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Acquisition (Based on a survey of English proverbs)**

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ABSTRACT

In our days second language acquisition is not just an option but rather a necessity, particularly, when it is about English which is a global lingua franca. It is a permanent process involving consideration both of constantly updating methods and techniques and novel approaches to various aspects of language. Given the intensified discussions of the androcentric nature of some aspects of English and of the so called he/man approach, I decided to check whether and how similar phenomena may evolve among Georgian learners of English. For the sake of this goal, I conducted the following survey.

The object of the survey was the dual meaning of the word man in English proverbs. The word referred either to “a male person” or “a person in general.” The survey was conducted in a group of 10 students.

The students got a survey file while being on the online meeting. The language of the meeting was English. After having read all the proverbs, the students were to write “a male person” or “a person in general” at the end of each proverb. If they were unable to distinguish between the meanings, they could write “I cannot guess.”

The paper presents the results of the survey with an emphasis on the students’ capability of distinguishing between generic and masculine meanings of the word in question and on related linguistic and didactic implications.

Key words: *androcentrism, English as L2, proverbs, survey*

Introduction

Androcentrism is the practice of placing a masculine point of view at the centre of one’s culture, history and even existence. The term androcentrism was introduced by Charlotte Perkins Gilman in a scientific debate. Her book “*The Man-Made World; or, Our Androcentric Culture*” was published in 1911. A man is the face of the mankind defining its past, present and future whereas a woman is an additional element created to deliver new humans. Women have always been considered to be in the position of being in a relationship with men.

Under androcentrism ,masculinity is normative and all things outside of masculinity are defined as other. Masculine patterns of life and masculine mindsets claimed universality while female patterns were considered as deviance. Things that are around us

are regarded as normal and natural, but at the same time something that we call a human nature is a masculine one..

The famous French writer Simone de Beauvoir brilliantly described androcentrism in her article “The Second Sex” without even using this term. The article was initially published in French in 1949. The relationship between men and women is a relationship of a dominant and a submissive. Men have a direct connection with the universe so they get it in the right way. On the other hand, women are obstacles and full of dilemmas. They are not considered to be autonomous or independent. They are additional, unimportant and trivial as opposed to men who are substantial and inseparable parts of our universe. Therefore, women are so called “others”.

The examples of linguistic bias in the English Language

As we can observe, androcentrism has invaded all the fields of human existence including languages and word choices used and made by humans every day. A key feature of androcentric language is that it involves the deployment of semantic and pragmatic values that sit alongside communicative strategies which exploit a particular knowledge of and understanding about gender, which has a certain impact on women’s sense of identity and place in culture and society.

The implicit and explicit linguistic bias against the feminine is evident in the use of the third – person singular pronouns *he* and *she*. The generic use of *he* in a British Act of Parliament in 1850 set the tone for its modern prescriptive import. Historically speaking, such usage can be traced back to Old English texts. English is a “naturally” gendered language in which personal pronouns tend to be pronominalised in a biased way, favouring *he* over *she*.(Martin & Papadelos, 2016, p.3). For example: if a student works hard, he will pass exams successfully. Or: if a teacher plans a lesson properly, he will deliver it with confidence. In spoken language the plural pronoun *they* is used co-referential to grammatically singular antecedents, as in for example, ”A doctor should carefully examine patients before they prescribe medicines.” In recent years, some people have been deliberately using *she* as a generic pronoun. For example: “ If a student works hard, she will pass exams successfully.”

Besides the third-person singular pronouns *he* and *she*, the word *guy* is an appropriate example of the androcentric nature of the English language. In ordinary usage *guy* has an explicit referential function to a man. For instance: “There was a tall guy

wearing a black coat and leather gloves.” The word *guys* is used to refer to men exactly. “A group of guys was gathered in the corner approximately 50 metres away from a group of women.” By extension, the word *guys* can be used for a mixed group of men and women.” “Guys! We need to be more careful or we’ll fail” [a teenager to a mixed-gender group of friends]. (Martin & Papadelos, 2016, p.4)

The word “*Man(Men)*” and its meanings in the English and Georgian Languages.

