

THE GRAMMATICAL GENDER AND THE SEXIST VOCABULARY, IDIOMS AND PROVERBS IN TURKISH AND RUSSIAN

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Abstract:

There are a great number of languages in the world which makes it essential for languages to be categorized into groups depending on their language families. It is normal for languages to bear some linguistic differences. These differences may occur in aspects like morphology and syntax. Russian belongs to the Slavic group of the Indo-European languages. Turkish belongs to the Altaic family group. In this study Turkish grammar and English grammar were investigated in general terms. A semi-structured interview was held with a native speaker of Russian who is also a second language learner of Turkish. The interviewer was asked about the sexist words, idioms and proverbs in her language and similarities and differences between the findings were determined.

Key words: *Turkish, Slavic language, Russian sexist words, idioms and proverbs.*

Türkçe ile Rusçada Dil Bilgisel Cinsiyet ve Bu Dillerdeki Cinsiyetçi Deyim ve Atasözleri

Özet:

Dünyada sayısız dil vardır ve bu yüzden dillerin dil ailelerine göre gruplara ayrılması kaçınılmazdır. Farklı dillerin farklı dil özelliklerini barındırması normaldir. Bu farklar cümle yapısı ve biçem bilimi gibi öğelerde kendini gösterir. Rusça Hint-Avrupa dil ailesinin Slav grubuna aittir. Türkçe ise Altay dil ailesine aittir. Bu çalışmada Rusça ve Türkçe genel bakışla dil bilgisel açıdan ele alınmış, ana dili Rusça olan ve Türkçeyi ikinci dil olarak öğrenen bir kişiyle yarı yapılandırılmış görüşme tekniğiyle görüşme düzenlenmiş, bu dildeki kadınlara yönelik cinsiyet ayırımı taşıyan öğeleri

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barındıran kelimeler, deyimler ve atasözleri ile ilgili bilgi alınmış ve bulgulardaki benzerlik ve farklılıklar belirlenmiştir.

Anahtar kelimeler: *Türkçe, Slav dili, Rusça cinsiyetçi kelimeler, atasözleri, deyimler.*

Introduction

Sexist language may seem as a controversial phrase, so it is necessary to define the phrase well. Sexist language is defined as “words, phrases, expressions that unnecessarily differentiate between women or men or exclude, trivialize, or diminish either gender.” They give examples of sexist language as false generics (e.g., he, mankind), hierarchical and separatist terms (e.g., man and wife, sex differentiated job titles), and words that can decrease self-esteem and negate personal identity (e.g., referring to adult females as “girls” rather than “women,” emphasizing the importance of women’s marital status with “Miss” and “Mrs.”) (Parks and Robertson 1998:478). There is also grammatical gender in language. The gender in languages is observed in morphological and lexical devices. The two main devices are articles and affixes. The majority of world languages bear articles in the language, like “der Tisch” in German and the “la table” in French. The use of affixes are common in Latin rooted languages. To give an instance in Spanish, Italian, and Portuguese many words ending in *a* are feminine whereas many words that end in *o* are male.

A large number of personal nouns correspond to the feminine and the masculine gender class and thus, they are lexically specified as a noun specifically as female and male. These types of languages are called gender languages or languages with grammatical gender (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001: 5). A majority of world languages do not convey a grammatical gender, and Turkish is one of these world languages. Language families are categorized in two: the languages that do not possess grammatical gender and the ones that do. For many of the Indo-European languages gender is an important feature and it is observed in many sentences, whereas in Daghestanian languages, such as Tsakhur it is more salient sufficing the syntax and morphology appearing on some unlikely agreement targets, and simply missing in almost all of the languages of the Austronesian family. (Corbett 2006:749).

Languages that possess grammatical gender have more means to overt gender marking. Since satellite elements have more gender variable elements, Slavic languages which are highly inflected languages visualize overt lexical

marking since it is more visible when compared to other languages like in most Germanic languages (Hellinger, Bußmann 2001: 8). Examples of Slavic languages with grammatical gender are Russian, Czech, Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian, and Polish. Turkish on the other hand, is one of the few languages in the world that does not possess morphological gender. In Turkish it is not necessary for a noun to be identified as masculine and feminine. Related to this there is no need for a syntactic agreement for gender in a syntagmatic structure (Castagneto, D'Amora 2006: 196). Although Turkish has no grammatical gender, the sentence “kral gebedir” “the king is pregnant” is as odd in Turkish as its translation in English; compare *kraliçe gebedir* “the queen is pregnant” which lacks this anomaly in both languages. Actually, the relevant semantic category is not just sex, but whatever semantic categories play a role in determining gender assignment (Comrie 1999: 458).

