

A.Z. ABDYKADYROVA¹, A.O. TYMBOLOVA¹, G.A. AMANGELDIYEVA²¹*Al-Farabi Kazakh National University*²*T. Jurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts* *e-mail: abdy.ainura@gmail.com*

MEDIATED CHILD-DIRECTED DISCOURSE IN CHILDREN'S ANIMATION: A COMPARATIVE ONTOLINGUISTIC STUDY

Abstract. This study examines children's animation as a form of mediated linguistic input within the framework of ontolinguistics. While existing research on animated media primarily addresses psychological and educational outcomes, the internal linguistic organization of animated discourse remains insufficiently analyzed. The study aims to identify the syntactic, lexical, and prosodic characteristics of animated discourse that reproduce the core properties of Child-Directed Speech (CDS) across distinct cultural and linguistic contexts. Employing qualitative discourse analysis, content analysis, and comparative prosodic observation, the study examines three animated series representing distinct linguistic and cultural environments: Bing (United Kingdom), Masha and the Bear (Russia), and Kùsik pen Pay-Pay (Kazakhstan). For each series, five episodes were selected and key dialogic fragments were manually transcribed and coded along syntactic, lexical, pragmatic, and prosodic parameters. The findings demonstrate that children's animation systematically reproduces universal characteristics of early language input, including structural simplification, lexical repetition, and marked prosodic patterning. These features are realized differently across linguistic environments: the British model emphasizes syntactic predictability and emotional regulation; the Russian model foregrounds expressive dynamism and morphological play; the Kazakh model integrates rhythmic repetition and melodic structuring rooted in oral folklore traditions, aligning with documented stages of Kazakh speech ontogenesis.

The findings suggest that children's animation functions as a supplementary mediated discourse that reflects CDS principles while adapting them to culturally specific communicative frameworks. By incorporating Kazakh-language material, the research expands cross-linguistic discussion beyond predominantly Indo-European contexts and contributes to the theoretical understanding of mediated child-directed discourse as an independent object of linguistic inquiry.

Keywords: ontolinguistics, child-directed speech, mediated discourse, speech ontogenesis, children's animation, prosody, cross-linguistic analysis.

Introduction

Language acquisition in early childhood is not a mere accumulation of vocabulary but a process of tuning into patterned speech, where rhythm, repetition, and emotional modulation help organize auditory perception. Central to this process is Child-Directed Speech (CDS) – a specialized register characterized by short utterances, lexical recurrence, and marked prosodic contours that facilitate speech segmentation and grammatical mapping [1]. Corpus-based analyses confirm that child-directed speech systematically contains shorter, higher-frequency words with greater phonological neighborhood density than adult-directed speech, and that these lexical

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properties directly predict children's early productive vocabularies [2]. Traditionally studied within live caregiver-child interactions, these structural affordances are increasingly manifesting in mediated contexts. As preschool children spend significant time with digital media, animated series have emerged as a stable, deliberately crafted source of patterned linguistic input [3].

While existing media research predominantly addresses psychological or educational outcomes, the internal linguistic organization of animated discourse remains underexplored. From a cognitive-linguistic perspective, animation can be conceptualized as a mediated discourse. Its dialogues often mirror natural CDS through slower tempo, pitch variation, and lexical predictability, which support memory retention [4]. Research on the acoustic-lexical properties of CDS demonstrates that previous research suggests that prosodic properties of CDS vary according to communicative context and developmental interaction [5]. However, animated discourse is not a direct reproduction of caregiver speech. Unlike natural adult-child interaction, it lacks reciprocal turn-taking and adaptive feedback, functioning instead as a one-directional form of mediated linguistic support that requires separate structural analysis within language socialization research.

The necessity of a cross-linguistic approach to this phenomenon is particularly evident when considering the Kazakh linguistic landscape. Within the framework of speech ontogenesis, T. Ayapova [6] demonstrated that the transition from one-word to multiword utterances in Kazakh-speaking children is deeply shaped by the specific rhythmic and agglutinative features of the language. This suggests that for animation to be effective as a linguistic mediator, it must align with these inherent developmental stages. Recent studies by Shunkeyeva, Abisheva, and Zhetpisbayeva further indicate that Kazakh animation, by integrating folklore traditions and melodic repetition, may reinforce linguistic identity while supporting phonological awareness [7]. By including Kazakh-language material, this study extends the discussion of mediated discourse beyond Indo-European contexts, providing a more comprehensive view of how universal CDS properties intersect with language-specific patterns.

