Problems of studying gender phenomena in different languages within the framework of general linguistic theory

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Abstract. This present article kind of looks into the theoretical plus methodological headaches tied to studying gender as if it were a linguistic phenomenon across typologically varied languages. In general, it claims that the current broad linguistic models do not quite do the job, because they can't really catch the full spectrum of gender expression from language to language. So the piece sort of calls for a more integrative, cross typological way of thinking, not just a single, general account, that feels a bit too narrow.

Keywords: gender linguistics, grammatical gender, general linguistic theory, typological diversity, gender universals, sociolinguistics, language and society.

Аннотация. В данной статье рассматриваются теоретические и методологические проблемы, связанные с изучением гендера как лингвистического явления в типологически разнообразных языках. В статье утверждается, что существующие общелингвистические модели недостаточны для охвата всего многообразия гендерного выражения в языках мира, и обосновывается необходимость более интегративного, кросс-типологического подхода.

Ключевые слова: гендерная лингвистика, грамматический гендер, общая теория языкознания, типологическое разнообразие, гендерные универсалии, социолингвистика, язык и общество.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada tipologik jihatdan xilma-xil tillarda gender hodisasini lingvistik fenomen sifatida o'rganish bilan bog'liq nazariy va metodologik muammolar ko'rib chiqiladi. Maqolada mavjud umumlisoniy modellarning dunyo tillaridagi gender ifodasining to'liq ko'lamini qamrab olishga etarli emasligini ta'kidlaydi va yanada integrativ, kross-tipologik yondashuvga ehtiyoj borligini asoslaydi.

Kalit so'zlar: gender lingvistikasi, grammatik gender, umumiy tilshunoslik nazariyasi, tipologik xilma-xillik, gender universaliyalari, sotsiolingvistika, til va jamiyat.

INTRODUCTION

The study of gender in language has, in the past several decades, undergone a pretty major transformation. What was once treated mainly as a morphosyntactic category, a sort of formal feature tied to noun classification in Indo-European languages, has kind of drifted outward into this wider interdisciplinary arena that bumps into linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and cultural studies. And yet, within general linguistic theory there is still this tricky issue: integrating gender as one coherent analytical category stays deeply problematic. Researchers are stuck in a tension, almost like two forces pulling at the same time. On one side there's the desire to write universal principles that could apply across all human languages, on the other side there's the empirical fact that gender shows up in radically different ways depending on each language's structural setup and cultural context. The core challenge, isn't really whether gender exists as a social or cognitive reality. The problem is the "how" for linguistic theory, like how can it handle gender systematically without bending or distorting the evidence taken from non-European or agglutinative languages such as Uzbek, Turkish, or Finnish, which depending on the traditional view don't have grammatical gender at all [1, p. 12].

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METHODOLOGY AND LITERATURE REVIEW

The methodological ground of this study is kind a critical comparison of academic literature about gender linguistics. Here, the article really does not touch empirical data gathering, experiments, or any fieldwork at all. Instead, it leans on theoretical analysis and interpretation of what is already written, in the existing scholarly discourse. The sources we look at cover a few foundational areas in theoretical linguistics, plus feminist linguistics, typological investigations and also sociolinguistics. Because of that, the whole problem can be assessed in a more multidimensional way, not just one angle, but several related perspectives at the same time.

The distinction between grammatical gender and social gender is kinda foundational to any general linguistic treatment of the phenomenon, because without it everything starts to wobble. Grammatical gender, as it was described in classical structural linguistics, is basically a formal classification system where nouns get slotted into categories that are usually masculine, feminine, and neuter. Those categories then trigger agreement patterns across other parts of speech [2, p. 44]. This account goes back to work rooted in Latin, Greek, and later Slavic and Germanic languages, and it was the kind of explanation that dominated scholarship for centuries. Still, Corbett showed in his well-known typological survey that the worlds languages don't behave in one neat way, gender systems vary wildly: some languages have two genders, others go as high as twenty, and a lot of languages seem to have no grammatical gender at all [3, p. 7]. So, this typological diversity makes it immediately harder to fold gender into a general linguistic theory, as if it were a universal feature of human language.

The rise of feminist linguistics in the 1970s and 1980s kind of introduced another dimension into the whole problem. Scholars like Lakoff argued that language does not just mirror social gender relations , it kind of builds up and keeps reinforcing them too, so gender becomes a pragmatic thing and also a discourse level phenomenon, not only a formal one [4, p. 38]. This line of thinking, despite being wildly influential, ended up creating a split that still stays with us today. Basically on one side you have formal linguists who treat gender mainly as a morphosyntactic category , and on the other side you find sociolinguists along with discourse analysts, who see it as a kind of social performance written into everyday language use . But then general linguistic theory has had trouble making these two approaches work together in one coherent framework [5, p. 91].

