

Comparative Analysis of Phraseological Units Meaning “Childhood” in Russian and Chinese

Chunyao Dou

*Faculty of Foreign Languages and Area Studies
Moscow Lomonosov State University
Moscow, Russia*

Abstract—This article deals with the comparative study of representation of *childhood* by means of Russian and Chinese phraseology. The subject of the research is Russian and Chinese phraseological units meaning “childhood”. The relevance of the research lies in the fact that childhood is an abstract concept that occupies an important place in Russian and Chinese worldviews and is a constituent part of the age concept. The aim of the paper is to identify and determine the isomorphic and allomorphic means of representation *childhood* as an age group within Russian and Chinese linguocultures. The comparative linguocultural analysis of Russian and Chinese phraseological units related to *childhood* has been carried out. The main conclusions of the study represent the prospects for further scientific research. The paper for the first time in linguistics advances the prototypical verbalization of a child in Russian and Chinese linguocultures. The concept of childhood is one of the most important ones in any culture, and at the same time, it is a dynamic one, which is reflected by the language means including phraseological units. *Childhood* serves as the initial stage of development of a person’s life in Russian and Chinese linguocultures.

Keywords—comparative analysis, phraseological units, Russian and Chinese languages, childhood

I. INTRODUCTION

Childhood is the “period of human life between infancy and youth”, i.e. between 1-3 and 12-15 years of age. According to the Brief Psychological Dictionary, *childhood* is divided into preschool childhood (4-6 years) and early school childhood (7-11 years) [1].

Childhood is a phenomenon that can be studied both from the scientific and casual viewpoint. The study of *childhood* as a phenomenon is performed in biology, physiology, psychology, medicine, philosophy, history, sociology, linguistics, etc. *Childhood* as a research object in linguistics is analyzed from sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic, and linguocultural perspectives. In these publications, the research and analysis of phraseological units concerning *childhood* in the terms of linguocultural approach is not sufficiently investigated. The relevance and novelty of this study consists in the study of Russian and Chinese phraseological units meaning ‘childhood’ within a comparative linguocultural approach.

Childhood is an abstract concept that occupies a very important place in the Russian and Chinese language world

views and is a constituent part of the AGE concept. In our opinion, age is the “key parameter in defining the life activity of a person, their physical and mental state, behavior and activities [2]. The concept of AGE is also important for the description of the surrounding world, which is treated as anthropomorphic – world that can be young, and can grow old as living beings. Thus the concept of CHILDHOOD can be relevant for humans, animals, plants, and certain tangible objects.

Language and culture are interrelated through representation. Representation, according to N.D. Arutyunova, is a category of consciousness and is characterized by reproducibility. Attributes of representation consist in integrity and thoroughness [3]. Representation serves as the basis of the occurrence of phraseological units. Phraseological units are “special signs of the language: their semantics integrates cultural semantics, or cultural connotation, which is represented through the reference of the phraseological units of the subjective domain of culture” [4]. Phraseological units also “emerge at the intersection of language and culture. The internal form of phraseological units is based on the already cultivated entities and the process of binding takes place in the form of figurativeness and semantics of phraseological units” [4].

We adhere to the linguocultural approach in phraseology [5]. The purpose of this approach consists in “identifying ways and means of translating the ‘language’ of culture in the content of phrases” [4].

The comparative linguocultural study is “aimed at identifying the universal, culturally-conditioned and nationally-specific aspects in phrases.” Phrases are viewed as signs of language and culture [6], i.e., the comparative linguocultural study of phrases meaning ‘childhood’ consists in the need to perform both linguistic and cultural analysis.

Russian idioms and Chinese Chéngyǔ are superlexical formations; which have an integral meaning with high idiomaticity and stability [7]. These units are characterized by figurativeness, expressiveness, culture-bearing, designed to implement the value-related content of culture in its semantics [7].

