

# The Effect of Cinderella Syndrome — *Gender Stratification of Speech in Women's Literature*

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**Abstract**—The study analyzes the cases of violation of socially stereotyped and linguistically accepted norms of gender-stratified verbal behavior; naturally, these special cases are marked, and the aim of the study is to decipher the meaning of this markedness. In the study the phenomenon of a marked new verbal gender model of the world that becomes womanly transformed is called Cinderella syndrome. Women's literature was chosen as the material for the analysis of female features in men's speech as it presents many cases of the phenomenon and at the same time happens itself to be a reason for it.

**Index Terms**—Inverted verbal gender roles, women's literature, speech/description contradiction, factor of addressee.

## I. INTRODUCTION

Sociolinguistic studies reveal close relation between speech and personality; speech makes it possible to establish one's personal identity: gender, cultural and social belonging as well as stereotypes accepted in a society of a certain period of time, including gender-related norms of verbal behavior. Still sometimes these norms are violated; definitely, these special cases are marked, and the aim of the study is to find out the meaning of this markedness.

Research into language and gender interrelation started in the second half of the XX century within the framework of sociolinguistics, rather a new branch of linguistics then. The studies revealed not only the fact of gender speech stratification, but also determined speech characteristics of male/female speech [1]-[5]. The reasons of the phenomenon were found out as well – they are both of social and historical nature and grow from a subordinate position of a woman in the society [1], [2].

A social status of a woman in the majority of civilized societies was traditionally an inferior one if compared to a status of a man. Already in the Bible this attitude to a woman could easily be found. Thus, in the Old Testament a woman's role and status are determined as subordinate, she is just a property of a man: The man was created by G-d first, and only then G-d created the woman as a 'helper' so that the man won't be alone. "God created Eve out of one of Adam's ribs. The term "helper" has historically been interpreted as implying an inferior role for Eve; Adam later asserts his authority over Eve by naming her: "... she shall be called woman, because she was taken out of man." In ancient times, one was believed to have authority over a person or thing by naming it. [6], [7].

The fact that Eve was the one who seduced Adam to eat the forbidden fruit is agreed. It seems (at least from the present day point of view), that in this event, it is Eve's character that is presented as the stronger one, as Adam could hardly face God and immediately put all the blame on Eve "The woman you put here with me --she gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it" [6]. As a result, God said to Eve "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you" [6]. The woman craving for her husband will ensure that she seeks him out and his authority over her will guarantee her part in procreation; only women were obligated to marriage and had to stay loyal to their husbands, while men were free to marry several women [6]. Here a clear loss of status could be traced. The man's authority is now seen as more emphatic and overbearing [8]. So, responsible, loving, courageous, subordinate – the characteristics of a woman that have managed to live through millenniums.

Naturally, times have changed followed by some shifts in the status of a woman, but gender stratification of language remains, sometimes contradicting the gender stratification of the society. Language changes very slowly and just now the languages demonstrate practically all the features of male/female speech that could be traced in the XVIII - XX centuries literature and records. The literature of Renaissance differs from the tradition as the time liberated a woman, giving her the possibility to be sincere and sometimes too tough even from the present day point of view, in the comedies of Shakespeare, for example; puritan centuries that followed the period of Renaissance just took the society together with the language back to the old times. It only shows that the tradition had always lived in the society – and survived.

It's not a surprise that the times of women's emancipation didn't change the language. Children acquire the reality, including verbal and non-verbal gender related behavior, by imitating the adults. Family, social institutions, literature and media form speech stereotypes [1]. Since gender stratification of people's behaviour, including verbal behavior, is observed already at the age of 3 – 5, it remains in speech of women even if they are highly emancipated. The characteristics of male/female speech analyzed and described in sociolinguistics studies give precise criteria for the analysis character speech analysis. Thus, male speech is more factual, presents statements with falling intonation, contains less emotive words (mainly adjectives) while female speech is marked by rising intonation, pauses, tag questions, bigger emotional vocabulary, exclamatory phrases [1]-[5], [9], [10].

For the purpose of male/female speech analysis the above mentioned characteristics were used as criteria of evaluation.

