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Verbalization of Concept «*Мистическое*» (“*Mysterious*”) in the Consciousness of Russian-Speaking People

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The article presents the results of preliminary psycholinguistic experiment. It has been established that concepts differ depending on culture. They represent clusters of cultural information in human consciousness. They can change depending on both linguistic and extralinguistic circumstances. The results of the experiment reveal the associations Russian students have with the word “мистический” (“mysterious”). Young people are influenced by cultural globalization most of all. Verbalized in the form of words / phrases these associations reveal the cultural changes of the last 30 years. The obtained results show that students demonstrated many associations which were not typical for Russian culture some decades ago. Associations they gave denote mysterious things, notions, places, people, etc. borrowed from American culture by means of language. The students pointed out few words which denote specific mysterious things, notions, etc typical for Russian culture only (such as водяной, леший, берегиня).

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During their historical development peoples express all images, symbols and notions important for them using language. All these images, symbols and notions evince the knowledge of the given language community about the reality they live in. As a result, they create a certain linguistic image of the world that consists of a system of basic concepts and key ideas that link them. It is a set of cultural peculiarities that marks concepts in different languages and appears to be an essential characteristic that contributes to the complex multi-layer structure of the concepts.

Concept is a mental unit which is general to certain extent that can be semantically decomposed, carries some ethnic or / and cultural peculiarities and has some fixed linguistic form through which it manifests itself in the language (Vorkachev, 2007: 20). Key concepts of each national culture represent the “clusters” of verbalized culture in peoples’ consciousness (Stepanov, 2004: 43). They reflect the unique experience gained by each particular nation, its history, and culture. For that reason concepts which exist in concept system of one nation can be just partially present that is have a set

of significant peculiarities or be absent in the concept system of another nation.

Basic concepts which are present in the concept systems of many peoples can be grouped and verbalized in different national languages. They are directly influenced by the operating linguistic, pragmatic and cultural factors that is why they are fixed in language having different meanings (Kubriakova et al., 1997: 92-93). A. Babushkin emphasizes that various types of concepts have universal (common for all nations) character, but their national and cultural peculiarity is that though they have identical types they possess different content. Concept determines how things are interconnected and how they are categorized (Babushkin, 1996: 6, 65). It is necessary to point out that with time due to different factors, for example, extralinguistic influence, concepts can change.

According to S. Vorkachev, emotional implication is one of the most important marks of concepts. For that reason if we compare concept and notions the first has a set of emotional and volitional implications. The core of each concept is formed by some value which is important for the particular nation.

Concepts manifest themselves through a variety of “linguistic and non-linguistic means which illustrate (directly or indirectly), specify and develop their content” (Karasik, 2002: 91).

If the concept appears in the language in the form of words, word-combinations, sayings, etc., this shows that the given concept is important for the given language community. Therefore when one studies concept it is vital to consider the whole variety of linguistic means through which the concept manifests itself in the language.

When a concept is emerging a great range of the experience gained by the nation is being simplified to the limits of human memory. It is brought into correlation with the cultural key notions of great value that have been adopted

earlier and were expressed in religion, ideology, art, etc. (Slyshkin, 2000: 10).

Certain specification is an important characteristic that shows linguistic and cultural peculiarity in the way language community denotes particular notions in the world around it. Here we speak about certain notions, objects, etc. which come into the minds of people who comprise a particular language community in the first place when they think about a particular concept. They repeat from person to person and are finally fixed in the language in some linguistic form to denote more abstract things in figurative sense. For example, when Russian people say that there is no-one in some place, they say *ни души*, whereas English-speaking people use negative pronoun *nobody*.

