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“NANNY LANGUAGE”: A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE
SEMANTICS OF DIMINUTIVENESS IN DAGESTAN
LANGUAGES

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Abstract

The paper formulates the general provisions resulting from the analysis of the “nanny language” as a means of representing the category of diminutiveness in Dagestan languages. The comparative analysis of the actual material of the Avar, Karatin, Rutul languages of the Nakh-Dagestan family and the Mukhrek dialect of the Rutul language revealed lexical units within the means of implementing the semantics of diminutiveness, with the help of which adults communicate with children. The diversity and richness of lexico-semantic means of the diminutiveness semantics in Dagestan languages are caused by the need to fill the shortage of morphological diminutive formations. The “nanny language” constitutes an autonomous subsystem with specific phonetic, grammatical and semantic traits allowing it to be considered among the representative of the diminutiveness category. This language subsystem includes a relatively limited number of lexical units refined by previous generations of speech groups, which were historically established in a given areal unit in the sphere of communication with small children. The choice of unequal forms of language existence (literary language – newly written language – unwritten language – dialect) was dictated by the research task: to trace the frequency of the “nanny language” words in linguistic units with different levels of functioning. A comparative study of language material made it possible to conclude that in dialect and unwritten language, which vocabulary is less filled with innovations, the vocabulary of the “nanny language” is much richer than in standard literary and written languages.

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Keywords: Nanny language, diminutiveness category, Dagestan languages.



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1. Introduction

The conceptual category of diminutiveness present in all languages of the world at morphological, lexical-semantic and phraseological levels and forming an integral part of the linguistic world view reveals the peculiarities of the ethnic perception of the world.

In Dagestan languages the morphological means of expressing the semantics of diminutiveness are not that widely spread, at the same time alternative methods of expressing the assessment by an addressee concerning the qualities of a reference, connotative meanings of expressiveness, emotional breadth, evaluativity are revealed. One of means of the semantics of diminutiveness at the lexical-semantic level is the “nanny language” used at the intermediate stage of language development by a child as a complex tool of thinking and knowledge of the world. In developmental psycholinguistics, when qualifying speech addressed to a child, the term “input” has been established, and some linguists refer to the input as to a special register (Menn, 1986). The use of a specific language to communicate with children is driven by the desire of adults to speak at a linguistic level that ensures understanding by the listeners.

2. Problem Statement

The “nanny language” constitutes an autonomous subsystem comprising a relatively limited number of lexical units refined by previous generations of speech groups, which were historically established in a given areal unit in the sphere of communication with small children. Linguistically, it is “... characterized by a number of features (compared to ordinary speech not directed to a child): <...> specific forms” (Grudeva, 1990, p. 63). The use of the “nanny vocabulary” in some volume in all languages of the world indicates the universality of this phenomenon. This layer of vocabulary, being a means of realizing the category of diminutiveness, is characterized by emotional saturation and the level of functional diversity in linguistic units.

3. Research Questions

The subject of the study is phonetic, grammatical and semantic characteristic of the “nanny language” of the literary Avar language, unwritten Karatin language, the newly written Rutul language and its Mukhrek dialect, which is a single subsystem representing the semantics of diminutiveness.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to establish common and specific phonetic and grammatical lexical units of the “nanny language” in four unequal forms of language existence (literary language – newly written language – unwritten language – dialect); to identify typical semantic groups of children’s language, to determine the frequency of the “nanny language” words in linguistic units with different levels of functioning.

5. Research Methods

In addition to general scientific methods the study was based on descriptive, comparative methods, continuous sampling methods, statistical, as well as linguistic geography methods, which allow characterizing the spread of the language phenomena in inter-language and inter-linguistic interaction.

6. Findings

The appearance of the “nanny language” is caused by the fact that phonetic, lexical, grammatical and semantic components of the language ability of children’s speech generally correspond to similar levels of language. At the same time, they are not identical due to differences of reflection and generalization of corresponding linguistic units in children’s consciousness.

The words of the “nanny language” used in communication with children at the initial stage are deprived of inflexion, which facilitates the task of learning a language. They are classified into two groups: onomatopoeias (imitations of the sounds of living and non-living nature); phonetically simple childish words consisting of open syllables. This aspect of the studied language is not only composed of diminutives formed from ordinary nouns by special affixes, most of it is made up of special words used only when communicating with children, but their structure may contain suffixes that give a diminutive-affectionate semantics.

In the studied linguistic units, the “nanny language” is characterized by the following phonetic features:

- words of the “nanny language” used at the primary stage of communication generally consist of one or two syllables;
- among the two-syllable words of the Avar and Karatan languages there are many lexical units consisting of two open syllables and having the CVCV structure typical for many languages (Chirikba, 1991), as opposed to the Rutul language and its Mukhrek dialect, in which the two-syllable words consist of reduplicated syllables, the first of which is open, the second is closed:

Avar language: *баба* “mother”, *дада* “father”, *цакли* “tooth”;

Karatin language: *нани* “child”, *дыды* “car”, *сақъы* “tooth”;

Rutul language: *нений* “mummy”, *деðий* “daddy”, *бебий* “bread”;

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *джиджей* “mother, aunt”, *зыгый* “uncle”.

