

The Concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE in the Global Academic Environment

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Abstract. *The authors analyze the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE as an element of the linguistic worldview. The paper compares the worldviews of native speakers of Russian and non-native speakers learning Russian through immersion into the linguistic and cultural environment and without it. The authors review the most representative studies of the concept, compare the results of association experiments, and make a conclusion about a specific nature of the concept in the worldview of non-native speakers of Russian learning the language outside the linguistic and cultural environment.*

Keywords – *Russian language, concept, Russian as a foreign language, academic communication* *.

I. INTRODUCTION

The object of our research is the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE that forms in the linguistic worldview of non-native speakers of Russian learning the language outside the linguistic and cultural environment (or through partial immersion into it). The objective of this research is to reveal specific content and interpretations of the concept. Our hypothesis is that the alleged specificity is connected with the global academic environment and conditions of learning Russian as a foreign language (RFL).

A concept as a phenomenological, epistemological, cognitive and linguistic element has been described in scientific literature a great number of times and is not an object of our research. We view a concept as a linguo-cognitive phenomenon, which is traditionally studied as a field structure (information and figurative content, interpretations field and paroemiological zone). We support the idea that lexis and idioms, texts and verbalized association fields create an “exterior” of linguistic consciousness. The Russian language is studied along with the concepts of other national languages [6].

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The verbal axiosphere is distinguished on the basis of metatexts that function in any discourse type [1, p. 230]. Verbal values become objects of linguistic, cultural and other studies (for example, the review of studies dedicated to the LANGUAGE and SPEECH concepts and carried out by V. Demyankov, I. Levontina, L. Nikitina, Yu. Stepanov and other Russian researchers in [3]).

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Conceptualization of the Russian language and its place in the system of verbal values attract researchers' attention. Mostly, the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE is modeled on the basis of texts and results of free or guided association experiments, with various groups of subjects – monolinguals, bilinguals and non-native speakers.

Z. Popova and I. Sternin propose a comprehensive linguistic and cultural description of the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE [2, p. 163–208]. In our opinion, the most representative research of the concept under analysis is the thesis of L. Tavdgiridze, written under the supervision of I. Sternin, which involves an experiment with 1790 subjects [5, p. 9]. We will focus on the predominant group of subjects and, for this paper, call them native speakers, even though foreigners took part in the experiment as well. L. Tavdgiridze models the concept as a whole and describes its specific characteristics in connection with professions, communities, territories and other factors.

Other researchers focus on linguo-cognitive processes in the consciousness of a certain target group. In particular, O. Shushakova is interested in notional interpretations of the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE in the school academic environment [3, p. 291].

For comparative analysis, researchers need data on the concept specificity, which forms in the consciousness of non-native speakers and bilinguals. T. Simanova conducts an experiment to study the specificity of the concepts RUSSIAN LANGUAGE and NATIVE LANGUAGE in the linguistic consciousness of foreign students in Russian universities [4]. To this end, she uses a guided association experiment (which-question), with, mostly, students from the former Soviet republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan).

The concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE may not be unaffected by the academic environment, and contact with the language and culture. We focus our attention on cognitive attributes of the concept, which are relevant for non-native speakers learning Russian outside the linguistic environment. In this paper, we do not aim to give a detailed description of the experiment results but rather analyze the similarities and differences in the linguistic worldviews of this target group and the groups analyzed by the researchers mentioned above. The results show that differences are connected, in the first place, with the actualization of

precedent names, stereotypes and the concept evaluative characteristics.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

To reveal the specificity of the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE that forms in the linguistic worldview of non-native speakers – online learners of RFL, we (1) reviewed the literature with the results of association experiments received from different target groups – native and non-native speakers, and (2) conducted an association experiment among non-native speakers learning Russian outside the linguistic environment. For our experiment, we chose Taiwanese students learning Russian at Tamkang University, Taiwan. The students taking part in our research communicated with native speakers – their Russian teacher and students of Northern (Arctic) Federal University – within the online course of *Speaking Russian*.

