

## PhR 2019 Philological Readings

### STEREOTYPES OF RUSSIAN STUDENTS ABOUT GREAT BRITAIN AND FRANCE

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#### *Abstract*

The article presents the results of the study of stereotypes about Great Britain and France in the linguistic picture of the world of Russian students. In the first part of the article, the author focuses on the fact that sustainable ideas about the structure, elements and processes of reality that exist in the minds of native speakers form a picture of the world expressed in the language, which is called the linguistic picture of the world. Stereotypes, being fixed ideas about something, form a permanent fragment of the linguistic picture of the world that exists in human consciousness. The purpose of the work is to identify and describe the system of stereotypes about Great Britain and France existing in the language picture of the world of Russian students. The main part of the article presents the results of the research. The author describes 23 revealed semantic fields reflecting the main stereotypes about Great Britain and France: *Capital, Landmarks, Food, Culture, Toponyms, Nature, People, Architecture, History, Animals, Characteristics, Fashion and Cosmetics, Transport, The realities of other countries, Other countries, Sport, Flag, Language (French), Monarchy, Weather, Education and Science, Finance, Color*. The results of the research demonstrate that the main stereotypes in linguistic picture of the word of the Russian student youth concern *Capital, Landmarks, Food, Culture, Toponyms, Nature, People, Architecture*. The most frequently mentioned stereotypes are *Big Ben, the Eiffel Tower, the Queen, Paris and London*.

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## 1. Introduction

Every nation perceives the surrounding reality in its own way, it has its own method of the world conceptualization. Sustainable ideas that exist in the minds of native speakers form a conceptual picture of the world expressed in linguistic form. According to Zalevskaya (2003) “these ideas about the structure, elements and processes of reality reflected in the language are called the linguistic picture of the world” (p. 42).

Most scholars agree that the linguistic and conceptual pictures of the world correlate as part and whole, but the linguistic picture occupies a significant amount of space in the conceptual picture of the world, because with the help of the language a person gets knowledge that exceeds the amount of information coming from any other source.

The linguistic picture of the world has repeatedly been studied by scientists. Currently, this phenomenon is considered in different aspects. Thus, Jzhu (2017) and Isaev (2015) study the linguistic pictures of the world of different ethnic groups are compared; Timralieva (2017) and Brukvina (2016) conducted their researches on different language material; Kravchuk (2018) and Kim (2016) reconstructed various fragments of the linguistic picture of the world.

## 2. Problem Statement

Maslova (2001) claims, that in every society, there are some stereotypical views - both about themselves and about the behavior within their own cultural space, as well as in relation to representatives of another linguistic and cultural space.

A stereotype functions primarily in the cognitive sphere and it is determined by the knowledge possessed by the cultural community. Stereotypes are formed in any area of human knowledge, playing an important role in the regulation of social behavior. Moreover, the stereotyping mechanism is aimed at streamlining and selecting the most significant pieces of information.

Sadokhin and Grushevitskaya (2000) believe, that using stereotypes, the accumulated information is presented not only as a sum of useful knowledge, but as experience organized in a certain way, which due to its structuredness can be passed on to next generations.

In this paper we use the term stereotype after Krasnykh (2002) a permanent fragment of the picture of the world that exists in human consciousness. This is an established way of judgments about the world, a definite permanent, mental picture, an idea of a subject or a situation due to cultural identity.

According to Bartminsky (2009), there is a complex system of stereotypes in the minds of native speakers, the overwhelming majority of which are not directly connected with public life: “For a linguist, stereotyping covers the whole picture of the world, both the image of things and the image of a person” (p. 13). However, probably, not all concepts can be the basis for creating stereotypes, but only those, which include social components that designate objects or phenomena of the surrounding reality, are socially significant for a native speaker. Petrova (2013) argues that “Not everything is fixed in the language, but only phenomena and objects that are active for a person and his life, and what is relevant for one people may not be relevant for another” (p. 158).

Biktagirova (2017) says, stereotypes are assimilated in childhood under the influence of the cultural and linguistic environment in which an individual is brought up and change very slowly, although they inevitably distort the reality that they reflect. One of the reasons is a lack of information, since in this case the opinion is formed under the influence of society, due to the media and in the learning process.

