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Research article

## Russian Diminutives on the Social Network Instagram

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**Abstract.** The article is devoted to the peculiarities of communication on the Russian-speaking segment of the social net Instagram. The aim of the article makes the analysis of diminutives — the words with diminutive-hypocoristic suffixes. In course of the study, over 250 users' pages of Instagram were analyzed, and the most high-frequency lexemes were chosen. The derivational analysis was carried out to sort out the groups of relevant suffixes, and such a phenomenon as the synonymy was revealed. As is proved, despite different formal expression, all suffixes of diminutives bear diminutive-hypocoristic (or just hypocoristic) meaning which helps express subjective positive evaluation in respect to the environment, and demonstrate emotions (also positive) in course of communication. As is marked, the use of diminutives on the social net is not an occasional occurrence, it's one of the significant exponents of the world view of the Russian-speaking people. The demand of language bearers for the diminutives witnesses of their high linguistic potential allowing the forms to create aesthetical communication over the Internet virtual space.

**Key words:** Russian language, communication, Internet, Instagram, diminutives, word derivation, fairy tales, suffixes, aestheticalization of life, linguistic world view

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## Introduction

Vladimir Bibikhin, a famous Russian translator, philologist and philosopher, states: “Our world is never better than our speech” [1. P. 25]. It is difficult to disagree with his words. Speech reflects all the changes that are happening around us. And it doesn't matter what they are: negative or positive. These changes can relate to different spheres of human activity, far and close to every person, attracting the attention of an entire ethnic group or its individual groups, relevant in a certain period of time, or considered in a diachronic aspect. “Issues of linguistic expression of the organization of the sides of social life, in particular the relationship between a person and power, a person and society, the role of a person as a social unit in the world” become the subject of linguistic research in different languages, including Russian [2. P. 6].

It should be noted that there is an emerging trend: anthropocentric research in modern linguistics is aimed at studying the life of society through the prism of conceptualization, embodied in the language picture of the world. In 1986, Y.D. Apresyan wrote that “active processes in the speech of native Russian speakers are caused by the national picture of the world, its implementation through the linguistic conceptualization of the world” [3. P. 5].

The ability to comprehend the world, to evaluate its uniqueness embodies the mentality of the people, their philosophy, unlike other world outlooks. The Russian language is characterized by its own reflection of the world. In this connection, A. Vezhbitskaya notes that “a feature specific to the Russian picture of the world”, is focused “on the emotional and moral, evaluative reflected attitude to the world and people” [4. P. 34—35]. Such attitude in the Russian language reflects the “rich possibilities of Russian expressive word formation” [5. P. 118—136]. Special means in this case are diminutive suffixes that “live” according to the laws of the Russian language for a long time of its existence. “Emotions expressed by diminutives can be quite individual, contextual”, they can be expressed in oral and written speech [6. P. 126].

In the last decade, more and more linguistic publications are devoted to written speech published on the Internet. Some of them describe negative changes in the Russian language. Others consider social networks as an opportunity to implement a communicative need through a language that has positive changes and is influenced by the socio-cultural environment. As a result of such positive impact active processes happen in the Russian

language that require further study in order to “demonstrate and preserve the peculiarities of the Russian language on the Internet...” [7. P. 3]. “It is the Internet that has convincingly shown how communicative conditions affect the structure of the language and its vocabulary. And our task is not to pursue fashion, but to describe the trends and mechanisms that form the lexicon” [7. P. 4]. For this purpose we use Instagram as a source containing the material studied<sup>1</sup>.

### Instagram: general characteristics

This is an application for sharing photos and videos, carrying only positive emotions. You can use it to share photos and videos on Instagram and other social networks. With this feature, Instagram has become a leading communication network with more than a billion registered users posting their beautiful landscape or portrait-oriented photos every day. As a rule, photos and videos are accompanied by comments (post), mostly positive.

For example:

**katya\_mtsitouridze** Встреча прошла в тёплой дружественной обстановке ❄️💙❄️ ни один тортик не пострадал! 😇 @mariabogdanovich 💕 спасибо за вечер!

