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DIMINUTIVES IN REPRESENTATIVE SPEECH ACTS IN ENGLISH PROSE LITERATURE FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG ADOLESCENTS

Summary. The current study examines the function of diminutives in the direct speech of characters in English prose literature for children and young adolescents, specifically in representative speech acts. Speakers' utterances were analyzed with regard to the meanings of diminutives and a speaker's intention in a given speech situation. The analysis involved looking into the types of diminutive forms (synthetic, analytical, inherent diminutives), denotation of diminutives, illocutionary force of utterances that contain diminutives, connotations of diminutives in the context of speech situations, and speakers' attitudes. It has been found that analytical diminutive forms are more recurrent than synthetic ones, and inherent diminutives are very rare. There have been found two cases of combining synthetic and analytical forms, and analytical and inherent forms. Predictably, the prevailing semantic denotation of diminutives is that of smallness; the semantic feature of unimportance is less recurrent ([small] and [non-important] in Wolfgang U. Dressler and Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi's [1] terminology). A rare but existing denotation is familiar relationships, but it takes a specific speech situation for a diminutive to reveal it. In the corpus of this study, the illocutionary force of representative speech acts is asserting, claiming, presenting an opinion, persuading, explaining, denying. The use of diminutives in the speech of the characters is aimed to give a reader a better idea about their social roles, intentions, and attitudes. In the majority of cases, diminutives boost the illocutionary force of an utterance. Affectionate or derogatory meanings of the same diminutives, their connotations depend on the speech situation; a diminutive may retain or change its presupposed attitudinal meaning depending on the speech situation, social roles of the speakers, and their intentions.

Key words: diminutive, representative speech act, denotation, connotation, attitude, illocutionary force.

1. Introduction

Communication among interlocutors occurs in a certain dynamic communicative environment, in which speaking activity has different purposes. A communicative situation defines (a) the ways in which interlocutors realize their communicative intentions and (b) the language means they employ for implementing them. In the present study we regard a communicative situation in which a speaker uses diminutives as a complex of external conditions of communication and internal states of interlocutors that are reflected in their language [2, p. 56].

Intensive studies of diminutives were carried out by Wolfgang U. Dressler and Lavinia Merlini Barbaresi [3], Daniel Jurafsky [4], Dorota Lockyer [5], Klaus P. Schneider [6; 7], Shushan Khachikyan [8], Hannah Gibson, Rozenn Guerois and Lutz Marten [9], Yakiv Bystrov, Ella Mintsys and Yuliya Mintsys [10], and others. K. P. Schneider [11, p. 4] states that "Traditionally, the term 'diminutive' has been used to refer to words which denote smallness and possibly expressing an attitude. The expressed attitude can be either positive or negative, i.e. either affectionate or derogatory, depending on the specific interplay of linguistic and situational factors in a given context". He distinguishes between "three types of diminutive forms: 1) synthetic diminutives formed by morphological processes, 2) analytical diminutives formed by syntactic processes, and 3) inherent diminutives, which are semantically, but not formally related to other items in the lexical system of a given language" [12, p. 293]. According to Paulina Bialy [13, p. 39], "Claiming that the same form of a given diminutive can express a range of different, and even contradictory, meanings, following Haas (1972: 148), it could be stated that the meaning of diminutives ranges from endearment and tenderness through mild belittlement and deprecation to open derogation and insult"; she also maintains that "Synthetically formed diminutives occur less often than the ones obtained analytically".

According to anthropocentric approach in modern communicative linguistics and linguistic pragmatics, a speaker/addresser occupies a core position in the process of communication (G. R. Hovhannisyan [14], O. M. Leontiev [15], I. P. Susov [16], T.A. Yeshchenko [17]). In view of this approach, a number of scholars study diminutivity with reference to the dynamics of interaction between communicators (O. Akay et al. [18], F. S. Batsyevych [19], O. I. Goikhman [20], M. Parzuchowski et al. [21]). The use of diminutives in a fictional conversation is aimed to give a reader an idea about social roles, intentions and attitudes of the characters, and this is where we enter the domain of pragmatics.

