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## **GENDER ISSUES IN GEORGIAN AND ENGLISH PROVERBS**

### **Abstract**

A proverb is a short, concise expression that conveys folk wisdom. It is universal and its roots must be sought in different cultures. The most important characteristic for them is that it belongs to the oral tradition. The general theme of the proverb relates to human experience and activities (Schiffer, 2010; Rusieshvili 2005;). Moreover, in almost all cultures, proverbs are general-referential expressions, the wisdom of which society must take into account (Rong, 2013). Proverbs are carriers of shared cultural values and can even be called a symbolic expression of culture. Therefore, reflecting the social and culturally specific features of society, the proverb can be classed as a sociolinguistic phenomenon. As well as this, through the proverb, we can explore the cultural worldview of the nation. Based on contrastive and comparative analysis, this article examines gender-marked Georgian and English proverbs. More specifically, it discusses (1) key themes revealed in the relevant groups of proverbs in both cultures, (2) similarities and differences between the gender stereotypes emerging in the proverbs of both cultures, and (3) reasons behind these similarities and differences.

**Keywords:** proverb, gender, sociolinguistics

### **1. Introduction**

A proverb is a short saying or piece of folk wisdom that emerges from the general culture rather than being written by a single, individual author. It is universal for many languages with roots in different cultures (literaryterms.net, Cambridge Dictionary, City Hall-Webster Dictionary). The most significant characteristic of a proverb is that it is easy to remember, passed down from generation to generation. It has been transmitted orally for millennia (Grzybek, 1994; Rasul, 2015). The general theme of the proverb is to describe a human being's experience (Schipper, 2010). Moreover, in almost all cultures, proverbs express wisdom that society relies on (Rong, 2013).

Proverbs manifest common cultural values, and they can be considered as a symbolic expression of culture.

Consequently, the proverb is a sociolinguistic phenomenon and reflects the social and cultural characteristics of an ethnic group, and through them, certain aspects of the cultural worldview can be studied.

The proverb emerged in linguistics, ethnology, folklore, sociology and actively studied in the second part of the XX century. Naturally, the fields of knowledge listed here explored the proverb from their perspective (Rusieshvili, 2005). It is noteworthy that the proverb is one of the most interesting and, at the same time, integral markers of cultural diversity (Rong, 2013). In general, it becomes popular if the experience well reflects the social expectations rooted in society (Lee, 2015). In addition, according to one of the definitions, the proverb is "short, pithy sayings that reflect the accumulated wisdom, prejudices, and superstitions of the human race" (New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy; Rasul, 2015).

This article aims to discuss gender-specific Georgian and English proverbs based on the methods of contrastive and comparative analysis. More specifically, it will examine (1) the main themes revealed in the relevant and compatible proverbs in both cultures, (2) similar stereotypes emerging in these two cultures, and (3) probable underlying cause(s) that can be identified behind their similar or different themes.

## **2. Theoretical overview of the issue**

In modern science, issues of gender are of particular interest. As the proverb expresses the traditional values of society, it also involves gender issues.

Rasul (2015) explores gender-based proverbs using the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough, 2003, 2010), according to which critical discourse explores inequality, racism, danger, suffering, superstition, etc. Based on the method of comparative and contrastive analysis, Rasul studies English and Urdu proverbs. He concludes that, as a linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon, the proverb reflects the folk wisdom that manifests the interests of the patriarchal society. It is noteworthy that, according to the same study, a woman is adorned with characteristics that society ascribes to her and demands of her. The author distinguishes four main categories of the proverb in both cultures (Urdu and English):

1. Woman as beautiful, weak and unable.
2. Woman as reckless and talkative
3. Woman as an immoral "subject" of pleasure

4. Woman as an unreliable, traitorous creature and a troublemaker.

Naturally, according to Rasul's (2015) research, a woman in proverbs is generally presented from an unfavourable position, which reflects the stereotypes in early society about women and their role in society.

Gender issues are quite a popular research topic in folklore, especially in proverbs. Moran (2019), in the article "Gender Issues in Folklore: A Study with Special Reference to Some Assamese Proverbs," explores the gender issues in folklore.