However, the fact that grammatical gender in a language does not exist, does not mean that discrimination of the sexes does not exist in the language completely. G. Németh, A. Zajackowski, M. Räsänen, O. Pristsak, G. Doerfer, A. N. Kononov are examples of Turkologists who claim that in some affixes in Turkish such as +çA, +çık, +kA, +m feminine affix exists. The words that are discussed the most are “*Tanrıça*”, “*begum*”, “*beyin eşi*”, “*hanım, kösem*”, *bike* “*han kızı veya eşi*”, “*kançık*”, “*biçe*”, “*beyin eşi*”, “*ağaça*”, “*hanım*” cited by (Kerimoğlu, Doğan 2015: 148).

In addition, in Turkish which lacks noun classification completely, there are other ways to send gender-related messages as there are many words, phrases, proverbs that are gender-related.

This study aims to look at Russian and Turkish in terms of the sexist lexical elements they bear namely the idioms and proverbs. A native speaker of Russian who is a second speaker of Turkish was asked to reflect on the different idioms and proverbs related to women in both Turkish and her native language and compare them. It is doubtless to say that there are a countless number of idioms and proverbs in both Turkish and Russian that are related to women, needless to say there are also many that portray women in a positive manner. However, this paper looks at a limited number of proverbs and idioms that portray women only in the negative way, so that it could fit in with our aim of finding the sexist elements in both languages.

2. Turkish

Turkish is the official language of the Republic of Turkey. It is spoken by more than sixty million people in Turkey. It is spoken in a wide area from Balkans to China. It belongs to the Altaic family group. It is a left-branching

language, and the word order is subject-object-verb. It expresses grammatical relations with suffixing morphology. In Turkish gender distinctions do not exist. The third person singular pronoun “o” stands for “he”, “she” and “it”. Most of the Turkish terms for person reference do not give clues about the gender of the person that is mentioned. Komşu (neighbor), işçi (worker), başbakan (prime minister) may refer to a man or a woman. Pronominal forms, either full pronouns or bound forms do not differentiate referential gender. O (pronoun) may mean “he”, “she” or it “ev-i” may mean “her house” or “his house”. There are gender-indicating suffixes such as *memure* (female officer), *sahibe* (female owner) or *müdire* (female director) but they are borrowed from the Arabic suffix -e (f). Also the suffix -içe (f) as in *imparatoriçe* (empress) or *kraliçe* (queen) are borrowed from Slavic. There are also isolated word pairs borrowed from Europe such as the *aktör/aktris*(actor/actress) or *prens/prenses* (prince/princess) (Braun 2001: 285). According to a study done by Kerimoğlu and Doğan to identify different aspects of gender in Turkish, Turkish is a language that bears the gender category in different dimensions. The generalization that “Turkish is a non-gender language” can be true for grammatical gender. There is no common gender market for grammatical gender in Turkish, thus the -içe marker is limited to a few examples like *imparatoriçe*, *patroniçe*, *Tanrıça*, and although the -um marker in historical texts are significant they are not productive and limited to only a few examples like “*begum*” and “*hanum*” etc. The most significant gender aspect is lexical gender like “*tavuk-horoz*”, “*kadın-erkek*”, “*bay-bayan*” and can both be used individually and to identify a noun like “*kadın futbolcu*”, “*erkek hemşire*” etc. Covert gender is a type of lexical gender. However gender categories may change according to context. “*Oğlan*”, “*genç*”, “*çocuk*” are examples of covert gender, as they are mostly used in significant contexts for male. Some words are highly significant to covert gender, and Turkish is highly male in that sense (2015: 159). However, Turkish being a grammatical gender-free language does not mean that it is also free of sexist elements in terms of lexicon. According to the linguistic relativity proposal, language influences thought. Therefore the language we use shapes our thoughts. An example from the book of Dede Korkut, a heroic dastan legend in which famous epic stories of the Oghuz Turks portray the morals and values of the nomadic Turkic peoples, may contribute with a cultural and historic perspective on women. In Dede Korkut, an ancient legend which was carried out as an oral narration until the 15th and 16th centuries that it was put into writing, the place of women in the Oghuz culture is determined by the tope, women standing beside her man when needed are quite powerful figures and have a solid place in the society. In the beginning of the book of Dede Korkut stories women are described in four categories. The first as “*evin dayağı yani direği*” meaning “*the support of the family*” second

