

The Negative Evaluation of Women in Russian and Yorùbá Proverbs and Sayings

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Abstract

Proverbs and sayings are an integral part of the spiritual treasures of the culture and language of a people. Proverbs and sayings are very important aspects of language use as a result of their metaphorical essence and widely acceptable truths; they depict the worldview and cultural beliefs of the people in any society. This article examines the image of women in Russian and Yoruba proverbs and sayings, with a focus on the negative evaluation of women. The paper employs the descriptive and comparative approach to bring to light the linguistic and national peculiarities of proverbs and sayings describing women in Russian culture and Yoruba culture.

Keywords: Proverbs; Sayings; Cultural linguistics; Gender; Woman; Anthropocentrism

Аннотация

Пословицы и поговорки неотъемлемые части духовных сокровищ культуры и языка народа. Пословицы и поговорки важные аспекты употребления языка из-за их образной сущности и общепринятая истина; они изображают важное мировоззрение и культурные верования народа в любом социуме. В статье рассматривается образ женщины в русских пословицах и в пословицах народа йоруба. Особое внимание уделяется отрицательным качествам женщин которые отражены в пословицах. Сопоставительный и описательный анализ пословичных единиц проводится с целью выявления лингвокультурных и национальных специфик пословиц, характеризующих женщин в русской культуре и в культуре йоруба.

Ключевые слова: Пословица; лингвокультурология, гендр, женщина, антропоцентризм.

Introduction

It is generally believed that the worldview of a people is encapsulated in their proverbs and sayings as embedded in their language, which is an exclusive human property and a direct reality of thought. It is the key to the incredible complex semantics of culture (Алефериенко 2014; Вишневская & Фалоджу, 2014).

Language is also the mirror through which it is possible to examine social perspectives and human behavioural patterns. All kinds of social concepts, including gender discrimination, are reflected through language. Since language mirrors the society, to a certain extent it reflects social and cultural concepts through proverbs and sayings. Proverbs and sayings are pearls of folk wisdom and their main purpose is to give people's assessment of the objective reality of phenomena as an expression of the world. The mindset, worldview, intelligence, customs, traditions, beliefs, superstition and general way of life of the people are viewed and portrayed through proverbs and sayings. The study of proverbs is referred to as paremiology (from Greek παροιμία - paroimía, "proverb") and it dates back to Aristotle.

Many scholars have written extensively on proverbs; however, there is no universally acceptable definition of proverbs. In Meider's view, a proverb is a 'short, generally known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form and which is handed down from generation to generation' (Meider, 1985; p. 119). However, N.R Norrick, a linguist, opines that a proverb is a traditional, conversational, didactic genre with general meaning, a potential free conversational turn, preferably with figurative meaning. V. Dahl, the Russian collector who is regarded as the father of proverbs and sayings in Russia, examined proverbs as a product of an extremely popular medium of communication among the people. According to Dahl, a proverb "это коротенькая притча; это «суждение, приговор, поучение, высказанное обиняком и пущенное в оборот под чеканом народности»." ». (Даль, 2007; p.13) – A proverb is a short parable; it is the judgment, opinion, sentence and precepts expressed in plain outwardness and put in circulation under the people's stamp. Investigating the relationship between language and culture has led to research in gender. The question of gender has spawned considerable debate in contemporary research the world over.

We therefore decided to compare the image of women reflecting negative human qualities in Russian and Yorùbá in order to bring out the cultural and linguistic peculiarities as well as the national and universal peculiarities attributed to women in Russian and Yorùbá cultures. This paper is structured as follows: Section 1 introduces the paper, Section 2 discusses anthropological linguistics, Section 3 discusses gender study as a branch of linguistics, Section 4 examines Russian proverbs and sayings on women, Section 5 analyses negative human qualities

about women reflected in Russian and Yorùbá proverbs and sayings, section 6 highlights the findings of the study while 7 is the conclusion.

Anthropological Linguistics

Anthropological linguistics is an integrative study that examines the worldview of a people in the light of their national language, which is seen as the exponent of a peculiar national or ethnic mentality (Махметова, 2015). It is a branch of linguistics that fuses linguistics and anthropology. Anthropological linguistics studies the manifestation of the culture of a people as reflected in language. The aim of anthropological linguistics is the vivid description of the world picture that is presented in the colloquial speech of native speakers in diverse discourses and the results of the personification of the material and spiritual culture of a living language (Токарев, 2009).