According to the article, it is difficult to ignore gender in folklore. Moreover, there is gender-specific folklore. A study of Assamese proverbs has revealed that they promote discrimination and gender inequality, which, following the author, reflects the approach to women in India. In particular, the proverbs depict a male-dominated society, gender discrimination, and attitudes toward women as objects.

A similar result was revealed by a study of proverbs in the Sundanese language. In his article, Mubarak (2017) examines the relationship between the role of women in society and the stereotypes in language. The author argues that language is one of the most significant tools in constructing and deconstructing gender issues. Moreover, through language, and in this particular case, with the help of proverbs, the role, status and identity of a woman are presented. All of this leads to the issue of inequality between women and men. Proverbs presented in the Sundanese language, according to Mubarak's research (2017), is divided into three main categories:

1. Woman as a sexually attractive object.
2. A virtuous woman
3. Woman as an obedient creature

According to the author's interpretation, the proverb conveys the traditional gender stereotypes that shape not only the role of women but also that of men in society. More specifically, masculine hegemony, i.e. man's authority, power and right to control/direct a woman's destiny. Mubarak argues that the proverbs are truly hegemonic because they reveal the superiority of the man which is so much ingrained into the public worldview and language that it hinders feminists in their struggle for gender equality.

Using the example of Pashto proverbs, Khan's article (2015) discusses the view of Thierry and Edwards (2006) that the content conveyed in the proverbs is quite complex, as well as a carrier of knowledge of social content, the knowledge of which is necessary to properly understand its content. In addition, Thierry and Edwards maintain that proverbs reflect the real face of the culture in which the proverbs originated. The validity of this view is substantiated by Khan based on his

research. According to the article, the ideology of Pashto proverbs is a masculine model and largely includes strength, power and masculine energy. Also, men appear as symbols of courage in Pashto proverbs. As for women, Pashto proverbs show a tendency for females to be mentioned predominantly in a negative context. In addition, the humiliation of women is frequent. According to the author, instead of portraying a woman as a progressive and active member of society, she is depicted as isolated from public life; her main duty is only to conduct activities related to the family sphere. According to the author, this social condition for Pashtuns presents an ideal social structure, which, through proverbs, is learned from an early age by both women and men. Negative traits such as jealousy, weakness, lack of energy and physical strength are also associated with women in Pashto proverbs. And if these characteristics are used concerning a man, then there is a criticism of any behaviour of the man and his demeaning. Khan (2015) argues that Pashto proverbs tell us about the world that can only be seen from the perspective of a man, while a woman is ascribed only a secondary role.

According to the hierarchy of public order, a man is superior to a woman - a woman should stay at home and be obedient to men. On the other hand, men are represented as the leaders of society, they are authorised to make important decisions not only for themselves but also on behalf of their wives and daughters.

In an extensive study, Lee (2015) reviews Chinese proverbs and gender issues that shine through them. It is interesting that according to the author, the study of proverbs in Chinese school curricula occupies an important place. Accordingly, in his opinion, it is necessary to study the hidden or overt messages that provide school students with a knowledge of gender roles and functions in society. Lee maintains that Chinese proverbs express gender inequality. More specifically, they often emphasise gender hierarchy or control of women by men. However, in the Chinese language and culture, gender-specific proverbs, a man is rarely seen, which, in the author's opinion, indicates that women have long been the object of public discussion and close study. As claimed by the author, another indicator of gender inequality is gender stereotypes. For example, traditionally, men were expected to support their families while the social role of women was limited to the home sphere. Naturally, this content is reflected in the proverbs. According to this study, Chinese proverbs describe a woman's activities and functions more frequently than those of a man.

In such proverbs, a woman's appearance, mental abilities, their role in society are represented. However, the proverbs that refer to a man mainly reflect their talents and physical or mental abilities, friendship, strength of character, sexual longing, etc. It is noteworthy that, as Lee argues, although gender proverbs are frequently employed in modern society, in China, a woman is no

longer valued only in the traditional way (housewife, mother, family caregiver) as she occupies a more or less equal place with men in society.

