

# Conceptual Structure of SLAVA/FAME/RUHM in Russian, American and German Consciousness

Olga G. Palutina<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, Kazan, Russia

Correspondence: Olga G. Palutina, Kazan (Volga Region) Federal University, 420008, Kazan, Kremlyovskaya Street 18, Russia. E-mail: opalutina@mail.ru

Received: June 2, 2015 Accepted: June 15, 2015 Online Published: June 29, 2015

doi:10.5539/jsd.v8n5p251

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/jsd.v8n5p251>

## Abstract

This paper investigates similarities and differences in the conceptualization of the lexemes SLAVA, FAME, and RUHM by culture and by individual perceptions among speakers of Russian, American English, and German respectively. Methods consisted of a free association experiment and lexicographic and phraseological analysis using dictionaries and Internet sources. All three cultures characterized the terms both positively and negatively, however each culture's characterization was unique. Russian text sources align 'slava' with wealth, but also with rumor and gossip; American English sources characterize 'fame' as eternal, but also as something to be avoided, while German sources consider 'ruhm' as a good stimulus, but one which may also be accompanied by envy. The cognitive linguistics approach provides exploration of cognitive consciousness at a cultural level as well as in the core, revealing that despite differences across the speakers' cultures, the speakers themselves show more similarity in their perceptions of the corresponding concepts.

**Keywords:** cognitive linguistics, association experiment, concept, concept core and periphery

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Scientific Relevance of a Problem

The most important achievement of modern linguistics is consideration of language "in a new paradigm from the point of view of its participation in the cognitive activity of the person" (Maslova, 2007). Language is the verbal treasury of a nation, a medium of thought transmission which it "packs" into language structure. The knowledge used during this process is not only the knowledge of language, but also knowledge of the world, of social context, of the principles of speech communication, of the addressee, and background knowledge, etc.

The major object of research in cognitive linguistics is the concept. The concept is a mental essence which has a name in language and reflects the cultural and national ideas of a people regarding the surrounding world. In this paradigm, the key concepts of culture are called the main units of the world image, the constants of culture possessing some importance, both for the individual, and for the linguocultural community as a whole.

In each concept the most significant knowledge for a person about the world is brought together and at the same time insignificant representations are rejected. The system of concepts forms the world image in which the understanding of reality by the person is reflected. Today in linguistic science it is possible to differentiate between three main approaches to the understanding of concepts: (a) the concept is the main "cell" of culture in the mental world of the person (Stepanov, 1997; Teliya, 1996); (b) semantics of a language sign forms a concept (Arutyunova, 1998; Shmelev, 2002); (c) the concept is an intermediary between words and reality (Kubryakova, 2004; Likhachev, 1997). Evans (2010) speaks of the relationship between non-linguistic concepts and the meanings encoded in the language, suggesting two terms, the lexical concept and the cognitive model and developing the Theory of Lexical Concepts and Cognitive Models.

### 1.2 Status of a Problem

The purpose of this research consists in the detection of both common and differing features in realization of the three concepts of SLAVA (from the Russian language), FAME (from American English), and RUHM (from German) in three linguocultures (Russian, American and German). Conceptual analysis is considered to be the main method for the research of concepts. Studies of works of different authors who were engaged in conceptual analysis show that there are different approaches to this term. Zubkova (1999) studied concepts TSAR and GOD

by means of analyzing proverbs and sayings containing the corresponding lexemes. Shamanova (1999) explored concept COMMUNICATION, building a lexico-phraseological field of the corresponding key word. As Frumkina states, "among different authors there is no consent regarding the set of procedures which should be considered as the conceptual analysis, but there is no agreement what should be considered the result either" (Frumkina, 1992). Popova and Sternin posit that the concept has no rigid structure; therefore, the conceptual analysis is a certain method of explicating concepts (Popova, Sternin, 2007).

## 2. Materials and Methods

In research a conceptual analysis can be based on the analysis of experimental data (free and directed association experiments, an experiment on subjective definitions and also analysis of lexicographic sources). The Association Experiment (AE) method helps to reveal the content of a concept in the cognitive consciousness of native speakers. The kernel of language consciousness includes those associations in an association and verbal network, which have the greatest number of connections revealed on the basis of the frequency principle. An association experiment helps to reveal not only the semantics of the word, but also the language stereotypes, peculiar features of mentality. That is to say, an association experiment is an effective way of access to the language consciousness of the person. There are several kinds of association experiments which can be used for the analysis of concepts and for the allocation of cognitive signs forming it. A free association experiment (Free AE) presupposes the answer with the first reaction which has come to mind to the word stimulus (Ufimtseva, 1996). There are no restrictions concerning reactions. According to Belyanin, an association experiment gives a chance to construct the semantic structure of the word, serves as a valuable material for studying psychological equivalents of semantic fields and reveals semantic links between words in a native speakers' mentality (Belyanin, 1999). Thus, the received reactions help to get an idea of what meanings or what frames of situations lie behind the studied concept for representatives of this or that culture.

