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GENDER IN CHILDREN'S SPEECH: RUSSIAN-UZBEK COMPARISONS

Chernova Natalya Vasilievna
Senior Lecturer of the Russian Language
Nordic International University
E-mail: n.chernova@nordicuniversity.org
ORCID: 0009-0009-4881-5245
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Abstract

The article presents a comparative analysis of gender features in children's speech based on the Russian and Uzbek languages. The study examines differences in the acquisition of grammatical categories, lexico-semantic preferences of boys and girls, as well as the influence of cultural factors on the formation of gender-marked expressions in speech ontogenesis. The empirical basis of the research includes data from spontaneous speech of preschool children, parental diaries from ontolinguistic research archives, as well as materials from literary and folklore texts. The analysis shows that, along with universal tendencies (earlier acquisition of morphology by girls, predominance of the "referential style" in boys), significant culture-specific differences are observed: in the Uzbek language, gender differentiation of speech is reinforced by morphological means of expressing respect and the system of address, whereas in Russian, gender differences manifest primarily at the level of grammatical gender and syntactic constructions.

Keywords: gender linguistics, ontolinguistics, children's speech, Russian language, Uzbek language, speech development, grammatical interference, cultural stereotypes.

Introduction

The field of linguistics that studies the process of a child's acquisition of their native language — ontolinguistics — has been actively developing over recent decades. However, as G.R. Dobrova rightly notes, the vast majority of research has been devoted to the general, universal properties of speech ontogenesis, whereas the variability of this process — differences determined by typological, gender, and sociocultural factors — has been studied to a significantly lesser extent.

Gender differences in children's speech are of particular interest because they allow us to trace how the first linguistic markers of gender identity are formed at the intersection of biological sex, cognitive development, and social environment. A.V. Kirilina defines gender speech differences as "differences that manifest in the speech of native speakers depending on their biological sex and the social role they perform in society." With regard to preschool children, the emphasis should shift toward the influence of the speech environment (input) and the cultural expectations placed on boys and girls within a specific linguocultural community.

A comparative analysis of the Russian and Uzbek languages is of particular interest, as they belong to different language families (Slavic and Turkic) and are characterized by different typological features in the area of the grammatical category of gender, systems of address, and politeness. As noted in studies on comparative grammar, these differences create different "starting conditions" for the formation of gender markers in children's speech.

The purpose of this article is to identify and compare the linguistic features of the formation of gender expressions in the speech of Russian-speaking and Uzbek-speaking children, and to determine the universal and culture-specific patterns of this process.

Main Body

Gender linguistics as a scientific direction emerged in the second half of the 20th century, primarily within the Anglo-American scholarly tradition (the works of R. Lakoff, D. Tannen, D. Cameron). In Russian academia, significant contributions to the development of this direction were made by A.V. Kirilina, V.P. Belyanin, and other researchers.

With regard to children's speech, the gender approach began to be actively developed relatively recently. In the Western tradition, the works of E. Bates, C. Snow, and E. Lieven are of particular importance, as they identified the existence of two main types of speech development — referential (nominative) and expressive (pronominal). Children of the referential type tend to predominantly use nouns — names of objects — while children of the expressive type acquire pronouns, verbs, and "frozen phrases" earlier.

It is important to emphasize that the identification of these types has a gender correlation: research shows that boys more often demonstrate a referential style, while girls tend toward an expressive style, although this correlation is not absolute and varies depending on the sociocultural context.

The methodological basis of our research is a comprehensive approach that includes:

-analysis of children's spontaneous speech (longitudinal observations);

-a comparative analysis of lexico-semantic fields representing gender stereotypes;

-a linguoculturological analysis of folklore and literary texts that transmit models of gender behavior.

The most significant differences in language acquisition by boys and girls are observed at the morphological level. Based on an analysis of diary records of 19 children (11 boys and 8 girls), A.A. Bondarenko found that girls, on average, master the imperative mood of verbs 3 months earlier, and word-formation innovations appear in their speech on average 5 months earlier than in boys. This phenomenon is interpreted as a manifestation of the earlier development of "active morphology" in girls.

Gender differences are also observed in the domain of syntax. Girls begin to use complex syntactic constructions earlier, particularly complex sentences with subordinate clauses of degree and comparison. Boys, in turn, demonstrate a greater tendency to use simple extended sentences and interrogative constructions of a directive type.

When compared with the Uzbek language, these differences acquire additional depth. The Uzbek language, unlike Russian, does not have a grammatical category of gender for nouns and adjectives. However, as M.Ch. Chutpulatov notes, this does not mean an absence of gender marking — it is realized through other mechanisms, in particular through the system of address, lexical units expressing respect, and features of word usage.

