

Specificity of the Spatial Representations in the Road Concept

Russian-Chinese Association Experiment

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Abstract—This article presents the findings of the experiment to identify the spatial representations pertaining to the image of ‘road’, conducted among Russian and Chinese students.

Keywords—*space; chronotope; worldview; association experiment; image of a road*

I. INTRODUCTION

As is known, a person perceives and builds in his mind the worldview according to the nation-specific perception of reality, and, therefore, in the course of studying a foreign language he might encounter new concepts concerning the world or he is likely to find there is a similar interpretation of various phenomena even in some dramatically different cultures.

Assigning images of another culture is rather a dilemma since each is multivalent, full of many meanings and "implies changes in students' cognitive space" [1]. In this one statement we see the concepts of meaning and image, culture and space that we use in the immediate neighborhood, in one row.

II. SPACE AS A PRESENTATION

A. *Space and Vastitude in Russian Culture*

An ordinary perception understands space as certain dimensions, wherein any phenomena can take place, there can be various subjects and beings realizing the potential of movement and transition. Searching space, even if it seems empty and motionless, a person always looks for and waits for the possibility of changing its contents, for any manifestations, for a certain occurrence.

In the worldview of a Russian person this appellation is synonymous with the word *vastitude*, creating an image of a free natural landscape, and with the concept of will – the possibility of getting outwards out of the chains of boundary conditions into vastness, into the choice of ways and opportunities. When the path is already chosen, chosen *at free will*, there comes a moment to realize this path in accordance with one's own understanding of freedom. So, the words *will* and *freedom*, constituting one phrase, carry no tautology: indeed, will is sought outside, in a boundless

vastitude of the choice of spaces, while freedom is gained within the individual self, through the series of self-restrictions, in folding spaces and in walking on a cutting edge of the only possible path – "the true path".

The representation of space in one's mind is such that it loses its static and turns out moving, changing depending on the observer's position: it can contract ("The language of space, compression to one point...!" O. E. Mandelshtam) or expand ("Contracting, I took pride of space for what has mushroomed" O. E. Mandelshtam) [2] [3].

B. *Different Models of Space in Science and Art*

The philosophy from its origins refers to various models of space and raises issues: whether the space exists as 'empty' or this is a specific 'co-existence' and the relationship of phenomena and subjects that fill it; whether it is necessary to objectify the space and pull it away from subject, and many other.

The originator of German classical philosophy I. Kant regards space not so much as a contingency of existing various developments, but rather as a representation native to human intelligence: "It is a preconceived idea, necessarily underlying external phenomena." The philosopher accentuates the transcendence (the cognition capability) and the apriority (as the primal truth that is unquestionable and does not need confirmation by experience) of such interpretation of the space concept and conceives that the effect of phenomena and objects, occurring at the level of "external contemplation", makes it possible to talk about from the position of human perception, the subjective condition of sensuality, where our external contemplations are possible. "The definitive form of this sensibility, called by us the sensibility, is prerequisite for all relationship where all subjects are contemplated as being outside of us; this form, besides these objects, presents pure contemplation known as space." Therefore, the phenomena and subjects that we assign to the outside (objective) world, "is the core of only representation of our sensibility, the form of which is space" [4].

When we talk of the spatial extent, we also mainly refer to the vision of space by man from different perspectives: conventional or scientific, including cosmogonic (cosmic,

physical, geographical, geometrical, cartographic and other space).

Different nations' vision of the world may vary considerably, may change over extended history periods, therefore, one can speak about archaic and modern ideas concerning space, mythopoetic and standard and everyday. Space can be architectural, public or living. We may speak of an integrated space of a town: advertising, cultural, creative, art and other. The scientific community writes about the space of meditation, of social processes, of language and culture, of modernity, etc.

An important place is also given to different space forms in art— architecture, visual art, literature and other. Each piece of art alone "is specified by the spatial and time structure", "describes a unique microcosm, arranged according to its specific principles (B. A. Uspensky) [5].