The research of concepts of SLAVA/FAME/RUHM was conducted by means of the analysis of dictionary entries and a free AE. A free AE enables us to determine the core of the concept, or the basic layer of the concept, whereas the periphery can be described by means of the analysis of proverbs and sayings (Popova & Sternin, 2007). The experiment was performed with 60 native speakers of Russian, 56 Americans and 47 native speakers of German. The respondents were people aged 18-55, of both sexes, whose images of the world have national and cultural specifics, people who have been since their birth included into this culture and for whom the language of this culture is their mother tongue. Our experiment involved face-to-face communication as well as interviews via social networks and e-mails.

## 3. Results

### 3.1 Russian Image of the World (Based on the Perception of the Analyzed Concept)

Results show that for the Russian respondents, the most frequently mentioned associations were: wealth (60 – the number of reactions), a celebrity (57), success (54), honor (49), admirers (29), parties (25), stage (20), victory (19), a man's name Slava (18), Hollywood (15), paparazzi (14). Thereby, we see that when speaking about glory, the majority of interviewees first of all imagined celebrities, their prosperity and popularity which depend on their success. We can see that the larger number of reactions in the association field of the word «slava» is connected with popularity and honor. On the other hand, for many people glory is something "inaccessible" and "unreal". The singular reactions included: God, New York City, the USSR, flag, I want, the First Channel.

### 3.2 Reactions of Americans Compared to Russians

We find somewhat similar results for the speakers of American English as many reactions coincide with the reactions of the Russian speakers. For example, star fever – stardom, a celebrity – celebrity, paparazzi – paparazzi, Hollywood – Hollywood. When carrying out a free AE with the representatives of the American culture, the following reactions were revealed: recognition (36), success (35), fortune (32), celebrities (32), popularity (29), wealth (24), movies (23), Hollywood (20), paparazzi (14), credit (11), tabloids (10), notoriety (8), applause (8), stardom (6), spotlight (3), beautiful women (2), power (2). Among individual reactions the following ones were revealed: playing the flute, 15 minutes of fame, superficial life. Nevertheless, glory possesses not only positive characteristics from the point of view of the speakers of American English. Some respondents try to avoid glory which can be proved by the following reactions: undesirable, unwanted, not for me.

### 3.3 The Results of AE with Germans

The most frequent reactions of Germans were: Erfolg – success (32), Anerkennung – recognition (26), Reichtum

– wealth (23), Beliebtheit – popularity (23), Reputation – reputation (21), Fortkommen – career (18), Talent – talent (15), Hollywood – Hollywood (14), Prestige – prestige (10), Musik – music (9), Star – star (9), Motivation – motivation (7), Eitelkeit – vanity (6), Freiheit – freedom (5), Sieg – victory (5), Herrschaft – power (4), Klatschpresse – yellow press (4), Röte Laufer – a red path (2). Among individual reactions we should note: Bewertung durch viele Menschen – an assessment of other people, Erfolg oft erst nach dem Tod – glory after death, König – the king, Gestaltwerdung – formation of the personality.

As we can see, glory in the consciousness of this small sample of speakers of German has a more positive value: success, wealth, popularity, etc. According to the experimental data, glory for Germans is persistent work which is usually accompanied by recognition and honor. As it should be noted, the concept of glory presupposes a certain stimulus, namely, having once gained it, the person continues to work on himself or herself, without stopping at the point they reached. Along with positive characterization, we find some negative points. In the German image of the world glory is not only certain aspiration, publicity, honor, but is also envy, success in the understanding of Germans is associated with envy or jealousy.

### 3.4 Periphery of the Concepts

The analysis of the periphery of the concepts SLAVA/FAME/RUHM, which is characterized by various proverbs, sayings and aphorisms, has shown that for native speakers of Russian glory is something inaccessible and ephemeral, however positive: “A good name is better than riches”; “The glory is the love available to few people; the love is the glory available to all” (Landau, n.d., para. 6); “Earthly fame is like smoke...” (Akhmatova, n.d., para. 18). Relying on the analysis of proverbs and sayings of the English language it is possible to say that for Americans glory is everlasting, but changeable: “Fame lives on after death”, “Fame, like a river, is narrowest at its source and broadest afar off.” The periphery of the concept RUHM is represented by the following proverbs and phraseological units: Schlüssel zum Ruhm – a key to success; Weg zum Ruhm – the road to glory; sich nicht gerade mit Ruhm bekleckert haben – not to brag of success; Ruhm vergeht wie Schall und Rauch – the glory passes like smoke and noise.

