

Phraseological Units Semantically Oriented to a Male Person in Spanish

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Abstract

The article, firstly, seeks to outline the main steps that gender studies have taken in the field of Spanish phraseology. Secondly, it analyses gender-specific phraseological units referring to a male person in the Spanish language. Special attention is paid to their connotation which includes functional-stylistic reference, evaluation, emotiveness and expressivity. The study revealed that Spanish gender-specific phraseological units referring to a male person are predominantly colloquial and expressive expressions of negative connotation. Emotiveness labels are very scarcely presented in Spanish phraseological dictionaries; thus, the article speaks for the need for creating a more accurate phraseological dictionary of the Spanish language.

Key words: Idioms, Gender-specific, Male person, Connotation, Functional-stylistic reference, Evaluation, Emotiveness, Expressivity

INTRODUCTION

In comparison with other branches of linguistics the study of gender and language can be considered young. In the late 60's - early 70's, the women's movement (also known as the feminist movement) became more active in the USA and Germany, which led to the discovery of new horizons in numerous scientific disciplines, including linguistics, where a new direction – feminist linguistics (FL), or feminist criticism of the language – was formed. The focus of feminist linguistics is on the linguistic behavior of men and women, as well as language phenomena associated with the designation of women and men in the language system.

FL began to develop in the Iberian Peninsula much later than in the US and Germany, after the death of the dictator Franco. Today, one can observe a radical change in the consciousness of the traditionally patriarchal, machistic Spanish society. The social and political changes that have taken place in the country in the past few decades have led

to a growing awareness of the Spaniards of their rights and to a rethinking of the role and place of women in society.

Much attention has been recently paid to this problem in Spain. A number of prominent Spanish linguists deal with the study of the gender factor in language and communication, e.g. M^a.Á. Calero Fernández [1], Á. García Meseguer [2-3], S. de Andrés Castellanos [4], M. Bengoechea y M^a. Luisa Calero [5] and others.

In our opinion, the research of O.V. Gorinova [6], which considers the manifestation of sexism on the grammatical level of the Spanish language, is of primary interest. The author emphasizes that FL in Spain, in its attempts to reform the language, followed the same path as in the US, Germany and France:

- word-formation;
- formation of positions and professions in the form of a feminine gender;
- the desire to escape from the “common” masculine gender in favor of a morphological division according to gender.

O.V. Gorinova shares the view of Á. Lopez Garcia and R. Morant that language itself cannot be sexist; it only reflects the sexism that exists in society [7]. Language is an instrument, not an ideology. Therefore, the idea of FL that changes in language will lead to changes in society seems to us idealistic.

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Currently, gender studies in the language deviate from harsh feminist ideas and focus not on discrimination against women in the language, but on studying of real differences in the speech behavior of women and men.

M.S. Krugova [8] devotes her work to the consideration of linguistic gender policy and speech practice in modern Spain in the sociolinguistic aspect. The author researched contemporary Spanish print media, manuals on gender-appropriate usage, published in Spain since the late 80s of the 20th century to modern days, lexicographic publications, and the Internet sites. It proves the fact that reforming the Spanish language from the perspective of gender correctness can be successful and promising if it is not imposed on the society, but is based on the conformity of the new form to the language system, is based on the mass and regular reproducibility of this phenomenon and its public approval.

D.K. Bakhronova [9] studies the reflection of gender stereotypes in idioms with animal name components. The author states that 75% of the PUs with a male name component and 79,3 % of the idioms with a female animal name component have negative connotation. Thus, she makes a conclusion that female gender is perceived more pejoratively than male gender in Spanish phraseology.

M.V. Kut'eva [10] arrives at the same conclusion, examining the verbalization of the categories "male" and "female" in Spanish. Desiring to characterize criminal, vile, nasty personalities, the native speaker of the Spanish language subconsciously searches for nouns that are feminine, not masculine, or nouns with feminine endings.

E.A. Pleujóva and L.G. Gazízova [11] examine the effectiveness of television advertising texts from a gender perspective among Russian-speaking and Spanish-speaking target groups. The authors conclude that the development of an adequate gender- and nationality-sensitive advertising text contributes to its effectiveness.

