

“Constructed Women”

-- Feminism in THE SECOND SEX

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Abstract: Simone de Beauvoir (1908 - 1986), as the pioneer and founder of feminist literary criticism, her feminist thoughts and Literary theory have had a profound impact on the development of women's movement and feminist literary theory around the world. Beauvoir is “one of the most important women of the 20th century.” His book *The Second Sex* covers the cultural content of philosophy, history, literature, biology, ancient myths and customs, and discusses the actual women's situation, status and rights in the historical evolution from Primitive society to modern society. In the book, linguistic theories and methods are applied to define and differentiate gender concepts, and a detailed study is conducted on the shaping and influence of daily life, religion, and taboo language on women's psychology and consciousness. Exploring the relationship between gender and culture is an important dimension that reflects a conscious awareness of language and culture. Beauvoir's language research has provided important theoretical inspiration for the development of feminism, especially postmodern feminist criticism, and has a transitional significance that connects the past and the future. This article takes *The Second Sex* as the research text and conducts a feminist analysis of Beauvoir's linguistic theory from three aspects: The first part elaborates on feminism by analyzing Beauvoir's application of linguistic methods and research on multiple linguistic issues, criticizing the traditional patriarchal cultural tradition. The second part compares Woolf's feminist language views and introduces the different focuses of language research between the two. The third part elaborates on the impact of Beauvoir's language research on feminist criticism and postmodern feminism.

Keywords: Second sex, Beauvoir gender concept, the other.

1. Literature Review

As far as the world is concerned, feminist literary criticism rose in the 1960s as a product of the feminist movement, which almost started from the study of literature. As pioneers of this critical theory, Virginia Woolf in the UK and Simone de Beauvoir in France undoubtedly received widespread attention and research from their contemporaries and descendants.

Simone de Beauvoir proposed a series of groundbreaking viewpoints, which for the first time allowed people to understand the social and cultural causes of women becoming second sex at a theoretical level. It fundamentally changed women's understanding of themselves, men, and the social relationships between men and women. The focus of this article is not a comprehensive review and analysis of Beauvoir's feminist views and the impact of the Western feminist movement, but rather an attempt to apply the language theory and methods reflected in Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* and her understanding of language issues in daily life, religion, and taboos.

2. Current research status at home and abroad Overview of Feminist Research

The feminist movement first emerged in Western capitalist countries, and the rise of feminist research originated in the 1960s and 1970s. Simone de Beauvoir's official work *The Second Sex* not only sparked a second wave of “feminism”, but also promoted scholars' thinking on the survival status of women. In view of Beauvoir's analysis of the history and

current situation of women's Role, her concentrated expression and deep concern for women's situation in her works. Because of her own practice and vanguard and exemplary role in changing women's situation, she has long attracted the attention of women with independent female consciousness, women's rights activists and women's liberation supporters. Therefore, the publication of *The Second Sex* in 1947, which caused widespread debate and even misunderstanding, has been reexamined and paid attention to it, along with Woolf's *My Room*, is regarded as the spiritual guide of the feminist movement and has been widely studied, with both affirmation and negation.

3. Beauvoir's Linguistic Methodology A Wave of Beauvoir's Application to Linguistic Methodology

The emergence and development of Beauvoir's feminist ideology is inseparable from the premise of feminism. Feminism originated in France and developed rapidly, playing a significant role in the advancement of women worldwide. The feminism of this period had a significant impact on Beauvoir's feminist ideology.

1. Beauvoir starts with the definition and differentiation of gender concepts, uses linguistic theories and logical rhetorical methods to reveal women's secondary social status and other identity, and criticizes patriarchal cultural traditions.

Contrary to the traditional Determinism that emphasizes physiology, politics and economy, Beauvoir's understanding of women is a groundbreaking “formation” theory. To reveal the issue of how women are “formed” by human culture as a whole, Beauvoir first used linguistic methods. She started

with the analysis of the etymology and meaning of the word “man”, and used the discovery and definition of the connotation and extension of the gender concept of “woman” to examine the interrelationship between the gender concepts of “woman” and “man”, defining and distinguishing the concept of the other involving women. Beauvoir angrily pointed out in the preface of *The Second Sex* that “Man refers to men”. Men do not interpret women based on women themselves, but rather describe women as individuals who are not autonomous compared to men. The reference for defining and distinguishing women is men, while the reference for defining and distinguishing men is not women. She is an affiliated person, a subordinate who is opposed to the main. He is the subject, absolute, and she is “the other”. [1] In *The Second Sex*, Beauvoir first proposed the assertion that ‘he is the subject, the absolute, and she is the other.’ [2]

