

GENDER MARKERS IN RUSSIAN NOUNS FROM SYSTEM LINGUISTICS AND SYSTEM TYPOLOGY PERSPECTIVE



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Abstract: System linguistics and system typology perspective introduces clarity into the understanding of grammatical status of language units and grammatical categories. The author proposes that the internal form and the system relationship of the language units make language learning process easier. This article explores and analyses the formation, evolution and current status of the internal form of Russian gender markers and their grammatical functions from the perspective of system linguistics and system typology. This makes it possible to see old problems from a new synthesised explanatory approach and reveals an optimal correlation between the form, matter and function of the various language units. It also takes into account the internal and external factors. Understanding these aspects of the language contributes towards an improvement in the effectiveness of language teaching as a native as well as a foreign language.

Key words: communication conditions; determinants; internal form; language collectives; developing eventivity; initiator of the event; singleness (oneness), concreteness Vs. massiveness, planeness (flatness), abstractness; activeness Vs. inactiveness.

Introduction

Supporters of system linguistics are some great linguists like W. von Humboldt, I. I. Sreznevsky, A. A. Potebnya, Baudouin de Courtenay (Гумбольдт, 1984; Срезневский, 1959; Потевня, 1958; Бодуэн, 1963). On the basis of system linguistics, the system typology was developed by G.P. Melnikov (Мельников / Melnikov, Преображенский / Preobrazhenskiy, 1989, с.77-80; Мельников / Melnikov, 1989; Лутин / Lutin, 1990). The main principles of system linguistics and system typology used for the analysis of gender markers in this article include:

- The idea of conditionality of grammatical structure of language – internal determinant; the peculiar conditions of communication – external determinant. Russian language reflects the content as a developing eventivity of nominative meaning of the Russian sentence with its own internal defining features governed by its linguistic system techniques.
- The idea of differentiation of concepts through the meaning of morphemes is the minimum of their internal form that hints at the ultimate idea. This ultimate idea is derived at by hints provided through all intermediate ideas and the entire inner form. This whole structure includes an entire chain of hints, starting from the meaning of the morphemes of the word and further through the intermediate ideas up to the penultimate idea.

Discussion

In order to find the grammatical status and the internal form of gender markers, we need to explore and analyse the formation, evolution and current status of the internal forms of markers and their grammatical functions. For this, "it is necessary... to start from the primary elements and further build the entire system of suffixes as they develop in the language since the prehistoric period" (Barrow, 19776 p. 113).

The notion of 'gender' (originating from the Latin word '*genus*') goes back to the linguistic classification of 'things' into kinds and classes. According to G.A. Klimov, the class markers have been developed for categorizing 'things' into particular 'classes' at the typological stage of the 'Class Language type'. For example, the immediate visible distinction of a thing by the feature of its 'singleness' or 'massiveness' is formally expressed by the elements -u/-o (<-ö) and -a (reconstructed Indo-European formants: *-o and *-a).

With the results of these experimental phonetic laboratory analysis, T. D. Polivanov concluded that by spending the same amount of air, you can pronounce the vowel [a] for about two-fifths of a second and the vowel [u] for one-fifths of a second (Polivanov 1991, p.29). Generally, a massive thing is perceived to be greater than an individual (single) thing. Hence, the formant -a could be a natural choice for massive things and the formant -u/-o (<-ö) – for individual (single) things.

In modern language typology, the generally accepted formants of the active language type are the reconstructed Indo-European formants *-s and *-m. These are present in various reflexes of the modern Indo-European languages as respective markers of potential activity or inactivity of the denoted concepts (Климов / Klimov, 1977; Иванов / Ivanov, 1965; Гамкрелидзе / Gamkrelidze, Иванов / Ivanov, 1984; Тронский / Tronsky, 1967; Андреев / Andreev, 1986; Кузнецов / Kuznetsov, 1958; Селищев / Selishchev, 1952). Earlier Antoine Meillet wrote on the difference of content of these two affixes *-s and *-m, as an indication of their "animation and inanimation" (Мейе / Meillet, 1951). A. A. Potebnya, analysing the formant -ъ, which etymologically includes *-s, writes that from the ancient times to this day, the words ending in -ъ also have the meaning of persons - agents, instruments and other concrete things, as agents, often combined with the meaning of actions and works (Потебня / Potebnya, 1968, p. 86).

