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Gender and language: Gender Implications in Proverbs (The Kartvelian Case)¹

ABSTRACT:

Gender studies have been remarkably popular among the representatives of different scientific fields in recent times. These topics appear to interest Sociolinguistics, Culturology, Anthropology and other neighboring disciplines besides Linguistics itself. Studying proverbs of the peoples all over the world as one of the perfect mediums for observing and comparing different cultures, is crucial in many respects. Studying proverbs from Gender perspective do not represent an exception. Highlighting and accentuating gender aspects contained in proverbs becomes particularly important while talking about cultures that are rich with masculine or feminine tendencies. Proverbs can be considered as an important medium for the representation of the stereotypes existed in any society, since they are the reflection of the knowledge and experience accumulated over the centuries within the culture. Human wisdom and the system of perspectives concentrated in proverbs determine the core nature of a certain culture. Thus, the structural-semantic analysis of proverbs demarcates the general picture built upon the common beliefs, viewpoints and global perspectives of a certain society.

Key words: Kartvelian languages, gender stereotypes, language and gender, proverb

Introduction

Choosing closely related Kartvelian Languages as data for the analysis of abovementioned issues is conditioned by the research hypothesis as well. Precisely, it is known that the basic stock of Kartvelian proverbs is common Georgian, to be more precise, unified common Kartvelian, since these Proverbs had a common path of origination, passing from generation to generation and development. Taking all these factors into consideration,

Kartvelian cultural space (where, by the way, androcentric tendencies are more conspicuous) differences based on deep national perspectives are less expected, because people speaking these languages have shared historical experience and intentions towards unified Georgian literary language. Our **aim** is to analyze Gender stereotypes reflected in the proverbs of Kartvelian languages and to highlight similar differences in unified Kartvelian cultural space.

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In specialized literature gender is equalled to sex, which “illuminates the characteristics of male and female speech in a language. Accordingly, Gender Linguistics studies the stereotypes characteristic of male and female speech.” (Kurdadze, 2008: p. 109)

Numerous works are being done in present day Georgian as well as European scholar fields referring the examination and exposure of interrelation of language and gender. Despite this, we still do not have sufficient conclusions about male and female social roles, their manifestation on different levels, existing limits and priorities, etc. Since we do not encounter Grammatical gender in any closely related languages of Kartvelian language family, there are only male/ female indicative words in Georgian, Megrelian, Laz and Svan languages. This very principle guides the qualification and classification of the proverbs accessible to us.

As shown by existed studies, uneven and unequal representation of the people of different sexes can be considered as universality at some point, which is called **Gender asymmetry**. In this respect the following case requires our attention: “It is considered that the image of the world is pictured in a language according to man’s vision, therefore language is not only anthropocentric, i.e. oriented towards human,

but androcentric too, i.e. oriented towards man as well. More precisely, language creates the world image built upon man’s standpoint, where the subject is the man whose perspective is obvious; and the object is a woman, she appears to be a “stranger”, or is completely ignored... Georgian literature and folklore requires a very specific approach and the consideration of numerous factors in terms of Gender asymmetry and Gender-related research in general.” (Kurdadze, 2011: p. 77).

Gender Implications in the Kartvelian Proverbs

The fact that Gender asymmetry in a language is a universal case is proven by Kartvelian proverbs as well. As it was mentioned above, in unified-Kartvelian language area the majority of gender-specific proverbs reveal androcentric tendencies and, accordingly, male dominancy, that will be verified by the material presented in groups below. The first group is consisted by the proverbs, where the male agent is preferred over the female one. Two subgroups can be allocated here:

a (1). Proverbs, where the male preference over a female is emphasized by comparing and creating contrast between them:

Georgian:

(1) **L1:** ვაჟი სახლის ბურჯია, ქალი – სხვათა ლუკმაა (<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=16609>).

L2: važi saxlis buržia, kali – sxvata lukmaa.

Word by word: “Son is the bastion of the family, woman is the morsel of others”.

