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LINGUOCULTURAL MEANINGS OF SEVERAL IMAGES IN CHINESE RUSSIAN-LEARNERS' INTERLANGUAGE

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Abstract

The article, on the one hand, aims to figure out the linguocultural meanings of several images in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage, which is regarded as a constantly developing, consistent internal language system in the process of acquiring second language. On the other hand, the article is devoted to discuss actual communicative problems, which can be identified and explained as misunderstandings of certain linguocultural images, in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage. The alternative definitions of the term “interlanguage” in Russian and foreign linguistics are concerned as well. At the same time, theoretical studies of linguoculture in Russian researches are demonstrated to provide a theoretical framework for the article. The main commons and differences of the following images: “smile”, “greeting”, “dragon” and “bear” in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage and Russian are compared and investigated by analyzing language materials from the linguocultural point of view, the main idea of which is that culture and language is inseparable. Until now, most researches, specializing in interlanguage studies, are focused on phonetic, lexical and grammatical aspects, while less attentions are drowning to the linguocultural aspect of interlanguage. Therefore, the study of linguocultural meanings of several images in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage has its practical significance.

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Keywords: Linguocultural meanings, images, interlanguage, Chinese Russian-learners.



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1. Introduction

As it is known, in the process of acquiring a foreign language, learners often make common or similar mistakes, which is caused by transfer – interference from their native language. For example, Spanish students in the process of learning Chinese make a certain type of error, and Korean students in turn – others. A similar situation is observed in the process of Chinese students learning Russian. Is this an accident or inevitability? The study of scientific and methodological literature on this issue suggests that these similar errors can be represented as interlanguage in the process of mastering a foreign language.

It is generally accepted that the study of a foreign language is a creative process, but not just mechanical memorization of those or other language constructs. In this process, learners, as a rule, try to build their language system, which is to some extent close to the foreign language being studied. This system is described by some relevant terms. We use one of them, namely “interlanguage”, since its definition, in our opinion, most reflects the property of this linguistic phenomenon, and is also most often used in scientific researches.

The term “interlanguage” was originally proposed and used by American linguist Selinker (1969) in the article “Language Transfer”. In his work “Interlanguage”, he gave the definition of the term “interlanguage” – “interlanguage refers to the language between the native language and the target language” (Selinker, 1972, p. 210), in other words, according to Shacklein and Zheng (2017), interlanguage is a language system, which is regarded as a mediation between the first (native) and second (foreign) languages.

Corder notes that the mistakes made by students are of great importance for the acquisition of knowledge in foreign languages on the following points: “firstly, teachers can find what still needs to be learned; secondly, researchers obtain evidence in the ways in which students learn a language; thirdly, mistakes are of great importance for the student himself, since the formation of errors can be considered as a strategy for better learning” (Corder, 1967, p. 167).

Ellis offers four stages of studying the characteristics of the external structure of a language based on the methods of research by Lado (1957): “1. Description – official description of the mother tongue and the language being studied; 2. Selection – the choice of special language units or phenomena to compare their differences; 3. Comparison of selected language units or phenomena; 4. Prediction – to suggest in what situations students will make mistakes” (Ellis, 1994, p. 307).

Wagner, was one of the first Russian researchers, who pointed out the phenomenon of interlanguage and compiled its definition. Wagner (1997) noted that “interlanguage (or intermediate language) is a transitional language system, that allows students to communicate even when the level of their second language is still far from perfect” (p. 15).

Pilipchuk (2003), based on his analysis of L. Selinker and many other researchers' works, concluded, that interlanguage or “intermediate language” is a permissible stage of mastering a foreign language, which allows students to solve some current problems of cognition and communication. According to Rogoznaya (2009), interlanguage can be understood as a special language system, which arises in the process of learning a second language and is in an intermediate state of competence, developing in a state of dynamics to the perfect level of proficiency of a foreign language. Thus,

interlanguage can be considered as an intermediate self-developing dynamic substance in an individual speech.

Polonskij and Klimova (2005) noted that the linguocultural approach to the vocabulary of a language directs teachers to work with a word filled with life, meaning and emotions, which ensures the achievement of the main goal of language learning – the formation of a linguistic personality as a carrier of a certain linguistic consciousness and picture of the world. Consequently, the task of forming not only linguistic, but also linguocultural competence is highlighted. According to them, the culturological look at the word allows us to interpret it not only as a combat unit of the language, which possesses characteristic semantic and grammatical features, but also as a unit of the people's cultural memory, as an objectification of its key concepts – concepts enriched by cultural meanings.

