

**MSC 2020****International Scientific and Practical Conference «MAN. SOCIETY.  
COMMUNICATION»****SEMANTICS AND PRAGMATICS OF DIMINUTIVES IN THE  
MODERN RUSSIAN LANGUAGE**

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(a) Yaroslav-the-Wise Novgorod State University, Veliky Novgorod, Russian Federation  
Anna.batulina@novsu.ru**Abstract**

The article discusses various types of formal and semantic relations between a motivating and motivated word in diminutivization. The study is conducted on the basis of the contexts of the use of diminutives from the Russian National Corpus and Internet communication. When identifying the nature of motivational relations, a word-formation analysis is used, which includes a description of the lexical-semantic, grammatical and pragmatic characteristics of the derivative and the generating base. By comparing the semantic and formal features of the diminutive derivative and the motivating word, the semantics, grammar and pragmatics of diminutive derivatives are described. The interpretation, comparison and generalization of the properties of individual diminutive forms were carried out using componential analysis, a descriptive and comparative method. The dependence of the presence or absence of semantic modifications of the diminutive derivative on the belonging of the generating noun to a specific lexical-semantic group and its lexical semantics is revealed. In characterizing the pragmatic content of diminutives used in modern Russian, it is concluded that there are two groups of derivatives: complicated by certain connotations and not complicated by the pragmatic component of meaning. Derivatives in which the meaning of dimension and evaluation of the diminutive suffix is neutralized, being replaced by the meaning of the stylistic marker are described. It is concluded that the mechanism of the formation of a derivational meaning during diminutivization is the result of a complex interaction of the lexical-semantic and grammatical properties of a motivating word and a diminutive affix.

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Diminutization as a productive way of word formation

Suffixation traditionally refers to one of the most productive methods of word formation, and derivative nouns with suffixes of subjective assessment, of course, are an integral part of the word-formation system of many languages, including Russian. About the activation of this derivational model writes (Petrova & Severskaya, 2016, p. 152). In the grammatical descriptions of the XIX - beginning of XX century the category of diminutiveness is associated with derivatives from substantives and adjectives and is assigned to the sphere of form-building (Shahmatov. 2001, pp. 452-454). It is noted that the addition of morphemes with the meaning of subjective assessment does not change the part of speech of the producing word and does not significantly affect its semantics: "... diminutive suffixes are not word-forming, but form-forming" (Vinogradov, 1986, p. 98). However, since the 70s of the XX century the theory of the grammatical status of diminutive forms gave way to the idea of the special derivational meaning of diminutives: «diminutive affixes are generally considered to be derivational» (Xuping, & Hongyong, 2019). Zemskaya (2011), following Milos Dokulil, assigns diminutive forms to modification word-formation: "modification types include those types whose derivatives denote various kinds of modifications of the meaning of the generating base. First of all, these are the types of nouns, adjectives and adverbs with suffixes and prefixes of subjective assessment ..." (2011, p. 200). Derivatives with diminutive suffixes and are considered in the Russian grammar of 1980 (Artyunova et al., 1980) as "stylistic modifications" expressing the meanings of endearment and disdain. Modification derivatives have a non-idiomatic type of meaning: the derivative meaning is predictable, i.e. does not contain any semantic increments and consists of a simple sum of the meanings of the generating word and the formant.

### 1.2. Functional-semantic syncretism of diminutive derivatives

The nature of the derivational meaning of diminutives in the literature of the question is described in different ways. The most "popular" in the designation of the semantics of the diminutive suffix in domestic and foreign studies is "diminutive-affectionate": "The term diminutive is interpreted as a category which expresses the meaning of 'reduction', 'endearment', and 'love' " (Bukhori, 2019, p. 22). It is noted that in a number of cases the meaning of dimension in the semantics of the diminutive is neutralized and evaluation comes to the fore: « Using words such as *starushentsiya* (old woman), *zdorovjishko* (health), *ponedelnichek* (Monday), *epopeika* (epic), etc., a person first of all expresses his attitude and evaluation» (Zemskaya, 2014, p. 263). Diminutives are called among "the main lexical units, the use of which shows the asymmetry of positive and negative ratings in language and speech" (Skvortsova, 2012, p. 10). One cannot but agree with the opinion that "the particularity of the semantics of derivative words is affected by the belonging of the producing word to a certain lexical-semantic group" (Chebochakova, 2019, p. 196).

In the Russian literary language of the national era, the use of derivatives with suffixes of subjective assessment (diminutives) was fixed for colloquial speech, communication with children, and in the language of the turn of the 20th - 21st centuries, it was also extended to the language of Internet communication (Petrukhina, & Dedova, 2019, p. 137). The demand for diminutive forms in speech is

explained by their multifunctionality: “a striking distinguishing feature of Slavic diminutive suffixes is their functional-semantic syncretism, which, for example, is marked in the Russian Grammar by the very name of the group -“ diminutive-affectionate ”and which is reflected in the description of the semantic variation of word-formation types with given suffixes ”(Rezanova, 2017, p. 162).

