

ON THE CATEGORY OF DIMINUTIVENESS IN ENGLISH, RUSSIAN AND BULGARIAN

PhD Bagasheva-Koleva M. S.,

Bulgaria, Blagoevgrad, South-West University "Neofit Rilski"

Abstract. *In my paper I will present the results of the research I made for my doctoral thesis based on the formation and usage of diminutive forms in English, Russian and Bulgarian. I have made a contrastive analysis of the means of diminutive expression and the frequency of usage of the patterns of diminutive meaning in the three studied languages. Due to the extensive length of my research, I will focus on the four most frequent diminutive patterns in English, Russian and Bulgarian. The contrastive analysis of the differences and similarities of diminutive formation in English, Russian and Bulgarian is based on the theoretical framework of James (1980) and Danchev (2001). For the purposes of my contrastive analysis I chose English as a source language and Russian and Bulgarian as target languages. The reason to do this is that English is considered as a language which has very few diminutives, whereas Bulgarian and Russian, as Slavic languages, both have a huge number of diminutive forms. My aim was to investigate and analyze the quantity of diminutive forms in a language in which diminutives are rather limited and languages which are rich in various diminutive forms. I have used statistical methods to calculate the frequency of appearance of diminutive forms in English, Russian and Bulgarian. The conclusions I arrived at are based on my research data.*

Keywords: *diminutive forms, diminutive formation, patterns of diminutive meaning, English, Russian, Bulgarian*

Diminutiveness as a linguistic phenomenon proves to be an interesting topic for investigation. Many studies of different aspects of diminutiveness have been carried out through the years investigating the specifics of this phenomenon in different languages. Naturally, languages which are characteristic of using diminutives have been more thoroughly investigated alone or in comparison to other diminutive-rich languages. Thus contrastive studies between socio-culturally linked languages are rather common. What needs a more extensive investigation and deserves a more careful consideration is a contrastive analysis of languages which are not necessarily socio-culturally linked or languages which have quite a big difference in the degrees of expressing diminutiveness.

In my doctoral thesis I have used the theoretical works of many linguists who have studied the category of diminutiveness throughout languages, but for the lack of space in this paper, I will briefly mention the most prominent names, such as Bratus (1969), Vinogradov (1972), Wierzbicka (1984), Dressler & Merlini Barbaresi (1994), Jurafsky (1996), Spiridonova (1999), Schneider (2003), Vaseva (2006), etc.

For the purposes of my contrastive analysis I chose English as a source language and Russian and Bulgarian as target languages. The reason to do this is that English is considered as a language which has very few diminutives, whereas Bulgarian and Russian, as Slavic languages, both have a huge number of diminutive forms. English does have diminutives, or rather, it possesses various devices to express diminutive meaning. The contrastive analysis of these three languages will help to outline the similarities and differences of diminutive formation and usage in the respective languages.

My analysis is based on a corpus of examples of diminutive use excerpted from English language sources and their respective translated versions in Bulgarian and Russian. The choice of the English language texts has been determined by the assumption that children's books or texts adapted for children will most probably have the most number of diminutive forms. Accordingly, the corpus of the present investigation consists of diminutive forms excerpted from the following books: Oscar Wilde's *Tales* (adapted for children), "Uncle Tom's Cabin" (by Harriet Beecher Stow), "Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" and "Through the Looking Glass" (by Lewis Carroll) and "Winnie-the-Pooh" (by A.A. Miln). Their translated versions in Bulgarian and Russian have been used respectively.

The total number of excerpts from the three languages is 5010. The excerpts from English are 1248, from Bulgarian – 1442, and from Russian – 2320. They are excerpted from texts the total number of words of which amounts approximately 960 417 words. The total number of pages of the excerpted texts in the three languages is approximately 2179. The total number of pages in the

three languages is almost the same, whereas the total number of words is quite different. The number of words in Bulgarian and Russian excerpted texts is almost the same, but in English the number is higher. In my opinion, this can be explained by the fact that Bulgarian and Russian are highly synthetic languages and many syntactical relations are rendered by different suffixes and grammatical inflections, while English has lost much of the inflectional morphology of Proto-Indo-European over the centuries and is considered more analytical. Therefore, it needs more words to express syntactical or grammatical relationships between words than Bulgarian and Russian.

I have to point out an interesting phenomenon I have attested while investigating the patterns of diminutive formation in the three languages: the number of patterns of diminutive formation in the three languages is in inverse proportion to the rate of frequency of occurrence in the respective languages, i.e. English has the biggest number of diminutive formation patterns – 28, in Bulgarian the patterns are 24, whereas in Russian they are only 19. This interesting phenomenon can be attributed to the ability of the English language to compensate the small number of diminutive forms with other linguistic devices so that the various meanings of diminutiveness can be rendered. In Bulgarian and Russian, due to the fact that most diminutive suffixes and diminutive forms are multifunctional as well as that more word classes can be diminished (which makes it easier to express a number of emotions only by means of a single form), the number of diminutive patterns is smaller.