We believe it is interesting to identify stereotypes that exist in the linguistic picture of the world of philology students at the initial stage of their study at the university, because later in the course of studying their cultural competence will be improved. This is facilitated not only by language they learn, but also by the training course on intercultural communication, which was included in university curricula relatively recently, but, as Chernyak (2015), Valeeva and Valeeva (2017) claim, students and teachers have already appreciated its contribution to formation of Russian students' cultural literacy.

It is noteworthy that in different countries, intercultural communication is studied not only by students of linguistic universities, but also by students of other specialties who, by the nature of their activities, encounter people from other cultures, as Chen, Jensen, Measom, and Nichols (2018).

### **3. Research Questions**

Stereotypes about Great Britain and France make up a certain fragment of the language picture of the world of Russian students. To reconstruct this fragment, it is necessary to identify the main stereotypes. To conduct the research, we should solve the following tasks:

- to develop a stimulus material - questionnaires for the experiment;
- to conduct an association experiment and process reactions;
- to reveal the main stereotypes about Great Britain in the language picture of the world of Russian students;
- to reveal the main stereotypes about France in the language picture of the world of Russian students;
- to find out what spheres of life they concern;
- to find the most frequently mentioned reactions;
- to see if such factors as gender, first /second foreign language, visit to the country have any impact on the associations.

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

The purpose of the study is to identify and describe the system of stereotypes about Great Britain and France that exist in the language picture of the world of Russian students.

### **5. Research Methods**

In this study we used psycholinguistic association experiment to obtain the linguistic material; to process the material we used component and field analyzes and statistical techniques, described by Moskvina (2017).

Due to the psychological nature of the language picture of the world, researchers of this phenomenon use psycholinguistic association experiment. An association experiment is a technique

aimed at identifying associations that have developed in an individual in his previous experience. When conducting a free association experiment, a person under test is asked to respond with a reaction word that first occurred upon presentation of the stimulus word without limiting in any way either the formal or semantic features of the reaction word. The type of associations that occur, the frequency of similar associations is recorded. Titscher, Meyer, Wodak, and Vetter (2017) consider the final product of the experiment to be a set of associations, which are ranked by degree of frequency.

Association is a dual process, because according to Shepherd and Marshall (2018), “on the one hand, by associating, an individual reproduces personal experience, on the other, repetitive typical, i.e. language and social experience” (p. 9). Consequently, on the basis of the analysis of associations that arise among informants, one can speak not only about the individual features of the perception of reality, but also about the social nature of the reactions. In our case, we are talking about a set of stereotypical reactions that reflect the ideas of France and Great Britain, which are in the minds of students.

## **6. Findings**

At the first stage of our work, we developed a stimulus material - a questionnaire for the experiment. The questionnaire included the following items, mandatory for each participant: age, gender, 1st and 2nd languages studied, visit the countries under study. We assumed that these indicators would have an impact on the characteristics of the reactions and will allow to reveal the subjective opinions of informants formed on the basis of personal experience. Participants were asked to give five reactions to the words “Great Britain” and “France”.

The experiment was conducted in the framework of the course “Introduction to the theory of intercultural communication”. Students of Orenburg State University, aged 18 to 19 years, studying English and French took part in the experiment.

It is believed that the nature of associations is influenced by many factors: age, gender, person's profession, etc. Before the experiment, we assumed that the personal experience of visiting a stimulus country should undoubtedly influence the responses of the informant, making them more subjective. However, the number of students who have been to the UK is only 11% of the total, while the overwhelming 89% of the participants have never visited this country. In France, there were only 15% of the informants, i.e. the information that they possess is not obtained through personal experience, but in the process of learning or through the media.

We used the information system of graphosemantic modeling Semograph, designed by a group of scientists headed by Belousov, Zelyanskaya, and Baranov (2012) to process the material. It is “designed to extract knowledge about subject areas from information arrays, including textual samples, metadata, semantic components and semantic fields, frequency, language and thesaurus dictionaries” (Semograph). It made it possible to carry out component and field analyzes more effectively.