as the “*solduran sop*” meaning “*the sort that makes it fade*” third as “*dolduran sop*” meaning “*the stuffed sort*” and forth as “*ne kadar dersen bayağı sop*” meaning “*whatever you say the vulgar sort*”. The first type of woman takes care of guests even when the husband is not at home. Dede Korkut approves and praises this type. The second type is negative and complaining all the time and is unmannerly. Dede Korkut advises not to have babies from this sort and wants them away from men. The third type is negative in that they are irresponsible, accusing and fussy. Dede Korkut warns men against this type of women too. The last type is the most negative one according to Dede Korkut. They are clumsy in their actions and humiliate their husbands. Dede Korkut prays so that these women are away from men. Dede Korkut makes a description that a home is based on women and aims not to humiliate them but makes it clear that they are responsible beings in social life. (Erbay 2014: 226, 229).

Except for the first description, the other three portray women in a tactful, yet witty approach. Taking into consideration that in the book of Dede Korkut, when categorizing women only one out of three descriptions is portrayed positively gives us a realistic insight on the perception of women historically. We may say that Turkey may be considered as a patriarchal society in some ways, and thus sexist elements in proverbs are observed in the language. However, historically Turkish culture was not based on patriarchal society. Çobanoğlu claims that the fact that generations are connected with natural bonds, the efforts of women in production, the mother ancestry line and mother power must have played the greatest role in the formation of early matriarchal structure (2001: 40, 41). Çobanoğlu adds that in historical times the female God named “Umay Ana” was nourishing and keeping beings alive which later, with accepting Islam, transformed to “Fatma Ana” cult. He adds that in many data it can be clearly observed that patriarchal structure gave a very big struggle to erase the Umay belief and culture (2001: 50). He also adds that with the change in the use of production tools, firstly matriarchy ended, to be more precise; men and women were first equaled and with societal changes the men superiority or dominance was maintained (2001: 63). The number of proverbs and idioms related to women are countless and there are not only negative ones but also positive ones. The sexist elements in Turkish can be observed in proverbs and idioms. In a research done by Küçük, Turkish proverbs were investigated from the point of men and women identity and the profiles of men and women on existing proverbs were investigated. It was found out that in Turkish proverbs the concept of women and their qualities were handled in more detail compared to men and more negative expressions were found when compared to men (2003: 213). As stated before, this paper aims to look at the sexist ones, only in a limited way. There are very common expressions and

idioms in Turkish that depict the inferiority of women. There are expressions like “*kaşık düşmanı*” (spoon enemy) which means that women only eat and drink without producing anything. There is another expression which is used even by some “educated” men when trying to defeat a woman with words, especially women who are trying to do “a man’s” job. It is “*elinin hamuruyla erkek işine karışmak*” (to be involved in men’s jobs with the dough in her hands). This implies that women’s place is at home cooking, and she should not be involved in men’s jobs because only men have the privilege of working in some fields. The expressions have been translated literally to give the exact meaning. There are also proverbs that highlight the inequality of gender.” *Yu-yayı dişi kuş yapar*” (the female bird builds the nest) is a common proverb that indicates the role of the woman as being responsible for keeping the house in order. On the other hand “*Er olan ekmeğini taştan çıkarır*” (a real man earns, gains his bread from the stone) depicts men as the breadwinner. Having a son is also preferred by the majority so “*oğlan doğuran övünsün, kız doğuran dövünsün*” depicts the male as the preferred sex for children.. “*Kadının sırtından sopa, karnından sığa eksik edilmez.*” (a woman should not be spared the rod on her back and the child in her womb) depicts that the role of women should be giving birth to new babies.

