

MATERNITY AND TIME: THE PERCEPTION OF TIME FROM MOTHERS DURING THE FIRST YEAR AFTER BIRTH ACCORDING TO TITLES IN BULGARIAN INTERNET DISCUSSION FORUM

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Abstract. The aim of the paper is to present the perception of time of the women who have babies less than 12 months old through observation on some titles of so-called annual topics in the largest Bulgarian forum platform – bg-mamma. Using qualitative and quantitative methods, the study includes the investigation of time indicators preferred by the forum users in the excerpted 50 threads. Attention is drawn to the presence of subjective/objective time markers as well as of linear/cyclic ones. Furthermore, excerpted words and phrases indicating time have been studied having in mind that time is often metaphorically represented. The investigation also reveals the most important events in the mother's life as expressed by the titles of the topics. It seems to the researcher that in the first year of maternity women perceive the time in a very specific way – they put the baby growth as a measure and the objective time marks only disclose the changing baby world. It is also interesting that some traditional holidays become very important as well as the rituals connected to them.

Keywords: *time, maternity, perception, metaphor, space, computer-mediated communication, linear time*

Тодорова Біляна. Материнство і час: сприйняття часу матерями під час першого року після народження відповідно до назв на болгарському інтернет-форумі.

Анотація. Мета статті – представити сприйняття категорії часу жінками, які мають немовлят менше року, за допомогою досліджень назв так званих «Щорічних тем» на найбільшій платформі болгарських форумів – bg-mamma. На основі якісного та кількісного аналізу дослідження охопило 50 індикаторів часу, яким віддають перевагу користувачі зазначених форумів. Автор звертає увагу на наявність об'єктивних та суб'єктивних часових маркерів, а також таких, які представляють час лінійно або циклічно. Ідеться також про вибір мовних одиниць, що є маркерами часу, зважаючи на те, що часто час представлено метафорично. На основі дослідженого матеріалу простежено найважливіші події в житті матері за назвами тем. Результати засвідчили, що протягом першого року материнства жінки сприймають час дуже специфічно – як етапи росту їхньої дитини. Об'єктивні маркери часу розкривають світ дитини, яка розвивається. Цікавим видається також сприйняття традиційних свят та ритуалів, що набувають у зв'язку з цим особливого значення.

Ключові слова: *час, материнство, сприйняття, простір, комунікація за посередництвом комп'ютера, лінійний час*

1. Introduction

“What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is. If I wish to explain it to him who asks, I do not know.” These famous Saint Augustine's words have been cited many times from various people, and they reveal the complexity of the notion in question (Savova, 2007:6; Berestnev, 2011:45; Vukanović, Grmuša, 2009:1, etc.).

It is well known that time is a basic category of our culture. I will not pay attention to the various theories about the nature of time, as they are numerous, and demonstrate its importance to humans, their world, and life. Time is a topic of interest for humanists and natural scientists.

The linguistic expression of time verbalizes the people's idea of it. From an anthropological point of view, we could speak of *cyclic and linear time*, and this is a kind of primary division. They represent two contrasting logics regarding the understanding the time (Hassard 1989). Linear time is usually conceived as an even unidirectional and measurable flow of empty “moments” (Mathisen, 2012:95). The repetition of events is at the base of the cycle time reception.

However, they both have something in common as traditional time cyclicity is a result only of the repeatability of the seasons. Oesterdiekhoff mentions that “It is only under certain aspects right to say that the modern time is linear, whereas the traditional time is cyclical.” (Oesterdiekhoff, 2009:159) Even in the cyclic time perception, the human has the idea of before and after.

In fact, there is an essential distinction between them: „While linear time points to the future, traditional cyclic time was mainly oriented towards past events and their reoccurrences“ (Mathisen, 2012: 96). So cyclic time is crucial even today – every celebration, every anniversary is based on the idea of cyclicity. Nonetheless, the notion of linear time as moving forward is fundamental to our culture. In such a point of view, the process is irreversible.