2. Problem Statement

The language of an individual is a regular system. It can be said that learning a foreign language is not just gaining knowledge about another language, another culture, it is also a necessary activity in human history and society, since language communication is one of the main methods of communication among people. Different language systems have their own rules and constructions that differ from each other. Most of those who study a foreign language, one way or another, are influenced by their native language in the learning process. Thus, the study of a foreign language contributes to the formation of a new language system or even a new secondary language personality, as some researchers believe.

According to Ignatova and Andreeva (2005), the goal of teaching Russian to foreign learners is the formation of a learner's communicative culture, that is, preparing it for the perception of a different sociocultural community. From their points of view, the new conditions of the social, economic and political life of Russia require significant changes in the educational system and, in particular, in the system of training national personnel for foreign learners and the outside world.

From Polonskij and Qi's (2005) point of view of, the vocabulary of the Chinese language reflects the basic cultural concepts of the people that differ from Russians. China and Russia distinguish from each other in historical background and the way of thinking in aspects of religion, culture, customs and other factors. Since ancient times, with the help of language, cultural features of peoples have been expressed. Thus, to learn Russian language well, Chinese learners must have a detailed knowledge of Russian culture, as well as the meanings of an amount of linguocultural symbols in the Russian language.

In recent years, the Amur Russian University researched the relationship between the Chinese and Russian people, the goal of which was to elicit the peoples' opinions about each other. The study involved Chinese and Russian residents of the Far Eastern region of Russia. In response to the question "What hinders communication between Chinese and Russians, except for the language barrier?", Russian residents answered as follows: "1. psychological characteristics of Chinese people; 2. habits; 3. psychological characteristics of Russians" (Lee, 2009, p. 82). Chinese residents answered this question as follows: 1. lifestyle; 2. the difference between the two political ideologies; 3. differences in labor skills. To the question "What are the differences between nations besides external and linguistic features?", the Russians noted that their "1. lifestyle and cultural traditions (food, culture, etc.); 2. behaviors in daily life"

are different from Chinese people. From these answers, we can see that the Chinese and Russian people are aware of the differences in language, daily habits, customs and other communicative activities.

Nowadays there are several obstacles to understanding the Russian language as an interlanguage. On the one hand, the task of developing the Russian language as a means of disseminating Russian culture is too explicitly and straightforwardly posed. From this point of view, it is difficult to perceive it as a means of spreading some other culture, especially very unlike the Russian one. On the other hand, national movements in Russia are not at all ready to accept the Russian language as a means of preserving and disseminating the cultural heritage of their peoples.

3. Research Questions

What are the differences between the linguocultural meanings of the image “smile” and the expression of “greeting” in Chinese Russian-learners’ interlanguage and Russian language?

What are the common and different linguocultural meanings of “dragon” and “bear” in Chinese and Russian language and culture? And what are the reasons for their commonness and differences?

4. Purpose of the Study

4.1. To figure out the linguocultural meanings of several images in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage

According to Frank (2005), the main purpose of culture is to be a means of spiritual enrichment of the individual. A person is immersed in the world of culture, mastering many languages specific to material and spiritual culture. For him, the value of culture in the development of any society is highly appreciated. In other words, culture develops through intercultural communication and international exchange.

In order to figure out linguocultural features in Chinese Russian-learners’ interlanguage, the author analyses the linguocultural meanings of such images as “smile”, “greeting”, “dragon” and “bear”.

4.2. To discuss actual communicative problems in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage from the linguocultural point of view

For a long time, foreign language teachers in the Soviet period came to the common notion that teaching language equals to teaching three main elements of a language – phonetics, vocabulary and grammar. In an amount of studies, it is believed that with the achievement of the knowledge of these three elements, the language is mastered. As a result, language learners often make sentences or expressions that are correct in the phonetic, lexical and grammatical aspects, but not culturally appropriate. Thus, it is hard to achieve a communicative goal in intercultural communication, because the language learners only learned the rules and patterns of the language, but did not understand the national characteristics or culture of the language, which they studied. In Chinese classes, the linguocultural aspect is often ignored in teaching Russian as a foreign language.

Thus, another main purpose of this study is to discuss actual communicative problems, which are caused due to linguocultural misunderstandings, in Chinese Russian-learners’ interlanguage.

