

**ISCKMC 2022**

**International Scientific Congress «KNOWLEDGE, MAN AND CIVILIZATION»**

**LINGUOCONCEPT “SOFT POWER” AND ITS EDUCATIONAL  
POTENTIAL IN ESP TEACHING**

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**Abstract**

This study is devoted to the consideration of the features of teaching English to international students within the framework of the educational potential of the linguistic concept "soft power". The research demonstrates the methodology for applying conceptual analysis in such socially significant texts as articles in periodicals. The main goal of the study is to present the educational potential of the linguistic concept "soft power" in the framework of the methodology for applying conceptual analysis. This method is aimed at identifying the specifics of the content of the concept and its verbalization in the texts of the English-language media, representing the soft power of China. In the process of research, both general scientific methods (generalization, analysis, comparison) and linguistic (cognitive, lexicographic, associative) methods were used. The effectiveness of the conceptual analysis method was confirmed during practical classes for third-year students of the Faculty of International Relations at the B2+ level by the Common European Competences (CEFR). The method of conceptual analysis in teaching ESP contributes to the development of the professional competencies of students. This method allows students increasing their readiness to work with texts of professional orientation in English, master the methodology for conducting conceptual analysis, and contribute to the development of speech skills and abilities, mastering the terminology and vocabulary of socio-political content and their practical application in the professional field.

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*Keywords:* Conceptual analysis, cognitive signs, soft power

## 1. Introduction

The study of issues forming the professional field of activity of future international specialists is impossible without relying on background knowledge. In recent years, more branches of science and research institutes have paid close attention to language. The reason is that language is important in itself as an object of exclusive linguistic research but language is also important as a key tool in building international relations and shaping the geopolitical map of the world.

Interdisciplinarity, being an integral characteristic of modern science, brings together and integrates various fields of knowledge, and research tools and contributes to the expansion of the scientific field (Kakoulli Constantinou, 2018; Petrova & Rubtsova, 2019). Language, being the focus of attention of scientists, “plays a dual role: on the one hand, language changes reflect the essence of ongoing social changes (the political alignment of forces, the direction of choosing partners for economic cooperation), on the other hand, language is a mechanism through which it becomes possible interlingual and intercultural interaction (Laletina, 2011).

It is also impossible to ignore the change in the status and functions of the English language, which has assumed the role of the language of international communication. As a result, the English language is perceived less and less as a conductor of the culture of a certain people and more and more as a means of expressing any culture. Thus, the linguistic concept “soft power” was introduced into scientific circulation by the American political scientist Joseph Nye (1990a, 1990b). Today, the concept of “soft power” has become widely known in academic circles, dividing power into “soft” and “hard” and actualizing the discussion around the concept. At the same time, the popularization of the concept led to the fact that discussions moved to an area far from the one that Joseph Nye focused on (Yudin, 2013).

In our work, we rely on the meaning and definitions of the concept of “soft power” in its original understanding by the author of the term and scientists who consider the lingua-concept in the understanding of a close interpretation of Joseph Nye.

In our work, we will consider the features of teaching English to international students within the framework of the educational potential of the linguistic concept “soft power”.

The relevance of using the method of conceptual analysis in teaching English is due to the productivity and effectiveness of working with concepts, which develops the skills of analysis, coherent speech, activation of memory and creativity, imagination, and mental activity. The relevance of the study is justified by the widespread use of conceptual analysis in English classes.

The novelty of this study lies in the development of guidelines for the study of the linguistic concept of “soft power” when teaching a professionally-oriented foreign language at a university. Moreover, the paper presents a comprehensive analysis of the deployment of the concept of “soft power” on the example of China's soft power model.

