

Realizing Cultural Component of Worldviews in Languages (Russian and English)

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Abstract – The paper considers the interrelation of culture, worldview and language. The cultural differences are acknowledged from the philosophic point of view and determine/are determined by the worldview. The worldview differences predispose the Russian and English national characters and are reflected in the languages: lexis, grammar and speech practices. Vocabulary as the most vulnerable aspect of language registers the changes first. On the basis of the author's classification of new vocabulary concepts some changes in the Russian worldview and language are treated as a result of the English culture and language influence.

Key words – national worldview; zero concept; quazi-concept; true concept; cultural differences; linguistic differences

I. CULTURAL DIFFERENCES OF LANGUAGES

The connection of culture and language is evident and accepted worldwide. Scientists agree on interdependent evolution of these complex open adaptive systems [4; 7]. It is stated that cultures differ in the habitual use of same generic properties of language, which in turn gives rise to differences in the way the stimulus environment is perceived. These observations provide a first step in understanding the rather complex relationship between language, the cultural differences in language use and perception [6]. In fact, the connection is so sophisticated and subtle that cultural-linguistic correspondence is often unexplainable on the “atomic level”. The more culture and language are researched as a complex, the closer relations between these diverse systems are found.

To all effects and purposes, a historic glimpse from a view of some philosophic researches [1; 13] seems help to explain much. To understand how culture is reflected in language one can rely on the genius of Aristotle who was maybe the first to realize that *the idea* as an image or thought could not exist without *the word*, i.e. *ratio* and *logos* are two sides of a sheet that carries cultural signs. However, ideation and language were divided by the separated ecclesiae in the Middle Ages, thus drawing the cultural vectors of Catholicism and Orthodoxy. This way the former preferred *mentality*, *ratio*, that preconditioned the rationalism of Western European culture; the latter preferred *idea/spirit* (of the church), *logos*, that predetermined the spiritual dominancy (of soul) in culture.

In fact, linguistically it is interesting to dwell on co-occurrences and specific meaning of the above mentioned notions, *mentality* and *spirit*, with one and the same concept, *body*, in the languages, English and Russian, that represent once separated cultures.

The body is not chosen occasionally. On the one hand, this concept bridges two ontologically different systems under discussion, culture and language; evidently, culture is translated from generation to generation with a help of language. On the other hand, it *embodies* a person, a key concept in every culture, who creates shapes and comprises the culture. Linguistically, in English the word *body* makes a collocation with *mind*, like *mind and body*, while in Russian a pair to *body* makes *spirit/soul*. Besides, the English *mentally ill* would sound in Russian as *with ill soul*. Is it because the “Western soul” is located in in the pineal gland [2], but the “Russian soul (*duša*)” is located in the heart? (Moreover, *duša* can travel to heels when a person is much scared!). However, it should be noticed that there is a translational aspect of the problem. The English *mind* doesn't have exact equivalents in French, German or Latin, and the French *âme* (roughly corresponds to the English *mind*) is sometimes translated as *soul* and sometimes as *mind*. Another notice to the point is that the English *mind* used to be clearly linked with emotions, whereas in present-day English emotions are normally linked with *heart*, not with *mind* [7]. Thus, the cultural differences can be discovered in the linguistic implementation.

II. WORLDVIEW AND KEY WORDS

A vivid apprehension of national culture in language is a manner of writing. Michel Foucault describes language as a modified nature, an image of environment [3]. To prove this statement he summarizes different manners of writing: the Hebrews, the Canaanites, the Samaritans, the Chaldeans, the Syrians, the Egyptians, the Carthaginians, the Phoenicians, the Arabs, the Saracens, the Turks, the Persians, the Moors and the Tartars all write from right to left following the course and daily movement of the first heaven; the Greeks, the Georgians, the Maronites, the Serbians, the Jacobites, the Copts, the Poles, the Romans and all the Europeans write from right to left following the course and movement of the second heaven, home of seven planets; the Indians, the Chinese and the Japanese write from top to bottom, in conformity with the

order of nature, which has given men heads at the tops of their bodies and feet at the bottom; the Mexicans write either from bottom to top or else in in spiral lines according to the sun in its annual journey through the Zodiac. This supports the idea of culturally determined worldview and possibility of tracing cultural specific. However, there are two pitfalls on the way of scientific description of culture by a reference to the language. First, it is an ill-founded conclusion about the cultural specific, such as voluntary deductions or/and subjective opinions. Second, it may be a complete refusal to do this kind of research due to insufficient tools of linguistics to provide a soundly-based research of cultural peculiarities of this or that language [6]. Anyway, the idea of culturally determined ideation finds more and more supporters as the national specific features of culture manifested in the national character and traditional behavior find their way in linguistic embodiments.