Özkan and Gündoğdu found out five different themes in Turkish proverbs and idioms in the context of “daughter”. The first one is based on mother-daughter relationship, the second is on daughter’s reaching the age of marriage, the third one is related to the daughter’s marriage process, the fourth one is related to the discrimination between the son and daughter, and the final one reflects the qualities of daughters in the family. The fact that most of these themes are based on marriage reflects the fact that expectations are based mainly on the marriage of daughters and having her own family and home (2011: 1145). In a study done by Okray on the image of women in Turkish proverbs and idioms 93 proverbs and 59 idioms were categorized according to subjects. It was observed that in the distribution of proverbs and idioms in terms of general classification, proverbs had the highest percentage and positive qualities of being a wife, motherhood, the insufficiency of women in decision making, her worthlessness comprised the subjects of most of the proverbs and idioms. The second degree increase were on marriage, the relationship between husband and wife, heredity, mother-daughter relationship, honor and virginity and the relationship of being a full or step mother, sister etc. Among the idioms and proverbs negative qualities of being a wife, the mother-in-law daughter-in-law relationships and the ones appearing in the quality of swearword stood out as the classifications with the lowest percentage (2015: 96).

3. Russian

In Eurasia, Russian is the most geographically widespread language, and among the Slavic languages it is the most widely spoken language. Russian is also one of the six languages that are officially accepted in the United Nations. It belongs to the Slavic group of the Indo-European language family. It is in the subgroup of East Slavic languages with Belorussian and Ukrainian. Russian nouns are divided into three gender classes, feminine, masculine and neuter. The neuter gender does not classify animate nouns. In Russian gender is highly grammatical, and masculine antecedent triggers masculine agreement and a feminine one feminine agreement. At times, masculine personal nouns are used in reference to women as some occupational terms do not have feminine counterparts and it is seen that respective suffix conveys a negative meaning (Doleschal, Schmid 2001: 262). Corbett states that in Russian there are four main inflectional classes, and each include several thousands of nouns. It is essential for a native speaker to know how the noun inflects to produce grammatical utterances. Semantic assignment rules are superfluous as *mal'čik* "boy" is in masculine, *devuška* "girl" and "mat" are in feminine, which shows that many of the sex differentiable nouns are assigned to the appropriate gender by morphological assignment rules (2001: 6337, 6338). Comrie claims that some of the exceptions in Russian are interesting in that they show how semantics can intervene even in a system that is largely formally driven. Nouns that end in "-a" denote male humans are masculine in spite of the form. To give an example "djadja" "uncle" and the masculine form of the past tense of the verb in "djadja byl" "uncle was" just as in "brat byl" "brother was". On the contrary "sestra byla" "sister was". Even more complicated cases of such formal and semantic interaction can be seen. Some nouns in "-a" that can have both male and female referents change gender according to the sex of the referent, eg. "sirota" "orphan", as in "sirota byl" "male orphan was" versus "Sirota byla" "female orphan was" (1999:459).

Although the concepts of gender and language have a long history in Soviet linguistics, the Soviet ideology did not look at the issue from a feminist point of view, which took for granted the implementation of equal rights for men and women. This caused the unequal treatment of the language structure to be hidden (Doleschal&Schmid 2001:269).

Proverbs are invaluable tools to get an understanding of gender related views. Kirilina (1999a) studied Russian proverbs and idioms and traced the female and male perspectives. "*Zena ne steklo-moznopobit*" (A wife is not made of glass-one can beat her up. "*Kurica ne ptica, baba ne celovek*" (A hen is not a bird, a woman is not a human being) "*Ne pet kuricepetuxom, ne byt babe muzikom*" (A hen must not crow like a rooster, a woman must not be

like a man) “*Vsexzlydnejzleezljazena*” (A bad wife is worse than all evils) “*Volos dlinnyj a um korotkij*” (long hair but short wits) are some examples that Kirilina gives in her research (Doleschal&Schmid 2001: 271).

4. Interviewer Reflections

The interviewee is a female Russian native speaker who is also a second language speaker of Turkish. She is married to a Turk and resides in Ankara where she works as a Russian instructor at a public university in Turkey. The interviewee was asked about the most frequently used biased idioms and proverbs against women in Russian and the following ones were chosen by the interviewee. Turkish and English translations were given in the paper to make the meanings more clear. The Turkish translations were made by the interviewee. English translations were made by the researcher. The interview was conducted in Turkish and English. The Russian word for woman was translated as “*karı*” instead of “*kadın*” by the interviewee because she found the word choice more suitable to give the exact meaning. The following eight idioms and proverbs are chosen by the interviewee.