1. Diminutive patterns in English.

Based on my corpus, the most common and most numerous pattern of expressing diminutiveness in English is the combination of the adjective 'little' and a base form of the common noun. This pattern has been found in 555 cases, which is 44.47% of all examples. The results show that almost 45% of all cases of diminutiveness found in the texts are rendered by this combination. The diminutive meaning of this pattern is pure diminutive, i.e. denoting small size only (e.g. *a little case of books, the little package, the little table, a little grave, a little pin*, etc.) and diminutive-hypocoristic (e.g. *the little sleepy head, little devil, little children, little girl*, etc.). Diminutive-pejorative meaning can be rendered only if the base noun is denoted by another adjective expressing a pejorative meaning, e.g. an ignorant little girl.

The second most common pattern expressing diminutiveness is when diminutiveness is rendered by means of a diminutive suffix. The number of these cases is 265, which is 21.23% of all examples. It is not a surprising number, considering the fact that the investigated texts are children's books in which young animals become common characters and the nouns denoting young animals are predominantly derived by means of suffixation, e.g. *kitten, chicken, goosie, piglet, piggy, eaglet, puppy*, etc. Another group of suffixed diminutive nouns, expressing endearment, tenderness, love, consists of nouns denoting family members, e.g. *granny, mommy, auntie, mamma, papa*, etc. And there is a group of nouns in which the diminutive suffix expresses only small size, e.g. *statuettes, streamlet, trinket, ringlet, gimlet*, etc. As noted from the examples above, synthetic diminutive formation is not infrequent in English and even comes second in the table of the diminutive patterns which have been studied.

The third pattern expressing diminutiveness in the table consists of base nouns for which the feature 'smallness' is a semantic component. The number of these nouns is 77, which is 6.17% of all examples. E.g. *brook* (= a small, natural stream of fresh water), *pebbles* (= small, rounded stones), *calf* (= the young of an animal), *lad* (= young man, a youth), *urchin* (= a young, small child), *colt* (= a young male horse), *breeze* (= a light, gentle wind), *beads* (= small, round pieces of material or objects), etc.

The next pattern which comes fourth in the table is the combination of the adjective 'small' and a base common noun. There are 70 cases of this combination in the studied texts, which makes 5.6% of all examples. Compared to approximately 45% of the combinations with 'little', constructions with 'small' are rare, denoting only small size of an object. The adjective 'small' does not express a hypocoristic meaning. E.g. *a small bedroom, a small estate, small white onions, a small book, a small town, a small ear*, etc.

2. Diminutive patterns in Russian.

The overwhelming majority of diminutive forms in the studied texts in Russian are presented by nominal diminutives, the total number of which is 1541 or 66.42% of all examples. This unusually big number of nominal diminutives can be attributed to the specifics of Russian language, which is characteristic of a great variety of diminutive suffixes conveying an array of different meanings as well as different degrees of expressiveness. In addition, like Bulgarian, Russian nominal diminutive suffixes are also marked for gender and number, which multiplies their number.

The second pattern of diminutive expression is presented by a group of lexicalized diminutive nouns, which have been found in 156 examples or in 6.72% of all cases of diminutiveness. The process of lexicalization in Russian is much more frequent than in Bulgarian, due to the higher frequency of the use of diminutive forms in Russian than in Bulgarian. The higher the occurrence of a diminutive form is, the lesser the diminutive meaning becomes. As a result, the diminutive meaning is lost and the diminutive form acquires a new lexical meaning. The new words are often technical terms, but other groups of lexical words are also common, e.g. flowers or parts of them (*колокольчик, лепестки, колючка*), insects (*бабочка, мотылёк*) and others (*портук; на цепочке; спинка стула; туалетный столик; ножки стула; глазок; носик куфшина; горлышко бутылки; узелок;*), etc. Many lexicalized diminutive nouns have become parts of set phrases, e.g. *свернувшись клубочком/ калачиком; на цыпочках; ни за какие коврижки; держать ушки на макушке; перемывали косточки*, etc.

The third pattern on frequency of occurrence is the construction ‘*маленький*’ + the base form of a noun (NDN), found in 136 cases, which makes 5.68% of all examples. As it appears, the analytic diminutive formation is also common in Russian. It expresses mainly pure diminutiveness, i.e. small size (e.g. *в маленькой бревенчатой хижине; маленький посёлок; маленькая спальня*, etc.) or small size because of young age (e.g. *маленький хозяин; маленькая негрятянка; маленькая мисс; маленькая дикарка; маленькая преступница*, etc.).

The fourth pattern is presented by diminutive proper nouns (personal names or nicknames) which have been attested in 96 excerpts or in 4.14% of all examples. For the same reasons as in Bulgarian, in Russian diminutive proper nouns are mainly nicknames also excerpted from “Winnie-the-Pooh”, e.g. *Мишутка, Кролик, Мишка, Крошка Ру*. However, their number is smaller than in the Bulgarian texts, which can be attributed to the translator’s choice.