## 2. Problem Statement

The teaching of professionally oriented English requires the use of various methodological techniques to prepare specialists who have all the necessary knowledge for successful negotiation at the international level, who have the power of persuasion, ease of establishing contacts, simplicity, freedom,

and ease in communication. This study is devoted to the consideration of the features of teaching English to international students within the framework of the educational potential of the linguistic concept "soft power". We consider the specificity and complexity of various genres of texts, based on which English classes are conducted at the Faculty of International Relations. Therefore, we take media texts as the basis of our study since it is in the media space that the concept of "soft power" is widely used, which contributes to its consolidation in the collective consciousness. In addition, it is the texts of this genre that make it possible to identify and study the main features of the concept. Moreover, reading and analyzing journalistic texts contribute both to deepening language training and expanding scientific knowledge within the specialty (Rubtsova & Dobrova, 2020).

### 3. Research Questions

The theoretical basis for research in the field of cognitive linguistics was the work of Vorkachev (2001, 2002), Hoffman (2001), and Goncharova (2013), Petrova and Rubtsova (2019).

Vorkachev (2001) noted that:

A concept is a culturally marked verbalized meaning, represented in terms of expression by a number of its linguistic implementations that form an appropriate lexico-semantic paradigm, a unit of collective knowledge that has a linguistic expression and is marked by ethno-cultural specifics. (p. 87)

According to Kolesov (1992), the concept appears "in its meaningful forms as an image, as a concept, and as a symbol. It is a reservoir of meaning" (p. 21). Goncharova (2013) defined the concept as "a named info-meme that has passed through primary semiosis, the mental component of words and similar language units" (p. 230).

The content of the concept as a scientific category is revealed through its components: conceptual, figurative, and meaningful.

The conceptual component reflects the attribute and definitional structure of the concept. The figurative component captures the cognitive metaphors that support it in the linguistic consciousness, the significant component is determined by the place that the name of the concept occupies in the language system (Vorkachev, 2002, p. 55).

In this paper, attention is focused on the conceptual and figurative components of the concept of "soft power". A careful selection of material was carried out to reveal the cognitive features of the concept under study. To identify the conceptual content, various types of dictionaries were used; when working on the figurative content, English-language journalistic texts of the periodical *The Economist* were considered, in the headlines of which there is "soft power" in the period from 2010 to 2022.

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

The study devoted to present the educational potential of the linguistic concept of "soft power" in the framework of the methodology for applying conceptual analysis in special English classes at the Faculty of International Relations of St. Petersburg University. This method of conceptual analysis is aimed at developing a general idea of the formation of the attractiveness of political ideas and values; to identify the specifics of the content of the concept and its verbalization in the texts of the English-language media representing the soft power of China; on the development of reading, speaking and writing skills using the studied vocabulary.

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

In the process of research, both general scientific methods (analysis, generalization, comparison) and linguistic (cognitive, associative, lexicographic) methods were used.

#### **6. Findings**

Language transmits information but also affects the individual, which means that language indirectly affects the life of society. The language of the media represents the views and points of view of political figures, and also influences the formation of a collective opinion on certain issues. Thus, the mass media can be considered one of the most effective mechanisms for the dissemination of soft power. The concept of "soft power" is widely used by journalists, political scientists, and analysts as one of the concepts of political communication. In our study, the concept of "soft power" is considered from the point of view of applying the method of conceptual analysis to identify the specifics of the content of the concept and its verbalization in the texts of the English-language media representing China's soft power. In addition, this technique is used as part of teaching English for Special Purposes to 3rd-year students of the Faculty of International Relations of St. Petersburg State University to comprehensively study the concept of "soft power" through reading, analyzing, and discussing English journalistic texts.

Let us present a methodological development of the application of the method of conceptual analysis in teaching professionally oriented English.

##### **6.1. Introduction stage**

We designated the first stage as the Introduction stage. It includes two stages. In the first stage, the topic is designated and the communication of linguocultural information about the origin of the concept is carried out.

