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## THEORETICAL PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCHING DIMINUTIVE

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**Abstract.** The article presents a survey of the diminutive-related researches and considers diminutive on all the language levels (morphological, lexical and syntactical). It analyzes the principal theories of the development of diminutive's semantics and draws a distinction line between "smallness" and "diminutive". Diminutive is viewed versus augmentative and is presented as a conceptual category, a system of semantic criteria which collectively denote diminution of objective characteristics of an object.

**Keywords:** diminutive, conceptual category, diminution, smallness, augmentative, suffix.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Diminutive-related research has a long history. It started in the 19<sup>th</sup> – early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. In late 20<sup>th</sup> century there appeared more than a hundred researches which viewed the phenomenon of diminutives from different perspectives (O.M. Dolozova, L.A. Dudnik, M. Haas, A.M. Kvasha, V.O. Kuzmenkova, P. Munro). Diminutives were studied in diachronic or historical aspects, and focused on individual diminutive suffixes (B.V. Makarchev, Taru Nurmi, E. Öhmann, V.N. Pokuts, E.S. Travushkina) or on ways of forming diminutives in a certain language: Ukrainian (T.I. Derkacz-Padiasek, G. Khomechko, A.Yu. Ponomarenko, A.V. Stepanov), Russian (O.V. Kramkova, L.I. Osipova, A.M. Rodimkina), German (A. Polzin, V.P. Shadeko, I. Schatz, Fr. Schirbauer, F. Wrede), English (K.P. Schneider), Spanish (V. Marrero), Slovak and English (A.A. Kačmárová, O.B. Pankiv). The most traditional aspect of investigating diminutives is a stylistic one. It presupposes the analysis of the units in question in a definite literary genre or literary period (Z.I. Bybina, V.A. Chervova, O.D. Fedorenko).

Some linguists studied the functioning of diminutives in different languages in comparison: Russian and German (V.Ya. Myrkin), Russian and Italian (Yu.O. Rulov), Russian and Bulgarian (S.K. Antonov), German and French (M. Fischer), German and Polish (Z. Klimaszevska), Italian, Portuguese and Spanish (S. Ettinger), Latin, German and Romanian (S. Ettinger), English and Ukrainian (L.I. Korunets). Analysis of translating diminutives which are formed in different ways is of interest, too (S.M. Antonyuk, N.V. Menkova, R. Oittinen).

A number of works consider the issues of diminutives' morphology and semantics (C. Goddard, D. Jurafsky, B.S. Pyloyan, R. Pomirko, O.V. Sevastyanova) as well as their pragmatics (W.U. Dressler, T.A. Kozlovska, S.Sh. Nurulova, S.V. Shedogubova, B. Volek).

The in-depth study of diminutives was performed by V. Dressler and L. Merlini Barbasesi who considered diminutivity from the point of view of morphosemantics and morphopragmatics, giving

priority to pragmatics which was extremely progressive because previously diminutives used to be viewed as units with the dominant meaning of objective smallness.

Diminutivity was investigated in more than fifty languages. In English diminutives were examined by A.O. Buryakovska, S.Sh. Isakova, L.K. Krasnogortsev, L.Yu. Reznichenko, V.I. Shakhovski, K. Schneider, R.G. Zyatkovski.

There are three principal theories of the development of diminutive's semantics. The first one [9] confirms the existence of "general Germanic suffixes of subjective evaluation" and admits the historically based tendency towards diminution in all Germanic languages. Another theory [18] points out that diminutivity is not typical of Germanic languages and the existence of this category in English is caused exclusively by the influence of borrowings from other languages. However, A.O. Buryakovska makes a conclusion that the semantics of diminutives in English is of Germanic origin, although it develops under the influence of close contacts with various linguocultures [3].

The diminutive suffixes *-ine*, *-ette*, *-otte* are borrowed from French, *-y*, *-ee*, *-ie*, *-ey* – from Scottish dialect, *-let* – from Middle English, from Middle French *-elet*, from *-el*, diminutive suffix (from Latin *-ellus*) + *-et*. There are also diminutive suffixes of Italian and Spanish origin (*-etto*, *-etti*; *-illa*, *-illo*).

The term "diminutive" comes from the Latin word "*diminutives*", that means "small" or "little". In linguistics diminutive (smallness) is viewed from two angles: semantic (the concept of smallness with various emotive shades) and grammatical (comprising an affix (suffix) with a diminutive meaning).

