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On the category of gender of nouns in Russian

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Abstract : The gender is a grammatical (morphological) classificatory non-prepositional category peculiar to the different parts of speech, consisting in the distribution of words or forms into classes traditionally associated with gender, or with its absence. It is usual to classify masculine, feminine and Neuter. The gender is expressed grammatically in the syntagmatic possibilities of a noun.

Keywords: zeugmatic constructions, zeugma, semantic heterogeneity, verb-predicate, stylistic effect

INTRODUCTION

A noun is a part of speech denoting a subject (substance) and expressing this meaning in the nominative categories of number and case and in the non-prepositional genus [Russian Grammar 1980: 460].

The gender category of a noun is a non-prepositional, syntagmatically detectable morphological category expressed in the ability of a noun in singular forms to relate selectively to the gender forms of the word form coordinated with it (in the predicate - coordinated): desk, large tree; Evening has come, A girl would walk; The window is open; The night is cold [Russian Grammar 1980: 465].

In modern Russian, all nouns except pluralia tantum (nouns that do not have singular forms) are masculine, feminine or neuter. A noun may not have the appearance of the categories of number or case, but no substantive can be outside of the genitive. This is why the gender is almost universally regarded as the dominant grammatical category of nouns.

The gender of a noun is a non-declinical (i.e. classificatory) morphological category consisting of three grammatical genders (masculine, feminine and neuter). This means that nouns are not changed into genders, but are distributed, classified.

The grammatical meaning of gender is based on the opposition of three grammatical meanings: Masculine, Feminine and Neuter. To each of these there is a word, not a form. Nouns can only be of one gender. On this account the genders are regarded as lexico-grammatical, and are not expressed by forms of the same word, but by separate lexemes. The opposition of feminine and masculine nouns is most clearly seen: it is found in all word forms in the singular (book - table, book - table, book - table, etc.). Less distinctly, masculine and

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neuter nouns are opposed (this opposition is expressed only in the original noun form): table - window, table - window, table - window, etc.

The lexicographical tradition, apart from the three Neuter genera, also singles out the so-called common genus. It is mentioned even in the first Russian scientific grammar: "Russian nouns are of four genders: masculine, feminine, Neuter and Neuter" [Lomonosov 1952: 438]. Subsequent scientific and scholarly grammars did not fix the treatment of the gender as a four-gender; the General Genus was referred to, but not as a separate, fourth gender. Indeed, words of the generic gender, or "two-gendered nouns" [Panov 1996: 104] include animate nouns which in a sentence or in a word combination show signs of either masculine or feminine gender: round orphan / round orphan, Sasha got interested / was interested in mathematics, rare fox / rare fox. In Russian language these words reveal masculine or feminine qualities depending on the context.

The means of expressing the meaning of gender are related to different levels of language, and they are also the criteria for differentiating nouns according to gender: semantic, morphological, word-formation and syntactic.

Semantically, nouns are divided into two groups, the animate and the inanimate with respect to gender. The gender of animate nouns denoting persons and animals can have a nominative meaning, which is connected to the division of living beings into biological masculine and feminine. The few middle gender animate nouns (insect, child, creature, etc.), however, are incapable of expressing biological gender.

Masculine and feminine animate nouns can be ranked according to gender as follows:

Nouns denoting persons

1. Nouns with an unambiguous gender-gender correspondence, i.e., those nouns denoting persons by characteristics peculiar only to a person of the respective gender (witch, brother, butler and witch, sister, maid). Most of these nouns form generic pairs: emperor - empress, man - woman and worker - worker.

2. Common nouns in -a(-ya) which, depending on the context, denote a person both male and female, which is syntactically expressed by the form of a consonant adjective: annoying wannabe - annoying wannabe.

3. Nouns denoting persons according to their occupation, outlook or profession. This group includes masculine nouns with null inflection in the Nom. sing. and having a feminine pair with the inflection -a(-ya) in Russian language: sophomore - sophomore, student - student, chatterbox - chatterbox. Depending on the nature of a sentence, nouns of this subtype may differently identify the gender of a named person. Also included here are masculine nouns that do not have a corresponding gender (such as dean, rector, driver, ambassador). They always denote a person without any indication of gender. Some words of this group may have

feminine suffixes, which are characteristic of colloquial language and have a reduced stylistic colouring: geologist, physicist, criticess, headmistress, brigadier. In connection with the lack in this group of feminine words intended to indicate the feminine gender of the named person, the use of the type doctor said, syntactically compensating this lexical insufficiency, is widely spread in modern Russian.