In Russian and Chinese phraseology, there are multiple idioms/Chéngyǔ meaning ‘childhood’, which express the universal and culture-specific concepts in Russian and

Chinese linguo-cultures, e.g. the Russian idioms: *впасть в детство* (literally, *go into childhood*), *желторотый птенец* (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*), *нос не дорос* (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*), *от горшка два вершка* (literally, *two inches from the pottie*) etc., Chinese Chéngyǔ: 黄口小儿 (literally, *a nestling and a child*), 金童玉女 (literally, *a golden boy and a Jade girl*), 天真烂漫 (literally, *naive and lively*), etc.

To prove the existence of similar and divergent features of their group of Russian and Chinese phraseology, we provide a comparative linguocultural analysis of Russian and Chinese phrases with the same semantics. Take five units of similar meaning: Chinese Chéngyǔ 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*), 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk on the body has not disappeared yet*); Russian idioms *желторотый птенец* (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*), *молоко на губах не обсохло* (literally, *milk on the lips has not yet dried out*), *нос не дорос* (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*).

口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*) denotes people who are still young, who do not have enough life or professional experience, knowledge, and are not able to do anything without assistance [8].

For example: 成瑶, 一个口尚乳臭的黄毛丫头, 依然在我的掌控之中! (English translation: *Chen Yao, a girl who still has the taste of milk in the mouth, is still under my control*).

乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) denotes people who are still naive, young and inexperienced to do anything [8].

For example: 1) 一个乳臭未干的小公司何以敢去“蛇吞象”? (现代汉语语料库) -- (English translation: *Why does a small company, which still smells milk, dare to do so, like a snake swallowing an elephant?* [9]; 2) 要么专业不对口, 要么外语水平低, 有的老板还嘲笑这帮乳臭未干的学生 (现代汉语语料库) -- (English translation: *Whether their speciality is not suitable, or their foreign language level is very low. Some owners still scoff at these students, whose bodies still smell milk* [9]; 3) 现在的家庭, 一家之主, 并不是挣钱养家的父亲, 倒是那些乳臭未干的孩子 (现代汉语语料库) -- (English translation: *In modern family, it is not the father who is the head of the family, but the child whose body still smells milk* [9].

Желторотый птенец (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*) means that the person (X) is at a young age and is therefore inexperienced in common activities or situations, does not yet have adequate life or professional experience. It is mostly said about men, who are young, inexperienced and naive [10]. According to the Russian-English Phraseological Dictionary *желторотый птенец* (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*) is “a very young, naive, inexperienced person” [11].

Compare: 1) *Среди этой шумной, весёлой и дружной*

братии он выглядел желторотым птенцом: на фронте он не был, пороха не нюхал (English translation: *Among this noisy, cheerful, and friendly flock, he looked like a yellow-beaked nestling: he had not been up the lines, never to the combat*) (B. Galin, Kireev Father and Son); 2) *У нас тут народ опытный, ты рядом с ними – желторотый птенец* (English translation: *We've got experienced people here, and compared to them, you're a yellow-beaked nestling*) [10,11].

Молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not yet dried out*), according to the “Big Phraseological Dictionary of the Russian Language”, means a very young and inexperienced person, “a person or a group of persons because of their very young age do not have enough experience and knowledge to act independently, to take part in serious, responsible affairs. It is mostly related to men” [10]. According to С.И. Лубенская, *молоко на губах не обсохло* (literally, *milk on the lips has not yet dried out*) means “sb. is still very young, inexperienced, immature” [11].

For example: 1) *У самого молоко на губах не обсохло, а уж такое дело раздул* (English translation: *Milk on his lips has not dried out yet, but he overblows such a story!*) (M. Sokolov, Sparks); 2) *Чего же в торговле лезет, когда молоко на губах не обсохло* (English translation: *Why is trying to become a merchant, if milk on his lips has not dried out yet*) (K. Fedin, Unordinary Summer); 3) – *Да тебе сколько лет-то?.. Молоко на губах не обсохло!.. а жениться собираешься!* (English translation: *How old are you? Milk on your lips has not dried out yet!.. but thinking already of getting married!*) (Turgenev. The Clock) [10,11].

Нос не дорос (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*) means “sb. is (still) not old and/or experienced enough (to do, undertake, handle, etc. sth.)” [11].