All arts, according to M. M. Bakhtin, can be divided according to their correlation with time and space into temporal (music), spatial (vision art) and space-temporal (theater, cinema, literature). Referring to the space of a text, Bakhtin introduces to the literature studies the term of chronotope – a figuratively understandable space-temporal unity where space becomes 'impregnated' with time, is involved in its movement, while time, in turn, 'condenses' and turns into a space form [6].

E. L. Balkind suggests in her work *Chronotope in Visual Art* that space is a universal term, applied to all forms of art and that the chronotope as a correlation and weaving of spatial and temporal forms, is present in every art work, is manifested in any piece of art, whether it is a literate form, music, a performance or a film. Since "time is the attribute of any reality, including art, it cannot be excluded of the chronotope, leaving only space", therefore, the artistic space "does not reduce to the arrangement of subjects in the actual space", but turns to be a more complex concept. In literature the leading source in chronotope is time, not space. In visual art, however, it is space and movement that manifest time as its fourth dimension" [7].

Spatial concepts are also studied in the terms of perception, psychology, human reasoning and language functioning: "There is nothing more natural than to image language in the form of space or dimensions, in which people form their ideas" [8]. E. S. Kubryakova focuses her work on the "language of space" and the "space of language" [9].

Various space understanding is explored by such sciences as anthropology, ethnology, culturology (for example, the semiotic spaces or semiospheres of Yu. M. Lotman as the space and condition of sense generation), linguoculturology and by the cognitive linguistics [10].

Specifically, D. B. Newby specifies the cognitive space as a human experience, being expressed in the relationship between the concepts [11]. Among the types of cognitive space there is the individual cognitive space (the backbone of which is the cognitive base with the requisite repertoire of stereotype knowledge and images); the collective and national cognitive space; and the space of

metacommunication [12] [13] [14]. All this is based on the concepts of mental and communication space, on the understanding of the sphere of concepts as a way of structuring the cognitive space, and on the concept of worldview [15] [16] [17]. According to E. S. Kubryakova, the worldview features the global image of the world as a result of man's entire intellectual activities. The man gets it during his contacts with the world [18].

C. *Spatial Image of a Road Identified During the Association Experiment*

1) *Vivification of space.*

Language speakers' space view, introduced by the archetype of culture and solidified in the linguistic worldview, is projected on the association-verbal model of linguistic persona. All this gives a large base for scientific studies (including the association experiments), showing that the abstract, continuous and homogeneous, infinitely divisible physical and mathematical space, scientifically understood, is saturated in man's thinking with different images and movements, filled with high value meanings, animated and inspired. A. O. Yakimovich said "in the spatial representation of one sort or another very often are reflected the universe, social system, a moment of history" [19].

Speaking about Russia, it can be stated that its boundless expanse presents not only the peculiarity of the environment, incidental to the external of existence. Russian philosophers note that this vastness of spaces belongs to the Russians' spiritual life. One of his works addressing problems of the philosophy of history, where he attributes the concept "of the geography of Russian soul" to the historical fate of the Russians, N. A. Berdyaev precisely names *On the Power of Space over the Russian Soul* [20].

"The remoteness is a natural outgo for the Russian soul's craving for the infinity," assumes G. D. Gachev. Listing everything that belongs to the collection of national values, he includes also a road—"...the integrity of the national life: nature, and weather, and the way of life, and folklore, and language, and the figurativeness of poetics, the relation of space and time and their bearings: expanse, vastitude, top and bottom, a slope, a road and such is used to identify the image of the world, namely, appears a kind of a pattern, the basic fund of the national values, landmarks, symbols, archetypes that defines further the thinking pattern, Logos of the nation" [21].

V. N. Toporov in his work *Space and Text* pays much attention to the archaic model of the world, to the mythopoetic space and its basic elements – the center and path [22].

It is not therefore accurate to speak about the world of the Russian man without mentioning the road image, one of the most important in Russian culture, holding many meanings and acting as a value criterion.

