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The Role of Cultural Prototypes in Discursive and Stylistic Evolution of Media Concept *Oil*

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The article analyses the role of cultural prototypes in the discursive and stylistic formation and development of global symbol of the modern epoch – media concept oil. It is proved that force of world modeling potential of the media concept is caused by power of the informational and interpretative impulses, broadcast its mental prototypes such as gold and coal.

Keywords: media concept, cultural and verbal prototypes, life cycle, world modeling potential.

Point

Today oil is a global symbol of the era, a base of collective social and cultural identity of a modern man, especially in so-called resource extracting countries and regions.

The importance of the oil factor in life of contemporary Russian society and mankind as a whole is so great and controversial that its mass media comprehension takes various multiple semantic directions of a polar axiological valence (Orlova, 2010): from the vector of total oil dependence, which generated a metaphorical cliché “oil hook”, to the vector of idealisation varying from the metaphor of beginning, source of life (cf. Oil, the mother of all reasons; Oil springs of economy) to a transcendental symbol of ontological determinant of all created things (cf. Oil is our everything).

Discursive and stylistic evolution of the concept under consideration gives every reason

to predict its entrenching in culture in the form of stable constant: as the concept actively migrates in non-media discursive spheres, it increases its semantic volume and complexity of axiological architecture intensively. For example, some popular scientific books written in 2009-2010 are devoted to ambiguous and to some extent fatal role of oil in human lives and mankind: “Oil: Precious and Ferocious” by A. Ostalsky, “Cherchez la Oil” by N. Starikova. The image of oil bright and complex appears in the Russian rock-poetry and prose, e.g. “The Eternity Smells Like Oil” by E. Letov, “When Burning Oil Splashes from One Floor to the Other” by B. Grebenshchikov, “When Oil Ends” by Y. Shevchyuk, “Mr. Oil, a Friend” by A. Ilichevsky.

It is obvious that media concepts – semantic dominants, significant for the social consciousness of a certain era – do not appear out of nowhere. Language and culture as two

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fundamental determinants of individual and collective mentality determine the presence of presuppositional matrices – the prototypes, providing a relatively easy entering of media concepts in discursive and cognitive space of a contemporary.

Firstly, it is a **verbal prototype** – a word that existed before its media actualisation in other discourses or even in a journalistic discourse, but in qualitatively different meaning (if not in terms of reference, then in terms of connotations). It is obvious that lexeme *oil* was widely used in scientific context, before adoption by mass media and general speech. Secondly, it is a **cultural prototype** – a cultural generalised sense embodied in different verbal guises in accordance with the requirements of time and historical situation, undergoing in each “reincarnation” certain semantic and axiological transformations.

Example

The media concept *oil* belongs to the category of media concepts with a stable cultural prototype which embodies the universal senses strongly implanted in mass consciousness and providing the bases of social life and activity. There are relatively few such media concepts because of their rather conservative nature: the change of their actual nomination should be preceded by pivotal social and historical events, and the change is also non-discrete, without significant time breaks.

Gold as a cultural prototype of a modern media concept *oil* focuses the semantics of raw material source of economic prosperity. Talking about functioning of the concept *gold* in Russian and the world culture, we can state its extremely high cultural and semantic fullness which goes back to folklore and epic poetry of many ethnicities, including European ones. For example, one of the paragraphs of the thesis by V.I.

Chechetka “The Concept *Man* in Mythological and Poetic World View: Based on the Material of old Germanic Heroic Songs and Legends” is titled “Gold as a symbol of power and might in heroic epics of ancient Germans” (Chechetka, 2005). The author proves that gold was one of a key determinant of the mythological and poetic world view, reflected in the texts of heroic songs and legends of the old Germans.

With all the ambivalence of this sense-image, possessing a great number of ethnospecific and idiostylistic modifications – gold has always been the main attribute of wealth, perceived both by pagan and modern societies rather ambiguously – the leitmotif of different cultures and eras is “the attitude to gold as a symbol of vitality, luck and glory” (Novichkova, 1996, 127); and the idea of sacralisation, initially associated with the cult of the sun, leaves all negative characteristics of the yellow metal to the lower, earthly world, while “the heavenly world is truly golden, sacred and pure» (Novichkova, 1996, 152).

