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**STRUCTURAL AND SEMANTIC FEATURES OF COLLOQUIAL  
RUSSIAN**

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***Abstract***

The paper describes the structural and semantic features of the Russian spoken language, in particular its specific phonetic, derivational, lexical, morphological and syntactic features. Due to insufficient knowledge, the problem of the analysis of lively colloquial speech is one of the urgent problems in modern linguistics. Linguists determine the Russian colloquial speech and its place in the system of the literary language in various ways. Some of them believe that a codified literary language and spoken language constitute two subsystems within a literary language. Thus, the goal of the work is to identify and describe the specific structural and semantic features of the Russian colloquial language and to justify the possibility of its separation into a special language subsystem. A descriptive method has been mainly used, that is, a method of describing linguistic facts in the synchronic aspect. Attempts to isolate the colloquial language into a special subsystem in comparison with the literary language have been made. The systemic nature of the colloquial speech, manifested in comparing with the codified literary language, suggests the existence of a certain system of norms and the appropriateness of identifying a special language subsystem – the spoken language, having its characteristic at all levels (phonetic, lexical, word-formative, morphological, syntactic).

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## **1. Introduction**

A colloquial speech is generally understood as a simple, spontaneous speech, consisting, as a rule, of replica phrases addressed to the interlocutor, designed to respond. However, one should not identify colloquial and vernacular speeches since colloquial speech is an unofficial language of literary language speakers. And in general, it is advisable to speak not only about colloquial speech, but also about the colloquial language, which is a special language subsystem with its specific phonetic, lexical and grammatical features. There are ongoing disputes concerning the relationship between colloquial and standardized literary speech. Moreover, when textbooks on stylistics and standards of speech say about the possibility of using one form or another in the colloquial speech, the question arises, whether this form is standard or not. Therefore, the approach to the colloquial speech as a special system, the laws of which are due to the situation awareness (term by LP Yakubinsky) (Yakubinsky, 1986) and mostly oral implementation allows us to consider it not as a divergence from a standard literary language, but in opposition to it, and allows to study not only the colloquial speech and communication strategies, but also a number of other important issues from a new perspective.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The linguistics of oral speech as a field of linguistics attracted the close attention of scientists only in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (the works of E. A. Zemskaya, E. Hanpiry, and others). Until then, oral speech was not considered as an independent linguistic object and only contrasted with writing as an irregular form of the language. Therefore, due to insufficient knowledge, the problem of the analysis of lively colloquial speech is one of the urgent problems in modern linguistics.

## **3. Research Questions**

A colloquial speech is generally understood as a simple, spontaneous speech, consisting, as a rule, of replica phrases addressed to the interlocutor, designed to respond. By colloquial speech we should not understand vernacular speech since colloquial speech is an unofficial language of literary language speakers. Along with the notion of “colloquial speech”, it is advisable to speak of “colloquial language” as a special subsystem with specific linguistic features opposed to the literary language.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The goal of the work is to identify and describe the specific structural and semantic features of the Russian colloquial language and to justify the possibility of its separation into a special language subsystem.

## **5. Research Methods**

In carrying out the research, a descriptive method has been mainly used (a method of describing linguistic facts in the synchronic aspect)

## 6. Findings

Conversation phonetics is characterized by the same set of linguistic units as the codified literary language, but each phoneme in the speaking system is represented by a large set of sound representations. One of the salient phonetic characteristics of the colloquial Russian language is the so-called phonetic “deformation”, manifested in the presence of many, especially high frequency, words of several pronunciation variants. Such variants appear due to the reduction of vowels, positional loss of consonants, and ellipsis of syllables. The elliptic pronunciation of some words is so typical of colloquial speech that their reduced forms are considered as colloquial lexical duplicates and become the norm in written colloquial speech. So, you can hear the following typical sound forms of some expressions: one thousand (тысяча – *тыща*), now (сейчас – *цас, ща*); generally (вообще – *воще, ваще*); what (что – *чо / чё*); today (сегодня – *сёдня, сёня*). A strong reduction of sounds is observed in the pronunciation of names and patronymic names, for example, Павлович – Палыч, Николаевна – Николавна, Александровна – Санна, and others.

