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A LINGUOCULTURAL STUDY OF CHILDREN'S SPEECH: A REVIEW OF CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH

Iskandarova Gulbahor Turabayevna

Doctor of Philosophy in Philology (PhD), Senior Lecturer, Department of Uzbek Language and Teaching Methods, Tashkent State University of Uzbek Language and Literature named after Alisher Navoi

gulbahoriskandarova2@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0002-4189-2725

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Annotation: By the beginning of the 21st century, alongside the communicative and cognitive functions of language, the understanding of language as a cultural marker and a means of expressing national identity began to develop rapidly in linguistics. As a humanities discipline, linguistics plays an important role in the study of culture. This interdisciplinary perspective has contributed to the emergence and development of linguoculturology at the intersection of linguistics and cultural studies. Linguoculturology examines the ways in which elements of folk culture are reflected, represented, and preserved in language.

The relationship between language and culture is a multidisciplinary issue studied at the intersection of several academic disciplines. The interaction between language and culture has become one of the central research problems in contemporary linguistics. Despite differences in scholarly approaches to the relationship between language and culture, many researchers recognize that language constitutes an integral part of national culture and serves as an important means of transmitting cultural values, traditions, and worldview across generations.

Keywords: language and culture relationship, linguoculturology, linguistics, national culture, language as a cultural marker, children's speech, ontolinguistics, linguocultural studies, cultural characteristics.

The first systematic attempts to explore the relationship between language and culture can be traced back to the works of Wilhelm von Humboldt. His concept is based on several fundamental principles. First, material and spiritual culture are embodied in language. Second, every culture is national in character, and its distinctive national features are reflected in the language. Third, the inner form characteristic of each people, which Humboldt associated with the concept of the "spirit of the people" (*Volksgeist*), is manifested in language as an expression of its cultural identity. According to Humboldt, language is not merely a finished or static product of human activity; rather, it is an ongoing process and a continuous manifestation of the intellectual and spiritual activity of a community. In this sense, language represents the external manifestation of the spirit of a people, while the language of a people reflects its collective worldview and cultural identity.

M. M. Kopilenko argues that the origins of ethnolinguistics can be traced back to the 11th century, suggesting that the foundations of this field were established long before the works of W. von Humboldt. Similar ideas can be identified in the works of Mahmud al-Kashgari, a prominent ethnographer, historian, folklorist, and linguist, and the author of the renowned *Dīwān Lughāt al-Turk* (*Compendium of the Turkic Languages*). As a comprehensive scholar, Mahmud al-Kashgari

emphasized the influence of extralinguistic factors, including geographical environment, occupation, and lifestyle, on language. Such factors contribute to the emergence and use of specific words and expressions within a particular linguistic community [4, p. 4].

The prominent linguist Z. K. Tarlanov also emphasizes the close relationship between language and ethnos. According to his view, language within an ethnic community is not merely a means of communication; it also serves as a repository of collective knowledge about the history and memory of a people, its cultural experience and cognitive activity, as well as its worldview and psychological characteristics. At the same time, language contributes to the preservation, transmission, and further development of the identity and cultural specificity of an ethnos [10, p. 6]. Thus, language can be regarded as a form of culture that embodies the historically determined national way of life in all its diversity and dialectical complexity.

Language is not merely a means of communication and a tool for expressing thought; it also reflects and shapes people's values, ideals, and perceptions of the world and their place within it. The ability of language to preserve cultural knowledge and transmit it from one generation to another constitutes one of its essential functions as a "product of culture." Therefore, language plays a significant role in the formation of individual identity, national character, ethnic identity, and the sense of belonging to a particular nation.

It is well established that in linguistics, as well as in the social sciences more broadly, scholarly paradigms do not necessarily replace one another. Rather, they complement one another and may coexist, focusing on different aspects of the object of study. Traditionally, three major paradigms are distinguished in linguistics: the comparative-historical, system-structural, and anthropocentric paradigms [12, p. 4].

The anthropocentric paradigm represents a shift in scholarly attention from the object of study to the human subject. Within this paradigm, language is examined in relation to the individual, while the individual is considered within the linguistic environment. As I. A. Baudouin de Courtenay noted, "language exists only in the brains, in the hearts, and in the individual psyches of the individuals who constitute a particular linguistic community" [5, p. 6].

