

The Traditional Patterns of Addressing a Toddler as a Projection of Childhood Image

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Abstract—The article deals with a cross-cultural analysis of traditional patterns of addressing a toddler that are used by the adults and their influence on the way the children name themselves. The problem is considered in the context of the psychological image of childhood that has historically developed in the society and determines the dominant system of the adults' attitudes towards the child as an object of action or a subject of interaction. The subject-object approach that is characteristic of Russian parents is based on patriarchal traditions and contributes to formation of paternalistic attitudes. The subject-subject approach that is typical of Western culture fosters child's own activity and appeals to his sense of personal responsibility for the consequences of his actions. Each system of interaction is fixed in traditions, customs, social and cultural representations and manifested in the behavior of adults dealing with children. The article presents the data of an empirical study, a participant observation and a natural experiment. It is shown that the implementation of both models of parental behavior is accompanied with crises of child development. The clash of two cultural patterns of interaction with a child in a bilingual family environment may cause more difficulties associated with the crisis period of personality development.

Keywords—*toddlers; self-awareness; addressing a toddler; childhood image; cultural tradition; developmental crisis*

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the essential features of the post-industrial society is the intensification of migration processes due to global transformations of job market [1] [2]. Looking for a job, people of working age, mostly young, move to other cities and even countries. This causes an increasing number of international marriages that combine cultural traditions of different nations. Children born in such families learn the languages of their parents as well as those of the country where they live. Each language carries particular cultural codes, reflects the mentality of the nation and determines the pattern of parents' interaction with a child. However, the

peculiarities of children's mental development in the culturally heterogeneous family environment have been little studied so far.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In psychology, the development of self-awareness in the early childhood is well-studied and described as the process of child's self-distinction from the world of objects and other people. The formation of the psychological "I" is closely connected with the emergence of speech that fundamentally changes the social situation of development. Denoting himself, the objects of the surrounding world and the actions with them by words, the toddler gradually becomes aware of his own desires, goals and motives. The toddler who begins to speak usually calls himself in the third person or by name. To the end of the third year of life, the toddler stops using third-person pronouns or his name when talking about himself, the pronoun "I" appears and stabilizes in his speech, which, according to researchers, indicates the emergence of the first forms of self-awareness [3] [4] [5]. This period of toddler's development is associated with a crisis of his relationships with adults, characterized by conflicts and active resistance to parents' requirements. By opposing himself to other people, the child realizes his selfhood more distinctly and forces the adults to change the style of relationships that has established in the first years of his life.

However, an unexpected observation made us revert to this problem that seems to be studied so well. A boy (2 years 3 months old) who lives in the USA and is brought up in a bilingual family calls himself in the third person, by name, when he speaks Russian, and refers to himself only in the first person never using the third person when he speaks English. Although he uses two different ways of self-designation simultaneously, he doesn't mix them when switching from one language to another. Therefore, the emergence of the first person in toddler's speech may not be

associated with the achievement of the development level where self-awareness arises.

Some authors also note that toddler calls himself as adults call him, and do not associate the appearance of the pronoun "I" with the development of self-awareness [6] [7] [8].

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What determines the way adults address a toddler?

What underlies the parental behavior patterns that cause differences in the process of toddler's mental development?

IV. PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study is to prove that the form of self-designation used by a toddler is determined by the cultural tradition of addressing young children that is transmitted by an adult native speaker of a particular language.

V. RESEARCH METHODS

- A survey which 48 mothers from Russia and 34 mothers and 3 fathers from the United States with children aged 1.5 — 3.5 years participated in. The parents were offered a questionnaire that we had developed; it consists of 3 scales that let us find out how children usually call themselves, how their parents address them and how the parents call

themselves talking to their children. Each scale includes six samples of statements presented in the first, second and third person. (We should note that linguistically first- and second-person pronouns referring to the participants of the situation are opposed to the third-person ones referring to those who are not involved in communication.) The respondents were asked to select and mark the statement format they usually use when communicating with their children. It was an anonymous survey conducted online; the respondents' statements were processed using the methods of content analysis and descriptive statistics (Student's t-test).

- Conversations with the parents who participated in the survey, as well as with kindergarten teachers from Germany (20 people), in order to interpret the psychological sense of the pattern they usually use to address toddlers.
- Participant observation of the dynamics of the mental development of a toddler from a bilingual family and a natural experiment involving a toddler from a Russian family.

VI. FINDINGS

The data concerning the features of parent-toddler spoken interaction are presented in "Table I".

