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# SUBMISSIVENESS: FROM PSYCHOLOGY OF BEHAVIOUR TO LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATION

The article explores submissiveness as one of the key models of human behaviour and social interaction, affecting both the individual and the collective level of functioning an individual. Submissiveness is interpreted as an inherently human trait, as well as a set of social defensive strategies that indicate a person's refusing power, status, autonomy or control. The article is aimed at identifying and analyzing the linguistic means by which submissiveness is expressed, as well as studying the influence of psychological and social factors on the formation of submissive behaviour in the context of interpersonal interaction.

In a psychological context, a submissive personality is viewed as a complex result of the interaction between various factors, including ingenuity traits, social environment, and the individual's personal experience. The formation of a submissive personality occurs under the influence of professional, social and cultural factors that reflect deeply rooted social norms and values. Submissive behaviour has been found to be typical of societies where there is a clear hierarchy, or where traditional gender roles are maintained.

The analyzed sources of illustrative material demonstrate how submissiveness is realized through a variety of lexical, syntactic and stylistic means, in particular rhetorical questions, soft imperatives, negative constructions, etc. The context of uncertainty, external pressure, emotional tension affects the speech behaviour of the characters, forcing them to adapt to the situation by avoiding confrontation, reducing the categoricity of utterances and creating a trusting tone. All these elements together form a multifaceted image of a submissive personality, who acts within the limits imposed by both internal feelings and external circumstances.

Keywords: submissiveness, submissive behaviour, humility, lexical, syntactic, and stylistic means.

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## СУБМІСИВНІСТЬ: ВІД ПСИХОЛОГІЇ ПОВЕДІНКИ ДО ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОЇ РЕПРЕЗЕНТАЦІЇ

У статті досліджується субмісивність як одна з ключових моделей людської поведінки і соціальної взаємодії, що впливає як на індивідуальний, так і на колективний рівень функціонування особистості. Субмісивність трактується як інгерентно властива людині риса, а також як набір соціальних захисних стратегій, які вказують на те, що особа відмовляється від влади, статусу, автономії чи контролю. Мета статті — виявлення та аналіз лінгвістичних засобів, за допомогою яких виражається субмісивність, а також вивчення впливу психологічних і соціальних чинників на формування субмісивної поведінки в контексті міжособистісної взаємодії.

У психологічному контексті субмісивна особистість розглядається як складний результат взаємодії між різними факторами, включаючи інгерентні риси, соціальне оточення та особистий досвід індивіда. Доведено, що формування субмісивної особистості відбувається під впливом професійних, соціальних та культурних чинників, що відображають глибоко вкорінені суспільні норми та цінності. Субмісивна поведінка є типовою для соціумів, де існує чітка ієрархія, або де підтримуються традиційні гендерні ролі.

Проаналізовані джерела ілюстративного матеріалу демонструють, як субмісивність реалізується через різноманітні лексичні, синтаксичні та стилістичні засоби, зокрема риторичні запитання, м'які імперативи, негативні конструкції тощо. Контекст невизначеності, зовнішнього тиску, емоційної напруги впливає на мовну поведінку персонажів, змушуючи їх адаптуватися до ситуації через уникнення конфронтації, зниження категоричності висловлювань і створення довірливого тону. Усі ці елементи спільно формують багатогранний образ субмісивної особистості, яка діє в рамках обмежень, накладених як внутрішніми почуттями, так і зовнішніми обставинами.

Ключові слова: субмісивність, субмісивна поведінка, покора, лексичні, синтаксичні і стилістичні засоби.

**Introduction.** Submissiveness is a concept that denotes a model of human behavior involving subordination, obedience, and compliance towards another person or a group of people. Although the modern model of society, especially in the West, is largely imagined as egalitarian, it often reflects asymmetrical relationships that require submission, dependence, non-assertiveness, and other forms of submissive behavior and its linguistic expression. Therefore, it becomes an object of study not only for psychologists but also for researchers in related fields, including linguists.