It is interesting that the theme of gold mining, gold as a mineral, apparently, was not relevant for global mythology, ontology and phenomenology of gold, unlike the motive of treasure hunting, reflected both in folklore and literature (e.g. “A tale about treasures is a special wide spread genre of a fairy tale; this theme has been often used by the writers of modern times, for example O. Somov and N. Gogol” (The Encyclopedia of Fairy Tales, 2005, 464)). While the media actualisation of this concept is regularly connected with the periods of so-called “gold rush”, when gold mining became a national obsession.

For example, the analysed cultural symbol occupied a special place in the history of journalism and literature in the USA. It allows us to speak not only of bright ethnic markedness, but also of unique “sovereignty” of the American variant of this universal human concept. The intensive actualisation of the sense-image, caused

by social and historical changes connected with the gold rush phenomenon together with unprecedented social importance of gold as a key political and economical factor in the history of the USA in 19th century, led to the rapid discursive evolution of the concept. Within only one or two decades this media concept went through all life cycle stages: from the stage of mass media formation in a booming American press to the stage of wide spread usage in the culture as a necessary component of a national myth about the American Dream: the idea that working hard every one can achieve prosperity.

Syncretism of journalism and literature, peculiar features of publicistic like writing and documentalism are particular characteristics of American prose (cf. “Many of American writers were primarily journalists ... In many ways, this has left its mark on all of the American literature. The particular interest to fact and document, the mix of documentary and literary features have become characteristic of American literature (Konovalova, 2009, 3). They have had a significant influence on the history of a discursive use of concept *gold*.

For example, the gold rush is vividly depicted in essays and novels by Mark Twain, initially published in newspapers and later united by the author in the collection of sketches “Roughing It” (Suponitskaya, 2004). The minds of millions of Americans of that time were fascinated by the numerous “stories of success” of Californian gold-seekers, who “are the masters of their destiny, seeking luck and happiness” (Gruzdeva, 2006). Apparently, at that time there happened stabilisation and enculturation of associative “welding” of the motive of *gold* into the ideological structure of a myth about the American Dream – “one of the most important components of the American mentality, culture, social and political life, the myth deeply rooted in the mass consciousness, that predetermined

the perception of the world by Americans” (Konovalova, 2009, 3).

Gradually the given associative-semantic correlation has become an ethno-cultural stereotype, still circulating in the world media, including Russian. See the description of California, so-called Golden State – the concentrated chronotope of the American dream: With the discovery of gold there in 1848, the California Gold Rush brought 300,000 people into the state, transforming it into the embodiment of the American Dream (Russian Business, 2008, <http://www.rb.ru/topstory/society/2008/05/20/103942.html>); But there are other factors which define California as the gold standard of the proverbial American Dream: the Hollywood stars, and many other rich and well-known people live there; surfing, yachts, suntanned slim girls and athletic young men are there on the California beaches; the pools under the palm trees, small cozy Spanish-style towns, good roads and a wonderful climate – the summer is not hot and the winter not cold; the living there is quiet, comfortable and interesting; the most advanced fashion and the cutting-edge technologies are there. People from all over America and the world have been always rushing to California (Russian News, 2009, <http://russiannews.ru/second/28109>).

As you can see, cultural semantics of the prototype, stemming from mythology and folklore, has served as a platform for emergence and development, first, of national media concept, which then transformed into a media concept with wider discursive and geographical coverage. During its further development within mass culture *gold* – a mineral obtained by hard work and literally a source of success, wealth, fame and power – metaphorised and became a symbol of American dream came true, the achievement of the gold standard of living and the Golden State-like lifestyle. However media

saturation of a modern frame of golden life is far from mythological and poetic ideas about gold as a “transformation of sun light” and “an attribute-mediator between people and the sacred world” (Novichkova, 1996, 140).

To live in a postindustrial society in accordance with the golden standard means to live like Hollywood stars and other famous and rich people. The attributes of the golden lifestyle have also changed, it was reflected in the use of “fashionable adjectives” in media texts (the term introduced by M.A. Krongauz), accumulating the semantics of fashion, prestige, social success (see the above-mentioned examples: suntanned, slim, athletic, cozy, advanced, cutting-edge, etc).

However, both the ideal of the American Dream and gold, as its material equivalent, gradually acquire the senses of disappointment and skeptical doubts not only in American but also in the world discourse of comprehension and assessment of “the world’s most powerful country, the country that defines the ways of international development”, according to George Soros (Soros, 2003). For example, the thesis by O. Cortes “The California Gold Rush is the Purest Expression of the American Dream in History”, is devoted to the Latin American variant of disappointment with the American Dream (Cortes, 2008).