Against this background, the present study provides a qualitative comparative analysis of three culturally and linguistically distinct series: "Bing" (UK), "Masha and the Bear" (Russia), and "Küsik pen Pay-Pay" (Kazakhstan). The research aims to identify the linguistic characteristics of animated discourse that enhance cognitive accessibility in early language acquisition. To achieve this, the following objectives are pursued:

1. To identify the principal syntactic, lexical, and prosodic features of contemporary animated speech;
2. To evaluate the correspondence between these features and the core properties of Child-Directed Speech;
3. To examine how these patterns align with the stages of speech ontogenesis described in Kazakh linguistic research;
4. To determine how animation functions as a structured form of mediated linguistic input complementing natural language exposure.

Methodologically, the study applies qualitative discourse analysis informed by cognitive and phonological perspectives. By situating animation within ontolinguistic research, the study seeks to explain how mediated discourse reproduces and culturally adapts structural patterns essential for early language development. Figure 1 summarizes the theoretical framework of the study by illustrating the relationship between mediated animated discourse, CDS mechanisms, and ontolinguistic functions.

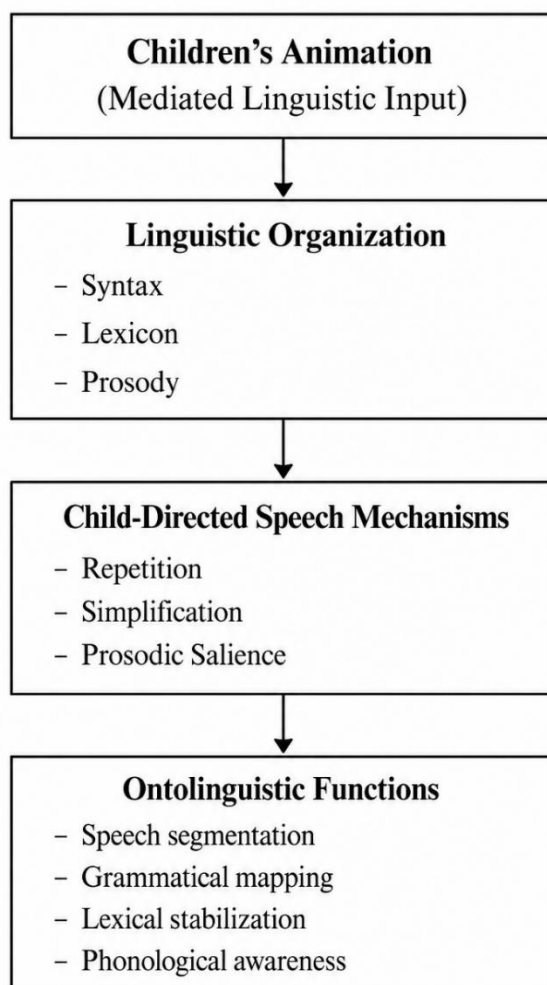


Figure 1 – Structural Components of Mediated Child-Directed Discourse

Research methods and materials

The study employs a qualitative comparative discourse-analytic approach within the framework of ontolinguistic and cognitive-linguistic analysis. The methodological focus of the study is the structural examination of animated discourse and the identification of its correspondence with the core features of Child-Directed Speech (CDS) and the natural stages of speech ontogenesis.

The empirical material of the study consists of three animated series representing different linguistic and cultural environments:

1. Bing (United Kingdom; English-language content),
2. Masha and the Bear (Russia; Russian-language content),
3. Kùsik pen Pay-Pay (Kazakhstan; Kazakh-language content).