One of the latest studies in the field of gender is undertaken by I.B. Kotenyatkina [12] who addresses rapid changes in the category of Spanish grammatical gender, especially when nominating women people in accordance with their profession, activity, or position.

METHODOLOGY

The instrument used in this study was a compilation of 150 Spanish phraseological units (PUs) semantically oriented to *a male person*. The PUs were selected from the Dictionary of Spanish Language of the Royal Spanish

Academy [13], a unilingual phraseological dictionary [14] and bilingual phraseological dictionary [15]. The selection was conducted following two criteria by I. Zykova's [16]: semantic and structural.

In accord with the semantic criterion, we singled out PUs with semantic gender markedness, i.e. PUs where a lexeme indicating a male person was present in their definition; for example:

Tener alguien un ramalazo (Darle a alguien un ramalazo) Parecer homosexual. Se usa exclusivamente referido a hombres [14, p. 701]; Lit. To have a fit (To give smb a fit) To look homosexual. Used exclusively for men.

Structural criterion implied selecting PUs with structural gender markedness, i.e. PUs where a lexeme indicating a male person was present among the constituents of a PU; for example:

Ser un hombre con toda la barba to be a real man [15, p. 13]; Lit. To be a man with a whole beard

Then, the analysis of the selected PUs from a connotative angle was undertaken. Connotation, being a macro component of a phraseological meaning (along with signification and denotation), is a set of evaluative, expressive, emotive and functional-stylistic micro components.

Evaluative micro component, which can be positive, negative or neutral, is not reflected in lexicographic description of a PU in the form of labels; therefore, we determined evaluation by the following three criteria: 1. criterion of components (or structural criterion); 2. semantic criterion; 3. extra linguistic criterion. For example:

Ir/venir con las de El Beri Tener malas intenciones. Pasarlo mal. Sufrir muchas penalidades [14, p. 365]; Lit. Go/come with those of El Beri Have bad intentions. Have a bad time. Suffer many penalties.

This PU obtains structural gender markedness because there is a masculine gender component 'El Beri' among its constituents. There is a popular belief that El Beri was a gypsy smuggler who went about the lands of Andalusia and had a bad reputation [14, p. 365]. This extra linguistic information (criterion 3) and the definition of a PU (criterion 2) give us an opportunity to suggest that the PU has negative evaluation.

Let us give an example of a PU with positive evaluation taken from an article by A. Zholobova [17, pp. 12-13] who stresses the fact that there is a complex relationship

between the interpretation of a phraseological meaning and culturally marked constituents of a PU:

The Spanish PU “artificio de Juanelo” means “ingenious and simple idea which solves some inveterate difficulty”. The PU alludes to the watchmaker and Italian hydraulic engineer Juanelo Turriano, who performed many works of mechanical ingenuity in the service of Charles V and Philip II. As in the previous example, extra linguistic information about culture (criterion 3) and the definition of a PU (criterion 2) give us an opportunity to distinguish whether the PU has positive, negative or neutral evaluation.

Emotive micro component is reflected in dictionaries by means of such labels as *irónico* (Eng. ironic), *pejorativo* (Eng. pejorative), *humorístico* (Eng. humorous), etc. For example:

en traje de Adán o como Adán en el paraíso (fig., hum.) in one's birthday suit (hum.), in the raw (fam.), in the nude, in the buff (fam., hum., Br.E.), starkers (fam., hum., Br.E.), stark naked (fam.), naked [15, p. 3]; Lit. in Adam's costume or as Adam in paradise

Expressive micro component might find its reflection in dictionary definitions through intensifiers, for example, adverbs (e.g. *muy* – very, *sumamente* – extremely, etc.), extreme adjectives, emphatic nouns and, rarely, verbs. For example, the definition of the following PU contains such an expressive lexeme as ‘*sumamente*’ (extremely): *Mandar a alguien al infierno/al diablo* (¡Vete al infierno/al diablo!) ¿Hay algún sitio mejor que el infierno para ver en él a quien no queremos precisamente muy bien? Allí mandamos a quien resulta sumamente molesto, a quien no queremos ver o a quien actúa de forma que provoca nuestro disgusto [14, p. 430]. Lit. send someone to hell/to the devil (Go to hell/the devil!) Is there any place better than hell to see somebody who we do not wish anything precisely very good? We send there somebody who is extremely annoying, who we do not want to see or who acts in a way that provokes our displeasure.

