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COMPARATIVE IDIOMS OF THE CONCEPTUAL FIELD «HUMAN» IN LANGUAGE AND BEYOND

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Abstract. The term “gender”, its relations to natural gender, and the question of arbitrariness of gender as a linguistic category and related issues have been discussed since Aristotle. Idiomatic units by definition are composed of a sequence of words whose meaning is different from their literal interpretation and their processing may involve further steps, such as realizing that the meaning of the phrases is not literal and associating the words with their figurative meanings. Across the languages of the world, gender systems vary widely which differ in the number of classes, in the underlying assignment rules, and how and where gender is marked. There must be 5 foci of an objective description of idioms: the figurative meaning, the contextual situation, the functions, the type, the structure. In the present paper the gender component and the interaction of its variants – masculine and feminine in the structure of the comparative idioms are of the major significance. The lingual-cultural approach and methods of cognitive linguistics to gender studies can clarify gender semantics of comparative idioms in order to give a model representation of English gender-marked idioms, and explore gender lingual-cultural makers in the idiom corpus. A special place in the study of linguistic representation of gender is occupied by idiomatic units which can express established gender stereotypes in language, evaluative priorities of traits, characteristics of men and women, their social roles and relationships between them. There is an opinion that gender is a “socially and culturally conditioned phenomenon” and it is “one of the parameters of the human personality, which includes a biological entity, as well as a culturally determined mental construct, and “social gender in contrast to biological revealed in the process of social, cultural and linguistic practice. Comparative idioms as stereotypes contain people’s social experience -- their use facilitates and simplifies communication, saving the language efforts of interlocutors. Baider stresses that stereotypes of thought highlight beliefs, attitudes and prejudices which prevail in a given community.

Keywords: comparative idiom, concept, gender, male/female, component of meaning, lingual-cultural.

Preliminaries. The term “gender”, its relations to natural gender, and the question of arbitrariness of gender as a linguistic category and related issues have been discussed since Aristotle [Gawronska-Pettersson 2011, p. 58]. Idiomatic units by definition are composed of a sequence of words whose meaning differs from their literal interpretation and their processing may involve further steps, such as realizing that the meaning of the phrases is not literal and associating the words with their figurative meanings

The anthropocentric approach to the comparative idioms of the “HUMAN” conceptual system presupposes the need to consider such an important anthropomorphic parameter of *human* as gender. In the real world *human* is manifested in two genders -- *man* and *woman*, who are simply two biologically different people representing two different worldviews with their moral values, behavior, and social practice. Gender characteristics are the most important ones of a person, which are reflected at all levels of language, especially in the lexical and idiomatic units which have a common semantic component *human*. Since most idioms are based on conceptual metaphors and metonymies, systematic motivation arises from sets of ‘conceptual mappings or correspondences’ that obtain between a source and a target domain in the sense of Lakoff and Koiecses [Lakoff and Koiecses 1987, p. 397].

At present, Strazny points out two major tendencies in exploring gender, first, natural or grammatical when gender of nouns corresponds to the biological sex of the living being, and, second, the social use of gen-

der in the context of gender and language study. Since the 70s of 20th century, the feminist view of gender is based on the primary social or cultural concept of gender rather than biological [Strazny 2013, p. 367–368]. Idiomatics is the branch wherein the primary – biological and social factors are intertwined.

Methodology. There must be 5 foci of an objective description of idioms: the figurative meaning, the contextual situation, the functions, the type, the structure. In the present paper the gender component and the interaction of its variants – masculine and feminine in the structure of the comparative idioms are of the major significance. Cameron claims that idiom has two main functions: pragmatic and referential. The first function is called cognitive, while the other is aesthetic. The pragmatic function is to appeal to the senses, to interest, to surprise, to delight, etc. [Cameron 2003, p. 10]. The referential function, on the other hand, describes a mental process or state, a concept, a person, an object, a quality or an action more comprehensively and concisely than it is possible in language’ Fernando subclassified three more functions of the referential one that are performed by idioms: ideational, interpersonal and relation [Fernando 1996]. Idioms that have ideational function denote content which includes action (*pull an invisible string*), situation (*to be under the thumb of one’s family*), people and things (*made rather a fool of myself*). The other function is interpersonal that fulfills interaction through apologies (*I beg your pardon*), greetings (*Good evening*), directives (*to put it straight*), etc. Finally, idioms in the relational function are used to

secure cohesion and coherence of discourse. These are idioms that integrate information (*on the one hand; on the other hand; in addition*) and a sequence the information (*in the first/second place*).