The research area is defined as the linguistic organization of child-directed animated discourse, specifically the syntactic, lexical, and prosodic dimensions of speech produced by adult and child-like characters in preschool-oriented animated series. The study does not address viewer reception, developmental outcomes, or production processes; it focuses exclusively on the structural properties of the animated speech itself as a form of mediated linguistic input. The selection of the three series was determined by their orientation toward preschool audiences (ages 2-6), their wide cultural and linguistic representativeness, and their documented relevance to early language development. For each series, five episodes were selected and repeatedly viewed and analyzed through auditory observation. Episodes were chosen on the basis of the presence of sustained

dialogic interaction between adult and child-like characters, phonological clarity of speech, and representativeness of the communicative style characteristic of each series. From each episode, key dialogic fragments totaling approximately 10-15 utterances were manually transcribed and coded. In total, the comparative corpus comprised approximately 540 utterances, with slight variation between series due to differences in conversational intensity and dialogue distribution.

The analysis was conducted through repeated viewing of selected episodes, followed by manual transcription of key dialogic fragments. The primary unit of analysis was the utterance, understood as a syntactically and intonationally complete speech segment produced by one speaker. Each transcribed utterance was coded along four parameters: syntactic type and length, lexical category and recurrence, pragmatic function, and prosodic profile. Coding was performed by the researchers independently and then reconciled through discussion to ensure descriptive consistency. The boundaries of the research area were delimited as follows: only utterances produced within scenes of direct adult-child or child-child interaction were included; background narration, song sequences not integrated into dialogue, and utterances shorter than three words were excluded from the primary corpus.

The study integrates elements of content analysis, discourse analysis, and prosodic observation. The following linguistic parameters were examined:

1. Syntactic structure (sentence length, type of construction, structural simplicity);
2. Lexical composition (frequency of repetition, use of high-frequency vocabulary, presence of diminutives and neologisms);
3. Pragmatic orientation (instruction, reassurance, emotional expression, humor);
4. Prosodic features (tempo, rhythm, intonation contour, melodic repetition).

Special attention was given to repetition patterns and rhythmic organization of speech, as these features are central to both CDS and early stages of child language acquisition. Prosodic characteristics were analyzed through attentive auditory observation and comparative interpretation. The study did not aim at instrumental acoustic measurement; therefore, prosodic analysis was limited to qualitative comparative observation of rhythm, tempo, and intonation patterns.

Comparative analysis was carried out in two directions. First, universal features characteristic of CDS were identified across all three series. Second, language-specific and culturally conditioned realizations of these features were interpreted in relation to national linguistic traditions and existing research on speech ontogenesis, particularly in the Kazakh linguistic context. The study does not aim at quantitative measurement of developmental outcomes. The study therefore adopts a structural and interpretative perspective on animated discourse as a mediated form of child-directed linguistic input.

Results and discussion

The linguistic analysis of “Bing” (UK), “Masha and the Bear” (Russia), and “Küsik pen Pay-Pay” (Kazakhstan) demonstrates that animated discourse functions as a specialized form of mediated linguistic input. This selection targets the preschool period (ages 2-6), which is recognized as the most critical window for speech sound development and phonological maturation [8]. By evaluating these series, we can observe how universal principles of Child-Directed Speech (CDS) are adapted across different cultural and linguistic environments. While classical generative linguistics emphasizes an innate capacity for syntax [9], the analyzed animated dialogues demonstrate that this potential is activated through an organized Language Acquisition Support System (LASS) [10].

In Bing, this support is manifested through extreme syntactic economy and predictable repetition patterns. Such structural adjustments mirror the natural patterns of lexical and syntactic simplification found in early infant-directed speech, which are essential for guiding initial grammatical mapping [1]. In the utterance “It’s okay, Flop. I can make another one,” syntactic complexity is minimized through the use of short declarative clauses and predictable lexical sequencing. The utterance avoids subordinate structures and maintains linear clause organization,

increasing perceptual accessibility for early language learners. The emotionally supportive repetition of the phrase “It’s okay” reinforces reassurance while reducing cognitive processing demands for preschool listeners. The segmented structure of the utterance also supports real-time comprehension by presenting information in short and predictable units, a feature characteristic of Child-Directed Speech.

Conversely, “Masha and the Bear” provides a more dynamic and conversational linguistic environment [11]. Its syntax is characterized by spontaneity, self-repairs, and interruptions. This complexity allows children to observe functional morphemes in a more natural, expressive context, supporting early acquisition through exposure to realistic conversational flow [12].