Since we discuss the use of diminutives in representative speech acts, a reference should be made to John R. Searle's typology of speech acts [22], which singles out five basic types of speech acts: representatives, directives, commissives, expressives, declarations. According to J. R. Searle, "The point or purpose of the members of the representative class is to commit the speaker (in varying degrees) to something's being the case, to the truth of the expressed

proposition” [23, p. 10]; they include asserting, claiming, concluding, reporting, stating [24, p. 240; 25, p. 106]. A. Wierzbicka interprets diminutivity with reference to speech acts [26, p. 97–103]. W. U. Dressler and L. Merlini Barbaresi [27, p. 144–145] state that the general morphopragmatic meaning of diminutives is [non-serious] (the same goes for the English unstressed *little*), while their morphosemantic denotation is [small] and morphosemantic feature, [non-important]; connotation of diminutives can be derived from pragmatics. W. U. Dressler and L. Merlini Barbaresi also claim that “A [non-serious]-feature added is, among other things, a strategy for lowering one’s commitment to its illocutionary force” [28, p. 144].

The objective of the current study is to examine the discourse function of diminutives in representative speech acts of characters in English prose literature for children and young adolescents.

2. Results and Discussion

The corpus of the study is based on the books of popular children’s authors R. Dahl, E. Nesbit, J. Wilson, and others. Overall, we examined 1063 pages of text. The manual selection procedure was employed to establish the corpus of the speech acts in question. 41 examples of representative speech acts that contain diminutives were chosen for the purpose of this study. Some of them will be discussed below along the following lines:

– synthetically/analytically formed diminutives, inherent diminutives;

- denotation and semantic features of diminutives;
- illocutionary force of utterances that contain diminutives;
- connotation of diminutives in the context of speech situations;
- speaker’s attitude.

The pragmatic meaning of speech acts that contain diminutives, connotation of diminutives, and speaker’s attitude can be worked out with reference to the whole speech situation.

Example (1)

*‘Anyway. You’ve got a new **dolly** now. Even better than Bluebell.’* (Wilson, 2001, p. 129) (emphasis added in all the examples).

A mother is talking to her daughter, who is no longer a little girl; yet the mother uses elements of the so-called “baby talk”. The diminutive *dolly* is synthetically formed; obviously, its semantic denotation is that of smallness. This mode of talking to a person is chosen in order to soothe and comfort her. The utterances have the illocutionary force of persuading; the connotation of the diminutive is humoring the addressee. The speaker’s attitude is positive, she wants to assure the addressee that she still cares for her.

Example (2)

*‘Hello, Mr. Inspector Man. I’ve come to work with **Mummy**.’* (Wilson, 1994, p. 40)

The scene is set in a police station. The child explains to the Inspector her unexpected presence there. The semantic denotation of the synthetic diminutive *Mummy* is familiar relationship, rather than smallness. Similarly, its connotation is relational and emotional closeness, and the naivety of the child, seeing the inappropriateness of this term of endearment in the given speech situation. The attitude is, obviously, positive. The illocutionary force of the speaker’s utterance is explaining.

Example (3)

*‘I know when your birthday is! I’m your mum. No, these are special presents for you because you’re my own **little girl**.’* (Wilson, 2001, p. 125)

The diminutive is formed analytically. The participants in conversation, the intention of the speaker, and the illocutionary

force of the utterance are the same as in (1), as well as the semantic denotation of smallness and the speaker’s attitude. The diminutive has the connotation of intimacy.