The subjects had to answer questions (*S chem u tebya assotsiiruetsya russkiy yazyk?* ‘What do you associate the Russian language with?’ *S kem u tebya assotsiiruetsya russkiy yazyk?* ‘Who do you associate the Russian language with?’ *Kakoy russkiy yazyk?* ‘What is the Russian language like?’) and finish sentences (*Ya izuchayu russkiy yazyk, potomu chto...* ‘I learn Russian because ...’; *Ya izuchayu russkiy yazyk, chtoby...* ‘I learn Russian to ...’; *Ya dumayu, shto russkiy yazyk...* ‘I think, Russian ...’). The answers had to be submitted in written form, without any time limits. The subjects had to follow the instruction: *Prochitay vopros. Napishi otvet. Pishi to, chto dumaesh. Pishi pervoe, chto pridyot v golovu. Ne pytaysya "menyat' mysli". Gramotnost' nevazhna!* ‘Read the question. Write the answer. Write what you think. Write the first thing that comes to your mind. Don’t change your ideas. The linguistic correctness is not significant.’ The questionnaires were anonymous; the following identifying information was collected for statistics: sex, age, status. Totally, 42 male and female students aged 19–21 took part in the survey. The survey was conducted in spring 2019.

IV. RESULTS

Comparison of cognitive attributes of the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE from studies of different target groups shows the following results. Working with the native speakers of Russian, L. Tavdgiridze distinguishes three cognitive attributes of the interpretations field in the concept content core (*krasivyy* ‘beautiful’, *slozhnyy* ‘difficult’, *khorooshiy* ‘good’) and two cognitive attributes of information content (*bogatyy* ‘rich’, *rodnoy* ‘native’). The close periphery, according to L. Tavdgiridze, comprises such characteristics as *grubyy* ‘rude’, *interesnyy* ‘interesting’, *khorooshiy* ‘good’, *mezhdunarodnyy* ‘international’, *nuzhnyy* ‘necessary’, *umnyy* ‘intelligent’, *zvuchnyy* ‘good sounding’, etc. Among top ten reactions to the question *How?* are the following: *krasivyy* ‘beautiful’ (846); *bogatyy* ‘rich’ (601); *trudnyy* ‘difficult’ (501); *rodnoy* ‘native’ (232); *velikiy* ‘great’ (203); *interesnyy* ‘interesting’ (190); *slozhnyy* ‘difficult’ (182); *khorooshiy* ‘good’ (113); *lyubimyy* ‘beloved’ (102); *moguchiy* ‘powerful’ (101).

High counts of *velikiy* ‘great’, *moguchiy* ‘powerful’, *svobodnyy* ‘free’ (almost twenty per cent of the subjects used them) can be explained by the precedence of Turgenev’s text – poem “Russian language”. The author holds aesthetic characteristics, extensive vocabulary, possibility of learning, familiarity to native speakers, sphere (including people – famous speakers of Russian; precedent texts, etc.) as the most vivid area of meaning. In addition, the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE in the national worldview is based on the following cognitive classification (given in order of importance): specific vocabulary, general characteristics, interest, moral characteristics, emotional characteristics, traditions, prestige, language learning, temporal characteristics, specific sounds, intellectual characteristics, individual characteristics, functional characteristics, communication culture, suitability for communication, physical characteristics.

The results of the described experiment show reactions possible (or most typical) among the native speakers of Russian: *nash rodnoy* ‘our native’ (50), *mat* ‘filthy language’ (50), *maternyy* ‘filthy’ (48), *matershinnyy* ‘filthy’ (20), *nash rodimyy* ‘our native’ (42), *glavnyy* ‘principal’ (27), *moy* ‘my’ (21), *nash* ‘our’ (13), *svoy* ‘my own’ (15), *luchshshiy* ‘the best’ (15), *obyazatel’nyy* ‘obligatory’ (12), *pervyy* ‘the first’ (9), *poshlyy* ‘vulgar’ (9), *zasoryonnyy* ‘dirty’ (9). The reactions include characteristics that indicate delicate meta-reflection and metaphorical assessment: *laskovyy* ‘tender’ (55), *nezhnyy* ‘gentle’ (52), *blagorodnyy* ‘noble’ (24), *tsvetnoy* ‘coloured’ (19), *perelivayishchiysya* ‘iridescent’ (10), etc. The following reactions are important for our research: *prostoy* ‘simple’ (61), *lyogkiy* ‘easy’ (58); *blizkiy* ‘familiar’ (30); *ponyatnyy* ‘clear’ (19).

