

LINGUISTIC TOLERANCE: FEMINATIVES AND INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE IN RUSSIAN

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Abstract

The article analyzes the phenomenon of feminatives and inclusive language in modern Russian. It examines the history of feminatives from Old Russian names of female professions to their development in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and highlights the influence of socio-social factors such as emancipation and feminism on their evolution. Contemporary language changes are considered, including the spread of feminatives in speech and media, public debates around them, and the main arguments of critics and supporters. The study concludes that feminatives are an important means of linguistic representation of women and an expansion of the expressive potential of the Russian language as well as a necessary component of an inclusive approach to language norms.

Keywords: Feminatives, inclusive language, gender linguistics, language norm, gender discrimination, history of the Russian language, feminism, language policy, tolerance.

Introduction

Language inevitably reflects social values and attitudes toward gender. In contemporary society, the issue of gender-oriented vocabulary is increasingly discussed, particularly the formation of feminine forms of professional and social roles. Feminatives, feminine nouns denoting professions or statuses corresponding to masculine forms, for example teacher and female teacher, have become an object of intensive study in gender linguistics [1, pp. 14–18]. The development of feminism has led to increased attention to feminatives. However, until recently there was no unified definition of the term in Russian linguistics. Some scholars interpret feminatives as feminine counterparts of masculine nouns,



while others include gender independent words such as mother, aunt, or maid [1, pp. 19–22].

The issue of introducing feminatives into Russian is not new. Already in Old Russian texts names of female professions such as weaver, cook, and laundress were recorded [2, pp. 102–105]. Researchers note that the richness of feminatives in both Old Rus and the Russian Empire was remarkable [2, pp. 102–105]. Indeed, feminatives existed for centuries reflecting women's social positions.

However, in the first half of the nineteenth century most professional titles were not applied to women since women's participation in public and political life was limited [2, pp. 103–104]. When women entered traditionally male professions masculine forms were often used emphasizing the unusual nature of the phenomenon.

The end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century marked the first major wave of feminatives. The expansion of women's participation in professional life led to the emergence of numerous feminine forms such as telephonistka, activistka, and policewoman [3, pp. 14–16]. The suffix *-k(a)* became productive in forming feminine occupational names [3, pp. 15–17].

At the beginning of the twentieth century feminatives were widely used in speech. Linguistic studies of the period record hundreds of feminine occupational terms [3, pp. 16–18]. However, a parallel process also developed, namely the use of masculine forms to refer to women in a generic sense.

By the mid twentieth century masculine forms with generalized meaning became dominant in Russian linguistic consciousness [3, pp. 18–20]. Many feminatives gradually disappeared while others were replaced by neutral constructions.

In the twenty first century interest in feminatives has reemerged in the context of global discussions on gender equality. Researchers note that their frequency has increased in both spoken and written discourse including official contexts [6, pp. 89–92].

An important modern trend is linguistic inclusivity in a broader sense. Besides feminatives it includes gender neutral expressions and consideration of non-binary identities.

The debate around feminatives is highly controversial. Some linguists advocate a conservative approach arguing that only established forms should be codified in dictionaries [8, pp. 1–3]. At the same time supporters emphasize that feminatives

have long existed in Russian and represent a natural part of its word formation system [9, pp. 2–5].

Feminatives represent a natural and historically grounded phenomenon in the Russian language that has evolved in close connection with social and cultural changes. Their development reflects shifts in the social status of women, the expansion of their participation in various professional spheres, and the growing demand for linguistic representation of gender equality.

The analysis shows that feminatives have existed in different periods of Russian language history, appearing, transforming, and sometimes disappearing depending on socio political conditions. In the contemporary stage, interest in feminatives has increased again due to global processes of democratization, digital communication, and the influence of feminist discourse.

At present, feminatives continue to develop as part of the active word formation system of the Russian language. They coexist with traditional masculine forms used in a generalized sense, which creates ongoing discussions about language norm, stylistic appropriateness, and linguistic tolerance.

Thus, feminatives should be viewed not as a distortion of linguistic norms, but as a reflection of natural language dynamics. Their study contributes to a deeper understanding of the interaction between language, society, and culture, as well as to the development of inclusive communication practices.

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