*Diminutivity* denotes "generalized meaning small in volume, size, etc., usually expressed with a help of diminutive affixes and accompanied by various emotional colouring – gentleness, humiliation" [1].

The dictionary of linguistic terms edited by O.S. Akhmanova differentiates *diminutive-hypocoristic* and *diminutive-pejorative* meanings. The former is interpreted as the one that "adds to the meaning the shade of small volume, size, etc., accompanied by the expressive colouring of tender feelings for something small and sweet". The latter is understood as the one that "renders the diminutive meaning via pejorative emotive colouring" [1].

Diminutive can be treated as a "result of the word-forming process during which the word form is changed for expressing "smallness", "youthfulness", "friendly attitude", "affection" [16]. K. Shneider considers deminutives to be "words denoting smallness and attitude" [17].

Diminutivity is a generalized meaning of diminished size or degree, expressed via language means of different levels (from lexeme to word combination), which are accompanied either by expressive or emotive/evaluative shades, or by both at a time [14].

The objective meaning of diminutive – smallness – is closely connected with the expression of subjective attitude which varies from gentleness, affection, friendliness to contempt and even humiliation.

## 2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Most linguists associate affixes with the main way of rendering the meaning of diminution. Affixation is considered to be of primary importance in the process of forming diminutives in Russian or Italian, whereas English, being an analytical language, more frequently forms diminutives by means of adding a lexical unit with a diminutive meaning.

In linguistic studies "smallness" and "diminutive" are often considered to be synonymous. In fact, "smallness" is to be understood as an inherent meaning of a lexeme, while "diminutive" is an acquired meaning as a result of word-building processes. So, we should differentiate between semantic and morphological diminutives. Diminutives of the first group render the inherent meaning of smallness: *city* – <sup>d</sup>*town*, *mountain* – <sup>d</sup>*hill*, etc. Diminutives of the second group have acquired their diminutive meaning from "outside", as a result of certain word-building processes: *dog* – <sup>d</sup>*doggie*, *pig* – <sup>d</sup>*piglet*, *pig* – <sup>d</sup>*little pig*.

The meaning of "smallness" presupposes the existence of the prototype which corresponds to the norm. This prototype is viewed as a model in the comparison of two objects, and as a result one of them

is defined as the one “diminished” in size, volume, etc. From this point of view, the lexeme *hill* is a semantic diminutive which has an inherent meaning of smallness. It can serve as a model for the morphological diminutive <sup>d</sup>*little hill*.

In the present paper the lexeme *hill* is considered exceptionally as a prototype of the diminutive <sup>d</sup>*little hill*. Thus, it is the diminutive with the meaning of “diminution”, not of “smallness”, that is in the focus of our research. Besides, we consider diminutivity as a generalized meaning of diminution of the object’s objective characteristics. Consequently, it acquires additional emotional shades of meaning.

On all the language levels (morphological, lexical and syntactical), deminutivity finds reflection in different parts of speech. The prototypical diminutives are, as a rule, the nouns formed from nouns as a result of suffixation (*dog* – <sup>d</sup>*doggie*, *house* – <sup>d</sup>*housie*). It can be explained by the priority of nouns in the process of language acquisition. Sometimes diminutives can be formed from other parts of speech, e.g. adjectives (*yellow* – <sup>d</sup>*yellowish*), to point out the weakening of quality or characteristics.

Usually, in the process of forming diminutives, the part of speech remains the same, although there are cases when diminutive nouns are formed from adjectival stems (*sweet* – <sup>d</sup>*sweetie*). All the diminutives built in such a way denote living beings, humans, as a rule. While the adjectival stem emphasizes the characteristic feature of the object, the derived diminutive names the bearer of this feature.

It should be mentioned that hypocoristics, augmentatives and pejoratives are related to diminutives. Hypocoristics and diminutives frequently function as interchangeable terms, although they can be differentiated, as the former ones are derived from proper names and nouns denoting family relations.

In *A comprehensive grammar of the English Language* by R. Quirk et al., the suffix *-let* is considered to be purely diminutive which expresses only smallness, whereas *-ie/y* is treated as hypocoristic which expresses only affection: *Billy, Willy, Sally* [13]. Because of the fact that diminutives cannot be formed systematically, hypocoristics are often formed in an analytical way, by means of the lexemes *sweetie, honey, sweet pea, pumpkin, baby, etc.* (e.g. *Jane baby*).

Hypocoristics are considered to be diminutives with the meaning of diminution and positive connotation, and pejoratives, in their turn, denote diminution and negative connotation. In the present research hypocoristics are viewed as a subtype of diminutives.

