

PRAGMATIC ROLE OF A DIMINUTIVE IN COMPUTER-MEDIATED COMMUNICATION OF SOCIAL NETWORKS

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Abstract: The relevance of the study is determined by the increasing use of grammatical and lexical variation forms in modern computer-mediated environment. In this connection, this article is aimed at identifying lexical and grammatical features of diminutive formations in social networks. The leading method to investigate this problem is a local survey conducted in the frames of the most popular Russian social network Vkontakte. At the same time for the extension of the research base lexemes relating to different parts of speech were subjected to analysis. Other applied methods are the diminutive phenomenon study, examples collection, analysis of the means of expressing a diminutive value, identification of the possibilities for differentiation of reduction and subjective assessment as well as objective value of diminutivity, data analysis. Allowing a comprehensive consideration of the colloquial speech of the audience aged 17-35, the article presents comprehensive examination of the category of diminutivity in the discursive sphere of modern Russian colloquial language. Diminutives provide an ability to produce the desired effect on an interlocutor. It is true for the discursive environment of social networks. This important multidimensional feature of a diminutive was revealed during the study. Materials of the article are of practical value for the search of new approaches for the discourse study of the social networks language, which in general determines modern language environment at present.

Keywords: Diminutivity, lexical units, communicative function, social networks, discourse, discourse analysis, language features.

INTRODUCTION

In the course of information revolution the new technologies thanks to which the modern information society received previously unknown and inaccessible modes of communication emerged. The result of the society computerization was the

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expansion of human-machine interaction as well as the involvement of an increasing number of participants into this interaction which in many respects determined the current linguocultural situation: requirements for the linguistic means used for recording, collecting, transmitting, storing and considering the informational process affect pace and direction of the language development.

The Internet discourse as a holistic phenomenon study is of special interest both from the position of understanding the cognitive virtual nature, and from the point of view of clarifying the connected laws of communication, language, and culture. A multidimensional analysis of a number of features of virtual discourse in real language practices directly related to the information revolution promotes the answer to the question of the mechanism of virtual discourse manifestation in the textual reality interacting with the segments of cultural and linguistic realities.

From the viewpoint of modern linguistics, the study of various aspects of computer-mediated communication is a matter of paramount importance: interpersonal communication is increasingly penetrating into virtual environment, new communication environments in which, in turn, their own formed genre laws and language features are being created.

Moreover, the anthropological paradigm of current philology makes it necessary to study not only certain aspects and systems arising in the language as a result of scientific and technical progress (Pinheiro, 2015), but also the need for the analysis of the psycholinguistic and linguopersonological component of modern computer-mediated communication (Bunt, 1998).

Currently the leading positions in terms of popularity among the internet users and the volume of produced texts are occupied by social networks (Barabasi, 1999). Chats, forums and blogs in their classic meaning gave way to this synthetic format, which determined the relevance the communicative features of social networks' study (Rice, 1994).

However, it is important to take into account not only the fact that social networks are gradually occupying leading positions in virtual discursive space, but also the fact that ratio of real and virtual communication continues changing, while maintaining a tendency to increase the share of network communication. As a result, not only the amount of information transmitted via Internet communication increases, but also the psychological involvement of the communicant, its emotional impact, mind changes consequence changes in language, so virtual environment transforms the human consciousness. This fact determined the relevance of this study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The expressive-emotional function is the most important function of the language; it is closely connected with its communicative function. When communicating

on the Internet including social networks communicants express emotions this or that way. Those emotions in turn are the main meaning-forming category of being a human. Thus, emotional expression is one of the main communicative goals (Lambert, 2004).

However, it is important to note that in addition to this goal, the communicant expects to receive maximum resonance in response to the point of view expressed by him. In fact one goal is a logical addition and a continuation of the other. Here the dialogical essence of social network discourse is expressed: “one statement automatically assumes a response to it in the form of another statement - and further along the chain” (Kalashnikova, 2012).

Communicative goals are solved through the implementation of communicative strategies which consist of a set of various communicative tactics - tasks that are solved consistently within the same strategic line.