Functional and stylistic micro component is designated via labels such as *coloquial* (Eng. colloquial), *desusada* (Eng. old-fashioned), etc. For example:

cada uno es hijo de sus obras 1. loc. verb. coloq. Denota que por la conducta o modo de obrar se conoce a alguien mejor que por las noticias de su nacimiento o linaje [http://dle.rae.es/srv/fetch?id=KOGiy39]; Lit. Each one is the son of his works 1. loc. verb. coloq. It denotes that someone is known better by their conduct or way of acting than by the news of their birth or lineage.

All the PUs with (a) positive, negative and neutral evaluation, (b) emotive labels, (c) expressive intensifiers, and (d) functional-stylistic labels were counted in order to compare their frequency.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Having analyzed the PUs structure and definition, we come to the following results:

Spanish male gender markers can be divided into four classes: 1) anthropometric lexemes (e.g. *hombre* – man, *niño* – little boy); 2) kinship lexemes (e.g. *padre* – father, *hijo* – son); 3) anthroponymic lexemes (i.e. proper names, such as *Pedro* or *Paco*); 4) agentive nouns (e.g. *rey* – king, *cura* – priest). For example:

1. PUs with anthropometric lexemes: *como niño, ña con zapatos nuevos* 1. loc. adj. coloq. Sumamente contento por lo que se acaba de obtener [http://dle.rae.es/?id=QW5mMvv]; Lit. As a boy/girl with new shoes 1. loc. adj. coloq. Extremely happy about what you have got
2. PUs with kinship lexemes: *hijo, ja de su padre* 1. m. y f. coloq. Denota la semejanza del hijo en las inclinaciones, cualidades o figura del padre [http://dle.rae.es/?id=KOGiy39#9OhdV0r]; Lit. Son/daughter of his/her father 1. masc. and fem. coloq. It denotes the likeness of the son/daughter in his/her inclinations and qualities to the figure of a father.
3. PUs with anthroponymic lexemes: *como Pedro por/en su casa* (fig., fam.) quite uninhibitedly, as if one owned the place [15, p. 140]; Lit. Like Pedro by/in his house (fig., fam.)
4. PUs with agentive nouns: *tener la cabeza más dura que un picador* (fig., fam.) to be pigheaded, to be stubborn [15, p. 147]; Lit. to have the head harder than a picador

The frequency of PUs with different male gender markers is presented in Figure 1.

More than half of the PUs (53%) contained male gender markers in both structure and definition. These PUs are said to obtain full gender markedness. 35% of PUs had

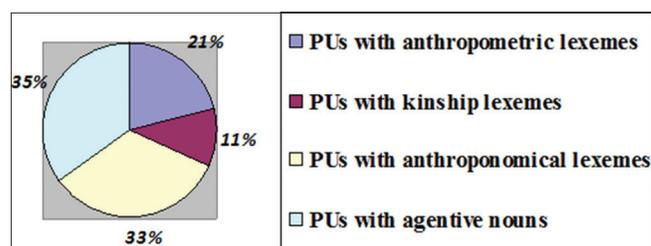


Figure 1: Frequency of PUs with different gender-specific markers

male gender markers present only among their lexical components and 12% of PUs had male gender markers in their definitions (Figure 2).

Interestingly, PUs semantically oriented to a male person can have a female gender marker in their structure; their frequency is 1% out of 12%. For example:

Como una sílfide [estar; quedarse; ser] (Parecer/ser una sílfide) Muy delgada y estilizada. Es extraño que la comparación se aplique a hombres [14, p. 121]; Lit. As a sylph [be; stay; be] (To seem/to be a sylph) Very thin and stylized. It is strange that the comparison applies to men. Indeed, in mythology a sylph is a type of a nymph (a beautiful female spirit) that dwells in the air [14, p. 121].