And question this assertion ‘why women are the other’, and then analyze and explore the reasons why women become the ‘second sex’ and ‘other’. Beauvoir believed that the key lies not only in the inability to be independent economically, resulting in a dependent status, but also in the collection of all concepts and facts of human history and social life over thousands of years under patriarchal culture, which has derived “second sex consciousness” or “other consciousness” in women’s conceptual world and life choices. Therefore, in the sense of being a ‘person’, women should re-establish and confirm themselves. On this basis, they construct new conceptual systems and organize new behavioral systems; Women should establish self-awareness, transcend their own limitations, and consider themselves as the cause and purpose of their existence. They should put forward goals, design plans, and undertake results together, take responsibility for themselves, and become independent individuals, complete individuals, and individuals with independent meanings. This is the establishment of women’s self-awareness.

Beauvoir not only debunked the language tricks of male culture by defining the concept of gender, but also profoundly revealed the tragic essence of the female ‘other’ from the philosophical significance of existentialism. The true meaning of ‘the other’ refers to those who have no or lost their self-awareness, are under the control of others or the environment, are completely in an object position, and have lost their subjective personality. [3]

As others, women lack independent thinking and are unable to express their desires. Her values are determined by the needs of men, and her identity is defined according to the man’s identity. Beauvoir, by revealing the social status and cultural situation of the “the other” of women, shifted her understanding of the two genders from an essentialist standpoint determined by physiological structure to a cultural level, thus establishing a new understanding of gender issues.

4. Beauvoir's Research on Multidisciplinary Language Problems

4.1. Daily life language

Beauvoir delved into the deep connection between daily life language and the formation of women’s second sexual status, emphasizing and valuing the prominent role of language in the cultural formation of gender differences between men and women.

Traditional biology starts from the role of sperm and eggs in animal bisexual reproduction, defining men’s initiative, the

range of activity beyond the family, and Women’s passivity, centered around the family, based on the surface initiative of sperm and passivity of eggs. This inference is only based on the surface and is farfetched. The term “male pornography” is often quoted from military terminology: the lover has the courage of a soldier, her organs are tense like bows, and ejaculation is “explosion”; He talked about attack, invasion, and victory. There is a hint of heroism in his sexual excitement. [4] If it is limited to focusing on or describing this linguistic phenomenon, it is not surprising that it reflects at most a certain sensitivity of the author to language and a disdain for rude language by middle-class women. Indeed, when people talk about their love relationship, even the most civilized people talk about conquest, attack, invasion, encirclement, defense, defeat, and surrender, clearly incorporating the concept of love into the concept of war. [3]

Beauvoir believes in the privileged status of men the unity of the enterprising role from the physiological perspective and the identity of a social leader or master; due to this difference in social function, the physiological differences are more meaningful. Because a man is the ruler of the world, he believes that the intensity of his desires is a sign of his dominance; people believe that strong individuals with sexual desires are strong and powerful - implying activity and transcendence. However, on the woman’s side, because she is only a “thing”, She will be described as ‘warm’ and ‘cold’, that is to say, her performance will always be passive in nature. [3] Feminists only strive for the same status as men, but this should be a natural thing that requires millions of women to pay a lot of hardships and efforts, even their lives. Many small things that are not noticed are manifestations of the patriarchal ideology rooted in the heart. Even English words such as ‘female/woman’ reflect men’s desire to control women, and they insist on showing their dominance over women. Through the analysis of the deep psychological accumulation of this language phenomenon, Beauvoir reveals the male power color of language and points out that this language privilege plays an important role in cultivating male enterprising roles and consolidating the psychology of male rulers. When men dominate nature, they do not receive a response.

Through this analysis of the unique language of male life and its inner consciousness connection, she came to the conclusion that “the so-called ‘true woman’ is an artificial product of culture, just like eunuchs in the past. Her nature of showing off coquettishness and ‘obedience’ is truly taught, just as men’s masculine pride is also taught. [3] Scholar Gao Xuanyang gave high praise for the wisdom and profound and unique understanding of Beauvoir’s thought: “Perhaps Simone de Beauvoir became the first thinker in the western cultural history to link the issue of gender relations with the emergence of western culture and the whole history of traditional culture.