Besides the above features, the study reveals the specificity of adult communication with children: high-pitched voice (“unnatural”, not typical for adults) when talking to babies, squatting down to establish a contact with the child (Belyanin, 2003). Some linguists draw similarities between adults’ style of communication with children and with animals (Magin, 2006; Solodova & Yampolskaya, 2018).

The “nanny language” within the studied linguistic units is characterized by the following morphological features:

- the structure of words, with which adults address children, is often complicated by diminutive-affectionate suffixes with pronounced emotional meaning, the use of which psycholinguists associate with the child’s personification of objects and phenomena of surrounding reality, the likeness of them to themselves and the expression of good attitude towards them:

Avar language: *ици-ко* “cat”, *яси-кIo* “doll”, *иии-кIo* “bird, chicken”;

Karatin language: *клокIo-чана* “baby, little”, *микIo-чана* “small” (commonly used *микIoб* “small”); *са-къу* “tooth” (commonly used *саle* “tooth”);

Rutul language: *бан-ый* “porridge”, *ձзыцI-ый* “tooth”;

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *джукъ-аү* “chicken” (commonly used *шарак* “chicken”), *uc-aү* “wound”.

- close to “childlike words” Karatin diminutives-addresses with affixes *-аө*, *-аү* and lexical units of Rutul language formed from ordinary nouns by means of suffixes *-ий*, *-үй*, *-ый* but with additional increments (often reduplicated):

Karatin language: *иلى-оў* “mother’s” (feminine), *иلى-ов* “mother’s” (masculine) (from *иля* “mother”), *им-оў* “father’s” (feminine), *им-ов* “father’s” (masculine) (from *имя* “father”);

Rutul language: *къалб-аб-ый* “cradle” (from *къалб* “cradle”); *гел-ел-ий* “lamb” (from *гел* “lamb”);

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *къалб-аү* “cradle” (from *къалб* “cradle”); *сикI-икI-еў* “fox” (from *сикI* “fox”), *к1аз-ал-аү* “jar” (from *к1аз* “jar, a vessel in which cream is made”);

- in spoken Rutul children’s speech and the speech of adults addressed to children, diminutives-addresses with affix *-аү* are often used: *нинаай* “mummy” (from *нин* “mother”), *дудай* “daddy” (from *дуо* “father”), *духай* “dear son” (from *дых* “son”), *рышиай* “dear daughter” (from *рыши* “daughter”). These forms with an affix *-аү* in the Rutul speech are used only for address, which allows assuming the presence of a vocative formed only from animate nouns in Rutul language in the recent past (Ibragimov, 2018). In Karatin language in the speech of adults addressed to small children, lexemes of the “nanny language” *баба* “mother”, *дада* “father” with affixes *-аү*, *-аө* reflecting a grammatical class of an object are used: *бабай* “mother’s” (feminine), *бабаө* “mother’s” (masculine), *дадай* “father’s” (feminine), *дадаө* “father’s” (masculine);
- the use of proper names instead of pronouns, observed in the studied languages when communicating with children, is caused by the desire of adults to take into account the absence of personal pronouns in children’s vocabulary;
- features of syntax of adult speech addressed to children consist in the use of short two-member sentences, exclamation (warning) sentences consisting of one word.

The analysis of the “nanny language” vocabulary in the studied languages revealed several frequency semantic groups:

1) names of animals, part of which refers to the category of onomatopoeia, since the sound complex, as a rule, has motivation by reproducing sounds produced by animals, birds. At the same time, these sound complexes denote both the animal itself and the sounds produced, and the whole inventory of units associated with it (*мяө* – cat, mewing, bowl for food, pillow on which the pet sleeps, etc.)

Avar language: *xIany* “dog, puppy”, *гиргир* “young ram”, *мими* “calf”;

Karatin language: *гIугIy-гIугIy* “cock”, *хIола* “dog”, *ицико* “cat”;

Rutul language: *гъалвый* “dog”, *балъалъый* “sheep, ram”, *сибамбый* “bear, bear cub”;

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *къыхъай* “calf”, *чиклай* “donkey”, *чыламай* “little dog, puppy”.

Over time, adults, when communicating with children, gradually retreat from sound-reflecting words in favor of commonly used lexical units, leading to the formation of parallel nominations:

Avar language: *мими* – *бече* “calf”, *иццико* – *кето* “cat”;

Karatin language: *инихо* – *льедер* “calf”, *бэглэгле* – *ригъа* “sheep, ram”;

Rutul language: *гъяловый* – *тыла* “dog”, *гышчиклы* – *йымал* “donkey”;

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *джукъай* – *шарак* “chicken”, *сиклуклей* – *сикл* “fox”.

