

GENDER ASPECTS OF VOICE PERCEPTION VERBALIZATION IN THE ENGLISH BELLES-LETTRES DISCOURSE: PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

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Purpose. This study is devoted to the gender differences in voice perception and their reflection in the English belles-lettres discourse. The purpose of the study is to make a comparative analysis of voice prosodic characteristics and their verbalization means in female and male authors' and to study how gender differences (if any) in voice perception are reflected in the English belles-lettres discourse.

Methods. On the basis of our previous research of voice prosodic parameters verbalization in the modern English language the lexical units nominating voice prosodic characteristics (melody, loudness, voice quality, tempo) and their combinations were singled out in female and male belles-lettres discourses. Qualitative and linguistic analyses highlight the main peculiarities of female and male author's voice perception verbalization in the novels "Bridget Jones' diary" by H. Fielding and "Never let me go" by K. Ishiguro.

Results. The results of the study show that in the male belles-lettres discourse the most significant verbalized voice prosodic characteristics are loudness and combinations of melody and loudness, to be more precise, of low pitch and decreased loudness. Thus, the prosodic characteristic of loudness goes first in the reflection of the voice perception in the male discourse. In the female belles-lettres discourse verbalized voice quality and combinations of two and three prosodic characteristics proved to play a leading role. Verbalized combinations of high pitch and increased loudness as well as of slurred voice quality and decreased loudness appear to be pivotal in the female author. This fact sustains the idea that the female writer favours a more detailed description of the voice prosodic characteristics meanwhile the male author tends to a general reflection of voice perception, foregrounding one prosodic parameter of loudness.

Conclusions. These results allow to conclude about female higher accuracy in voice perception and its verbalization. Melody and tempo seem to be the least important in voice perception and its reflection for both female and male authors.

Key words: gender differences, lexical units, prosodic characteristics, comparative analysis.

ГЕНДЕРНІ АСПЕКТИ ПЕРЦЕПЦІЇ ГОЛОСУ ТА ЇЇ ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЇ В АНГЛОМОВНОМУ ХУДОЖНЬОМУ ДИСКУРСІ: ПРЕЛІМІНАРНЕ ДОСЛІДЖЕННЯ

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Мета. У статті представлено результати аналізу гендерних аспектів перцепції голосу та їх реалізації в англomовному художньому дискурсі. Здійснено порівняльний аналіз засобів вербалізації просодичних параметрів голосу у фемінному та маскулінному художньому дискурсах. Досліджено деякі гендерні аспекти перцепції голосу та її віддзеркалення в англomовному художньому дискурсі.

Методи. З огляду на результати наших попередніх досліджень, із фемінного та маскулінного художніх дискурсів було виокремлено лексичні одиниці, що вербалізують просодичні характеристики голосу (гучність, мелодійний компонент, темп, якість голосу) та їх комбінації. За допомогою кількісного та лінгвістичного аналізів було висвітлено основні особливості перцепції голосу автором-жінкою Х. Філдінг і автором-чоловіком К. Ісігуро в творах "Bridget Jones's diary" та "Never let me go".

Результати. Результати дослідження доводять, що в маскулінному художньому дискурсі найбільш значущими виявилися вербалізовані просодичні характеристики гучності та комбінації гучності та мелодики, точніше, низького рівню голосового тону та пониженої гучності. Таким чином, параметр гучності відіграє найголовнішу роль в відображенні слухової перцепції в маскулінному художньому дискурсі. Що стосується фемінного художнього дискурсу, то тут провідна роль належить якості голосу та комбінаціям двох або навіть трьох просодичних характеристик. Серед комбінацій просодичних параметрів голосу найбільш вагомими є вербалізовані комбінації високого рівня голосового тону й підвищеної гучності разом із комбінаціями небагатої якості голосу й пониженої гучності. Цей факт підтверджує припущення про те, що авторів-жінці притаманний більш детальний опис сприйнятого на слух голосу, а саме його просодичних характеристик, в той час як автор-чоловік тяжіє до більш загального відображення слухової перцепції, висуваючи на перший план одну просодичну характеристику гучності.