Augmentatives, which are opposite to diminutives, have the denotative meaning of “magnification” [5]. L.P. Letyucha believes that diminutives and augmentatives refer to parametrical-evaluative nouns and treats them as a display of objective assessment, but hypocoristics and pejoratives – as emotives [11].

From the point of view of stylistics, diminutive meaning belongs to the scale of quality grading. Stylistic grading characterizes “correlation of the degree of quality to its norm” [19]. Elative expresses a high degree of quality, while diminutive is evaluated as a degree of quality which is below the norm (<sup>d</sup>*half full, scantily populated, poorly lighted*).

There is a variety of opinions about diminutive as a category. Some scholars understand diminutivity as a grammatical-wordbuilding category of a universally linguistic character which is realized in different meanings – smallness, diminution, youngness, tenderness, etc. [15]. Others state that in English diminutivity is not a grammatical category, as not every lexeme can have a diminutive form [3]. The description of diminutivity as a functional-semantic category [14] presupposes the analysis of diminutive language forms with reference to descriptive or level-related principles, and to classification by means of cognitive reflection of real differences in native speakers’ thinking.

So, in the present research, diminutivity is considered as a conceptual category which is “a closed system of meanings of some universal semantic feature or a certain meaning of this feature irrespective of degree of “grammaticalization” and way of expression in a concrete language” [10].

The way of expressing – direct, indirect, lexical, morphological, syntactical – is not a matter of principle for defining the essence of a conceptual category. Conceptual categories are treated as “semantic elements of a general character, typical not of certain words or systems of their forms, but of broad classes of words, in different ways expressed in a natural language” [10].

Conceptual categories are “relevant to the language of the mental category, on the one hand, focusing on logical-psychological categories, and on the other hand, on the semantic categories of the language” [6]. Being the result of human experience mediated by the universal laws of thinking, they are the basis of the language semantic structures, the significant condition of functioning of the language system as a whole.

Conceptual categories differ from surface structures in the following way: the former are the concepts which are deep in people’s conscience, while the latter are material language means received through physical perception [4].

O.V. Bondarko differentiates conceptual categories and functional-semantic fields comprising semantic elements interpreted by a certain language and language means of their mode of expression. The scholar suggests treating functional-semantic fields as structures which are found on the surface, which perform the function of realizing a certain “deep” invariant conceptual category. Thus, a conceptual category has a universal character and is an underlying structure, and concrete linguistic semantic interpretation of this conceptual category is a specific linguistic surface language structure [2].

Conceptual categories are, generally, universal, i.e. they are inherent to most of the world’s languages [7], however, they rarely have a clear and distinct definition in languages. I.I. Meshchaninov [12] points out that language differences are not absolute, they are relative. First and foremost, it concerns the form of expressing content. Thus, conceptual categories serve as a basis for defining what part of speech the word belongs to, irrespective of its morphological form. Wallace Chafe also supports this idea, asserting that material language means are only a surface structure, while concepts are deeply hidden on the level of a person’s nervous system [4].

The category of diminutivity (CD) can be described with a help of such logical-semantic characteristics determined on the basis of the following binary oppositions: “object / not object”, “person / not person”, “diminished size / undiminished size”, “youthfulness / un-youthfulness”, “adulthood / un-adulthood”, “emotional attitude / unemotional attitude”, “importance / unimportance”, “sympathy / un-sympathy”, “familiarity / unfamiliarity”.

The above mentioned logical-semantic characteristics made it possible to specify the logical component of the main concept “diminutivity” and explicate the semantic charge of notional elements which make it up. So, the logical constituent of the main concept CD is presented by an object or a person small in size, usually young, who is treated emotionally, with sympathy-based attitude or with feelings related to unimportance, insignificance, familiarity with this object or person.

In the grammatical aspect, the “nucleus” of the conceptual CD can be expressed by the category of nouns chiefly coined in a morphological way, by means of adding the affixes *-et, -ette, -y(-ie), -let, -ling, -ule, -el, -kin, -ock, -in, -een, -erel, -ing*, etc. However, this way is not very productive in the English language, therefore, the conceptual CD can find reflection in free word combinations with different adjectives, and in phraseological units which are characterized by expressiveness and possess emotive charge.

A lot of phraseological units highlight a diminished size of the referent, which can be considered analogous to the use of diminutive suffixes for rendering diminution and emotional attitude. In phraseology both the content of expression and form of expression are of importance. S.Sh. Isakova points out that “peculiarities of the ‘inner form’ also come to the fore in the conceptual category of diminutivity which can be presented within a word and a word combination” [6].

