

ПСИХОЛІНГВІСТИКА

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VERBALIZATION OF THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTANCE BETWEEN ADOLESCENCE AND EMERGING ADULTHOOD IN NARRATIVES

(based on emerging adults' letters to their teenage self)

The article looks into three letters written by emerging adults to their adolescent selves in order to depict the process of identity construction and negotiation. Applying linguistic analysis, the research reveals that emerging adults assume the role of a knowledgeable and experienced mentor and therefore psychologically distance themselves from their teenage selves. The verbalization of the role is achieved by shifting personal and temporal deixis in the narrative with the help of the second person pronoun, present and future forms of verbs and the Imperative mood.

Key words: narrative, identity, psychological distance, adolescence, emerging adulthood, deixis

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Кіївського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка ВЕРБАЛІЗАЦІЯ ПСИХОЛОГІЧНОЇ ДИСТАНЦІЇ МІЖ ПІДЛІТКОВИМ ТА РАННІМ ДОРΟΣЛИМ ВІКОМ

(на матеріалі листів 25-річних до себе-підлітка)

У статті досліджуються три листа, написані авторами в віці ранньої дорослості до себе-підлітків з метою простежити процес формування своєї ідентичності. Лінгвістичний аналіз нарративів дозволяє виявити роль обізнаного та досвідченого ментора, яку намагаються грати автори листів по відношенню до себе в підлітковому віці, що вказує на існування між ними психологічної дистанції. Вербалізація цієї ролі в наративі досягається за допомогою зсуву особового та часового дейксису, який забезпечують особовий займенник другої особи, форми дієслова теперішнього та майбутнього часу, а також наказовий спосіб.

Ключові слова: наратив, ідентичність, психологічна дистанція, підлітковий вік, рання дорослість, дейксис.

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Киевского национального университета имени Тараса Шевченко ВЕРБАЛИЗАЦИЯ ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ ДИСТАНЦИИ МЕЖДУ ПОДРОСТКОВЫМ И РАННИМ ВЗРОСЛЫМ ВОЗРАСТОМ (на материале писем 25-летних к себе-подростку)

В статье исследуются три письма, написанные авторами в раннем

взрослом возрасте себе-подросткам с целью проследить процесс формирования своей идентичности. Лингвистический анализ нарративов позволяет выявить роль знающего и опытного ментора, которую пытаются играть авторы писем по отношению к себе в подростковом возрасте, что свидетельствует о наличии между ними психологической дистанции. Вербализация этой роли в нарративе достигается с помощью сдвига личного и временного дейксиса, который обеспечивается употреблением личного местоимением второго лица, глагольными формами настоящего и будущего времени, а также повелительного наклонения.

Ключевые слова: нарратив, идентичность, психологическая дистанция, подростковый возраст, ранняя взрослость, дейксис.

Formulation of the problem. Linguistics of the 21st century develops within the anthropocentric paradigm, which means regarding language primarily as a medium and a tool of cognition and self-expression. Linguistic research, therefore, is aimed at collecting language data so as to comprehend workings of human mind and psyche. The anthropocentric approach enables researchers to contribute to the interdisciplinary studies that are conducted at the intersection between linguistics, psychology, sociology, cognitive and cultural studies.

Since language provides with a key to understand its speakers, linguistics is well-equipped to study the 21st century Western personality that have inherited and then aggravated controversies of Postmodernism. Made up of numerous groups, modern Western societies may be viewed as the most complex ever: the unprecedented longevity, migration, revision of mores with regard to sexual orientation and, consequently, a remarkable rise of various non-traditional sexual groups have added heterogeneity to the social landscape. It is not surprising, then, that, exposed to this diversity, modern individuals have to negotiate and then may need to re-negotiate their identities, currently seen as a dynamic phenomenon comprising multiple components (for example, gender, ethnic, national, cultural, age, professional, class to name just a few).

It is quite obvious that identity may be fully embraced only within this multidisciplinary research, where an individual's speech provides scholars with the material to be examined and where linguistics comes in handy for a researcher.

Analysis of the recent investigations and publications. The data that 'feed' research into identity are usually extracted from people's personal stories, i.e. narratives. The stories told in retrospect give shape and meaning to one's life and play the crucial role in identifying one as a personality by uniting self and memories in one memory fabric and by weaving a continuous story of a life journey through establishing causal relations between events and states. Identity-shaping narratives are studied within a number of sciences, e.g., narrative psychology, sociology, literary criticism, discourse studies, communication and cultural theory (see, for example, [1;

2; 3; 9; 10].