It is clear from the previous studies that proverbs present a woman stereotypically and from the point of view of a gender bias. This, naturally, is explained by the fact that language is a social phenomenon that reflects the prevailing opinion in society. Gender inequality in language unequivocally indicates that sexist attitudes towards a woman are rooted in society.

### **3. Research Methodology**

As mentioned above, the purpose of this article is to provide a contrasting and comparative analysis of Georgian and English gender-labelled proverbs. More specifically, it examines (1) the main themes revealed in the relevant and compatible proverbs in both cultures, (2) similar stereotypes emerging in these two cultures, and (3) probable underlying cause(s) behind the similar or different themes.

The article discusses twenty proverbs (ten Georgian and ten English) selected from the electronic database of Georgian idioms and proverbs (with their English, German, French, Russian, Turkish and Arabic equivalents) through the principle of selectivity.

The gender-labelled proverbs were selected through the following keywords in Georgian ქალი, ცოლი, ბავშვი (woman, wife, child) and in English, through the words woman, wife.

The process of analysis was based on the semantic and pragmatic model suggested by Rusieshvili (2005), according to which the proverb metaphor consists of three layers. The first layer presents the metaphorical form of the proverb, the second layer presents its meaning and pragmatic parameters, whereas the third layer shows the cultural model behind the image of the proverb.

**Table 1**  
**Georgian Proverbs**

	ლამაზი ქალი ცოლად შეირთე - წყალში გადავარდიო. Marry a beautiful woman - fall into deep water.
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	<p>ლამაზი ცოლის პატრონსა უნდა ჰყავდეს ძალი ფრთხილი, ან თითონ უნდა ფრთხილობდეს, ან მისი დედამთილი</p> <p>The owner of a beautiful wife should be careful and have either a dog or alert mother-in-law</p>
	<p>ქმარი ციხეში მიჰყავდათ, ცოლი კაბას უბარებდაო</p> <p>The husband was being taken to prison and the wife was asking him to buy a dress for her</p>
	<p>დედაკაცის თმა გრძელია- ჭკუა მოკლე</p> <p>A woman's hair is long whereas brains are short</p>
	<p>ცხრა ქალის ჭკუა ერთი თხილის ნაჭუჭში ჩაიდება და კიდევ ადგილი დარჩებაო</p> <p>The brains of nine women can be placed in the shell of one nut and there will still be room left</p>
	<p>სულ არარაობას, ქალიც შვილიაო</p> <p>Better to have a daughter than no child.</p>
	<p>ქალი სხვისი საქონელიაო</p> <p>A woman is someone else's commodity</p>
	<p>ავია თუ კარგიაო, ქალო, შენი ქმარიაო</p> <p>Whether good or bad, that man is your husband</p>
	<p>ცხენსა და დედაკაცს კაცი არ უნდა ენდოსო</p> <p>A man should never trust a horse and a woman</p>
0	<p>კაი კაცის ნაცოლარი, კაი ღვინის ნაძირალი</p> <p>A good man's ex- wife is good wine's dregs</p>

1. Table 2
2. **English Proverbs**

	A woman's place is in the home
	A woman's work is never done
	A woman's advice is never to seek.
	There was never a conflict without a woman.
	Many women, many words; many geese, many turds.
	A man of straw is worth of a woman of gold.
	A man is as old as he feels, a woman as old as she looks.
	A worthy woman is the crown of her husband.
	Woman is like roasted meat, the more you beat, the softer it will be
0	When an ass climbs a ladder, we may find wisdom in a woman

### **3.1. Results and Discussions**

The selected proverbs reveal a stereotypical attitude towards a woman dominant in society. Based on the chosen proverbs, we can distinguish several main categories.