The anthropocentric approach to language marked a significant theoretical shift in linguistic research by placing human beings and their role in culture at the center of scholarly inquiry. Today, this perspective constitutes one of the fundamental principles of contemporary linguistics. Y. S. Stepanov conceptualizes the complex nature of language through several interconnected representations, emphasizing that none of them can fully encompass all aspects of language. From this perspective, language may be understood as the language of an individual, as a component of a language family, as a structure, and as a system.

Within various speech and communicative situations, individuals express their affiliation with a particular culture and its traditions through different dimensions of the self, including the physical self, social self, intellectual self, emotional self, and speech-thinking self. Such multidimensional manifestations of personality may take different forms depending on the communicative context. For instance, the emotional self may be expressed through various socio-psychological roles adopted by an individual in the communication process. Influencing one particular aspect of an individual's identity may, in turn, affect other dimensions of the addressee's personality.

Thus, individuals engage in multifaceted communicative interactions through speech, adapting their verbal behavior to specific communicative strategies and tactics. Such interactions are determined by the social and psychological roles of the participants, as well as by the cultural content embedded in the information being communicated. Through self-awareness, theoretical reflection, and practical activity, individuals perceive and interpret the surrounding world.

Consequently, language functions not only as a means of communication but also as a fundamental mechanism through which individuals construct, express, and transmit their personal, social, and cultural experience.

The prominent Uzbek linguist N. Mahmudov notes that, in accordance with this objective characteristic of language, the anthropocentric paradigm places the human being at the center of linguistic inquiry, while language is regarded as a fundamental factor in the formation of human personality. Referring to the observation attributed to the Russian writer S. Dovlatov, scholars emphasize that "language accounts for 90 percent of human personality." V. A. Maslova likewise argues that "human intelligence cannot be conceived separately from the human being, language, and the ability to produce and comprehend speech" [7, pp. 6–7].

Scholarly interest in the linguocultural aspects of children's speech began to develop actively in the late 20th century. For example, the Chinese researcher Zhin Si, in a dissertation entitled *The Image of a Child in Linguistic Perception: A Study of Various Linguocultures*, examines the nominative and semantic characteristics associated with the concept of "child" in different languages [14]. Based on the results of an associative experiment conducted in Russian and Chinese, the study identifies both similarities and differences in the linguistic representation of children. The similarities concern perceptions of children's appearance, internal and external qualities, and social status, whereas differences are particularly evident in representations of typical patterns of behavior. The study indicates that these differences are largely determined by the traditions, customs, and culturally specific standards of child-rearing and beauty established in a particular society.

The findings demonstrate that the social factors influencing children's behavior include the surrounding environment, interpersonal relationships, and the objects and phenomena with which children interact. The study also highlights common linguocultural features reflected in the proverbs of both peoples, particularly the ideas that the mother exerts the greatest influence on a child and that children should be raised with an appropriate degree of discipline and strictness.

A comparative analysis of Russian and Chinese folk tales further reveals similarities in the representation of relationships between children and their parents or parental substitutes, including step-parents. At the same time, notable cultural differences can be observed. Chinese fairy tales tend to emphasize children's complete obedience to their parents, whereas Russian fairy tales do not portray parental authority and children's obedience in quite the same way. These differences demonstrate how culturally specific values, traditions, and child-rearing practices are reflected in the linguistic and narrative representation of childhood.

In Russian linguistics, M. Ugryumov, in his research article entitled *The Age of the Child in Nominative Units: The Linguistic Aspect (Based on the Middle Ob Dialects)* [11, pp. 37–41], conducts a linguistic analysis of lexical units as means of representing and transmitting ethnic culture. The study examines how elements of ethnic culture are reflected in linguistic units used to designate children in the Middle Ob dialects. In particular, the author classifies the lexical items referring to children according to age groups, including newborns, children under one year of age, children under three years of age, and adolescents.

Children's speech constitutes an important object of research from a linguocultural perspective, and a number of studies have examined the linguistic units characteristic of children's speech and folklore. For instance, the scientific article by I. I. Chumak-Zhun and S. V. Kovalyova, and M. I. Sayenko, entitled *Linguopragmatic and Linguocultural Aspects of Children's Folklore Texts*, focuses on the analysis of children's folklore from linguopragmatic and linguocultural perspectives [16, pp. 98–107].