*(Translation: the meeting was held in a warm and friendly atmosphere /emojis/ not a single “tortik” (cake) was hurt! /emoji/ @mariabogdanovich /emoji/ thank you for the evening!)*

Account owners (users) tell subscribers (or followers, as it is more common for Instagram community) about interesting moments in their lives, hobbies, travels, meetings with famous people, etc.

For example, the owner of the @georgiykot account writes:

— “*Good morning, my ‘rodnulechki’ ‘krasotulechki’ (sweethearts and beauties). How are you feeling? I’m running to work impressed by yesterday’s mood. The stories about my ideas inspired me.*”

Here are more examples: olly.boar:

— “*‘Privetik’ (Hey there) everyone! While waiting my cheatmeal I decided to cook something ‘vkusnen’koe’ (yummy)... And it turned out just divine! Catch a ‘desertika’ (dessert) recipe for a carb-free day*”<sup>2</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> official link: Instagram: <http://Instagram.com>

<sup>2</sup> Account owners’ spelling, punctuation, and writing style are saved.

Nowadays, Instagram is not only a platform for posting photos and videos with comments, but also a more targeted communication platform where people have a real opportunity to communicate. Instagram account owners use a variety of means, verbal and non-verbal, to attract the attention of followers (the more, the better). The most popular non-verbal mean of communication is emojis, which are a set of images aimed to express a wide range of emotions and feelings that help enrich and specify the verbal message.

pp\_mari\_food Последний пост 2018 года 🙏❤️  
отлайкайте его от души , сделайте подарок 📺💋  
А я Хочу сказать , Вам спасибо 💋 за этот год 🎄

За каждое сердечко ❤️ , за каждый комментарий 🤔 , за обратную связь 🌟 , за ваш интерес ко мне и моему блогу 😍 , за каждое упоминание в постах и сторис 💋 , за каждый фотоотчёт в Директ 😊 , за ваше доверие 💕

*(Translation: the last post in 2018 /emojis/ like it with all your heart, make me a present /emojis/ And I want to say thank you /emoji/ for this year /emojis/*

*For every “serdechko” (heart) /emoji/ for every comment /emoji/ for your feedback /emoji/ for your interest in me and my blog /emoji/ for every reference in posts and stories /emojis/ for every photo report in Direct /emoji/ for your trust /emoji/)*

Among the verbal means, we should note the use of formulas of Russian speech etiquette (greetings, farewells, thanks, requests, acquaintances), as well as *words with diminutive suffixes (diminutives)*. The use of the latter is more than 70%.

A diminutive is a subjective-evaluation, diminutive-affectionate, enlarging, humiliating, etc. lexical unit of a language [8. P. 45].

It should be noted that diminutive vocabulary is a special code of Russian speech. No language has such a large number of subjective-evaluative vocabulary as Russian. In this regard, there is a great interest of researchers in its study. Diminutives have been the subject of research in fiction [9], folklore texts [10], dialects [11], and mass media [12]. It should also be mentioned that Russian [13—15] and foreign researchers [16—19] pay close attention to the problems of studying vocabulary of social networks

[13—19]. However, until now, diminutives on Instagram have not been the subject of special linguistic research.