## **2. Problem Statement**

The objective of our study is to determine the nature of the semantic and formal relationship between the derivative and the producing word during diminutization, which involves:

- establishing the boundaries of diminutization as a way of word formation;
- determining the nature of the modification of the lexical meaning in the formation of diminutives.

## **3. Research Questions**

To solve this problem, we need during the study to find answers to the following relevant questions.

### **3.1. What are the boundaries of diminutization as a way of word formation?**

The answer to this question involves the identification of the features of diminutization as a way of word formation, as well as the determination of the parts of speech of the stems from which diminutive derivatives can be formed.

### **3.2. What changes are taking place in the significative, pragmatic and stylistic component of the lexical meaning of diminutives?**

Solving this issue, we will analyze the semantic changes occurring in the diminutive derivative, as well as conduct a situational-contextual analysis of the pragmatic load of diminutives used in modern Russian.

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

The purpose of our study is to prove that the nature of the change in the lexical meaning of a derivative during diminutivization is individual and depends not only on the linguistic semantics of the derivative, but also on the semantic features of the generating base, as well as on the context.

## **5. Research Methods**

To describe the derivational semantics of diminutives, the derivational analysis was used. The part of speech the lexical-grammatical category of a derivative and a generating word were determined. The derivational meaning of individual diminutive forms was revealed by comparing the derived and the generating bases. A coincidence or divergence of relations between formal and semantic derivation was

recorded. When interpreting, comparing and generalizing the properties of individual diminutive forms, componential analysis and comparative method were used. In determining the pragmatic meaning of diminutives, the method of situational-contextual analysis was applied.

## 6. Findings

In this article, we use the "broad" definition of diminutive, proposed by Zemskaya: suffixal or prefixal derivatives of nouns, adjectives, adverbs, words of the category of state, verbs expressing the size-estimating meaning, the meaning of the intensity of the attribute, which are stylistically marked (*glazizchi* (huge eyes), *babulya* (granny), *milen'kiy* (pretty), *yasnen'ko* (pretty clear), *prisest'* (sit down) (2011, p. 259).

### 6.1. The boundaries of diminutization as a way of word formation

It seems appropriate to consider diminutivization as word-building, rather than a form-building, since diminutive affixes are selectively combined with generating bases, i.e. do not have regularity of grammatical morphemes: *stol* – *stolik* (table – small table), but *stul* – *stul'chik* (chair – small chair), *prestol* – ...? (throne, altar – ...?) It should be noted that in the Russian language of the turn of the century, diminutives are formed from the substantive stems of the same thematic groups that were noted for the language of the previous period – concrete vocabulary containing the sememe “size”, vocabulary related to the conceptual sphere “man”: terms of kinship, personal names, names of parts of the human body, items of clothing, food, etc. (*druz'ashki* (pals, friends), *dzhinsiki* (jeans), *memchiki* (memes)).

At the same time, there is an expansion of the range of stems, which become a producing base for diminutive derivatives, thanks to abstract nouns *obidka* (insult), *yumorok* (homour), *soveshchalka* (meeting), relative adjectives *greshnovato* (rather sinful), *pravoslavnen'kiy* (orthodox), *democratichnen'kiy* (democratic), as well as the vocabulary of other lexical and grammatical categories that did not previously have diminutive derivatives: *yevrik* (euro), *feechka* (fairy), *pokasiki* (bye, see you). At the same time, not only nominal, but also verb stems can be producing (*rasstavashki* (saying good-bye), *podnachki* (tricks)), stems of words of the category of state (*glamurnen'ko* (glamorous), *neudobnen'ko* (uncomfortable)), univerbs (*probnichesk* (mock exam), *intensivchik* (intensive courses)) as well as abbreviations: *tseerbeshka* (from central district hospital) *yuoshka* (from the initials Yulia Olegovna)). In some cases, there is a discrepancy between formal and semantic derivation (*obnimashki* (hugs), *pozdravlyalki* (congratulations)). The activation of diminutivization in modern Russian speech is also manifested in the appearance of forms parallel to the already used diminutive derivative: *pivo* → *pivasik* (*pivko*) (beer), *podruga* → *podruzhayka* (*podruzgka*) (girlfriend), *kot* → *koteyka* (*kotik*) (cat). According to researchers, “the closer and more important the attitude, the greater the variability” (Buras, & Krongauz, 2013, 123). Thus, the variability of diminutive forms of kinship terms is high: *matushka*, *mamasha*, *mamochka*, *mamulya*, *mamusik* (mother, mommy).

## 6.2. Changes in the significative, pragmatic and stylistic component of the lexical meaning of diminutives

It seems that from the point of view of the presence / absence of changes in the lexical meaning diminutives can be divided into two groups: not complicated by changes and complicated by various changes in semantics, pragmatics or grammar.

1. Let us consider the pragmatic meaning of diminutives. An analysis of the materials of the Russian National Corpus shows: in many cases, the addition of a size-estimating suffix does not add an evaluative meaning to the derivative. The diminutive forms *privetik* (hello), *yevrik* (euro), *podruzhayka* (girlfriend) etc. used to give the utterance a shade of ease, informality. So, in modern mass media, a diminutive *mamochki* (mothers) has a high frequency as a nomination of a certain social group:

*In our Soviet childhood, poor mothers (mamochki) from an old T-shirt and tulle made something similar for daughters for matinees in kindergarten* (Tuboltseva, 2013).