Often Russian-speaking people associate an abstract word *смерть* (*death*) with *coffin*, *corpse* or *grave* whereas English-speaking people associate the word *death* with *throe* (*сильная боль*), *knell* (*похоронный / погребальный звон*), *penalty* (*наказание*), *resurrection* (*воскрешение*), *mutilation* (*мутиляция, отторжение от организма частей тела, кожи, внутренних органов в результате некроза*), *rebirth* (*возрождение*), *elegy* (*погребальная песнь*), *suffocation* (*удушье, удушение*), *banishment* (*изгнание*), *decease* (*смерть, кончина*), *starvation* (*голодная смерть*), *sickness* (*болезнь*), *bones* (*кости*), *skull* (*черепа*) (Word Associations Network).

These examples show that representatives of different cultures have different images in their mind then they hear the words which seem to be fully equivalent.

Concepts *mysterious* and *мистическое* belong to the group of fundamental concepts in American and Russian language cultures. Representatives of Russian culture have been facing mysterious, enigmatic and strange things and notions from ancient times. These extraordinary things generated various

associations in their minds. But globalization of cultures caused sufficient changes within concept “*мистическое*”.

The objective of the given study is concept “*мистическое*”. The research subject is semantic peculiarities of language units that verbalize the given concept in Russian language.

Concept “*мистическое*” is a multifaceted formation which has various forms which manifest it in the language. As the considered concept has a particular value in its core it occupies a crucial place in the world linguistic image of Russian people.

Semantic analysis of linguistic units that express this concept in the language is quite a difficult task as such concepts have multi-layer semantic structure that has been developing for a very long time influenced by various sociological, cultural and ethnic factors.

Centuries ago people tried to explain mysterious things and notions happening around them in different ways, for example, by means of religion (polytheism). That was why on early stages of society development there were various mysterious gods, their helpers, etc., that as people thought had diverse supernatural abilities. Even after transition to monotheism some part of polytheism anachronisms still remained. For example, there still is such a mysterious creature in Russian culture as *Вий*.

According to “Slavic Religion Encyclopedia” Ний (Western Slavic) or Вий (Eastern Slavic) is a god that rules underworld. He is a judge of the dead. He was considered to be the guardian of the souls which left people’s bodies (Slavic Religion Encyclopedia).

These days we are witnesses of active culture globalization. Different cultures enrich each other. Due to this process within two last decades Russian culture has been borrowing new images (including mysterious ones) which did not exist in it before. However, they could not fully

replace traditional images typical for Russian culture. They turned out to be very resilient.

Children start to understand the meaning of the concept “*мистическое*” very early generally due to folklore (fairy tales, fables, nursery rhymes, cradle songs, sayings, tongue twisters, riddles, etc.). For that reason the images of mysterious creatures and notions that have been present in Russian culture for centuries are so steady. For example, such mysterious creatures as *леший*, *водяной*, *бес*, *лихо*, etc. are still present in the following sayings and proverbs:

Был бы лес, будет и *леший*.

Шутил бы *черт* с *бесом*, *водяной* с *лешим*.

Домовой тешится, *леший* заводит, *водяной* топит.

Леший бы тебя задавил!

Не буди *лихо*, пока оно тихо!

Перегоняет с места на место, как *леший* зверя (Dal’, 2001: 209).

The author of the article held an associative experiment to study concept “*мистическое*”. Fifty students of Kemerovo State University and Kemerovo State Agricultural Institute took part in the experiment. The researcher asked the participants to write down a list of their associations when they hear words “*мистика*”, “*мистическое*”.

The experiment revealed that participants associate the words mentioned above with the following:

1) *Common nouns*

Дежавю, ведьма, призрак, привидение, галлюцинации, смерть, змея / змей, загадка, магия, заклинание, сатана, тайна, ночь, луна, ужас(ы), лес, сверхъестественное, экстрасенс, колдун, мрак, загадочность, необычность, туман, замок, экстрасенсорика, волшебство, дар, фэнтези / фантастика, демон, вымысел, дух, черт, феноменология, жуть, атмосферность, странность, кот / кошка, перекресток,