Uzbek children's speech is characterized by the early acquisition of politeness forms differentiated by the gender of the addressee. For example, boys aged 4-5 begin to use the address "aka" (older brother) when addressing older boys and men, while girls use "opa" (older sister) when addressing older girls and women. In Russian children's speech, similar differentiation is less pronounced and develops later, primarily through the acquisition of first name and patronymic forms.

Children's lexical preferences demonstrate stable gender differentiation, which is confirmed by research based on different languages.

Russian-speaking children. In the speech of Russian-speaking preschool boys, vocabulary related to the thematic domains of "movement and activity," "transport," "construction," and "fighting/competition" predominates. Girls more often use vocabulary from the semantic fields of "family and close relationships," "home and household," "clothing and jewelry," and "emotional states."

Uzbek-speaking children. Research by D. Shokirova reveals that the vocabulary of Uzbek-speaking boys is enriched by lexemes such as jangchi ('warrior'), bahodir ('bogatyr, hero'), pahlavon ('wrestler, champion'), which carry significant cultural meaning, appealing to traditional notions of the masculine ideal in Uzbek culture. Girls, in turn, acquire diminutive and affectionate forms and vocabulary expressing care and empathy earlier.

Interestingly, cultural differences manifest in the sources of lexical enrichment. For Uzbek boys, epic tales (dastans) and historical narratives serve as significant sources, whereas for Russian-speaking children, modern media and commercial culture play a larger role.

The formation of gender expressions in children's speech cannot be examined in isolation from the broader linguocultural context. Uzbek culture traditionally imposes more differentiated requirements on the speech behavior of men and women. As Chutpulatov notes, "the specifics of women's speech are determined by modesty, faith in their husband, use of diminutives, respectfulness, and deference," while "men's Uzbek speech is characterized by certain categoricalness and brevity combined with respect and attentiveness to the interlocutor."

These cultural expectations are transmitted to the child through input — the speech of parents, caregivers, and older relatives. Girls hear and acquire patterns of more elaborate, emotionally evaluative speech, while boys acquire more directive and laconic speech. A "gender-oriented communicative style" is formed, which is more rigidly established in the Uzbek linguistic community than in the Russian one.

Comparative analysis shows that in the Russian-speaking environment, the gender differentiation of children's speech is largely determined by the child's individual characteristics and family upbringing style, whereas in the Uzbek-speaking environment, culturally entrenched norms of speech behavior for boys and girls play a more significant role.

A special aspect of the study is the analysis of the speech of bilingual children simultaneously acquiring Russian and Uzbek. As V. Primova notes, when Uzbek-speaking students study the category of gender in Russian, persistent grammatical interference arises, due to the absence of this category in their native language.

At the level of children's speech, this manifests in the following errors:

-violation of adjective-noun agreement in gender (e.g., "red-MASCULINE sun" instead of "red-NEUTER sun");

-confusion of noun gender assignment (e.g., "my-MASCULINE mom");

-difficulties in acquiring third-person personal pronouns differentiated by gender.

These errors are a direct consequence of interference and require special methodological approaches when teaching Russian as a non-native language. At the same time, a "strategy mixing" effect is observed in the speech of bilingual children: elements of the Uzbek politeness system are transferred into Russian-language communication, which may be perceived by native Russian speakers as hypercorrectness or unnaturalness.

The conducted comparative analysis of gender features in children's speech in Russian and Uzbek allows us to formulate the following conclusions.

Regardless of language background, girls on average acquire the morphological systems of the language earlier than boys (in particular, verb forms and word-formation models). In the lexical sphere, boys demonstrate a greater tendency toward the "referential style" (predominance of nominal nouns), while girls tend toward the "expressive style" (earlier appearance of pronouns and verbs with emotional-evaluative semantics).

Conclusion

The grammatical category of gender in the Russian language creates an additional channel for expressing gender meanings, which is absent in the Uzbek language. However, this does not

mean that Uzbek is "genderless" — gender differentiation in Uzbek is realized through the system of address, vocabulary of respect, and culturally entrenched speech strategies.

Cultural conditionality. Uzbek children's speech demonstrates a more rigid connection between the speaker's gender and speech behavior, which is explained by the traditionalist character of Uzbek culture. Russian children's speech is more variable, with gender differences often being leveled under the influence of egalitarian tendencies in modern society.

The obtained results can be used in the development of methods for teaching Russian as a non-native language in Uzbek audiences (taking into account the phenomenon of grammatical interference), as well as in the practice of family and preschool education for the conscious formation of a gender-sensitive speech environment.

Prospects for further research are related to expanding the empirical base (including data from spontaneous speech of children from different social backgrounds) and applying corpus linguistics methods for quantitative analysis of gender-marked units in children's discourse.

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