There are key concepts in every language that play an essential role for the national culture. These Russian key concepts are *volya*, *toska* and *duša* [13]. They explain much about what is called emotionality of the Russian character. The concept *volya* means freedom that is not restricted either by law or interests of another person, so it is impossible to give it a one-word translation because there is no such a notion in the English language. Likely, the Russian key concept *toska* can be conveyed by some shades of meanings of the English words *anguish*, *sorrow*, *yearning*, *depression* and *grief*. Moreover, these three key concepts are closely interrelated: *volya* and *toska* go together as far as the feelings that convey the state of a person who can experience them because she/he has *duša*. Though *duša* seems to be easily translated into English either as *soul* or *heart*, the translated version and the frequency it is used in the Russian fiction or speech, plus its puzzling function denoting a person, produce an odd impression on both English and Russian readers. In fact, the English feel embarrassed because their culture calls for reserve and does not encourage talks about soul; the Russians often feel that this word sounds unnaturally in the English environment. So, *duša*, *toska* and *volya* give much understanding about Russian culture because the collocation and associative fields of the concepts are responsible for a huge range of feelings covering all possible emotions from enjoyment to frustration, sometimes in mix.

As the cultural specific of the English and Russian languages are traced in the key words, they form the national conceptual linguaspheres [5; 13; 14; 16; 18; 19]. On the one hand, the key words bear the features of their national culture because they possess a high nominative density that shows the importance of the concepts for the language and, consequently, play the great role for the culture. For the English language and the Anglo-Saxon culture the key concepts are *home*, *freedom*, *privacy*, *fair play*, *face work*, *reserve*, *gentlemanship*, *heritage*, *humor*, *common sense*, *self*, *challenge*, *efficiency*, *message*, *comfortable life*, etc. They are comparable to the national features of character surveyed in national and cross national evaluation. A general portrait of the Anglo-Saxons describe them as

accurate, honest, sincere, educated, organized and polite (The British) as well as sociable, patriotic, emotional, business-like and self-assured (the Americans) with a great resentment at being overlooked or controlled [5; 18]. On the other hand, most of the key words are abstract notions, so their cultural component is attached to the significatum, the conceptual core. Therefore, they are not easily translated into other languages because it is the cultural component that determines different linguistic articulation of the similar conceptualizations. It means the idea of a key concept can be covered by several words or word combinations in the target language. For example, there are three words in Russian for the English *lie*. The first, *nepravda*, is neutral in usage and generally means *not to the truth*. The second one, *lozh'*, is strongly disapproving about saying a lie. The third one, *vraniyo*, is used for discussing rumors or self-correcting; it has even positive connotation or is at least is loyal to a lie. As far as *the truth*, there are two Russian concepts: *pravda* for civil life issues and *istina* for the divine. As far as the English word *truth*, its meaning has shrunk to its cultural value while its original meaning was transmitted to the word *evidence* in the used-to-be context of truth [14]. So, a distinct elaboration of these moral concepts highlights one of the characteristic features of the Russian culture, so-called "moral passion".

There is a certain connection and even interrelation between the most important key concepts and the national specific characteristics. Moreover, the way the concepts are formed from a lexicon supposes a certain way of thought organization in sentences.

III. WORLDVIEW AND GRAMMAR

It is suggested that language may influence thought during "thinking for speaking" [10; 11]. In this view, we are forced to attend to specific aspects of our experiences and reality by making these aspects grammatically obligatory. Consequently, speakers of different languages are biased to attend to and encode different aspects of their experience while speaking.