Another important dichotomy is *objective time – subjective time*. As Elias (1986, in Cini, 2014:3) said:

Time is not the reproduction of an objectively existing flux, nor a form of common experience of all men, antecedent to any other experience. . . The word “time” is, so to say, the symbol of a relationship created by a group of human beings, endowed with a given biological capacity of remembering and synthesizing, between two or more series of happenings, one of which is standardized as a frame of reference or a unit of measure of the other one.

The linear and the cyclic time have something in common – they are social, and therefore external; and the same time they are out of humans as subjects, although everyone takes time through their own perspective. “The life of the individual is regulated by their personal social time whose events correspond to the significant events in their life (marriage, injury, childbirth, etc.) (Savova, 2007:25).

As one may see, the variety of meanings of the notion *time* are connected to different situations. Every linguistic use is related to special events - the perception of time is closely related to the situation as well as to the speaker's point of view; and „each person must reconcile objective time, cultural time, and personal time to function in the society.“ (Doble, 2014:10)

Therefore, every human being is concerned by all these time(lines/cycles): our personal events are correlated in time with the objective time markers like important events, holidays, parts of the day (of the year), dates, etc. (*My brother was born two days before Christmas, She came in summer*, etc.)

One of the most important events in one’s personal life is childbirth. Although it happens once or twice in the lifetime now (or because of that) it changes the

family world. It is clear that during the pregnancy and the first year after childbirth the woman's daily routine changes dramatically. The hypothesis is that the change in the lifestyle influences new mothers' perception of time.

2. Methods

As I was interested in the perception of time of women who have babies less than 12 months old, I collected, and I observed the titles of some so-called "annual topics" in the largest Bulgarian forum platform - *bg-mamma*. These *topics* form communities of mothers who have had children born in the same month of the same year. Every *topic* is a thread of 50 pages. When it is over, a new one is started. Each topic has its own title (usually rhymed) which points out the critical moments of the life of the community.

The investigation aims to study the expressions of time in some titles to reveal the concept of time in the mother's language. For that reason, qualitative and quantitative research methods are combined. The specific objectives include the titles' excerption as well as the expression's division by some distinctive features.

Some author's observations on the topic have already been published (Todorova 2014a, Todorova 2014b). In this particular study the research is deepened, and also some statistical data are included. The use of quantitative data helps researchers discover the correct interpretation and leads to reasonable conclusions.

3. The study

The excerpted titles for the study are taken from three annual *bg-mamma* topics, written by mothers whose babies were born in February, July and October 2011. They have finished 50 (28, 9 and 13) threads of 50 pages per year. As one may see, the activity in them is not equal - it depends on communities, on the topics and the alternatives (Facebook, Skype, etc.)

The names of titles in question reveal the particular sets of values, practices, and beliefs, held by mothers who are writing in the so-called *annual topics*. As already mentioned, the baby's age plays the organizing role in them. Every title indicates the month of baby's birth. The special noun with diminutive suffix *-че* (*-če*) is used to nominate the baby who was born in the month in question: *майче* (*'majče'* – *baby born in May*), *юнче* (*'junče'* – *baby born in June*), *юлче* (*'julče'* – *baby born in July*), *октомвријче* (*'oktomvrijče'* – *baby born in October*), etc. The use of these special nominations in the titles is user-friendly because people can easily understand which topic to join. The titles are usually structured as compound sentences or complex ones. They are often formed by rhymed and rhythmical phrases (clauses). Users choose the title by voting.

4. Results and Discussion

The excerpted titles have the following features:

- When the objective time marker is mentioned in the title, it usually denotes a part of the traditional holiday cycle (a.) or represents the season's change (b.). 27 out of all 50 titles, or 54% of them include such a time marker (season's name, month's name; holiday's name, etc.):

(a). **Коледата** приближава, а ФЕВРУАРЧЕ все по-палаво става! (*'Christmas is coming, February baby gets even naughtier!'*); Октомврийчетата сладки чакат коледните изненадки! (*'The sweet October babies are waiting for the Christmas surprises!'*); **Коледата** на вратата чука, октоврийче сладко вкъщи гука! (*'Christmas is knocking at the door; the October baby is cutely cooing at home!'*); Октомврийската дружина посреица **Новата година** и мечтае за приятна **зима**! (*'October group welcomed the New Year, and it is dreaming now for the nice winter!'*); В **месеца на любовта**, октомврийчето с усмивки сладки пълни нашите сърца! (*'In the month of love (i.e., February) the October baby fills our hearts with their sweet smiles!'*); За **Великден** с червеното яйце, ще мацнем октомврийското чело! (*'At Easter time we will daub the October baby's forehead with red egg!'*), etc.