Analysis of recent research and publications. The concept of submissiveness has mostly fallen within the focus of psychologists. For example, Moskovitz, D. S., studies models of interpersonal traits that traditionally include two independent dimensions, one of which concerns dominance and the other – submissiveness (Moskowitz, 2005). Given the multifaceted and complex nature of submissive behavior, Paul Gilbert explores it in various dimensions: he places submissive behavior within the context of social defense strategies and analyzes its functions; outlines variations of submissive behavior from the perspective of avoidance, escape, defeat, infantile attractiveness, and affiliative submission; and investigates the role of submissive behavior in psychopathology, with a particular emphasis on depression (Gilbert, 2000). Other research psychologists, Clegg K. A. and Moskovitz D. S., in their work "Submissiveness." examine the manifestations of submissive behavior in interpersonal interactions and their impact on communication (Clegg K., Moskowitz, 2017).

Linguistic analysis of submissiveness has so far been only fragmentary. V. Ya. Mizetska, in the article "Verbalization of the concept WAR in the discourse of English-language media," touches upon concepts related to power and submission in mass media discourse (Mizetska, 2023). N. Tatsenko, in her monograph, analyzes the linguistic features of expressing emotions related to submission in a political context (Tatsenko, 2017). Lexico-semantic features of the discourse of the English-speaking submissive personality have also been analyzed (Odarchuk, Mironchuk, 2024).

Thus, as we can see, a complete picture of submissiveness does not yet exist. Therefore, the study of discursive practices associated with submissiveness will allow us not only to analyze the linguistic means of expressing social roles but also to understand more deeply the psychological and social underpinnings of submissive individuals' behavior. This is the **relevance** of the research.

The **aim** of the article is to identify and analyze the linguistic means by which submissiveness is expressed, as well as to study the influence of psychological and social factors on the formation of submissive behavior in the context of interpersonal interaction.

The outline of the main research material. Submissiveness can be interpreted as an inherently human trait, a model of interpersonal behavior, and also as a set of social defense strategies that indicate that a person renounces power, status, autonomy, or control. The function of obedience often lies in shaping social interaction by leveling or reducing conflicts and promoting reconciliation (OALD, 2000).

Historically, the roots of this concept trace back to the psychoanalytic theories of Sigmund Freud, who first explored the individual's tendency towards submission, viewing it through the lens of unconscious mechanisms that govern human behavior. In his works, Freud drew attention to how the specifics of upbringing and parental attitudes lay the foundation for basic models of submission, shaping the child's consciousness and psyche in such a way that the child learns to obey authority figures and also develops the need to be protected and supported.

In the mid-20th century, submissiveness as a personality trait underwent deeper investigation in sociology and psychology, notably through the works of Erich Fromm. He broadened the understanding of submissiveness, considering it a defense mechanism that arises in response to external social pressure, feelings of anxiety, and fear. Fromm analyzed how, in socially unstable conditions, a person might feel the need to submit, striving to avoid responsibility for their own decisions. Fromm also emphasized the role of the fear of losing social support, which contributes to the formation of dependence and submissiveness. Thus, submissive behavior became a tool for adaptation to the social environment, providing a certain level of psychological comfort and stability. In contemporary research, submissiveness is examined through the lens of the interaction between individual psychological characteristics and the influence of social circumstances. The concept gains relevance in the analysis of social relationships, professional activities, and also in the context of linguistic communication, where submissive behavioral patterns can manifest as obedience, willingness to compromise, and acceptance of another's opinion as dominant. This approach allows for the study of submissiveness not only as a static trait but also as a dynamic process that is constantly shaped by social, cultural, and economic factors that contribute to its manifestation.

Paul Gilbert notes that the origins of submissive behavior can be traced back to reptiles, and all social animals, including humans, are capable of expressing it. However, there are many varieties of submissive behavior, some of which are affiliative and others are not. From an evolutionary perspective, submissiveness can be understood as a complex set of social behaviors that mitigate aggression within a species and promote social cohesion and harmony (Gilbert, 2000).

In a psychological context, a submissive personality is considered a complex outcome of the interaction between various factors, including personal traits, social environment, and the individual's personal experience. This phenomenon cannot be explained unequivocally, as it is shaped by the influence of many elements acting simultaneously. A. B. Mudryk, in her fundamental work "Psychology of Dependent Behavior," provides an in-depth analysis of the nature and manifestations of submissive behavior. The researcher notes that submissive personalities are often characterized by low self-esteem, which is expressed in a feeling of their own inferiority and insecurity in their abilities. This insecurity gives rise to an increased level of anxiety, which in turn leads to a fear of making independent decisions, complicating the possibility of independent existence and functioning in the social environment.