In modern Russian collective consciousness the fetishisation of America is akin to fetishisation of gold and fanatic worship of gold. “For native speakers of Russian, America is undoubtedly the concept. America is not only the name of a country (by the way, there is no such country), it is not only the name of a continent (there is no such continent, too), first of all it is a “cultural-mental-language” formation, symbolizing prosperity, the Evil Empire, wealth, advanced technologies, the number one enemy, the ultimate dream for an ordinary Russian, the most just country in the

world, etc. And Finland? It is only a beautiful northern country and a neighbour. That is all” (Gruzberg, 2002).

In Russian-speaking press one of the most frequent epithets of the idiom “the American Dream”, including the context of gold symbolism, is an adjective *notorious* (rus. *preslovuti* “пресловутый”), an old Church Slavonic word, that transformed its emotional content, and according to V.V. Vinogradov, “revived in the language of publicistic literature of the second half of the 19th century”. This word still bears an ironical and contemptuous connotation with sharply negative pejorative effect, i.e. “well-known for some bad or unfavourable quality, deed, ill-famed” (Vinogradov, 1994): the golden standard of notorious American dream (Russian news, 2009, <http://russianews.ru/second/28109>); do not bite the hand that feeds you, the notorious American dream is based on this principle (Radio Azattyk, 2010, http://rus.azattyq.org/content/nursultan_nazarbaev_anniversary/2021042.html).

Thus, rapidly developing in the American and the world fiction and nonfiction literature variant of interpretation of the cultural universal has spawned a stereotype, serving as one of the most powerful driving forces of mass information activities, due to its involvement in global processes of the national self-identification. In addition, the analysis of semantic evolution of the concept *gold* admits the special role of economical media concepts, raw material concepts in particular, in formation of the ideological structure of national or regional identity and formation of the national or regional idea.

A separate study may be devoted to the issue, whether the image of *coal* – currently a locally marked media concept in coal-mining regions, e.g. in Kuzbass – an ideological symbol of economic stability for a person living in the period of the first five-year plans in the Soviet

Union and a direct historical predecessor of modern neomythologeme *oil*.

For example, a philologist M. Epstein, describing archetypical light- and god-hating forerunners of the Soviet ideology, describes the issue of coal in the Soviet literature as a messianic one (Epstein, 2006). Indeed, as gold became the standard and a measure of the national myth about the American Dream, coal became a key ideologeme of the Soviet era, to be more precise, a semantic impulse for structuring of new ideological myths with natural inherited trajectory of development, described by N.A. Kupina in her monograph “Totalitarian Language”. The trajectory varies from “reduction, replacement of transformations of constant semantic components of ideology on the level of concept” and then “creation of artificial ideologemes” (Kupina, 1995, 15) to semantic diversification of the same ideologemes in mass speech practice and verbal creativity.

Probably, the raising of status of coal to the status of measure of social welfare was determined not only by its increased economical significance, as a result of industrialisation, but also by its higher, in comparison to gold, supply. Besides, coal-mining, unlike gold-mining, associated more with luck of a gold digger, rather than with his diligence, was linked directly with intensity of labour and with inexhaustibility of human efforts. The vivid example of this in the so-called Stakhanov movement named after Aleksey Stakhanov who had mined 102 tons of coal, 14,5 times the norm. In the Soviet period coal-mining acquires heroic features and a miner becomes “the most archetypical and glorified figure of the Soviet working class pantheon» (Epstein, 2006).

As it is known, the peculiar semantic crystallisation of ideologeme occurs when an ideologeme is included in precedent texts, first of all slogans and mottos. For example, the sense

with maximum intensity in the structure of the ideologeme reaches its peak of activity when it is used as a part of an ironical phrase “Give the coal to the country!” (rus. *daesh strane uglia* “Даешь стране угля”) (it is informal expression, used to describe somebody’s activity playfully and ironically, when the workload is above average quantitatively and qualitatively). Being idiomatically close to a revolutionary imperative *give* – this imperative according to A.M. Selishchev expresses not only “persuasion, but also good result” (Selivshchev, 1991, 93) – the image of coal in the given precedent statement represents as a synonym of unlimited abilities of a person when building a socialist society and also as a synonym of patriotism. The connection of personal efforts (the imperative *give* in Russian is used in the singular) and consequently, personal destiny with the country’s destiny is carried out through a mythologisation and fetishisation of the substance of coal, because coal is the basis of well-being and prosperity of the mother-land.

