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LANGUAGE AS A MEANS OF EXPRESSING IDENTITY IN AN INTERCULTURAL CONTEXT

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Abstract

Using the example of modern German-language poetry of Russian Germans – authors with a migratory background, often published not only in a traditional format, but also in a digital space, it is explored how cultural identity is expressed with the help of language. Linguistic analysis at different levels of language and a cognitive method are used. In the reviewed texts, the main linguistic markers of the identity of Russian Germans are determined: lexical (toponyms, ethnonyms, anthroponyms, lingvonyms, words denoting realities) and morphological (pronoun *we*). Key concepts are formulated: *homeland, longing, foreign land, place, time, memory*. The figurative means involved in the expression of identity are analyzed, the most common of which are metaphors. It was revealed that the content of identity is influenced by the intercultural context, which is reflected in its ambiguity and changeability. Russian Germans can identify themselves sometimes with Russian or German culture, strive to combine both identities into one, as well as recognize an independent Russian-German identity. In the conclusion, the perspective of the study of identity based on comments on poetic texts is noted, which arose thanks to the publication of texts in the digital space (social networks) and the opportunity for readers to comment on what was read in this connection.

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1. Introduction

Identity problems have often been raised recently. They are often studied by scientists in connection with migration processes (Kunuroglu, 2021; Marschall, 2017; Paloma, 2021; Wang, 2018). Hereinafter, identity will mean, first of all, cultural identity, namely, self-identification with a certain culture (Assmann, 2002). In the case of migration, a person inevitably encounters a different culture, different from the culture of their country of origin, and turns out to be included in an intercultural context.

Interculturalism is characteristic of many European countries, one of which is Germany. Active immigration to Germany since the middle of the 20th century has led to the fact that currently there are many people living in the country, whose identity is ambiguous: both the country of origin of a person and the country of permanent residence have an impact on his self-determination. Russian Germans are one of the largest migratory groups in Germany. It is worth emphasizing that the term *Russian Germans* refers not only to Germans from the Russian Federation, the geography of their origin is much wider and includes other countries of the former USSR: Kazakhstan, Belarus, Ukraine, etc. This is the name of the descendants of the Germans who moved to the Russian Empire in the 18th century. Many Russian Germans in the late XX–early XXI centuries repatriated to Germany. Unlike other migrants, they receive German citizenship immediately only on the basis of their belonging to the German ethnic group, provided they speak German (Bundesamt für Migration und Flüchtlinge, 2019).

Language is considered a part of culture, a generally accepted symbolic resource in a cultural system (Lee, 2019). Self-identification with culture is expressed outwardly largely through language. The difficult path of finding identity can also reflect literary creativity. Thus, migrants become authors of works that talk about the problems of self-identification and integration (Bedard-Goulet, 2020; Fontefrancesco, 2020).

This article examines the poems of Russian Germans, one way or another, touching upon the problem of identity. The empirical basis of the study was a corpus of 30 modern poetic texts in German written by recognized Russian-German authors, whose names were published on the Internet portal of the literary society of Germans from Russia, “Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte”. In this study, the poems of the following authors were analyzed: Agnes Gossen, Wendelin Mangold, Andreas Peters, Heinrich Rahn, Arthur Rosenstern, Ida Heusser, Max Schatz. The condition for selecting a poem for the corpus is the presence of at least one identity marker in the text (Bschleipfer, 2010). Due to limited access to printed publications, this study mainly uses digital sources – author sites, blogs, pages on social networks, specialized Internet platforms where authors publish their poems. This position is quite consistent with the current trend. Despite the fact that traditional books continue to be published, most modern (including recognized) authors prefer to acquaint the reader with their work via the Internet, since access to the worldwide network allows for reaching a wider audience.

