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## **Woman vs. Baba in Russian Culture and Internet Language**

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### **Abstract**

The study of the functioning of the language as a means of electronic communication is one of the most relevant areas of linguistics. In this article, based on messages from women's and men's forums of the Russian-speaking Internet, gender representation of the words *woman* and *baba* is considered, and the speech characteristics assigned to these words are highlighted as criteria for femininity recorded in Runet. The study of *woman* and *baba* lexical items in the language of the forums of the Russian-speaking Internet made it possible to identify and describe the gender criteria of femininity existing in modern linguistic culture, as well as to determine the role and place of these lexemes in the system of gender values of users in a virtual environment. The novelty of the work lies in the fact that the use of *women* and *baba* lexical items in a comparative aspect was carried out on the material of Russian-language Internet forums.

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## 1. Introduction

The growing popularity of the Internet and the increasing presence of different segments of the global community in cyberspace has raised questions about the capacity of the Internet to change everyday life. Although the penetration of the Internet has taken a rough path, in developed countries that have easy access to cyberspace, it is the media and the new society that people in most countries are rapidly beginning to jump to more cyberspace presence. Like the flourishing of radio and television, there are many signs that the Internet is becoming a ubiquitous element of global communication in the 21st century. Such rapid growth raises questions about the role and influence of the Internet in shaping today's society (Mitra & Watts, 2002).

Many people emphasize the hope of the Internet as a communication revolution in the contemporary world. They believe that the Internet will destroy the current structures of inequality in twentieth-century mass communication. Proponents of the Net are calling it a tool for promoting participatory democracy, equality, and diversity. They claim that the Internet, by providing an interactive communication medium, allows individuals to participate in decision-making processes and generate messages instead of simply using mass media. Enthusiasts also say that the Internet offers free services that expand information sharing with everyone in the world, based on a common spirit. Recently, however, important researchers have begun to point to the more dangerous possibilities of using the Internet. Howard Besser (1995), for example, observes that the Internet can be led in the wrong direction if it is conceived of as an Information Superhighway. Besser (1995) argues that this conception, as it stresses commercial uses, may suppress the development of the Internet as supporting democratizing dialogues in an electronic public sphere. According to Besser (1995), commercialism on the Information Superhighway transforms the Internet in four key ways: 1. from flat fee to pay-per-use; 2. from an orientation towards the user as a producer to the user as a consumer; 3. from information to entertainment; and 4. from a small niche audience to mass audience (Yoon, 2001).

At present, virtual communication prevails over real communication, and therefore the language of electronic communication implemented via the Internet is of scientific interest. We can talk about forming a virtual language picture of the world and a virtual male and female language personality. The influence of the gender factor on electronic communication is noteworthy since the gender component is quite significant in the structure of any language personality.

More and more modern researchers are turning to the study of the human image in various discourses, genres, and social variants of the language (Akhmerova & Gilazetdinova, 2015; Antonova, 2011; Bochina, Miftakhova, & Malikov, 2015). The object of scientific attention is the study of virtual reality and the specifics of the functioning of the language as a means of electronic communication (Miftakhova, Bochina, & Zhuravleva, 2018).

It is a common misconception that computer-mediated language is less accurate, complex, and coherent than standard written language. Thus, an author for Wired magazine describes the messages sent on the Internet: A completely new and broken language - certainly not as beautiful and elegant as the former English. Likewise, Baron predicted that participants in computer conferences would use fewer subordinate clauses and more limited vocabulary - and this as a result of computer communication over time (Baron, 1984). Language expressive functions can be reduced. In fact, although computer-mediated language often contains non-standard features, only a relatively small percentage of these features appears to be errors due to lack of attention or knowledge of standard language forms (see, e.g., Herring, 1998). Most of these errors are conscious choices made by users to save effort in typing, imitating spoken language features, or expressing their creativity. Economics seems to be the driving force behind the observation that computer scientists use CMD simultaneously in the workplace to remove thematic pronouns, determinants, and complements; use abbreviations; do not correct misspellings (Murray, 1990).

Another deliberate practice that results in unconventional orthography is the textual representation of auditory information such as prosody, laughter, and other non-language

sounds, as illustrated in the following message posted to Usenet:

haa  
\*sniff\* waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhh

I laughed, I cried. ... that post was GREAT! :-)  
Amusedly,

-Mirth strategies like these, instead of reflecting poor or simple communication, show users' ability to adapt to the computing environment with their expressive needs. Significantly, this leads to a linguistic diversity that, although produced through text-like, often has oral linguistic features.