In some cases, it is also possible to use intermediate diminutives in the transition from onomatopoeias to “adult language”:

Rutul language: *мяв* – *бисий* – *гъйт* “cat” (*мяв* – onomatopoeia, *бисий* – name of a cat typical for children’s language, which the lexical unit *гъйт* corresponds to in the commonly used language); *му* – *дзицений* – *къыхъ* (*му* – onomatopoeia, *дзицений* – name of a calf typical for children’s language, formed from the conscripted “*дзиц-джсан*” or from a word by which an animal is driven away – “*дзиц!*” contrasted with the commonly used lexical unit *къыхъ*);

Karatin language: *мяв* – *иццико* – *ucco* “cat” (*мяв* – onomatopoeia, *иццико* – name of a cat typical for children’s language, *ucco* – commonly used word); *гъялов-гъялов* – *хъола* – *хвай* “dog” (*гъялов-гъялов* – onomatopoeia, *хъола* – name of a dog typical for children’s language, *хвай* – commonly used word);

2) kinship terms:

Avar language: *баба* “mother” (commonly used *эбел*), *дада* “father” (commonly used *эмен*), *дацци* “uncle” (commonly used *имгил*);

Karatin language: *баба* “mother” (commonly used *иля*), *дада* “father” (commonly used *имья*); *аъя* “older sister, aunt” (commonly used *йацци*, *иляцци*);

Rutul language: *нений* “mother” (commonly used *нин*); *дедий* “father” (commonly used *ди*);

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *рышиклавай* “sister, little sister” (commonly used *рини*), *духууй* “son, dear son” (commonly used *джух*);

3) names of food, drinking:

Avar language: *мамма* “food” (commonly used *квен*), *махла* “water (liquid in general)” (commonly used *льим* “water”);

Karatin language: *нана* “food (any)” (commonly used *къамер*), *жисжи* “meat” (commonly used *рикви*);

Rutul language: *бебий* “bread” (commonly used *хъыя*), *бапый* “porridge” (commonly used *ямаг*);

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *аный* “porridge” (commonly used *емаг*), *гъхай* “sweets” (commonly used *ширинлугъ*);

4) somatism names:

Avar language: *коко* “breast (mother’s)” (commonly used *керен*), *квачлы* “hand” (commonly used *квер*);

Karatin language: *бажси* “hand” (commonly used *рекъла*), *сақъу* “tooth” (commonly used *сале*);

Rutul language: *бай* “breast (mother’s)” (commonly used *мыхыр*), *гвачлий* “hand” (commonly used *хъил*);

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *ձզւլայ* “tooth” (commonly used *сыс* “tooth”, but *сылабыр* “teeth”);

5) verbs relevant for the first years of life:

Karatin language: *буччи* “walk”, *лалаальъ* “go to bed, sleep”, *хланы* “You may fall!” (warning);

Rutul language: *дай-дай* “sleep”, *доч* “stand”, *ам* “eat”;

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *быылы ваъ* ‘dance’, *ии гъаъ* “hug”, etc.;

Among the lexical units of the “nanny language” in languages of different cultures the words of the common gender – unproductive category at the modern stage of language development – hold a special place (Murashova & Yashchenko, 2017). In the studied linguistic units, in quantitative terms, the words of the common gender predominate in the Karatin language and the Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language, some of which are used exclusively in communication with children:

Avar language: *нани* “moppet, child”, *богло* “boogeyman, bugaboo”;

Karatin language: *будағъан* “glutton”, *хъахъал* “weeper”;

Rutul language: *гиченмий* “wimp”, *вешенмий* “weeper”;

Mukhrek dialect of Rutul language: *шилыхкай* “glutton”, *плизай* “weeper”.

In the studied languages, lexical syncretic units are also identified, reflecting, depending on the context, either the semantics of a noun or the semantics of a verb:

Avar language: *uc* “fire, you may get burnt (warning)”; *a-a* equivalent of Russian “kaka”, “Do not touch! (warning)”;

Karatin language: *xlae* “fire, you may get burnt (warning)”, *изизи* “sore” – *изизи?* “Does it hurt?”;

Rutul language: *an* “danger, you may fall! (warning)”, *члан1-члан1* “bathing, to bathe”.

7. Conclusion

High degree of implication of emotive concepts in the studied languages is compensated by the presence of rich “nanny language”, the words of which help a child to master a language due to phonetic simplicity and lack of inflexions. At the same time, the developmental psycholinguistics, which studies the input (speech addressed to a child) on the material of dozens of languages (Mesenyashina, 2009), does not reveal mechanisms when the adults select those words that correspond to the level of abstraction necessary for communication with children.

Our comparative analysis of the material of unequal forms of language existence – literary Avar language, the unwritten Karatin language, the newly written Rutul language and its Mukhrek dialect – showed that the structure of the dissyllables children’s words SVCVS in Rutul language and its Mukhrek dialect differs from the traditional CVCV model. In the “nanny language” of the studied languages it is typical to convert heterogeneous phonemes into homogeneous ones and bring words to the CBCV//CBCVC structure usual for children. The frequency of the “nanny language” words and their number in linguistic units with different levels of functioning is different: in dialect and unwritten language, which vocabulary is less filled with innovations, the vocabulary of the “nanny language” is much richer than in standard literary and written languages.

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