As a result of the emergence of the Internet as a new communication environment (Androutsopoulos, 2013), the question about the emergence of a special type of communication arises (Crossley, 2006). The visual-written format provided from the virtual space technology perspective, is perceived by sight. It also provides possibility of temporary remoteness between speech acts, which is typical for the written discourse (Tarsiero, 2004). However, Internet communication, especially in social networks, is characterized by spontaneity and conversationality (Georgakopoulou, 2013), and this can be proved by the illegitimacy of interpreting network communication as strictly written (Virtanen, 2011). That is, according to the methods of translation and perception, communication in social networks is written, and by language structures and behavioral aspects - oral. Thus, the discourse of social networks is hybrid, intermediate in its essence.

The communicant’s aspiration for the text verballity is widely implemented in the dialogue of comments. The authors of the comments are firstly subjected to the mood set by the “instigator” - the topic-starter, and secondly, being in the conditions of the mediated mechanisms limit, means and techniques of communication, gravitate toward the oral embodiment of a speech act.

This is also facilitated by the temporary limitation of the communicant (Herring, 2013): trying to realize the communicative goal of receiving a response, the commenter tries to leave a comment as quickly as possible. That means: the earlier a statement is made, the faster an answer will be received.

In the discourse of social networks, especially in the dialogue of comments some technical features like abbreviations, font or color highlighting, emotion icons, likes, symbolic signs, orthoepic spellings, simplification of grammatical constructions (means from various areas of communicative basis: graphic, phonetic, syntactic, lexical) are widely used due to genre (Giltrow, 2013), specific concepts and word forms (Kalashnikova & Kovaleva, 2013).

“Emotions can be implemented at all levels of the language system - from phonetic up to syntactic textual, they cannot be limited to only a lexical level” (Romanov, 2004, p. 25), however linguistic science is featured with a tendency of lexical ways of expressing emotions becoming extremely demonstrated.

Speaking about the lexical emotional layer, special attention should be paid to such aspect of communication as the use of diminutives. Special attention to this linguistic aspect is due to the hybrid written-oral specification of the discursive environment of social networks. The presence of diminutives is a clear signification of a spoken language. It would be wrong to deny the existence of a close connection between the category of diminution and expressiveness. And since colloquial speech, which in social networks takes the written form, has a particularly trusting character, the use of words with suffixes of subjective evaluation is a way to achieve the desired communicative goal.

The concept of diminutivity goes back to the Latin “*diminuere*” - “to shatter”, “to reduce”, “to weaken” (Protasova, 2001, p. 77). The basic interpretation is: “A diminutive is a word with an affix which has been modified to convey a slighter degree of its root meaning, to convey the smallness of the object or quality named, or to convey a sense of intimacy or endearment” (Kanashina, 2015, p. 200).

Let us note that for the first time in Russian linguistics diminutives were described by M.V. Lomonosov as “insubstantial names”. It was M.V. Lomonosov, who divided the diminutives into “caressing” and “contemptuous” (Lomonosov, 1788, p. 103). A.A. Shakhmatov (1941) considered it necessary to distinguish the category of subjective evaluation, which is revealed with the help of word-building suffixes, which just give a basis for distinguishing words with different meanings: diminutiveness, caressing, neglection.

The phenomenon of diminutivity could be quite adequately regarded as one of the possible ways of systematizing world-knowledge, so diminutive is an independent language category (Samigullina, 2003). Taking as a basis the views of Russian and foreign linguists, we will understand diminutivity as a semantic-pragmatic category, which is characterized by the interaction of such categories as diminution, modality and evaluation. Herewith, the category of diminution plays the central role, however, without the overlapping of other categories, the diminutive would remain within the framework of purely lexical phenomenon.

It is noted that diminutives express the value of the size in pure form very rare. Indeed, the seme of dimension, although it is basic, does not become categoric-generative. It is most often complicated by the value of subjectivity: positive or negative (Vakulich, 2008).

Thus, diminutives are signs representing different levels of the language with the basic diminutive seme, including the additional meaning of evaluation and performing pragmatic functions in communication. Diminutives are used quite

often, being an aspect of speech in the most varied situations of communication and realizing the main communicant goal mentioned by us: the expression of emotions and attitudes to this or that phenomenon (Krylova, 2016).