Nevertheless, an average variable has a powerful effect on structural complexity: concurrency. As the structure of unplanned speech shows cognitive limitations in real-time language encoding, for example, during information units, lexical density, and degree of syntactic integration (Chafe, 1982), concurrent CMD modes also have limitations. Thus, in the Interchange study, a type of concurrent CMD used in educational settings, Ko (1996) found fewer compliments, more string prepositions, and shorter words than the formal text set. In addition, for features related to "accurate information and detail concentration" (e.g., lexical density, the ratio of nouns to verbs, and the use of adjectives), InterChange messages have a lower average frequency than those of writing or speaking. Ko (1996) attributes this finding to the heavy burden of production and processing placed on users by the Intersystem - not only does it have to type, which is slower and requires more conscious attention to the speech, but it also has to type fast, and little time remains to schedule the message.

In contrast, asynchronous CMDs allow users to spend time composing and editing messages. Thus, the variation in structural complexity in email messages should reflect the factors of social status that determine the level of formalities and, with it, the structural and standard complexity - appropriate to the context. For example, Australian University staff receive private emails filled with informal and spoken language features: contractions, abbreviations, use of lowercase letters, punctuation, and removal of grammatical functional words (Cho, in press). However, the same email technology, when used by computer scientists in professional interaction

in a public discussion group on ARPANET, contains very standard messages that contain features of syntactic complexity such as naming, sub-clauses, and complement (Herring, 1998). However, ARPANET files are not usually formal emails like other edited forms. This is partly due to the less formal goals that emails usually use to achieve this and partly due to the relative openness of the email as a new form of communication that has not yet been colonized by strictly prescribed norms.

The importance of this article lies in the importance of studying the lexical cases of wife and father in the language of Runet communities, which allows us to identify and describe the criteria of femininity in modern language culture, as well as to determine their role and position. As Bochina and Miftakhova (2014) mention,

We believe that the presence of specialized male and female associations on the network allows us to identify gender symmetry/asymmetry in the conceptualization and classification of the world by men and women in general and in the language of men and women in particular. (p. 8)

The scientific novelty of the work lies in the fact that for the first-time study of lexical items, *woman* and *baba* in a comparative aspect was carried out on the material of Russian-language Internet forums.

The purpose of this article is a comparative description of the specifics of the functioning of *woman* and *baba* lexemes in Internet discourse. To achieve this goal, the following tasks were set: to analyze contexts with lexical items of a *woman* and a *baba* in the language of women's and men's forums of the Russian-speaking Internet; based on the categorical structure to establish the role and place of these nominations in the value picture of the world of women and men; to identify gender symmetry/asymmetry of the image of *women* and *baba*, by comparing the identification results of persons of the opposite sex and self-identification (Fernandez, 2020; Jobo, 2016).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

Herring (1998) introduces computer-mediated discourse and believes that CMD is the

communication that humans make with each other when interacting with the transmission of messages over networked computers. The study of computer-mediated discourse (hereinafter CMD) specializes in the study of the broader interdisciplinary study of computer-mediated communication (CMC), which focuses on the use of language and dialects in computer network environments. Most CMCs currently in use are text-based, meaning that messages are typed on a computer keyboard and read as text on a computer screen, usually by a person or persons in a different location from the sender of the message. The CMC-based text comes in a variety of forms (e.g., email, chat groups, real-time chat, virtual reality role-playing games) whose linguistic features vary depending on the messaging system used and the embedding of social and cultural text. However, all of these commonalities are that the activity through which they are performed is primarily - in many cases, exclusively - made up of visual language. These media features have important implications for understanding the nature of computer-mediated language. They also provide a unique environment, free of competitive influences from other communication channels and from the physical context, where you study verbal interaction and the relationship between discourse and social action (Herring, 2001; Herring, Schiffrin, Tannen, & Hamilton, 2001).

In a world where technology can provide a wide range of compelling technical materials and simulated images (such as HDTV, WWW, and video games), many people are concerned about the concept of being in these virtual environments. I feel it is not necessary to focus on visual stimulus effects to continue such studies because they ignore the basic principles of our cognitive need to feel present in our daily lives and interactions. If we can understand some of the basic mechanisms that establish a presence at the cognitive level using a fully perceptual method of interpersonal communication, we can apply these concepts to research and development for these more stimulating environments.