She pointed out that the duality of sex, like all other dualities, is manifested through a conflict. Therefore, it can be understood that if one of the two succeeds in coercing the other to create his superiority, then the winner will become the absolute winner. [5]

Language has become an important dimension for Beauvoir's attention to gender and cultural composition, reflecting her deep thinking and understanding of language issues.

4.2. Religion, Mythology, Pornographic Language

Beauvoir systematically explores the various influences of religious language, erotic language, mythology, and other factors on women's gender psychology, linking language with culture and the formation of the subject psychology of women's second sex.

In addition to linking the development of language and gender awareness in daily life, Beauvoir also turned her attention to religious language, erotic language, and mythology, which are rarely paid attention to by the general public. She studied the influence of these words on different stages and aspects of gender psychology formation, and extended her tentacles of thinking about the causes of second sex culture to multiple fields of human language to make readers aware of the important components of language and culture that have a subtle or implicit impact on the formation of women's inferior status. "Thank God, he didn't make me a woman", the Jews say in their morning hymns, but their wives obediently pray and say, "Thank the Lord, give me life according to his will." When Plato thanked the Lord for the grace he had bestowed on him, firstly, he was born free, not a slave, and secondly, he was a man, not a woman. [3]

Catholicism has a particularly confusing effect on young girls. Virgins kneel down and hear the language of angels, but answer, "Look! The maidservant of the Lord." [3] And regarding the negative impact and role of myths on women's psychology, Beauvoir also has a clear revelation and criticism: "Women, because they are not established as subjects, do not create male myths that reflect their plans; women do not have their own religion and poetry; they still dream through men's dreams. They worship the gods created by men. The asymmetry between the two categories of men and women is manifested in the unidirectional composition of myths about sex. [1] Beauvoir pointed out that, Culture, civilization, and well-known values are all created by men, because men represent all of humanity. Men do not belong to women, but women belong to men. "Nature is kind because it bestows women on men. In these and other similar sentences, the man once again asserts in a arrogant and childish tone that his presence in this world is an inevitable fact and right, while the existence of women is an ordinary accidental event. [1] Therefore, the religious language, erotic language, and mythology that embody the patriarchal ideology have played an important role in the formation of women's second sexual inferiority.

4.3. Taboo language behavior and psychological exploration

Beauvoir also conducted research and exploration on the special feelings of language and female psychological experiences at a certain stage of women's growth process: "People joke about words and intentions in order to erase the magic of danger. I have seen young girls, and in Latin, they see *temur* (hip bone) With just one word, laughter burst out. Obscene language refers to the use of not only a method of resistance, but also a provocation against adults, a desecration of sacred objects, a deliberate and perverse behavior, mocking nature and society. [3]

The use of taboo language by young girls during their growth process, especially during their rebellious youth, is not aimed at the literal meaning of the language itself, but rather at expressing their subtle and complex rebellious psychology

and resistance to nature and society through this behavior. Beauvoir closely connects language with the establishment of female gender awareness and physical and mental growth by paying attention to this special language phenomenon, and explores language issues from a psychological perspective.

Beauvoir was the first to link language and culture, as well as the psychology of female second sex subjects, and paid great attention to language issues. Her research covered a wide range of topics and her thinking was extremely profound, indicating that she had developed a spontaneous language awareness. Although these accounts for a small proportion in *The Second Sex*, as the "Bible" of Western feminism, they are sufficient to provide ideological inspiration and theoretical growth points for other feminists.

5. Inheritance and Transcendence --A Comparison between Beauvoir and Woolf's Reflections on Language Issues

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when the first wave of world feminist movement rose, Woolf first proposed feminist demands and feminist literary criticism in *A room of one's own* (1929); Although Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* caused a lot of controversy at the beginning of its publication, with the second wave of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s and the rise of feminist Literary criticism, the *Second Sex* was re recognized by people.

In terms of the history of feminist movement and feminist criticism, Virginia Woolf was the first to pay attention to and explore gender issues in literary language, and proposed the concept of female language. She believed that a female language sentence structure could be found to express a unique female language style, reflecting an instrumental language perspective.

