



## SEMANTICS AND FUNCTIONING OF NOUNS WITH DIMINUTIVE- AFFECTIVE MEANING IN MODERN RUSSIAN

Akhmedova Sokhiba Mukhsinjon qizi

Master's Student

University of Exact and Social Sciences

### Abstract

This article examines the semantic characteristics and functional features of nouns with diminutive-affectionate meaning in modern Russian. Diminutive nouns represent a productive lexical and word-formation category that not only expresses the notion of smallness but also conveys a wide range of emotional, evaluative, and pragmatic meanings. The study analyzes the mechanisms of diminutive formation, their semantic variability, and their communicative functions in different speech contexts. Particular attention is paid to the role of diminutive nouns in expressing the speaker's attitude, creating emotional expressiveness, and reflecting cultural and linguistic values. The findings demonstrate that diminutive-affectionate nouns constitute an important component of the Russian linguistic worldview and play a significant role in both everyday communication and literary discourse.

**Keywords:** Diminutive nouns, affectionate meaning, semantics, word formation, Russian language, linguistic expressiveness, evaluative vocabulary, pragmatics, emotional connotation, discourse.

### Introduction

The study of diminutive-affectionate nouns occupies a significant place in contemporary linguistics, as these lexical units represent a unique intersection of morphology, semantics, pragmatics, and sociolinguistics. In modern Russian, diminutive forms are among the most productive means of expressing emotional evaluation, subjective attitude, and interpersonal relations. Unlike many other languages, Russian possesses a highly developed system of diminutive

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derivation that enables speakers to create numerous expressive forms from a single lexical base.

Traditionally, diminutive nouns have been associated with the expression of small size or reduced quantity. However, contemporary linguistic research demonstrates that their functions extend far beyond the notion of physical diminutiveness. In actual speech practice, diminutive forms often serve as markers of affection, tenderness, intimacy, irony, politeness, sympathy, and even sarcasm. Consequently, the semantic interpretation of such forms depends not only on their morphological structure but also on communicative context, speaker intention, and sociocultural factors.

The relevance of this research is determined by the growing interest in the interaction between language and emotion, as well as by the increasing attention paid to pragmatic aspects of linguistic communication. In modern Russian discourse, diminutive-affectionate nouns actively function in family communication, media language, advertising, literature, and digital communication environments. Their widespread use reflects broader tendencies toward emotionalization and personalization of speech.

From a theoretical perspective, the study of diminutive nouns contributes to a deeper understanding of subjective evaluation in language, mechanisms of semantic derivation, and the relationship between linguistic form and communicative function. Furthermore, the analysis of diminutive-affectionate forms allows researchers to investigate cultural models embedded in language and to identify distinctive features of the Russian linguistic worldview.

The purpose of this study is to examine the semantic structure and communicative functioning of diminutive-affectionate nouns in modern Russian, identifying their principal meanings, stylistic characteristics, and pragmatic functions in various types of discourse.

### **Scientific Analysis and Discussion**

Diminutive-affectionate nouns constitute one of the most expressive and culturally significant categories of the Russian language. Their linguistic value extends beyond grammatical word formation, reflecting the emotional, psychological, and sociocultural dimensions of communication. Modern

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linguistic studies emphasize that diminutive forms are not merely indicators of size reduction but serve as important markers of subjective evaluation and interpersonal relations.

According to V.V. Vinogradov, diminutive forms occupy a special place in the lexical-semantic system of Russian because they combine nominative and expressive functions. A noun such as *дом* (house) denotes an object, whereas its diminutive form *доми́к* conveys not only the notion of a small house but may also express warmth, affection, familiarity, or emotional attachment. Thus, the semantic structure of diminutives includes both denotative and connotative components.

One of the primary functions of diminutive nouns is the expression of affection and emotional closeness. In family communication, parents frequently use diminutive forms when addressing children. For example:

- *сын* → *сыно́к* (“son” → “dear son”)
- *дочь* → *доченька* (“daughter” → “dear daughter”)
- *мама* → *мамочка* (“mother” → “mommy”)

These forms indicate positive emotional attitudes and strengthen interpersonal relationships. Linguist N.D. Arutyunova notes that such lexical units function as markers of emotional solidarity and contribute to the creation of a psychologically comfortable communicative environment.

The semantic versatility of diminutives becomes particularly evident in literary discourse. Russian classical literature provides numerous examples of their stylistic use. In the works of Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy, and Fyodor Dostoevsky, diminutive nouns frequently reveal the emotional state of characters and their social relationships.