For poetic texts, in contrast to other literary creativity, a special density of the text and a great importance of imagery are characteristic. The form of verse, tropes and rhetorical figures have an aesthetic function, serve to convey the experience of sensory perception and can have an emotional impact on the reader (Habscheid, 2021). Despite the fact that poetry cannot solve problems associated

with the cultural context, it is able to participate in the construction of identity, while playing a therapeutic role, conveying deeply personal experiences and filling the void inside caused by crisis phenomena (Garbisch, 2021).

2. Problem Statement

Oftentimes, the intercultural context complicates the identification process. The identity of Russian Germans is also ambiguous, as it is influenced by two cultures – German and Russian. However, it cannot be said that both cultures act in the same way. Their roles can be different depending on territorial, socio-historical and other factors. In addition, some Russian Germans – in addition to the Russian and German culture as such – have absorbed the peculiarities of the third culture of the region of residence, for example, Tatar, Kazakh (Danilova & Ivygina, 2017).

The main problem associated with the self-identification of Russian Germans is that their experience of interaction with both Russian and German culture is quite painful. Living in the Soviet Union for Russian Germans was associated with the deportation of their families and the families of their ancestors, complete or partial loss of cultural traditions. When they moved to Germany, they were faced with the fact that in German society they are strangers and must go through a difficult path of integration. These facts allow one to speak about the “broken” identity of Russian Germans (Kisser, 2019).

The Russian Germans also have a difficult situation with their language. According to the German Federal Law on Refugees and Displaced Persons, an important prerequisite for belonging to a German nationality is sufficient knowledge of the German language (Bundesministerium der Justiz und für Verbraucherschutz, 2020). Thus, the German language is an integral part of the German identity. However, for many Russian Germans (including those who moved to Germany and obtained German citizenship), the language of the country of origin (Russian) is the first (not least because of the prohibition of the public use of German as a native language in the Soviet Union), while German is being studied as a second, foreign one.

3. Research Questions

1. What linguistic means are used to express identity in poetic texts?
2. What content does identity have in an intercultural context, expressed by means of language?
3. What linguistic features may be inherent in an intercultural context?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify ways of manifestation of the cultural identity of Russian Germans in poetic texts. It is necessary to establish what linguistic means the authors use to express the identity of the lyrical hero, and also to identify the characteristic features inherent in the self-determination of Russian Germans.

5. Research Methods

1. Linguistic analysis at various levels of language (morphological, lexical, textual, discursive), with the help of which identity markers, as well as figurative means, are considered.
2. Cognitive method, analysis of the conceptual structure of the text.

6. Findings

Based on the classification of lexical and morphological markers of identity of the German linguist Bschleipfer (2010), the analyzed poems revealed the lexical and morphological markers of the identity of Russian Germans. So, at the lexical level, the most common (in brackets here and below the translation from German done by the paper's translator is indicated)¹:

- toponyms – first of all, the names of the countries *Deutschland (Germany)* and *Russland (Russia)*, as well as the names of regions, cities, mountains and rivers, for example *Sibirien (Siberia)*, *der Ural (Ural)*, *der Rhein (Rhine)*, *Karaganda (Karaganda)*, *Nürnberg (Nuremberg)*;
- ethnonyms – *Schwaben (Swabians)*, *Bayern (Bavarians)*, *Hessen (Hessians)*, *Russen (Russians)*, *Kasachen (Kazakhs)*, *Tataren (Tatars)*;
- anthroponyms – *Heine (Heine)*, *Mandelstamm (Mandelstam)*;
- lingvonyms – *Deutsch (German language)*, *Russisch (Russian language)*, *Platt (Low German dialect)*;
- words denoting realities – *Ewiges Feuer (Eternal Flame)*, *Verbannung (deportation)*, *Rückkehr (return)*.