A. B. Mudryk emphasizes that submissive personalities often face deep internal conflicts arising from self-doubt and a constant need for approval from others. This need is a key aspect of their psychology, as it forms a dependence on the environment that can become the basis for serious mental health problems. Internal conflicts caused by self-doubt can lead to the development of conditions such as chronic anxiety, social isolation, and even depression. This, in turn, can lead to a further deterioration of mental state and limit a person's opportunities to achieve their life goals and realize their potential (Mudryk, 2022).

The social environment plays a key role in the formation of a submissive personality, especially socialization within the family context, which determines basic values, behavioral style, and attitude towards the surrounding world. Family relationships, particularly the specifics of upbringing, have a decisive influence on the development of submissive traits in an individual's character. An authoritarian parenting style, in which one parent or another adult plays a dominant role, creates an atmosphere where the child grows up with a feeling of dependence on a stronger figure. This approach forms in the individual a habit of compliance and submission, which can further become entrenched as stable personality traits. As a result of authoritarian upbringing, where initiative or independence is not encouraged, the child becomes accustomed to avoiding responsibility and largely depends on the opinions of others. This can develop into a constant need for external approval and a fear of making independent decisions, which subsequently

manifests in adulthood as submissive behavior. Such behavior becomes an integral part of the overall psychological profile of the personality, influencing all aspects of their life: in the sphere of interpersonal relationships, a submissive personality often takes a passive position; in professional activities, they may avoid career advancement, fearing responsibility; and in personal decisions, they seek external support (Mudryk, 2022: 123–158].

The analysis of submissive behavior in the context of professional activity is detailed in the work of Tasneem, Mehwish, and Sadia titled "Supervisor undermining and submissive behavior: Shame resilience theory perspective." In this study, the authors comprehensively explore various aspects of submissive behavior in work relationships, paying particular attention to how this behavior can have a destructive impact on the professional and personal lives of subordinates. The researchers note that employees prone to submissiveness often become targets for supervisors with authoritarian or manipulative traits, who use their position to deliberately lower the self-esteem of subordinates. They emphasize that such supervisors can undermine subordinates' sense of competence, creating in them a feeling of insecurity in their own strengths and abilities, which gradually becomes an obstacle to their professional development (Tasneem et al., 2020).

This leads to the emergence of a persistent fear of management, which not only deters employees from openly expressing their opinions but also limits their willingness to offer new ideas or initiate positive changes in the workplace. Over time, this fear and self-doubt only intensify, creating significant psychological pressure on the employee. This environment of heightened stress becomes the basis for the development of professional burnout. An important conclusion of the authors is the assertion that such submissive behavior effectively blocks professional self-expression and reinforces employees' dependence on the supervisor. The researchers also point out that submissive employees, seeking to avoid conflict, often compromise by agreeing to additional tasks and responsibilities even when their work capacity is significantly overloaded. These employees demonstrate a low ability to defend their boundaries and make decisions in their own favor, which increases their vulnerability to external pressure and manipulation (Tasneem et al., 2020).

Cultural peculiarities play an extremely important role in the formation and manifestation of submissive behavior in the professional environment. This study examines the specific influences of cultural context on the perception and attitude towards submissiveness. It is known that in collectivist cultures, where the orientation towards preserving social harmony and avoiding conflicts dominates, submissiveness is often seen as a valuable trait that serves as the foundation for harmonious interpersonal interactions. In many Asian societies, for example, Japanese or Korean, submissive behavior is not only a form of politeness but also an expression of deep respect for elders and authoritative figures, which contributes to strengthening team spirit and maintaining hierarchical relationships. This, in turn, can ensure a more stable and productive work climate. At the same time, such behavior in collectivist cultures can also have negative consequences.