## 4. Discussions

Concept SLAVA was previously explored by Nagibina (Nagibina, 2002), who focused on paradigmatic, syntagmatic and epigrammatic connections of the corresponding noun, as well as on association experiment data. Concept GLORY was analyzed by Antipova (Antipova, 2006), however, the research dealt only with the corresponding concept in the Anglo-Saxon culture. A complex comparative analysis of the three concepts in the three cultures – Russian, German and American, which was described in this paper, has been undertaken for the first time.

## 5. Conclusion

Having investigated the core and the periphery of the above concepts, we have arrived at the following conclusions:

1. Coincidence of reactions of free association experiments in the three cultures: celebrity – celebrity – Star; paparazzi – Paparazzi – Paparazzii; Hollywood – Hollywood – Hollywood, success – success – Erfolg.
2. Americans characterize glory by means of eternity, whereas Russians associate it with wealth.
3. On the periphery of the American and German concepts there is no such phenomenon as "gossip and rumor" that is observed in the Russian world image.
4. The difference between Germans and the other two cultures lies in the fact that for Germans glory is connected with envy.

The findings from our analysis have certain implications for the field of cognitive science, providing a snapshot of similarities and differences among the three ethnic groups in their perception of the world. One of the limitations of this study might be relatively small groups of interviewees, which we are planning to expand in our future research. It might also be interesting to include the Spanish respondents into our research since the Spanish language is getting more and more widespread all over the world. Determining possible gender differences in verbalization of the concepts under analysis might be another area of study.

## Acknowledgments

The work is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

## References

- Akhmatova, A. A. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://d1.webproxy.nic.tel/lookup/xn--80aaf8a3a.xn--e1aoq2b.aforizm.tel>
- Antipova, A. S. (2006). Concept *Slava* in Old English and culture. *Vestnik NGU. Series: Linguistics and intercultural communication*. Retrieved from <http://www.nsu.ru/jspui/bitstream/nsu/2108/1/16.pdf>
- Arutyunova, N. D. (1998). *Language and a person's world*. Moscow, Russia: Yazyki russkoi kultury.
- Belyanin, V. P. (1999). *Manual on the course "Psycholinguistics"*. Moscow, Russia: Novy gumanitarny universitet Natalii Nesterovoi.
- Evans, V. (2010). *How words mean*. New York, USA: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Frumkina, R. M. (1992). *Concept, category, prototype. Linguistic and extralinguistic semantics*. Moscow, Russia: INION RAN.
- Kubryakova, E. S. (2004). Language and knowledge. On the way to learning about language: parts of speech from the cognitive point of view. *Language role in knowledge of the world*. Moscow, Russia: Yazyki slavyanskoi kultury.
- Landau, G. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.inpearls.ru/author/8534>
- Likhachev, D. S. (1997). *Concept sphere of the Russian language*. Moscow, Russia: Academia.
- Maslova, V. A. (2007). *Introduction into cognitive linguistics: study guide*. Moscow, Russia: Flinta: Nauka.
- Nagibina, E.V. (2002). *Concept "slava" in the Russian language (Linguocultural aspect)*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Novosibirsk State Pedagogical University, Novosibirsk, Russia.
- Popova, Z. D., & Sternin, I. A. (2007). *Cognitive linguistics*. Moscow, Russia: AST: Vostok-Zapad.
- Shamanova, M. V. (1999). National specifics of reflection of concept "communication" in lexico-phraseological system of the Russian language//*Language and national consciousness*, 2, 52-54.
- Shmelev, A. D. (2002). *Russian language image of the world: materials for a dictionary*. Moscow, Russia: Yazyki slavyanskoi kultury.
- Stepanov, Y. S. (1997). *Constants. Dictionary of Russian culture. Experience of research*. Moscow, Russia: Shkola "Yazyki russkoi kultury".
- Telia, V. N. (1996). *Russian phraseology. Semantic, pragmatic, and linguocultural aspects*. Moscow, Russia: Yazyki russkoi kultury.
- Ufimtseva, N. V. (1996). *Russians: experience of one more self-knowledge. Ethnocultural specifics of language consciousness*. Moscow, Russia: Institut yazykoznaniya RAN.
- Zubkova, L. I. (1999). Concepts "God" and "tsar" in Russians' religious consciousness//*Language and national consciousness*, 2, 22.

## Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>).