The authors pay particular attention to the *alla* genre, which occupies an important place in children's folklore, as well as to national rituals associated with putting children to sleep. An analysis of the communicative processes represented in folklore texts makes it possible to identify how culturally determined expectations concerning a child's future well-being are constructed and how information about the national and cultural identity of the community to which the child belongs is transmitted through these texts.

One of the characteristic features of these folklore texts is the positive communicative intention of the speaker and their inherent informational value. By preserving historical connections with previous generations and ensuring the continuity of cultural priorities and values, children's folklore genres transmit spiritual, moral, and aesthetic values. Through children's engagement with such texts, these values become embedded in their linguistic worldview and communicative experience. In this way, children's folklore serves not only as a form of cultural expression but also as an important mechanism for the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, values, and traditions.

E. A. Flaik's research article, *Applying a Linguocultural Approach to the Formation of Perceptions of the Native Language*, emphasizes the theoretical and practical significance of a linguocultural approach in developing students' linguistic competence and linguistic personality. The study examines the relationship between the linguocultural approach and the competency-based approach in contemporary Russian language education. Particular attention is paid to the interrelationship between linguocultural and communicative-linguistic competencies, and methodological recommendations are proposed for addressing linguistic challenges through various forms and methods aimed at developing students' linguistic identities [13]. The study thus substantiates the theoretical and practical importance of developing students' linguistic personalities through a linguocultural approach and demonstrates its relevance to competency-based language education.

N. S. Starzhinskaya's research article, *Methodological Directions for Implementing a Linguocultural Approach to Speech Development in Preschool Children: The Case of Closely Related Languages*, also contributes to the linguocultural study of children's speech [9]. The article discusses methodological approaches to developing Belarusian-language speech among Russian-speaking preschool children. Particular emphasis is placed on several key areas: developing children's understanding of the values and realities of national culture; mastering culturally specific lexical and linguistic units of the Belarusian language; and teaching Belarusian through a dialogue-of-cultures approach.

In their research article *Linguocultural Aspects of Children's Word Formation*, V. N. Matonin, E. N. Yegorova, and N. I. Bedina examine children's word formation in specific communicative situations, focusing on the distinctive characteristics of children's speech [6]. The study presents the results of an empirical investigation into children's verbal creativity from a linguocultural perspective. Drawing on an analysis of daily records documenting the speech development of the large Matonin–Morozov family, who lived on the Solovki Islands between 1981 and 2001, the researchers systematize children's word-formation patterns and cognitive characteristics across different age periods. The study also identifies patterns in the ways children's impressions of their surrounding environment are reflected in their speech. These findings demonstrate that children's word formation is closely associated with their cognitive development, communicative experience, and interaction with the sociocultural environment.

The lexical material was collected through observations of the speech development of the children in the Matonin–Morozov family, including Valya (born in 1981), Katya (1983), Masha

(1982), Vitalik (1984), Alexandra (1986), and Nikolai (1993). The speech productions of children who interacted with or became acquainted with the characters in the book *Voices from the Fifth Apartment* were also included in the research material.

The integrity of children's perception and the spontaneity of their self-expression provide valuable insights into the complex relationship between thought and language in the process of individual development and personality formation. The study identifies age-specific characteristics of children's speech between the ages of two and five. During this period, children's speech may reflect elements of an animistic worldview, which can be associated with cultural patterns traditionally characteristic of early human communities. This is manifested, in particular, in the symbolic perception of reality and the attribution of human qualities and agency to toys, household objects, and other inanimate entities.

At this age, several characteristic mechanisms of children's word formation can be identified, including the combination of existing words, linguistic economy, and the creation of neologisms through sound imitation and analogy based on familiar functions or characteristics of objects. Another distinctive phenomenon observed in children's speech is contamination, which may occur at different levels of language structure. Between the ages of five and six, preschool children increasingly express their thoughts through short fictional narratives, parables, and fairy tales. Such forms of expression provide a convenient means of communication and often function as a form of linguistic play. During adolescence, speech is increasingly characterized by the use of slang expressions, imitation of adult speech patterns, and occasional inaccurate use of specialized terms and unfamiliar lexical items.