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In addition, some factors functioning as variables were taken into account: age and social position of speakers, even their origin. Since gender stratification of people's behaviour is observed already at the age of 3 – 5, including verbal behaviour, and since language acquisition is being performed by means of imitation, the variable of the original family (full, single-parent-mother/single parent-father, parentless) also matters. Historical background cannot but contribute to the correct decoding of speech patterns [11]-[13].

Speech patterns in the XIX, XX and XXI centuries were analyzed and revealed practically identical male/female speech characteristics. The matter of interest for the present research was gender speech discrepancies and their interpretation. Women's literature, as well as other pieces of literature, contains the cases, but they happen to be of a special nature.

Three types of discrepancies were established:

- Character/speech discrepancy
- Character and speech vs. social stereotypes
- Speech and declared character vs. the real one (conscious disguise)

The first case was called Cinderella syndrome as only in this case macho's sweet words create a princess out of a poor, tired, hopeless woman.

Women's literature was chosen as the material for the analysis of female features in men's speech as it's practically the only field where the phenomenon grows and at the same time happens itself to be a reason for it.

It seems possible to give the name to this phenomenon; in this study it's called the Cinderella syndrome. Cinderella syndrome presents a new norm of a role-play. The verbal gender model of the world becomes womanly transformed – gender roles change as gentlemen start speaking the way women would like to hear thus violating gender stratification of speech functioning in a society, and the speech of a male character presented as a brutal personality immediately reveals the contradiction.

In the case of Cinderella syndrome two underlying factors happen to be at work: the factor of self-satisfaction and the factor of the addressee (the reader), the factor of popularity and success.

## II. WOMEN'S LITERATURE

### A. Please Say What I Would Like to Hear

In women's literature men very often say the words women would like to hear but, unfortunately, rarely hear from their men. Of course, in literature and in life young men can speak in a manner close to female speech, and it reveals only how young and romantic they are. When David Copperfield in Dickens's *David Copperfield* novel speaks to his girl-wife, revealing many female speech characteristics, it only underlines how young he is; in addition he was brought up in a single parent-aunt family [16]. This is the case of character and speech vs. social stereotypes discrepancy.

The format of the article makes it impossible to present the precise analysis itself, but some well-known pieces of literature will be quoted just as examples.

*Scarlett O'Hara was not beautiful, but men seldom realized it when caught by her charm as the Tarleton twins were [14].*

Margaret Mitchell's novel starts with the words quoted above. Has anybody ever counted how many heroines of love stories created by women are not pretty and look dull? Ordinary "grey mice" (Scarlett O'Hara is, of course, is an exception here) they, when their merits are recognized by strong and handsome men, become queens and only then other people start appreciating them. Why should unattractive women become heroines of women's literature? Definitely, it's a kind of promised happiness that each woman deserves, and women's literature presents hope to its readers, telling each time another story of Cinderella.

*"He said: "My dear little girl, I love you, I fell in love when I saw you in the airport. I cannot live without you". [15]*

The quotation wouldn't sound this ridiculous didn't we know the age of the participants. The gentleman is 58 and the lady is 47. Of course a woman of 47 is by no means a little girl but she actually hears what she wants to hear. And a man of 58, violating all the stereotypes of male speech, speaks as she would like him to. Recently many women's novels with the main female characters over 35 - 40 have been issued. Two basic reasons for the age of their heroines could be established. The first one is the author herself: the older the writers become, the older their characters grow. The second reason is the audience - ordinary women over 40.

The novels give them hope, they present elderly Cinderellas' stories, with men, who can see how beautiful and meaningful the women with life experience are. This reason is highly practical, as it means popularity.

If we compare two novels written by women, *Jane Eyre* by Charlotte Bronte and *A Cool Lady* by Catherine Willmont, we will see the similarities, although the first novel was written in England in the XIX century, and the second one – in the XXI century in Russia.