Example (4)

*‘The human beans is making rules to suit themselves,’ the BFG went on. ‘But the rules they is making do not suit **the little piggy-wiggies**. Am I right or left?’*

(Dahl, 1982, p. 79)

The speaker, the Big Friendly Giant, whose English is a bit erratic, makes a stand for animal rights. The diminutive is a combination of synthetic and analytical forms. Its semantic denotation is smallness (seeing that the speaker is a giant). The illocutionary force of the utterance is presenting an opinion. The connotation of the diminutive is empathy. The speaker expresses deprecation of actions of human beings in the first part of the utterance (humans make the rules that suit them), and warm feelings for animals in the second one (human rules pose a threat to animal welfare).

Example (5)

*‘If I am not mistaken, my dear Badger,’ he said, ‘we are now underneath the farm which belongs to **that nasty little pot-bellied dwarf, Bunce**.’*

(Dahl, 2009, p. 50)

In this example, the speaker’s commitment to the truth of the expressed proposition is somewhat lower (*If I am not mistaken, ...*). Yet it does not concern the second proposition in the utterance (*the farm which belongs to that nasty little pot-bellied dwarf, Bunce*), since the speaker knows that Bunce owns a farm. The illocutionary force of the utterance is, therefore, claiming. The example is interesting in two ways. First, the key word *dwarf* is an inherent diminutive, whose semantic denotation of smallness is intensified by the attribute *little*, thus it is a “junction” of analytical and inherent diminutives. Second, the speaker’s attitude and the derogatory connotation of the diminutive are apparent thanks to the lexemes *nasty* and *pot-bellied*; so actually, we do not need the whole speech situation to get the speaker’s intention – to present an opinion: a strong disapproval and lack of respect for the third party, the dwarf.

Example (6)

*‘Girls are great at **footie**,’ I said. ‘Well, I am. Let’s play, yea? No, get lost, **little girly**.’* (Wilson, 2001, p. 74)

(6) is a conversation between a boy and a girl. Both speakers use diminutives – synthetic and analytical ones, the latter featuring a combination of synthetic and analytical forms (see also Example (4)). The girl uses *footie* in order to make her statement more persuasive; the diminutive helps to convey the pragmatic meaning of assertion, wherein she wants to give the impression of being an old hand at playing football. *No, get lost, little girly* is not a representative, but a directive. Yet the juxtaposition of the two speech acts that contain diminutives is worth our attention. The first diminutive, *footie*, has the semantic denotation of smallness, the semantic feature of lesser importance, and the connotation of casualness, familiarity. The speaker’s attitude is positive. The addressee picks up the diminutive tone of the conversation; however, he uses it for his own purpose – to say “no” to the girl and to display mild contempt: *little girly* reveals the speaker’s mocking attitude towards his interlocutor. In this speech situation, the two diminutives have opposite connotations.

Example (7)

*‘You all right, kid?’ ‘Oh, yeah. Sure. Just having a **little kip** on the pavement,’ I mumbled.* (Wilson, 2001, p. 74)

A girl is playing street football with some boys; she is hit hard in her back with the ball and falls down. Her utterance *Just having a little kip on the pavement* and the use of a diminutive is but a brave attempt to show no signs of weakness. Here we have an analytical diminutive with the semantic denotation of smallness and the semantic feature of being unimportant. The illocutionary force of the utterance is denying the seriousness of the accident. What is said contradicts the actual state of affairs; it is a violation of Paul Grice's maxim of Quality: "Try to make your contribution to one that is true" [29, p. 308], which means we have to look for some kind of implicature. In this case, the speaker implies that she is quite able to continue the game. The illocutionary force of utterance can be classified as asserting. The diminutive carries the dismissive connotation. Though the speaker tries to pull a brave face and joke about her nasty fall (the pragmatic meaning of the diminutive is [non-serious]), her attitude is negative.