1. Баба с возу кобыле легче (Baba s vozukobyleleghe)

When the woman gets off the horse, the horse feels good.

(Karı attan inince at rahatlar.)

2. Курице не быть петухом, а бабе мужиком (Kuritse ne bit petuhom, a babemuzhikom)

The chicken doesn't become a rooster, a woman doesn't become a man.

(Tavuktan horoz olmaz, karıdan adam olmaz.)

3. Кто с бабой свяжется сам баба будет (Kto s baboysvyzhetsa sam baba budet)

If a person gets involved with a woman, the person becomes a woman.

(Karıyla oturup kalkan, karı gibi olur gider.)

4. Женский обычай слезами беде помогать (Zhenskiyobichayslezami bede pomogat)

If there is a problem, women always cry out.

(Dert karşısında kadının adeti çığırınmaktır.)

5. Три бабы - базар, а семь - ярмарка (Tribabybazar, sem - yarmarka).

If there are three women it is a bazaar, if there are seven women it is a fair.

Üç karı pazar, yedi karı panayıır.)

6. Бабадабес - один у нихвес (Baba da bes - odin u nihves).

Women and the devil weigh the same.

(Karının ve şeytanın kilosunu aynıdır.)

7. Лучше раздражить собаку, нежели бабу (Luchshe razdraznit sobaku nezhele babu).

To anger the dog is better than making the woman angry.

(Karıyı sinirlendirmektense köpeği kızdırmak daha iyidir).

The interviewee was asked if there was a difference between addressing women in terms of marital status. She stated that there was no difference between addressing married women and single women in Russian. She found this similar to Turkish in that there is no distinction in addressing women with varying marital status in Turkish as well. When asked about the discrimination in terms of lexicon, the interviewee stated that some professions are always expressed with the male gender form. For example the university teacher is always used with the male gender form: преподаватель (prepodavatel'). There is also the female form, but it is not used in academic context, it is used in informal speech. преподавательница (prepodavatel'nitsa). Turkish on the other hand is very gender neutral in addressing people in the teaching profession. For instance primary school students refer to their both male and female teachers as "öğretmenim" whereas in high school and university levels they are addressed as "hocam". However in some cases especially elementary school and high school contexts, some teachers, especially male teachers tend to address female teachers as "hocanım". Braun accepts the existence of the affix "+anım" in a structure like "hocanım" that developed from the word hanım: "hocanım" "müdiranım", "hemşiranım" (2000: 53).

The interviewee stated that there are some professions that use both the male and gender form *student-studentka*, *jurnalists-jurnalistska*, *sportsmen-sportsmenka*. Turkish on the other hand is gender-free in this context too, they are referred as *sporcu*, *öğrenci*, *gazeteci* without any distinction in gender. Nevertheless, in some cases it is not surprising to see some expressions like "kadın gazeteci", "kadın sporcu" or "kadın doktor" which are used especially in order to specify the gender of the professional in order to make it obvious that it is not the male, but the female who is the doer of the action, mostly in situations where such actions are not expected from women. Similarly, coming across expressions like "erkek hemşire", or "erkek sekreter" is also possible.

The interviewee also added that in some professions the she form does not convey a good meaning, in fact it conveys a bad meaning. To give an example,

vrach (doktor - he), *vrachiha* (she, but bad female *doctor*, rude version), the same for doktor (again doctor) and *doktorsha* (bad female doctor), *Sekretar'* (he) *orsekretarsha* (she, again there is a small, but not nice meaning inside it). In Turkish doctor and secretary are borrowed words and they are used for both sexes without any difference in the meaning.

