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**BUILDING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE THROUGH  
STUDYING THE PHRASEOLOGICAL STOCK OF THE  
LANGUAGE**

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**Abstract**

The paper deals with the problem of students' intercultural competence development, which is one of the essentials in foreign language teaching, via the analysis of the language phraseological stock. It exposes the ethnocultural potential of phraseological units and their role in the background knowledge reconstruction of a foreign language culture. The study aims at demonstrating that the phraseological units in English, French and Russian are based on different images of consciousness, which is due to the differences in the real world interpretation by the representatives of different cultures. The applied interdisciplinary approach, which integrates certain provisions of cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology and the theory of intercultural communication, allows demonstrating the existence of a close connection between different types of knowledge that form the conceptual system of bearers of a particular linguistic culture, and their linguistic representation. The differences in the image component of phraseological units in English, French and Russian are shown to be due to the unique cognitive experience gained in the process of the reality cognition within a certain linguistic and cultural community, as well as the degree of significance of certain knowledge structures in the collective consciousness. The analysis of factual material, including data of English, French and Russian distinguishes cognitive basis and culture-determined nature of the phraseological units.

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## 1. Introduction

The competence-based approach is known to be born in the second half of the 20th century prompted by the development of transformational generative grammar by Noam Chomsky. The rationalistic approach to science, particularly, the science of language, is embodied in the fact that the language is considered "from the inside", i.e. from the point of view of the speakers' "competence" and their ability to use their own language and understand it. Additionally, researchers distinguish between linguistic competence (i.e., the internal grammar of an abstract speaker) and linguistic performance which is understanding and producing speech in real communication situations (Chomsky, 2006).

In modern educational conditions, the competence-based approach to the development of state educational standards of higher professional education is quite relevant, since the quality of a university graduates training is assessed in terms of their competence in the field of the chosen professional activity. Competence (from the Latin *competentia*) in the broadest sense, is understood as recognized knowledge in a particular field, according to the dictionary definitions "competence" is "the ability to do something well" (OALD, 2000, p. 246) or "the ability to do what is needed; skill" (LDLC, 1998, p. 259). Along with language and communication ones, cultural competence is one of the components of intercultural competence and is one of the most important components within the scope of foreign languages teaching at a university. Being one of the most important factors necessary for effective intercultural communication, cultural competence implies an understanding of the background knowledge, the system of values and attitudes characteristic of a particular culture.

The issue under scrutiny is one of topical among researchers around the world, since the results of competence analysis are widely discussed in numerous publications (Behrnd & Porzelt 2012; Cranmer, 2017; Ilie, 2016, 2019).

## 2. Problem Statement

Transdisciplinarity and interdisciplinarity as distinctive features of modern science make provisions for considering the data obtained within various research areas. This work attempts to model the images of consciousness that underlie the semantics of phraseological units in English, French and Russian, which is a relatively novel approach. The relevance of the research is due to its interdisciplinary character that integrates certain provisions of cognitive linguistics, linguoculturology and the theory of intercultural communication. This approach involves the correlation of mental structures and formats of knowledge with their linguistic representation, with the focus being on the motivation of language units with the knowledge obtained by a certain linguistic and cultural community in the process of cognition.

## 3. Research Questions

In this context, it logically follows that phraseological units are also motivated by the knowledge about the world. Thus, the research question is: what can underlie the differences of the phraseological units' semantics?

#### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to try to correlate the differences in the image content of phraseological units in English, French and Russian with the unique cognitive experience gained within a particular linguistic and cultural community, as well as with the degree of 'salience' of certain knowledge structures relevant to a particular culture.

#### **5. Research Methods**

Modern cultural studies and linguistics explore the relationship between consciousness and language on the basis of conceptual, cognitive and comparative methods, with reference to the dictionary definitions and contextual analysis.

#### **6. Findings**

In the theory of intercultural communication, the terminological meaning of competence is not just the sum of the acquired knowledge and techniques that a person can use as needed in the situations of intercultural communication. Competence implies the presence of a set of skills that allow for adequate assessing the communicative situation, correlating intentions with the assumed choice of verbal and nonverbal means, implementing the communicative intention and verifying the results of the communicative act using feedback (Leontovich, 2007).