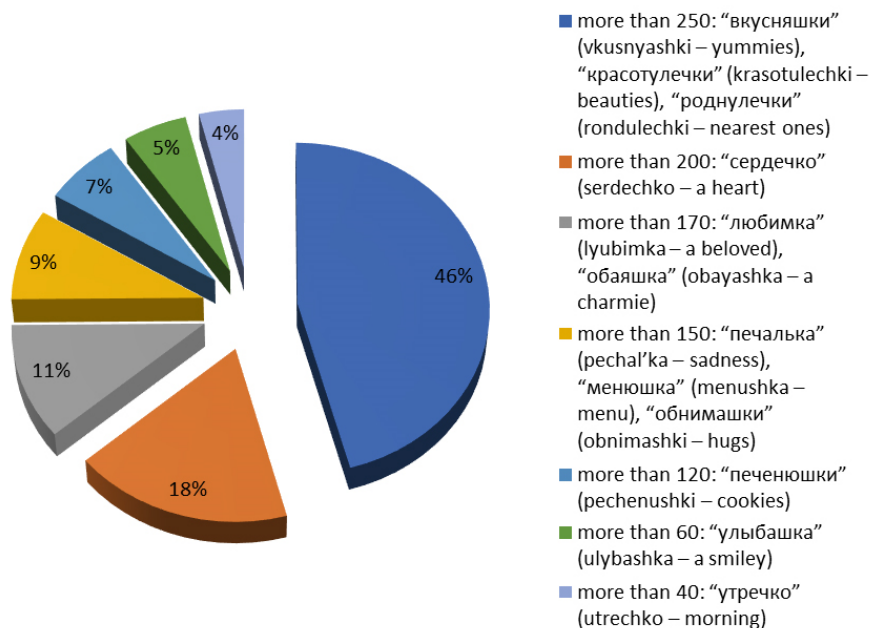
*The purpose* of our research is to analyze the vocabulary with diminutive suffixes (diminutives) in the Russian-speaking Instagram community.

The following methods are used: linguistic description, comparative analysis, lexicographic development of language units and quantitative characteristics of the material. At some stages of the work, more specific methods of analyzing language material were also used, including component and word-formation analysis.

More than 250 Instagram user profiles were analyzed. They can be divided into several groups: personal user accounts, bloggers, publicists, online stores, business accounts, brand accounts, and accounts of famous people. Among the groups listed, bloggers make up the largest percentage of the total number of Instagram users — 25%, public accounts — 20%, online stores, business accounts and brand accounts — 20%, personal user accounts — 20%, accounts of famous people — 15%.

### Diminutives: language analysis

Almost all of the Instagram groups mentioned above use vocabulary with positive connotations, in particular, diminutive suffixes. The total number of diminutives is about 1,000 units. We have selected words based on their quantitative usage: they are shown in Figure 1.



**Fig. 1.** Number of diminutives used on Instagram

At the same time, it should be noted that we have selected the most frequent lexemes, but in fact, there are much more of them.

According to our observations, the most common way of forming the words we are considering is morphological (the formation of words by attaching affixes and suffixes to the generating stem). This method of word-formation is well studied and presented in the works of Russian linguists [20—24].

The composition of suffixes is quite diverse. We would like to take a closer look at them. When describing the values of suffixes of subjective evaluation, we used the classification of N.Yu. Shvedova, given in “Grammatika-80”.

– Suffix -к-. It is used to form “feminine nouns (in some cases masculine and neutral nouns), have a diminutive meaning, usually accompanied by the expression of endearment, less often-pejorative, or only an affectionate expressive meaning”. For example: “*печалька*” (*pechal’ka* — *sadness*), “*любимка*” (*lyubimka* — *a beloved*) [25; 26].

– Suffix -шк-. Using this suffix we can form “feminine and neutral nouns having a general meaning “an object (animate or inanimate) characterized by a feature called a motivating word”. For example: “*улыбаюшка*” (*ulybashka* — *a smiley*), “*обнимаюшки*” (*obnimashki* — *hugs*) [25; 26].

– Suffix -ечк-. Using it one can form “neutral nouns, ‘which are motivated by neuter words (unmotivated) and have a diminutive or only affectionate meaning’.” For example: “*времечко*” (*vremechko* — *time*), “*утречко*” (*utrachko* — *morning*), “*сердечко*” (*serdechko* — *a heart*) [25; 26].

– Suffix -яшк-. Using this suffix we can form “feminine and neutral nouns having a general meaning” an object (animate or inanimate) characterized by a feature called a motivating word”. For example: “*вкусняшка*” (*vkusnyashka* — *yummy*), “*обаяшка*” (*obayashka* — *a charming*) [25; 26].

– Suffix -ушк-. It is used to form “nouns that have a diminutive-affectionate or diminutive-pejorative meaning. Words of this type belong to the feminine gender, including those motivated by masculine and neuter words.” For example: “*печенюшка*” (*pechenushka* — *a cookie*), “*менюшка*” (*menushka* — *menu*), “*зверюшка*” (*zveryushka* — *a beastie*) [25; 26].