Conceptual equivalent: “The elder son is the support of the family”

(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=16609>) / “A woman builds her own house”

(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=17197>)

Laz:

(2) **L1:** ბაბაში ნენა ნანაქ ვა გოგუაფს (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 202).

L2: babaši nena nanak va goguaps.

Word by word: „Mother will not provide you with the discipline of your father“.

Svan:

(3) **L1:** ფიშირ დინა ლაჭტარ ესერ ლი ი ფიშირ ნაღუჟურ – ლაზიგარ (Davitiani, 1973: p. 144).

L2: pišir dina laçtär eser li i pišir nağûžur – läzigar.

Word by word: “Many daughters are a curse, numerous sons are flourishers”.

It is worth mentioning that we encounter some proverbs that portray a man or a woman without mentioning the opposite sex (which in

our case can be seen as a somewhat opposing half), however, in such cases the other sex is always implied. Respectively, the second subgroup of the first group is:

a (2). Proverbs that depreciate women’s role and face and, hence, reveal male preference, but without mentioning the latter.²

Georgian:

(4) **L1:** ქალი სხვისი საქონელიაო (Prov. I: p. 133).

L2: kali sxvisi sakoneliao.

Word by word: “Daughter is the property of others”.

² It must be mentioned that unlike proverbs in **a (1)**, proverbs in **a (2)** are more frequent in Kartvelian languages, that must be conditioned by the Paroemial principle characteristic of proverbs, laconic nature, quickness and flexibility of a phrase. It is also interesting that proverbs expressing male preference may not mention the female agent, only male one, and the preference tend to be distributed by praising and admiring him, that to a certain extent prevents the necessity to mention female agent at all. Cf.

Megrelian: L1: ქომოლკოჩი ცუდეს ვარენ, კიდალევი ინგარანია (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 144).

L2: komolkoči `udes varen, kīdalepi ingarania.

Word by word: “Even walls cry when a man leaves house”.

Laz: L1: ბაბაში ნენაფეში ჟინ ოხთიმუ უნონ (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 202).

L2: babaši nenapeši žin oxtimu unon.

Word by word: “Listen to your father’s advice”.

Svan: L1: ქორლისგა ლეღუმარიშ (ღუაჟმარემ) მენჩალ ესერი ხოჩა ლი (Davitiani, 1973: p. 152).

L2: korlisgā leğūzmāriš (ğūažmarem) mənçal eseri xoča li.

Word by word: “Even the shadow of a man fills the house”.

Megrelian:

(5) **L1:** ძღაბიში ერჩქინას ღორონთო
ვანოკათუენია (Sherozia & Memishishi,
1994: p. 171).

L2: zǵabiši erčkinas ğoronti vanoĸatuenia.

Word by word: “God does not participate
in woman’s creation”.

Conceptual equivalent: “A woman is
never helped by God” / “A woman’s work is
never done” (<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=17206>).

Laz:

(6) **L1:** ოხორჯალეფეშა კაპულა ვარ
ნიდვენ (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p.
247).

L2: oxorǵalepeša ĸapula var nidven.

Word by word: “One should not lean back
on women”.

Svan:

(7) **L1:** აშუ ნეზუიშ თელ ჩხარა ზურალს
ესერ ოთგთალახ (Davitiani, 1973: p. 18).

L2: ašû nezûiř tel čxara zurals eser
ototalax.

Word by word: “Nine women shared a
sow’s brain”.

The majority of the proverbs given here
may seem obsolete or less popular, and may
not be distinctive in terms of frequent use,
which is normal, however, it is worth
mentioning, that Kartvelian languages are not

the exception regarding such stereotypical
depiction of a female agents and sharply
exposed Gender asymmetry. For instance, a
Rajasthani (Rajasthan – a state in Northern
India) proverb says: „When a girl is born,
don’t take care of her, she will grow like a
cactus; when a boy is born, take good care of
him, as you would with a rose tree“ (Rasul,
2015: p. 2). Proverbs with similar narrative
can be encountered in English language as
well: i) Women are wacky, women are vain;
they’d rather be pretty than have a good brain
(Rasul, 2015: p. 3); ii) Women in state affairs
are like monkeys in glass-shops (Rasul, 2015,
p. 6); iii) Women are the devil’s nets (Rasul,
2015: p. 8).