The concept of "soft power" is one of the central concepts of the American political concept sphere. As noted above, for the first time this concept was proposed and conceptually disclosed by the American political scientist Nye. He proved that the status of a state in the international arena is undoubtedly more than a combination of military strength and economic power. From the researcher's point of view, "soft power" "is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payments. It arises from the attractiveness of a country's culture, political ideals, and policies... Seduction is always more

effective than coercion, and many values like democracy, human rights, and individual opportunities are deeply seductive. The soft power of a country rests primarily on three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values (when it lives up to them at home and abroad), and its foreign policies (when they are seen as legitimate and having moral authority)" (Nye, 2004, X). According to Nye, "soft power" is the power that makes it possible to achieve what is desired based on the principles of the country's attractiveness, namely its culture, political ideals, and political courses. Attractiveness is always more effective than coercion, and many values such as democracy, human rights, and individual opportunity are very attractive. The main spheres of influence of soft power are culture, political values, and foreign policy.

In the second stage, definitions in explanatory and political dictionaries Macmillan, Oxford Learner's Dictionary, Cambridge dictionary, Collins Dictionary, and Political dictionary were considered. Considering the origin of the concept, as well as analyzing the dictionary definitions during the discussion with the students, they revealed their common components and concluded that the concept is represented using the basic meaning: *ability/way to obtain/get/to achieve one's goals*. And conceptual the signs in which the imagery inherent in each concept is manifested are: *influence, persuasion, attractiveness (co-option)*, which can be represented in the text by lexemes of the same name, or combinations that are close in meaning.

## 6.2. Basic stage

The practical implementation of the objectives is the implementation of three stages. In the first stage of the lesson, English-language media articles on the topic of China's soft power were considered and the scope of its application was identified. In our work, we took as a basis a study by Gregory Holik (Holik, 2011), in which he identified the following areas of application of "soft power":

- economic soft power;
- soft power of human capital;
- cultural soft power;
- diplomatic soft power;
- political soft power (Holik, 2011, p. 229).

When analyzing the articles in the classroom, all 5 of the above-mentioned spheres of influence of China's soft power were highlighted:

### 1. Economic soft power.

China's "soft power" in the economic sphere is a clear example of how an attractive economic model of a country makes it attractive in the international arena, attracting states to cooperation. At the moment, China's competitiveness is beyond doubt, the country is on a par with such economically developed countries as the United States, Germany, Switzerland, and Japan. China's competitiveness index has grown significantly since 2016.

China's economic diplomacy can be traced to the signing of regional trade agreements aimed at developing regional cooperation. China is also involved in the provision of official foreign development assistance (ODA, Official Development Assistance). Moreover, with more than 140 countries and 30 One belt and One Road "One Belt and One Road" (The Economist, 2017).

Nevertheless, it is necessary to note China's unsuccessful initiatives in the field of economic assistance to other countries. For example, a professional training program for African journalists. The program covered thousands of reporters and other media industry workers who studied in China every year listened to lectures on Chinese history and traveled around the country. On one of the trips, the students were taken to a relatively poor village in Shanghai. "The purpose of the trip was to evoke sympathy by demonstrating that China is exactly the same developing country" (The Economist, 2018).

#### 2. Humanitarian soft power.

This type of "soft power" is characterized by the attractiveness of the education system and the attractiveness of scientific and technological activities. Student mobility is related to the attractiveness of the country, the prestige of the university, and marketing policy. The number of foreign students studying at universities in China is steadily growing (Yang & Wit, 2019).

#### 3. Cultural "soft power".

To promote a positive image of the state in the international arena, China uses the attractiveness of popular culture, cultural heritage, history, and tourism. Since the latter aspect is severely limited by the pandemic, we will focus on the first two. Thus, the main tools of cultural "soft power" that we can identify based on selected articles will be the following:

- The spread of Confucius institutes around the world (The Economist, 2017, 2019). "China expresses hope that foreigners will accept some Chinese traditions. For example, the Chinese New Year can become as popular as Christmas" (The Economist, 2017);
- the success of the feature film "Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon" (The Economist, 2017), which premiered in 2000;
- the country's sporting achievements, in particular, the 2008 Olympic Games, which, by increasing the tourist flow, allowed China talking about its culture (economist, 2011);
- the ancient Chinese treatise "The Art of War", written by Sun Tzu, in particular, is used in the training of the military in the US Army (economist, 2011).