Children acquire their native language remarkably rapidly, progressing from simple word combinations to grammatically structured sentences and eventually developing fluent speech. Even before entering school, children acquire substantial knowledge of the grammatical system of their native language without systematic formal instruction and are generally able to use morphological and syntactic structures in accordance with the rules of the language [2].

Linguocultural research in Uzbek linguistics has developed particularly actively over the past decade. In this context, the studies of Z. Soliyeva, D. Khudoyberganova, and N. Mahmudov have made significant contributions to the understanding of the theoretical foundations of linguoculturology and the major research problems within this field [12, p. 25]. It is well established that folk proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, and other culturally marked linguistic expressions contain valuable information about the history, traditions, worldview, and cultural identity associated with a particular language community.

In Uzbek culture, national communicative norms and traditions are also reflected in speech behavior. Uzbek speakers express culturally specific forms of politeness, respect, interpersonal relations, and social etiquette through their choice of linguistic expressions and communicative strategies. Thus, children's acquisition of language involves not only the mastery of its lexical, grammatical, and syntactic structures but also the gradual internalization of culturally determined patterns of communication.

Therefore, in the contemporary context, Uzbekistan is increasingly engaging with the international community, while interest in Uzbekistan and its cultural and communicative practices is also growing worldwide. The culturally specific patterns of Uzbek communication are not concealed from representatives of other nations who interact with Uzbek speakers. On the contrary, understanding these patterns and raising awareness of the norms that should be observed when communicating with Uzbeks can contribute to more effective intercultural communication [8, p. 4].

Linguocultural studies may be regarded as a field that preserves and systematizes the collective perceptions of reality encoded in linguistic units at particular stages of the historical and cultural development of a community. Language reflects the way in which a people conceptualizes and interprets the surrounding world. In this sense, the study of a particular language provides an opportunity to explore aspects of the corresponding community's way of life, culture, history, traditions, and worldview.

Each ethnic community perceives and conceptualizes the world through the influence of its collective representations, mentality, national consciousness, and culturally established concepts. In addition, a range of extralinguistic factors—including geographical and climatic conditions, lifestyle, forms of economic activity, religious beliefs, traditions, and customs—contribute to the formation of a community's worldview. Consequently, different peoples may conceptualize and interpret the same aspects of reality in culturally specific ways.

N. V. Chernova focuses on gender-related differences in the linguocultural characteristics of children's speech and examines children's speech from a linguocultural perspective [15]. Her research considers the mechanisms through which children develop a linguistic picture of the world in relation to gender identity and analyzes lexical, semantic, and pragmatic differences in the speech behavior of boys and girls.

Particular attention is given to the influence of cultural and social factors on the formation of gender-related communicative strategies. The study argues that children's speech functions not only as a means of communication but also as an important mechanism through which culturally established norms, social expectations, and gender roles are reflected and transmitted. In the process of language acquisition, children demonstrate both universal patterns and features specific to the structure and forms of functioning of their particular language. These linguistic features develop in close interaction with the cultural and spiritual environment in which the child is raised.

The Uzbek language, for example, reflects a number of traditional Eastern cultural values, which are gradually acquired by children through everyday communication. From an early age, children are introduced to culturally specific forms of communicative etiquette, including greetings, farewells, expressions of gratitude, and other conventional forms of polite interaction. Such situationally appropriate expressions constitute an important component of Uzbek children's speech and reflect the cultural norms of interpersonal communication [3].

Regardless of the communicative purpose, children's expression of ideas through both linguistic and non-linguistic means tends to reflect the speech patterns and communicative conventions characteristic of their particular cultural environment. This demonstrates the significant role of the social and cultural environment in the development of children's practical speech activity throughout ontogenesis.

Language is the primary means through which people communicate, while culture exerts a profound and undeniable influence on its development and use. Culture can be understood as a historically transmitted system of meanings, values, and patterns of behavior that is encoded and preserved in language. The interaction between language and culture provides a mechanism through which individual thoughts, collective experiences, and culturally established meanings are expressed and realized in social life.

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