Our world is understood, interpreted and expressed by the means of language. In order to know and comprehend language, it is necessary to pay attention to its native speaker, since language is directly related to life, human activities and human thought.

The development of anthropocentric paradigm was based on the consciousness that language is a human establishment and it cannot be understood and explained beyond its relationship with the creators of language and the users (Humans) (Кубрякова, 1994). Anthropocentrism has been defined by E.S. Kubriyakova as 'the tendency to make man the focal point of all theoretical premise' Humans are not simply involved in the analysis of certain phenomena but also determine the prospects of this analysis and its ultimate goal (Кубрякова, 1995).

Gender Study as a Branch of Linguistics

Gender is an important characteristic of personality that determines a person's social, cognitive and cultural position in the world. The performance of male and females is of interest to linguists in the context of disciplines like psychology, philosophy, mythology, and cultural studies. The study of how language use varies by gender has become an established linguistic tradition that is interdisciplinary in nature. This study is known as gender linguistics (Кирилина, 2000). In contemporary studies, research in gender studies as an integrative direction of linguistic analysis within the framework of the anthropocentric paradigm of knowledge is in demand in the circle of contemporary humanities.

Gender is a socially constructed definition of women and men. It is not the same as sex (biological characteristics of women and men) and it is not the same as women. Gender is determined by the conception of tasks, functions and roles attributed to women and men in society and in public and private life. According to the dictionary of gender terms, gender is defined as ‘the sum total of social and cultural norms that society prescribes to be carried out by people based on their biological sex’ (Денисовой, 2002).

Russian Proverbs and Sayings on Women

Russian proverbs and sayings portray knowledge of life, the world outlook and the worldview of Russians about women. They express the national feature of the Russian language and Russians more clearly (Аникин, 1987). The lexeme *баба* has the following meaning in Russian: 1 *Деревенская женщина* (a peasant woman); 2) (любая женщина) any dame, married or matured lady). The lexeme *дева* in Russian means a maiden or a young girl. These lexemes *баба* and *дева* feature very frequently in Russian proverbs and sayings. - *Баба с возу - кобыле легче* — (Good riddance to bad rubbish); *Не было у бабы забот, купила баба порося* — (One has invited difficulty oneself); *Девка красна до замужества* — (A maiden is beautiful before marriage) *Держи девку в тесноте, а деньги в темноте* — (Hold a girl tightly, and money in darkness). Expressions about intellectual faculties of simple Russian women are not focused on the description of the average generally accepted norm of intelligence. There are two categories of women usually presented in Russian proverbs and sayings judging by their actions: foolish and senseless (глупая и нелепая): *Ладила баба в Ладоду, а попала в Тихвин*, — A woman is either with a developed intuition that replaces her logic or compensates for her lack of intelligence and experience. The Russian proverb *Бабий ум лучше всяких дум* translates to ‘a woman’s wit is better than every council representative’. The universal philosophical opposition is reflected in Russian proverbs and sayings (feeling – mind) «чувство – разум» which is realised via the lexical contrast of ‘a woman's mind – thoughts: *бабий ум – думы*.

In Russian proverbs and sayings, a female’s mind is often described and compared with household objects particularly against the backdrop of the description of everyday tasks:

Example 1

- *Красавица без ума – что кошелек без денег.* — A beautiful woman without sense – is like a purse without money.

- *Пусти бабу в рай, она и корову за собой ведет.* — Allow a woman to paradise, she leads a cow.

Russian proverbs and sayings portray the female intellect in comparison to the stereotypical 'exchange value' «обменная стоимость» of the female mind that is determined by beauty which compensates for stupidity, and vice versa: житейский ум не — приглядную внешность (the worldly intellect – ugly appearance). Example (2) illustrates this –)

Example 2

- *Волос долог, да ум короткий* (long hair, but short mind).
This proverb proves that in traditional Russian society, a woman's logical reasoning in Russian proverbs and sayings is assessed from the male point of view. Apart from this, there are other negative attributes of scorn and ridicule attributed to women in Russian proverbs and sayings, as can be seen in example 3:

Example 3

- *Баба бредит, да кто ж ей верит* — (A woman is delirious, but who believes her).
- *Баба бредит, да черт ей верит* — (A woman is delirious, the devil believes her).