Nevertheless, it is important to pay attention to the shortcomings of the "soft power" tools that China uses to promote the country's positive image in the international political arena. Thus, representatives of the scientific community said that Confucius's institutes spread propaganda and suppress discussion of sensitive issues, such as Taiwan's independence (The Economist, 2019). The success of the mentioned feature film was not repeated, in this area, the animated film "Kung Fu Panda" (The Economist, 2017) did more to spread the culture of China. As for the treatise "The Art of War", for Western experts, the book has become, rather, a source of information about China's military power, and not about its "soft power" (economist, 2011).

#### 4. Diplomatic soft power.

The Covid-19 pandemic created certain conditions in which it allowed countries expressing themselves in those industries that were not sufficiently developed before. So, in China, in addition to being a source of technology, investment, and vaccines for Covid-19, the state has also succeeded in providing humanitarian assistance. Moreover, China was one of the first to announce that the vaccine will be available worldwide as soon as it is created. This position has created a favorable image of the country in the international political arena, especially against the background of the fact that the United States is locked

in solving its own economic and social problems caused by the pandemic, and the developing economies of the world are without support. However, it is obvious that China is not ready to cooperate at the global level on issues of global warming (The Economist, 2015) and air pollution (The Economist, 2017).

#### 5. Political soft power.

In this area, we can distinguish two main aspects – the political system and respect for human rights. It is obvious that politics and diplomacy are close, contiguous spheres of activity. This is also indicated by the comment: "The government is more concerned about its enrichment, rather than the health of the inhabitants of the country or the population of the whole planet" (The Economist, 2017).

Let us turn again to the treatise of Sun Tzu, who, describing "hard power", is the conductor of "soft power": "Know the enemy and know yourself, and you will not need to worry about the outcome of a hundred battles." In the commentary on this aphorism, the author of the article writes: "If China aspires to power on a global scale, then it first needs to think about the values it promotes on its territory" (The Economist, 2011).

It is important to note the target audience of China's influence using soft power: These are states that admire China's economic power (phenomenal economic growth, economic influence, unprecedented economic achievements, economic power, economic opportunities, broad diplomatic reach, economic power), being developing countries. For example, opinion polls of respondents from Africa showed that China is treated more friendly in this region. "This is partly due to China's injections into the continent – in Angola, all football matches (we are talking about professional football) are held at one of the four stadiums built by China (economist, 2017).

The influence of China's economic "soft power" is directed at the neighboring states of Southeast Asia, which undoubtedly benefit from such a balance of power. Also, the status of China plays an important role in the formation of relations between the countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

Exploring with students from the economist's article, we describe the model of China's "soft power". In this regard, it is interesting to study the content of the concept of "soft power", the scope of its application, and tools in Japan, the United States, and South Korea for comparative analysis.

Thus, during the discussion and analysis of the articles, the following spheres and instruments of their influence were identified:

- economic soft power → cooperation with different countries;
- soft power of human capital → education for foreigners;
- cultural soft power → popularization of culture, ancient history, and cinema;
- diplomatic soft power → cooperation with various countries (especially regarding the Covid-19 pandemic);
- political soft power → cooperation and diplomacy.

In the second stage, the main attention was focused on the linguistic aspects of the representation of the concept, namely, its cognitive features were isolated in the texts. In the course of the work in the classroom, it was revealed that all the listed signs of the concept are represented in all spheres of influence in China. Here are some examples illustrating the signs of the concept that students identified during their work in the classroom.