– Suffixes -ул-+- ечк-. Using this suffix, we can form “neutral nouns having a general meaning ‘an object (animate or inanimate) characterized by a feature called a motivating word’”. For example: “*роднuleчки*” (*rodnulechki* — *nearest ones*), “*красотuleчки*” (*krasotulechki* — *beauties*).

[25; 26]. One can note that in this case, two suffixes are used, which strengthens the meaning of “affection”.

The analysis of the suffixes on the example of the analyzed words indicates such a phenomenon as synonymy. All suffixes have a diminutive-affectionate (or simply affectionate) meaning with different formal expressions. Their use allows account owners to make their speech attractive. This speech, to a certain extent, resembles the communication of young children with their parents. The famous scientist M. Krongauz believes that “the Internet lives the most pleasant bully time of childhood”<sup>3</sup>.

In our opinion, this is not accidental. Diminutives have always been a part of the Russian language since they served as “reflectors” of the language picture of the world of Russian people. So in Russian folk tales there is a “крылечко” (*krylechko* — a porch), “службушка” (*sluzhbishka* — duty service), “банька” (*ban'ka* — a bathhouse), “зятюшка” (*zyatyushka* — a son-in-law), “лягушка-скакушка” (*lyagushka-skakushka* — a frog), “островок” (*ostrovok* — island), “диковинка” (*dikovinka* — curio), “домишко” (домишко — a little house in a fairy tale “Go There — Do Not Know Where”), “иглочка” (*iglochka* — a needle), “племяннушка” (*plemyanushka* — a nephew), “матушка” (*matushka* — a mother or mommy), “тетушка” (*tetushka* — auntie), “маслице” (*maslitse* — oil), “гребешок” (*grebeshok* — a comb in a fairy tale “Baba-Yaga”), “вдовушка” (*vdovushka* — a widow), “чуланчик” (*chulanchik* — a closet), “холодочек” (*holodochek* — cool weather), “цветочки” (*tsvetochki* — flowers), “Vasilisushka” (a Russian name *Vasilisa*), “краюшка хлеба” (*kraushka khleba* — crust of the bread), “чернушка” (*chernushka* — a character of a Russian fairy tale), “зернышко” (*zernyshko* — a seed), “дитятко” (*didyatko* — a child in a fairy tale “Vasilisa the wise”). Almost every Russian fairy-tale contains from five to ten diminutives. The Russian people, when telling fairy-tales, tried to reflect in them their perception of the world full of unforeseen events and sometimes difficulties that they had to face in life. But the belief in the best and positive meant creating strong characters capable of extraordinary (and most importantly!) positive actions. At the end of the story, good always triumphed over evil.

Frequent use of diminutives in Instagram, from our point of view, allows participants to immerse themselves in a beautiful and fabulous world that

<sup>3</sup> Krongauz, M.A. (2011). *Russkomu yazyku nichego ne ugrozhaet, dazhe Internet* [Nothing Threatens the Russian Language, Even The Internet]. *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, 190. December 20. p. 10.

distracts from difficulties, troubles and sets up a positive perception of the surrounding reality. It is difficult to say to what extent the virtual images of the Russian-speaking Internet correspond to the real identities. Walther believes that “the media environment often creates conditions for communication that transcends the usual interpersonal level” [27. P. 30]. In Instagram, this barrier is erased by positive impressions from verbal and non-verbal communication, including the use of diminutives in speech.

Most often, the use of words with diminutive-affectionate suffixes “is dictated by a conscious or unconscious desire to establish a situation of friendly communication” [6. P. 128]. However, this does not mean that the person with whom the communication takes place really becomes a friend. Instagram is a platform where only positive emotions prevail, positive communication, which is a form of spoken written speech, where suffixation is a “mean of stylistic modification” [6. P. 116].