5. Research Methods

This study is based on benchmarking methods. In accordance with the purpose and objectives of this study, the following methods are used:

- descriptive, defining and expressing terms such as “interlanguage” in this study;
- analytical, analyzing scientific literature on the topic of this study;
- comparative-typological, through which the linguocultural features of several words in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage and their causes are shown and analyzed.

6. Findings

Under the relation between language and culture Shaklein (2010) understood that “people of each subsequent generation begin their lives in the world of objects, phenomena and concepts created and accumulated by previous generations. Participating in production and social activities, they assimilate the riches of this world and in this way develop those human abilities without which the world around them is alien and incomprehensible” (p. 6). From his point of view, people's linguistic speech is formed in the process of their assimilation of a historically formed language. And, “the process of mastering a language by a person is close to the process of mastering a culture, but not equal. Language, if mastered by humans, is a more social phenomenon, culture is more biological” (Shaklein, 2010, p. 7). Linguoculturology is regarded as a scientific study the relationship of linguistic as well as cultural phenomena.

Interlanguage is built not only because of the phonetic, lexical and grammatical interference, but also under the influence of cultural interference. The linguocultural differences between several symbols in the Russian language and in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage are considered as the following.

6.1. The linguocultural meaning of the image of “smile” in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage

Besides oral speech, there is a special language – body language: facial expressions and gestures, which plays an important role in human communication. With the help of body language, a person expresses his attitude, emotions, thoughts, and often this happens unconsciously.

Chinese culture has a history of more than five thousand years, where most of the influence of Confucian culture, etiquette, manners on the development of the Chinese people was traced. However, Chinese people, unlike the Americans and Europeans, are not passionate fans of smiling to strangers on the street, but under the influence of Confucian culture, Chinese people often remain friendly, modest in communication with others, especially with foreigners. Therefore, among the Chinese, a smile is a sign of goodwill. There is even such a proverb – “笑一笑, 十年少”, that is, “if you smile more often, you will become ten years younger than you are now”.

In the minds of the Russian people, a smile is a trusting and friendly symbol and reflects the real internal feelings of people. Russian people rarely smile to strangers. This phenomenon is associated with various characteristics of culture, religion, perception, even geographical factors, which led to the perception by the Chinese as the “coldness” of the ethnic characteristics of Russian people. In Russia

there is such a saying: “Laughter for no reason, a sign of foolishness”, which very well reflects the understanding of Russian causeless laughter and smile. An insincere smile and laughter are considered signs of frivolity, stupidity and cunning among the Russian people.

Nevertheless, in Chinese, if people describe one girl as “她很爱笑 (She loves smiling)”, it means that this is a pretty, friendly, gentle girl who has a good character. Even in Chinese culture “smile” is a symbol of luckiness. So when Chinese Russian-learners want to give the same assessment to a Russian girl, they often say that “She loves smiling”, which is not considered as a positive assessment or makes no sense in Russian culture. Therefore, the expression “She loves smiling” is a compliment of personal characters in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage.

6.2. The linguocultural meaning of the way of “greeting” in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage

The most common expressions of greeting among acquaintances of Russian people are “Hi, how are you? / Good morning! / Good afternoon! / Good evening! / Hello!”. While among the Chinese, the most accepted way of greeting is “Hello, have you had breakfast / lunch / dinner yet? (你好, 你吃饭了吗?)”. The theme of “eating” in Chinese culture has been traced for more than five thousand years. Chinese people pay special attention to the topic of “eating”, which can be seen in the saying “Food is the basis of people (民以食为天)”.

“Eating” is not limited only to the food culture, but also extends to the communicative culture of the Chinese people. Chinese people often ask “Have you already eaten?” to express their warm attitude and careness to others or a greeting, farewell, or sometimes they just want to attract others' attention with the help of this phrase. But in fact, they are not interested in whether the others have eaten or not. When Russians come across this phrase in communication, they perceive it as an invitation to eat together and are perplexed if, as a result, communication does not end with a joint meal. Recently, a transliteration of the word “eating” has even appeared in the Russian language – chifan (吃饭 chīfàn). In Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage “Hello, have you had breakfast / lunch / dinner yet?” is often used instead of “Hi, how are you? / Good morning! / Good afternoon! / Good evening! / Hello!”, since in their minds the standard expression of greeting should be associated with “eating”.