RESEARCH METHODS

The aim of the conducted survey is to consider diminutives from the point of view of their use in computer-mediated environment. The subject of this study is lexical and grammatical features of diminutive formations in social networks. The purpose of the study is a comprehensive examination of the category of diminutivity in modern Russian language. Achieving this goal implies the following tasks:

1. diminutive phenomenon study;
2. examples collection;
3. analysis of means of expressing a diminutive value;
4. identification of the possibilities for differentiation of reduction and subjective assessment as well as objective value of diminutivity.

As the study material, the communicative field of the social network VKontakte was chosen. This is due to the results of studies conducted at the federal level by Brand Analytics (Brand Analytics, 2016) and Mail.ru Group as well as the result of a local survey. According to the statistic data the audience of social networks in Russia in February 2017 is distributed as follows:

- VKontakte 13 288 thousand people;
- Odnoklassniki 9150 thousand people;
- Instagram 2900 thousand people;
- Facebook 979 thousand people;
- Twitter 640 thousand people.

By “audience” we mean not the number of registered accounts, but the number of active users who regularly write or comment on posts (Thilakarathna et. al., 2017).

A local survey was conducted with the students of the Architecture and Construction Academy of the Don State Technical University within the period: January 2016 – February 2017. 500 full-time students from the 1st to 4th year of the undergraduate course studies and from the 1st to 6th year courses of the technical and economic training specialties were interviewed by a random choice without any personal identification. The questionnaire included the following questions:

1. Are you a member of any social network? (yes/no)
2. Name the social network that you use most often.

Analysis of the survey results showed that 98% of respondents are active participants of a social network (“yes” answer was received in 489 cases).

As the most popular and used social networks, the following were named:

- VKontakte (95%);
- Instagram (60%);
- Odnoklassniki (45%);
- Facebook (21%);
- Twitter (5%).

Thus, both national and local data demonstrate the leadership of the social network VKontakte as a platform for active communication, which is quite balanced from the position of the ratio of linguistic and extralinguistic components. Therefore, VKontakte was chosen as the main network and the most popular among Runet users, at the same time having separate genre features of the main original text genres of computer-mediated communication: chat, forum, blog.

The empiric object of research is the records on personal pages and in public on the social network VKontakte, as well as comments of users to them. The General Internet Corpus of the Russian language Webcorpora was used in the work, in addition, the material was obtained from the Internet service Yandex.Blogs (Blogs.yandex.ru, 2016).

The applied method of analysis is a qualitative content analysis (Wellman, 2008) that allows describing the results of research of records and user comments describing the variants of reproduction of subjectness by using the category of diminutivity.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Diminutives are used both in dialogical speech (in social networks context - in comments), and in internal monologue (record) for expressing the paradigm of emotions. In dialog communication, there are several areas of speech interaction where diminutives use is most frequent. These are the areas of “home communication”/“generation communication”; “pets”; “gastronomy”; “etiquette communication”; “irony and sarcasm”. All these spheres in this or that form are reflected in the social network discourse (Widdowson, 2008).

It is interesting that users themselves often transform the names of social networks into diminutive constructions: “Vkontaktik” - little VKontakte (VKontaktee), “Facebucheck” - cute Facebook (Facebooky) “Jejeshechka” - pretty Live Journal (LiveJournally):

“Is it more convenient for you to book by phone? Online? Or a message in Vkontaktee? Can you immediately choose the time?”.

“Or the tomato method as a way to combat procrastination - put the timer for 25 minutes, and all this time you honestly work and then again get thick in Facebooky with a good conscience”.

“Here we are writing in a cozy little Live Journally”.

A conceptually new phenomenon in the sphere of realization of the diminutivity category, which found its application in the Internet discourse, was the so-called “mimimi” (“nyashnyj” - soooo cute or “kawaii”) language. In many respects the origin of this lexical-pragmatic phenomenon is connected with the Japanese culture, in which the influence of anime cartoons is very strong. The value of cuteness, affection, touching - kawaii is hypertrophied and extremely emotionally expressed and brought into the network communication, expanding the communication abilities to express emotions of the communicant limited by the technical nature of the environment.