It is also noteworthy that the word stems that relate to different parts of the Russian language are used as generating words: noun, adjective, verb, and less often participle. This is explained by the fact that certain suffixes are combined with the generating stems of specific parts of speech, that is, each part of speech has its own set of word-forming and form-forming suffixes.

So, the suffixes *-ул-* + *-ечк-* and *-к-* form words from the generating stems of nouns and adjectives (*печальный* — *печалька*, *родной* — *роднучекки*);

*-ечк-* и *-юшк-* join only to the generating stem of the noun (*время* — *времечко*, *печенье* — *печенюшки*);

*-яшк-* forms words from the generating stem of the adjective (*вкусный* — *вкусняшка*);

*-шк-* is a word-forming verb suffix (*обнимать* — *обнимашки*, *улыбаться* — *улыбашка*).

It should be noted that in written conversational speech the same rules of the Russian language apply as in the Russian language as a whole.

It is also interesting to note that when using words with suffixes, a subjective tendency to reflect the surrounding reality is clearly observed. For example: “*Однако вчера со мной случалась великая печалька... забыла ключики от машины*” (*However, yesterday I had a great sadness... I forgot my car keys*).

Subjective evaluation demonstrates the speaker’s attitude towards himself or herself, but may also express an attitude towards the listener or a



certain subject of speech. For example: “*Девчули, советую попробовать закуску с морепродуктами. Это такая вкусняшка!*” (*Girls, try this appetizer with seafood. It's so yummy!*)

Diminutive suffixes are suffixes of personal and subjective assessment given to various phenomena by users and their subscribers, thereby expressing their emotions. V.N. Vinogradova states that “the speaker’s emotions and the way they are expressed serve primarily as a characteristic of the speaker as a person, his social affiliation” [6. P. 121]. However, in our case, it is not necessary to talk about social affiliation. Representatives of various professions communicate on Instagram: doctors, artists, art historians, teachers, marketers, accountants, hairdressers, stylists, makeup artists, actors and actresses, singers, politicians, etc. Most of the account owners and subscribers are women. They make up 70%, while men make up 30% of the total number of users. “*Today... the Internet is awash with girlish sentimentality. And we have the fashion for such diminutives as “няшечка” (nyashechka — sweetie), “печалька” (pechal’ka — sadness), “улыбашка” (ulybashka — smiley)* [27. P. 121]. However, not only women, but also men actively use such words in their speech. As a result, there is no need to speak about the gender aspect in this case.

In terms of nationality, most account holders are native Russian speakers. But there are Georgians, Armenians, Tatars, Turkmens, Chechens and other representatives who speak and write well in Russian. All of them use diminutives. We also note the wide geography of Instagram users: various cities of Russia, as well as countries of the near and far abroad are represented.

With such an active use of diminutives, it is impossible not to say about their absence in dictionaries. Most words with diminutive suffixes (“*печалька*” (*pechal’ka — sorrow*), “*вкусняшки*” (*vkusnyashki — yummys*), “*обнимашки*” (*obnimashki — hugs*), “*обаяшка*” (*obayashka — charmie*), “*няшка*” (*nyashka — cutie*), “*улыбашка*” (*ulybashka — smiley*), “*ласкунчик*” (*laskunchik — tender*), “*роднuleчки*” (*rodnulechki — nearest ones*), “*менюшка*” (*menushka — menu*)) are not fixed in modern standard dictionaries. These words appeared recently, during the period of active development of social networks, so they are not codified. Lexicographic parameterization of some words is presented only in the Wiktionary, which is a universal lexicographic source reflecting both common lexical units recorded in well-known dictionaries, and new words that have not yet received a lexicographic description. Due to its universality, Wiktionary aims to reflect all language levels in the description of units: phonetic, spelling,

morphological, syntactic, semantic, and etymological levels. This is how it differs from common dictionaries.

As an example, we analyzed a word “*печалька*” (*pechal’ka* — *sadness*):

“*печалька (pechal’ka)* — noun, feminine, 1st declension, *colloquial, diminutive* to ‘печаль’ (*pechal’*); something that causes negative emotions; *This is the last season of Eureka, the show is being closed, which is ‘печалька’ again. The plot is as follows: once upon a time there was a vile little man who worked as a recruiter and had one ‘печалька’ — his height*” [28].