3. Diminutive patterns in Bulgarian.

The most frequent diminutive formation is the pattern of diminutive common nouns derived by a diminutive suffix. This pattern has the biggest number of 781 cases, which makes 54.16% of all examples. The high frequency rate of this pattern can be attributed to the synthetic nature of the language and the fact that in Bulgarian the nominal diminutive suffixes include the greatest number of suffixes deriving diminutives from common nouns in masculine, feminine and neutral gender as well as in plural form.

The second most frequent pattern in Bulgarian is the construction ‘*малък*’ + the base form of the common noun (non-diminutive noun). It is found in 195 cases, which is 13.52% of all examples. This analytic diminutive formation is very common in Bulgarian to render pure diminutive meaning, i.e. small size or young age, e.g. *малко момче, малко дете, малка русалка, малък нож*, etc.

The third pattern includes diminutive personal names and nicknames – 131 cases, making 9.08% of all examples. Diminution of personal names is not an object of interest in this thesis and has not been discussed, but I have to mention the wide application of diminutive names in Bulgarian as well as the great variety of diminutive suffixes and nick names which exist in the language. The major meaning of diminutive personal names and nicknames is diminutive-hypocoristic with predominantly expressive nuances. E.g. *Чернушко, Прасчо, Мечо*, etc. The excerpted examples in this pattern are predominantly diminutive nicknames. Obviously, the reason why there are hardly any diminutive personal names is that the source language of the excerpted materials is English and English names are very difficult to be diminished by Bulgarian diminutive suffixes. They will sound unnatural. Therefore, the personal names in the excerpted Bulgarian texts preserve their base form and diminution is expressed in other ways.

The fourth pattern is the construction ‘*малък*’ + a diminutive common noun. There are 75 such examples in the texts, which makes 5.20% of all examples. This construction illustrates the combination of an analytic and synthetic diminutive formation. It has diminutive-hypocoristic meaning, e.g. *малка групичка дървета, малки пухкави облачета, малки поточета, малки локвички*, etc.

Conclusions. By reviewing the data from the contrastive qualitative and quantitative analysis presented above, I have arrived at several conclusions regarding the ways diminutiveness is expressed in the three languages:

English has the smallest number of excerpts of cases of diminutive meaning but has the biggest number of patterns expressing diminutiveness (1248 excerpts, 28 patterns). The most frequent formation of expressing diminutive meaning in English is analytical, while synthetic diminutive formation is also common as in my corpus the examples are half the examples of the analytical patterns.

In Bulgarian the excerpted examples are 1442 divided into 24 patterns. The number of diminutive forms is bigger than in English but the difference is not substantial unless the number of approximate words in the excerpted texts is considered. As a result of this comparison in both languages, the proportion of the frequency of occurrence of diminutive forms is 1: 1.6 in favour of Bulgarian. The most frequent pattern is presented by diminutive common nouns derived by diminutive suffixes— over half of all excerpts fall into this group. Considering the number of excerpts of other diminutivized word classes, namely, adjectives, adverbs and verbs, it can be concluded that synthetic diminutive formation is the major means of diminution in Bulgarian. Analytic and a combination of analytic and synthetic diminutive formations are also common.

Russian, with its 2320 excerpts, proves that the number of diminutive forms in the language is the greatest compared to the other two languages, having twice as many diminutive forms as English and half as many diminutive forms as Bulgarian. However, the patterns of diminutive formation have the smallest number, only 19, which can be attributed to the multifunctional character of synthetic diminutive forms. The most frequent patterns of diminutive formations are synthetic, presenting diminutives of common nouns, adjectives and adverbs, which constitute an overwhelming majority of all examples. Like in Bulgarian, analytic and a combination of analytic and synthetic diminutive formations are common enough.

REFERENCES

1. Bratus 1969: Bratus, B.V. The Formation and Expressive Use of Diminutives. // *Studies in the Modern Russian Language* 6. Cambridge University Press. Cambridge, 1969.
2. Danchev 2001: Данчев, А. Съпоставително езикознание. Теория и методология. София: Университетско издателство „Св. Климент Охридски“, 2001.
3. Dressler, Merlini Barbaresi 1994: Dressler, W., Merlini Barbaresi, L. (1994). *Morphopragmatics: Diminutives and intensifiers in Italian, German, and other languages*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
4. James 1980: James, C. *Contrastive analysis*. Longman, London and New York, 1980.
5. Jurafsky 1996: Jurafsky, D. Universal tendencies in the semantics of the diminutive. // *Language*, 1996, V.72, №3, pp.533-578.
6. Schneider 2003: Schneider, K.P. *Diminutives in English*. Max Niemeyer Verlag GmbH, 2003.
7. Spiridonova 1999: Спиридонова, Н.Ф. Русские деминутивы: проблемы образования и значения. // *Известия АН. Серия литературы и языка*, т.58, 2, 1999, с.13-22.
8. Vaseva 2006: Васева, И. Умалителност, експресивност, емоционалност. *Авангард Прима*, С. 2006.
9. Vinogradov 1972: Виноградов, В.В. *Русский язык (Грамматическое учение о слове)*. М., 1972.
10. Wierzbicka 1984: Wierzbicka, A. Diminutives and depreciatives: semantic representation for derivational categories. // *Quaderni di Semantica* 5.1, 1984, pp.123-130.