Seen from a Western perspective, Russian grammar is quite unusually rich in constructions referring to things that happen to people against their will or irrespective of their will. The first reason of the specificity is due to ontological differences of English (as an example of Western languages) and Russian: the former regards the objective reality from the cause-effect point of view, while the latter implies subjective, impressional or phenomenological worldview. In point of fact, "the-fate" constructions can be traced through all the strata of the Russian language. Some of these constructions specifically reflect a folk philosophy with a kind of "fatalism" and resignation at the core of it [13]. A quite developed system of relevant sentence structure is supported by a strong corpus of fate-inference verbs and adjectives, and on the top of that, a historically transmitted conception of life, the Russian key concept *sud'ba*, that roughly corresponds to *fate*. Frequency data show the importance of this concept for the Russian language: *sud'ba*

181/ 1mln; *fate* 33/1mln [13]. By these linguistic means the Russians communicate about life and develop their attitude toward life. So, the high frequency and elaborated modes of expressing the fate ideation bring the Russian language the feature of irrationality which opposes the Anglo-Saxon rational worldview. In the other words, put it generally, variations in how the person is culturally oriented are likely to imply different constructions of social events reflecting the types of relationships between the person and the social world.

Another point of differences that accompany objective – subjective linguistic worldview lies in the binary opposition of agentivity - nonagentivity. Grammatically, nonagentivity of the Russian language is featured in abundance of impersonal sentences, while in the same situations the subject as a doer of the action is used in English. For example, the English *I am used to living in a big city* and *I like living in a big city* in Russian would sound as **It is used to living in a big city to me* and **It is liked by me living in a big city*. This binary opposition of the languages can also be observed in usage of personal pronouns *I* and *we*. Conforming to the old cultural traditions, the Russians use *we* in many cases that infer the self and, actually, suppose the usage of *I*. Indeed, this phenomenon refers to the community (collectivist) consciousness and is culturally kept in “the collective memory” as a cliché from the Russian tsars’ orders that began with *We, the Tsar of Russia ...* or in the used-to- be popular saying “*I*” is the last letter in the *ABC*. That is why in all communication discourses the Russians feel free to use *we* instead of *I* that is quite confusing for the English speakers. The rational thinking suggests at least two people in case of *we*, and it is absolutely impossible to use *we* when the self is meant. Meanwhile, the capital English *I* is viewed as a criticized highlighting of one’s importance that contradicts the Russian cultural instruction “personal interests go last”. So, there are different linguistic devices that permit different aspects of the very same reality to receive attention. These differences, in turn, give rise to distinctive differences in how the very same reality is perceived. Thus, the pragmatics of the languages reflects the culturally determined language structure.

IV. WORLDVIEW AND LANGUAGE PRAGMATICS

Diverse linguistic researches [13; 14; 15; 16; 18; 19] highlight peculiar typical features as **emotionality**, **moral passion**, **irrationality** and **nonagentivity** that contour the national universum of the Russian language. It has nothing to do with appealing to familiar stereotypes but rather to linguistic evidences of the national specific in various forms. A communication discourse is likely the most graphic platform for observing the cultural specific. It involves not only the language itself, its lexicon and grammar, but also speech etiquette and speech ethics - tacit rules and assumptions governing human conduct which the speakers take for granted because they seem to them to be totally “natural”. It is the national cultural ethics that saturates all

anthropogenic activity and emerges in interaction with other cultures.

The Anglo universe of discourse contains many colors, and many shades. There is “truth”, and there is “lying”, but there are also “white lies”; there is “small talk”, “polite conversation”, “understatement”; there are “compliments” (a far broader and more important category than the Russian one); and there is the whole cultural emphasis on not hurting other people’s feelings. Unlikely, there are no words for “white lies” or “face work” in Russian because the moral passion for seeking the truth has excluded such phenomena from the traditional Russian culture making the Russian universe of discourses either black or white. The Russian national ethics requires sincerity as the main value of relationship. Consequently, in communication sincere truth outweighs respectful/merciful politeness; that is why the Russian manner of speaking is notoriously famous for being straight and categorical. Indeed, there are linguistic routines for highlighting disagreement rather than for playing it down. For example, in Russian there is no saying comparable to *Let's agree to disagree*. Nor is there any set phrase comparable to the English *I couldn't agree more* – a phrase which emphatically stresses agreement. Though, there is no parallel phrase in English emphatically stressing disagreement *I couldn't disagree more* (which is highly significant), one can hear it in a formal discussion from a Russian speaker of English as well as *You are wrong* in English classrooms all over Russia, *You are aged* or *You've gained weight* in a routine conversation without realizing their cultural malapropism. It is needless to say that for the Russian mentality they are quite appropriate. This coincidence of utterance and reality infers a special sign of honest and trustworthy relations, while the care for effect of one's words on other people can often be seen as hypocrisy from the Russian point of view.