For instance, in conversational contexts:

«Посиди здесь, дружок.»

The noun *дружок* (little friend, dear friend) expresses friendliness and sympathy. However, depending on intonation and context, the same form may acquire ironic or even patronizing connotations.

An important feature of diminutive nouns is their polyfunctionality. The same morphological form can convey different meanings in different contexts. Consider the noun *человечек* derived from *человек* (person).

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Example 1:

«Маленький человечек сидел у окна.»

Here the form denotes physical smallness.

Example 2:

«Он хороший человечек.»

In this context, the noun expresses affection and positive evaluation.

Example 3:

«Нашёлся ещё один человечек, который решил нас учить.»

Here the form acquires an ironic and slightly derogatory meaning.

This semantic flexibility demonstrates that diminutives are highly context-dependent linguistic units whose interpretation requires consideration of pragmatic factors.

The productive nature of diminutive word formation in Russian is another distinctive characteristic. Various suffixes contribute different shades of meaning. Among the most common are:

- -ик (*домик, столик*)
- -ок (*сынрок, дружок*)
- -очка (*девочка, мамочка*)
- -енька (*доченька, Машенька*)
- -ушк(а) (*матушка, дедушка*)

According to A.A. Zaliznyak, these suffixes not only modify lexical meaning but also create emotional nuances that enrich communication. Their productivity explains the abundance of expressive vocabulary in Russian everyday speech.

Modern media and digital communication have further expanded the use of diminutive-affectionate nouns. Social media users frequently employ forms such as:

- *котик* (kitty)
- *солнышко* (sunshine, darling)
- *зайчик* (bunny)
- *друзьяшки* (dear friends)

These lexical units contribute to informal and emotionally charged communication, reflecting the tendency toward personalization in digital discourse. Researchers observe that internet communication increasingly favors

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emotionally expressive language, making diminutives particularly relevant in contemporary interaction.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, diminutive forms also reflect cultural values. Russian communicative culture traditionally emphasizes emotional openness, interpersonal warmth, and solidarity. The extensive use of diminutives in everyday speech distinguishes Russian from many languages where such forms are less productive. Scholars such as Yu.D. Apresyan argue that diminutive vocabulary constitutes an important element of the Russian linguistic worldview because it encodes culturally specific attitudes toward family, friendship, and social interaction.

At the same time, diminutives may perform pragmatic functions related to politeness and mitigation. For example:

«Подождите минутку, пожалуйста.»

The diminutive *минутку* instead of *минуту* softens the request and makes it sound more polite.

Similarly:

«Подпишите бумажку.»

Although *бумажка* literally means “little paper,” it may reduce the formality of the communicative situation and create a more relaxed atmosphere.

The analysis demonstrates that nouns with diminutive-affectionate meaning represent a multifunctional category combining semantic, stylistic, emotional, and pragmatic dimensions. Their extensive use in spoken language, literature, media discourse, and digital communication confirms their central role in modern Russian linguistic practice. Through diminutive forms speakers express emotions, evaluate reality, establish interpersonal relations, and construct culturally meaningful communicative contexts.

The analysis of nouns with diminutive-affectionate meaning in modern Russian demonstrates that these linguistic units perform a complex set of semantic, stylistic, and pragmatic functions. Although their primary morphological purpose is traditionally associated with the expression of smallness, contemporary usage reveals a much broader semantic potential that includes affection, emotional closeness, evaluation, irony, politeness, and expressive intensification.

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The study confirms that diminutive-affectionate nouns constitute an essential element of Russian communicative culture. Their frequent use reflects the emotional richness of Russian speech and the tendency of speakers to encode subjective attitudes through grammatical and lexical means. The semantic interpretation of these forms depends on contextual, social, and cultural factors, which makes them highly dynamic and multifunctional language units.

Furthermore, diminutive nouns play a crucial role in shaping interpersonal relationships within communication. They facilitate the expression of positive emotions, strengthen social bonds, and contribute to the creation of communicative comfort. At the same time, they may serve ironic or evaluative purposes, demonstrating the flexibility of their pragmatic potential.

In conclusion, nouns with diminutive-affectionate meaning represent not only a productive word-formation category but also an important mechanism for expressing emotional and cultural meanings in modern Russian. Their study contributes to a broader understanding of semantic processes, language creativity, and the interaction between linguistic structure and human communication. Future research may focus on comparative studies of diminutive systems across languages, as well as on the functioning of diminutive forms in digital and intercultural communication.

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