The analysis of submissive behavior in the context of professional activity is an important aspect of research into modern working relationships, which is detailed in the work of Tasneem, Mehwish, and Sadia, "Supervisor undermining and submissive behavior: Shame resilience theory perspective." The authors pay particular attention to the relationships between supervisors and subordinates, focusing on the role of submissive behavior in these interactions. In their work, they examine the factors that influence the formation of submissiveness, including the personal traits of employees, as well as the social and organizational context, which can either amplify or, conversely, reduce the manifestations of submissiveness. Research shows that submissive employees often become objects of covert exploitation by management, who may use their compliance and dedication to achieve their own goals, without considering the rights and needs of subordinates. This creates a situation where employees feel a strong moral obligation to fulfill demands, even if they contradict their personal beliefs or pose a threat to their mental and physical health. In such conditions, employees can find themselves trapped in professional self-sacrifice, leading to moral and physical exhaustion. Given these risks, it is important to develop comprehensive strategies to protect the rights of submissive employees, which will minimize the threat of their exploitation. Among such measures may be programs for developing assertiveness and self-defense skills, which will help increase self-esteem, form the ability to more confidently defend their own interests, and communicate more effectively with management. This, in turn, will contribute to increasing their resilience to manipulation and improving working conditions, which is an important step towards creating a balanced and fair work environment (Tasneem et al., 2020: 191–203).

The research conducted by De Boni and his colleagues, presented in their scientific paper titled "Automatically predicting dominant and submissive personality types from text," is an extremely important contribution to the development of automatic text analysis technologies. In this study, the authors draw attention to the significance of recognizing submissive traits in text messages for a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The researchers emphasize that studying submissive and dominant personality traits using automated systems is critically important in the modern world, where digital communication plays a leading role. The researchers developed special algorithms that allow for the effective analysis of textual data to identify characteristics of a submissive personality within them. These algorithms are based on complex natural language processing models that take into account various aspects of the text, such as sentence structure, word choice, intonation, and so on. Thanks to this, the system can accurately identify the presence of submissive or dominant tendencies in the text, allowing for a deeper and more accurate understanding of the nature of communication. Such technologies are particularly important in the context of modern digital communication, where text messages often become the primary means of interaction between people. Given that more and more communication takes place through digital platforms – social networks, email, or other forms of online communication – the need for such tools becomes even more relevant. Algorithms capable of detecting submissive personality traits in texts can be used in various contexts, including professional, educational, and social spheres. They can help employers, educators, and social workers better understand their interlocutors and adapt interaction strategies accordingly.

The application of these algorithms can also become an indispensable tool for researchers engaged in the study of communication processes and interpersonal relationships. In professional fields such as psychology, sociology, or human resource management, the ability to automatically analyze texts for submissive or dominant traits can significantly increase the efficiency of specialists' work. In the educational context, these technologies can be used to better understand the behavior of students or pupils, which, in turn, will allow for the adaptation of teaching methods and approaches. In the social sphere, they can contribute to the identification and support of vulnerable individuals who require a special approach or assistance (De Boni et al., 2016: 120–125).

Taking into account all aspects of submissive behavior, we will present its manifestations in the form of a table:

Table 1

## Characteristics of a Submissive Personality from Different Aspects

Aspect	Characteristics
Psychological	Low self-esteem, anxiety, fear of independent decisions, dependence on the approval of others.
Social	Influence of authoritarian upbringing, formation of dependent behavior under the pressure of dominant individuals or management.
Professional	Fear of management, reluctance to express ideas, increased risk of professional burnout.
Cultural	In collectivist cultures, submissiveness is a positive trait, but it often leads to exploitation.
Communicative	Insecurity in communication, avoidance of conflicts, dependence on others' reactions to one's own statements.
Mental state	Due to constant insecurity, there is a risk of developing chronic anxiety, social isolation, and depression.
Digital	Possibility of identifying submissive tendencies in texts using natural language processing algorithms.

Modern linguistics is increasingly turning to the study of the submissive personality, which is part of an interdisciplinary approach to the study of human behavior and communication. Linguistic analysis of submissive personalities focuses on their speech strategies and discursive practices, which help to identify the specific linguistic patterns of such individuals. This research is important for a better understanding of their role in communication processes, as well as for the development of methods that will promote the development of assertive communication, increase confidence, and effective interaction. To this end, we analyzed several sources.