No wonder that verbal and physical expression of emotions is an inherent part of Russian culture. Most of them are literally denoted by verbs and accompanied by physical expressiveness like crying, laughing, hugging, slapping on the shoulder and other different gestures and movements. Unlikely, the Anglo-Saxon culture views touching and emotional overstatement as suspicious and disapproving. Emotions in English usually denote a state of a person mostly through adjective and participle constructions as in *Mary is happy/amused*, while the emotional verbs like *fret*, *sulk* or *rejoice* are becoming fewer in Modern English. Indeed, the following functional equivalents show the difference in emotional expression: English - *I'm a bit unwell*; Russian - *I feel terribly: the head is cracking, I'm hardly pulling my legs. In the morning I thought I would never get up* [18]. In addition to verbal expressiveness of the Russian language, there is a non-verbal sign of emotionality of the traditional Russian culture – an exclamation mark at the end of addressing either in formal or informal letter instead of English comma/colon/blank.

Writing and thought organization in different cultures are the most difficult for understanding and learning. It is the rationality/irrationality of English and Russian cultures and

mentalities that totally accounts for the differences. It is the definite structure of an English written passage with a fixed word order in a sentence, the rules for composition/essay writing including linking/signposting words, order of mentioning, etc., that make thoughts clearly organized and determine/are determined by the English-speaking mentality, which in its turn can hardly perceive a voluntary word-order of circumlocutionary, enigmatizing and phenomenological Russian mentality being put in a spoken or written form. A great amount of misunderstandings happen not due to poor language knowledge but rather because of unawareness of the cultural specific in the thought structure.

There is one more culturally specific feature of the English language that does not exist in Russian – a culture of conversational response giving. It is a cultural norm to give a support to a speaker in English conversation, like *Right, Really?, Oh, my gosh!, I see* that is not practiced in Russian. The presence or absence of this cultural specific feature seems relative to independent – interdependent (individual – collective) societies and reflects their agentivity – nonagentivity. So, the norms of politeness in conversation are different. In English it is polite to give responses during a speech of a partner thus showing involvement, while the Russian polite involvement is expressed in a silent attention and eye-contact until the end of a speech when one can respond; “butting-ins” are viewed as disruptive for thought making process of a Russian speaker.

Although there is no direct dependence between culture and language, it is possible to state that various semantic and formal linguistic modes of expressing the selective complex of conceptualization constitute the cultural specific worldview. According to W. von Humboldt, this multifold combination creates the linguistic circle, and it is not static but in a permanent movement of development.

V. CHANGES IN THE RUSSIAN WORLDVIEW AND LANGUAGE

Our linguistic habits are shaped by recurrent cultural patterns of representing, acting, feeling, interpreting and experiencing social events, so language is used in a communicative context with a view to structure the cognitions of an addressee [8; 9; 12]. In case of international communication, cultures and languages experience some influence from their counterparts of other languages, and the process goes intensively as the globalization spreads. Though the “worldview as a reflection of culture changes quicker than the linguasphere, it is the language that directs the changes of worldview” [17, p.37]. As the lexicon is the most vulnerable to changes part of language, the changed vocabulary can be a sign of a changing worldview.

A new word can denote a **zero concept**, a **quazi-concept** or a **true concept**. If a new word is used along with/instead of the “old” word to denote the existed concept, and it does not bring any new meaning to the concept, it is considered a **zero concept**. Likewise, many recent English borrowings are fashionably used in Russian instead of “ordinary” words, e.g. an English calque *security* is used instead of *warding*;

an accustomed *store* is substituted by *boutique*. Zero concepts “litter” the language and produce a negative effect on its users or even irritate them. In contrast to, **quazi-concepts** bring new words to a language together with new phenomena. They are often borrowed as calques out of the language economical principle. This way, the Russian language has been enriched with *computer, printer, internet, deadline, president, manager, dealer, leasing, realtor, coffee-machine*, and many others. Some quazi-concepts have a hard transcribed spelling for the Russian phonetics rules. They sound unnatural and, therefore, are rejected by non-professionals. An interesting exception, *Xerox*, is completely assimilated into the Russian language, so that now not very many Russians realize it is a proper noun. The name *Xerox* has acquired Russian phonetics (‘kserəks), grammatical variety (to xerox, xeroxed, a xerox, a xerocopy) and morphological characteristics as an ability to be used with some prefixes and suffixes. The new phonetic form has produced a relevant spelling as a result of metonymy: the English *Xerox* has become the Russian *ксерокс* [‘kserəks] denoting the copy-machine; amazingly *copy-machine* is used mostly by professionals. So, both zero concepts and quazi-concepts carry out their nominative functions either ineffectively or effectively, but they do not change the worldview.

