

# Length and Width “Measurement” in Mood and Light or Few Words on Nationally-and Culture-Specific Representations of Road

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**Abstract**—The article cites the results of an experiment carried out amongst Russian and Chinese student populations for the purpose of identifying the visual and emotional contents of the cultural representation of the “Road”.

**Keywords**—worldview; cultural universals; concept; mental representation of road

## I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporarily, China is becoming closer to the Russians and their ways of life. Chinese students are learning the Russian language and are understanding the depths of Russian culture. Literature courses have been a source of knowledge and opportunity. The Sanya University in Hainan Province (China) offers its four-year students an intensive course of Russian literary history.

Conversance with Russian literature suggests to address the linguistic worldview. Any piece of art conveys its author’s vision alongside their national-specific worldview that was instilled in them from an early age.

An author strives to convey this by applying specific linguistic means from their personal and emotional relationships into narrated events and characters. At the same time, an author tries to evoke a narrator’s feelings in tune with the artist’s concept, thus concurrently achieving the expressive function, namely, the function of self-expression and the function of response [1].

## II. EXPERIMENT OF MENTAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE CHINESE AND THE RUSSIANS

Since one perceives and builds in the mind a mental representation of the world in accordance with their national-specific perception, it is of special interest to juxtapose the mental representations of the native culture and of the culture of the language studied.

For example, the representation of the “Road” in Russian art is pivotal and carries much meaning. Treatment of the “path”/ “road” as a cultural unit and a universal concept draws attention to the Russian and Chinese researchers

(Arutyunova N.D.; Bespalova O.E.; Golovnya A.I.; Yan Xinxin; Guseva E.V.; Rudnev E.N.; Svobotova S.V.; Tikhomirova E.E., Lin Hai; Ippolitov O.O.; Mikitchenko E.S. and other) [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] [10].

While offering students the opportunity to read Russian classics (“The Winter Road” by Alexander Pushkin, “Onto the Road I walk Alone” by Mikhail Lermontov, “The Dead Souls” by Nikolai Gogol (fragments) and such), it is essential to explore the students’ individual (and national) representation of the “Road” and at what extent it correlates with the classic works of Russian fiction.

For that purpose, a written questionnaire survey had been distributed among the Chinese students studying Russian at the Sanya University, China.

Since not only the word presents the objectivity of the cultural concept but its visual representation as well, the survey’s first task was to describe verbally an imaginary scene of the “Road” that the students might have pictured as artists or film directors. With the assistance of questions, the researchers found out what kind of the “Road” the respondents had imagined and explored the national contents of the “Road” representation.

The results of the survey showed that Chinese youth would rather describe the “Road” as perfect, modern, comfortable, sunny, and gleeful. It was decorated with flowers and trees, which, it must be said, corresponds to reality, as Hainan indeed is the place of sufficient roadways and yearlong festive blossoming.

On the contrary, Russian students’ answers differ from such an “optimistic” worldview. (A similar survey had been distributed among the Russian population) [11]. To the question: what kind of road can the “Road” be, the Russians wrote: “The road can be long, winding, straight, bumpy, nice, tiresome, wrong, to nowhere, last, homeward, dirt, asphalt, closed, under repair, narrow, wide, tough...” and so on. [12].

It would seem that the visual representation and interpretation of the concept of the “Road” by the Russian and Chinese population is different and offers contrast. However, in the description by the Chinese population of a

long/ short or wide/narrow road show answers that *do not* relate to the traditional measurement units of length – meters or kilometers:

“If eight men can walk alongside – it is a wide road, and if three men cannot walk alongside – the road is narrow”.

“There are several driveways and a sidewalk therefore the road is wide, and it’s vice versa if the road is narrow.”

As we can see here, in the first instance, the road is measured by the size of a man’s assumed figure, and in the second instance - “in cars”. Indeed, road safety is very important for everyone, and, for that reason, we must determine the width of a road by the possibilities to drive along it: “The road is so narrow – there are just few places where two oncoming cars can pass each other safely enough” [13].

“Asphalt and urban roads are wide, and a rural road is narrow”.

“An urban road is usually wider, unlike a rural one”.

“A road is long when you cannot see its end at a glance”.

A long way means you cannot return for a great while. A short way means that you can return at any time you like”.

The variety of roads, a personal impression, or distance to home can serve as measurement units of the road, as well. However, the road is “measured” by the man’s emotional and attitudinal status towards the road:

“What is a long road? It’s the road that would be boring”.

Here the distance and time are fused into one: a boring way is long, and a cheerful way is short, although these paths can be of the same distance. We also describe a long lesson as dull. In other words, anything unexciting turns out to be long and lengthy. “What a lengthy movie! What a long lecture!” – this exclaims that, in such cases, time passes by tediously and monotonously.

“It is impossible to see the end of the road; tough work or tough job”.

“Need to travel for long time or with difficulties”.

This “or” is excellent: it turns out that the trip takes short time formally, but, if with difficulties, it would be “a long way” as well. In this case, particular measurements become trifling. Important is what the road/ path brings the man – difficulties of overcoming or lightness in achievement.

There we see the significant, emotional tension that displays certain differences:

“A narrow road – dark, desperate.

A wide road – light, cheerful” .

The “measurement” of length in “mood” and the measurement of width in “light” in Russian literature is typical. By the expression of emotions referring to certain length: “Happy the wayfarer who, after a long, boring journey with its cold, slush, dirt...sees at last the familiar roof...” (Nikolai Gogol) [14]. For most Russians, such

expressions as a “wide specious dark desperate road” or a “narrow tight joyful light road” sounds disagreeable.

The representation of the road/ path, besides the unity of spatial-time properties, absorbs the emotional-attitudinal properties. Only “in the semantics of the name ‘Road’ the emphasis is put on the spatial-presentive vision, while in the meaning of the road the emphasis is on the temporal-dynamic vision,” writes Russian scholar of language Nina D. Arutyunova [15].

Russian philosopher, Mikhail Bakhtin, calls “the interrelatedness of the temporal and spatial relations, artistically adopted in literature” the chronotopos: “The live artistic contemplation ... nothing sets apart and distracts from nothing. It seizes the chronotopos in all its entirety”; “the time here as if inflows into space and runs through it (creating roads), herefrom there is such a rich metaphorization of the road-path” [16].

“A light road is wide, but the dark one is narrow” (from a Chinese student’s questionnaire); “The way can be held on to, but one cannot hold the road!” (from a Russian student’s questionnaires) – are answers that are visually descriptive and support Bakhtin’s ideas that all art and literature definitions denote that spatial-temporal relationship are usually emotionally and appraisingly colored.

Compare how the Chinese students’ emotional evaluations of the road length and expanse are responding to the expression of feelings in Russian poetry:

“By road dull-lengthy,

Mirthless-desert,

She led me....”

“Obedient to her, indolent,

On my wearing way

Complaining not, I keep silent.

To find the trodden path,

Joyful, vast,

Desire not myself ” (Fyodor Sologub) [17].

### III. CONCLUSION

The similarities in delivering the attitudinal content of different cultures’ concepts help teachers find a common base that allow foreign students to lessen difficulties in the study of national-specific cultural representations of Russian literature despite differences in the artistic and linguistic worldviews.

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