Russian linguistic scholarship, honestly, has made quite substantial contributions to this whole debate, especially when you look at how grammatical gender works in Slavic languages. In that sense Zaliznyak's morphological research gives rather detailed descriptions of the gender agreement systems in Russian and, at the same time, it stresses the arbitrariness of assigning gender whenever natural gender and grammatical class stop matching each other [6, p. 113]. Then there is the Uzbek side which is kind of a contrasting scenario: as Reshetov and later Yusupov have pointed out, Uzbek, despite being a Turkic agglutinative language, has no grammatical gender, but still the social gender difference gets encoded quite clearly through lexical resources, terms of address, and discourse habits [7, p. 56]. So you get this revealing tension that shows a basic inadequacy in general linguistic theory. Historically it has treated the lack of grammatical gender as if gender becomes irrelevant as a linguistic category, and in doing so it kind of misses those richer non-morphological mechanisms that carry gender meaning even in languages that are genderless.

The whole idea of gender universals has been proposed as some kind of theoretical link, you know. In the universal grammar camps, especially the Chomskyan line, people have tried to pinpoint abstract functional categories that sit underneath the surface differences we see across natural languages [8, p. 204]. Still, these efforts got a lot of pushbacks, mainly from typologists and linguistic anthropologists. They say that forcing Indo-European categories onto languages that are structurally unrelated can create something more like theoretical leftovers, artifacts, rather than real universals [9, p. 17]. And it gets worse, because gender doesn't just float on its own, it tangles s up with animacy,

politeness, and honorific systems, in ways that differ quite a bit across language families. So in practice, keeping a single universal story seems extremely hard to defend.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The literature review points to three main problems when people do general linguistics work on gender phenomena. First, it feels like there is a stubborn Eurocentrism in the basic theoretical models, those were built mostly by looking at Indo-European languages and they don't quite carry over to agglutinative, isolating, or polysynthetic languages. Second, even if it makes sense to conceptually split grammatical gender from social gender, this split has sort of pushed the area apart, so morphosyntactic research and sociolinguistic research end up moving in parallel without much real conversation between them. Third, a lot of the existing general linguistic frameworks don't really have the right instruments for gender expression that isn't morphological, meaning gender can show up through lexical choice, prosody, discourse organization, and social pragmatics. And in fact, this is often the dominant way gender gets expressed in many languages around the world. So, taken together, these missing pieces make it hard to see how general linguistic theory, as it stands right now, could actually support a full account of gender phenomena across the whole range of human language. What seems needed is a more integrative model. One that doesn't treat grammatical gender and social gender like totally separate topics, but more like complementary aspects of one complicated thing, and that relies on truly cross-typological evidence rather than simple extrapolations from a small selection of well-studied European languages [10, p. 88].

A further dimension of the problem, has to do with how gender and power link up, in ways that get encoded across separate linguistic systems. General linguistic theory, has usually treated gender as some sort of neutral classificatory thing, but when you look across languages it keeps showing that gender categories are never just "formal" they also have evaluative and hierarchical weight, reflecting how the speech community is set up socially. In languages with grammatical gender, the default, or unmarked forms tend to be overwhelmingly masculine, and this has been documented again and again in Latin-based languages, Slavic languages, and Arabic, among others. Meanwhile in genderless languages, like Uzbek or Finnish, the imbalance is not really shown through morphosyntactic agreement instead it comes out via lexical asymmetry, uneven ways of addressing people, and a kind of semantic derogation that certain terms for women pick up over time. So, this kind of convergence across language types that are structurally unrelated suggests something pretty strong: the connection between language and gender hierarchy is not just the result of a specific grammatical mechanism, but more like a deeper socio-cognitive tendency that appears in different formal clothing depending on the language you look at. So general linguistic theory needs to handle not only the formal devices used to express gender, but also the evaluative and ideological content those devices quietly bring along with them. That means moving beyond a purely structural description, and leaning into a more socially informed theoretical orientation.

It is also necessary to consider the implications of language change and contact for the general linguistic treatment of gender. Languages do not exist in isolation, and gender systems are among the features most susceptible to shift under conditions of bilingualism, language contact, and socio-political transformation. The Soviet-era standardization of Uzbek, for example, involved the deliberate suppression of Arabic-Persian grammatical influences and the reinforcement of the gender-neutral Turkic base, a process with direct consequences for how gender is currently encoded in modern written Uzbek. Similarly, contemporary debates in European languages about gender-neutral pronouns and inclusive language reforms demonstrate that gender categories in language are actively contested and historically contingent rather than fixed natural givens. These processes of change and contestation are poorly accommodated within static synchronic models of general linguistic theory, which tend to describe language systems as stable objects of analysis.

CONCLUSION

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The study of gender in language occupies an important but theoretically unresolved position within general linguistics. The typological evidence clearly demonstrates that gender is a universal dimension of human linguistic behavior, yet its formal realization is so varied across languages that any single theoretical model risks privileging one type of linguistic structure at the expense of others. The integration of agglutinative languages such as Uzbek into gender-linguistic research is particularly valuable in this regard, as these languages challenge the assumption that morphosyntactic gender is the primary or most important mode of gender encoding. Advancing a more adequate general linguistic theory of gender will require sustained engagement with typological diversity, genuine interdisciplinary collaboration between formal and sociolinguistic approaches, and a willingness to revise foundational categories that have been inherited from the European grammatical tradition.

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