

EVOLUTION OF THE GENDER CATEGORY IN THE FRENCH LANGUAGE

Sabirova Gulasal Babadjanovna

Teacher, Uzbekistan State World Languages University
gulasals@mail.ruStudent of the 5th year of the Uzbekistan State World Languages University)
Khasanova Makhliyo

Annotation: This article comprehensively analyzes the stages of historical formation of the gender category in the French language, its place in the grammatical system, and its semantic functions. The gender category is one of the central components of French grammar, ensuring important grammatical correspondence not only in the system of nouns, but also in the system of adjectives, articles, pronouns, and verbs. The study consistently examines the evolutionary development of the gender category in the period from ancient French to modern languages. In particular, the mechanisms of transition from the three-sex system to the two-sex system in Latin, the disappearance of the neutral gender, and the morphological and syntactic consequences of this process are analyzed. The article highlights the significance of the gender category not only from a linguistic point of view, but also in a sociolinguistic and cultural context. The movement for gender equality and the phenomenon of inclusive writing ("écriture inclusive") that emerged in the 20th-21st centuries led to a revision of the gender system in the language. Thus, modern changes in the gender category indicate that the French language is developing in harmony with social values in society.

Keywords: gender category, morphology, French, grammatical system, neutral gender, semantic evolution.

The gender category is one of the central components of the French grammatical system. It plays an important role not only in the morphological formation of nouns, but also in the forms of adjectives, articles, pronouns, and verbs that determine them. The category of gender is expressed in the French language at the semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic levels. Therefore, it plays an important role in understanding the internal mechanisms of the language system.

The gender system in the French language was formed from the ancient Gallo-Romantic period and was inherited from the Latin gender system. However, this category has changed significantly in the process of historical development. While the Old French language had three genders (male, female, and neutral), by the modern era it has been reduced to a bisexual system - masculin and féminin. This process arose as a result of grammatical simplification and semantic adaptation within the system.

In linguistics, the category of gender is studied not only as a grammatical phenomenon, but also in a social, cultural, and historical context. Because gender differences in the language system are directly related to gender stereotypes, social roles, and cultural values in society. In particular, in recent decades, gender equality and inclusive language issues have become a pressing topic in European scientific circles.

In the 21st century, the movement of gender neutrality led to a revision of the French gender category. This process manifests itself in the form of "écriture inclusive" - an inclusive writing style aimed at neutralizing grammatical gender and ensuring gender equality in expression.

Therefore, the study of the evolution of the gender category has not only linguistic, but also sociological significance.

The relevance of this research lies in the fact that it illuminates the complex interrelationships between language and society by analyzing the historical changes in the category of gender in the grammatical system of the French language, new approaches in the modern era, and trends in gender neutrality.

The main goal of this research is to analyze the stages of historical development of the gender category in the French language, the mechanisms of their morphological and semantic changes, as well as the processes of gender neutrality occurring in the modern era. To achieve this goal, the following scientific tasks have been defined:

Analysis of the history of the formation of the category of gender in the French language, starting from the period of the ancient French language.

Determination of the morphological and syntactic functions of the gender category in the grammatical system.

Study of semantic changes in the category of gender and the subtleties of meaning arising from them.

Analysis of linguistic changes in the French language in the 20th-21st centuries under the influence of gender neutrality movements.

Study of the forms of inclusive writing (*écriture inclusive*) in modern French and their linguistic foundations.

Identification of social and cultural factors associated with changes in the gender system of the French language.

Several methods of scientific analysis were used in the study. First of all, using the historical-comparative method, the gender system of the ancient and modern French languages was studied comparatively. Also, based on the descriptive method, the role of the gender category in the modern grammatical system is described.

Through structural-semantic analysis, morphological forms related to the gender category and their semantic aspects were analyzed. With the help of a sociolinguistic approach, the movement of gender neutrality and the social significance of inclusive writing were studied. In addition, through the analysis of discourse, the features of the use of the gender category in the media, education, and official correspondence were analyzed.

The research was based on monuments of the ancient French language, scientific literature on the grammar of the modern French language, as well as normative documents on gender neutrality and language policy materials.

The evolution of the French gender category encompasses a long historical process. The formation of the gender category began in ancient Latin, and at that time there was **a system of three** genders: masculinum (male), femininum (female) and neutrum (neutral). However, in the early stages of the development of the Old French language, the neutral gender morphologically integrated into male gender forms. Thus, in modern French, a bisexual system - **masculin** and **féminin** - has been formed, which is reflected in all nouns, adjectives, articles, and pronouns of the language.