We are convinced that by applying lingual-cultural approaches and methods of cognitive linguistics to gender studies, we can clarify gender semantics of comparative idioms in order to give a model representation of English gender-marked idioms, and explore gender lingvocultural indicators in the idiom corpus. There are a variety of methods used for investigating idioms and their characteristics, for example, method of identifying dominant lexical items in our corpus of idioms. Dominants of the expression plane of English idioms are more or less limited in both the formal and the semantic aspects. The analysis is rather important though in idiomatics every idiom is unique. And the quantitative investigation of the English idioms [see Pastor, Gloria Corpas, Mitkov 2019] with the common component *human* reveal their frequency scale

State of the art. The study of the “gender factor” has been widely reflected in modern linguistics: Coats 1986, Fernando 1996, Cameron 2003, Butler 2007, Hellinger & Motschenbacher 2015, Moze & Mohamed 2019 et al. who have formulated general principles of gender studies in linguistics and recognized as a social and cultural phenomenon. The research of the definitions of the term “gender” does not reveal any specific differences in linguistics – all of them just complement each other. First, the gender paradigm of expression varies from marked to unmarked means due to the type of language, second, morphological means and, third, syntactic agreement which is quite relative. However, across the languages of the world, gender systems vary widely which differ in the number of classes, in the underlying assignment rules, and how and where gender is marked. [Gawronska-Pettersson 2011, p. 7–8]. First, Hockett 1958, then Corbett 1999 consider the presence / absence of widely understood agreement (phrase agreement, sentence internal agreement and anaphoric relations) to be the criterion for the presence / absence of grammatical gender. As a consequence of this approach, pronominal systems of the English type are regarded as semantic systems, the classification motivated by the agreement between antecedent nouns and anaphoric pronouns [see Corbett 1999, p. 51]. Thus, there is an opinion that gender is a “socially and culturally conditioned phenomenon, and it is “one of the parameters of the human personality, which includes a biological entity, as well as a culturally determined mental construct, and “social gender in contrast to biological revealed in the process of social, cultural and linguistic practice”. The given definitions mostly relate to the twofold interpretation of *gender* as a phenomenon of the both planes – linguistic and social, though the basic components are considered to be “masculine::feminine”.

A special place in the study of linguistic representation of gender is occupied by idiomatic units which express established gender stereotypes in language, evaluative priorities of traits, characteristics of men and women, their social roles and relationships between them [Bylytsia 2013, p. 54; see also Mykhalenko 2019, p. 68]. These issues have been in focus of a num-

ber of publications on “gender idiomatic units” or “gender phraseology” or “phraseological genderology” [see Hockett 1958; Birikh, Mokiienko, Stepanova 1996].

The comparative idioms in their development representing the concept of *human* require a ubiquitous description. However, the object of this paper is limited by the concept of “human” in the framework of comparative idiomatic units. Accordingly, there is an attempt to differentiate between “male” idioms and “female” idioms either supporting their primary stereotypes or breaking their gender component or discontinue the traditional relatedness to one of the gender components.

Corpora analysis. Special attention has been paid to the theory of androcentricity in the English language and the deficiency of female images in speech [see Coates 1986]. The images of men and women presented by English idioms will be further analyzed. From the point of view of gender, all comparative idioms sharing the component *human* can be divided into two large groups, namely: (1) units that are not differentiated by gender; (2) units with an explicit or implicit gender marker.

The most numerous group of idioms, which can describe people of both sexes, and the designation of their gender can be specified in the context only, for example, *(as) still as a mouse, (as) good as gold, (as) slick as ice* and so on. The second group consists of gender-marked idioms: (i) Anthropometric lexemes, such as *man, woman, husband, wife: not who has a fair wife needs more than two eyes; a woman knows a bit more than Satan*. Some comparative idioms with a male component do not always have male reference, but a generalized component like *human: As a man sows, so shall he reap*, where constituents of *man* and *he* are also co-referential with *human = male / female*, and *he = she/he*; (ii) Anthroponymic comparative idioms often refer to religious, mythological, historical, literary male characters: *(as) old as Adam, (as) old as Methuselah (a biblical patriarch whose life span as recorded in Genesis (5:27) was 969 years), (as) wise as Solomon, (as) rich as Croesus*, and female characters: *(as) old as Eve, (as) dead as Queen Ann(e), to laugh like little Audrey*. Some proper names often neutralize their gender reference in some idioms, like *Better master of one than Jack of all trades*; (iii) Agentive comparative idioms, which denote male / female by type of activities, professions, positions, titles, occupations, for example: *live like a king / a lord, work like a navy, swear / talk like a sailor / a trooper, shout / talk like a fishwife*; (iv) “zoo- and phytomorphic symbols” as a rule refer to the male / female and they are able to transfer that feature to the whole comparative idiom, for example: *(as) big as an elephant, (as) strong as a lion, fight like a tiger, (as) gruff as a bear (masculinity) and (as) silly as a goose, (as) busy as a bee, (as) fair as a rose, (as) fresh as a daisy (femininity)*.

