critical discourse analysis, and scholarship from Uzbek, Russian, and international traditions to establish the cross-linguistic generality of these mechanisms while acknowledging their culturally specific inflections. The theoretical synthesis developed here has implications for language policy, educational practice, and critical literacy, suggesting that effective engagement with gender inequality requires sustained attention to the linguistic structures through which that inequality is produced and naturalized.

REFERENCES

1. Butler, J. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. 272 p.
2. Cameron, D. *The Feminist Critique of Language: A Reader*. London: Routledge, 1998. 368 p.
3. Lakoff, G., Johnson, M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 242 p.
4. Lakoff, R. *Language and Woman's Place*. New York: Harper & Row, 1975. 83 p.
5. Fairclough, N. *Language and Power*. London: Longman, 1989. 259 p.
6. Кирилина, А. В. Гендер: лингвистические аспекты. Москва: Институт социологии РАН, 1999. 189 с.
7. Йўлдошев, М. Ўзбек тилида гендер белгиларининг лисоний ифодаси. Тошкент: Фан, 2011. 134 б.
8. Hellinger, M., Bußmann, H. *Gender Across Languages: The Linguistic Representation of Women and Men*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2001. Vol. 1. 308 p.
9. Van Dijk, T. A. *Discourse and Power*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008. 308 p.

10. Томская, М. В. Оценочность в языке и тексте (на материале русскоязычных феминистских текстов). Москва: МГЛУ, 2000. 156 с.