However, the falsity, affectedness, exaggeration and semantic primitivism of the ideological slogan in conditions of the Soviet language diglossia (see Vorozhbitova, 2000) practically immediately at its occurrence stimulate profanisation, decrease and semantic diversification in colloquial speech “Give the coal to the country, small pieces but a lot of it” (rus. *daesh strane uglia, melkogo, no mnogo* “Даешь стране угля, мелкого, но много”). Here, the play with quantitative sign, accumulating the semantics of intensity, is important: the decrease of slogan pathos occurs due to the use of the phrase “small pieces” (indicating bad quality), in contrast to “a lot”. It generates oxymoric effect: a lot of coal of a poor quality. As N.A. Kupina mentions, “the ambiguity especially brightly acts against the official slogan which has become an ideological instruction, a certain guiding symbol, a vital reference point for the Soviet people”

(Kupina, 1995, 104). It reveals the stupidity of the Soviet ideology and the way of managing, started by strict following the peremptory orders and regulations.

Both the popular and famous authors and anonymous experienced the ethical ban to use the analysed slogan in poetic context, glorifying the work of miners, e.g. *And a joke "Give the coal to the country!" / We feel on own palms* by V. Vysotsky ("Black gold"); *Among numerous professions there is one, / That extracts the riches to the mother-land, / And the motto "Give the coal to the country!" / Here everyone understands without sarcasm* (The Congratulation on the Miner's day. [http:// www.srozhdniem.ru/prazdniki/shahter.php](http://www.srozhdniem.ru/prazdniki/shahter.php)). It is necessary to use special modal descriptors and (*a joke, without sarcasm*) to return initial sense to pretentious phrase and to transform a sarcastic joke into an idiom, reflecting the real state of affairs.

That is how the reciprocating movement of the concept, included in the structure of ideological myth, happens, whether it is a myth about American Dream or a myth about Stakhanov movement. In the process of diversification, profanisation and mockery are followed by the stage of demonisation of the object of the dependence, generated by the power of objective social and historical circumstances, imposing the significance and firmness of the factor of economic raw dependence. For example, a publicist Dmitry Danilov in his essay "Coal Depression" shows an infernal picture of one of the Kuzbass cities: "It is Siberia. Kuzbass. The Kemerovo region. A coal-mining region... The existence of the mining town of Prokopevsk almost entirely depends on coal. There are a lot of coal mines there. All of them look terrible. All the mine structures are black; there are heaps of

coal stored on land near the galleries trough which the coal is transported; a dirty yellow bulldozer moves the coal slowly, trying to form heaps of necessary shapes. The mine is surrounded not by heaps, but the mountains of coal, covered with snow" (Russian life, 2008). The journalist shows a repulsive image of coal as a dark, alien substance, transforming the landscape and the lives of citizens with the help of parceling (verbal forms of the so-called present reporting), unambiguous estimates (*terribly*), colour symbolism (*black, dirty yellow*), gradation and hyperbole (*heaps, huge mountains*).

Resume

Thus, the media concepts with a stable cultural prototype, including economical and raw material ones, have a tendency be included in the structure of key national ideological myths – neomythologemes, determining the public consciousness at a certain stage of development of this or that society. Neomythologemes, in their turn, have an interpretative resource firstly, in the form of "eternal", archetypical mythological and folklore plots, and secondly, in hermeneutic tradition of interpretation of these plots within ambiguous and ambivalent borders of a glorification- mockery, an rise-decrease, idealization-profanisation.

Cultural and verbal prototypes form the preliminary matrix, some prognostic contours of content and axiological development of a media concept; and discursive demand of this or that sense-image, caused by emerging social and cultural objective circumstances, stimulates the "recovery" and "general mobilisation" of informational and interpretative resources, accumulated in its verbal and mental prototypes.

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Роль культурных прототипов в дискурсивно-стилистической эволюции медиаконцепта нефть

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В статье анализируется роль культурных прототипов в дискурсивно-стилистическом становлении и развитии глобального символа современной эпохи – медиаконцепта нефть. Доказывается, что сила миромоделирующего потенциала медиаконцепта обусловлена мощностью информационно-интерпретационных импульсов, транслируемых его ментальными прообразами, такими как золото и уголь.

Ключевые слова: медиаконцепт, культурный и вербальный прототипы, жизненный цикл, миромоделирующий потенциал.