The comparison of reasoning with nonsense, that is, to reason and to argue as if to rave, is the appearance of word signal traits that indicate a critical relationship to a woman's sense. In archaic stereotypical situations a woman, especially a traditional Russian woman, is not deemed to possess the same level of intelligence as men. However, beyond the female logic, Russian proverbs and sayings are carefully used in an ironic manner. It is noteworthy that the average mental capability of a woman does not at all mean the presence of intellect, but always gravitates towards the path of folly: Дура не дура, а ума нет (A fool is not a fool, but he has no sense).

Negative Evaluation of Women in Russian Proverbs and Sayings

Many Russian proverbs and sayings on women indicate a negative evaluation of the female gender. Examples include *Лень* (laziness), *болтливость* (loquacity), *глупость* (stupidity), *злость* (malice/anger), *пьянство* (drunkenness) and *упрямство* (stubbornness). In Russian proverbs, laziness is connected to the image of woman as seamstress or spinner: *Длинная нитка* — ленивая швея

(long thread — lazy seamstress), *Рада б я пряла, да лень напала* (I was glad I spun, but laziness attacked), *У ленивой пряжи и про себя нет рубах*— (A lazy seamstress has no shirt on herself).

Foolishness is portrayed in Russian proverbs and sayings as an attribute of women, as shown in example (4):

Example 4

- *У бабы волос долог, а ум короткий* - (A woman's hair is long, but her sense is short).

Farhutdinova (2000) has observed that in Russian native culture proverbs and sayings sequentially express the difference between the male's mind and the female's mind. Example 5 shows this comparison:

Example 5

- *Мужичий ум говорит: надо, бабий ум говорит: хочу* (A [traditional] man speaks with sense: women should also speak with sense).
- *Мужа чтут за разум, жену по уму* (A man acts on his intellect, while his wife by her reasoning)
- *Бабий ум, что бабье коромысло: и косо, и криво, и на два конца*- (A woman's mind is a woman's yoke; it is slanted and crooked on both ends)
- *Женские умы – что татарские сумы (переметные* – Women's mind – tartar's saddle bag;
- *Бабы умы разоряют дома* – (Women's wits destroy houses «family»).
- *Волос долог, да ум короткий* – (Long hair, but short mind).

The above proverbs clearly demonstrate two valued qualities in Russian culture, that is intelligence and rationality, which are deemed to be characteristics possessed by men. Mind or wit are emotional and behavioural and are therefore attributed to women (Фархутдинова, 2001).

Russian proverbs and sayings clearly depict women's tendency to abuse and quarrel with people. A woman can be angry not at any particular person but at the whole world, and for no particular reason; such sayings reflect a negative evaluation of women.

Example 6

- *Сердилась баба на торг, а торг про то и не ведает* (A woman was angry at haggling, but she does not know what she is doing)
- *Старуха три года на мир сердилась, а мир того и не знал*-(An old woman was angry for three years at the world, but the world does not know or notice)
- *Собака умней бабы: на хозяина не лает*- (A dog is wiser than a woman, it does not bark at its owner).

In traditional Russian culture, disorderliness, noise and bustle are the common typical descriptive qualities of a Russian woman as evident in examples of the Russian proverbs stated in example (7) below:

Example 7

- *Где баба, там рынок, где две - там базар* (Where there is a woman, there is a market there; where there are two women, there is an uproar «noise» there.)
- *Где две бабы, там сѹм (сейм, сходка), а где три , там содом –* (Where there are two women, there is a «meeting» disturbance there).

Drunkenness is another negative quality attributed to women in Russian proverbs and sayings. It reflects in many Russian proverbs as the most dreadful, destructive and inconceivable negative quality of Russian women.

Example 8

- *Баба пьяна – вся чужа* (To a drunken woman everything is strange). This Russian saying suggests that a woman cannot control herself under the influence of alcohol. Another Russian proverb further reveals this negative human quality:
- *Муж пьет – полдома горит, жена пьет – весь дом горит* (A husband drinks and half of the house is on fire; a wife drinks and the whole house is on fire).