The formants *-s and *-m are interpreted as the initial ways of contrasting the case content before G. A. Klimov's introduction of the concept of "active languages" for a specific stage of typological transformations in the direction of subject-object relation expression (as the first

eventive stage in the understanding of the system typology). Therefore, A.V. Popov says that the case ending *-s became the indicator of the main 'thing' (предмет) - the subject in action; the case ending *-m was supposed to mean the opposite, incidentally, the passive 'thing'(предмет), passive state (Попов / Popov, 1881, p.33).

V. B. Krysko (Крысько, 1990) draws attention to the fact that A. V. Popov, following G. Curtius, recognizes that formants *-s and *-m were the first case forms in Indo-European grammar and this inflectional feature was secondary for them. Initially, they were derivational affixes: formant *-m was used for "the names of 'things' (предметы) that means something secondary, dependent", whereas *-s was used for the formation of agentive names (Попов / Popov, 1881, p. 34).

In light of the above mentioned discussions, it is clear that we are dealing with the formants *-s and *-m as class markers of Indo-European languages at the stage of an active structure and thus characterizing the potency features of their corresponding denotatum to be or not to be the initiators of the events (Степанов / Stepanov, 1989, p. 12). Thus, the use of these morphemes began to indicate the factual role of the denotatum in one or other events, i.e. the transition of formants *-s and *-m from the derivative to the inflectional markers that shows how they are converted into actual case markers.

Only in the nominative stage of language restructuring, does the transition of these class markers with the said function occur to form the formants of gender category in the system of inflected languages. And this transition is manifested in the initial use of the class markers to emphasize not the potential role of the said denotatum in an event field, but to the factual role in the event (Ченнаккадан / Chennakkadan, 2017, p 231). This reorientation of functions leads to the transformation of the class markers into case formants. In this situation, there may be chances when etymologically one and the same class marker is drawn into a system of both gender and case markers and also as the number opposition markers.

The clarifications made above are important to understand the deep relationship between the emerging category of gender in Indo-European languages and the earlier division of 'things' into classes with morphemic markers. A majority of the nouns with endings *-o, depending upon how they are expanded by adding the class marker of activeness or inactiveness, form the masculine or neuter nouns. Thus, the masculine nouns are formed with markers -o-s in Greek; -u-s, in Latin; -a-s in Lithuanian; -a-h in Sanskrit, and correspondingly, Greek -o- u, Latin u-m, Lithuanian -ą and Sanskrit -a-m are used for the neuter gender (Ван-Вейк/Van Wijk, 1957, p. 324).

As opposed to the meaning of massiveness of the noun formant -a, the formant -o provides the ancient nominal stem contained in its original meaning (Барроу / Barrow, 1976, p.114). The eventive aspect emphasizes the fact of the singleness of the named denotatum through the semantic components associated with the prominence of individual characteristics (Потебня / Potebnya, 1968, p. 211-236; Барроу / Barrow, 1976, p.182; Тронский / Tronsky, 1967, p. 61).

In the eventive communication perspective of the Indo-European nominative grammatical structure, the combination of the meaning of singleness that is expressed using the formant *-o with the meaning of activeness that is expressed by the subsequent morpheme *-s happens

to be an effective means to underline the fact that the named participant in the event is its initiator. They form the masculine nouns. Correspondingly, a combination of the meaning of singleness that is expressed by the formant *-o with the meaning of inactiveness expressed by the formant -m has become a means to specify that the named participant in the event is not an initiator. They form the neuter nouns.

The nouns with marker * -a was formed in the pre-eventive stage to indicate the classes of denotatum with distinctive features like collectiveness and massiveness. In the eventive stage, nouns with the formant -a underline the fact that the named participant in the event has more or less equal probability to be in the role of a subject or of an object. Therefore, the names with marker *-a form a new and third category of nouns, namely the category of feminine nouns. This is a system-typological justification of the facts in the history of the formation of nominal grammatical categories of Indo-European languages.