The book "The Submissive Wife: Breaking the Strong Arm of Jezebel" deeply analyzes the behavioral characteristics of women who adopt a submissive role in social and interpersonal contexts. The author uses a comprehensive approach to defining submissiveness, emphasizing both its psychological and social aspects. In the statement "Passiveness is a culture and not just a state of mind" (Buckner, 2016: 36), the emphasis is placed on the concept of culture as a system of norms and behavioral patterns that shapes personality and determines its place in society. The term "culture" in this context takes on special significance, as it is considered an environment that reinforces submissive behavior through social expectations, role models, and limitations. The lexeme "passiveness" is interpreted not only as a character trait but also as a multi-layered phenomenon that affects an individual's interaction with the environment. This approach allows us to see submissiveness not only as an individual choice but as a result of social influence with deep roots in traditions.

The phrase "She sees herself as unworthy of love and affection" (Buckner, 2016: 36) introduces into the text the semantics of low self-esteem, which acts as a fundamental characteristic of a submissive personality. The use of the lexemes "unworthy," "love," and "affection" creates an image of deep internal conflict based on a feeling of one's own inadequacy. This forms a dependence on external approval, which is reinforced by social expectations and the influence of partners who occupy a dominant position. The author consciously uses such vocabulary to emphasize the psychological vulnerability of women who adopt a submissive role.

Additionally, in the text, the author emphasizes the use of negatively charged vocabulary to describe the external factors that influence the formation of submissiveness. For example, the expression "Jezebel-infected men" (Buckner, 2016: 36) reflects the idea of an external negative influence that reinforces women's dependence. The lexeme "infected" here serves as a metaphor to describe a destructive influence, viewed as a moral and social contagion. This reinforces the notion of subjugation as a process imposed on women from the outside, emphasizing their limited capacity for independence due to external pressure. The use of words like "wicked", "manipulative", and "psychopaths" (Buckner, 2016: 37) creates in the text an image of external evil that not only suppresses but also shapes a certain social order to which women are forced to submit. The lexeme "wicked" underscores the moral condemnation of the negative influence, while "manipulative" focuses on the hidden mechanisms of control that shape submissive behavior. The lexeme "psychopaths" in this context is used to create an image of pathological models of dominance that impose subordination. Such vocabulary creates a dual effect: on the one hand, it emphasizes the powerlessness of women in these conditions, and on the other hand, it highlights the strength of external factors that create systems of dependence.

Syntactic and stylistic means of expressing submissiveness in English-language discourse encompass a wide range of linguistic strategies that help the author create multifaceted images of subordinate characters, their interaction with other participants in communication, and also reflect the complexity of their emotional sphere.

In P. S. Goldner's work "Red-Hot Cold Call Selling," the creation of a submissive tone depends on carefully considered linguistic strategies, among which conditional constructions, polite formulas, and soft ways of expressing requests play a key role. The statement: "I was wondering if you could tell me who would be responsible for purchasing sales training in your organization" (Goldner, 2006: 182) vividly demonstrates a linguistic style oriented towards avoiding categorical statements. The phrase "I was wondering" creates a tone of uncertainty and signals the speaker's dependence on the interlocutor's willingness to provide information. The conditional mood ("could tell me") reinforces this dependence, shifting the emphasis to the possibility or permission from the other person, instead of a direct demand. This lexical construction not only emphasizes politeness but also creates space for maintaining harmony in communication. Another example is the statement "Sally, you've been most helpful. Thank you." (ibid.), in which the expression of gratitude is amplified by the epithet "most helpful". In this context, the epithet functions to enhance the positive attitude towards the interlocutor, which is characteristic of submissive discourse. The use of such emotionally charged words helps to establish a balance in the interaction, where the speaker emphasizes their gratitude, reducing any tension or possibility of conflict. This demonstrates how language becomes a tool for maintaining social harmony and dependence on the interlocutor.

The dialogues in the book are often filled with short replies that serve as means of clarification or expressing polite questions. For example, the phrases "Why not?" or "Sure. What can I do to help?" (Goldner, 2006: 184) create a sense of availability and willingness to adapt to the needs of the other party. Structurally, such replies emphasize submissiveness through the use of a direct but soft tone that conveys a readiness to cooperate. This also demonstrates a linguistic strategy of avoiding any pressure or coercion.