New words can become **true concepts** if they bear some cultural components that concern aspects of the national worldview. Great deals of English borrowings that have brought some unspecific concepts have dramatically changed the Russian linguasphere since the introduction of market economy. Its rationality has significantly influenced the Russian national worldview.

The new economic conditions in Russia have revived some old pre-Socialist Revolution concepts. The word *market* carries positive connotation now, and a part of its professional content has moved to the common lexis. The almost forgotten word *household* has become widely used in connection with spreading of private real estate.

It is interesting to note that a part of the borrowed English concept *privacy* that is referred to housing or business is quite distinct and tolerable from the Russian worldview point. The other way is about the personal privacy. This part of the concept is quite vague in the Russian culture because it contradicts the basic prescriptions of collectivist society, open-hearted relations and elastic rules of courtesy. That is why the personal privacy in the Anglo-Saxon meaning seems never be adopted by the Russian culture.

Another true concept which has been transforming the Russian national worldview is the borrowing *business*. When it appeared in the Russian language about two decades ago together with new economic realia, it had a strong negative connotation. The positively marked word *entrepreneur* was technically used by professionals, while in the common lexis the meaning of *businessman* was rendered by several equivalents from the criminal lexicon. The reason of such an active antagonism to the concept lies

in its principle of provident money making which had been greatly disapproved in the Russian culture for centuries. The national worldview encouraged a society service that provided a person's living rather than a vulgar profit gaining. Over the years, the concept has assimilated, acquired some nominative density and lost its strong negative connotation, though it still is viewed with a suspect of something "not right". However, the modern Russian society is acquiring new concepts as life is developing in a more rational direction and demanding relevant characteristics.

New concepts influence the lexical semantic level of the traditional content of the Russian notions thus forming a tendency of the concept enlargement. For example, a Russian version for *angel*, which is used in art or educational context, represents the concept *benefactor*. Recently it was broadened with the English calques *sponsor* and *angel*. A "newly-come" *angel* is used in its specific area as a *business angel* showing the Russian business is a part of an international trend. *Sponsor* has a negative connotation in folk mentality because it appeared in Russian at the times of establishing corruptive relations. Despite the intensive efforts of official mass media to repackage it, the moral passion of the Russian worldview cannot accept it as a positive because hidden lucrative relations are damnable in the Russian culture. The same is true as far as the concept *donative*, its traditional manifestation *gift* and the English calque *present*.

Enlargement of a concept at the expense of borrowings does not carry only negative connotation as a rejection of another culture values. Exposure of a human body and sex relations used to be the strictest taboo. Now they are settled to a more liberal attribute that can be seen in the new concepts *nature* and *girl/boy-friend*, for example. Traditionally, the Russian concept *nature* did not include its English lexical component *naturist*. It has been accepted to the Russian language and acquired its original positive (or at least neutral) semantic attitude to the state of nakedness as an opposition to the traditional negatively marked *nudist*. The introduction of the concept *girl/boy-friend* has been unexpectedly welcomed to the Russian language. Now it is considered a successful nominative form, free of ideological hypocrisy, for an unmarried state of family relation. The language itself was not able to create something positive for it because this kind of relations has always been blamed which was reflected in the negative official lexis only. Generally, the Russian worldview is becoming more positive, and an illustration of this can be the phrase *no problem(s)* widely used in both forms, as an English calque and a Russian translation.

VI. CONCLUSION

No doubt that a changed language sends out a message of transformations in the national worldview, and the lexis is on the front line of the process. Some transformations in the lexical meaning of traditional vocabulary and the general tendencies in the borrowed lexis in Russian that are

accompanied by a changed speech pragmatics have exposed the definite trends in the Russian culture. They show that two peculiar features of the Russian national worldview, irrationality and emotionality, remain unchanged or slightly influenced, while two others, moral passion and non-agentivity, are experiencing the influence of the Anglo-Saxon culture. The linguistic shaping of the interpretation and representation of events across cultures eventually affects the mentality process, thus changing the national culture. So, this ongoing process of language, culture and worldview is an intriguing subject for investigation.

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