The desemantization of the diminutive suffix is also evidenced by the formation recorded by the researchers from one motivating base of diminutives with antonymic affixes: *sotka* and *sotyga* (1 are), *pyatachok*, *peterik*, *pyatyora* (5 rubles) (with «deleting» of the diminutive suffix) (Artyomova et al., 2015, pp. 154-155). In those cases when diminutive derivatives become evaluative, the paeiorative or meliorative nature of the connotative meaning is not predetermined by the semantics of the suffix. So, despite the presence of a diminutive-affectionate suffix, diminutives have a stable negative connotation *muzhchinka* (man), *zvezdul'ka* (star), *faktic* (fact) and so on:

*After the demonstration of this product, I wanted to catch a couple of entertainers and feed them with a soothing Persen or Novopassit. It's painfully touching, our starlets (zvezdul'ki) told how they get tired during the holidays* (Vy cheshite, vy cheshite, vam zaplatyat, 2006).

At the same time, diminutives with increased suffixes may have a narrow positive connotation:

Estimate: here at the factory a man, a hard worker (*rabotyaga*), an advanced worker, thinks that he makes candies, but in fact - vodka! (Meshkov, 2014).

Finally, typical of a number of diminutive forms (*muzhenek* (hubby), *zyatek* (son-in-law), *detki* (babies), *veshchichki* (little things), etc.) is the dependence of the connotative meaning on the context: We list useful things (*veshchichki*) that can be useful in the country and at a picnic (Yuzbekova, 2013).

Teachers and law enforcement officers have repeatedly encountered, for example, the fact that in shops they sell all kinds of frivolous things (*veshchichki*) to children - from student notebooks with eroticized covers to t-shirts with the image of hemp leaf (Mikhailov, 2009).

2. The addition of the suffix of subjective assessment can lead to a change not only in the pragmatic, but also in the significative component of the semantics of the diminutive. Diminutivization practically does not affect the semantic sphere of common nouns and personal names: *kafe* → *kafeshka* (café), *Lena* → *Lenok*, *Lenochka*. Derivatives of other lexico-grammatical categories - material, abstract - differ from producing words at the level of semantics, morphology or syntax. So, in diminutives formed from the names of professions and nationalities, on the basis of the seme of small quantities contained in the suffix, the meaning of immaturity, unprofessionalism, inferiority develops:

*Everything is wrong here, starting from the vocabulary and ending with the cream of the nation, which is now represented not by a scientist, poet or painter, but by a rogue, a song-maker (pevichka) and a tennis player (Petsuh. Comparative comments on the proverbs of the Russian people).*

Similar semantic changes occur with diminutives formed from nouns denoting persons of high social status:

*Deputy Prime Minister Dmitry Rogozin, who was present at the meeting, expressed concern that governors in the event of direct elections would turn into a kind of tsar (tsar'ki). We definitely do not need regional tsars (Krivyakina, 2012).*

A change in the significant component of the meaning of diminutives is evidenced by a change in their syntagmatics: “the combinatory capabilities of diminutive forms do not duplicate the valency properties of the generating base” (Batulina, 2019, p. 3).

Some diminutive derivatives are characterized by the presence of phraseological increment in the derivational meaning: the appearance of the seme “criminal” (*druzhki* (buddies)), “insignificant” (*hozaychik* (host)) is not conditioned either by the semantics of the producing noun or the semantics of the suffix:

*If on the way your criminal dentist's friends (druzhki) don't terminate us, they'll immediately enroll us at Kresty upon arrival (A. Motorov. Crime of Doctor Parovozov).*

3. In the formation of individual diminutive forms, a change in the part of speech or lexicogrammatical category of the derivative is observed, which prevents them from being assigned to the modification type of word formation. Thus, the diminutive *pechal'ka* (sadness) unlike the noun *pechal'* (sadness) is most often used predicatively, as a word of the category of state (*pechal'no* (it is sad)):

*AlexAS has lost. As it is often said now: «It is sad (pechal'ka)!» For the team it is a signal. (Yakovleva, 2011).*

Diminutive derivatives, which have a more concrete meaning, acquire a complete paradigm of number, the ability to combine with quantitative numerals and go into the category of single nouns: *pechen'e* (cookie), *morozhenoe* (ice-cream) (nouns of material) – *pechen'ka*, *morozhenka* (common nouns). The given examples illustrate the process of lexicalization of diminutive derivatives.

## 7. Conclusion

The analysis of the use of diminutives in modern Russian language showed that diminutization is one of the productive ways not only of expressive and stylistic word formation, but also a means of nomination. The inconsistency of the distribution of diminutives on the evaluative scale, taking into account the semantics of the suffix, is revealed. There is a dependence of the presence or absence of changes in the significant component of the meaning of diminutives on their belonging to a particular lexical-semantic group. On the whole, the ratio of semantics and pragmatics of the derivative and the generating base during diminutivization is largely individual.

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