The Kazakh series “Küsik pen Pay-Pay” offers a unique syntactic synthesis, utilizing rhythmic imperatives like «Пай-пай, менімен бірге қайтала!» (Pay-Pay, repeat with me!). The repetitive imperative structure functions as a form of social scaffolding that encourages verbal participation and supports the transition from passive auditory perception to active speech production [11].

A key mechanism identified in all three series is “linguistic recycling” - the intentional reuse of recurrent items to stabilize the child's emerging mental lexicon [13]. “Bing” implements this through high-frequency, emotionally grounded vocabulary that ensures maximum semantic retention within media discourse [2; 3]. Across the analyzed “Bing” episodes, short declarative utterances and lexical repetition appeared more frequently than complex syntactic constructions, reinforcing communicative predictability.

“Masha and the Bear” elevates lexical recycling to the level of metalinguistic play. The series deliberately incorporates playful distortions and creative word formations that imitate characteristics of child speech and reflect the creative dimension of speech ontogenesis characteristic of early language development [14]. Such lexical experimentation reinforces conversational spontaneity within mediated discourse and contributes to expressive linguistic interaction. Despite their nonstandard structure, these playful formations remain semantically accessible through contextual repetition and phonetic similarity, supporting both communicative comprehension and linguistic creativity. In contrast to the relatively predictable syntactic organization of Bing, “Masha and the Bear” demonstrates a higher frequency of interruptions, interjections, and emotionally expressive speech patterns.

In Küsik pen Pay-Pay, the lexical profile is deeply aligned with the foundations of speech ontogenesis described by T.T. Ayapova. The progression from simple nominal repetitions to predicative structures («Мен – кішкентай күшікпін») reflects developmental patterns characteristic of early Kazakh speech ontogenesis. By grounding these items in folklore motifs, the series not only expands vocabulary but also reinforces linguistic identity [7]. The phrase «Мен – кішкентай күшікпін» illustrates the transition from nominal identification to predicative structure characteristic of early Kazakh speech ontogenesis. The agglutinative suffix “-пін” simultaneously marks predication and first-person reference, while rhythmic repetition supports phonological segmentation and highlights morphemic boundaries. The melodic organization of repeated forms further increases prosodic salience, facilitating auditory processing within an agglutinative linguistic system. The Kazakh corpus showed the highest concentration of rhythmic repetition and parallel prosodic constructions among the analyzed series.

Prosody functions as a major mechanism for directing children’s auditory attention in animated discourse. In “Bing”, the slow tempo and exaggerated intonation provide clear cues for word segmentation, mirroring how prosodic modulations in caregiver speech facilitate word learning [4].

The Kazakh model in “Küsik pen Pay-Pay” leverages “melodic prosody” derived from oral tradition. Rhythmic recitation («күшікпін, күшікпін, күшікпін...») acts as a mnemonic tool that anchors auditory patterns in long-term memory. This rhythmic continuity is vital for the acquisition

of the agglutinative structures of the Kazakh language, as it highlights morphemic boundaries through musicality.

To illustrate these qualitative contrasts, Table 1 summarizes the linguistic strategies across the three environments.

Table 1 – Comparative Linguistic Characteristics of Child-Directed Animated Discourse Across Three Cultural Contexts

Animation Series	Communicative Profile	Representative Dialogue Example	Dominant Linguistic Features	Dominant CDS Mechanism	Ontolinguistic Function
<i>Bing</i> (United Kingdom) 	Preschool-oriented British animation focused on emotional regulation, routine interaction, and calm adult-child communication.	Flop: “Oh no, Bing! It’s all gone!” Bing: “It’s okay, Flop. I can make another one!”	Short declarative constructions; high-frequency vocabulary; lexical repetition; emotionally supportive intonation; slow speech tempo	Syntactic predictability and emotional regulation	Facilitates perceptual clarity, supports early grammatical mapping, and reinforces emotionally stable language processing
<i>Masha and the Bear</i> (Russia) 	Russian animated series characterized by spontaneity, humor, expressive interaction, and dynamic conversational flow.	Masha: “Au-au-au! Everything fell down!” Masha: “Look, Misha! I broke everything again!”	Interjections; expressive prosody; spontaneous self-repair; neologisms; playful morphological constructions	Expressive lexical experimentation and playful word formation	Stimulates linguistic creativity, supports morphological awareness, and models flexible conversational behavior
<i>Küsik pen Pay-Pay</i> (Kazakhstan) 	Kazakh-language preschool animation drawing on folklore rhythm, repetition, and melodic oral tradition.	Pay-Pay: “Pay-Pay, repeat with me!” Küsik: “I’m a little puppy, a puppy, a puppy! Running and jumping, I play, I play.”	Rhythmic repetition; melodic phrasing; repetitive imperatives; folklore-based vocabulary; prosodic parallelism	Rhythmic-prosodic scaffolding	Reinforces phonological memory, highlights agglutinative structure, and supports culturally grounded speech ontogenesis