For example: *Начальник, улыбаясь, сказал Сергею, что ему требуются опытные электрики и что до такой работы у него, вчерашнего школьника, нос пока не дорос* (English translation: *The boss said smiling to Sergey that he needed experienced electricians and that he as a yesterday's student still has a nose that has not grown yet*) [11].

II. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

A. Linguistic analysis

The expression plan is compared: Chinese phrases 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*) and 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) perform in the sentence the function of characterizing adjectives to describe objects. Russian idioms *желторотый птенец* (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*) and *нос не дорос* (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*) in the sentence play the role of a subjective nominal part of the predicate or complement. The Russian phrase *молоко на губах не обсохло* (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) acts

as part of a complex sentence or independent expression. The structure of the Chinese phrase 乳臭未干 (literally, *the taste of milk has not disappeared yet*), and the Russian phrases молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) and нос не дорос (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*) are very similar: all of them use “not” to make the meaning negative for underlying the inadequacy of a young person.

The content plan is compared: the denotative components of the meaning of the Chinese and Russian units are similar: they denote inexperienced, young and naive person, unable to do anything properly. However, the denotation areas do not match completely: the Chinese phrases 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*), 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) and the Russian phrase нос не дорос (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*) can be attributed to both men and women, and the Russian phrases молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) and желторотый птенец (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*) are mostly about men. The significative component reveals the configuration of typical representation of a young person who has the features of youth, naivety and inexperience. The motivational component exhibits features of the national worldview in the images presented by Russian and Chinese phrases. The representation of the Russian phrase желторотый птенец (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*) is based on the “bird – man” analogy, i.e. the image of this phrase contains a zoomorphic metaphor; the image of the Russian phrase нос не дорос (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*) is represented with a body metaphor; the image of the Chinese phrases 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk on the body has not disappeared yet*) and 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*), the Russian phrase молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not yet dried out*) is related to body and gastronomic codes of the culture. With regard to the emotive-evaluative component of the compared phrases, all of them, except the Russian phrase нос не дорос (literally, *the nose has not grown yet*), converge in a neutral position. The rest of the units are semantically identical, contain disapproval, disdain, or irony.

B. Cultural analysis

The cultural semantics is compared: as above stated, the image of the Chinese phrases 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*) and 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*), the Russian phrase молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) is related to body and gastronomic codes of the culture. The milk component in 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*), 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) and молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) is related to the gastronomic code of the culture, while the components mouth in the phrase 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*), body in the phrase 乳臭未干

(literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) and lips in the phrase молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) are related to the somatic, i.e. body code of the culture. The taste component in the phrase 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*) and the smell component in the phrase 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) are related to the physiological code of the culture, the dried out component in the phrase milk on the lips has not dried out yet and the disappeared component belong to the physical condition code.

The Chinese phrase 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*) dates back to ancient oppositions “birth – death,” “young – old”; the Chinese phrase 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk on the body has not disappeared yet*) dates back to the ancient opposition “young – old.” The Russian idiom молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not yet dried out*) dates back to ancient oppositions “man – woman,” “birth – death,” as well as to the associated opposition “young – old.” The image of the phrases 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*), 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*), and молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not yet dried out*) is based on the anthropic metaphor that compares an inexperienced person who is not independent due to young age, to an infant who is fed with the mother’s milk. The image of the Chinese phrases 口尚乳臭 (literally, *the taste of milk in the mouth*) and 乳臭未干 (literally, *the smell of milk has not disappeared yet*) shows the stereotypical representation of the Chinese about young people; the image of the Russian phrase молоко на губах не обсохло (literally, *milk on the lips has not dried out yet*) the stereotypical representation of a very young person, usually a man.

The image of the phrase the nose has not grown yet relates to the body code of the culture through the nose component. The image is based on the ancient opposition “young – old.” A nose as a part of the human body appears to be rather inconspicuous. “In various phrases, a nose denotes the spatial boundary, which means the maximum proximity to a person in general” [12]. At the same time, a nose metonymically substitutes a person in general.