We have created two independent projects, each of which was dedicated to one country: Great Britain or France. Each project included all reactions received for the stimulus word and information about each informant. Each reaction was considered as a separate component. Then, using the field analysis method, described by Moskvina (2017), in each project we grouped all the components (355 in the project “Great Britain” and 338 in the project “France”) into 23 semantic fields. In both projects, the list

of fields is the same, as this will allow to obtain reliable results, which can then be compared. However, the size of the fields is different.

It's necessary to note that the same component can be included in several semantic fields. For example, the reaction *Buckingham Palaceto* the stimulus word Great Britain is a component of the field *London* and *Landmarks*, i.e. it is one of the attractions of the British capital. Moreover, this component is included in the field *Monarchy*, since it is the official residence of the royal family, as well as in the field *Architecture*, since the palace, according to Oxford living dictionary, is “a large building, usually distinguished by its architecture and used for public purposes or serving as the permanent residence of reigning sovereigns or head of state” (Oxford living dictionary).

Thus, the reaction *snails* to the stimulus word France is a component of the three semantic fields *Animals*, *Nature* and *Cuisine*, because *Snails* (Escargo) – one of the traditional dishes of the French cuisine.

The table 01 consists of 5 columns: columns 1 and 2 reflect the names of semantic fields that structure a fragment of the picture of the world “France”, and their size; columns 4 and 5 show the semantic fields that form a fragment of the picture of the world “Great Britain” and their size; column 3 performs the separation function.

**Table 01.** The system of stereotypes about Great Britain and France in the language picture of the world of the Russian student

1	2	3	4	5
Name of the field	Size, %		Size, %	Name of the field
<b>Capital (Paris)</b>	<b>33</b>		<b>38</b>	<b>Capital (London)</b>
<b>Landmarks</b>	<b>25</b>		<b>19</b>	<b>Landmarks</b>
<b>Cuisine</b>	<b>21</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>Architecture</b>
<b>Culture</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>People</b>
<b>Toponyms (French)</b>	<b>13</b>		<b>13</b>	<b>Toponyms (British)</b>
<b>Nature</b>	<b>12</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>Culture</b>
<b>People</b>	<b>11</b>		<b>9</b>	<b>Monarchy</b>
<b>Architecture</b>	<b>9</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>Nature</b>
History	6		6	Flag
Animals	6		6	Transport
Characteristics	4		5	Culture
Fashion and Cosmetics	4		4	Sport
Transport	3		4	Color
Realities of other countries	2		4	Characteristics
Other countries	2		3	Weather
Sport	1		3	Other countries
Flag	1		2	Language (English)
Language (French)	1		2	Education and science
Monarchy	0		2	Realities of other countries
Weather	0		1	Animals
Education and science	0		1	Finance
Finance	0		0	History
Color	0		0	Fashion and Cosmetics

The size of the fields in the table is indicated in percent. This figure indicates what proportion of the total number of reactions (in each project this number is different) is the size of a particular field. Fields are presented in order of decreasing size.

Information system “Semograph” allows to create as many sets of components as necessary for the study on the basis of additional data (in our case: gender, first foreign language, visit to the country). In each project, we created 4 active component sets based on a) first language (English / French), b) gender (male / female), c) visit, d) accounting for all data. Within each set, an analysis of the frequency of the fields and components was carried out. It allowed to isolate the fields of the greatest volume that had overcome the threshold of significance (the volume of the field is larger than average). The names of such fields are highlighted in bold in the table.

The arithmetic average value is “the value obtained by adding all the members of a number series and dividing the sum by the number of members” (Moskvin, 2017, 43). According to Moskvin (2017, 45), “it shows the probability of an event”. In our case, it can be interpreted in the following way - those fields the size of which is larger than average is more typical for this audience, whereas those whose size is below the average can be considered single, subjective, and, therefore, random.

In both projects the field with the largest number of components is *Capital*. The components are united by a common feature - each of them is related to the British / French capital. For example, Tower Bridge, the Tower, London Eye – tourist attractions located in London; *The 2012 Olympics* took place in this city; *Buns* from *Baker Street*, one of London’s streets; *Vanilla* is a youth subculture, the most famous elements of which are T-shirts with the words “*I love London*” and “*I love NY*”. The most frequent reaction in this group and in general in the whole project is *Big Ben* (43 reactions). No wonder it is called one of the symbols of the UK. The second most frequently mentioned reaction is *London* (24 reactions).