Let's consider the basic lexical units of the “mimimi” language:

- mimimish - extreme cuteness (something causing affection/admiration of the highest level):

*“A detachment of fluffy branded **mimimishes** (cutesies wootsies) is ready to love and be touched!”*

- nyashka, nyashechka - pretty, cutie, lovely (the same, comes from “nya” - “meow” in Japanese):

*“You are very **nyasha** (cutie), I want to continue to meet with you”.*

*Tianochka's character is very easy) She is cheerful and kind) Simply **nyashechka-nyashechka** (lovely) Limitlessly adores communicating with people. ... She just dissolves in people!”.*

Another meaning of the word “nyashka” is a very beautiful well-groomed girl:

*“There is such a **nyashka** (a beautiful girl): plump lips, short skirt. A dream!”.*

Individual communicants share the sign of cuteness in gradations: nyaka (cute, lovely), nyashka (more lovely), nyashechka (cuteness quintessence).

*“Good morning, **nyashechki, nyashki and nyaki** (lovely audience)! Wake up and go eat something delicious”.*

The word “nyashka” produced some lexical units:

“fitonyashka” - a girl with an ideal fit figure:

*“She was so much offended that she stopped eating and took care of herself. Now she has grown into an awesome **fitonyashka** (fit girl) and still thanks me”.*

“hochushka” - any wish, desire:

*“Happy Birthday! I wish you a lot of new little **hochushek** (wishes) - good and different!”.*

“vkusnyashka” - yummy (something very tasty, collective to indicate delicacies):

*“It's just a super recipe, and it's very, very tasty! I advise you to try it, you'll lick your fingers! **Vkusnyashka!** (yummy)”.*

*“Friends, this time we meet at 19.00. Waiting for everybody! **Vkusnyashki** (sweet dessert) for tea are welcome”.*

In general “gastronomy” diminutives are used very widely:

*“Sometimes the cheese is normal or melted on **graterie** (little grater) and I add it (but usually if there is a gravy to pasta)... Hello, today pasta with **cutleties** (little cutlets), vegetable **salady** (tasty salad), **compotie** (tasty compote) with dried fruits and pizza! Everyone enjoy your meal!”.*

*“First, we will grate all the necessary ingredients with a large **graterie** (grater) - boiled vegetables”.*

*“Simple **saladies** (tasty salads) for every day. **Salady** with smoked **sausagie** (tasty sausage)”.*

*“As far as I get, the ingredients are better for the **graterie** (grater), some for the large, and some for the small or grindsomewhat... Lenchik P. **salady** (salad) is **redheaddy** (oforange color) thanks for the **vkusnyashka** (tasty food). **bay leafy** (bay leaf). Tatyana”.*

*“-I love that! Just add more **mushroomies** (lovely mushrooms)!”.*

*“**Mashenka** (my lovely Mary), you won’t believe it! I wanted to add **mushroomies** - there are no at the market!”.*

It is important to note that the origin of certain “mimi” lexical units differs from the others. So, the word “pichalka” (little sadness) is probably the product of the so-called Albanian language (a specific layer of the lexical units of the early Internet communication era, within which the orthographic image of the word was distorted).

*“For the first time I saw such a beauty by cloudy weather. **Pichalka** (little sadness)”.*

*“I lost weight to 50 per month, nerves and **pichalka** (sorrow), fitted the graduation dress. I changed my mind bout selling”.*

In the field of “pets” social network communicants also make extensive use of diminutives. We are going to specify those usual for the discourse of social networks:

– **kotanchik** (serious beloved adult male cat):

*“It has been a while since I saw a British **kotanchik** (cattery) and finally”.*

– **sobachinka** (little doggie):

*“He just wants to kill all the other **sobachinek** (doggies). Everyone, you know, has his own shortcomings”.*

Note that in positivistic meaning in social networks alongside with the above mentioned diminutives, augmentatives “**kote**” (cat) and “**soba**” (dog) are used.

*“Let’s arrange a flashmob?) Send in the comments your festival **kotes** (cats) or **sobs** (dogs)”.*

In the sphere of “home communication”/“generation communication” the discourse of social networks presents an extremely wide application of diminutive constructions. The so-called “Mamma” language - a lexical layer that describes the various aspects of the existence of women who are concerned about reproductive functions was gradually formed. Diminutives naturally represent one of the signs of a special register of communication - “nanny language”. This register is used in the “adult-child” speech situations⁶ and differs widely in the use of diminutives, onomatopoeia, etc.

