

CONCEPTUAL ISSUES AS A BASIS FOR GENDER STUDIES

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ABSTRACT

This article deals with the conceptual issues of gender linguistics as a new branch of modern linguistics.

Key words: gender linguistics, conceptual issues, language, culture, community, proverbs and sayings, identity

Each nation has own culture, language, traditions and customs. Firstly, we should pay attention to the relationship between language and culture. There is a close relationship between them. But language, thought or culture are not all the same thing, but none of them can survive without the others. Language expresses the patterns and structures of culture, and consequently influences human thinking, manners and judgement. Language is intrinsic to the expression of culture. As a means of communicating values, beliefs and customs, it has an important social function and fosters feelings of group identity and solidarity. It is the means by which culture and its traditions and shared values may be conveyed and preserved. Language is fundamental to cultural identity²³.

Culture is a defining feature of a person’s identity, contributing to how they see themselves and the groups with which they identify. Culture may be broadly defined as the sum total of ways of living built up by a group of human beings, which is transmitted from one generation to another. Every community, cultural group or ethnic group has its own values, beliefs and ways of living. The observable aspects of culture such as food, clothing, celebrations, religion and language are

²³ Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture -Harlow: Addison Wesley Longmans Limited, 1992, P.155.

only part of a person’s cultural heritage. The shared values, customs and histories characteristic of culture shape the way a person thinks, behaves and views the world. A shared cultural heritage bonds the members of the group together and creates a sense of belonging through community acceptance.

Culture is indeed a very influential factor in behavior and attitudes, in what one can or cannot do, or even in what one can or cannot imagine doing. In fact, structures and mental frames that determine our patterns of thinking are deeply embedded in social institutions, in language, in proverbs and sayings.

Proverbs not only belong to a language but also reflect much of its culture. In other words, they are considered to be a mirror reflecting social-cultural traditions in the most reliable ways²⁴.

Proverbs were always the most vivacious and at the same time the most stable part of the national languages, suitable competing with the sayings and aphorisms of outstanding thinkers. In the proverbs and sayings picturesqueness of national thinking was more vivid expressed as well as their features of national character. The proverbs and sayings are the paper of folklore which is short but deep in the meaning. They express the outlook of the amount of people by their social and ideal functions. Proverbs and sayings include themselves the some certain features of historical development and the culture of people.

Vulic and Zergollern-Miletic draw attention to the fact that each nation or country has its own proverbs, the occurrence of which has resulted from the lifestyle and customs of people, who have had strong bonds with the natural world, their religion and traditions at all times²⁵.

In fact, these specific utterances, as well as English proverbs, represent wisdom, experience and commonplace beliefs, moral and social values that are basically the same in many nations. They have strong connection with people’s philosophy on life and contain general observations of practical knowledge, situations and other

²⁴ Profantova Z. Proverbial Tradition as Cultural-Historical and Social Phenomenon, in Durco, Europhras 97: Phraseology and Paremiology. - Bratislava: Academia PZ.1998, P. 302- 307.

²⁵ Vulic S., L. Zergollern-Miletic, Croatian Folk Proverbs Containing Names of Catholic Holidays, 1998, P. 360-365

various aspects of life. Bufiene states that proverbs reflect reality as it is perceived by human beings without neglecting the most trivial, irrelevant phenomenon or situation²⁶.

Proverbs and sayings of a particular nation provide a key to understanding the nation’s frame of mind, what stirs its emotions and provokes its thoughts; they can demonstrate how the national imagination is linked with the national identity and its peculiarities through memories, myths and meanings. The ‘links’ between the proverbs and cultural identity are reciprocal.

Proverbs and sayings make explicit the nation’s hidden constructs through its attitudes towards the concepts of space and time, through nation’s relationship with such values as fate and destiny, power and hierarchy, directness and indirectness, modesty, risk taking, age, and other facets. Proverbs and sayings are constructed to demonstrate the interplay between these meanings and the cultural identity of a nation. On the other hand, these proverbs and sayings shape and determine this or that cultural identity and dictate the rules and behavior codes for this very nation.

Taylor believes that “A proverb is an invention of an individual who uses ideas, words and ways of speaking that are generally familiar²⁷. Because he does so, his sayings win acceptance and circulate in tradition”. Bearing all this in mind, it is evident that an easily memorable form and everyday speech help to establish proverbial tradition, which is handed down from generation to generation. Simple constructions and ordinary vocabulary make proverbs more acceptable to the general public and allow them to be applied in whatever circumstances. In connection to what has been discussed above, one can see that proverbs have not out lived their usefulness as they are still widely used till nowadays. One of the reasons can be noticed in the work of Grigas who states that proverbs can be considered as a result of people’s

²⁶Bufiene G. Patarlių pasaulėvaizdžio bruožai, in Skeivys, Tautosakos darbai XII(XIX). -Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2000, P. 173-178.

²⁷ Taylor A. The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One, in Mieder, W. and A.Dundes (eds). The Wisdom of many: Essays of the Proverb. – Madison: Wisconsin, 1994, P. 320.

psyche, spiritual life, ethics and customs, and, therefore, they are closely related to human beings²⁸.

¹ Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture -Harlow: Addison Wesley Longmans Limited, 1992, P.155.

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4 Bufiene G. Patarlių pasaulėvaizdžio bruožai, in Skeivys, Tautosakos darbai XII(XIX). -Vilnius: Lietuvių literatūros ir tautosakos institutas, 2000, P. 173-178.

5 Taylor A. The Wisdom of Many and the Wit of One, in Mieder, W. and A.Dundes (eds). The Wisdom of many: Essays of the Proverb. – Madison: Wisconsin, 1994, P. 320.

6 Grigas, K. Lietuvių patarlės, lyginamasis tyrinėjimas. -Vilnius: Vaga.1976, P.27.



²⁸ Grigas, K. Lietuvių patarlės, lyginamasis tyrinėjimas. -Vilnius: Vaga.1976, P.27.