Another approach to narratives is aimed at discovering patterns of story-telling, which has revealed two types of narrative of personal experience that are believed to influence strongly both one's perception of events, their nature and one's cognition [11].

Numerous scholars look into social interactions to study the link between identity and place (see [12; 14].

Recognition of social groups defined by sexual identity has opened another field of research that focuses on investigating identity work carried out by those who have to deal with incompatible identities (e.g., sexual and religious). The strategies they use to negotiate and accommodate these conflicting components have been studied through narratives in psychology [7].

Intercultural communication, in its turn, brings up the issue of kaleidoscopic representation of one's identities in interactions: participants may prioritize different identity facets at different stages of a conversation which may turn cross-cultural interactions into a puzzling game that is of particular interest for communication studies and linguistics (see [4]).

Despite its intensity and multiple approaches, the research into identity issues still shows some lacunas. One of these unexplored areas is the perspective of self taken by an individual when moving on to a next stage in life. Linguistic analysis of narratives will shed light onto this phenomenon, which makes the study **relevant**.

The purpose of the paper is to study language means used by emerging adult narrators to verbalize their adolescent past and to identify their current psychological positioning in respect to the teen stage.

The purpose presupposes solving the following **objectives**: 1) to define the emerging adulthood and importance of its narratives for one's identity formation; 2) to distinguish and analyze language means used in emerging adults' narratives to mark psychological positioning to their adolescent selves, and 3) to specify identities seen as meaningful for identity construction at the emerging adulthood stage and their verbal markers.

Presentation of the basic material and interpretation of the results of the investigation. The research is based on the analysis of the article '*Don't pretend to be something you're not*': a letter to my teenage self written by three female authors, Samantha Theminimulle, Niellah Arboine and Liv Little, and published in *The Guardian*, June 1, 2019 [13]. The article is, in fact, made up of three letters by three emerging adults in response to extracts from their own diaries written at the age of 14-16.

Before analysing the letters, it is worth mentioning that 'emerging adulthood' is a term proposed in 2000 by U.S. developmental psychologist Jeffrey Jensen Arnett. 'Emerging adulthood' is defined as a developmental stage that is neither adolescence nor young adulthood but is theoretically and empirically distinct from them both, spanning the late teens through the

twenties, with a focus on ages 18 to 25. Emerging adulthood is distinguished by relative independence from social roles and from normative expectations. Having left the dependency of childhood and adolescence, and having not yet taken on the responsibilities that are normative in adulthood, emerging adults engage in identity exploration, a process of trying out various life possibilities (e.g., in love, work, and worldviews) and gradually moving toward making enduring decisions [5]. The importance of the stage can hardly be overestimated, and this is confirmed by dynamic research carried out in this field (see, for example, [8; 15]).

The authors of *The Guardian* publication are the top management of *gal-dem*, a British online and print publication 'committed to sharing perspectives from women and non-binary people of colour [6]. The key words in this journal's Internet self-presentation are *women, non-binary* and *of colour*. These words outline the three social groups that are the publication's target audience and these are the identities that are at the heart of the letters to self. The identities of the *Guardian* feature are, correspondingly, cultural (described by Samantha Theminimulle, a British citizen of Sri Lankan origin), racial (Niellah Arboine, British of Jamaican descent), and sexual (Liv Little, a black Lesbian).

The striking peculiarity of the three letters is the role assumed by the authors in respect to their teen selves. This role, by and large, determines their perception of the distance between themselves now and their adolescent selves. The three texts are a first-person narration, where the authors address their teenage selves using the second person pronoun *you* and construct themselves today as knowledgeable mentors. This role is constructed with the help of modal verbs of necessity and obligation and the forms of the Imperative mood: *You don't have to ignore..., ...don't pretend, don't mindlessly be what your parents want you to be..., ...try to see, Be true to yourself, Learn about..., Don't wait, Don't think...* Interestingly, the effect created by this language use, is an illusion of no time distance (the 25-year-old emerging adult seems to be talking to a teenager who is living through the hurdles here and now). It is easy to see when comparing, for example, *don't wait* vs *I should not have waited*). The 'here and now' perception is boosted with the help of the present tenses used to describe the authors' past experience, lived through during the adolescent stage (*You feel forced to lie, you don't realize, you sing, you deserve to figure out what you like*).