In modern conditions of universal integration, there is a major leveling of communication boundaries between representatives of different linguistic and cultural communities and even cultures. Since effective intercultural communication between representatives of different cultures is possible only if both the linguistic and mental imagery barrier is overcome, the importance of linguistic and cultural education is particularly relevant today, since this type of knowledge promotes the dialogue of cultures on the one hand, and cultural self-identification in the context of world integration, on the other. In this regard, the issue of the language and culture interaction does not lose its relevance, and, as several centuries ago, continues to be considered within a number of scientific schools and directions.

In the process of intercultural competence forming, the study of language units that most clearly reflect the national characteristics of a particular society is of crucial importance. The linguocultural layer of knowledge is based on the background knowledge of speakers, on the body of culture specific vocabulary, on the phraseological and paremiological stock of the language.

The lexical and phraseological resources of the language are considered to be the most culturally sensitive. However, in comparison with the common vocabulary, phraseological units are more stable. This fact determines their use in the language as a kind of template combinations, with the rigidly fixed cultural and historical experience of the people (Dobrichev, 2013).

From the point of view of linguistic and cultural studies, the study of the phraseological composition of a language allows reconstructing such specific areas of foreign language culture as the character traits and mentality of representatives of a particular linguistic and cultural community, the attitude of representatives of a particular nation to the phenomena of the surrounding world, and cultural

values. A certain way of life of an ethnic group, occupation, geographical conditions in which it lives, contribute to the formation of a special mentality of the people, which is understood as "a system of interrelated images, ideas and beliefs that regulate the behavior of the linguistic and cultural community members and are reflected in the language" (Kozlova, 2009, p. 40).

Since language structures and stores the knowledge of a certain ethnic group about the world, each member of the ethnic group via knowing and using the language acquires a system of images, which form a generic image of the world of a specific national consciousness. The presence of images associated with ideas about animals in the phraseological units of almost any language indicates the existing close relationship between the human world and the animal world. Based on everyday experience, the categorization process of human consciousness resulted in identifying the most significant features inherent in the representatives of the animal world, which was further reflected in the language in the form of distinctive metaphorical standards that represent the evaluative attitudes of a certain ethnic group. The evaluative component as part of the connotative component is associated with the figurative basis of phraseology. The phraseological image is the structuring basis of phraseology, which contributes to the formation of phraseological meaning. So, for example, in the minds of representatives of the French-speaking culture, the idea of cold is associated with such an animal as a wolf:

1) *Un vent du nord s'était engouffré dans la baie, amenant avec lui une pluie fine et ciselante, il faisait un froid de loup* (Levy, 2000, p. 55).

In Russian, the French *un froid de loup – une température rigoureuse* (LLDLF, 2002, p. 1067) corresponds to the expression *собачий холод* (lit. *dog's cold*), while the images associated with the idea of a dog in the French-speaking consciousness are actualized in such an expression of the phraseological body as *un mal de chien*, associated with the ideas of strong, unbearable pain:

2) *Où avez-vous ces crampes terrible? questionna le docteur. Partout dans le ventre, cela lui faisait un mal de chien* (Levy, 2000, p. 111).

These examples indicate a discrepancy between the image basis of phraseological units in the Russian and French linguistic cultures, which is due to the specifics of the world perception.

The analysis of the factual material showed that in the English-speaking culture, such an animal as a dog is associated with ideas of hard work. Here is an example:

3) "Yes", *Jane said simply, "but he also work like a dog"* (Steel, 2004, p. 189).

The reverent attitude of the British to this pet is explained by the fact that the dog has long been considered an ideal human helper. The inhabitants of the British Isles are known to have been training dogs to graze sheep; in addition, hunting with hounds has always been popular. Thus, dogs in everyday life took on a significant part of the work, which is reflected in this language unit.

However, in the French collective language consciousness, the standard image of hard exhausting work is rather an ant. Here is the following example:

4) *Je n'espère pas parce que c'est un travail de fourmi en terrain sensible* (Levy, 2000, p. 195).

When analyzing the associative meanings of the elements of phraseological units, it becomes possible to identify not only some features of the mentality of a particular nation, but also features related to the lifestyle, norms and values of the linguistic and cultural community. Thus, winemaking has always been and remains an integral part of the French economy. However, the excessive consumption of alcohol

(as well as the intemperate manner of eating) is rather condemned by French society, which is reflected in such expressions as *boire comme un trou*, *manger comme quatre*. For example:

5) *Tu permets que je m'inquiète, vous buvez tous comme des trous* ... (Gavalda, 2001, p. 65).