цветы, русалка, пират, совпадение, гадание, гном, колдовство, вурдалак, пришелец / инопланетянин, единорог, чародей, эльф, леприкон, йети, руны, вуду, игра, кино / фильм / сериал, чудовище / чудище, дракон, кровь, боль, алкоголь, чернокнижник, триллер, исчезновение, медиум, история, сверхспособность, сон, глаза, судьба, чары, сверхчеловек, космос, полет, корабль, маг, кладбище, вампир, страх, легенда, непознанное, странное, необъяснимое, оккультизм, везение, предчувствие, чудо, мрачность, таинственное, ложь, сказка, иррациональное, полтергейст, эротика, неожиданность, туфта, секрет, ритуал, суеверие, перевоплощение, обман, комиксы, монстр, дьявол, воскрешение, странности, душа, церковь;

2) *Proper nouns*

Средневековье, Гарри Поттер, Бредбери, Хэллоуин, Бермудский треугольник, «Астрал», ТВЗ, «Сверхъестественное», Доби, Аллах, Волондемонт, Первый мистический канал, Саквач, Книга мертвых, Орден масонов, «Битва экстрасенсов», «Секретные материалы», Баба Яга, Нарния, Акан, Белый хлад, Дяды;

3) *Adjective*

Тайный, необъяснимый, потусторонний, сверхъестественный, интересный, черный, нереальный, антинаучный, магический, внезапный, страшный, фантастический, волнующий, пугающий, метафизический, неизведанный, величественный, лунный, интригующий, гипнотический, старый, загадочный, захватывающий, средневековый, труднообъяснимый, скрытое;

4) *Adverbs*

Скучно, неинтересно, маловероятно;

5) *Verbs*

Вселять (страх), не люблю, выдумано;

6) *Word combinations*

Потусторонний мир, невыясненные обстоятельства, сбывшиеся сны, чувство дежа-

вю, жанр кинофильмов и книг, магический шар, потеря ключей / тапочек, древний замок, летучие мыши, параллельные миры, внутренний голос, страшные истории, старые книги, проклятие фараонов, обладание сверхспособностями, глухой лес, заброшенный замок, замок с привидениями, полная луна, черный цвет, неземные существа, переселение душ, экстрасенсорные способности, шестое чувство, третий глаз, ползучие гады, паранормальные свойства, странные ситуации, необъяснимые явления;

7) *Pronouns*

Что-то, нечто;

8) *Numerals*

666, 13.

The results of the experiment show that nouns account for 66 % of all words. 55 % are common nouns and only 11 % are proper nouns.

85 % of the given associations are words, 15 % are word combinations. Ordinal numerals are mentioned only as members of word combinations. It is important that the participants pointed out two numbers, namely, 13 and 666. Verbs, proverbs and pronouns account for just 1,5 %, but it is crucial that a limited number of indefinite pronouns are persistently repeated in many lists. The most frequent is *нечто*.

The obtained list of associations shows clear tendency towards using nouns. 64 % of word combinations are built using one scheme “adjective + noun”. It is essential that nouns are present in all word combinations. Nominative nature of the associations reveals the fact that for respondents it is more important that mysterious creatures and things exist and what feelings they awake in people than what they can do.

Two word combinations are built using almost the same scheme when the participants used ordinal numeral as an attribute (*шестое чувство, третий глаз*). This helps convey the

idea that mysterious things possess something a real person cannot, for example, the third eye.

As for morphological structure of the words which represent the concept *мистическое* they have the following prefixes: *сверх-* (*сверхъестественное, сверхчеловек, сверхспособность*), *экстра-* (*экстрасенс*), *ино-* (*инопланетянин*), *не-* (*непознанное, необъяснимое, нереальный*), *ир-* (*иррациональное*), *анти-* (*антинаучный*), *пара-* (*паранормальный*). These prefixes help respondents express the idea of extraordinary nature, exception, having something inexplicable, alien to common people. The given trend can be found on semantic level as well (for example, *потусторонний, единорог*). The first word describes belonging to another world, while the second denotes a creature that does not exist in reality.