In the project “France”, *Capital* was also the largest field. It includes the most frequent reactions, *the Eiffel Tower* (43 reactions), *Paris* (25 reactions), *the Louvre* (18 reactions). Unlike the project “Great Britain”, this field mainly includes the names of sights, the name of *the Seine river* (5 reactions), and the reaction *two banks* (1 reaction), because the river divided Paris into two banks, each of them is to some extent another world.

The field *Landmarks*, the second largest in each project, includes such components as *Big Ben*, *Tower Bridge*, *the Tower*, *London Eyes*, *Madame Tussauds*, and others. The most frequent response in this group is *Big Ben* (43 reactions), the rest of the reactions were mentioned once. We see that the overwhelming majority of students from all the attractions of this country know only the world-famous clock and the clock tower on the Houses of Parliament.

In the project “France”, the field *Landmarks* consists of the following reactions: *the Eiffel Tower* (43 reactions), *the Louvre* (18 reactions) and *the Champs Elysees* (10 reactions), *Montmartre* (2 reactions), *Notre Dame* (2 reactions), *Loire castles* (1 reaction) and others.

In third place in the project “Great Britain” there is the field *Architecture*, that is not surprising. Cambridge Dictionary defines the word *architecture* in the following way –“the art and practice of designing and making buildings” (Cambridge Dictionary online, n.d.). Consequently, this field includes the names of all buildings, some places of interest, of what can be observed in the environment - *English parks* (1 reaction), *castles* (1 reaction), *bridges* (1 reaction), etc. In the project “France”, the field

*Architecture* is at the end of the list - 8th place. Here there are such reactions as *narrow alleys* (1 reaction), *quiet streets* (1 reaction), *huge windows* (1 reaction), *balconies with flowers* (1 reaction).

In this project, the field *Cuisine* is in the 3rd place: such reactions as *cheese* (14 reactions), *wine* (10 reactions), *croissants* (10 reactions), *frogs* (9 reactions), *bistro* (1 reaction), *cafe* (1 reaction), *restaurant* (1 reaction) and etc. It is interesting, that the field *British Cuisine* did not even overcome the threshold of significance and was represented by such reactions as *tea* (10 reactions), *pub* (1 reaction), *hot dog* (2 reactions), *oatmeal* (2 reactions). It can be explained by the fact that the British cuisine is known notoriously. They even say that there is no such thing as British cuisine, therefore, it does not matter to foreigners. On the other hand, it is possible that the textbooks on the English language do not attach much importance to this topic, which was revealed as a result of the experiment.

In both projects, the field *People* is significant. It consists of the names of the famous British (James Bond, Sherlock Holmes, Elizabeth II, Harry Potter, JK Rowling, Arthur Conan Doyle, Kate Middleton) / French (Edith Piaf, Sophie Marceau, Jean Reno, Gerard de Pardier, Napoleon), generalized concepts related to Great Britain (queen, British, guardians) and France (Arabs, blacks, handsome French).

It is noteworthy that the most frequent reaction in this group is *the Queen* (19 reactions), whereas the personal name *Elizabeth II* was mentioned only once. It should be noted that in the project “France”, this field includes real people: singers, actors, historical figures, writers and sportsmen.

In the English Oxford living Dictionaries (English Oxford living Dictionaries online, n.d.), culture is interpreted as “The arts and other manifestations of human intellectual achievement regarded collectively”. The field “Culture” turned out to be significant in both projects. It includes reactions related to painting, literature, music, cinema, British television (*culture, cinema, civilization, Madame Tussauds, the Beatles, Sex Pistols*, etc.) and France (*Audrey Tautou, Dumas, Impressionists, Little Prince, film "Taxi"*).

The name of the semantic field *Toponyms* speaks for itself. Toponym - is “a word that is the name of a place” (Cambridge Dictionary online, n.d.). Its components are the following associations with Britain – *the Thames* (10 reactions), *London* (24 reactions), *Scotland* (3 reactions), *Oxford* (3 reactions), *Irish Dances, Ben Nevis* (1 reaction), *Cambridge* (1 reaction) etc.; and associations with France - *Paris* (25 reactions), *Cote d'Azur* (5 reactions), *the Seine* (5 reactions), *Marseille* (1 reaction), *Provence* (1 reaction) etc.