Example (8)

'Pickpockets is coarse and vulgar people who only do easy little amateur jobs. They lift money from blind old ladies.' *'What do you call yourself then?'* *'Me? I'm a fingersmith. I'm a professional fingersmith.'* (Dahl, 2000, p. 39)

Two characters talk about pickpocketing. One of them, a pickpocket himself, expresses contempt for his less experienced "colleagues". The attributes *easy* and *amateur* intensify the analytically formed diminutive *little jobs*, highlight its denotation of smallness and semantic feature of unimportance, and add the connotation of simplicity. The illocutionary force of the utterance is claiming that pickpocketing is an "art", rather than a simple action.

Thus, the analysis of structural and semantic aspects of diminutives contributes to our understanding of utterances in which they are used, the speaker's intentions and attitudes.

Conclusions

Diminutives are an inherent part of literature for children and young adolescents. The analysis of diminutives in the direct speech of characters shows that they are a factor contributing to readers' understanding of literary discourse. Due to the use of diminutives, the speech of the characters created by R. Dahl, J. Wilson, and other authors receives specific features that clearly indicate the social status of communicators, their relationships with other characters, intentions, true meanings of their utterances, and attitudes.

The analysis of representative speech acts that contain synthetic/analytic/inherent diminutives in the texts of R. Dahl and J. Wilson shows that:

– the analytical form prevails and inherent diminutives are very few; there have been found two cases of combinations of synthetic and analytical forms, and analytical and inherent forms;

– in addition to the generally recognized semantic denotation of smallness and semantic feature of unimportance or lesser importance, there have been discovered the denotation of familial relationship;

– the illocutionary force of the analyzed representatives is that of asserting, claiming, presenting an opinion, persuading, explaining, denying;

– positive or negative meanings of the same diminutive unit, its connotative meaning are predetermined by the situational context; a diminutive may retain or change its presupposed attitudinal meaning depending on the speech situation, social roles of speakers, and their intentions;

– diminutives can boost the illocutionary force of an utterance.

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Мінцис Е. Є., Кульчицька О. О. Димінутиви у репрезентативних мовленнєвих актах в англійських прозових творах для дітей і молодших підлітків

Анотація. Стаття присвячена проблемі функції димінутивів у персонажному мовленні в англійських прозових творах для дітей і молодших підлітків. Висловлювання персонажів проаналізовані з точок зору значення димінутивів і намірів мовців. Аналіз включав такі аспекти: тип димінутивної форми (синтетичний, аналітичний, інгерентний димінутиви), семантична денотація димінутива, іллокутивна сила висловлювання, що містить димінутив, конотативне значення димінутива в контексті мовленнєвого акту і мовленнєвої ситуації, ставлення мовця. Аналіз нашого корпусу матеріалу засвідчив, що аналітичні димінутивні форми використовуються частіше, ніж синтетичні, а інгерентні димінутиви трапляються рідко. Виявлено два випадки комбінованих форм: (1) синтетична форма у поєднанні з аналітичною, (2) аналітична форма у поєднанні з інгерентним димінутивом. Цілком передбачувано, преваючим семантичним денотатом димінутивів виявився “малий за обсягом, розміром”, а його семантичним елементом – “не важливий” ([small] і [non-important]) у термінології Вольфганга У. Дресслера і Лавінії Мерліні Барбаресі [1994]). У деяких мовленнєвих ситуаціях зрідка трапляється денотат “родинна близькість”. У нашому корпусі матеріалу репрезентативні мовленнєві акти мають іллокутивні сили ствердження, припущення, вираження власної думки, переконання, пояснення, заперечення. Димінутиви у персонажному мовленні використовуються з метою дати читачу більш повне уявлення про соціальні ролі, наміри героїв, їх ставлення до оточуючого світу. У більшості випадків димінутиви підкреслюють іллокутивну силу висловлювань. Позитивне чи негативне значення одних й тих самих димінутивів, їх конотації обумовлюються мовленнєвою ситуацією; димінутив може зберегти або змінити оцінне значення в залежності від мовленнєвої ситуації, соціальних ролей мовців та їх намірів.

Ключові слова: димінутив, репрезентативний мовленнєвий акт, денотація, конотація, іллокутивна сила.