The comparative analysis demonstrates that although all three animated series reproduce core characteristics of Child-Directed Speech, they prioritize different communicative strategies. Bing foregrounds syntactic predictability and emotional reassurance, Masha and the Bear emphasizes expressive conversational dynamism and lexical experimentation, whereas Küsik pen Pay-Pay relies on rhythmic-prosodic scaffolding rooted in oral tradition. Building on these comparative

observations, the findings suggest that animated discourse constitutes a systematically organized form of linguistic input rather than a spontaneous reproduction of caregiver speech. The analysis reveals recurring structural tendencies across the examined material, including relative utterance length, repetition density, interjection frequency, and rhythmic prominence, while also highlighting cross-cultural contrasts in the realization of CDS principles.

Taken together, the results indicate that children's animation does not mechanically reproduce Child-Directed Speech but selectively adapts its structural principles within a mediated communicative environment. In all three cases, syntactic simplification, lexical recycling, and prosodic salience create conditions for perceptual accessibility. Research demonstrates that prosodic exaggeration in IDS actively supports children's ability to predict conversational turn structure and attend to speech cues from as early as 12 months of age [15]. Furthermore, the degree of prosodic modification in word-learning contexts – particularly when introducing unfamiliar vocabulary – has been shown to predict children's vocabulary growth longitudinally [16]. These findings provide empirical support for the prosodic organization observed across the analyzed animated series. However, these universal mechanisms are culturally adapted: the British model privileges regulation and predictability, the Russian model foregrounds expressive experimentation, and the Kazakh model integrates rhythmic continuity grounded in oral tradition. Animation therefore functions as a structured mediated form of linguistic input that transforms patterned auditory exposure into opportunities for grammatical mapping and lexical stabilization. These findings confirm that mediated discourse can reproduce core ontogenetic mechanisms while adapting them to culturally specific communicative models.

Conclusion

The present study examined children's animation as an organized form of mediated linguistic input and identified the syntactic, lexical, and prosodic features that align animated discourse with the core properties of Child-Directed Speech (CDS). Based on a qualitative comparative analysis of three culturally distinct animated series – Bing, Masha and the Bear, and Kùsik pen Pay-Pay – the findings demonstrate that animated speech systematically reproduces central mechanisms associated with early language organization, including syntactic simplification, lexical repetition, and prosodic salience. At the same time, the analysis revealed that these universal CDS characteristics are realized differently across linguistic and cultural contexts. Although all three animated environments reproduce core CDS principles, they adapt them through distinct communicative strategies: the British model prioritizes predictability and emotional regulation, the Russian model foregrounds expressive experimentation and conversational dynamism, whereas the Kazakh model relies on rhythmic and melodic structures rooted in oral tradition. These distinctions indicate not a mechanical imitation of caregiver speech, but its culturally adapted realization within mediated discourse.

The study further demonstrates that children's animation functions as a mediated discourse in which universal mechanisms of early speech perception intersect with nationally specific models of discourse organization. The recurrence of predictable syntactic patterns, lexical recycling, and prosodic expressiveness supports perceptual clarity and early language processing. At the same time, animation cannot replace live adult-child interaction, as it lacks reciprocal feedback and situational adaptation. Nevertheless, it may function as a supplementary form of mediated linguistic input that reinforces regular exposure to patterned speech during early language acquisition. The inclusion of Kazakh-language material broadens the cross-linguistic scope of the research and extends discussion of mediated child-directed discourse beyond predominantly Indo-European contexts. The findings suggest that universal CDS principles may be realized within a typologically different linguistic system shaped by agglutinative structure, rhythmic repetition, and melodic traditions embedded in national culture. From a theoretical perspective, the study addresses an important gap in contemporary ontolinguistic research by offering an integrated linguistic description of animated discourse from a comparative-cultural perspective. Unlike studies focused

primarily on the psychological or educational effects of media content, the present research demonstrates that the structural organization of animated speech itself constitutes a legitimate object of independent linguistic inquiry.