(b.). **Пролетта** е тука вече, за слънчеви разходки е готово февруарското човече! (*'Spring is already here, the February little child is ready for walking in the sun!'*); Отминават **пролетните** дъждове, октомврийче тръгва на море! (*'The spring rainfalls are left behind, the October baby is going to the sea!'*); **Лято** е и слънце грее, а ФЕВРУАРЧЕТО с глас се смее. (*'It's summer, and the sun is shining, the FEBRUARY BABY is laughing loudly.'*); **Лятото** е тука вече, февруарчетата разсъблече! (*'Summer is already here, it undressed the February babies!'*); **Есента** дойде и отминава, а талисманчето **Мартина** на годинка става! (*'Autumn has come and goes, the mascot Martina makes a year!'*); С топло яке и обувки, ФЕВРУАРСКИТЕ деца ще преборят **есента**! (*'In a warm coat and boots FEBRUARY KIDS will get the better of the autumn!'*); **Зима** иде, вятър вее-вкъщи ОКТОВРИЙЧЕ гука и се смее! (*'Winter is coming, the wind is blowing; the OCTOBER baby is cooing and laughing at home!'*). Октомврийските слънца очакват с нетърпение **пролетта**! (*'The October suns are looking forward to the spring!'*); **Август** месец тече ли тече, а октоврийче мечтае за синьо море. (*'In peak August time the October baby is dreaming of the blue sea.'*); **Последен месец с "p" отмина**, **лято** чака октоврийската дружина! (*'Last month with "r" is gone, the October group is waiting for the summer!'*), etc.

- In some cases (in 5 titles, or 10 %) the season or the period is not verbalized. They become evident because of their attributes or typical features.

Ябълки и круши сладък сок наляха, **ЮЛЧЕТАТА** още на млекце стояха! (*'Apples and pears are ripe with sweet juices, the JULY BABIES were still milk drinking!'*); Октомврийското дете на морето дупе ще пече! (*'The October child will sunbathe their bottom on the beach!'*); Октомврийските пъргави деца **събират кестени и шарени листа**. (*'The October lively children collect chestnuts and patterned leaves.'*); **На море или балкан**, февруарчетата на почивка ще се юрнат знам! (*'February babies will go on vacation to the sea or to the mountains, this I know!'*); **Дядо Коледа** пристига с шейната, за **ЮЛЧЕТО** подаръци ще има **под елхата**! (*'Santa Claus comes on the sled; there are presents under the Christmas tree for the JULY BABY!'*).

- As previously mentioned, titles usually are compound or complex sentences. They often contain two parallel phrases or clauses (32 out of 50 titles, or 64%). The first refers to the objective events as a situational framework presenting the baby's life:

Отминават пролетните дъждове, октомврийче тръгва на море! ('The spring rainfalls are left behind, the October baby is going to the sea!'); *Пролетта е тука вече, за слънчеви разходки е готово февруарското човече!* ('Spring is already here, the February little child is ready for walking in the sun!'); *Лято е и слънце грее, а ФЕВРУАРЧЕТО с глас се смее.* ('It's summer and the sun is shining, the FEBRUARY BABY is laughing loudly. '); *Лятото е тука вече, февруарчетата разсъблече!* ('Summer is already here, it undressed the February babies!'); *Есента дойде и отминава, а талисманчето мартина на годинка става!* ('Autumn has come and goes, and the mascot Martina makes a year!'); *Коледата приближава, а ФЕВРУАРЧЕ все по-палаво става!* ('Christmas is coming, and February baby gets even naughtier!'), etc.

In such titles there is no confrontation between external and internal time, they are interdependent and in correlation. The objective time is expressed by PP (preposition and noun) or by NP, which may function as an adjunct as well as a subject or as an object of the clause.