The main reason for the formation of this inflectional system with its eventive nominative perspective is the typical conditions of communication in the language collectives. They are characterized by a large inter-communication interval on the space axis if the interval length is measured by the average number of "repetitions" of the conveyed socially important message, with the average number of links required for retelling the message from one person to the next in a chain starting from the author of this socially significant message to its addressee, till the transmitted message is known to all of the members who form the language collective. Such conditions tend to form in very large and relatively homogeneous collectives that reside quite densely in a large common territory (Мельников / Melnikov, 1983a, 1989).

Usually, these are collectives of sedentary farmers, and, as shown by historians, ethnographers and linguists, with the development of agriculture and where the Indo-European proto-language emerged as the only representative of the inflectional system of languages (Гамкрелидзе / Gamkrelidze, Иванов / Ivanov, 1984). Until recently, it continued to develop in the same direction of other inflected synthetic languages only in such settlement zones of the Indo-Europeans where a sedentary agricultural way of life was accompanied by a growth in the number of members of the language collective as well as in the occupied territory while maintaining the relative homogeneity of each population. One such zone happened to be Eastern Europe, as noted by A. Meillet, where those grammatical trends by which proto-Indo-European structure was differentiated from all the other languages of the world were most consistently developed in the Baltic and Slavic languages (Мейе / Meillet, 1951, p. 14). Now the Indo-European synthetic inflection is fully represented only in the East Slavic languages and more particularly in the Russian language.

Systemic linguistics provides an explanation of why such large language groups of relatively homogeneous and densely populated large areas of settlements are predisposed towards the development and consolidation of inflectional techniques from an event nominative perspective. Large spatial intercommunication intervals, that is, long chains of retransmissions of socially important knowledge from one to another member of the language collective, dramatically increase the likelihood of distortion of the transmitted content. In order to prevent such distortions and to increase the reliability, the structure of the language has been constantly improved using effective language techniques in which if there is any occurrence of semantic

distortions, misunderstandings and confusions, they could be easily detected.

It is an established fact in system linguistics that the gender category, especially in highly inflected languages, was formed due to the increasing demand of formal grammatical expression of the potential role of the agent of action (doer) in an event if the participant in the event is assigned such high probable role (Мельников / Melnikov, Стовец / Stovpets, 1989a). The doer in such cases has a high probability to be the most active doer or the initiator of the event and is included into the class of masculine nouns. On the other hand, the doer who has a high probability to be a passive doer, in the sense that more often it is not an initiator of the event, is included into the class of neuter nouns. When the probability of the doer is not certain in terms of 'to be or not to be' the initiator of an event, it is included into the class of feminine nouns, i.e. the intermediate, median class, lying between the active (masculine nouns) and passive (neuter nouns) (ibid.).

From the above discussions, we understand that the specific external communication conditions have emerged as a precondition of the formation and development of inflectional systems. The functional differentiation of the potential internal characteristics and the potential eventive role of the 'things' in the depicted event are described in a sentence. Thus, 'things' with inseparable internal semantic characteristics of oneness/singleness were assigned with markers -o as opposed to 'things' with inseparable internal semantic characteristics of massiveness that were assigned to the 'things' with the use of formant -a. The markers -s and -m respectively formalise such eventive active and inactive role characteristics that emphasize their high or low probability to be or not to be the initiator of an event. The 'massiveness' formant -a is used to denote the additional eventive role meant for a medium probability to be the initiator of an event. Table -1 given below shows the Gender markers from system linguistics and system typology perspective.

Table – 1: Gender markers from system linguistics and system typology perspective

Gender markers from system linguistics and system typology perspective								
Probability to be the initiator of the event	Gender	Gender marker in CIE	Protomorpemic components and their meanings in Gender Markers		Gender marker			
					Sanskrit	Greek	Latin	Russian
High	Masculine	*-os	*-o Individual (single) thing	*-s Active thing	-as (<-ah)	-os	-us	-ъ*
Low	Neuter	*-om	*-o Individual (single) thing	*-m Inactive thing	-am	-om	-um	-o
Medium	Feminine	*-a	*-a massive thing	-∅	-om	-a	-a	-a

* After the Reform of Russian Orthography in 1918, the hard sign (ъ) at the end of words was excluded.