Besides,

1) the method of word formation is specified: “derivative: ‘печаль+к+а’ — suffixal”;

2) grammatical characteristics are given: “noun, inanimate, feminine, 1st declension”;

3) paradigmatic relations (synonymy, antonymy, hyperonymy) are presented: “огорчение” is a synonym; “радость” is an antonym; “переживание” is a hyperonym”;

4) the etymology of the word is noted: “derived from the noun “печаль”, from Preslavic *pečalbъ*” [28].

The smallest part of words (“*любимка*” (*lubimka* — *beloved*), “*утречко*” (*utrechko* — *morning*), “*печенюшки*” (*pechenushki* — *cookies*), etc.) has long existed in common language and as recorded in dictionaries of the Russian language [29; 30] and in dictionaries of the derivative words [31]. In particular, in the pre-revolutionary period, the lexical units we have indicated were actively used in fiction. For example:

“*Well, you’re a molly. Baroness’s “lyubimka”. What else can I say?*”<sup>4</sup>

At that time, these words were common and used by intellectuals. They tried to show maximum politeness, delicacy and respect in communication with people of their class. In the post-revolutionary period, due to the change in the social system and establishment of the new government, other words began to appear in the Russian language. And those that were once used earlier became a thing of the past. Nowadays, some of the forgotten words are being returned to the Russian language. Thanks to the Internet, they get a “second life”, including in their use in modern fiction.

For example:

“*Так бедному родственнику заворачивают на дорогу две печенюшки. Я упорно молчала. Просто этот невоспитанный испанский трубадур был из моего цеха*” (*So it is the way two cookies are wrapped for*

<sup>4</sup> Charskaya, L.A. Priutki. 1907. URL: [www.litmir.me](http://www.litmir.me) (accessed: December 25, 2018).

*a poor relative for the road. I remained stubbornly silent. That ill-mannered Spanish troubadour was from my workshop*)<sup>5</sup>.

In works of art, Russian writers strive to create images that would attract readers' attention with their aesthetics. For this purpose, words with diminutive suffixes are used. Now it has become fashionable to talk about the aestheticization of life. "Instagram accounts can be viewed as virtual biographies of users who share their life projects. Each trivial event is endowed with a special value and significance, which comes from a person's own ideas and self-presentation" [32. P. 175].

We believe that the aestheticization that has actively penetrated Instagram. It contributes to the creation and use of words with diminutive suffixes that allow to draw attention to an individual. This happens due to the anthropocentric nature, since the words we study differ in "including the addressee in the personal sphere of the speaker" [33. P. 145], which is a necessary condition for interaction between communicants on Instagram, sets up for embedding in personal space. "Subjective emotional attitude to people correlates in such words with the manifestation of 'affinity' — an expression of participation and interest in relation to people who are similar in their way of life and spirit" [34. P. 87]. Showing interest in the companion and attention to their personality sets up further virtual communication, which can develop into friendship or remain at the level of friendly, non-binding relationships. It is difficult to disagree with the British linguist David Crystal, who writes that "Internet users are constantly searching for words to describe their experiences, trying to understand the features of the electronic sphere" [35. P. 67].

## Conclusions

Summing up the above, it should be noted that social networks are actively implemented in the Russian-speaking virtual space. Instagram allows participants not only to communicate, but also to use the features of the Russian language system. Diminutives represent a perfect example of this phenomena. In his speech, every adult can use a particular word and the main aim is to establish contact with the recipient in the virtual space. This is facilitated by the active use of diminutives formed using various suffixes and allowing Instagram users to attract attention, immerse their followers in a

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<sup>5</sup> Rubina, D.I. *Voskresnaya messa v Toledo* (Sunday mass in Toledo). 2000. URL: [www.litmir.me](http://www.litmir.me) (accessed: December 25, 2018).

beautiful fairy-tale world (part of the Russian-language picture of the world), and create an aestheticization of communication in the virtual space of the Internet.

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