- Admittedly, in some of the titles the phrases expressing external reality and the phrases describing the baby's life may be assumed as contradicted:

Ябълки и круши сладък сок наляха, ЮЛЧЕТАТА още на млекце стояха! ('Apples and pears are ripe with sweet juices, (but) the JULY BABIES were still drinking milk.').

- The contradiction may be spatial, because of the dichotomy *in-out*:

Зима иде, вятър вее – вкъщи ОКТОМВРИЙЧЕ гука и се смее! ('Winter is coming, the wind is blowing; the OCTOBER BABY is cooing and laughing at home!'); *Коледата на вратата чука, октомврийче сладко вкъщи гука!* ('Christmas is knocking at the door; the October baby is cutely cooing at home!').

- Occasionally, the external and the internal events are interdependent and expressed by causal relations:

Дядо Коледа пристига с шейната, за ЮЛЧЕТО подаръци ще има под елхата! ('Santa Claus arrives on the sled, there are presents under the Christmas tree for the JULY BABY!'); *Пролетта е тука вече, за слънчеви разходки е готово февруарското човече!* ('Spring is already here, the February little child is ready for sun walks!'); *Лятото е тука вече, февруарчетата разсъблече!* ('Summer is already here, it undressed the February babies!'), etc.

- Some of the time phrases in titles (8 out of 50 titles, or 16%) are expressed by spatial metaphors (Lakoff 1993: 387, Haspelmath 1997:145, etc.): *есента дойде и отминава* 'autumn has come and is passing by'; *зима иде* 'winter comes'; *отминават пролетните дъждове* 'the spring rainfalls are left behind', etc.

- The traditional holidays (Christmas, New Year, Baba Marta¹, etc.) are significant events in the investigated titles – in 10 out of 50 titles (20%) such a holiday is mentioned. Children love family holidays because of the rituals, gifts, etc.

Октомврийчетата сладки чакат коледните изненадки! ('The sweet October babies are waiting for the Christmas surprises!'); *Дядо Коледа пристига*

¹ *Baba Marta Day* is celebrated on the first of March. On this day people give each other martenitsa/ martenichka (diminutive) – a gift made of red- and white-colored threads.

с шейната, за ЮЛЧЕТО подаръци ще има под елхата! ('*Santa Claus comes on the sled; there are presents under the Christmas tree for the July baby!*');

Коледа на вратата чука, октомврийче сладко вкъщи гука! ('*Christmas is knocking at the door; the October baby is cutely cooing at home!*'); *Мартенички бели и червени връзваме на октомврийчета засмени.* ('*We tie martenichki white and red to the laughing October babies.*'); *Октомврийската дружина посреща Новата година и мечтае за приятна зима!* ('*October group welcomed the New Year and dreams for the nice winter!*'), etc.

The rituals have lost much of their symbolic value today, and they continue being in use because of the children. At the same time, as we may see, mothers play a key role in making these holidays a part of the family life – at such an age scarcely a child would show any preferences on which holiday to celebrate. The tendency of mothers preparing and adapting their lives to children's one has numerous manifestations: speech simplification (Eftimova, 2011:212), the use of rhymed structures, the interest in handcrafting, toy crafting, appliques, health food, cooking, etc. All these exhibit the social power of maternity as a process. It is a widespread opinion that motherhood is a lost time in a woman's professional life, a period of loss of creativity and imagination. I consider it quite oversimplified. It is hardly strange that women are very active Internet users. Even their online activity shows their social energy. They write; they make dolls or jewelry; they work from home; they have an active political or social position, etc. I think this phenomenon has to be studied in more detail.

Although titles usually refer to the traditional holidays/festivals or seasons/other parts of the natural cycle, the scheme presented by them is a linear one. Holidays or events are the objective basis showing the baby's growth.

- The linear time presentation may also be seen in 5 other titles (10%):

Преди година – две чертички, а днес – октомврийски блеснали очички! ('*A year ago we had two lines, today – the October baby's glowing eyes!*'); *Ето ЮЛСКАТА дружина стана на половин година. Искат вече да пълзят и самички да седят.* ('*The JULY group has become a half of year old. They want to crawl and sit by themselves.*'), etc.