The qualitative nature of the research defines its limitations. The study focused on structural description and interpretative analysis rather than experimental measurement of developmental outcomes. Future research may therefore benefit from corpus-based quantitative methods, instrumental acoustic analysis of prosodic features, and longitudinal studies examining the interaction between mediated and natural linguistic environments. Overall, children's animation can be understood as a systematically organized form of mediated linguistic input whose effectiveness depends less on explicit instructional content than on the patterned organization of syntax, vocabulary, and rhythm. By approaching animation not merely as entertainment but as a structured form of mediated discourse, this study expands the theoretical framework of language acquisition research and refines our understanding of how culturally organized linguistic input contributes to early language perception. Animation does not merely imitate early speech patterns; it restructures them within a culturally mediated communicative system.

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**Балалар анимациясындағы балаларға бағытталған медиа дискурстың тілдік ұйымдасуы:
онтолингвистикалық талдау**

Андатпа. Мақалада балалар анимациясы онтолингвистика аясында медиаланған тілдік кірістің құрылымдалған түрі ретінде қарастырылады. Қазіргі зерттеулер анимациялық медианың көбіне психологиялық және педагогикалық әсерлеріне назар аударғанымен, анимациялық дискурстың ішкі лингвистикалық ұйымдасуы жеткілікті деңгейде зерттелмеген. Зерттеудің мақсаты – әртүрлі мәдени және тілдік ортадағы анимациялық дискурстың балаларға бағытталған сөйлеудің (Child-Directed Speech, CDS, ББС) негізгі белгілерін қалайша қайта өндіретінін синтаксистік, лексикалық және просодиялық деңгейде анықтау. Зерттеуде сапалы дискурстық талдау, контент талдау және салыстырмалы просодиялық бақылау әдістері қолданылды. Зерттеу материалы ретінде әртүрлі тілдік және мәдени кеңістікті білдіретін үш анимациялық сериал алынды: «Bing» (Ұлыбритания), «Маша мен аю» (Ресей) және «Күшік пен Пай-пай» (Қазақстан). Әр сериалдан бес эпизод таңдалып, негізгі диалогтік фрагменттер синтаксистік, лексикалық, прагматикалық және просодиялық параметрлер бойынша қолмен транскрипцияланып, кодталды.

Нәтижелер балалар анимациясының ерте тілдік кіріске тән әмбебап сипаттарды – құрылымдық ықшамдылықты, лексикалық қайталамалылықты және айқын просодиялық ұйымдасуды – жүйелі түрде қайта өндіретінін көрсетеді. Сонымен бірге бұл белгілер әртүрлі тілдік ортада өзіндік сипатта жүзеге асады: британдық модель синтаксистік болжамдылық пен эмоционалдық реттеуге негізделсе, ресейлік модель экспрессивтік динамика мен морфологиялық ойын элементтерін алға шығарады; ал қазақ моделі ауызша фольклор дәстүрімен сабақтас ырғақтық қайталамалылық пен әуезді құрылымға сүйеніп, қазақ тіліндегі сөйлеу онтогенезінің сипатталған кезеңдерімен үйлеседі.

Зерттеу балалар анимациясының ББС қағидаларын бейнелей отырып, оларды мәдени тұрғыдан айқындалған коммуникативтік модельдерге бейімдейтін құрылымдалған медиаланған тілдік орта ретінде қызмет ететінін көрсетеді. Қазақ тіліндегі материалды енгізу арқылы жұмыс негізінен үндіеуропалық тілдермен шектеліп келген кросс-лингвистикалық зерттеулер аясын кеңейтіп, медиаланған балаларға бағытталған дискурсты дербес лингвистикалық зерттеу нысаны ретінде теориялық тұрғыдан түсіндіруге үлес қосады.