(v) noun derivatives are regular constituents of the comparative idioms, for example, *(as) drunk as a fiddler / a piper, be / look etc like a princess*.

These examples show that the leading role in objectifying the image of a woman / man is played by standard images, which are the subject of comparison. However, comparative idioms can also be gender-marked seman-

tically, for example: *(as) beautiful as a (Dresden) doll*, wherein *doll* is a standard female image. Besides, it is evident that due to the role of the gender equality factor there are some masculine or feminine-marked idioms referring to both sexes, i.e. the traditional category gender can be neutralized, for instance, *like an iron lady* (see the history: Mrs Margaret Thatcher after she gave a hard-line speech in 1976, the Soviet press gave her a so briquet of which she was proud: the Iron Lady), where the feminine marker *lady* in fact substituted the masculine marker *man* compare: *like an iron man*. But we cannot consider it as the case of feminizing it must be the case of generalizing when an anthropocentric feature becomes a stronger member than an androcentric one in their opposition. The analysis of our corpus shows that in some hypoconcepts such as “beautiful, attractive” *man* is represented by quite a few comparative idioms, while *woman* is represented by a great deal. Conversely, the hypoconcept “strong” is relevant for males. But we must admit that some comparative idioms, constantly used in speech to nominate certain features of either males or females, acquire the character of gender stereotypes. According to Baider: “since language and thought are linked, stereotypes can be stereotypes of thought and / or linguistics and serve as a reference when assigning significance to observations and experiences in social interactions” [Baider 2013, p. 1166–1167]. In this case the author shares Lehtonen’s opinion: “they are mental structures, which simplify the complex stimuli from one’s environment and facilitate their comprehension” [Lehtonen 1994, p. 173].

Comparative idioms as stereotypes embody people’s social experience – their use facilitates and simplifies communication, saving the language efforts of interlocutors. Baider stresses that stereotypes of thought highlight beliefs, attitudes and prejudices which prevail in a given community [Baider 2013, p. 1166; Armstrong 1996, p. 49]. In everyday use the concept stereotype is used in various contexts: usually the word stereotype is used to refer to members of particular collectives: firemen are courageous, females are less aggressive than men [Lehtonen 2005, p. 63]. Stereotyped comparative idioms are aimed at accurately sketching the image of *human* but stressing the standard image of either *man* or *woman* accepted in the community. Accordingly, the dominant role in stereotyping the image of male or female is played by the subject of comparison, which, acting as part of these units “sets” certain patterns of stereotyping. The results of the corpora analysis distinguish comparative units, which together with other linguistic means participate in forming positive stereotypes of women in English [Nezhelskaya, 2018]: (i) “beauty, attractiveness” crucial for women.: *(as) beautiful as a (Dresden) doll / as a princess, (as) pretty as a picture / as paint;* (ii) “omnipotence”, “ubiquity”: *A woman knows a bit more than Satan; a lover is as sweet as eating raisins;* (iii) “the keeper of the hearth”: *the grey mare is better than a horse;* (iv) «industriousness»: *(as) busy as a bee / as an ant; the fingers of a housewife do.* Under the circumstances the woman attempts to realize the features characteristic of

male like “courage, firmness of character”: *be like an iron lady. Despite more than a yoke of oxen;*(v) «tolerance»: *a blow from current tendencies in representing female in the positive feature the negative feature still prevails* : (i)“appearance”: *(as) ugly as a witch, look like a wet hen;* (ii)“volubility”: *chatter like a magpie; a woman’s hair is long, but her tongue is longer;* (iii)«excessive emotionality»: *There is no fury like a woman’s fury. Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned;* (iv)«excessive fuss»: *(as) busy as a bee (with two tails) / as a hen on a hot girdle / as a hen with one chicken;* (v)“naivety”: *(as) silly as a goose, behave like a dumb Dora;* (vi)«obedience»: *A young woman married to an old man must behave like an old woman;*(vii) “bountifulness»: *A woman can throw out the window more than a man can bring in at the door;* (viii)«weeping»: *It is as great pity to see a woman weep as to see a goose go barefoot. We can underline a male’s traditional negative attitude to women* (ix-)«outlook»: *(as) ugly as a witch, look like a wet hen;* (x) «way of dressing»: *look like mutton, dressed (up) as a lamb, look like a scarlet woman;* (xi) “awkwardness”: *as awkward as a cow on roller skate.* Though the comparison to a mule may refer to both sexes *she/he was stubborn as a mule*

A male’s positive attitude to women represented by a few comparative idioms which is a consequence of the patriarchal society. However, the current state of art and the corpus analysis reveal the frequency of using comparative idioms, primarily due to the socio-cultural changes in the society to women’s equality. Accordingly, the language reflects the reassessment of values and the position of women in the society [Butler 2007], for instance:

a good Jack deserves a good Jill → There is not so bad a Jill, but there’s as bad a Will (або Jack); a woman without a man is like a fish without a bicycle. → A woman needs a man like a fish needs a bicycle.