Mr. Rochester is presented in *Jane Eyre* as a strong and enigmatic personality, overlooking the other people, proud of his nobility and social position:

*"In what way is he peculiar?" "I don't know--it is not easy to describe--nothing striking, but you feel it when he speaks to you; you cannot be always sure whether he is in jest or earnest, whether he is pleased or the contrary; you don't thoroughly understand him..." [17]*

If in the previous example Mr. Rochester characterized by his housekeeper, in the following one he is characterized by Jane herself:

*I had not forgotten his faults; indeed, I could not, for he brought them frequently before me. He was proud, sardonic, harsh to inferiority of every description [17]*

And the speech of such a strong and proud landlord meets the requirements of female speech:

*...he murmured, "It will atone--it will atone. Have I not found her friendless, and cold, and comfortless? Will I not guard, and cherish, and solace her? Is there not love in my heart, and constancy in my resolves? [17]*

And later his speech keeps being composed due to female stereotype:

*"My living darling! These are certainly her limbs, and these her features; but I cannot be so blest, after all my misery. It is a dream; such dreams as I have had at night when I have clasped her once more to my heart, as I do now; and kissed her, as thus—and felt that she loved me, and trusted that she would not leave me."* [17]

The same type of a personality/speech discrepancy we discovered in present-day Russian women's literature. Thus, in the novel by C. Willmont *A Cool Lady* the description of a macho character says:

*A man about forty, in black t-shirt and bandana, approached the table.*

- *Are you a biker? - asked Margo. - No, simply I am fond of bikes but belong to no bikers' community.*
- *Lev, who is the man, is he crazy? - Never ever. He is a cool businessman* [18].
- .....
- *At this moment the door opened and yesterday's biker came in. He was dressed the same way. Does he come to the bank wearing the same clothes?*

*He knelt. - Please stand up.*

- *Devil, I have never knelt in front of women. ... But I have never come across such a woman. Kneeling in front of you is not a shame.*
- *Are you married? - Yes, but why...? - It's a pity, you I would marry* [18].

Here two underlying factors are at work: the factor of self-satisfaction and the factor of the addressee, or, in fact, popularity and success. The second one has already been presented. The factor of self-satisfaction realizes the dreams of a woman writer; in reality men would never consciously use the long structures with tons of emotional adjectives and, if they are gentlemen, would never openly humiliate other ladies, but ugly women are bloodthirsty. Thus, in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* it's not enough for Jane to hear a confession of love formulated exactly the way she and the writer could only imagine; no, her enemy, beautiful and brilliant Miss Ingram should be ridiculed – sweet revenge of a grey mouse. Both non-verbal (fortune-telling) and verbal behavior of Mr. Rochester is by no means of a gentleman, but only rude humiliation of a beautiful lady of high society would completely satisfy ugly and miserable Charlotte Brontë.

It seems possible to give the name to the above analyzed phenomenon; in this study it's called the Cinderella syndrome. Cinderella syndrome presents anew norm for a role-play. The verbal model of the world becomes womanly transformed – gender roles change as gentlemen start speaking the way women would like it to hear. But the norms accepted in the society remain, and the author may hundreds of times society remain and the author may hundreds of times characterize her hero as a strong personality – the speech reveals real features and if so Mr. Rochester, for example, ... is not a man.

### III. MEN'S LITERATURE

#### A. *Tell Me Who You Are*

Still Cinderella syndrome is not the only case of an inverted gender role-play. Of special interest for the analysis could be first person narration when the narrator is a woman while the author is a man; the woman presents her verbal interpretation of male/female characters. Written by men-writers in the form of a lady's diary the texts present cases of double interpretation. Two novels were chosen for the analysis: *Bleak House* by Charles Dickens and *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins. Both are written in the form of a diary. But even in the cases the diaries present direct speech of the ladies who write them their speech doesn't change: it is highly restrained and reserved and has as little female features as possible. Even the main female characters, Esther and Marion, themselves are very much alike: both ladies having recovered after small pox have their faces spoiled by the disease but don't worry much about it. They are not jealous and don't hate pretty young ladies. Like *Jane Eyre* they are not beautiful and only few people can really appreciate their personality; unlike *Jane Eyre* they wouldn't pretend to be shy and struggle for a lucky chance but sincerely with no feeling of sacrifice devote their lives to their beloved.