The word formation level of the spoken language is quite vividly represented. Among the speech colloquial neologisms one can single out the standard formations created by the usual methods of derivation in accordance with the word formation types of the language. Among the usual methods of word formation in Russian colloquial speech, the mainstream is the affixal method, and its most productive variety is called suffixing. In colloquial speech, nouns are most often formed with the help of suffixes. The results of the analysis showed that the most productive suffixes with the meaning of the person are: *-чик/-щик, -щиц(а)/-щица(а), -ник/-ница(а), -ун, -тель*, which serve for naming a person by an action characteristic of him, for example, *О, это лучший игральщик в «Что? Где? Когда?»; сколько можно сидеть за компьютером, виртуальщик! А, это наша претендовищица на должность главного бухгалтера?!; Тот же мне думатель нашёлся; Опоздунов будем наказывать; Я сегодня три часа с егэшниками занималась*. For naming objects, suffixes *-тель, -ник, -лк* are frequently used, for example, *разрезатель* (about a knife); *охлаждатель* (an air conditioner); *протыкалка* (about a punch), *мазилка / замазывалка* (about correcting fluid); *стиралка* (about a washing machine or an eraser); *держалка* (about the handle of a pan); *поливалка* (about a watering pot).

The formation of colloquial words using diminutive suffixes *-ишк, -оньк, -еньк, -очк, -ушк, -чик*, etc., the so-called diminutives, is worth noting. For example, *домишко, вкусняшка, денежка, пуговичка, книжечка, остановочка, супчик, печенюшка, творожок, ясенюк, ладненько, юбочка*, etc. These suffixes are very typical of the Russian spoken language, which, as a rule, is more emotional and expressive than written. On this subject, E.A. Stolyarova notes: ‘It is in the sphere of colloquial speech that we are not stingy in emotions and express (sometimes even unconsciously) our attitude to what we are talking about... Largely, the use of diminutives is individually determined by personal speech habits and tastes of the speakers, but their very presence is an integral feature of colloquial speech. It is the colloquial speech where the diminutives are created, mainly used and give it a bright color, expressing various feelings and moods of the speakers’ (Shatalova, 2009). In addition, the formation of verbal nouns with colloquial coloration with the help of the suffix *-ниж(е)* is typical, for example, *доставание денег, нехождение на занятия, разгребание бумаг*, etc.

Verbs in the colloquial speech are often derived by the suffixal way of word formation. The formation of verbs from material nouns by joining the suffix *-и(ть)* seems to be quite productive, for example, *Раз в неделю лицо надо скрабить* (derived from the noun «скраб»); *Чтобы волосы не электризовались, надо их муссить* (derived from the noun «мусс»); *Обувь нужно кремить не перед выходом на улицу* (derived from the noun «крем»); *Волосы я предпочитаю гелить* (derived from the noun «гель»). Impersonal verbs are formed in much the same way, for example, *Вот так снегопадут сегодня!*; *С утра начало метель* (Shatalova, 2009). Single-word verb names derived from nouns with the help of suffixes *-и(ть)*, *-нича(ть)*, *-ирова(ть)*, replacing whole phrases, are typical of the colloquial speech, for example, *Ну что ты умничаешь?!* (show your mind); *Он теперь каждое утро физкультурничает* (is engaged in physical education); *Дети сегодня учились баскетболировать* (play basketball); *Сейчас будем семинарить* (conduct a seminar).

Prefixal formations are also frequently used. For example, neologisms with a prefix *пере-* have the semantic shade of repetition or completeness of the action: *У кого бы мне перезанять?*; the prefix *про-* bears the semantic shade of vigor, thoroughness or completeness of the action: *Всю зарплату прогулял*; the prefix *недо-* has the semantic meaning of not achieving the proper degree of action: *Так я ещё недопересказала всей истории*; *Мы ещё недопереехали*.