Analyzing notional interpretations of the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE among native speakers in the school environment, O. Shushakova comes to the conclusion that the linguistic worldview and its element “Russian language” is determined by the academic environment. In particular, top reactions are *rodnoy yazyk* ‘mother tongue’ (26) and *Rossiya* ‘Russia’ (13), with the following in descending order: *rodina* ‘motherland’, *predmet* ‘subject’, *gramotnost’* ‘literacy’, *nichego* ‘nothing’, *slozhnyy* ‘difficult’, *podgotovka k uroku* ‘preparation for a lesson’, *uchebnik* ‘textbook’, *orfografiya* ‘spelling’, *krasota* ‘beauty’, *pravila* ‘rules’, *velikiy* ‘great’, *izuchenie* ‘study’, *rech* ‘speech’, *bogatyy* ‘rich’, *slova* ‘words’, *yazyk* ‘language’, *Pushkin* ‘Pushkin’, *otsenka* ‘grade’, *interes* ‘interest’, *sushchestvitel’noe* ‘noun’, *glagol* ‘verb’, *mir* ‘world’, *shkola* ‘school’, *znaniya* ‘knowledge’, *moguchiy* ‘powerful’, *napisaniye* ‘spelling’, *Oksana Vital’evna* ‘Oksana Vitalievna’, *nauka* ‘science’, *bukvy* ‘letters’, *skuka* ‘boredom’, *budem pisat’* ‘will write’, *diktant* ‘dictation’, *khoroosho* ‘good’, *slovar’* ‘dictionary’, *strakh* ‘fear’, *prilagatel’noe* ‘adjective’, *natsional’nost’* ‘nationality’, *uchyoba* ‘studies’, *uchitel’* ‘teacher’, *muchenie* ‘torture’, *razgovor* ‘conversation’, *Irkutsk* ‘Irkutsk’, *domashnyaya rabota* ‘homework’, *Gogol’* ‘Gogol’, *interesnyy predmet* ‘interesting subject’, *lingvistika* ‘linguistics’, *EGE* ‘Russian national exam’, *grammatika* ‘grammar’, *sochinenie* ‘essay’, *mogushchestvo* ‘might’, *Rus’* ‘Rus’, *poeziya* ‘poetry’.

literatura 'literature', *skazki* 'fairytales', *kul'tura* 'culture', *tolkovyi slovar'* 'Russian dictionary', etc. The researcher notices that a big number of reactions indicate the meaning of "subject matter" that is not fixed in dictionaries and that creates a connection with the process of learning, connection with a person, characteristic of the language and the process of its learning, contents and attributes of learning [3, p. 292]. The results of the experiment allow us to follow the dynamics of the concept formation, which is age-specific.

The list of evaluative associations that characterize the Russian language as an object comprises the following nouns and adjectives: *krasota* 'beauty', *velikiy* 'great', *moguchiy* 'powerful', *bogatyi* 'rich', *vlast'* 'power', *svoboda* 'freedom', *gordost'* 'pride', *bol'shoy* 'big', *svyatoy* 'saint', etc. We can see that the words from Turgenyev's precedent text are included on the list of main reactions. A separate group is personalized reactions: *Pushkin*, *Gogol'*, *Lomonosov*, *Lermontov*, *Tolstoy*, *Medvedev*, and teachers' names.

Thus, there is no doubt that the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE is within native speakers' verbal values, being a basic element of the national (Russian) worldview and formed with account for age, social and cultural factors. A specific place of the concept in the worldviews of non-native speakers of Russian is determined by the fact that a foreign language (including RFL) is an object and a means for learning and teaching at the same time. For a concept to form, extralinguistic context of language learning and speaking is important. Research led by T. Simanova proves that linguistic and cultural specificity of the target group taking part in the experiment manifests itself in such reactions as *foreign*, *second native*, *want to study*.

A great number of the subjects used the adjective *trudnyi* 'difficult', which is not surprising, considering the make-up of the group. However, 52 subjects characterized the object with the word *lyogkiy* 'easy'. Let us draw attention to the ratio of evaluative antonyms in the studies under analysis. In L. Tavdgiridze's thesis, adjectives *trudnyi* 'difficult', *slozhnyi* 'difficult', *samyi slozhnyi* 'the most difficult', *tyazhyolyi* 'hard' (about 700) are opposed to such characteristics as *lyogkiy* 'easy', *prostoy* 'simple', *ponyatnyi* 'clear' (about 70), i.e. there is an up-to-tenfold difference. It should be mentioned that native speakers, in the case of *slozhnyi* 'difficult', can reflexively exclude themselves and use the Own/Alien opposition (*slozhnyi dlya inostrantsev* 'difficult for foreigners'). In the group of foreign students, 420 people characterized the Russian language as *trudnyi* 'difficult', and 52 – as *lyogkiy* 'easy', i.e. the difference in quantity is not so great. Other examples are *ponyatnyi* 'clear' – *neponyatnyi* 'unclear' (20 and 13 subjects respectively) and *neudobnyi* 'inconvenient' – *udobnyi* 'convenient' (7 and 4 subjects respectively).