The experiment revealed that associations given by the participants were either nouns or word combinations that were used in plural form very often (*неземные существа, ползучие гады, ужасы, духи, полтергейсты, паранормальные свойства, странные ситуации, необъяснимые явления, параллельные миры т.д.*). The given trend indicated that people who speak Russian as native language, first of all, associate mysterious things with plurality rather than singularity. Besides, participants have some categorization of mysterious things, and the whole variety of mysterious things and notions are roughly divided into groups that unite rather heterogeneous objects (notions). These groups help people structure the information they have about mysterious world.

As for micro-concepts that we consider as concepts having narrower volume (more specific meaning) that can be included, fully or partially, into a concept that has bigger volume (Sergeeva, 2013: 24) conceptual pictures account for about 40 %. These are very detailed pictures of mysterious things (*вампир, ведьма, русалка, дракон, церковь*). Concepts-schemes are less

frequent. They are not so detailed (Babushkin, 1996: 73-74). For example, *призрак / привидение, туман, лес, душа* can be describes as concepts-schemes as they are more general and participants do not assign them as many visual peculiarities as they do to conceptual pictures.

What is necessary to mention is that participants associate the concept with black and red colors (*кровь, чернокнижник*).

It is worth mentioning that the list of associations the students gave was quite different from the list of synonyms of the words *мистика* and *мистический* in various dictionaries.

According to modern dictionaries the word *мистический* has the following synonyms: *сверхъестественный, суеверный, тайный* (Gavrilova, 2013: 161), *тайный, невероятный, загадочный, мистичный, необъяснимый, орфический, спиритический, таинственный, чудесный* (Dictionary of Synonyms..., 2011).

Whereas the word *сверхъестественный* has an extensive list of synonyms: *колдовской, волшебный, магический, чародейный, чародейский, чернокнижный, ведовской, призрачный, иллюзорный, эфемерный, нереальный, пророческий, провидческий, вещий, загадочный, мистический, таинственный, чудесный, чудодейственный, волшебный, магический, чудесный, чудотворный*. The word *сверхъестественное* is a key word in the following group of synonyms: *дьяволица, чертобесия, диво, бесовщина, дьяволизм, чертовщина, сон, видение, сновидение, грёза, чудо, диковина, феномен, невидальщина, невидаль* (Dictionary of Synonyms..., 2011).

When the word has many synonyms a person can choose the most appropriate one that conveys his ideas very accurately in particular situation. But the respondents did not use more than a third of these synonyms. Probably that is due to their belonging to literary style and archaic nature. Moreover, they are used in modern books

and films very seldom. As for those sources where they were used, possibly, they are not so interesting for the youth. For instance, no-one mentioned such synonyms as *колдовской, чародейный / чародейский, чернокижный, ведовской, иллюзорный, эфемерный, пророческий / провидческий, вещий, чудодейственный, орфический и спиритический* that are fixed in the dictionaries.

According to associations list, many words belong both to literary style (атмосферность, феноменология, сверхъестественное, метафизический, чародей, галлюцинации) and colloquial style (туфта, жуть, ползучие гады). But there is evident tendency towards using words of literary style. Generally that is connected with their usage in modern books and films translated from English.

The most frequent associations that verbalize concept *мистическое* are the following: *таинственный / тайный / тайна, сверхъестественный, загадочный, странный, черт / сатана, необъяснимый, ведьма страх / ужас, смерть, магия / колдовство / волшебство, призрак, экстрасенс, ночь / тьма / мрак, черный, луна, фильм / телепередача / сериал, туман, лес, существа, шар, гадание / гадалка*. They are given in the order of their frequency from 12 down to 2.

There is a considerable number of the words among the associations which denote altered state of one's consciousness (галлюцинации, дежавю, сон). This indicated that for Russian speakers there is a link between mysterious things (notions) and abnormal state of mind.