The study concentrated on the two male characters – Count Fosca in *The Woman in White* and Harold Skimpole in *Bleak House*. Their speech demonstrates many characteristics of female speech: they are both very talkative, produce long grammatical structures with subordinate clauses, participial constructions, use emotional adjectives. And finally happen to be inveterate scoundrels; Count Fosca builds a plot against Laura trying to send her to the asylum up to the end of her days and thus to get her money. Mr. Harold Skimpole does all his best to look a light-minded infantile unpractical "big child" and by many people is accepted as such:

*"Are you arrested for much, sir?" I inquired of Mr Skimpole.*

*"My dear Miss Summerson," said he, shaking his head pleasantly, "I don't know. Some pounds, odd shillings, and halfpence, I think, were mentioned."*

*"It's twenty-four pound, sixteen, and sevenpence ha'penny," observed the stranger. "That's wot it is."*

*"And it sounds — somehow it sounds," said Mr Skimpole, "like a small sum?"*

*"I thought," he suggested, as if good-naturedly to help us out, "that being parties in a Chancery suit concerning (as people say) a large amount of property, Mr Richard, or his beautiful cousin, or both, could sign something, or make over something, or give some sort of undertaking, or pledge, or bond? I don't know what the business name of it may be, but I suppose there is some instrument within their power that would settle this?"*

*"Not a bit on it," said the strange man.*

*"Really?" returned Mr Skimpole. "That seems odd, now, to one who is no judge of these things!"*

And this is what his friends say about Mr. Skimpole, it's their mutually accepted opinion:

“— Being quite a child, sir,” said I, “and so different from other people—”

“Your woman's wit hits the mark. He is a child — an absolute child. I told you he was a child, you know, when I first mentioned him.”

“And he is a child. Now, isn't he?” asked Mr Jarndyce, brightening more and more.

He was indeed, we said [19]

Esther as a woman, when quoting his speech, only speculates on these funny and attractive features; still in the text they produce rather a strange effect on readers and when finally we get to know that he is highly self-interested and for five pounds throws a sick miserable boy out into a frosty night it's a great surprise for Esther but not for us. A pragmatic and prosaic character, Mr. Bucket tells her:

“Do you generally put that elderly young gentleman in the same room, when he's on a visit here, Miss Summerson?” “You know Mr Skimpole!” said I.

He is a singular character,” said I.

“No idea of money,” observed Mr Bucket. - “He takes it though!”

And he adds:

Now, Miss Summerson, I'll give you a piece of advice that your husband will find useful when you are happily married, and have got a family about you. Whenever a person says to you that they are as innocent as can be in all concerning money, look well after your own money, for they are dead certain to collar it, if they can [19].

No pretense remains, the mask is thrown away, the real egoistic, cruel, merciless personality reveals.

This is the case of double interpretation: the writer as a man first presents a character through his speech presented by a woman. The first layer of decoding is her, female interpretation, the second one is his own, male interpretation, which, while the text develops, becomes more and more evident to the reader; this is an example of speech and declared character vs. the real one (conscious disguise) discrepancy.

Thus the same phenomenon – inverted verbal gender roles – conveys different messages; in *Bleak House* and *The Woman in White* [20] it's marked from the point of view of a specific character (disguised scoundrels) and unmarked in the perspective of Cinderella syndrome.

In women's literature female features in gentlemen's speech mark it from the point of view of Cinderella syndrome while it's unmarked in the perspective of hypocritical and disguised characters.

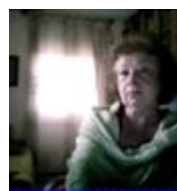
#### IV. CONCLUSION

The study shows that the same inverted characteristics of female/male speech reveal different conceptions. If an

addressee is regarded as an objective factor of communication process, the pragmatics of the two cases is absolutely, almost polar different. In the first case it throws away the masks and proves/disproves initial character's description to give deeper understanding of his/her personality. In the second case it contradicts the intended pragmatics, revealing an absolutely opposite character. And of course also throws away the mask of a woman-writer. This how Cinderella syndrome works.

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