However, the psychological distance between the addresser (emerging adult self) and the addressee (adolescent self) seems to be quite considerable. The 25-year-old narrator appears to be so wise and omniscient that she can see clearly the teenage addressee's future. This impression is created with the help of future tenses used to express prediction (*you'll come to appreciate..., you'll blame your parents, you'll start cooking more, you'll tell your friends, you'll chat over MSN*). The meaning of the tense form is a blatant transposition: the events foretold are, in fact,

already the past. The statements *It's a long journey..., I'll let you into a little secret* imply the emerging adults' experience and knowledge of life.

What makes the emerging adult self drastically different and, in fact, more advanced compared to the teen self is the successful solution of the main challenge in adolescence, i.e. one's being different and not fitting in. The idea of difference and maladjustment is recurrent in all the three narratives: *there's no one around who looks like you, eats like you, or lives like you; being too different; fitting in is the most important thing; feeling of not fitting in; trying too hard to fit in with your white peers, you are spending your time at school trying to fit in*. Succeeding in coping with difference gives the emerging adult the right to mentorship and justifies their feeling of psychological distance.

As it may be seen from the narratives, different identities cause rifts in different aspects. The clash between two cultural identities (British and Sri Lankan) is dealt with by accepting the parents' ethnic identity though *embracing your Sri Lankan identity, through learning how to balance your parents' point of view with yours* and, in emerging adulthood, regretting *not waking up and smelling the Sri Lankan food sooner*, food here obviously standing for the ethnic culture in its entirety.

As for racial identity in Niellah Arboine's case, then the challenge lies in coping with the stereotype of the black which she did not match as a teenager in respect to hobbies, clothes, and attitude to studies. The discrepancy is expressed metaphorically in the image of *Oreo: somehow black on the outside but white on the inside* followed by the worrying question *Are you somehow failing at being black?* Experience gained later on teaches the author that *there is no right way to be black*, the language offers a new category – *blerds* (black nerds) – that puts Niellah into a social group which legitimizes her racial identity and interest in science. The emerging adult concludes that her racial identity is her inseparable part that 'comes in a package': *to be black you just have to be black; Black is who you are; it's not about what you wear or the music you listen to, or how you speak*.

Dealing with the issue of her homosexual identity sets one in opposition to the mainstream society. To embrace this part of oneself requires discovering *unknown territory* that is *new* and *confusing*, so Liv Little has to challenge the society, namely the idea of socially approved *heteronormative relationships*, and *to unlearn what society packages as the norm*. This experience will transform *old Liv* into a new person: *you will grow brave and listen to what inner voice is telling you*. The opposition *old – new, society – inner voice* deliver the idea of fundamental transformation, which justifies the psychological distance between the teen and the emerging adult.

Conclusions. The research into the letters written by emerging adults to their teenage selves has revealed the psychological distance the

individuals feel when they move from adolescence to emerging adulthood. The emerging adults shift personal and temporal deixis: they use the second person pronoun *you* to refer to their own teen selves, employ the present tenses to talk about their past experience and the future tenses to tell about past events that followed a certain point in the past. These modifications create the effect of psychological distance and turn emerging adults into omniscient mentors to their adolescent selves.

The identities that undergo the emerging adults' retrospective analysis are cultural, racial, and sexual. In each of the cases, the clash occurs along specific lines: cultural identity presupposes a rift between one's two cultures, racial identity implies following or breaking a stereotypical behaviour, sexual identity requires breaking social norms and discovering one's own way to shape relations. Embracing one's identity in its entirety and, finally, achieving psychological integrity entail the psychological distance between the adolescent self and the emerging adult.

Perspectives of further investigations. Studying identity as it is expressed in communication is a promising field for linguistic research. The current paper is an attempt to uncover phenomena that occur in one's psyche when passes through life stages. In order to advance in this tentative investigation, a researcher needs to collect a larger sample of narratives produced by people of various age groups. It is linguistic analysis of language means used in personal stories that will reveal the working of human mind and explain how individuals construct and negotiate their identities and how they interpret their experience.

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