The foreign students distinguish different aesthetic, practical (including communicative) and physical (perceptual) characteristics. Aesthetic associations are verbalized in *krasivyi* 'beautiful' (second place in the ranking), *zvuchnyi* 'good sounding', *priyatnyi* 'pleasant', *vyrazitel'nyi* 'expressive'. Aesthetic characteristics overlap

with the cognitive attribute "vocabulary": *vyrazitel'nyi* 'expressive', *bogatyi* 'rich'. Practical characteristics are rather frequent: *vazhnyi* 'important', *nuzhnyi* 'necessary', *poleznyi* 'useful', *vliyatel'nyi* 'influential', *mnogofunktsional'nyi* 'multifunctional'. Among pejorative practical reactions are such adjectives as *neinternatsional'nyi* 'non-international', *nerasprostranyonnyi* 'unexpanded'. The concept specificity is evident in comparison: *ne takoy, kak rodnoy* 'different from the native language'. Physical (perceptual) characteristics are unique as compared to the native speakers' reactions: *gromkiy* 'loud', *bystryi* 'quick', *medlennyi* 'slow'. We believe that the characteristic *grubiy* 'rude' (15 reactions) should in a number of cases be included in physical characteristics since it can refer to the way the language sounds rather than to the cognitive attribute "vocabulary" (cf. 18 reactions *grubiy* 'rude' in the native speakers' group). The adjective *tvordiy* 'hard', which is unique as compared to the native speakers' reactions, proves that. On the contrary, the native speakers' reactions include *myagkiy* 'soft' (36), which we consider a metaphor, a synonym to *nezhnyi* 'gentle', *laskovyi* 'tender', etc. that characterize the language in terms of its expressive potential.

Metonymic characteristic *velikiy* 'great' (a great country, great people, the language of the great literature) is common for both the native and non-native speakers. We believe that, in some cases, a quantitative parameter is actualized in the semantics of that word, cf. *bol'shoy* 'big' suggested by the non-native speakers and *beskrayniy* 'borderless', *obshirnyi* 'wide', *neob'yatnyi* 'spanless', etc. in the native speakers' reactions. The position of the adjective *moguchiy* 'powerful', as mentioned above, is to a great extent determined by the text that is precedent for people of the Russian culture, that is why it is not among the non-native speakers' reaction.

General characteristics and emotive adjectives indicate different positions of the Russian language in the hierarchy of verbal values. In particular, the non-native speakers place such adjectives as *khorooshiy* 'good', *lyubimyi* 'beloved' on the positive end of the spectrum, while the verb *ne nravitsya* 'don't like' – on the negative end; a neutral characteristic is *ne khorooshiy i ne plokhoy* 'neither good and nor bad'. Positive characteristics in the native speakers' group are more radical: *luchshiy* 'the best', *samyi luchshiy* 'the best of the best', *samyi lyubimyi* 'the most beloved', *neobyknovenniy* 'not ordinary', *ideal'nyi* 'ideal', etc. The Russian subjects gave emotive negative reactions *skuka* 'boredom', *strakh* 'fear', *mucheneye* 'torment', etc., connected with learning Russian at school.

Ideological characteristics are much less prominent in the non-native speakers' reactions. In particular, the adjective *svobodnyi* 'free' is one of the most frequent reactions among the native speakers, whereas, in research led by T. Simanova, only one person used the adjective *nezavisimyi* 'independent'.

Some reactions indicate extralinguistic factors of language-learning. In particular, the characteristic *yazyk druzheskogo obshcheniya* 'the language of companionship' is valid with account for a situation when foreigners have to

communicate with fellow students, friends and acquaintances.

The author of research also analyzes the concept in dynamics taking into account the time students spend in Russia (up to 5 years). In our opinion, the conclusion that “positive” cognitive attributes *krasiviyi* ‘beautiful’, *khorooshiy* ‘good’, *bogatyi* ‘rich’, *vliyatel’nyi* ‘influential’, etc. of the concept becoming less vivid can be explained by habituation effectis not quite valid since these characteristics are present in the native speakers' reactions (see above).

The association experiment conducted among the Taiwanese students showed the following. Personalized reactions were rather scarce: precedent names *Putin* (mentioned by most subjects), *Chaikovski*, *Pushkin*, sporadic reactions *Tolstoy*, *Mendeleyev*, unique reactions *Polina Gagarina*, *odin buryatskiy muzhchina*, *kotorogo ya vstretil in Baikale* ‘a Buryat man whom I met at Lake Baikal’, *moy uchitel’* ‘my teacher’, *moy onlain partnyor* ‘my online partner’, etc. We would like to draw attention to the fact that the president's name was often misspelled: *s Pudimom*, *s F.F. Putinom*, etc. Such variants of the precedent anthroponym, in our opinion, are unlikely to appear in the speech of non-native speakers learning Russian in authentic social context.