In addition to the traditional suffixal and prefixal word formation methods, there are cases of prefix-postfix and prefix-suffix-postfix verb formation. For example, *Зарепетировались уже, целый день репетируете!*; *Что-то я совсем зачавничалась у вас, пора домой идти*; *Мы сегодня совсем запроблемились*; *Напроверялась я сегодня сочинений, одни буквы и запятые перед глазами!*; *Он уж совсем изревновался*; *Когда же ты уже наинтернешисья?*; *Хватит, надеканился за свою жизнь*.

A typical method for the new words formation in colloquial speech, where the tendency to save speech efforts takes place, is a semantic condensation – univerbation and syncope (Shatalova, 2009). When univerbation takes place, the original phrase (fixed expression), consisting of two or more components, is folded into a single word, which combines the meaning of the original phrase. Often the semantic condensation is accompanied by suffixing, for example, *лабораторная работа – лабораторка*, *операционная система – операционка*, *читальный зал – читалка*, *зачетная книжка – зачетка*, *маршрутное такси – маршрутка*, *манная крупа – манка*, *«Комсомольская правда» – «Комсомолка»*, *девятиэтажный дом – девятиэтажка*, *зарубежная литература – зарубежка*. Another productive way of colloquial derivation is the syncope of the stem. Nouns are most often subjected to this way of word formation, for example, *университет – универ*, *преподаватель – препод*, *госэкзамены – госы*.

A noticeable phenomenon in the field of colloquial derivation was the activation of such method of word formation as stem-composition. Complicated words, regularly created in speech, allow one-word presentation of any object or phenomenon. For example, *На эту должность нужен ответственный человек, поэтому посоветуй мне какую-нибудь краснодипломницу*. Such a method of composing two stems is sometimes very convenient, especially when the speaker cannot quickly recall the right word, or simply wants to replace the borrowing with a Russian synonym, for example, *волососушилка* (instead of фен); *а зубовыдиратель* (instead of стоматолог, дантист), *воздухогонятель* (instead of кондиционер) (Shatalova, 2009).

The lexical level of the colloquial language is closely connected with the word formation level, but it is very heterogeneous. The main layer comprises neutral vocabulary. Though the use of the following groups of words can be noted: typical household words associated with everyday life, for example, *чулки, кастрюля, щи, ползунки, пижама*, etc. ; words of colloquial tone, having neutral synonyms, for example, *заработная плата – получка, отец – батя, деньги – бабки, тысяча – рубль или штука*, etc.; “condensated” verbs, for example, *Ну что, все-таки сняли его* (в значении « »); *И давно он сидит?* (meaning «сидит в тюрьме») (Ushakova & Trufanova, 2003). Such a stylistic variety of colloquial vocabulary is primarily due to its wide thematic range; moreover, the speaker’s biases cannot be ignored: his tendency to jokes, plays upon words, or, conversely, increased inclusion of the literature vocabulary. Another typical feature of colloquial vocabulary is its semantic syncretism, polysemy, and expressiveness (Zemskaya, Kitaygorodskaya & Shirayev, 1981). In colloquial speech, words with a wide meaning specified by the situation are frequently used. So, for example, the word “*временка*” has a general meaning “something temporary”, but in various conversational situations it can acquire such contextual meanings as: temporary house, staircase, stove, an extension, etc. Some polysemantic words in each concrete communication situation actualize a certain component of its meaning. For example, the word “*простой*”:  
*простая задача – трудная задача; простое платье - шелковое платье; простой человек – сложный (по характеру) человек, образованный человек; простой ужин - праздничный ужин*, etc. (Zemskaya, 2016).