Another interesting fact in this respect is
that in 2003 in the preface of “Selected
Georgian Proverbs” compiled by Karlo
Jorjaneli, the author writes: “The collection
had to exclude as well: «Woman’s brain got
eaten by a goat», «Long of hair and short of
brains» and other similar proverbs that were
morally obsolete and no longer relevant”.³
Apparently, Karlo Jorjaneli legitimately labels
these proverbs as **obsolete** and **irrelevant**.

In opposition to the discussion before,
another group of proverbs are encountered in
Kartvelian languages, precisely, proverbs that

³ see. K. Jorjaneli, Selected Georgian Proverbs.
“Merani” Publishing House, Tbilisi, 2003.

carry the female preference narrative, her almightiness. Similar to the case (a), two subgroups were allocated:

b (1). Proverbs that carry the female preference narrative, depicting her almightiness comparing and in opposition to the male one:

Georgian:

(8) **L1:** ქალის გაბედნიერებული კაცი ღმერთმა ვერ გააუბედურაო, ქალის გაუბედურებული კაცი ღმერთმა ვერ გააბედნიერაო
(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=15397>).

L2: kalis gabednierebuli kaci ġmertma ver gaaubeduraa, kalis gaubedurebuli kaci ġmertma ver gaabednierao.

Word by word: “God could not dispirit a man delighted by a woman; and delight a man dispirited by a woman”.

Conceptual equivalent: “Where the devil cannot come, he will send a woman”
(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=10048>).

Laz:

(9) **L1:** ნანაშანტეში გიყონ-ნა, ბაბათი ბაბაშანტეში იყვენ (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 240).

L2: nanašanteši ġiqoon-na, babati babašanteši iqven.

Word by word: “When one has a stepmother, father also becomes a stepfather” (<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=7513>).

b (2). Proverbs that show female preference, her almightiness without mentioning the opposite sex:

Georgian:

(10) **L1:** ქალმა თუ გაიწია, ცხრა უღელი ხარ-კამეჩი ვეღარ დააკავებსო
(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=10048>).

L2: kalma tu ġaičia, cxra uġeli xar-kameči veġar daakavebso.

Word by word: “Nine oxen cannot subdue an angry woman”.

Conceptual equivalent: “Where the devil cannot come, he will send a woman” / “A woman can make or break a man”
(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=10048>).

Megrelian:

(11) **L1:** ოსური ქოთი ქიდგობორუანს დო ქოთი ერჭყვიდუნსია (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 110).

L2: osuri koti kidgoxoruans do koti erčqvidunsia.

Word by word: “Wife (woman) can build your life or exterminate you with the same success”.

Conceptual equivalent: “Where the devil cannot come, he will send a woman” / “A

woman can make or break a man“

(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=10048>).

Laz:

(12) **L1:** ნოსეი ნანამ ბერეფე ნოსეი

ოყვენან-და (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 242).

L2: nosei nanas berepe nosei iqvenan-ja.

Word by word: “Wise woman has wise children”.

Svan:

(13) **L1:** ზურალ ისგ’ პათეშუი, ეჯი კოჯ
ესერი ჩუ კეშნი (Davitiani, 1973: p. 40).

L2: zural isg ätešüi, eži kož eseri ču
kešni.

Word by word: “Woman’s rage can
break a rock”.

Conceptual equivalent: “Where the devil
cannot come, he will send a woman” / “A
woman can make or break a man”

(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=10048>).

On the basis of empirical data given
here, interesting circumstances are displayed
by another group of Kartvelian languages:

*c. proverbs where male and female
agents are pictured positively, that ruins
Gender asymmetry:*⁴

⁴ Unlike the groups **a** and **b**, we have not managed to allocate subgroups in this case, because we think that mentioning both sexes in the given proverbs makes an essential difference.

Georgian:

(14) **L1:** ვაჟიშვილი ოჯახის საყრდენია,
ქალიშვილი სიმშვენე (Jorjaneli, 2003: p.
92).