• In some cases, the objective time indicator is missing (15 out of 50, or 30%). Only the achievements of the baby are presented or the "symptoms" of their growing:

Февруарско бебче към играчките посяга, иска вече то да сяда! ('*The February baby is reaching for the toys, they want to sit by themselves.*'); *ФЕВРУАРски дребосъци вече правят маймунджелъци!* ('*February little boys are already making trouble!*'); *ЮЛЧЕТО гука, усмивки раздава и с помощ от мама света опознава!* ('*The July baby is cooing, smiling and with mom's help they get to know the world!*'), etc.

The matter of what the baby can do at a given age is extremely important and is one of the main topics in the forum communication.

I may conclude that childbirth is a starting point of new mother chronology and this is especially valid for the first year after childbirth. At that time every baby's sound, smile, gesture looks like a great achievement. Therefore the pragmatic

choice of some linguistic features depends on the communicator's feelings and intentions (Stalker, 1989:182, Vicente, 2002, Jarbou, 2017:71, etc.)

- Only one title presents the mother's figure as an actor. It is an interesting fact that the preferred pronoun use is 3 p sing instead of 1 p sing, showing a kind of objectification of the mother's personality:

ЮЛЧЕТО гука, усмивки раздава и с помощ от мама света опознава! ('The July baby is cooing, smiling and with mom's help they get to know the world.')

Such a use is a part of the more general tendency of putting the baby at the center of the family world; the tendency of identification with the baby and of using the so-called baby talk. As a consequence, speech simplification strategies are used not only when mothers talk to their babies but also in other situations. It is, therefore, an overall attitude towards the baby expressed by language as well.

- Another title group presents *solidarity* – a feature, which is also very typical for maternity:

За Мими и малкия Мони отправяме молби милиони ('We say countless prayers for Mimi and the little Moni'); *Към Богородица отправяме молба за бързото оздравяване на Ванката на Амидала!* ('We pray to Virgin Mary for the speedy recovery of Amidala's son Vankata!'); *Да се помолим от сърце, Иван с мама у дома здрав да се прибере!* ('Let's pray from the heart for healthy Ivan and mamma's coming home!'); *Стига вече мъки и тегоби, стискаме палци за Мартина и Боби!* ('Enough of all those grieves and sorrows, let's keep our fingers crossed for Martina and Bobby!'); *Всички се молим от сърце сили на Надето и здраве на Борянка Бог да даде!* ('We are all praying from the heart that God give strength to Nadeto and health to Boryanka!'), etc.

The last group is formed by 8 out of 50 titles or 16 %. The objective time reference becomes clear from the verb tense as well as from the hypertext – the topic's interface contains the time and date information for each shared thread or opinion. As expected, Present¹ is the most frequent tense used in the title corpus.

5. Conclusions

The hypothesis that the lifestyle change caused by childbirth influences new mothers' perception of time is confirmed by the data. All excerpted items including objective time markers present the children's growth. More than half of the titles introduce words and phrases which denote seasons or traditional holidays. These expressions are linked with the cyclic time perspective. In other titles, the season or the period is not verbalized, although it is represented by its attributes or typical features. All these objective time markers and their attributes present events connected to babies and their life.

Most of the titles are compound or complex sentences which contain two parallel phrases or clauses. In some cases, the first phrase/clause refers to the objective events as a situational framework presenting the baby's life. Sometimes the related parts may be assumed as contradicting. The contradiction may be spatial

¹ In Bulgarian there is only one Present tense.

or presented by spatial metaphors. These uses confirm the assumption that time and space are closely related.

As it has been seen, the achievements of the baby are mentioned in a large number of titles. In some cases, the objective time marker is missing, and the kids' acquisitions indicate the linear time perspective.

There is a group of titles without time phrases. They present solidarity or serve as prayers. The tendency of presenting group solidarity during the maternity leave period has been investigated before (Todorova, 2010) and these observations just reaffirm it. However, even in such a situation, the objective time reference is not ambiguous because of the verb tense use and because of the hypertext.

The investigation may continue with expanding the source data. It is also interesting if the tendency remains the same in the next years of the child's life and what kind of changes of women's perception of time and life maternity causes. However, these are topics for further research.

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