The close connection of conversational utterances with the communicative act generates special ways of naming objects, one of which is “the name of the situation”. Behind such one-word nominations there can be a whole complex of meanings, understandable to the interlocutor who is aware of the situation. To the uninformed it will seem a strange and incomprehensible combination of words. For example, *Ну что, кончился твой интернет?* (The Internet limit has been reached). Another interesting method of naming is metonymic transfer, for example, *Подай мне того синего Пушкина* (Can you give me the book of blue color by Pushkin); *Я уже целую тарелку съела* (I have eaten one plate of soup) (Ushakova & Trufanova, 2003).

The morphology of colloquial speech has no particular differences from the morphology of the codified literary language and is characterized by practically the same set of units. Special colloquial vocative forms can be noted as specific, for example, *Тань! Мам! Лен, а Лен! Зай! Солнц!* In addition, in the spoken language, in contrast to the book-written, the proportion of grammatical classes of words and word forms is somewhat different. Thus, such half-significant and non-significant parts of speech as pronouns, conjunctions, and particles are the most frequent. Statistics shows, that there are far more verbs than nouns, and the participles and verbal adverbs are replaced by verbs, for example, *Намусорила и ничего не уберет уходит; Я тут обложилась словарями сидела весь вечер*. Similar constructions with double-verb predicates are more commonly used, as noted by E.A. Zemsky, when describing a long-lasting action (Zemskaya, Kitaygorodskaya & Shirayev, 1981).

Also in the morphological system of Russian colloquial speech the use of non-significant parts of speech in unusual functions can be noted, for example, *Да что вы там бу-бу-бу всю пару?! Платье на тебе – не ах.*

In the morphological system of the Russian colloquial speech, it is possible to note the use of non-significant parts of speech in functions that are not specific to them: in our opinion, the most striking and diverse layer of the spoken language is the syntactic one. In the study of the syntax of colloquial speech, linguists face a number of difficulties. Many consider that in colloquial speech, that not a sentence but an utterance is used as the main communicative unit, relying on such important criterion of colloquial speech as intonation (Shvedova, 1960). By the utterance a tactic unit of colloquial speech, usually consisting of a single phrase, is meant. However, in colloquial speech, the phenomenon of parcellation is possible, that is breaking up one statement into several phrases with the help of a falling intonation, for example: *Она пришла домой поздно / Уставшая / С кучей заданий*. Speech facts of this kind are considered as one utterance consisting of several phrases (Zemskaya, Kitaygorodskaya & Shirayev, 1981).

It cannot be denied that one of the problems in the study of colloquial speech is that, as a rule, it is oral and spontaneous (Infantova, 1973). Although it is the oral form of the functioning of conversational speech that explains many of its syntactic features with uncomplicated types of communication. So, one of the most prominent features of the Russian colloquial syntax is the break of the structure, the free word order, which is associated with intonation, and the semantic relations, that are formed on the basis of loose connection, are very diverse (Sirotinina, 1974). For example, *Молока купи, пожалуйста, по дороге две бутылки. Какая интересная передача ты говорил будет сегодня по Первому каналу? Как вашего декана фамилия?* Such constructions are built according to the principle of free associative joining of parts of the utterance as the idea is developing, therefore, there is a syntactic gap between two closely related units of speech.

One of the main specific syntactic features of colloquial speech is ellipsis, contextual or situational syntactic incompleteness. For example:

- 1) Ты придешь сегодня на занятия?  
- Приду (compare: Я приду сегодня на занятия).
- 2) Дайте мне от головы ('headache medicine' is meant); В красном за вами? (Has the girl in the red coat lined up after you?); В деканат что ли его? ('called' is omitted).

The lack of verbalization of individual elements of the utterance is explained by the commonality of the communication situation for the interlocutors, therefore, the verbal ellipsis does not break their mutual understanding (Kanonic, 1988).

E.A. Zemskaya distinguishes stationary and nonstationary ellipses (Zemskaya, 1981). Stationary structures are reproduced as ready-made structures, and understood unambiguously out of context, for example, *А тебе потом за это премию (дадут)*. Such syntactic constructions are assigned to a specific situation that clarifies them. In non-stationary structures, one of the components of the phrase is omitted and such phrases can be understood in different ways, for example: *А, это тот; Может, у Саши*.

