

**THE DESCRIPTION OF A PERSON'S APPEARANCE  
IN RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH FICTION:  
GENDER PERSPECTIVE**

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**Key words and phrases:** gender stereotypes; description of a character's portrait; femininity; masculinity.

**Abstract:** The paper considers male and female portrait description on the examples from Russian and English fiction written at the beginning of the XXI century. The paper focuses on stereotyping of human appearance given the gender aspect.

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Numerous studies of gender stereotypes have identified a set of traits that make up male and female characters in cognitive and emotional spheres, in the spheres of activity and interpersonal interaction. In people's minds, there are stereotypical ideas about male and female physical abilities, social roles, typical jobs, and typical appearance of men and women.

Our study of the existing stereotypes is conducted on the basis of the context analysis of portrait descriptions, which include lexical items with semantic components "feminine" / "masculine". Special attention is given to a number of speech patterns expressing stereotypical ideas. Following O.V. Korotun, we highlight the most frequent "formulas" verbalizing a stereotype: 1) X – typical (usual) Y; 2) X – real Y; 3) X – like Y; 4) X – symbol (sample, ideal) of Y; 5) X – attribute (accessory) of Y; 6) despite X, he (she, they) – Y; 7) X, but Y; 8) it's is difficult (impossible) to believe that X – Y; 9) X, as it befits – Y; 10) such X is not Y; 11) X must (should, ought to) be Y; 12) they believe (they say) that X – Y [1]. It should be noted that to this list of speech schema, we add a few more: 1) X is not suitable for Y; 2) X is too... (than required) for Y; 3) X is manifestation of Y; 4) X attaches some quality of Y.

According to the study, majority of stereotype ideas on how a man and a woman should look are based on different physical characteristics. Gender difference in the description of a character's body and its parts is created on the basis of the opposition that is verbalized by the parametric adjectives-antonyms: *большой / big – маленький / small, высокий / tall – низкий / short, широкий / broad – узкий / narrow, крепкий / hard – хрупкий / delicate*.

The male figure is usually characterized by a large size of the body parts and height, which is associated with dominance and power, qualities that are traditionally ascribed to men. A diminutive body is considered to be a sign of femininity, e.g.: *Только сейчас, разглядев его так близко, она поняла, что сложение у него слишком хрупкое для мужчины...* [2, p. 187]. *She was so small and so fragile. Everything about her was pretty and feminine and delicate* [3, p. 327]. In the first example the linguistic realization of the stereotype is as follows: X is too... for Y; in the

second one the listed qualities *small, fragile* are characterized by the author with the lexeme *feminine*.

Well-developed musculature and as a result physical strength is a male characteristic feature, not typical for women. In Russian, this feature is usually verbalized through adjectives *мускулистый, атлетичный, сильный, мощный*, in English they use adjectives *muscular, athletic, strong, powerful*: *Женя, из-за твоих упражнений у тебя мышцы становятся, как у мужчины* [4, p. 37]. *Kenna licked her lips at the sight of his bare, masculine form. He was all sinuous power. All golden skin and muscles* [5, p. 52]. In the first example the author uses the formula: X as Y; in the second one the stereotype idea is detected on the base of the context.

It is believed that the body of a man should take the form of an inverted triangle – a broad chest and shoulders, narrow hips, and the body of a woman, on the contrary, should have a well-developed female form, that can be seen in the following examples: *Высокий, с хорошей на первый взгляд мужской фигурой, Додик был очень привлекательным. На второй, более внимательный взгляд, Додик оказывался узкоплечим и слегка субтильным для своего роста, да и бедра у него были немного шире, чем положено для хорошей мужской фигуры. Додик напоминал узкий высокий треугольник или вытянутую елку с детского рисунка* [6, p. 194]. *A slim waist, a flat belly, wide, totally feminine hips, and lush impudently rounded buttocks* [7, p. 56]. In the first case the formula that expresses the contradiction between being male and the lack of the typical male body characteristics is used: X is not suitable for Y. In the second fragment in the heroine's features are described as *feminine* by the author.

It is considered that there is a set of characteristics that distinguish a male face from a female one. A person is considered to be masculine, if he has a massive nose and jaw, a strong chin, deep-set eyes and thick eyebrows. A feminine person, as they believe, has a thin, delicate, even childish features, full lips, big eyes and long eyelashes, all this is perceived as a sign of sensitivity, tenderness, weakness – the qualities which are attributed to a woman, in accordance with the existing gender stereotypes: *На вид – чистый ангел. Хрупкая, женственная... Пухлые губы, чуть вздернутый аккуратный носик и большие голубые глаза, цвет которых часто менялся при помощи контактных линз* [4, p. 40]. *She looked past the dark hair that hung below his shoulders, then looked up to his square jaw, firm lips and sculpted cheekbones. Such a strong face, with rugged, masculine features* [8, p. 53]. The words *женственная* and *masculine* allow us to suggest that those physical qualities represent the gender-based norm of appearance.