The image of the Russian phrase желторотый птенец (literally, *yellow-beaked nestling*) is based on the “youth – old age” opposition. The phrase component nestling is correlated with the zoomorphic code of the culture. Birds have a variety of features and act as an indispensable element of the religious and mythological system and rituals in various myths and poetry tradition [13]. The yellow-beaked component correlates “with the culture code revealing the representations of external distinctive properties. In this very case we speak of the yellow color of a beak” [10]. “The phrase generally acts as a standard sample of an immature, naïve and helpless person who is not ready for living a life” [10].

III. CONCLUSION

Russian idiom / Chinese Chéngyǔ represent the metaphorically motivated part of Russian and Chinese phraseology. They reveal different ways of specifying highly generalized concepts, such as the concepts AGE and their components, cf.: *childhood, youth, maturity, old age*. Russian idioms and Chinese Chéngyǔ display a typical way of understanding these concepts, their metaphorical models. In this very way, Russian idioms and Chinese Chéngyǔ help us to understand the language world view. Cultural ideas, meanings, prescriptions encoded in the form of idioms/Chéngyǔ can be identified with regard to cultural interpretation of concepts.

Childhood is conceptualized both in Russian and Chinese phraseology: in most cases, *childhood* is used as a metaphor rather than denotation, i.e. the denotative component of the meaning of such phrases is related to other periods of a person's life. *Childhood* very rarely is used in its denotative meaning. Besides, conceptualization of *childhood* in Russian and Chinese phrases is implemented by the corresponding concepts, such as "BEGINNING", "BEAUTIFUL", "NAIVETY", "INEXPERIENCE", "STUPIDITY", etc.

Thus, the concept of CHILDHOOD is one of the most important ones in any culture, and at the same time a dynamic one, which is reflected in the language, including phraseology. Despite the fact that every culture has its own periodization of the life spark of a living being, *childhood* serves as the initial stage of development of a person's life in every culture.

REFERENCES

- [1] Svetsitsky A.L., Brief Psychological Dictionary. Moscow: Prospekt. 2011. (in Russian).
- [2] Dou Chunyao, Kovshova, M.L., Conceptualization of Age in the Russian and Chinese Phraseology: Revisiting the Issue. *Linguocultural Study: the Language of Linguistic Culture: Theory vs. Epirus*. Ed. Kovshova, M.L. Moscow: LENAND. pp. 227-230. 2016. (in Russian).
- [3] Arutyunova, N.D., *The Language and the World of Humans*. 2nd ed. Moscow: Russian Culture Languages. 1999. (in Russian).
- [4] Levisky, A.E., Slavova L.L., Borisenk N.D., *Linguistics*. Kiev: Knowledge of Ukraine. 2006.
- [5] Teliy, V.N., *Russian Phraseology. Semantic, Pragmatic and Linguocultural Aspects*. Moscow: Languages of the Russian cultures. 1996. (in Russian).
- [6] Levisky, A.E., Slavova, L.L., *Comparative typology of English and Russian languages: textbook*. 2007. (in Russian).
- [7] Dou Chunyao, *Phraseology and its Classification in Russian and Chinese Philology*. Herald of Orel State University. New Humanities Research Series, 5(46): pp.284-287. 2015. (in Russian).
- [8] *New Great Phraseological Dictionary of the Modern Chinese Language*, Commercial Press. 2000. (in Chinese).
- [9] *The Modern Chinese Language Corpus*. <http://ccl.pku.edu.cn/corpus.asp>. (in Chinese).
- [10] Teliy, V.N. (Ed.), *Great Phraseological Dictionary of the Russian Language*. 4 th ed. Moscow: AST-PRESS KNIGA. 2014. (in Russian).
- [11] Lubenskaya, S.I., *Russian-English Phraseological Dictionary*. Moscow: Russian Culture Languages. 1997. (in Russian).
- [12] Gudkov, D.B., Kovshova, M.L., *Body Code of the Russian Culture: Materials for a Dictionary*. Moscow: Gnozis. 2007. (in Russian).
- [13] Tokareva, S.A. (Ed.), *Myths of the World Peoples*. Encyclopedia: 2 Volumes. Moscow: Great Russian Encyclopedia. 2000. (in Russian).