Thus, the way of greeting with each other in Chinese and Russian language is quite different. In Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage exist the expressions of greeting related to “eating”, the result of which makes Russian native speakers confused and the communicative goals among Chinese Russian-learners and Russian native speakers not achieved.

6.3. The linguocultural meaning of the image of “dragon” and “bear” in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage

In Chinese culture, “dragon (龙 lóng)” is not just a symbol, but also a totem that people have worshiped and respected for many centuries. In Chinese language, there are more than three hundred proverbs and winged expressions, which are written with the word “dragon”. And all definitions of the Chinese character “dragon” have an exclusively positive meaning.

In ancient times in Russia, the “dragon” was the personification of evil, darkness and trouble. Drawings of Slavic peoples often depict a plot where the “dragon” eats sun or moon. Most tales say that the “dragon” abducted the princess. However, the continuous cultural exchange and the growing mutual understanding between China and the Russian Federation lead to the fact that an increasing number of Russians are more deeply aware of Chinese culture, and as a result, the nagtive symbol of “dragon” becomes positive. In 2012, Russian President Vladimir Putin, in his New Year’s address to citizens said, by the way, the coming year is the year of the Dragon according to the eastern calendar. I was born in the Year of Dragon. We had good time in the past year, I hope that in this year the Dragon will bring luck, prosperity and prosperity to every Russian family, to all our citizens.

Compared with the image of “dragon” in Chinese linguoculture there is a similar image – “bear” in Russian linguoculture. The main differences of the image of “bear” in Chinese and Russian language and culture are shown in the following:

1. In Chinese culture, “bear” is considered as a stupid, useless, bulky, but kind animal. This is reflected in Chinese language, for example, in such expression as “children as bears” (熊孩子 *xióngháizi*), which refers to the children who are troublemakers, and show themselves unpolite or not well-educated.

2. “Bear” in Russian language and culture is a totem, a symbol of honesty, justice. In Russian folklore, “bear” is the king of the forest and all animals. This conception can be seen in many Russian sayings:

- a. “The bear is clumsy, but a dozen”;
- b. “The owner of the house is like the bear in the forest”.

In Russian linguoculture a strong man is often compared to a “bear”. Even in reference books on the interpretation of dreams, a bear is a personification of a positive hero – “To see a bear in a dream means to have a wedding”.

One of the main reasons why “dragon” and “bear” have different meanings in Chinese and Russian linguoculture is that these two countries have different geographical features: in Russia there are a lot of forests, therefore the resident of the bear in the forest is closer to the Russian people's spirit; in China, in turn, there are many mountains, and the dragon, as it is known, is a fabulous beast living in caves or on the top of mountains and, therefore, “dragon” is closer to the Chinese people’s spirit. Many famous people in China are often named after “dragon”, for example, the well-known actor and director Jackie Chan’s name in Chinese “成龙 *chénglóng*” means to become a dragon.

7. Conclusion

In this article linguocultural meanings of such images as “smile”, “greeting”, “dragon” and “bear” in Chinese Russian-learners’ interlanguage are discussed; meanwhile, the reasons for their differences in Russian linguoculture are analyzed. This study is a description of specific language materials, based on theoretical principles, relating to linguoculture and communication. So, the author’s analysis of linguocultural meanings of several images in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage in this article leads to the following conclusions.

7.1. Linguocultural meanings of certain images in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage are different from the ones in Russian language

First of all, in the article various definitions of the term “interlanguage” in Russian and foreign linguistics are figured out, in a word, interlanguage is regarded as an intermediate language system, which exists in every learner’s language acquisition process. Theoretical linguocultural studies in Russian linguistics provided a theoretical framework for this article.

Secondly, by analysing the different linguocultural meanings of “smile”, “greeting”, “dragon” and “bear” in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage and in Russian language, it can be seen that, sometimes one image in different linguoculture has different meanings; while sometimes in different linguoculture different images are used to express the same or similar meaning.

Linguocultural differences and misunderstandings in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage lead to communicative barriers among Chinese Russian-learners and Russian native speakers.

By analyzing the collected language materials, it can be concluded that, culture and language is inseparable. Communicative problems and barriers can be considered as a result of linguocultural misunderstandings among language learners and target language native speakers. Language learners should be aware of the differences in language, daily habits, customs and other communicative activities in the process of acquiring a second language. Thus, the study of linguocultural meanings of several images in Chinese Russian-learners' interlanguage has its practical significance.

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