The expression *boire comme un trou* (lit. *drink like a pit*) probably motivated by universal spatial images about the quasi-infinity of downward movement (cf. in Russian *бездонная бочка*, (lit. *bottomless barrel*)).

In the consciousness of the English-speaking people, this meaning is represented by the comparative phraseology *to drink like a fish*, reflecting the close associative links between the concepts of WATER and FISH, as well as, probably, the observations of this ethnic group on the behavior of fish that are forced to constantly open their mouths in order to obtain oxygen. These observations formed the basis for the formation of this idiom with the meaning *to drink a lot of alcohol*:

6) *She would be a student somewhere now if she hadn't had the baby, she' be drinking like a fish and taking drugs* (Atkinson, 2004, p. 57).

In French, this zoonym component is part of the phraseological expression *retrouver un poisson dans la mer*, which denotes the futility of the efforts made:

7) *Dans cette ville immense, elle avait autant de chances de tomber à nouveau sur lui que de retrouver un poisson dans la mer!* (Richard, 2008, p. 60).

Notably, such a meaning in English is reconstructed on a stable combination based on the opposition of large / small size:

8) *Anabelle felt sometimes as though they were emptying the ocean with a teacup, or worse, a thimble* (Steel, 2009, p. 256).

Russian phraseological units containing this meaning are perceptibly different: *искать иголку в стоге сена* (*look for a needle in a haystack*), *искать ветра в поле* (lit. *look for the wind in the field*), since they reflect the phenomena typical of Russian culture. For example:

9) *Через год план её выкристаллизовался. Улучить день, вечер, момент, когда Карл будет нежно настроен и явно при деньгах, она, ... убивает, берёт все деньги и резко срывается на юг, в Одессу. Ищи ветра в поле.* (lit. *A year later, her plan crystallized. To seize the day, the evening, the moment when Karl will be affectionately inclined and clearly with money, she, ... kills, takes all the money and abruptly breaks off to the south, to Odessa. Look for the wind in the field*) (Weller, 2010, p. 59).

Special attention should be paid to the symbolism of numbers as constituents of phraseological units. The number 7 in Western European culture has positive symbolic meanings. The linguistic mechanism which transfers the number symbolism is phraseologization, a numeral possesses an abstract and symbolic meaning (not result of counting) within the structure of a phraseological unit. For example:

10) *Shazzer was in seventh heaven* putting them on speaker phone then murmuring sexily, 'Hello, is that First Time Advertised on the line?' (Fielding, 2004, p. 212).

11) *Joséphine eut envie de se jeter à son cou, mais elle se retint et reçut sans rien dire une épaisse bouffée de cigare qui la fit tousser et effaçà son sourir de septième ciel* (Panco, 2010, p. 167).

These examples prove that number 7 is the basis to reconstruct the meaning of happiness in English, Russian and French linguistic consciousness.

At the same time, the qualification of the thinking process in numerical terms and the idea of a normal amount varies from culture to culture. For example:

13) *Beth said that if I were a man I wouldn't think twice about it* (Trollope, 2017, p. 47).

14) *Tourne sept fois ta langue dans sa bouche, dit l'expression* (Gavalda, 2002, p. 78).

These examples suggest that in French and Russian cultures the norm correlates with number 7, while in English, it correlates with number 2.

## 7. Conclusion

The research of the material, which includes the data from English, French and Russian, reveals the differences in linguistic interpretation of knowledge within specific cultures. It also marks distinct areas of collective linguistic consciousness which highlight various knowledge domains. The analysis of the phraseological stock of the studied language reveals the presence of extralinguistic facts that are reflected in the structure of phraseological units. This can be explained by the close relationship between language and culture. In this regard, it becomes obvious that the appeal to the phraseological composition of the language and its analysis in the linguistic and cultural aspect contributes to the implementation of the cultural model of professional education and the formation of students' background cultural knowledge, which is an integral part of foreign languages teaching.

Thus, taking into account the information related to the culturally determined features of the cognition process, which find their expression in the phraseological stock of the language, is a necessary condition for the formation of an interculturally competent personality. The perspective of studying phraseological units from the point of view of the content of collective knowledge can contribute to the development of the so-called language empathy as the ability to perceive the world and verbalize the results of this perception from the perspective of a representative of the culture whose language is being studied. This contributes to the achievement of authenticity in the foreign language speech activity of educational artificial bilinguals.

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