Another important issue is the associative link between the Russian language and the online partners (people with whom non-native speakers are learning the language online and who become a personalized embodiment of the language culture). The non-native speakers who learn about the Russian culture online fall victim to stereotypes, their frequent reactions being *vodka* ‘водка’, *kholodnaya pogoda* ‘cold weather’, *matrioshka* ‘nesting doll’, *medved’* ‘bear’.

The described element of the linguistic worldview is influenced by the academic environment, the concept is connected with academic materials (reactions *fil’my* ‘films’, *pesnya* ‘song’, *traditsionnye pesni* ‘traditional songs’, *poslovitsy* ‘proverbs’, *alfawit* ‘the ABC’, *bukva “r”* ‘letter “r”’, *strannye bukvy* ‘strange letters’, *slovar’ i uchebnyk* ‘a dictionary and a student’s book’, *Chaikovski*, etc.), with objectives (*grammaticheski slozhnyi* ‘grammatically difficult’, *govorit’ bistro* ‘to speak quickly’, *bystroye govoreniye* ‘a quick speaking’, etc.). These reactions are extremely important because the Russian language is connected with learning and not included into daily routine and social life.

Without doubts, one common characteristic for all the subjects is the adjective *trudnyi / slozhnyi* ‘difficult’. However, in the native speakers’ answers, the cognitive attribute “possibility to learn” ranks third [5], whereas in the non-native speakers’ answers it ranks first, with 26% [6]. In our experiment, this attribute has a strong lead (it is mentioned in every questionnaire), for example: *slozhnyi* ‘difficult’, *trudneye*, *chem. yaponskiy yazyk* ‘more difficult than Japanese’, *samyi trudnyi v mire* ‘the most difficult language in the world’, etc.

The fact that the Russian language culture is not similar to the non-native speakers’ one enhances mystery

and attractiveness of the language, that is why every questionnaire has adjectives that actualize these meanings: *slavyanskiy* ‘slavic’, *neobychnyi* ‘unusual’, *krasiviyi* ‘beautiful’, *interesnyi* ‘interesting’, *osobennyi yazyk* ‘special language’; *slozhnyi*, *no udivitel’nyi* ‘difficult but extraordinary’, etc. We define this evaluative characteristic as “object irrationality/ transcendence”. Admirative characteristic *udivitel’nyi* ‘extraordinary’, *neobychnyi* ‘unusual’, *strannyi* ‘strange’, etc. takes second place. Aesthetic characteristic ranks third: *ochen’ krasiviyi* ‘very beautiful’, *zvuchnyi* ‘good sounding’, etc. Together, aesthetic, admirative and other characteristics lead to philosophic conclusions: *russkiy yazyk otkryl mne dver’ v novyi mir* ‘the Russian language has opened the door into another world for me’; *russkiy yazyk assotsiiuetsya s novoy zhiznyu* ‘the Russian language is associated with a new life’. A good example is one subject’s attempt to give an answer in the form of a proverb: *Snachala gorko, potom sladko*. ‘First bitter, then sweet’. Such reaction indicates a cognitive experiment – an attempt to describe the object using a linguistic means whose characteristics are relevant to the object's characteristics. Such description is “modeling language through language”.

The practical relevance of the results obtained from comparing the verbal value RUSSIAN LANGUAGE with the corresponding element of the linguistic worldview lies in prospects for culture-specific courses of RFL abroad.

V. CONCLUSION

To sum up, the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE constitutes a verbal value, being an element of the linguistic worldview, which is determined by the global linguistic environment. The concept interpretations field and information content, and the cognitive attributes ranking are determined by the academic environment: correlation between L1 and L2, immersion into the linguistic environment or learning the language outside the linguistic environment.

The specificity of the concept under analysis for an average non-native speaker learning Russian outside the linguistic and cultural context manifests in precedent names, stereotypes, priority of the cognitive attribute “difficulty”, link with academic materials content, emphasis on the interpretative characteristic “transcendence/irrationality”. More research is needed to study the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE in a more representative group due to the social and historical dynamics: a new political reality and globalization processes affect the place of the concept RUSSIAN LANGUAGE in the linguistic worldview of non-native speakers of Russian, foreign nationals.

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