For example, in the nouns *le livre* (book) and *la table* (table), gender differences are expressed not only by the article, but sometimes also by morphemes at the end of the word. Although gender in many nouns is not determined by grammatical signs, **their traditional gender separation in the system** has a historical basis. **This indicates that the gender category has a grammatical, not a semantic, character..**

1. Stages of historical change

In the historical evolution of the category of sex, the following stages can be distinguished:

- **Stage I (Latin period):** trinomial system, differentiation of the sex of horses by morphological suffixes (-us, -a, -um).
- **Stage II (Old French):** disappearance of the neutral sex and fusion with the male sex. For example, the Latin word *templum* (neutral) in Old French took the form *le temple* (male gender).
- **Stage III (Middle French):** the emergence of articles and the reinforcement of gender at the syntactic level (*le, la, les*).
- **Stage IV (modern period):** strict normalization of gender markers in the grammatical system (*le garçon / la fille, un ami / une amie*).

These stages indicate the transition of the gender category from a morphological to a syntactic system, i.e., the transformation of gender features from formal to functional in the language.

2. Correspondence in the grammatical system

In the French language, gender requires grammatical correspondence in parts of speech associated with nouns. For example:

- *Un bon étudiant* (good student) - male;
- *Une bonne étudiante* (good student) - female.

In these examples, quality (*bonne/bonne*) varies by gender. Also, gender appears as an important grammatical factor in pronouns and verbs:

- *Il est beau* (She is beautiful - male);
- *Elle est belle* (She is beautiful - female).

Therefore, the gender category is based on **the principle of morphological harmony** of the French grammatical system.

3. Changes in the modern era: gender neutrality

In the 21st century, new perspectives on gender emerged in linguistics and sociology. In particular, as a result of the ideas of gender equality and inclusivity, the inclusive writing style "**écriture inclusive**" appeared in the French language.

This method is aimed at the sexual neutralization of language. For example, the following shapes are examples:

- Traditional form: *Les étudiants* (students - grammatically male gender form is also used as a general form).
- Inclusive form: *Les étudiant·e·s* or *les étudiant (e) s* (to represent male and female students together).

Such attempts to ensure sexual neutrality are also observed in some job titles. For example, words like *le professeur, le maire, le directeur*, which were previously used only with the male gender form, are now used for women in the forms *la professeure, la mairesse, la directrice*.

These changes demonstrate the language's adaptability to new values in the social environment. But at the same time, these innovations also caused controversial issues in French linguistics. There are also criticisms of language, such as "overloading morphologically" or "creating forms that contradict normative grammar."

4. Social and cultural factors

The category of gender in the French language is considered not only as a grammatical phenomenon, but also as a **cultural** code. Gender differences in the language system are a reflection of historical gender roles in French society. For example, in the past, some professional names were used only in the male gender (*le médecin, le juge*), which strengthened social gender inequality through language.

In the modern era, concrete steps are being taken to eliminate these stereotypes within the framework of language policy and the education system. In 2017, the French Ministry of Education developed a document regulating the use of inclusive writing in school textbooks. Thus, it can be seen that the linguistic evolution of the category of gender is directly related to the policy of gender equality in society.

The evolution of the gender category in the French language clearly demonstrates the dynamic and adaptive nature of the linguistic system. Based on historical sources, it can be said that although the gender category was initially inherited from the three-sex system of the Latin language, over time, as a result of the disappearance of the neutral sex, a bipolar system was formed - male (masculin) and female (féminin). This process of simplification is the result of adaptation to the internal grammatical laws of the language and speech practice, which indicates the historical consistency in the French language system.

In modern times, the category of gender is reinterpreted not only as a grammatical unit, but also as a social and cultural phenomenon. The ideas of gender equality, social justice, and communicative neutrality are reflected in the language system, stimulating the formation of new linguistic processes such as "écriture inclusive" (inclusive writing). This means that the French language is actively adapting to changes in social life and strengthening the role of the language as a means of forming social identity.

Changes in the gender category are considered, on the one hand, as a stage of natural development of the grammatical system of the French language, and on the other hand, as a process inextricably linked with language policy, education, mass media, and cultural values. While supporters of inclusive language view sexual neutrality as an effective means of ensuring gender equality through language, language purists assess this process as dangerous for grammatical stability. Thus, this phenomenon demonstrates a complex interaction between linguistic change and social identity. In general, the evolution of the French gender category is a product of the dynamic balance between the grammatical system, social life, and cultural values of the language. From a historical point of view, this evolution reveals the processes of simplification and systematization in language, and from a modern point of view, it forms a new language paradigm based on human rights, equality, and communicative ethics.

Further research in this direction will allow for a deeper study of the patterns of sociolinguistic development of the French language, as well as a comparative analysis of changes in the gender category with processes in other Romance languages. Thus, the study of the gender category has important scientific significance not only in elucidating the grammatical phenomenon, but also in illuminating the mechanism of interaction between language and society.

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