The field *Nature* was significant in both projects. It includes reactions that semantically correspond to the definition given in Cambridge Dictionary online: “all the animals, plants, rocks, etc.” (Cambridge Dictionary online, n.d.). British nature is represented by such associations as *fog* (8 reactions), *English bulldog* (3 reactions), *island* (2 reactions), *rain* (2 reactions), *English parks, river, nature, green grass*, etc. French nature associates for our informants with *frogs* (9 reactions), the *Seine* (5 reactions), *snails* (4 reactions), *oysters* (3 reactions), *other animals, sea, mountain serpentine* and *vineyards*.

In the project “Britain”, the field *Monarchy* turned out to be significant, but in the case of France it is represented by one reaction (*kings*). The British Monarchy is associated with *the royal family* (queen

(19 reactions), *monarchy* (5 reactions), *Elizabeth II* (1 reaction), *Buckingham Palace*, *the royal guard*, *Kate Middleton*).

There are several semantic fields that have a certain size in one project, while in the other they have empty content. Thus, the semantic field *Color* consists of associations containing the name of a color. It is noteworthy that Britain associates to informants with 2 colors - *red* (6 times) and *green* (2 times), whereas in the second project this field has empty content, i.e. informants do not have color associations with this France.

So, the field *Fashion and cosmetics* in the UK project has no components, whereas in the project "France" its size is 6% of the total number of reactions (*fashion*, *L'etoile*, *Chanel No. 5*, *style*, *perfume*), which is not surprising, as France is considered to be a trendsetter in the field of fashion and cosmetics.

The students do not associate France with *Education and science* and *Weather*, whereas in the British version these fields include various reactions. It can be explained by the fact that in the UK there are world-known universities Oxford and Cambridge, children from wealthy Russian families go to the United Kingdom to study, and British scientists is a well-known Internet meme, which is mentioned if scientific research is presented as absurd or beyond the conventional opinion about serious scientific research.

The field *Finance* (*expensive*, *pound*, *pound sterling*, *business center*), presented in the project "Great Britain", has empty content in French version. Most likely the reason for this is the stable British economy and the stable position of the pound sterling in the world economics.

## 7. Conclusion

So, we considered the concept of a linguistic picture of the world, which means ideas about the structure, elements and processes of reality reflected in the language. Stereotypes, being fixed ideas about something, are a permanent fragment of the linguistic pictures of the world that exists in human consciousness.

The main purpose of this paper was to identify and present the system of stereotypes existing in the language picture of the world of Russian student. The corpus of reactions consisted of 355 (stimulus word Great Britain) and 338 (stimulus word France) answers. We revealed 23 semantic fields that reflect the main stereotypes about these countries: *Capital*, *Landmarks*, *Food*, *Culture*, *Toponyms*, *Nature*, *People*, *Architecture*, *History*, *Animals*, *Characteristics*, *Fashion and Cosmetics*, *Transport*, *The realities of other countries*, *Other countries*, *Sport*, *Flag*, *Language (French)*, *Monarchy*, *Weather*, *Education and Science*, *Finance*, *Color*.

It was determined what position in the structure of each fragment of the linguistic picture of the world these semantic fields occupy. It was found that the fields *Capital*, *Landmarks*, *Culture*, *Toponyms*, *Nature*, *People*, *Architecture* include the most typical stereotypes about the two countries for the student audience, and the most common ones are stereotypes about the capital and landmarks.

Semantic fields *Animals*, *Characteristics*, *Fashion and Cosmetics*, *Transport*, *Realities of other countries*, *Other countries*, *Sport*, *Flag*, *Language (French)*, *Weather*, *Education and Science*, *Finance*, *Color* consist of sporadic, subjective reactions, i.e. not typical for students of Russian universities.



The hypothesis that such personal data of informants as gender, age, first / second foreign language will cause a significant difference in the reactions was not confirmed. Most of the associations were typical, common to many participants.

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