2) *Road as an Indispensable Constituent of the National Worldview.*

Some collaborative studies of Russian and Chinese researchers have been dedicated to the comparison of the

concepts (cultural universals, mental representations) of path / road in the Russian and Chinese languages. Specifically, E. E. Tikhomirova and Lin Hai are considering the ethical connotations of the cultural universal 'path' in the Russian and Chinese languages; A. I. Golovnya and Yang Xin – the functioning in the Russian and Chinese languages of the synonymic concepts 'path' and 'road'; E. S. Mikitzenko and Liu Binyu are identifying the figurative-emotional filling of the mental representation 'road' in the Russian and Chinese student audiences and the effect of the symbolism of color and color archetypes of native culture on the beginnings of individual concepts and images [23] [24] [25] [26].

Findings of the experiments identifying the specifics of the Russian and Chinese students' ideas of the national images of 'road' and 'path' (they were asked to describe a visual image of road) have been presented earlier in the articles *The Associative Experiment as a Way to Identify the National and Cultural Contents of Lexical Associations, "Measurement" of the length in mood and the width in light: the national and cultural features of the road image*, etc. [27] [28].

The visual road image identified by the Chinese students stands a stark contrast to the traditional ideas of road among the Russian students—a cheerful, bright description of a modern roadway for a high-speed traffic, surrounded with greens and flowers in China and, as the well-known poet Sergei Yesenin delicately quoted, "not a very savory road" which, nevertheless, is "everlasting dear", "by which every Russian traveled much" [29]. The emotional attitude to the infinite extent and disorder of Russian roads was best expressed by N. V. Gogol in his masterpiece *Dead Souls*: "Happy the wayfarer who, after a long, boring journey with its cold, slush, dirt ... sees at last a familiar roof ..." [30].

An additional survey among the Chinese and Russian students was conducted later to clarify the spatial correlation associated with road and represented in the worldview. The questions were oriented to the assessment of road parameters: its length and width.

In the research community it has been underlined that in the association experiments "the particular importance presents the statistic parameter of the experiment – the sample size, since only the extent of its representation determines the validity of the survey findings" [31].

However, even one example can sometimes be indicative as well. One English girl who was speaking good Russian, on a request to give the definition to the word *road* quickly answered "Useful!" It appears that no Russian will ever say so because he does not put himself (or, the human being in general) in the center of the Universe. In Russian mythopoetic and religious worldview road "leads" a man, yet "the ways of God are inscrutable". Road represents the mystery of life, and the earthly course is associated with the power of other, supreme forces. Occidental culture treats the world more pragmatically and recognizes everything that serves man's wellbeing—the role of road is to promote a comfortable moving, and therefore, to benefit.

Since the survey was conducted in small groups (10 to 15 students) and there are not enough statistics, this paper is limited to commenting the respondents' answers in the context of expressing the culturally conditioned concepts of space and time linked to the image of path and road.

3) *Width and Length as the Key Spatial Parameters: The Road Long and Short.*

One of the survey questions was "What road can be called long or short?" The Russian and the Chinese students' answers can be divided into the following groups from the perspective of covering a certain distance, time span, emotional attitude and appraisal of the difficulties while covering the distance.

Examples of the Russian and the Chinese informants' answers defining a long road:

a) *Distance*

The Russian students: "Bigger distance; over 400 km; from Vladivostok to Moscow, from Moscow to Sochi by car; a serpentine road, by sea" (28%).

The Chinese students: "Long – don't see the end of the road at once".

b) *Time*

The Russian students: "More time; long; have a snack on one's way" (15%).

The Chinese students: "Have to travel for a long time or with difficulties".

c) *Emotions*

The Russian students: "Dull; eventful; difficult but interesting" (14%).

The Chinese students: "What does a long road mean? The one that may seem boring to me".

d) *Overcoming difficulties*

The Russian students: "Long road is difficult: the one that affects exhaustion, fatigue, one's energies run low, the breath knocked; the one it is difficult to go physically or spiritually (43% of the answers).

The Chinese students: "Impossible to see the road end, a difficult task or a hard case".

This is how a shorter road is depicted:

a) *Distance*

The Russian students: "Short-distance, in a courtyard, from one's house to the baker's store, from one's house to a store in your house, nearby" (22%).