In modern Russian, the nouns that have a stem ending in a hard consonant and have no formal gender markers, with their potential internal semantic of singleness (oneness) and eventive characteristics of activeness, belong to the masculine gender. These were formally expressed

by the hard sign -ъ that is excluded at the end of the words after the orthographic reforms in Russia in 1918. Etymologically, -ъ represents the meaning of two morphemes: Indo-European suffix -o denoting internal semantics of singleness (oneness) and -s denoting the eventive role meaning of activeness.

Similarly, the nouns that have a formal marker -o, with their potential internal semantic of singleness/oneness and eventive characteristics of inactiveness, belong to the masculine gender. Etymologically, -o represents the meaning of two morphemes: Indo-European suffix -o denoting internal semantics of singleness/oneness and -m denoting the eventive role meaning of inactiveness.

Nouns with stem endings on soft consonants (with or without a soft sign) and with no formal gender markers in modern Russian belong to either feminine or masculine genders. Their gender differentiation can be done by applying the internal semantics of these nouns. Thus, nouns with the internal semantics of singleness (oneness) and its associated semantic variants of concreteness - as characteristics are assigned to the masculine gender whereas nouns with the internal semantics of massiveness and its associated semantic variants of planeness (flatness), abstractness - as characteristics are assigned to the feminine gender.

As an experiment to prove the correctness of the gender classification criteria and the meaning of gender markers presented through this article, we have taken out from the short dictionary (*Краткий толковый словарь русского языка, 1978*) all the nouns which have their stem ending on a soft consonant. All these nouns belong to either the feminine or to the masculine gender. They were then classified into masculine and feminine using the respective criteria of singleness (oneness), concreteness on one hand, and massiveness, planeness (flatness), abstractness on the other. (see: Table -2 below).

Table 2: Gender classification of Nouns with stem ending in a soft consonant and with no formal gender markers into masculine and feminine using the internal semantic criteria of singleness, oneness, concreteness for masculine and massiveness/planeness (flatness), abstractness for feminine.

Nouns with stem ending on soft consonant and with no formal gender markers in modern Russian	
Singleness, oneness, concreteness (Masculine gender)	Massiveness, planeness, flatness, abstractness (Feminine gender)
автомобиль алкоголь апрель водитель вождь гвоздь голубь гость гусь день деятель дождь житель заместитель зверь зритель избиратель изобретатель июль июнь календарь камень картофель	предатель председатель представитель преподаватель путь ремень рубли руль сентябрь словарь стебель стержень стиль строитель токарь уголь уровень учитель февраль фонарь читатель январь
кисель контроль конь корабль корень кремль лагерь лебедь ливень локоть медведь ноготь ноль ноябрь нуль огонь октябрь писатель победитель покупатель полдень портфель посетитель	безопасность болезнь боль бровь вещь власть внешность возвышенность возможность гибель глупость гордость горсть грудь грязь дверь действительность деятельность должность дочь ель жизнь кисть кость крепость кровать кровь
	ладонь лень ложь лошадь любовь мазь мебель медаль медь мелочь местность месть молодежь молодость мораль морковь мышь надпись национальность ненависть необходимость неприятность нить новость ночь область обувь
	общественность обязанность опасность осень ось отрасль очередь память печень печь площадь поверхность подпись подробность помощь постель потребность пристань промышленность пыль радость речь роль связь сельдь сирень
	скатерть скорость смерть собственность совесть совокупность соль способность сталь старость степень степь стоимость страсть ступень тетрадь ткань уверенность цель цепь церковь часть честь четверть шерсть юность

And all nouns with stem ending in -й and -ч.

Conclusion

The whole history of Russian language structure formation is a consequence of the peculiarities of its internal determinants. This mainly consists of the eventivity of a nominative idea of a typical Russian sentence with the tendency to hint at an idea by creating an image of the developing event. In such a formation, it was essential that no random derivational affixes are added to grammatical morphemes while being added to the root morphemes. They were specific markers with defined meanings that together with the root morphemes hint at different event-significant features of the named 'thing'.

An understanding of system linguistics and system typology enables one to see the old problems in a new perspective and helps solve them through the use of functional synchronous and evolutionary aspects of the grammatical system of language.

Taking into account the internal and external factors, the purpose of both the current state of the language and its historical changes is clearly understood as a constant optimization for an effective functioning of the language system. Such understanding contributes to an improvement in the effectiveness of teaching Russian as a native as well as foreign language.

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