Expanding to the relationship and role of gender in the formation of cultural traditions. Some of them are Beauvoir's own opinions, and some of them can be used for reference by scholars in other fields such as religion, cultural anthropology, psychology and other fields in their thinking on language problems. Beauvoir was able to use language and logical rhetorical methods to conceptually define and distinguish the gender of men and women, and found the cultural causes that can deeply reveal the status of women as the "other". She analyzes and explores language as an important component of human culture from different fields and perspectives. Although these discourses are relatively scattered, they have shown a systematic and continuous nature, which is a crucial factor in their consideration of the causes of the second nature. Beauvoir's thinking on language issues is not simply a mention or superficial description, but a rational analysis of various language phenomena, exploring the underlying causes, and analyzing the effects and influences it has on women's psychology, physiology, and gender cultural traditions. There is a considerable theoretical depth of thinking and research. Although she has not completely shaken off the influence of instrumental discourse, her depth, theoretical nature, and systematization of thinking on language issues are beyond Woolf's.

6. The Influence of Three Beauvoir Language Studies on Feminist Criticism

Beauvoir's feminist Literary theory, based on her own feminist thoughts, first appeared in front of the world. Due to its frankness and boldness in destroying traditional beliefs and shaking the foundation of male centered culture, it was criticized and opposed by readers, including some women, at that time.

The feminist cultural revolution movement and theoretical construction initiated by Beauvoir propelled the development of the entire postmodern feminist trend in the 1960s and 1970s. In terms of language research, her influence on feminist criticism is reflected in at least three aspects.

1. The concept of the other and its ideas provide ideological weapons for feminist criticism and postmodern feminism. Beauvoir's definition of the concept of female gender and her examination of the status of women as "others" provide a theoretical basis and a starting point for feminist criticism of the patriarchal cultural tradition. The other is not the creation of Beauvoir. "The category of the other is as primitive as consciousness. In the most primitive society and the oldest myth, the Dualisms of the self and the other can always be found; this distinction was not placed in the situation of gender discrimination at the beginning."

In the language of Phyllis, which takes the Binary opposition between men and women as the core, women are always the negative side that proves the positive value of men, and the other who reflects the male self. The Binary opposition mode of thinking of patriarchy draws a clear and insurmountable boundary between men and women. She sharply but not deeply raised the question of 'why women are others', And a clear explanation was given: "Those who make and codify laws, as men, make their gender advantageous, and jurists turn laws into norms." [1] However, the ultimate evolution of human society is: "Women are determined or distinguished compared to men, not men compared to women; women face essence rather than essence. Men are the subject and absolute; women are the other." [1]

A specific manifestation of men's "otherness" towards women. "Physically, psychologically or economically, no fate can determine the image of human women in society. It is the entire civilization that determines the so-called Femininity between men and women." [5] In a patriarchal society, the decision maker is men. They find women as rivals to show their physical strength and use this strength to suppress women. In sexual relationships, women are trapped in a vicious cycle, where the less they are certain of their subject status, the less they receive, the less freedom they lack, and the more they are subdued, the more oppressed they become. Women have always had independent survival and objective selves from the beginning. People taught her that in order to be liked, she must do her best to please and make herself an object; So, she should give up her right to autonomy. Male dominated rule integrates law, theology, philosophy, literature, and other aspects into their use, and socializes and internalizes male privileges and advantages through various social operations, becoming the foundation for shaping the ideological consciousness and spiritual mindset of Westerners. Under the premise of this non social relationship between men and women, the basic concepts of "self", "subject", "other", and "object" as well as their related ideological consciousness emerged in Western culture. In this way, as the

'other', women naturally become negative and therefore are in a state of being determined and restricted, deprived of all equal two-way interaction.

The woman made by two boys in Atwood's poetry with mud, "it is the product of male imagination, objects created to be enjoyed by men. As Simon de Beauvoir pointed out in "The Second Sex," Phyllis, as the embodiment of everything in the King's Landing, belittles women as an Other. [6] More importantly, Postmodernism feminists, on the basis of accepting Beauvoir's thought of "the other", redefined and interpreted the concept of "the other". They believe that women are others, but such others have various advantages and there is no need to surpass them. In terms of the various connections between otherness and oppression and inferiority, its meaning goes far beyond the social situation of oppression and inferiority. Others can also be a way of existence, making openness, diversity, and difference. [4]

1. Beauvoir's exploration of daily life, religion, pornography, taboo language, and other aspects laid the foundation for theoretical and systematic research on the relationship between language phenomena and gender differences, and provided inspiration and guidance for the birth of a new branch of linguistics - gender linguistics.