The gender-specific issues represented in Georgian proverbs can be further divided into the main categories:

**1. A woman's beauty is dangerous**

- A) Marry a beautiful woman - fall into deep water.
- B) The owner of a beautiful wife should be careful and have either a dog or alert mother-in-law

**2. Woman is another household's property**

- A) Better to have a daughter than no child.
- B) A woman is someone else's commodity
- C) A good man's ex- wife is good wine's dregs

**3. Proverbs reflecting a woman's weak mental abilities**

- A) The husband was being taken to prison and the wife was asking him to buy a dress for her
- B) A woman's hair is long whereas brains are short
- C) The brains of nine women can be placed in the shell of one nut and there will still be room left

**4. A woman cannot be trusted**

- A) A man should never trust a horse and a woman
- 5. A woman should unhesitatingly obey her husband
- A) Whether good or bad, that man is your husband

As seen from the proverbs above, a woman's beauty is evaluated negatively- A man cannot trust a beautiful woman. Moreover, marrying a beautiful woman is tantamount to "falling into the water." Approximately the same meaning - distrust -is presented in the proverb - "a horse and a woman should never be trusted ", where a woman is compared to a horse, which, if allowed to do so, may even kill the owner.

It is common in Georgian proverbs to present a woman as property or commodity. There is still a stereotypical attitude in Georgian society regarding the continuation of the family name and being an "heir". Moreover, according to statistics, pregnancies on more than 30,000 girls have been purposefully terminated in Georgia in the past 25 years (Results of Selective Abortions in Georgia, 2018).

This horrible content is conveyed in the proverb: "Better to have a daughter than no child", which, first of all, puts the female child slightly above having no children at all and expresses the attitude of society towards it. The linguistic choice is also interesting in the following two proverbs, which uniquely look at a woman as an object, commodity or property: "a woman is someone else's commodity", in both cases, the connotation is negative and presents the woman as an object owned



by the man. It is also interesting to note that a divorced woman, even though she was the wife of a good man, is still undesirable - she is good, but still a scum, the sediment of wine.

The proverbs negatively convey the mental abilities; women are stupid: "The husband was being taken to prison and the wife was asking him to buy a dress for her", "A woman's hair is long whereas brains are short", "The brains of nine women can be placed in the shell of one nut and there will still be room left".

In addition, a woman is required to be patient and bear everything, including a good -for-nothing husband or bad conditions in the family: "Whether good or bad, that man is your husband", which once again presents the stereotype that a woman is subordinate to a man, her fate is in the hands of a man and she is obliged to endure everything without uttering a single complaint. This proverb clearly shows the aspiration of society to suppress the voice of a woman and make her an obedient person who is treated like a commodity.

Topics emerging in English proverbs can be narrowed down to the following main categories:

**1. Connecting a woman to a home sphere**

- A) A woman's place is in the home
- B) A woman's work is never done

**2. The mental abilities of a woman**

- A) A woman's advice is never to seek.
- B) Many women, many words; many geese, many turds.
- C) When an ass climbs a ladder, we may find wisdom in a woman

**3. Woman as property/item/commodity or an accessory to her husband**

- A) A worthy woman is the crown of her husband
- B) Woman is like roasted meat, the more you beat, the softer it will be

**4. An unworthy man is much better than a decent woman**

- A) A man of straw is worth a woman of gold
- 5. A woman is an essential participant in troublemaking

- A) There was never a conflict without a woman

**6. Other**

- A) A man is as old as he feels, a woman is as old as she looks.

The English proverbs presented above are also quite discriminatory towards a woman. A woman is frequently associated with the domestic sphere of the female sex, which, as already mentioned, is due to the fact that men, from time immemorial, have taken on the role of breadwinner, and women

have long been associated with home and family care. It's natural It is also caused by the physiology of a woman who gives birth to a baby and then has to feed it (Hofstede, 1991).

The proverbs also express a negative attitude towards a woman's mental abilities, according to which one should never seek a woman's advice, presumably due to the fact that her mental abilities, she would not be intelligent enough to give a man good advice. In the following proverb, the woman is compared to the goose whereas her words and thinking abilities to the goose turd. According to the proverb, where there are many women, there is a lot of nonsense- "Many women, many words; many geese, many turds".

Moreover, according to the stereotype, in the last proverb of this category, a woman is so far from common sense that before a woman becomes wise, even a donkey can climb a tree - "When an ass climbs a ladder, we may find wisdom in a woman".