These examples clearly show that lexical markers relate to both countries and cultures – both Russian and German, which indicates that Russian Germans have a mixed Russian-German identity. Understanding the last group of markers (*words denoting realities*) requires knowledge of the discursive context. Thus, *Ewiges Feuer (Eternal Flame)* in the context of Russian history symbolizes the memory of the heroes who died in the Great Patriotic War; *Verbannung* – deportation of the Volga Germans from the Autonomous Republic of Volga Germans, which was liquidated in 1941, to Siberia, Kazakhstan and Central Asia; *Rückkehr* – the return of Russian Germans to their historical homeland (Germany), repatriation.

The lexical level can be supplemented with other words that are often found in the texts of Russian Germans and related to the central themes for them: *Heimatland (homeland)*, *fremd (alien)*, *anders (other)*, *dort (there)*, *hier (here)*, *zwei (two)*, *zwischen (between)*, *halb (halfway)*, *Sprache (language)*, *neu (new)*, *alt (old)*, *Hoffnung (hope)*, *Träume (dreams)*, *Sehnsucht (longing)*. These lexical units make it possible to formulate a number of key concepts that are present in the poems of Russian Germans: *homeland*, *longing*, *foreign land*, *place*, *time*, *memory*. The content of these concepts indicate the duality of the identity of the Russian Germans, as well as, possibly, an identity crisis, which can be traced, for example, in these lines of Arthur Rosenstern: *falsche zeit – falscher ort (wrong time – wrong place)*; *ich*

¹ Despite the fact that a toponym is, first of all, a marker of territorial identity, and an ethnonym is an ethnic one, they are included in the general list of markers of cultural identity, since their connection cannot be denied.

gehe den weg zurück auf der / suche nach unserer zukunft von gestern / ich will die schienen neu legen / die züge umleiten (going back / in search of our yesterday's future / want to re-lay the tracks / change the direction of trains) (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.).

As for the concept of *memory*, it includes the memory of German ancestors and of Russia as a country of origin. While the memories of Russia are largely personal, as they are based on personally experienced events, the memory of the ancestors of the Russian Germans is mostly collective in nature and the connection with the historical homeland seems to defy logical explanation. Thus, in a poem by Ida Heusser: *Dieses Heimweh ist lila./ Es riecht nach Staub/ (...) Wie kann man Heimweh haben/ nach etwas, wo man noch nie war?/ (This homesickness is purple./ It smells of dust / (...) How can one be homesick / for somewhere one's never been before?)*(Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.).

The Russian identity of the Russian Germans competes with the German one. Outside Germany, German identity often comes to the fore, and outside Russia/former Soviet Union countries, Russian. This thesis is reflected in the lines by Wendelin Mangold:

Im kasachischen Karaganda lebten etwa/ 130 Tausend verbannte Russlanddeutsche –/ Und man konnte daher auf Schritt und Tritt/ Auf vertraute Gesichter stoßen, Deutsch,/ (...) hören/. Geh ich nun durch die Altstadt Nürnbergs/ (...) treffe ich auf Schritt und Tritt/ Auf vertraute Gesichter meiner ausgewanderten/ Landsleute und höre verdeutschtes Russisch

(In Karaganda, Kazakhstan, there were about/ 130 thousand exiled Russian Germans –/ And one could therefore come across familiar faces at every turn, German,/ (...) one could hear/ If I now walk through the old town of Nuremberg/ (...) I see them every step of the way/ The familiar faces of my emigrated/ compatriots and hear the Germanized Russian language). (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.)

The morphological level is represented by one identity marker: the personal first person plural pronoun *wir* (*we*), and in the poems analyzed *we* are not Russians or Germans, but Russian Germans. This fact allows one to speak about the recognition by the Russian Germans of an independent Russian-German identity. Max Schatz expresses this in the following lines: *Wir waren auf vielen Straßen in Sibirien,/ (...) und wir klopfen an Türen, doch sie sind verschlossen (We were on many streets in Siberia,/ (...) and we knock on doors, but they are all locked)* (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.).