The masculine comparative idiomatic stereotypes keep on stressing masculine positive features: “physique”: *(as) strong as a bull / as a lion / as an ox, be built like a castle / like a tank; “strong will and determination” as) hard as a flint/ as a nut / as a rock; look like a stone wall;* «courage»: *(as) bold / brave as a lion,(as) game as a cockerel, fight like a tiger, (as) game as Ned Kelly;* «determination»: *as) obstinate / stubborn as a mule / as an ox / as the devil, as firm / steady as a rock;* «diligence»: *work like a navy / like a slave / as a horse;* «intellect»: *(as) clever as a devil,(as) wise as Solomon, (as) clever as a dog;* «reliability»: *a faithful friend is better than gold; better lose a jest than a friend; no doctor like a true friend.*

Frankly speaking, the comparative idioms explore masculine negative stereotypes: “male’s subjection to women”: *behave like a mother’s boy; live like under the cat’s foot;* «superiority»: *a man doesn’t want a woman smarter than he is;* «inclination to hard drinks»: *(as) drunk as a beggar / as a fiddler / as a lord;* «indelicacy»: *(as) gruff as a bear, belike a bull at a gate;* «ferocity»: *(as) fierce as a lion / as a tiger.*

But all the social institutions – educational, cultural, legal, and public – are aimed at fostering equal

relationship of both sexes though their study requires comparative studies in various languages [see Hassan, Khandoker 20013, p. 200].

Findings and perspectives. The gender component is relevant for the HUMAN concept, which is primarily due to the division of humanity into male and female. This gendercomponent of the comparative idi-

oms is mostly masculine in nature -- the outcome of androcentrism created by males A significant part of gender-relevant comparative idioms is actively involved in stereotyping of male and female images However, masculine marked units, for the most part, form a positive image of a man, unlikely feminine marked – mostly a negative imaget of a woman.

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КОМПАРАТИВНІ ІДІОМИ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНОГО ПОЛЯ «ЛЮДИНА» У МОВІ ТА ЕКСТРАЛІНГВАЛЬНІЙ ДІЙНОСТІ

Анотація. Термін «гендер», його стосунок до біологічної статі та питання роду як мовної категорії дискутуються ще з часів Арістотеля. Ідіоматичні одиниці за визначенням складаються з послідовності слів, значення яких відрізняються від їх прямої інтерпретації, що може передбачати подальші кроки: усвідомлення того, що значення словосполучень не є буквальним, а асоціацією слів із їх переносними значеннями. У різних мовах світу гендерні системи мають свої характерні риси за кількістю класів, основними функціями, а також засобами вираження. Виокремлюють 5 різновидів об'єктивного опису ідіом: переносне значення, контекстуальна ситуація, функція, будова. У нашій статті домінують значення виступає гендерний складник та взаємодія його варіантів – чоловічого та жіночого в структурі порівняльних ідіом. За допомогою мовно-культурного підходу та методів когнітивної лінгвістики можемо уточнити гендерну семантику порівняльних ідіом, щоб дати типологічне представлення англійських гендерних ідіом та дослідити

дити гендерні лінгвокультурні показники в структурі значення ідіоми. Особливе місце у вивченні мовного вираження гендеру займають ідіоматичні одиниці, які виражають усталені гендерні стереотипи в мові, оцінювальні пріоритети рис, особливостей чоловіків і жінок, їх соціальних ролей та стосунків між ними. Існує думка, що гендер – «суспільно та культурно зумовлене явище та один із параметрів людської особистості, що включає біологічний чинник, а також культурно зумовлену психічну конструкцію та соціальну стать, на відміну від біологічного вияву, в процесі соціальної, культурної та мовної практики. Ставлення чоловіка до жінок представлене обмеженою кількістю позитивних порівняльних ідіом, що є наслідком патріархального суспільства. Порівняльні ідіоми як стереотипи містять соціальний досвід людей – їх використання полегшує та спрощує спілкування, економлячи мовні зусилля співрозмовників.

Ключові слова: компаративна ідіома, концепт, гендер, чоловіча/ жіноча стать, лінгвокультурологічний, компонент значення.

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