Висновки. Отримані прелімінарні результати дають змогу зробити висновок про те, що авторам-жінкам притаманна більша точність та детальність слухової перцепції й її відображення, на відміну від авторів-чоловіків. Мелодика разом із темпом та їх вербалізація виявилися найменш значущими як для фемінного, так і для маскулінного художнього дискурсів.

Ключові слова: гендерні розбіжності, лексична одиниця, просодична характеристика, компаративний аналіз.

1. Introduction

In my previous study I analyzed verbalization means of voice perception in the modern English language (Demchuk, 2019). The research was based on the English belles-lettres texts written by female and male authors. In the process of analysis of the voice perception and its verbalization means I became interested in the gender aspects of voice perception, i.e. in the issue of gender differences between female and male voice perception and its reflection in the English belles-lettres discourse.

Gender differences in voice perception were predominantly researched in the field of psychology and behavioral sciences on the basis of oral speech. The results of these studies highlight the complex relationship “between perceptual and cognitive mechanisms of voice perception” in general (Nagels, Gaudrain, Vickers, et al. 2020) and demonstrate significant variability in voice perception between female and male listeners in particular. The female listeners show better abilities and accuracy than males in vocal emotions recognition, decoding emotional prosodic parameters (Lausen & Schacht, 2018). Male listeners are proved to better identify male than female voices while female listeners demonstrate similarly precise identification of both genders’ voices (Skuk & Schweinberger 2012). Collins, sustaining Berry’s (Berry, 1992) previous results, claims that women associate male attractiveness with low-pitched and deep voices (Collins, 2000). P. Birkholz, A. Lee, W. Wu, X. Ziu support Collin’s conclusions stating that women are attracted by low-pitched male voices with narrow formant dispersion while men prefer relatively high-pitched, breathy female voices with wide formant dispersion (Lee, Wu, Ziu, Birkholz, 2013). It actually means that for women as well as for men the leading prosodic characteristics in the process of voice perception are melody and voice quality.

It is quite obvious that women and men perceive voices more or less differently. Thus, the **object** of the present research is voice perception verbalization, and the **subject** is gender aspects of voice perception verbalization in female and male belles-lettres discourse. The **purpose** of the study is to make a comparative analysis of voice prosodic characteristics and their verbalization means in female and male authors’ and to study how gender differences (if any) in voice perception are reflected in the English belles-lettres discourse.

2. Methodology of the research

The article suggests comparative analysis of the voice perception verbalization in the belles-lettres discourse of two modern British writers: H. Fielding (“Bridget Jones’s diary”) and K. Ishiguro (“Never let me go”). On the basis of my previous research of voice prosodic characteristics and their verbalization (Demchuk, 2010) I singled out verbalization means of the main voice prosodic characteristics: melody, loudness, tempo, voice quality and their combinations that reflect female and male authors’ voice perception in order to compile a “female” and “male” voice perception vocabulary.

Quantitative analysis is aimed at highlighting frequency distribution of the researched data in both authors. This allows to elucidate dominant elements in the universal multitude of the corpus. The method of linguistic description is applied to classify the corpus of lexical units that nominate voice prosodic characteristics, and to analyze their peculiarities in female and male belles-lettres discourse.