It is also important to note that the syntactic features of the text, particularly the use of conditional constructions and transitional forms, serve as means of conveying the speaker's submissive status. For example, formulations such as "I was hoping you could..." or "Would you mind if I asked..." often serve to relieve tension and maintain harmonious interaction. Such phrases signal not only the speaker's willingness to cooperate but also their caution in imposing their own opinion or request. This indicates a deeply thought-out discourse in which the speaker is oriented towards preserving goodwill and avoiding direct confrontation. Overall, the analysis of the text confirms that the author uses linguistic strategies aimed at softening the tone, emphasizing gratitude, and demonstrating a willingness to cooperate. Such techniques not only convey submissiveness in communication but also serve as means of building effective communication oriented towards avoiding conflicts and maintaining positive social connections. The syntactic and lexical means analyzed in the text show how language can be a tool that shapes the context of submissiveness and maintains balance in interpersonal relationships.

In Lisa Jackson's novel "You Don't Want to Know" (Jackson, 2012), syntactic and stylistic devices are key in creating an atmosphere of emotional tension, vulnerability, and the characters' dependence on each other. Pauses and repetitions occupy a special place in the novel and are important syntactic and stylistic elements. For example, the phrase "I came to tell you—" (Jackson, 2012: 52) is interrupted by a pause that carries significant meaning. This syntactic technique, a break in the narrative, reflects the hero's uncertainty, his emotional turmoil, and fear of the interlocutor's reaction. Pauses also create a dramatic effect, giving the reader space to comprehend the unsaid, emphasizing the emotional pressure that prevents the character from finishing their thought. Such pauses are a typical means of expressing submissiveness, as they demonstrate the hero's dependence on the situation and on the other character, the addressee. Short and fragmented replies, such as "He's a little shaky" (ibid.), reinforce the feeling of instability both physically and emotionally. Such fragmentation of speech emphasizes the hero's insecurity and creates an image of a personality that cannot clearly express their thoughts due to their emotional state. Each reply adds to the sense of tension and uncertainty that are characteristic of submissive discourse.

Furthermore, the text abounds with examples of emphatic constructions that amplify the significance of what is said. For instance, in the *statement "I just thought I might look rather foolish"* (Jackson, 2012: 53), the adverb "*just"* serves as a means of diminishing the importance of the expressed thought, while simultaneously highlighting the hero's emotional discomfort. This reflects his desire to avoid direct confrontation and shows how important the interlocutor's opinion is to him. Such a strategy is characteristic of submissive discourse, as it demonstrates a striving to maintain harmony in relationships, even if it requires self-deprecation or devaluation of one's own feelings. Overall, Jackson's novel offers rich material for analyzing the impact of syntactic and stylistic means on creating an atmosphere of emotional vulnerability and submissiveness. Pauses, inversions, rhetorical questions, modal verbs, short fragmented replies, and emphatic constructions are key devices that the author uses to reveal the inner state of the characters. Each of these techniques not only adds emotional coloring to the text but also reveals deep interpersonal connections based on dependence, confusion, and the desire to avoid conflict. All of this forms a multifaceted image of submissiveness as a complex linguistic and psychological phenomenon that reflects the interaction between characters and their context.

Overall, the analysis of syntactic and stylistic means in these literary works shows that they serve as key tools for portraying submissiveness in English-language discourse. Conditional constructions, repetitions, inversion, rhetorical questions, and softened imperatives are used to create images that demonstrate the dependence, emotional vulnerability, and insecurity of the characters. These devices lend depth to the texts, allowing the author to reveal the psychological and social aspects of submissiveness through linguistic forms.

Conclusions and Perspectives of the Research. Thus, submissiveness is a complex phenomenon that includes traits such as dependence, fear, lack of initiative, and insecurity in decision-making. The formation of submissive behavior depends on many factors: personal traits, social environment, and individual experience. Such individuals often have low self-esteem, which gives rise to anxiety and fear of independent actions, which, in turn, limits their opportunities to achieve life goals and worsens their mental state.

The analyzed sources of illustrative material demonstrate how submissiveness is formed through various lexical, syntactic, and stylistic means, including rhetorical questions, soft imperatives, negative constructions, and so on. The context of uncertainty, external pressure, and emotional tension constantly influences the linguistic behavior of the characters, forcing them to adapt to the situation by avoiding confrontation, reducing the categorical nature of their statements, and creating a trusting tone. All these elements together form a multifaceted image of a submissive personality acting within the constraints imposed by both internal feelings and external circumstances. We see the **perspective** of the research in the analysis of the pragmatic features of the discourse of a submissive personality.

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