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***THREAT IN PERSONAGES' SPEECH OF MODERN BRITISH DRAMA:
GENDER ASPECT***

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Modern linguistics is interested in how the speech reflects different parameters of a personality such as background, age, social roles, gender and the like. As a rule gender is treated as a social sex of an individual which implies definite cultural and social peculiarities. Gender stereotypes as a set of images and rules, on the one hand, include the knowledge about the speakers' behavior depending on their sex and influence the attitude to the representatives of the opposite sex, on the other. Modern British Drama which serves as material for our investigation reflects gender stereotypes of speech as the playwright is a representative of the British social cultural community and finds it necessary to reflect in the play the norms of the speech which exist in the community. Thus, the aim of the research is to show how the dramatists manage to reflect gender stereotypes of the British social cultural community in personages' speech.

Gender is one of the characteristics which influences the speech and guides the choice of strategies and tactics in the process of interaction. A communicative strategy is a set of acts planned before and realized in the communicative process aiming at reaching the communicative goal. The choice of adequate strategies and tactics helps to focus attention on the information which is essential for reaching the aim. The tactics in its turn is a definite way of strategy realization. The analysis of Modern British Drama shows that definite peculiarities are found in the use of the tactics of threat in the speech of the male and female personages. The tactics of threat strengthens the position of the speaker and violates the rights of the addresser from the point of view of the Politeness Theory. The use of the tactics in the speech of female and male personages demonstrates the aspiration of both sexes to strengthen their status.

At the same time the differences lie in the quantitative data as the female personages employ the tactics 1.3 times more often. Besides, the personages' reaction to the threat depends on the sex. As a rule when there are no visible differences in status

characteristics in the dyad *man – woman* a female personage readily reacts to the threat and fulfils the demand of the male personage. For instance, a woman-personage yields to the demands of her husband's friend giving him the information he is interested in:

Frank. *Well, if you go on being secretive, I shall have to go on calling him Valerie.*

Paula. *I wasn't being secretive.*

Frank. *Oh. I must have misunderstood.*

Paula. *Mark* (Benfield, 1981:5).

As the example shows the status of the male personage is strengthened not only by the use of the threat, but by the reaction of the addresser.

The research shows that in the *woman – man* dyad the male personage ignores the demands of the female personage trying to prove their inadequacy. In the following example a female personage uses a threat to drive her husband's friend who tries to blackmail her out of her house:

Paula. *I think you'd better go. Now!*

Frank. (reasonably) *But I'm trying to help you.*

Paula. (pointing to the door) *Get out! [...]* If you don't get out of here *I shall call the police!*

Frank. *The police? Whatever will you tell them?*

Paula. (nervously) *I'll – I'll tell them you broke into my house.*

Frank. *But I didn't.* (Pointedly) *You opened the front door yourself* (Benfield, 1981:11).

As it is seen from the above example the tactics of threat (*I shall call the police!*) is used only when indirect directive (*I think you'd better go*) does not reach its aim. Besides, a male personage puts a question (*Whatever will you tell them?*) making the woman continue the conversation (*I'll – I'll tell them you broke into my house*) and changing her psychological state.

The personages' speech shows that the usage of the tactics of threat and the reaction received can strengthen the position of one of the interlocutors. If the reaction of female personages to the threat strengthens the position of the male personage, the disregard of the demands of female personages by male personages strengthens the

position of the latter and as a result the attempts of women to raise their own status fail. Thus, speech characteristics of the personages reflect the gender stereotypes according to which men tend to dominate in a conversation with a woman.