However, unlike the domestic “nanny language”, the communicative paradigm of “childishness” in social networks is represented by specific units, often combining elements of physiology and “mimic” language:

- beremenyashka/beremenyushka (pregnant woman):
*“I have the most **mimimishniye** (lovely) **beremenyashki** (pregnant women)”.*
*“And this photo session of happy **beremyushek** (pregnant women)! Somehow a couple of years ago I was shooting the guys’ wedding and I’m very glad to see you again!”*
- **ovulyashka/ovulyashechka** (a woman, planning conception):
*“I am now an **ovulyashka** (a woman, planning conception), I want children so badly.”*
“I really want a little baby, I am ovulyashechka now (I’m ovulating now)”.

Speaking about the “Mamma” language of social networks, it should be noted that its terminological apparatus gradually begins to acquire an ironic tinge. The word “ovulyashka” has recently received a rather negative significance of mental fixation on reproductive function to the detriment of the cognitive one:

- “You, of course, will say that hormones, pregnancy hit the head, but it was me who was pregnant, and my husband turned into a stupid ovulyashka (a pregnant woman)”.*
- **godovasik**(yearling; one-year-old child):
*“Could you please advise me a good confectioner !! We need a cake for our **godovasika** (yearling)”.*
- **ekoshka** (the child who was born as a result of invitro fertilization, a tube baby):
*“My baby is **ekoshka** (a tube baby). I’m glad that it’s so, simply happy”.*

In general diminutives in social networks have a wide range of functions. Communicatively-pragmatic functions of diminutivity are based on excluding excessive categoricity from the speech because it interferes with the realization of normal communication. And diminutives potential from pragmatic point of view is realized by means of the opportunity to produce the necessary communicative effect and the establishment of effective interaction between interlocutors.

Such shades of meaning as softness, request and politeness are emoseme of a diminutive. This fully confirms the relationship between the categories of diminutiveness and motivation. Effective communication is achieved by adding such implicit meanings as:

- request mitigation
*“Just a **moment (a little moment)**, as they say. Guys, tell me please. Do you want to know more about creating and promoting events?”*
- refusing mitigation
*“Sorry, I cannot **today (todayling)**. Our hands are not for boredom, we have invented ourselves **something to do (buisnessies)** and are in a rush”*
- degree of categoricalness reduction
*“I basically do not agree, but for the 7 month old **baby’s (little cute baby)** mother she looked already good”*
- strengthening of politeness
*“Thank you very much for your models! How many **babies and toddlers (male babies and female babies)** will look fashionable and esthetically pleasing!”*
- giving the ironic effect
*“We both know the Internet is a global information dump, but we often take someone’s opinion from there at face value. **Pichalka (little sorrow)** comes after such dialogues”*
- communicational deformation
*“**Kotanchiki (guys)**, hello! I’m selling my camera. Haven’t been using for a year and a half and it’s been missing action!”*

Diminutives are quite effective as a communicative mechanism as they provide the ability to produce the desired effect on an interlocutor. This is also true for the discursive environment of social networks. Despite the specifics and genre features, diminutivity acts as categorical antagonist, leveling the language barrier of conflict situations that arise both from the addressee and from the addresser. Conflict is usually a communicative failure so the mitigating diminutive significance is able to participate in the transformation of the conflict into empathy.

CONCLUSION

Diminutive as a language tool is actively used in the communication of social networks. By now the discursive field of social networks has already formed its own lexical layer, in which whole subsystems of diminutive structures are distinguished, e.g. “mimic” and “Mamma” languages.

In the discourse of social networks, the diminutive can perform one of three functions: positivizing, pejorative and signifying on the basis of “mine - non-mine”, with possible enantiosemic transitions.

Positive and pejorative functions characterize a diminutive as a phenomenon from the earliest times of linguistic science. Just recently a diminutive has got the feature characterization role of belonging to this or that group.

Social networks and computer-mediated communication environment allows diminutives to perform the pragmatic function of achieving the goal, because this is due to the high degree of emotionality and potential conflict of the environment, as well as the specificity of the technical implementation of speech situations: instability of time frames, potential unlimited addresses, and the level of communicative compression.

Considering the ambiguity and diversity of the diminutivity phenomenon, also, it could be perspective to study how diminutive constructions can become markers of protest and escapism.

In addition, it is necessary to note the widespread use of diminutives in the marketing discourse of social networks, which can also be one of the directions for further studies of diminutiveness phenomenon as a pragmatic instrument of influence.

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