L2: važišvili ožaxis saqrdenia, kališvili
simšvene.

Word by word: “Son is the pillar of the
family; daughter is the adornment”.

Conceptual equivalent: “The elder son is
the support of the family”

(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=16609>).

Svan:

(15) **L1:** დინა ი ნალჷჷურ ქერდ’ ესერ
გეზალ ლიბ (Davitiani, 1973: p. 34).

L2: dina i nağûžur kərd eser gezal lix.

Word by word: “Son or daughter, both
are children”.

Another separate group must be
designated in the proverbs of Kartvelian
languages:

*d. proverbs where male and/ or female
agents are characterized by their main
occupation or personality traits:*

Georgian:

(16) **L1:** ტირილი ქალის საქმეა, გაძლება
– ვაჟკაცისაო
(<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=17112>).

L2: țirili kalis sakmea, gazleba –
važkacisao.

Word by word: “Crying is a job for a women, man must endure”.

Conceptual equivalent: “Women cry, men endure” (<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=17112>).

Megrelian:

(17) **L1:** ოსურკობიში იარაღი კიჟინი (ბილამური) რენია (Sherozia&Memishishi, 1994: p. 111).

L2: osurkočiši iaraği kižini (čilamuri) renia.

Word by word: “Woman’s scream (tears) is her ultimate gun”.

Conceptual equivalent: “A woman can beat the devil” / “Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned” (<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=19906>).

Laz:

(18) **L1:** ქიმოლი კობის თი ომცქუ ვარ უბქინ (Sherozia & Memishishi, 1994: p. 255).

L2: kimoli kočis ti omcku var učkin.

Word by word: “Real man does not praise himself”.

Conceptual equivalent: “Man’s praise in his own mouth stinks” (Br.) (<http://idioms.tsu.ge/?p=15319>).

Svan:

(19) **L1:** ლაკუტანი ესერ ზურალს ხესგუიმ, ფაყუ – ლქაჟმარა (Davitiani, 1973: p. 49).

L2: laḳûcani eser zurals xesgûiš, paḳû – ḡûažmara.

Word by word: “Head covering suits women; hat suits men”.

In respect of gender stereotypes reflected in paremiological stock, it must be mentioned that the idea that a woman is associated with beauty, tenderness and other similar characteristics and man – to strength and intelligence, is maintained not only in proverbs of Georgian, Megrelian, Laz and Svan but of foreign languages as well, that is worth the attention in respect of Typology. For instance: *More beauty than a peacock, but the intelligence of a block of wood* (Mangolian); „*A doll’s head and an empty brain*“ (Polish); (Rasul, 2015: p. 3); *The more women look in their glass the less they look to their house* (Rasul, 2015: p. 5).

Conclusion

Thus, as shown by the analysis of the appropriate empirical data and respectively designated abovementioned groups of adverbs, gender stereotypes reflected in Kartvelian paremiological stock do not express only androcentric tendencies. In parallel to Gender asymmetry reflected proverbs, the tendency of attempts for equalization of gender stereotypes are encountered, that makes unable to firmly state

that the proverbs of Kartvelian languages built on male-female interrelation, and ones that reveal their faces, carry discriminative nature. In such cases the time and purpose of the formation of a certain proverb gains crucial importance, to what extent was it spread and established in folks, what type of social-economic factors conditioned his origin, etc.⁵ The issues discussed above are an object of a separate study, that will demand the extension of empirical data and further discussion of gender aspects in the context of the neighboring disciplines, that enables us to present the abovementioned problems viewed from a different angle. Furthermore, it is also interesting to take into consideration the environment of other languages in this respect.

⁵ In this respect, the idea according to which “social basis for gender difference between a man and a woman shows up in different methods of raising boys and girls, and is later conditioned by tough outdoor tasks done by men and domestic activities done by women. In fact, these social factors determine the gender domination of men.” (Kurdadze, 2008: p. 110)

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Abbreviations and Contractions

- L1** – Linguistic data in the original language;
L2 – Transcription.