TABLE I. THE USE OF THE FIRST AND SECOND PERSON IN THE INTERACTION BETWEEN ADULTS AND TODDLERS (AS A PERCENTAGE OF THE TOTAL AMOUNT OF ANSWERS ON EACH SCALE)

Scales (first- and second-person addressing)	Russia	United States	Difference (t-test)
Toddler talks about himself	32.4	73.9	p≤0,001
Adult addresses toddler	30.1	78.4	p≤0,001
Adult talks about himself	37.8	82.7	p≤0,001

The data in the table show that the respondents of both samples use pronouns of all the persons communicating with their children, but it is clear that the Russian mothers prefer third-person pronouns or the child's name while the American parents rather choose the first- and second-person pronouns. Accordingly, the Russian toddlers call themselves mainly by name while the American ones actively use the pronoun "I".

We consider the speech patterns of parents' communication with toddlers as a projection of their idea of child's place in the family and childhood as a sociocultural phenomenon. What is a toddler for them — an object of action, which is spoken about, or a subject of interaction, which is spoken to as an equal? Such significant differences in how Russian and American parents mark the distribution of family roles — from patriarchal hierarchy to democratic egalitarianism — confirm our assumption about the cultural determination of toddlers' self-designation. In the Russian scholarly literature there are many extracts from parents' diaries that illustrate the peculiarities of both adults' speech addressed to a toddler and 2–3-year-old children's phrases about themselves: "Lyalya will eat and go to bed. — No,

Lyalya doesn't want to sleep!" "Where is Kiryusha? — Here he is, Kiryusha!", "Give it to Petya!", "Petya wants!", "The girl has a doll like Vika's", "Borya is a barber" [9] [10]. Meanwhile, the examples of two-year-old children's phrases about themselves cited by the American researchers of the early childhood indicate that toddlers actively use the first-person pronouns: "I'll sit down", "I want cookies", "my toy" [11].

Talking to the mothers who took part in our survey we found out what they thought of how the form of addressing the child influences the development of his personality. The Russian mothers explained that they addressed their toddlers in the third person because it was a sort of tradition ("everybody says so"); some of them also feared that the child wouldn't learn his name. The American mothers, on the contrary, were surprised to see the third-person options in the questionnaire, they emphasized that the child's personality was very important for them and he could understand that he was addressed ("He's not stupid, how can I talk to him like that?")

Apparently, the answers of our respondents to a large extent rationalize their verbal behavior in communication with toddlers. The traditional ways of interacting with children, established in a particular culture, are used unconsciously, so the direct question about why they address their child by name or in the second person became a sort of a "sense challenge" that allows people to realize the motives of their actions [12] [13].

Sometimes a particular form of addressing a child can be an implementation of a pedagogical idea. 20 kindergarten teachers from Germany took part in our study, and we offered them to fill in the scale of the questionnaire dealing with the form that the adult uses to address a toddler. We chose only one scale because that group of respondents participated in the survey as professionals. Overall the teachers made 60 choices, and only 6.7% of them belonged to the model of addressing a child in the third person. During the conversation the teachers explained that they consciously called toddlers in the second person in order to form a responsible attitude towards their actions.

The hypothesis was also confirmed in the course of a natural experiment that had been conducted by one of the authors of this article with her son from the age of six months till the age of two years. All the family members agreed to talk to the boy using the first- and second-person pronouns (I, you, we) and call him by name only when addressing him directly. By the time of the speech emergence, that is, by the age of 2, the boy confidently used the pronoun "I" and never referred to himself in the third person. However, when he started kindergarten, he encountered the addressing pattern established in the Russian culture, and the structures containing not only his first name, but also surname and even gender appeared in his speech. At the same time, he continues to use the pronoun "I", especially in stressful situations. This fact evidences that the first-person form is instable in the speech of the toddler who is raised in the Russian cultural tradition. We assume that it'll become stable during the fourth year of his life, that is, after the three-years-crisis.

We should also note that the child from a bilingual family who we observed never mixed the first and the third person within the same language, although objectively he referred to himself in two different ways, too: in English he called himself "I", in Russian he used his name. By the age of four, the third-person form had almost disappeared from his Russian speech, replaced by a stable "I". At the same time the toddler's behavior changed significantly: he became more obedient, calm, friendly, and the manifestations of negativism and stubbornness noticeably subsided.

The results of the study have confirmed our hypothesis that the form of toddler's self-designation is determined by a cultural tradition. Communicating with the child, his adult relatives use the behavior patterns that they have adopted since their own childhood. As our observation showed, the use of such traditional forms didn't depend on the gender of the parent: the father addressed the toddler in the way typical of Russian culture, while the mother talked to the boy in the

Western manner, and both forms were used by the toddler depending on the language he was speaking.