Previous studies have examined some of the mechanisms of conversation in an emerging form of computer-mediated communication (CMC) called Internet Relay Chat (IRC). The

goal is to achieve some of the cognitive structures of interaction through the study of this mediated social domain. To this end, Moshe (2020) focuses on the social cognitive manifestations of frame and face, a concept based on the writings of Irving Goffman. During this discussion of the IRC, he claims that there are basic cognitive structures for presence that are constructed through conventions and discourse strategies, and within them, we find a parallel to ordinary conversation.

The IRC feature lies in a combination of its written and spoken features. IRC destroys the physical quality of conversation that exists in face-to-face interactions such as voice, stress, and movement. However, there is a presence. The author suggests that participants suspend the concept of physical presence because there are other discourse strategies that meet the need for a core sense of presence. In the physical settings of the computer screen and navigation dialog, this frame creates a valid interactive environment. Speech tools such as third-party self-referential speech and conversation strategies such as managing multiple "conversations" simultaneously and stickiness identify perceptual barriers and allow users to engage personally in these electronic communities. Previous studies have shown how participants build and maintain a social environment, first studying frame construction and then the dynamics of working in IRC. Inside the frame, the face-holding functions are at a basic structural level, while the surface manifestations are environmentally friendly (Bays, 1998).

In his article, Chiu (2013) also discusses how to revise a statistical method designed for face-to-face conversation, the SDA, to use it in online discussions encrypted by participants (Fujita, this volume). In contrast to the linear sequence of conversation rotations, asynchronous online messages often branch into separate strands. Successful and revised use of SDA in an online discussion can benefit participants from automatically encrypting messages to extend the analysis of large databases and extend online research beyond the features of the entire message (e.g., Lee & Martin, 2017) to the relationships between messages. Just as previous conversations affect later conversations, earlier online messages may affect subsequent

messages. In particular, I examine how the cognitive and social metacognitive aspects of previous messages influence the ideas and descriptions of subsequent messages. While individual metacognition is the control of one's knowledge, emotions, and actions, social metacognition is defined as the control of group members over each other's knowledge, emotions, and actions. By understanding how the components of the cognitive and social metacognitive components of recent online messages create a context between the time that helps or hinders students' ideas and explanations, educators can help students navigate the processes and Participate online to learn more. This study contributes to the research literature in two ways. First, I propose a new way to model the branches of online messaging on several topics. Second, this method tests how explanatory variables at different levels (individual characteristics, metacognitive and social aspects of messages) affect 1330 simultaneous online messages during a thirteen-week technology training course. By examining students' online asynchronous messages, researchers can develop a more comprehensive understanding of students' online processes and their implications for appropriate teacher interventions and computer environments (Chiu, 2013).

### 3. Methodology

The material of the study was 1200 posts of women's and men's forums (the authors of letters are divided equally by gender), selected from the most popular and largest Russian-speaking forums: a) men's: Wolf cubs forum (50,241 users), Anti baba forum (21051), Let's Talk (Pogovorim - 10742), BestForum (9090), Men's Club (7520), MaxiChat (2213); b) women's: The main women's forum of the country (28321), No points (16565), MakeCool (43687), Temptation (2726), Wow (2036).

In order to structure the gender version of the image of *women* and *baba* and compare them, a cognitive interpretation of the contextual semantics of these nominations was carried out.

For lexical items, *woman* and *baba* were identified as cognitive attributes in two forms: "X - what?" and "X- what does she do?", since these forms are the most informative, they

allow you to get essential information about the essence of an object/phenomenon, record the largest number of language tools that objectify the image of a person, reflecting the language consciousness of the people in the virtual world, and are convenient for conducting cognitive interpretation.

A further study of the gender specifics of the perception of women and baba by Internet users consisted of a description of the categorical structure, i.e., in the distribution of the resulting cognitive differential features according to the cognitive classification features (classifiers) used to conceptualize this phenomenon. As is known, a cognitive classification attribute is a component of the concept content that reflects one or another aspect, a categorization parameter of the corresponding object or phenomenon, and generalizes homogeneous differential signs in the concept structure.

Further, cognitive attributes were ranked by the degree of brightness, which was calculated as the percentage of this attribute in the complete array of obtained objectification of the cognitive content of the concept (Kobzieva, Gordiienko-Mytrofanova, Udoenko, & Sauta, 2020). Then the relevance of the classifier and the brightness of the classifier was calculated. The relevance of the cognitive classifier is defined as the relative number of cognitive attributes generalized by a particular classifier. The brightness of the cognitive classifier is defined as the relative number of linguistic objectification of this classifier which is called textual realizations (Knott & Dale, 1994).