3. Comparative analysis of the authors’ vocabularies

The quantitative analysis shows that H. Fielding’s vocabulary is much more various in comparison with K. Ishiguro’s one. Fielding’s vocabulary comprises 62 lexical units verbalizing loudness, melody, voice quality, tempo and their combinations. Ishiguro’s vocabulary consists of 25 lexical units. As for the distribution of verbalization means of separate voice prosodic characteristics and their combinations we obtained the following results:

Table 1

Vocabulary units distribution

Prosodic characteristic	H. Fielding	K. Ishiguro
Loudness	20,8%	48,0%
Melody	11,5%	4,0%
Tempo	6,2%	7,0%
Voice quality	25,5%	18,0%
Combinations of characteristics	36,0%	23,0%
Total	100%	100%

It is obvious that K. Ishiguro gives preference to such prosodic characteristic as loudness (48,0%). The author uses 4 lexical units and 1 word combination that verbalize increased loudness: *to burst out, to cry, to explode, to shout, to raise one’s voice*; and 7 lexical units that verbalize decreased loudness: *gently, softly, quietly, quiet, whisper, to whisper*.

Combinations of parameters take the second position (23%). Combinations of prosodic characteristics are presented by the following types in Ishiguro’s novel: 1) melody + loudness (*to yell, to murmur, to burst*), 2) loudness + voice quality (*to mumble, to mutter*).

Voice quality is presented by 5 lexical units that verbalize 5 different qualities: trembling (*shaking*), tense (*eagerly*), slurred (*casual*), precise (*steady*), and “cold” voice quality (*coldly*).

The least significant characteristics are tempo and melody: only one lexical unit nominating pitch range (“*flatly*”) and two lexical units verbalizing tempo (*quickly, slowly*) were singled out.

Unlike K. Ishiguro, H. Fielding gives preference to the lexical units nominating combinations of prosodic characteristics (36,0%) and voice quality.

Fielding’s voice perception vocabulary differs from Ishiguro’s one by its variety: 1) melody + loudness (*to shriek, to croon, to hoot, to yell, to murmur, to coo, to crow, to purr, to grumble*), 2) melody + tempo (*to snap*), 3) melody + voice quality (*to trill, to crack*), 4) loudness + voice quality (*to roar, to falter, to mumble, to boom, to mutter*), 5) tempo + voice quality (*to gabble*), 6) melody + voice quality + tempo (*to growl*), 7) melody + voice quality + loudness (*to bellow, to bleat, to sheep-voice*). As we can observe Fielding renders perception of 5 combinations of two prosodic characteristics and 2 combinations of three prosodic characteristics. Ishiguro does not use lexical units that verbalize more than two parameters. It proves that a female author is more accurate than a male one in reflecting voice perception, to be more precise, voice prosodic characteristics.

Voice quality verbalization is also rather diverse. The author’s vocabulary consists of 17 lexical units (25,5%) that nominate the following voice qualities: breathy (*breathy, breathily*), husky (*guttural*), trembling (*tremulously*), tense (*eagerly, stiffly, tense, tensely, throatily*), slurred (*casually, to slur*), muffled quality (*sepulchral*). 5 lexical units verbalize voice qualities metaphorically: “cold” (*coldly, icily*), “dark / bright” (*darkly, brightly*), sweet voice quality (*sweet*).

Melody verbalization means comprise 7 lexical units (11,5%): *high-pitched, to chirp, to snarl* verbalize the pitch; *to sing-song* nominates a moving tone; *abruptly, curtly, mildly* reflect tone pitch contour.

The parameter of tempo appears the least important. The writer employs 4 lexical units (6,2%) to nominate quick tempo: *to blurt, to gush, to spit, hurriedly*; and do not use any lexical units to nominate slow tempo. It can be explained by a typical female discourse feature of high emotionalism (Hapon, 2002: 34) and by a stereotype of female fast speech (Kramer, 1977). I mean that a natural female emotionalism and a general female inclination to quickened tempo influence a female author’s voice perception in such a way that slow tempo is not perceived as clearly as fast tempo and becomes an insignificant parameter in the description of the prosodic characteristic.