Perhaps the most prominent illustration of androcentric usage of language is revealed in the word *man* (including its plural form *men*). Various scholars have touched upon its meaning of the word in question. They have drawn attention to the problem of its biased use. The “he/man” approach to language implies use of male terms to refer both specifically to males and generically to human beings. In linguistic terms, some have characterized the male as an unmarked; the female a marked category. The unmarked category represents both maleness and femaleness, while the marked represents femaleness only (Martyna, 1980, p.483).

Since my paper is immediately concerned with the word *man*, I will discuss its meanings in English in details. The word has the following meanings:

1. An adult male person, as distinguished from a boy or a woman: *The man standing on the river bank disappeared.*
2. A member of the species *Homo sapiens* or all the members of this species collectively, without regard to sex: *prehistoric man.*
3. The human individual as representing the species, without reference to sex; the human race; humankind: “That’s one small step for man. One giant leap for mankind.”
4. A husband
5. A male lover or sweetheart.
6. A male follower or subordinate: *the king’s men.*
7. A male employee or a representative.
8. A male having qualities considered typical of men: Be a man!
9. A male servant
10. A valet

Initially, *man* was a generic term. Old English used *wer* and *wif* as the words for adult male and female human beings. At the turn of the 1st and 2nd millennia A.D., *man*

became a word for an adult male, retaining the initial meaning, while *wer* began to disappear (surviving only in werewolf) in the late 13th century and was totally replaced by *man*. Thus, the two meanings were conveyed by the word. (Kikvidze, 2015, p.19)

Yet the question of what “he” and “man” really mean is fully answered neither by turning to dictionary definitions nor by consulting the intentions of their users. Good intentions are not enough, unfortunately, to guarantee that generic meaning will be conveyed. And guided tours through Latin and Old English are not enough to guarantee that the generic masculine is used clearly and fairly today. (Martyna, 1980, p.487).

It would be noteworthy to look at meanings of *k'ac'i* (*man*) in the Georgian language in order to detect similarities and differences between the meanings of the two words in both languages..

Irrespective of background distinctions , the English *man* and Georgian *k'ac'i* appear to have a lot in common. Based on the *Explanatory Dictionary of the Georgian Language* , it has the following meanings:

1. Human being
2. Male person
3. Call. Husband
4. Obs. Manservant
5. Errand-boy
6. Indefinite pronoun one:”one can agree with that”
7. Final component of a compound: *jaris-k'ac'i*-army-GEN-man-NOM. (soldier)

As we see, both the English *man* and Georgian *k'ac'i* initially referred to a human being in general. Later, both items took on the meaning of “an adult male person,” retaining the initial sense. Notwithstanding the co-existence of the meanings, Georgian speakers do not find any traces of linguistic sexism and androcentric bias in the said practice and, thus, do not tend to offer any reformative steps. (Kikvidze, 2015, p.20).

The Survey

While reading and studying various research papers on the subject, I decided to check if such bias existed in the students who are studying English as a second language. For the sake of this goal, I conducted a survey. As I mentioned above, English *man* has a lot of meanings but I decided to choose only two of them: *man*-a male person and *man*-a person in general. The object of the survey was the dual meaning of the word *man* in

English proverbs. The word referred either to “a male person” or “a person in general.” The survey was conducted in a group of 10 students. They are 11th and 12th graders. Their level of English proficiency is Intermediate+ (B1+) according to European framework. They are talented, determined and hard-working students. The students have a relevant level in all four skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking). They are able to translate proverbs correctly and understand their meanings adequately. I have been teaching English to them for 5 years, hence, when I asked them to take part in the survey, they were more than eager to participate in it.

The students got the survey form while being on the online meeting. The meeting lasted for two hours. The first half was for filling in the form. The second one was allocated for the discussion. The students were to read each proverb and write “a male person”, “a person in general” or “I cannot guess” at the end of each proverb. The language of the meeting was English. They did this task independently thus they had no communication with each other during the first period of the meeting. An hour later, I started discussing the results with the students. They read proverbs one by one. Whoever read the proverb, had to explain its meaning too. Then the person reading the proverb said the answer. If anyone had a different answer had to persuade the other students that their answer was correct. If there was no clear answer and the students could not come to conclusion, I announced the correct answer and explained why it was the correct one. The meeting was lively and the students were actively involved in the discussion.