Beauvoir emphasized that in Western culture, "the relationship between the sexes is not a positive, negative, or bipolar relationship: men represent both positive and neutral, and in French, "men" are used to refer to people, meaning that the special meaning of the word "man" has absorbed the general meaning of the word "man". [1] She connects the thinking of gender issues with language, highlighting the gender aspect of language. Inspired by this, feminist critics and some linguists have found such a regular phenomenon that in the languages of western countries, "masculine" and "positive", "positive" and "positive" are synonyms, that is, men not only represent men and masculine themselves, but also appear very skillfully in the face and form of legitimation "neutral", so that it becomes a synonym of the whole class. In 1973, Robin Lakeff proposed the concept of "female language" and used linguistic terminology to propose a series of introspective hypotheses on gender differences in language. He published the book "Language and the Position of Women" in 1975, "The book points out that in the world picture reflected by language, men occupy the central position, while women's images are incomplete, and the gender differences reflected in the use of language by men and women are the embodiment of social inequality between men and women. Lacoff's views have aroused the interest of linguists, and almost all subsequent studies on language and gender relations directly or indirectly drink or comment on her views. "[7] Lakeff pioneered another new branch of linguistics-gender linguistics, and the book "Language and the Position of Women", which laid the foundation of the discipline, followed the publication of the English translation of Beauvoir's "Second Sex". The two were not just coincidental in terms of time, but had an inherent inheritance relationship with Beauvoir's thinking of linking language, gender, and culture as the theoretical premise and research methods of the discipline.

Beauvoir sorted out the connections between gender, language, and culture, revealing and criticizing the male centered nature of traditional language, providing a theoretical basis for feminist criticism to clarify and criticize the male dominated nature of language, and providing ideological guidance for postmodern feminist criticism to

shift from literature to literary criticism. Beauvoir clearly revealed and criticized the unidirectional nature of traditional language centered around men. She believed that traditional language is a language that favors men because it is always discussed with men as the main body in the process of application.

Traditional patriarchy utilizes this one-dimensional language to continuously reproduce the concepts, systems, and entire socio-cultural system that oppress women. This sorting out of the relationship between gender, language, and culture provides a theoretical basis for feminist criticism to clarify and criticize the male dominated nature of language. Before Beauvoir, the feminist movement was mainly limited to the explicit aspects of politics, economy, and society. The social concept that fosters gender inequality and the cultural tradition that upholds male dominance have not truly changed. Based on the understanding of the important role of language in the construction of human culture, and the pioneering role of language in creating and maintaining the patriarchal cultural tradition, an important task of feminist criticism is to reveal and criticize the patriarchal traditional culture represented by language from the perspective of clarifying the patriarchal attribute of language, and to comprehensively deconstruct and subvert it. Beauvoir's comprehensive and profound revelation of the role of language in the male dominated social and cultural system of "creating and discriminating against women" has opened a new territory for thinking about gender issues, opened a new way for women to strive for equality and freedom, and provided a demonstration preview for the transformation of Postmodernism feminist criticism from literature to culture, from literary language to ideological discourse, to daily life language, changed the path and direction of the feminist movement.

7. Conclusion

Simone de Beauvoir skillfully applied linguistic methods to define and distinguish gender concepts, meticulously and

deeply studied the shaping and influence of daily life, religion, and taboo language on women's psychology and consciousness, and conducted a profound analysis of the cultural causes and shaping process of women's low status. Language has become an important dimension for her thinking and exploring the relationship between gender and culture. Although there is still a linguistic instrumentalism in her thoughts, she no longer sees language as just a tool and medium, but sees that in addition to carrying tradition, language also participates in the shaping and construction of female consciousness. Drawing on the achievements of Woolf and other predecessors' thinking and research on language issues, she has a conscious awareness of language and began to think about language issues in a systematic and multi-dimensional way, providing theoretical resources for feminist criticism, providing important theoretical and methodological enlightenment for feminist criticism, especially for the development of Postmodernism, which has a turning significance of connecting the past and ushering in the future.

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