There are common nouns which were formed from adjectives by means of conversion. It is typical for such nouns to be used in neuter gender, for example, *сверхъестественное, непознанное, странное, необъяснимое*.

As adjectives they were used as a part of word combinations with indefinite pronouns

ничто, что-то / что-либо, for example, *ничто загадочное / пугающее / сверхъестественное*, etc. This demonstrates that the given concept is quite indistinct.

The concept does not have any fixed picture that could represent it in the minds of Russian speaking people. Probably that is due to the heterogeneity of things and notions (micro-concepts) that this concept unites (йети, леприкон, вампир, дух, змей, колдун и т.п.). It is impossible to represent all of them into one visual image. Though it is very easy to classify the emotions evoked by these images and evaluate them.

One should note that the words which denote mysterious things and creatures typical for Russian culture such as *леший, водяной, etc.* are mentioned rather seldom. In contrast, there is a variety of associations connected with mysterious creatures borrowed from other cultures, first of all, American culture. For example, such words as *леприкон* and *орк* have been taken into Russian language, and the notions they represent were imbedded into Russian culture not earlier than 10 years ago. Firstly, this is connected with the participants' age and their age peculiarities. Students are very interested in everything new and join the globalization processes very fast. And cultural globalization is becoming an evident trend nowadays.

The group of words that unites proper nouns is rather heterogeneous as includes diverse precedent phenomena, for example, mysterious places (Бермудский треугольник, Сайлент Хилл), real or unreal people (Дракула, Франкенштейн), historical periods (Средние века), celebrations (Хэллоуин), etc. The most important thing is that names of mysterious places, people and celebrations became a part of Russian culture not so long ago. As for Middle Ages as a mysterious period, it is also closely connected with history of European countries, but not Russia.

The participants included in the lists of their associations both names of mysterious things and notions that appeared very long ago (Баба Яга, Книга мертвых, Аллах, Орден масонов), and modern mysterious images (Нарния, Белый хлад, Доби).

It is worth mentioning that the participants used three verbs in the lists of their associations. However, if we consult dictionaries we will find much more verbs, connected with mysterious, unnatural notions, for example, *гадать, ворожить, предсказывать (будущее), заколдовывать, завораживать, заморозить, зачаровывать, околдовывать, очаровывать, волхвовать, ворожить, превращать, обращать, предвещать, прорицать, пророчить, предчувствовать, чуют, присниться, привидеться, пригрезиться, etc.* (Dictionary of Synonyms..., 2011).

Such results indicate that concept *мистическое* in the consciousness of a Russian speaker is something static. But it possesses a wide range of properties that evoke intense emotional reactions. First of all, this idea is based on the fact that there are numerous words which have evident connotation. For example, the following words have explicit negative connotation: *ужас, жуть, страх, страшный, интересный, захватывающий, маловероятно, скучно, неинтересно*, etc. These results point out that concept *мистическое* has intense emotional feedback for Russian speaking people.

It should be emphasized that the participants mentioned only 5 words which belong to the colloquial style and have a note *coll.* in the dictionary entries. Such a result can be explained by low frequency of their use these days.

As for the list of mysterious creatures, the participants gave much more associations than we can find in the dictionaries. For example, the author has found the following list of mysterious

creatures in the dictionaries of synonyms: *амур (купидон, эрот, бес (черт), вампир, вурдалак, упырь, оборотень, колдун / колдунья, маг, ведьма, колдунья, волшебник, колдун, чаровник, / чародей, гуманоид, инопланетянин, пришелец, приведение, видение, призрак, тень, фантом, умерший, чудовище (чудище, чудюдо), монстр* etc. For instance, they mentioned such creatures as *йети, полтергейст, эльфы, духи, демоны, Баба Яга* etc. Most of these words evoke negative emotions.