Кілт сөздер: онтолингвистика, балаларға бағытталған сөйлеу, медиа дискурс, сөйлеу онтогенезі, балалар анимациясы, просодия, кросс-лингвистикалық талдау.

**Медиированный детоориентированный дискурс в детской анимации:
сравнительное онтолингвистическое исследование**

Аннотация. В статье детская анимация рассматривается как структурированная форма медиированного языкового ввода в рамках онтолингвистики. Несмотря на то что современные исследования анимационных медиа преимущественно сосредоточены на психологических и образовательных эффектах, внутренняя лингвистическая организация анимационного дискурса остается недостаточно изученной. Цель исследования заключается в выявлении синтаксических, лексических и просодических особенностей анимационного дискурса, воспроизводящих ключевые свойства детоориентированной речи (Child-Directed Speech, CDS; далее – ДОР) в различных культурных и языковых контекстах. В исследовании применяются качественный дискурс-анализ, контент-анализ и сравнительное просодическое наблюдение. Материалом исследования послужили три анимационных сериала, представляющих различные языковые и культурные среды: «Bing» (Великобритания), «Маша и медведь» (Россия) и «Күшік пен Пай-пай» (Казахстан). В работе анализируются синтаксические, лексические и просодические особенности анимационной речи и оценивается их соотнесенность с ключевыми свойствами ДОР.

Результаты показывают, что детская анимация систематически воспроизводит универсальные характеристики раннего языкового ввода, включая структурную упрощенность, лексическую

повторяемость и выраженную просодическую организацию. В то же время данные признаки реализуются по-разному в различных языковых средах: британская модель акцентирует синтаксическую предсказуемость и эмоциональную регуляцию; российская модель характеризуется экспрессивной динамикой и морфологической игрой; казахская модель интегрирует ритмическую повторяемость и мелодическую структуру, восходящие к устной фольклорной традиции и соотносимые с описанными этапами речевого онтогенеза казахского языка.

Исследование показывает, что детская анимация функционирует как структурированная медиализованная языковая среда, отражающая принципы ДОР и одновременно адаптирующая их к культурно специфическим коммуникативным моделям. Включение казахского языкового материала расширяет кросс-лингвистическое обсуждение за пределы преимущественно индоевропейских контекстов и способствует теоретическому осмыслению медиализованного детоориентированного дискурса как самостоятельного объекта лингвистического анализа.

Ключевые слова: онтолингвистика, детоориентированная речь, медиа дискурс, речевой онтогенез, детская анимация, просодия, кросс-лингвистический анализ.

Information about the authors

Abdykadyrova A.Z. – The Corresponding Author, PhD Doctoral Student, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, e-mail: abdy.ainura@gmail.com, Kazakhstan, Almaty.

Tymbolova A.O. – Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor, Al-Farabi Kazakh National University, e-mail: tymbolova@mail.ru, Kazakhstan, Almaty.

Amangeldiyeva G.A. – PhD, Acting Associate Professor of T. Jurgenov Kazakh National Academy of Arts, e-mail: gulmiraamangeldiyeva2@gmail.com, Kazakhstan, Almaty.

Авторлар туралы мәлімет

Абдыкадырова А.З. – корреспондент-автор, PhD докторант, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, e-mail: abdy.ainura@gmail.com, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.

Тымболова А.О. – филология ғылымдарының докторы, профессор, Әл-Фараби атындағы Қазақ ұлттық университеті, e-mail: tymbolova@mail.ru, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.

Амангелдиева Г.А. – PhD, Т. Жүргенов атындағы Қазақ ұлттық өнер академиясының доценті м.а., e-mail: gulmiraamangeldiyeva2@gmail.com, Қазақстан, Алматы қ.

Сведения об авторах

Абдыкадырова А.З. – автор-корреспондент, PhD докторант, Казахский национальный университет имени Аль-Фараби, e-mail: abdy.ainura@gmail.com, Казахстан, г. Алматы.

Тымболова А.О. – доктор филологических наук, профессор, Казахский национальный университет имени Аль-Фараби, e-mail: tymbolova@mail.ru, Казахстан, г. Алматы.

Амангелдиева Г.А. – PhD, и.о. доцента Казахской национальной академии искусств имени Т. Жургенова, e-mail: gulmiraamangeldiyeva2@gmail.com, Казахстан, г. Алматы.