From the above-mentioned, we may conclude that masculine nouns are generally unmarked in most cases. This is due to social changes in the structure of society: many professional and other social activities now available to women used to be exclusively male privileges, and this was reflected in the use of corresponding masculine nouns.

Nouns referring to animals

1. The masculine noun is used to denote a male or a common name for the species, the feminine noun for a female only. The most common nouns are those referring to wild animals: the eagle is an eagleess, the tiger is a tigress.

2. Feminine nouns are used to denote a female or common name of an animal species, and masculine nouns are used to denote a male. Nouns of domestic animals are of this gender, ram = sheep, hog = pig, drake = duck and bull = cow.

3. The masculine noun denotes a male, the feminine noun is used to denote a female, and the name of an animal species is represented by a separate word, either masculine or feminine: stallion - mare - horse, horse.

4. A masculine noun denotes a common name for a non-mature animal: serpent, puppy, foal.

5. Masculine and Feminine nouns denoting a common name of a species without gender: cockroach, golden eagle, mole, seal, wood grouse, falcon, hawk, hippopotamus; pike, wagtail, rat, cuckoo, frog, shark, marten.

As opposed to personal nouns, both Feminine and Masculine nouns are unmarked in animal names, both can indicate the gender of an animal and the common name of the species.

Of the group of inanimate nouns, the gender is not nominative: pencil - pen - feather; ceiling - wall - window, etc. Here, however, we may observe a certain degree of semantisation of the generic oppositions. For instance, the masculine includes the names of months (January, February etc.), most of the names of sound actions (howl, sound, howl, groan, roar) and names of teams, institutions and enterprises. The Feminine includes, for instance, names of painful conditions (rubella, fever, jaundice, ailment, pain, scabies) and many words with negative evaluation (euphemism, nonsense, nonsense, tastelessness, massacre). Neuter nouns prevail among words naming abstract concepts (population, broadcasting, mankind, old). Undoubtedly, formal oppositions tend to be semantized in Russian language, but it is not possible to identify any more or less clear semantic picture in formal genitive oppositions.

Each genus in Russian language has its own system of inflections, but there are exceptions. So, the ending -a, which is characteristic of the Feminine (will, country), may be in the Masculine (voivode, young man) and in the Common gender (weeper, toady). In such cases, the gender is determined semantically or syntactically.

Indications of gender may be derived from derivatives, either additional to the inflexive or acting as major derivatives.

The syntactic expression of gender is most striking and regular in the forms of words agreeing with a noun (adjectives, participles, gender-changing pronouns like ours and ordinal numerals), which function as the definition and with their endings indicate the gender of any noun in the singular: A small pond, a small river, a small lake, a playing boy, a playing girl, a playing child.

The gender is also expressed by the forms of words co-ordinated with the noun in the predicate (verb forms of the past tense, subjunctive, short and full adjective forms): A pond would become shallow/shallow, A river would become shallow/shallow, A lake would become shallow/shallow; Lesson - cheerful, Recess - cheerful, Class - cheerful. The syntactic manifestations of the gender category also include the possibility of replacing nouns with different pronouns: the river - she, the pond - he, the lake - it.

Thus, gender is one of the main characteristics of a noun as a part of speech. All nouns, including indeclinables, belong to one of three genders: masculine, feminine or Neuter. It is generally accepted that pluralia tantum nouns are not genitive. The gender of a noun is expressed in Russian by morphological, syntactic and semantic means. In declension nouns, gender is determined by the stem and the infinitive case (nominative case of the singular). The gender of a noun is classificatory and indeclinable. The gender of nouns is continuous. Nouns can be masculine, feminine or Neuter, and there are also genders and non-genders. There are two essential features of the Neuter: firstly, they can denote feminine as well as masculine; secondly, they can co-occur with feminine and masculine consonants in a word or a sentence. Any word which does not possess this feature is not a member of the Neuter gender.

Most generic nouns are used mostly as expressive words. They are mostly used in colloquial speech style. The generic nouns are expressed syntactically - agreeing with them adjectives and masculine or feminine pronouns, and also coordinating with them the forms of past tense verbs and the subjunctive mood, both masculine and feminine.

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