Make-up, manicure, and pedicure are traditionally feminine methods of adorning: *Прическа, макияж, все такое прочее – без этого никуда. Даже после атомной бомбежки настоящая женщина должна быть свежей и красивой* [9, p. 137]. This example illustrates the formula: X should be Y.

Another factor, affecting the categorization of people based on gender, is the length of the hair. Long hair is considered to indicate the female sex: *The only obvious difference that jumped out at her was the length of his hair, which was completely opposite to the military buzz cut he'd worn when she'd known him. It was longer than her own now, which should have lent his face a feminine aspect* [10, p. 68]. In this case the stereotype is verbalized with the formula: X attaches some quality of Y.

A large role in the gender difference between people is played by clothes. There is a split into men's and women's clothes, including distinction of clothing, colors, and materials. It is reflected in the language in the form of a frequency difference e.g. dresses and skirts are not found in the descriptions of a male character, while suits, trousers, shirts and ties are typical of his wardrobe.

Some bright colors can be considered more typical of women's clothing. Dull colors such as gray, green, brown are often worn by men. To the category of "feminine"

materials we refer such thin, transparent, soft fabrics such as silk, lace, satin, velvet and fur. Look at the examples: *На нем были коричневые вельветовые джинсы и более темный свитер* [11, p. 305]. *I hurriedly dressed in a lime-green blouse and the lime and fuchsia Lilly Pulitzer print skirt* [12, p. 134].

Models of women's footwear include shoes, sandals, clogs, boots, etc. High heels of various shapes are a feature of women's shoes only. Men's footwear include shoes, boots, and their color is limited to black, brown, white, beige. The examples of the description of women's and men's shoes in the text are: *Вроде девушка, но почему у нее на ногах кожаные мужские ботинки?* [13, p. 86]. *I believe men should be required to wear high heels for one day...* [14, p. 83].

In the first case the stereotype idea that a woman should not wear male leather shoes verbalized by the formula X, but Y. The context of the second example indicates that there are no high-heeled shoes in a man's wardrobe.

Stereotypes convey not only the idea of what is normal for a person's appearance, they also represent knowledge about deviations from the norm. In cases when a character does not conform to the requirements of the gender, his appearance gets negative appreciation and can be described as masculine or effeminate: *With black hair with flyaway curls and pale blue eyes, he was incredibly handsome, but in an effeminate way. His skin was too smooth, his nose too thin* [15, p. 304].

In this article we consider the mechanisms of the languages that form only one component of a character portrait – a statistical appearance. In the future, it is interesting to determine the role played by gender stereotypes of physical description in the dynamic component of the portrait and to compare the realization of gender stereotypes in diachronic terms.

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## Изображение внешности человека в русскоязычной и англоязычной художественной прозе: гендерный аспект

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**Ключевые слова и фразы:** гендерные стереотипы; маскулинность; описание портрета персонажа; фемининность.

**Аннотация:** Рассмотрены примеры описания внешнего портрета мужчины и женщины, встречающиеся в русскоязычной и англоязычной художественной прозе начала XXI века. Основное внимание в работе уделяется гендерными стереотипам внешности человека с точки зрения гендерного аспекта.

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## Darstellung des Äußeren des Menschen in der russischsprachigen und englischsprachigen künstlerischen Prosa: der Genderaspekt

**Zusammenfassung:** Es sind die Beispiele der Beschreibung des äußerlichen Porträts des Mannes und der Frau, die sich in der russischsprachigen und englischsprachigen künstlerischen Prosa des Anfanges des XXI. Jahrhunderts treffen, betrachtet. Die Hauptaufmerksamkeit in der Arbeit wird den Genderstereotypen dem Äußeren des Menschen vom Gesichtspunkt des Genderaspektes geschenkt.

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## Description de l'apparence de la personne dans la prose littéraire russe et anglaise: aspect de genre

**Résumé:** Sont examinés les exemples de la description de l'apparence d'un homme et d'une femme dans la prose littéraire russe et anglaise du début e XXI-ème siècle. L'attention essentielle est prêtée aux stéréotypes de l'apparence de la personne liés au genre.

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