The other common feature of the Russian colloquial syntax is the structure with a noun in the nominative case in the meaning of the objective case, for example: *Ты живешь третий этаж, да?; Рубашка эта черная, покажите мне; Ручка у вас нет телефон записать? У нее шуба дикая норка (noun as an attribute); Она из Чебоксар? – Нет, она Уфа (a noun as a predicate)*. Such colloquial structures testify to the multifunctionality of the nominative case of nouns (Krasilnikova, 1990).

Syncretism and articulateness are considered among the most important system features of colloquial syntax (Zemskaya, 1973). Syncretism is the so-called fusion of the many into one, a kind of compaction; the opposite process is articulateness. In terms of content, syncretism manifests itself in a particular frequency of such conjunctionless structures like *Голова болит / выключи //*; *Зонтик / промокнешь //*; phrases like *Это не доходя «Молока» //*. In terms of expression, the characteristic of the articulateness manifests itself in such units typical of colloquial speech as many-word nominations such as *Дай куда яблоки положить, есть чем писать, возьми чем укрыться*. By the way, these expressions being articulated in form are syncretic in content, as *куда яблоки положить* can be a bag, a sack, and a basket; *чем укрыться* is almost everything that can be used for such a purpose – from a blanket and a plaid to a coat.

Another salient characteristic of colloquial speech is the abundance of unspecialized constructions. For example, constructions with an infinitive, performing the functions in colloquial speech that are not characteristic of it in a codified language. So, it can expand nouns with a specific meaning, denoting the purpose of the subject, for example, *Надо купить кроссовки бегать* (for jogging); *В прихожую нужен маленький коврик ноги вытирать* (for wiping). The abundance of unspecialized conversational structures with particles and conjunctions should be noted. For example, the particular use of particles of a pronominal or adverbial origin *где (там), куда (там), какое (там)*, for example:

- 1) - Вы были у директора? Подписали?  
- Какого там директора? В приемной такая очередь!
- 2) - Ты уже написал курсовую?  
- Какой там курсовая? Я еще зачеты не сдал.

The typical subordinating conjunction *чтобы* is often used in colloquial structures implying conditionality (Danilova, 2011). For example, *Мне не пятнадцать лет, чтобы носить такие короткие юбки; Он не такой глупый, чтобы доверять первому встречному; Сейчас не время, чтобы ходить по гостям; Это слишком красивая история, чтобы быть правдой; Вместо того чтобы уроки делать, он сидит и играет на компьютере*.

## 7. Conclusion

Now it can be seen that linguists determine the Russian colloquial speech and its place in the system of the literary language in various ways. Some researchers view it as an oral variety within the literary language (Lapteva, 2003), others consider colloquial speech as a particular style (Sirotinina, 1980). A great contribution to the description of the spoken language was made by E.A. Zemskaya, who developed the theoretical concept, according to which the Russian spoken language, being an uncoded variety of the literary language, is opposed to the literary language and differs from it both in extralinguistic (conditions of use) and language (specific system-structural properties) terms. Therefore, following the E. Zemskaya, we believe that a codified literary language and spoken language constitute two subsystems within a literary language, the realization of which is determined by the communicative conditions: “a codified language serves the sphere of official communication (personal and public), while a spoken language is used in the sphere of unofficial unprepared personal communication” (Zemskaya, 2016). The systemic nature of the colloquial speech, manifested in comparing with the codified literary language, suggests the existence of a

certain system of norms and the appropriateness of identifying a special language subsystem – the spoken language having its characteristic at all levels (phonetic, lexical, word-formative, morphological, syntactic). The description of the features of a spoken language is impossible without taking into account such inherent characteristics as oral form of implementation, situation awareness, dialogics, commonality of apperceptional interlocutors base, spontaneity, linear nature of the utterance deployment, high variability, emotionality, connection with non-verbal components of the communication act. ]

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