At different stages of the study, the following methods were used: computer selection of language data, descriptive-analytical, lexical-semantic analysis, contextual analysis, linguo-cognitive method (description of cognitive structures through the analysis of language means of their objectification), and quantitative data processing.

### 4. Results

Lexical items *woman* and *baba* represent that part of the naive picture of the world that is associated with the concept of femininity, formed in the real and reflected in the virtual world. In previous studies, many authors have already analyzed the features of woman and baba lexical items in functioning in the Russian

Internet forums vocabulary (Miftakhova et al., 2017; Miftakhova et al., 2018). It was concluded that users of both men's and women's forums associate mostly positive characteristics with the word *woman*, while a broadly negative assessment connotation is assigned to the word *baba*.

Females are often the subject of discussion, so in forums, you can often find a topic such as "Woman and baba: what is the difference". In quantitative terms, in women's forums, the lexical item *woman* is more often used, while in men's forums, on the contrary, it is the *baba* (see Table 1).

**Table 1**  
*Lexical Items Number of Men's Forums and Women's Forums*

Lexical items	lexical items number	
	Men's forums	Women's forums
Woman	302	310
Baba	319	283

In quantitative terms, the word *woman* is actively used in both men's and women's forums (302/310), while the word *baba* is used more often in men's forums (319) than in women's (283).

The universal values, standards, and models are fixed in the lexical meanings of words and get a different interpretation in the speech uses of words. As our studies show, in women's and men's forums, the words *woman* and *baba* often act as antonyms, contrasting in some aspects ('appearance', 'manners and behavior', 'character traits'): "A *baba* cannot be admired, but a *woman* can be"; "A *woman* is respected, a *woman* is admired, and a *baba* is used - mainly in dirty and hard work".

First of all, a woman is marked as a good wife, mother, and mistress, in contrast to a *baba* who does not attach value to family relations, raising children: "I want to see a woman. Strong rear. Husband-family-children. An example - exist. Near. *Baba* - has no such thing. Dirty trail. Former (..) abortions, fatherlessness, (...), ambition, house, supposedly, shared"; "A *woman* is a person with her inherent gender features: the desire to create a full-fledged family, clean, smart kids, a loving and beloved man, comfort. *Baba* doesn't bother. For her, 'everything acceptable' and

*the drunk cohabiter who will beat her child will be acceptable*".

When evaluating a female person by the aspect of appearance, the word *woman* acquires a positive emotional and evaluative value, to which are assigned such components as "beauty", "attractiveness", "harmony", "grooming", "grace". The word *baba* is used with a negative rating, the basis of which are such signs as 'huge body sizes', 'vulgar appearance', 'groomed', and 'dirty clothes'. These signs indicate a mismatch of these qualities with the image-standard of a woman in Russian culture: "A *woman* seeks to decorate herself. This is in her blood - from the desire to lose weight or get better, to the dream of new fur coats, sweets, hair clips, etc. *Baba* doesn't bother. (...) Her appearance will also come down (rotten teeth?) Well, okay!"; "Baba is a whopper, in a salted bathrobe, with huge hair rollers, always dissatisfied with everything and everyone, with a rolling pin, waiting for her frail little man at home. A woman is still a little different"; "If the fists rest on the sides - a market woman. And if she folds her hands around her waist, then a woman with grace".

Such qualities cause the contemptuous attitude of users as "stupidity", "immorality", "anger", "lack of education, intelligence", "talkativeness", "fussiness", and "commercialism", which are reflected in the semantics of the word *baba*: "And for us *baba*. In the perception immediately comes out the image of a life-blached woman, possibly noisy and plump-looking. And who knows what kind of woman she is? Maybe she is kind, sensitive, caring, wise, and proud? And the other is intelligent, elegant, and well-groomed in appearance, smelling of expensive perfumes, in beautiful and fashionable clothes, seemingly with good manners at first glance. But no. Maybe she's just a *baba*. Bitchy, narrow-minded, and seeing everything only within the limits of her nose. Hating children and believing that all men around should pay her attention and, of course, MONEY".

If users of men's and women's forums agree in determining the negative characteristics of *baba*, the positive qualities are different. So, in women's forums, the word *baba* can be used as a synonym for the word *woman* with a neutral assessment: "That Beethoven wrote music that

*any baba gives birth to a child - exclusively for herself, and not for the surrounding society*". A word gets a positive assessment if it emphasizes nationality (*Russian*), physical strength, and health (*full of health*), strong physique, attractive appearance: "*You are healthy beautiful baba!*" Such qualities as the ability to stand up for oneself and express one's opinion, to be free in actions are evaluated positively from the female language collective and are assigned to the woman's word: "*a woman means a noble creature, a kind of intellectuals, and a baba so \*\*\* immediately and a trollop. But the baba can say everything she thinks and does everything she wants, and the woman stands aside and hesitates*".