Chinese students: "To go not far – where is it? Home".

b) *Time*

The Russian students: "Less than a two-hour drive; half the time; don't notice how the time pass by; at night when asleep, with a book in a train; the length does not matter – unnoticed" (36%).

The Chinese students: "To spend less time".

c) *Emotions*

The Russian students: "Jauntiness; with pleasure; does not make nervous; go happily no matter how far; light of heart: the journey home" (36%); "Like a short life – can be mournful".

The Chinese students: "Short road is fun".

d) *Overcoming difficulties.*

The Russian students: "To get less tired" (60%);

The Chinese students: "Simple matter or work".

The measurement of a road length with the help of temporal characteristics (lengthful – long) is typical for the archaic and mythopoetic worldview by the Russian man, where space and time are inseparable from each other and form the integral spatial-temporal continuum, named by philosopher and art theorist M. M. Bakhtin the chronotope, "The time here as if blends in space and flows across it (forming paths), herefrom is some right metaphorizing the way and road: 'the path of life', 'to strike a new path'", "historic path", etc." [32].

In the answers of the Chinese students we find a road length that can be measured in time spent on traveling.

On the question in which art forms we find the road image ("Where is the theme of the road explored?"), one Chinese student answers "At the time of birth," understanding it in one's own way.

Indeed, space models the life, directing one along paths—roads, realizing the implementation and comprehension of one's destiny through movement (advancement), hence the origination of such associations of the representatives of Russian culture: a short road – a short life (one of the answers was "Like a short life – can be sad").

This may imply the impossibility to achieve one's life ambitions, the loss of one's own path or the lack of strength to overcome destined severities, since in the mythopoetic worldview the path is a form of connection between two marked points of space and leads to some focus through overcoming whatsoever obstacles, perils and hardships. "Meeting a goal objective by the subject of the path always necessitates the promotion in the relative-mythological or sacral status ... The difficulty of path – its permanent and sortal property; to move along the path, to overcome it already makes a deed, the self-sacrifice on the part of a marching zealot, a wayfarer "[33]. It becomes clear that the highest proportion (43%) in the Russian students' questionnaires accounts for the associations "a lengthy road – hard". The hardships of path are marked by the Chinese students as well— "What is a long road supposed to mean?" "The road that seemed boring to me," replies one of the Chinese students. And this totally coincides with the mental outlook of the Russian man who calls a long road boring and fatiguesome and who loves wide, bringing joy to one's soul.

D. *The Road Wide and Narrow*

The sample answers of the Russian and the Chinese informants for the definition of a wide / narrow road split up

into two big groups: an urban road and / or the traffic safety and environment with the perception of wide and freedom (or vice versa).

E. *A wide road*

1) *Traffic safety*

The Russian students: "a four-lane; many lanes; four lanes, when the road width does not stress while moving along it, ensures safety; free traffic; two cars can pass around; an avenue; a highway; wide – in Khabarovsk, narrow – in Vladivostok" (63%).

The Chinese students: "There are several passageways for motor-cars and a sideway for passersby – means wide, while narrow – vice versa. Asphalt and wide urban, while the village road – narrow. An urban road is usually wider than village one. If eight men can walk alongside – it is a wide road, and if three men cannot walk alongside – a narrow road".

2) *Closeness to nature*

The Russian students: "A field road, one can go through a field in different directions; spaciousness, a road stretched to the horizon (horizon-wide); a country road, you can drive even without the road, one's one way. Wide relates to the word vastness. Vastness in a field around. Any path is free, you are alone. For a big man with a big heart. A wide and bright road" (37%).

The Chinese students: "A wide road – bright, joyful".

F. *A narrow road*

1) *Traffic safety*

The Russian students: "In a town amidst skyscrapers; single-lane; many vehicles and people, thronged; dual and parked motor-cars; narrow for overtaking, passing of oncoming traffic, maneuvers; motor-cars unable to pass around" (57%).

2) *Closeness to nature*

The Russian students: A plank of wood laid across a brook; a run; a path; a path through the woods; twisting like a strip; through obstacles, ups and downs, rocks and chutes, it can be dangerous; in mountains" (43%).

The Chinese students: "Village – narrow; three men cannot walk alongside – this is narrow; a narrow road – dark, despairing".