According to the results of the association experiment, the most frequent words in the lists were:

магия – 12 times, тайна – 9, ведьма – 8, сверхъестественное – 7;

волшебство, Гарри Потер и привидения – 6 times each;

смерть, фильм / кино, загадочность / загадка, ночь, ужас – 5 times each;

The following words have lower frequency:

эзотерика, призрак, колдовство, призраки, экстрасенсы – 4 times each;

страх, туман, ложь, фантастика, привидение, лес, духи, гадания, демоны, луна, паранормальные явления, кот / кошка, необъяснимое, «Битва экстрасенсов», нереальное, черный (цвет) – 3 times each;

ббб, фэнтэзи, экстрасенсорика, тьма, совпадение, загадка, полтергейст, гадалка, дяды, эльфы, сериалы, колдуны, единороги, «Секретные материалы», Белый хлад, ТВ 3, потусторонний мир, необъяснимые явления, магический шир, таинственное, странное, страшное, непонятное, загадочное, таинственный – 2 times each.

All of the obtained words can be divided into the following groups:

1) Mysterious creatures / notions (эльфы, потусторонний мир);

2) Source of knowledge about them (фильмы, ТВ 3, «Секретные материалы»);

3) Feelings evoked by the mysterious (ужас, страх);

4) Properties of the mysterious (таинственное, загадочное).

Mass media helped enlarge the list of precedent proper names which, according to the participants, are connected with mysterious things.

Many students showed that they link the word *мистическое* with the sources of knowledge about it. For example, they mentioned the names of serials / series («Сверхъестественное»), TV programs («Битва экстрасенсов»), books («Гарри Поттер»), etc.

As for the words that have positive connotation, the participants mentioned *церковь*, *эльфы*, *единорог*, etc., their number is about 7 times less than that of the words that have explicit negative connotation. What is interesting, many of them are connected with transformations. For example, *церковь* (*church*) is a place of worship which connects this world with another better

one. The origin of the word proves that. The word was borrowed from Germanic language (**kirkō*). There it came from Greek – *Kyriakos* (*domos*) – “God’s (home)”.

In general the lists of associations were quite long and on average included from 5 to 18 words or word combinations. Again this demonstrates that the concept is verbalized through a variety of words and word combinations.

The results of the experiment show that globalization of cultures erases differences in some fundamental concepts, such as concept *мистическое*. It has already lost several peculiarities connected with mysterious images typical for Russian culture. Due to extensive borrowings the periphery of this concept is steadily increasing.

The most frequent words-associations which verbalize concept *мистическое* will be further used in the experiment which will reveal cultural differences between concepts *мистическое* and *mysterious*.

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Вербализация концепта «мистическое» (“mysterious”)

в сознании носителей русского языка

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В статье представлены результаты пилотного психолингвистического эксперимента. Было выявлено, что содержание на первый взгляд идентичных концептов может значительно отличаться в зависимости от культуры. Концепты представляют собой кластеры культурной информации, запечатленные в сознании человека. Они являются динамичными образованиями, поэтому могут меняться со временем под воздействием как языковых, так и экстралингвистических обстоятельств. Проведенный ассоциативный эксперимент помог выявить, с чем в сознании русских студентов ассоциируется слово «мистический». Данная группа была выбрана в силу того, что молодые люди в большей степени подвержены глобализации культуры. Вербализуясь в виде слов или словосочетаний, данные ассоциации показывают, какие изменения произошли в культуре за последние 30 лет. Полученные результаты продемонстрировали наличие в ассоциативном ряду таких слов и словосочетаний-репрезентантов концепта, которые не были типичны для русской культуры несколько десятилетий назад. В ассоциативный ряд входят репрезентанты, заимствованные, как правило, из американской лингвокультуры. При этом лишь несколько студентов указали слова-репрезентанты концепта, которые характерны именно для русской лингвокультуры, например, водяной, леший, берегиня.

Ключевые слова: концепт, ассоциативный эксперимент, лингвокультура, мистическое.

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