In order to clearly determine the limits of CD it is necessary to define its functional charge. So, one can “diminish” volume and size (*little town*), quantity (*a wee bit*), intensity (*light breeze*), value (*cheapie*), importance (*small beer*) [3], etc. Thus, **diminutivity** as a conceptual category is a system of semantic criteria which collectively denote diminution of objective characteristics of an object.

Klaus P.Schneider associates diminutivity with such phenomena as quantity, quality, modification, intensity, grading and assessment as it combines the characteristics of the abovementioned categories – size, attitude, evaluation, smallness, underestimation [17].

In current logical philosophical researches CD is viewed through the category of quantity which is interpreted as a block of criteria indicating the size of the thing, its objective definiteness due to which it

can be divided into equal parts [8]. Within the conceptual category of quantity the logical aspect of diminutivity means that the object loses a part of its volume, size in comparison with the norm/standard. Thus, the category of quantity embraces the opposition diminutive (making smaller) and augmentative (making larger).

Augmentativity is a category which is opposite to diminutivity, forming the trychotomic opposition: diminutive [meaning of making smaller +] :: neutral lexeme [meaning of making smaller/larger -] :: augmentative [meaning of making larger +]. The term "augmentative" is used to render the denotative meaning of "making larger" or positive/negative connotations which depend on linguistic and contextual factors. The concept of augmentative is connected with the concepts of quantity, quality, grading, intensification and evaluation. By contrast with diminutives, augmentatives are not coined synthetically (except the use of prefixes in the words like *macro economy*, *maxi-skirt*). They can be formed only analytically (by means of adding the words *large*, *big*, *giant*, etc.). Besides, there are no reasons to assert that augmentatives are language universals as they cannot be found in every language, although all the languages which possess the category of augmentativity, *a priori*, also form CD. It should be mentioned that the opposite assertion is not true: CD can form a dichotomic opposition (diminutive [meaning of making smaller +] :: neutral lexeme [meaning of making smaller -]) without the category of augmentativity. The difference between augmentatives and diminutives consists in the fact that in case of little children, animals and plants smallness has a biological, therefore, logical, understandable explanation. An enlarged size of objects is considered anomalous and unnatural, and, as a result, they have only negative connotation [17].

Apart from that, according to S.Sh. Isakova, CD is in antagonistic relations with the category of intensity or degree of criterion expression. The scholar refers the words which weaken the category of intensity to compromizers, diminishers, minimizers and approximators [6].

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

Thus, diminutive is viewed as a generalized meaning of diminution of objective characteristics of an object. As a result, it acquires extra emotiveness. The meaning of smallness is not inherent, it is acquired from "outside" as a result of certain word building processes.

The lexeme can be considered as diminutive after it has been compared to its prototype which corresponds to a certain norm and standard meaning. The logical meaning of diminution first and foremost is related to the expression of volume and size of the object. The expression of diminutive-based subjective evaluation varies from mildness, sympathy, friendliness to contempt and even humiliation.

Diminutivity as a conceptual category is a system of semantic parameters which collectively signify diminution of objective characteristics of a certain object. The logical component of the nucleus concept of the category of diminutivity is represented by an object or a young person diminished in size that calls forth emotional attitude based on the feeling of sympathy or on unimportance, insignificance, familiarity with this object or person. CD is a hyponym to the category of quantity. Diminutivity forms a trychotomic opposition with the categories of augmentativity and quantity.

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У статті узагальнено результати наукових розвідок пов'язаних з проблемою демінутивності у сучасній англійській мові. Демінутивність розглянуто на всіх мовних рівнях (морфологічному, лексичному та синтаксичному). Проаналізовано основні теорії розвитку семантики демінутивів, зазначено відмінності між поняттями “зменшеність” та “демінутивність”, “демінутив” та “аугментатив”. Демінутивність трактується як поняттєва категорія, система змістових ознак, які у своїй сукупності означають зменшеність об'єктивних характеристик певного предмета. Предметно-логічний складник центрального поняття категорії демінутивності становить предмет або особа зменшеного розміру, часто молода, до якої існує емоційне ставлення на основі почуття прихильності або у зв'язку із незначущістю, неважливістю, близьким знайомством із цим предметом чи особою.

**Ключові слова:** демінутив, поняттєва категорія, зменшеність, здрібнілість, аугментатив, суфікс.