The analysis of connotation showed that from evaluative perspective PUs semantically oriented to a male person are overwhelmingly of negative evaluation (61%). PUs with positive evaluation constitute 30% of gender-specific phraseology. PUs with neutral evaluation comprise 9% of the database. The above mentioned results are shown in Figure 3. This study finding aligns with the previous work by N.G.Med [18] who suggests that PUs with negative evaluation dominate in the Spanish language; it might be explained by the fact that people’s reaction to negative phenomena is more acute [19].

Surprisingly, according to our statistic data emotiveness seems to be not peculiar of Spanish PUs. Only approx. 10% of all the PUs had an emotive label: humorístico (5%) or pejorative (5%). We believe that this finding does not reflect reality because unilingual and bilingual dictionaries of idioms present the following problem: “aspects regarding pragmatics, register, social, and geographical variation, etc., are usually neglected” [20]. In addition, context samples which “may provide the possibility for realization of emotive, expressive and functional stylistic aspects of phraseological connotation” have not achieved the sophisticated level of quality [21, p. 285; 22]. Our research proved that, indeed, the labels (emotive in our case) are rarely used in dictionary entries; therefore, we cannot draw a firm conclusion on emotiveness of Spanish PUs referring to a male person.

SUMMARY

Expressivity is present in the majority of PUs (80%), which demonstrates that most PUs express notions not in a neutral logical form, but emotionally expressive one if compared with words and free word combinations.

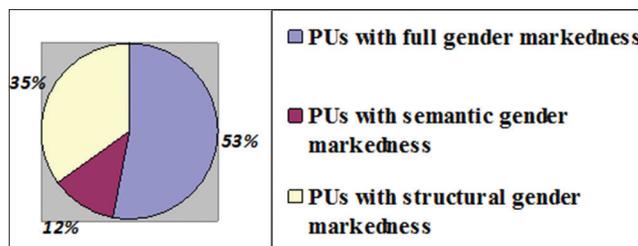


Figure 2: Frequency of PUs with full and partial gender markedness

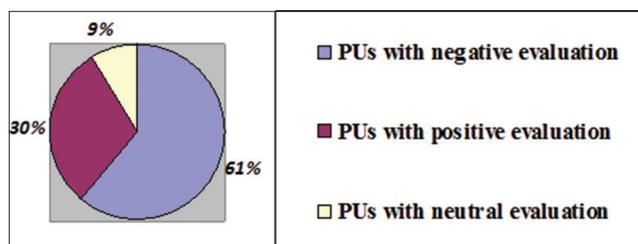


Figure 3 Frequency of PUs with negative, positive and neutral evaluation

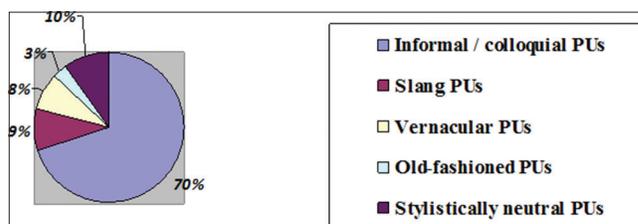


Figure 4 Frequency of PUs with different functional and stylistic labels

As regards functional and stylistic reference, the prevalent part of gender-specific phraseology is informal or colloquial (70%). Slang PUs comprise 9% of the database. Vernacular phraseology (vulgar PUs) is also present (8%). Quite a few Spanish PUs are stylistically neutral (10%). Bookish PUs are not found; however, 3% of the PUs are followed by the label *desusada* (Eng. old-fashioned). The abovementioned results are shown in Figure 4.

CONCLUSION

Gender approach enabled to distinguish 150 Spanish PUs semantically oriented to a male person. The PUs containing male-gender markers are mostly colloquial and expressive expressions with negative connotation. Emotiveness of the majority of the PUs under analysis is yet to be discussed.

We hope that the case study will be interesting for linguists working in the field of phraseology as well as gender studies and phraseography.

Further research involving PUs semantically oriented to a female person in the Spanish language may be undertaken.

Furthermore, a comparative study of gender-specific PUs of different languages can be undertaken.

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