The third subcategory of English proverbs presents an attitude towards a woman as property/commodity. Although the first proverb "A worthy woman is the crown of her husband" can be perceived positively at first glance, a worthy woman is compared to an item - a crown, she is still the property of her husband and his "owner", therefore, the connotation is still negative. A woman is an item in relation to a man and not to her equal. The second proverb is also interesting in this respect: "Woman is like roasted meat, the more you beat, the softer it will be", which justifies violence against a woman for "meekness". Interestingly, according to statistics, up to 30.3% of women in England are victims of domestic violence (Michael, 2018).

The proverbs in the following categories are interesting insofar as they allow us to compare the roles of women and men. According to the proverbs, a man is a much more valuable member of society, even he had a value of straw compared to a woman's price ("A man of straw is worth a woman of gold").

In addition, a man has so much freedom that he can manage to look (presumably behave) according to the age he feels when a woman's age can be judged by her appearance ("A man is as old as he feels, a woman as old as she looks"). This sexist proverb emphasizes the importance of a woman's appearance as well, as the beauty for a woman is one of the defining attributes. As for the last proverb - "There was never a conflict without a woman", it expresses the opinion that women are the source of trouble. We can also recall historically the wars that started because of women, for example, the Trojan War, the fight Between Rama and Ravana and many others.

The analysis of Georgian and English proverbs revealed almost the same theme. The gender-specific proverbs chosen in both languages convey basically the same stereotypes: they emphasize

the beauty of a woman, although in this case, it is very interesting that the beauty of a woman is conveyed in a negative context, which puts a man on the defensive and urges him to be careful.

In addition, proverbs often treat women as subjects. Moreover, violence against women was also revealed in the English proverb. Interesting folk attitudes towards women's mental abilities are also obvious - women are stereotypically presented as brainless, reckless creatures who have little virtue to be trusted, or until their mental capacity develops, "a donkey may climb a tree."

English proverbs also reveal a connection between a woman's home and family space. All this is naturally caused by the stereotypical attitude that is so prevalent in society. As has been mentioned many times, language is a social phenomenon, and in particular, it reflects the thinking and the worldview of society.

Consequently, those stereotypical attitudes and unequal distribution of gender roles, sometimes even the unjust attitudes are seen in proverbs, directly reflect the attitudes rooted in society. Note that English proverbs are characterized by frequent and daily use of proverbs in real social life. Interestingly, to this day, even a developed country society like England is still stereotypical regarding gender stereotypes and gender roles.

According to the survey, there is no country that recognizes equality. English society is still dominated by men. The majority of the population believes that men have more "rights" to earn a job than women. Society also negatively evaluates women occupying positions in politics, for instance (Gender Studies, 2020; Oppenheim, 2019; Agerholm, 2018).

The issue of gender inequality is also acute in Georgia. Although according to studies, the population of Georgia accepts that both boys and girls should be educated equally, the same society believes that the decision-maker in the family should be a man and only he should work, while a woman should stay home, raise children and take care of the family. In addition, sex before marriage for women is also frowned upon by traditional people (Rekhviashvili, 2012).

Naturally, all these gender inequalities and stereotypical attitudes towards the role of women and men are directly reflected in language. One of its manifestations can be considered proverbs, which are quite typical for both Georgian and English everyday language.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Proverbs are the folk wisdom that conveys to us the knowledge accumulated over the centuries. By studying them we can restore the customs, thinking or prevailing stereotypes of the society. For both Georgian and English, proverbs are an important part of the language reflecting the attitude of the society towards various issues, including the redistribution of social roles. On the example of

the twenty proverbs discussed above, we can say that they indeed express the inequality between women and men and the stereotypical attitude towards women that was common and still is characterized by society - in the discussed proverbs such topics as women's connection not with the social but with the home sphere were raised. The proverbs also emphasize a woman's appearance and her foolishness. Interestingly, both societies view women as the property of a man who also has the right to beat her in order to tame and subdue her. In addition, the desire to suppress a woman's voice demands them to be obedient and to endure everything because it is their duty.

Proverbs, as parts of the code of public order, also appear to be a culturally specific layer of the language. In addition, as Lee (2015) points out, sexism can be society and not the language itself. Consequently, in order to change such a deep-rooted way of thinking in society, we need to be more positive concerning gender-specific issues reflected in the language.

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