We find the road width is not measured in standard units, but rather by the capacity for men and transport; along with this an asphalt urban road, naturally wide enough, is perceived as narrow because it fails to provide spaciousness of the soul ("In a town amidst skyscrapers").

A field road, with width in meters, perhaps, narrower than an urban one, is perceived as fairly wide because "you can go your own way"; the space is free to the horizon and 'a man with big heart' feels his 'free rein' in the spreading vastness. In the Chinese audience, the wide road is associated rather with light and joy (and light needs open spaces), while the narrow road – with darkness, gloom and hopelessness

(namely with captivity and the lack of space), which in no way contradicts the worldview of the Russian man.

III. CONCLUSION

The spatial relations, reflecting various life developments (the event and presentive-correlative spheres, the subjectivity of their assessment by a man, the specifics of natural surroundings, of the landscape and the parametrical localization, the most diverse parametrical characteristics of objects and phenomena – all uniquely find expression in language), form one of the most prime aspects of the linguistic worldviews.

Considering the spatial model of the universe or its elements, the spatial coordinates and reference points, included into the collection of national values (such, for example, as way and road), we should bear in mind that "the worldview is multilayered: it includes both the mythological universe, and scientific patterning, and everyday "common sense. At the same time, in ordinary humans these layers form a heterogeneous mixture that functions as something integral. The Newtonian, Einsteinian concepts are blending in the modern human conscience with profoundly mythological representations and intrusive habits of see looking at the world in its common outlines. Upon this substrate are imposed the images created by art or more in-depth scientific understanding, as well as by the constant code translation of spatial representations into other models. As a result, a complex, semiotic mechanism, in permanent motion, is being created" (Yu. M. Lotman) [34].

Conducting experiments to identify the coincidences or diversity of the native culture concepts with the images of culture of the studied language is of special interest for teachers of Russian as a foreign language, as in the association experiment "it is possible to obtain the data indicative of the national and cultural markedness of the linguistic sign, and of the features of the ethno-linguistic conscience" [35].

The experiment conducted shows that the space, understood by man, always has the anthropocentric orientation. Both the Russian and the Chinese students inherently have primarily standard-everyday verbal description of a road space. Such description of space is characterized by continuity with material objects, by the representation from the position of an observer present in the described 'picture' (people, motor-cars, buildings, trees and scenery); this space is being organized, constituted by various objects (items, things, people. In contrast to the scientific concept of the space continuity, in everyday representations space is divided into separate fragments, discretely ("From Home to the Grocery Store", "from Moscow to Sochi", "less than two hours driving", etc. Here the priority properties of objects are topological (qualitative) rather than metric, the precise quantitative characteristics of size or distance between them are used not very frequently ("an urban road – wide, and a village road – narrow", "Wide is when you are alone on the road", etc.).

In the representation of the road image, also manifests itself the presence of archaic and mythopoetic worldviews

(specifically, a 'wide' road to the Russians is attributed to the concept of will, and to the Chinese - with the concepts 'bright' and 'illuminated') and the influence of art works of the culture of origin on this image-building. Thus, the offered road image is described by most of the Russian students a la paintings Rye of I. I. Shishkin and I. I. Levitan's Vladimirka, or is close to the image of a country road in wheat fields, as shown in the film *The Ballad About the Soldier*, directed by G. N. Chukhrai. The visualization by modern young people of the Russian winter road with a fast-moving carriage drawn by a trio or horses is, for the most part, intermediated by art.

In spite of the contrast of visual representation of road in worldviews of the Russian and the Chinese students (the modern comfort and structuredness of road for the Chinese students and the disorder and uncertainty for the Russians, and also the different color preferences in the color description of roadbed), their emotional and assessment constituents, related to the spatial world perception, associated with path and road, are in many ways close.

Using the common ground inherent in such different cultures, the close spatial and temporal conceptualization by the representatives of the Russian and Chinese civilizations, teachers of Russian as a foreign language have the opportunity to bring Chinese students closer to an adequate perception of one of the most important images, having the special meaning, of Russian culture – the image of path and road.

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