As for the aesthetic experience associated with identity, it is conveyed in the analyzed poems with the help of imagery at various levels of the language. Comparisons and metaphors at the text level are especially common. In this case, the entire text of a poem is often a metaphor. For example, Wendelin Mangold compares Russian Germans to migratory birds: *Welche von zweien/ Ist ihre richtige/ Heimat:/ Wo sie den Winter/ Oder den Sommer/ Verbringen? (Which of the two/ Is their real/ Homeland:/ Where do they/ Spend/ Winter/ Or summer?)* (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.). In a poem by Max Schatz, Russian Germans are like flying trees: *Wie fliegende Bäume sind wir und unsere Träume (We and our dreams are like flying trees)* (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.). The two aforementioned examples show that the Russian Germans are not

secure in one territory. With the help of poetry, the authors try to unite their two homelands. Such an attempt can be traced, for example, in a poem by Agnes Gossen: *In der neuen Heimat/ schmücke ich mein Zuhause/ mit alten vertrauten Bildern* (*In a new homeland/ I decorate my home/ with old, familiar pictures*) and by Heinrich Rahn: *Da wiegt sich die Steppe im Osten –/ Sich windet im Westen der Rhein./ In dieser vereinigten Gegend/ find ich jetzt mein neues Zuhause'* (*The cradle of steppe in the east –/ The meanders of Rhine in the west./ In this united area/ I now find my new home*) (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.).

An interesting aspect is the use of multiple languages in the text. In some of the analyzed poems, Russian is used in addition to the main German language. This linguistic device is a striking feature of the intercultural context. It can be illustrated with the example of a poem by Wendelin Mangold: „*Kusnetschik*“: *Deutsch der Grashüpfer./ Russisch das Schmiedchen./ Deutsch oder Russisch –/ Das gleiche Liedchen* („*Kuznechik*“: *German der Grashüpfer./ Russian little blacksmith./ German or Russian –/ The song is the same*) (Portal für russlanddeutsche Literatur und Literaturgeschichte, n.d.). This poem is based on the disclosure of the internal structure of the Russian word “kuznechik” (“grasshopper”) included in the text, or rather, in the title. Thanks to this technique of the language game, the author manages to show that the essence (“song of the grasshopper”) is the same, the essence of what is said is the same, despite the differences in languages. If we develop this idea further, it turns out that the different identities of people, their differences in national, ethnic, cultural grounds cannot devalue the fact that people have a common basis – their common human identity.

7. Conclusion

In the course of this study, the ways of manifestation of the identity of Russian Germans in poetic texts were identified. First, it was noted that identity is expressed with the help of the following linguistic markers: lexical (toponyms, ethnonyms, anthroponyms, lingvonyms, words denoting realities) and morphological (pronouns *we*). Secondly, a number of frequently encountered lexical units made it possible to formulate several key concepts that are present in the poems of Russian Germans: *homeland, longing, foreign land, place, time, memory* Thirdly, the figurative means expressing identity were considered, for the most part they turned out to be metaphors that often permeate the entire text. Finally, the linguistic peculiarity inherent in the intercultural context and used as a language game was identified and analyzed – the inclusion of single foreign language elements in the text (in this case, vocabulary in Russian is interspersed into the German text).

As for the content of the identity of Russian Germans, it is very ambiguous. Lexical markers reveal the presence of two identities – both Russian and German. The morphological marker indicates the existence of an independent Russian-German identity among Russian Germans. The content of the identified concepts emphasizes the duality and uncertainty of self-identification of Russian Germans, the competition of both identities, which indicates a certain crisis of self-determination. Figurative means are able to harmoniously combine different time and space in a text into one whole and, therefore, achieve the simultaneous coexistence of both identities.

Thus, identity in the analyzed texts is a discursive quantity, i.e. not something static, but on the contrary ready for constant changes. This understanding of identity allows one to take into account many

aspects of the history of Russian Germans and their current situation, as well as explain the ambivalence of their self-determination. Poetry provides an opportunity for creative, imaginative understanding of identity, is a way to work through a difficult personal experience of migration.

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