When the interviewee was asked if she found Turkish a sexist language, she said that Turkish is not sexist grammatically and this is reflected in her teaching Turkish students Russian because students tend to confuse the male and female pronouns in Russian as only “o” exists in Turkish. When asked to reflect about the sexist idioms and proverbs in Turkish that she was familiar with, she stated that she was not familiar with any. The interviewer read the Turkish idioms and proverbs “kaşık düşmanı”, “elinin hamuruyla erkek işine karışmak”, “oğlan doğuran övünsün kız doğuran dövünsün” to ask what kind of meanings they convey. She said that they all portray women as some kind of servants without any say in the household. She said that they portray women with the duty of doing the household and men doing the important work. When asked which of these she found the most offensive, she said that she found the idiom “oğlan doğuran övünsün kız doğuran dövünsün” the most offensive. When asked to compare the notion of using sexist elements in vocabulary in Russian, she stated that in the past, in rural areas in Russia it was important to get the girls married as they were seen as an extra mouth to feed and that the proverbs and idioms that she listed were reflections of this. She added that these proverbs no longer reflect the reality in the present and mentioned that there is a feminist movement in Russia, but not as effective as the ones in Europe.

5. Conclusion

Languages differ in the way they are gender languages or gender-free languages. Russian is considered a gender language in the way it has three pronouns feminine, masculine and neuter. Turkish only has the pronoun “o” that may cause ambiguity in meaning since it is used in all three cases, masculine, feminine and neuter. However the two languages have mutual aspects in the use of sexist idioms and proverbs which portray women in a traditional and inferior manner. According to a study conducted by Alagöz which is a socio-cognitive analysis experiment on some of the idioms and proverbs that are used in daily language, the metaphors used in the daily language are not literary or linguistic ornaments, but they have a cognitive value and these metaphors actually reflect the intellectual structures of individuals and societies, and thus describe a societal fact. Alagöz states that idioms and proverbs construct an ideological discourse. The cognitive fields that associate with the notion of

women present a negative ideology by forming negative associations through metaphors that at times belittle and trivialize women. Alagöz points out that according to the survey that she conducted on 10 men and women, the total values that are perceived as urbanization forms an intellectual difference only on women and that their perception on women is different from that of traditional cognitive structure. As for male participants it is not surprising for them to produce similar metaphors that stand out as the proverbs and idioms that are referred to are a part of patriarchal culture and are called “*atasözü*” meaning “the words of the ancestor”. Although men are educated, they partially reflect the same point of view and the words that are considered culture are carried out to the new generations and reflect them. The fact that they describe women in a humiliating way is not compatible with the actual social status and value given to Turkish women (2009:46,47). Özkan and Gündoğdu state that when proverbs and idioms are investigated in terms of gender, several societal lifestyles can be traced. The distribution of societal roles according to sex, the messages they convey and handling them according to the difference in thematic use we can observe that masculine gender is glorified and male figures take part in out of home contexts whereas the female gender is considered second class and take part in domestic contexts. (2011:145). In his article “Turkish Mythology, The Literary History of the Turkic World” Çobanoğlu explains in detail the historical transformation in the Turkish society from an matriarchal one to a patriarchal one and claims that the societal life which transformed from the matriarchal one to a patriarchal one, the process in the change of gathering in “*ana ocağı*” instead of “*baba ocağı*” did not occur all of a sudden (2001:67) The researchers that deal with woman type in Turkish legends related to gender type state that in the pre-Islamic Turkish structure women were considered to be independent types, but with Islam they were pacified and kept at home, and an increase in polygamy was observed. The biggest wrong in this is that in the Turkish culture sedentariness and Islamization took place concurrently. It is wrong to associate the phenomenon, observed also in sedentary nations belonging to religions like Christianity, Buddhism and other religions, that patriarchal societies have become more of an association compared to nomadic societies to religion because Islamization in the Turkish culture occurred concurrently (Çobanoğlu 2003:142,143).

For many people like me, who chose teaching as a career, being aware of sexist language, and making our students aware of sexist language and motivating them to use non-sexist language is very important. This study aims to raise awareness in the way that languages no matter which language family they belong to bear sexist elements which especially shows itself in idioms and proverbs. However, this does not mean that there are not any proverbs or

idioms that portray women in a negative way, indeed there are many idioms and proverbs that portray women in a positive way in both Turkish and Russian which may be a good topic to consider for further studies.

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Appendix 1 (Ek 1)

Questionnaire

1. Can you please give examples of sexist idioms and proverbs in your language that in any way describe women in a traditional, dependant and inferior way?
2. Do you know Turkish idioms and proverbs that describe women in a traditional and dependent and inferior manner?
3. Can you find similarities in Turkish and Russian/Serbian idioms and proverbs in the way they approach women?
4. Do you have problems to understanding idioms and proverbs in Turkish that bear sexist elements? If so in what way?