By the age of three, almost all toddlers start to use the pronoun "I" consistently, which is due to the very course of child's mental development: he becomes more independent, grows able for basic self-care and full-fledged partnership, the nature of the activities done together with adults changes. In the Russian culture, this transition is accompanied by a crisis of relationships with adults — the so-called three-years-crisis. It is no accident that the crises of child development are studied most thoroughly in the Russian psychology. The attitude towards children that is characteristic of our culture puts them into the position of an object of the action and doesn't allow the adults start treating the child as a partner when it becomes necessary. Only the upbringing problems faced by the parents of three-year-old children force them to reconsider their position "over the child" and adopt more democratic models of child-parent relationships. The three-years-crisis can be viewed as the process when toddler overcomes subject-object relationships with adults, that are based on patriarchal traditions and have outlived their potential, and turns into a subject of interaction.

The children who are brought up in the culture of subject-subject relationships experience a period of stubbornness, willfulness and negativism, too, but a bit earlier, around the age of 2. In the English-language psychological and pedagogical literature this period is usually called "terrible twos". The researchers associate it with the fact that toddler isn't prepared for independence offered to him: he wants to break away from an adult but is afraid to do it [14] [15] [16] [17].

Thus, we see that in the Russian culture the parents often establish subject-subject relationships with the child too late, while in the Western tradition they are ahead of their own capabilities and the needs of the child. Both situations are difficult for the toddler, both lead to crisis manifestations in his behavior. As our observation of the bilingual toddler has shown, due to the clash of different approaches to interaction with the child he underwent two development crises — both "terrible twos" and "I'll do it myself". The period of willfulness, capriciousness and negativism began after the age of two and ended only by four, at the time when the stable pronoun "I" appeared in his speech in both languages.

The establishment of subject-object relationships with a toddler is characteristic of Russian culture, and this tradition is rooted in the patriarchal customs of our country. The head of the family or community bore responsibility for the life and well-being of all its members, but eliminated their independence. Such distribution of social roles ensured survival under the difficult conditions caused by a number of factors: economic, social, demographic, climatic, geographic ones.

Despite all the socioeconomic transformations experienced by Russian people in different historical periods, modern Russian family still retains the features of Eastern Christian patriarchy. Such a family is characterized by the dominance of one of the spouses and the subordinate position of the children; traditional patriarchy is often

replaced by "matriarchy", that is, psychological and financial primacy of women [18] [19] [20].

By contrast, subject-subject relationships are built on the basis of parents' interest in child's personality, respect for his rights and needs, recognition of his individuality and equality not only in desires, but also in responsibility to others and himself. Subject-subject relationships are typical of self-regulating societies, where the responsibility for survival and well-being lies with the citizens, and the only function of the government is to carry out the overall management of the society evolution [21].

The adults' perception of a young child as an object of action or a subject of interaction is a projection of the historically conditioned psychological image of childhood, which is reflected not only in the style of parental behavior, but also in the folk art and children's literature, thus establishing itself as a sociocultural norm. For example, the characters of the poems by one of the most popular authors of books for toddlers Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss) most often address the reader (the listener) in the second person. Russian books for toddlers contain a lot of sayings and funny phrases that adults use dealing with the children, but these phrases are not addressed to the child, they rather tell something about him.

VII. CONCLUSION

The study has confirmed our suggestion that the toddler's choice of first-person or third-person pronouns to designate himself is determined by the cultural tradition of intrafamily interaction and is not directly related to the emergence of self-awareness. The adults' perception of a toddler as an object of action or a subject of interaction is a projection of the psychological image of childhood historically established in the society and reflects the dominant system of the adults' attitudes towards the children. This system of relationships is fixed in traditions, customs, social and cultural representations and manifested in the behavior of adults dealing with children.

The establishment of subject-object (inherently paternalistic) relationships with a small child is characteristic of Russian culture, and this tradition is rooted in the patriarchal customs of our country. The subject-subject relationships, typical of Western culture, foster child's own activity and appeal to his sense of personal responsibility for the consequences of his actions.

However, the implementation of both systems of relationships between adults and toddlers is accompanied by crisis manifestations in children's behavior. In the Russian cultural tradition, parents often establish subject-subject relationships with their toddler too late, which causes the "three-years-crisis", while in the Western culture they are ahead of their own capabilities and child's needs, which provokes the manifestations of the so-called "terrible twos". The clash of two cultural patterns of interaction with a child in a bilingual family environment may cause more difficulties associated with the crisis period of personality development.

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