4. Comparative analysis of the frequency data

As for the frequency of lexical units occurrence the quantitative analysis shows the following results: 153 word usages in Fielding’s novel against 70 word usages in Ishiguro’s novel. The occurrence data of the verbalization means in both texts are presented in the table below:

Table 2

Frequency distribution of the lexical units

Prosodic characteristics	H. Fielding	K. Ishiguro
Loudness	14,5%	48,6%
Melody	7,7%	2,8%
Tempo	8,5%	12,8%
Voice quality	19,0%	11,5%
Combinations of characteristics	50,3%	24,3%
Total	100%	100%

On the whole the percentage of occurrence of the verbalization means coincides with vocabulary percentage in both authors.

K. Ishiguro is inclined to use widely lexical units that nominate loudness (48,6%). As Table 2 shows their frequency index is higher than frequency indices of other prosodic characteristics. However, the word usage quantity of decreased loudness verbalizers almost three times more than the quantity of increased loudness lexical units (73,6% v 26,4%). At the same time the vocabulary of the lexical units verbalizing decreased and increased loudness do not differ greatly (58,3% v 41,7%). I would not claim that domination of verbalized decreased loudness is typical of male discourse. In this particular case it may be ascribed to the general depressive atmosphere of the novel. That is why it is necessary to continue the research of this phenomenon.

In Fielding’s discourse the frequency indices of verbalized loudness coincide completely (50% v 50%).

The quantitative analysis highlights one more peculiarity in Ishiguro’s discourse: vocabulary of the lexical units verbalizing voice quality and combinations of prosodic characteristics (about 19% each) considerably differs from the frequency indices. The lexical units for nominating combinations are used twice frequently than for nominating voice quality (24,3% v 11, 5%), and take the second position after loudness. The most typical combinations are melody + loudness (35,3%). As for the voice quality, tense quality dominates (37,5%) in this prosodic characteristic verbalization.

In Fielding’s discourse frequency indices (50,3%) of combinations of the prosodic characteristics coincide with the vocabulary data in terms of being the more significant than other parameters in the verbalization of voice perception. Fielding gives preference to the combinations of loudness + voice quality (37,7%) and melody + loudness (35%). Voice quality stays in the second place with 19% of word usage frequency. It is interesting that in both authors a tense voice quality plays a leading role. In Fielding’s discourse the frequency index of these lexical units is 31% of total quantity.

As for the verbalization of melody and tempo Ishiguro shows stability: the vocabulary units and word usage frequency coincide (3% v 2,8%; 11% v 12,8%). Melody proves to be the least significant characteristic in voice perception verbalization.

Unlike Ishiguro Fielding uses her melody and tempo vocabulary differently. Vocabulary data (11,5%) exceeds frequency index (7,9%) of melody nominators. Tempo with poorer vocabulary (6,2%) outstrips melody in frequency of occurrence. It means that melody appears to be the least significant of all prosodic characteristics in voice perception for Fielding as well as for Ishiguro. As for the prosodic characteristic of tempo, quickened tempo is typical of voice perception in Fielding’s discourse.

5. Conclusions

The research results allow to make preliminary conclusions about gender differences in voice perception and its verbalization in female and male belles-lettres discourses. The most significant markers for male perception of voice

prosodic parameters are verbalized characteristic of loudness and combinations of melody (predominantly low pitch) and decreased loudness (i.e. loudness proves to play a leading role).

In female belles-lettres discourse the most important markers in voice perception are verbalized prosodic characteristics of voice quality (firstly, tense voice quality) and combinations of two and three parameters, to major degree, combinations of high pitch and increased loudness, slurred voice quality and decreased loudness. Domination of combinations proves female voice perception to be more accurate that is reflected in more detailed description of the voice prosodic characteristics. Unlike female author in the male belles-lettres discourse voice perception is verbalized in a more general way, foregrounding only one prosodic parameter – loudness.

Besides gender differences there is a common feature of voice perception verbalization in female and male belles-lettres discourse. Melody and tempo prove to be the least significant in voice descriptions for both authors.

The perspective of this preliminary research is to enlarge the list of British and American female and male authors and the corpus of belles-lettres texts of different genres in order to provide more profound and verified results highlighting gender differences in voice perception and its verbalization.

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