A woman through this proverb is not encouraged to drink excessively like men since she is the home keeper – хранительница домашнего очага. Another saying even entirely denies women their humanity:

Курица - не птица, баба - не человек: (A chicken is not a bird; a woman is not a human being).

Negative Evaluation of Women in Yorùbá Proverbs and Sayings

To many native speakers of Yorùbá, proverbs are key to communication, as they are used to communicate in difficult circumstances. This is why there is a saying that when words are lost in communication, proverbs are used to find them (Delano, 1966; Owomoyela, 2005; Ajikobi, 2014). Many proverbs and sayings reflect a negative evaluation of women in the Yorùbá language and culture. Sexism is one of the dominant themes in Yorùbá proverbs about women and this can be seen in the proverbs below:

Example 9

- *Obínrin bí ọmọ fún ní kò ní kó má pa ní. Obínrin kò bí ọmọ fún ní kò ní kó má pa ní.* — (That a woman has borne a man a child does not mean she can't kill the man).

The proverb portrays women in traditional Yorùbá culture as a group of people not to be trusted since they are capable of even murdering the father of their own children. Similar examples are as follows:

Example 10

- *Obínrin mò àlè méfà ọjó fúú.* — (A woman has sex with six concubines and pretends as if nothing ever happened.)
- *Bí kò sí tọ mú ti mbe láyà obínrin, bí kò sí ti ilẹ̀kẹ̀ tí m bẹ ní idí àgbèrè, òrẹ mí dára diẹ̀ ju obínrin lọ.* — (If not for the breast on a woman's chest, if not for the beads on the waist of a harlot, my male friend is far better than a woman).

The above examples illustrate the inequalities that exist between man and woman and the perceived supremacy of the male gender over the female in traditional Yorùbá society.

In the Yorùbá culture and worldview, a woman can be perceived as a property and can be compared to a man's cap, as shown below:

Example 11:

- *Fílà l'obínrin wọ̀n kì í bá ọ̀dẹ̀ wọ̀ ití.* — (Women are caps; they never accompany a hunter to the forest).

This means that men should never rely on women because they never stay with men when trouble and difficulty arise.

Owomoyela (2005) cites another variant of the above proverb:

- *Ojú l' obìnrin mọ̀.* — (A woman knows only the face)

Aladejobi (1999) cites yet another variation of the above proverb:

- *Owó l'obìnrin mọ̀.* — (Women know only money).

This proverb simply means that women are only interested in money; therefore, they are not to be trusted.

Example 12 illustrates this view:

Example 12

- *Obìnrin kò ní gògòngò tí n fòrò pamọ́ sí.* (A woman has no Adam's apple where she can keep secrets)

In traditional Yorùbá society, women are viewed not only as the property of men but also as promiscuous. Examples of proverbs and sayings in example 13 explain this view:

Example 13

- *Àgbà obìnrin kì ẹ̀ ọ̀gbẹ̀rì okó dídó* (An old woman «experienced lady» is well familiar with having sex).

This Yorùbá proverb is used not only in reference to women; it can also be used when referring to a task that one has done over time.

- *Ojú l' à ń dó; òbò wẹ̀rè ò yàtò.* (The face is the unique thing; a mad woman's vagina is not any different).

This proverb clearly portrays women as sex objects in traditional Yorùbá society.

Finally, there is a proverb on careful planning in life that is drawn from the field of sex:

- *Èrò ní ọ̀kọ́ dídó.* (A woman must plan before she engages in sex).

Findings

The proverbs and sayings examined in this study reveal the dominant Russian and Yorùbá worldview in relation to women. Compared to the Russian proverbs examined, negative qualities such as drunkenness, stubbornness and foolishness do not exist in Yorùbá proverbs. On their part, Yorùbá proverbs and sayings portray women as the property of men, as objects used daily in Yorùbá society and as sex objects.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have examined two unrelated cultures and languages. We focused on the image of women in Russian and Yorùbá proverbs and sayings depicting negative human qualities. We found differences, similarities and peculiarities in the representation of women in the proverbs and sayings of the two cultures and languages. Inequality between the male gender and the female gender is common to both Russian and Yorùbá as revealed by the Russian and Yorùbá proverbs. The study also reaffirms the universality of proverbs.

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