Users of men's forums often use the word *baba* concerning a simple, emotional, beautiful, stately, smart, sensual woman: "... *baba is a beautiful, energetic, emotional, teaches dancing*"; "*There is no difference between a woman and a baba, it is said: the smartest baba. Cool baba*".

## 5. Discussion

The gender specificity of image verbalization of *woman* and *baba* is found, first of all, in the various quantitative and qualitative characterizations of the cognitive classifiers and cognitive attributes identified in the forum posts in the form "*Woman - what?*" and "*Baba - what?*"

Thus, the cognitive classifiers and cognitive characteristics recorded in the messages of women are more diverse. The most popular classifiers for both lexical items were "*Character and Temperament*" (woman - 33/40 (relevancy index/brightness index in women's forums and 30/32 in men's forums, respectively, baba - 18/32 and 18/20); "*Outward impression*" (woman - 27/49 and 20/48, baba - 9/20 and 11/13). The brightness indicators of the classifiers allow us to conclude that forum users are more likely to talk about the woman's outward impression. In contrast, for baba, they discuss character and temperament first.

The lexical item *woman* is undoubtedly assigned primarily as a positive assessment in the messages of men's and women's forums. This is evidenced by the most striking cognitive signs: *smart, beautiful, ideal, real,*

*strong, sweet, wonderful, beloved, feminine, self-sufficient, emotional, kind, well-groomed.* Also, vivid signs are neutral-evaluating lexical items: *any, Russian, married.* In men's forums, when evaluating the character, negative evaluative signs were encountered: *corrupt, bitchy, capricious, spoiled, greedy, grumpy.*

In combination with evaluative adjectives (*thick, envious, bad, very impudent, bazaar, scary, scandalous, embittered, ill-educated, without the education*), the word *baba* allows you to express a wide range of characteristics that cause contempt and, accordingly, a negative assessment from the language collective. However, positive-appraisal lexical items are quite striking: *beloved, normal, healthy, beautiful, not snotty*, and neutral-appraisal: *Russian, modern, young, married.*

It is noteworthy that only positive and evaluative signs became common for words of a woman and a baba in messages of users of both sexes: *real, normal, beautiful, married, and Russian, beloved.* Negative and evaluative signs are combined with these words with different shades of meaning. So, if we are talking about a not-so-slender body, then with the word *woman* is used the adjective *plumpy* (beautiful voluminous figure), and with the word *baba* - *thick* (graceless, ugly figure).

Analysis of cognitive signs indicating the actions of *women* and *baba* identified in the form "*Woman - what does she do?*" and "*Baba - what does she do?*" also reveals markers of female and male cognitive consciousness, showing similarities and differences in the perception of these images.

Users of women's forums equally focus on the appearance, reproductive function, intellectual qualities of women, and baba. However, in the context of discussions about relationships with the family, children, and husband and professional activities, the word *woman* is more often found in messages. The classifiers "*typical social behavior*" and "*attitude to material values*" were allocated only for the lexical item *woman*.

When describing a *woman* and a *baba*, users of men's forums discuss their attitude to family, children, and husband, attitude to material values, intellectual qualities, appearance, professional activity, reproductive function, and habits. The classifier "*typical*

social behavior” is allocated only for the lexeme *woman*, while for the word *baba* only the classifier “age” is allocated.

The procedural features are predominantly positive for the word *woman* and negative for the *baba*. Thus, lexical items *woman* and *baba* occupy a large place in the virtual world, which reflects real-life and real communication. For users of both men's and women's forums, it is relevant to determine the meaning of these lexical items and the specifics of their functioning both in real and in virtual life. The study showed that in many ways, the “portrait” of a modern woman, reflected in the forums, coincides with the stereotype presented in the minds of native speakers. In user messages, these words can be used both as synonyms and as antonyms. A positive assessment is assigned mainly to the word *woman*, negative to the word *baba*.

As a result of the study, the specifics of the functioning of *woman* and *baba* lexemes in the Internet discourse were examined; based on the non-procedural and procedural characteristics of *women* and *baba* reflected in the language of users of the Russian-speaking Internet, gender symmetry/ asymmetry of the image of *women* and *baba* is described by comparing the results of identification by persons of the opposite sex and self-identification.

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