I could say that the results were surprisingly impressive. Out of 10 students, one student had 48 answers correct (96 %). Four students got 43 (86%) right and five of them had 40 (80%) answers correct. I had the role of a facilitator. I let them express their opinions on the proverbs, discuss and share ideas with each other. The students were amazed by how much more interesting English became when discussed from linguistic points of views. The students asked me to conduct more surveys as they saw English from different angles and this was a breaking point for them to research further.

Concluding Remarks

The androcentric nature of the language is perfectly represented in using male-related words to refer to both males and females.

Such nature is characteristic for every language more or less, so conducting a survey among Georgian students who are studying English as their second language would

show them the differences and similarities in their first and target languages.

Language acquisition is a complicated process and conducting surveys based on word meanings is a helpful hand for both teachers and students.

The survey I conducted showed me how much progress my students can make if they think, discuss and express themselves in the target language.

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Appendix

The students filled in the following survey form. They were given detailed instructions before they started working on it. The proverbs were arranged in no particular order.

Name:

Grade:

Date:

Linguistic Survey on the Word “Man (Men)” in English Proverbs

Please complete the survey about meanings of the word “man(men)” occurring in the following English proverbs. The word man has different meanings. However, the present survey is focused on two of them: Man may occur as a male person and also a person in general. In the proverbs below you should distinguish between the meanings of this word. Write “a male person”, “a person in general” or “I cannot guess” at the end of each line. You will have two hours to complete the survey. After completing the survey, we will discuss our answers and find out which ones are correct. The proverbs are arranged in no particular order. Thank you for your participation.

Proverbs containing the word “man(men)”

1. Men are but children of larger growth.
2. An old man is twice a boy.
3. Honest men marry soon, wise men not at all.
4. A man without money is no man at all.
5. Man is wolf to man.
6. One man’s meat is another man’s poison.
7. Clothes don’t make the man.
8. Opportunity knocks at every man’s door.
9. A man is known by the company he keeps.
10. Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.
11. The wealthiest man has the biggest hump.
12. A man’s home is his castle.
13. It’s easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of god.
14. Time and tide wait for no man.
15. A drowning man will clutch at a straw.

16. Boldly go there where no man has gone before.
17. Every man has a price.
18. In the land of the blind, the one-eyed man is king.
19. Man proposes, God disposes.
20. A hungry man is an angry man.
21. Every man is the architect of his own fortune.
22. When the wind is in the east, it's neither good for man nor beast
23. Man cannot live by bread alone.
24. You can't keep a good man down.
25. A man without a smiling face mustn't open a shop.
26. A tree is known by its fruit and a man by his deeds.
27. Give a man enough rope and he will hang himself.
28. A man who is his own lawyer has a fool for a client.
29. Rich man's joke is always funny.
30. You should know a man seven years before you stir his fire.
31. There is an hour wherein a man might be happy all his life, could he find it.
32. There is no good accord where every man would be a lord.
33. Try not to become a man of success but a man of value.
34. Two things a man should never get angry at: what he can help and what he cannot.
35. The coat makes the man.
36. The healthful man can give counsel to the sick.
37. The man in boots doesn't know the man in shoes.
38. The rich man may dine when he will, the poor man when he may.
39. The riches of the mind may make a man rich and happy.
40. The wit of one man, the wisdom of many.
41. If a man deceives me once, shame on him; but if he deceives me twice, shame on me.
42. No man can play the fool so well as the wise man.
43. In the end, a man's motives are second to his accomplishments.
44. No man is content with his lot.
45. Man learns little from success, but much from failure.
46. God help the rich man, let the poor man beg.
47. Hope often deludes the foolish man.
48. A man may die old at thirty and young at eighty.
49. Authority shows the man.
50. Do not correct a fool or he will hate you, correct a wise man and he will appreciate you.