Sign of persuasion: "Chinese leaders, determined to persuade America that they mean no harm, have recruited Sun Tzu to their cause" (The Economist, 2011), "Huimin county regards itself as the birthplace of Sun Tzu and thus the fountainhead of an ancient wisdom which, officials believe, can help persuade the world of China's attractiveness" (The Economist, 2011). As can be seen from the examples, the cognitive attribute "persuasion" is vividly presented in media texts to describe situations when China uses soft power policy in various areas to convince the rest of the world, and in particular, America, as the progenitor of the "soft power" concept. China strives to convince the world of its friendliness, openness, and willingness to cooperate. In these examples, the sign of the concept is represented by the lexeme "to persuade" of the same name.

Sign of attractiveness: "The party knows that its ideology has little chance these days of attracting others" (The Economist, 2017), "China's soft-power strategy focuses mainly on promoting its culture and trying to give the impression that its foreign policy is, for such a big country, unusually benign" (The Economist, 2017), "More recently, however, the Chinese government has been trying to sell the country itself as a brand—one that has the ability to attract people from other countries in the way that America does with its culture, products and values" (The Economist, 2017), "Abroad, officials have been trying to win over Western audiences by pouring billions of dollars into the creation of global media giants to rival the soft power of brands such as CNN and the New York Times" (The Economist, 2011). The sign of "attractiveness" is also vividly presented in the media texts when describing China's soft power strategy, which is aimed at creating a more attractive image of the country, its culture and values. In these examples, the attribute "attractiveness" is represented in the text by the lexeme "attracting", "to attract", the gerund form of the verb "to promote". From the meaning of this lexeme, we can conclude – that "to promote culture means to make it more attractive", as well as the verb "to win over" with the meaning "to win, interest", i.e., "attract".

Sign of influence: "If China wants to influence the world, it needs to think hard about the values it promotes at home" (The Economist, 2015), "Chinese influence on African media is still growing in more subtle ways" (The Economist, 2018), "China will find it hard to win friends and influence nations so long as it muzzles its best advocates" (The Economist, 2017), "A second, nascent source of influence is via Chinese investment in private companies" (The Economist, 2018). The cognitive attribute "influence" is manifested when it comes to the ways, methods, and sources of influence of China's soft power on other nations. In the presented examples, the sign of influence is represented by the lexeme influence of the same name.

In the third stage, during the discussion with the students, a glossary was compiled from eight groups of verbs that are combined with soft power. The first group with the general meaning "own, use" – to gain, to wield, to possess, to preserve, to have, to use, to capitalize on.

The second group has the general meaning of "lose, squander" – to lose, to squander. The third group has the general meaning of "the need to possess" – to lack, to need. The fourth group has the general meaning of "restore" – to regain, to recover. The fifth group has the general meaning of "promote, strengthen" – to boost, to assert, to enhance, to promote. The sixth group has the general meaning of "destroy, weaken" – to destroy, to dilute. The seventh group has the general meaning of "create" – to build, to produce. The eighth group has the general meaning of "invest, contribute" – to contribute to, to invest.



### 6.3. Final stage

In the final stage, students are invited to complete a small research project in the form of a presentation report on the topic: “Model of the soft power of a certain state (optional)”. As part of the project, international students are invited to present a model of the soft power of a country, as well as in the form of a diagram to illustrate the frequency of representation of features by lexemes and combinations close in meaning. Thus, the structure of the project includes the following items:

- 1 Introduction.
2. Soft power spheres.
3. Soft Power Instruments.
3. Frequency of lexical items (related phrases), representing the cognitive criteria of the concept (diagram).
4. Conclusion.

## 7. Conclusion

The conceptual analysis method contributes to the development of students' professional competencies, namely the willingness to work with professional texts in English and acquire the skills of qualified analysis, commenting, summarizing, and summarizing the results of scientific research conducted by other specialists, using modern techniques and methodologies. In addition, the method of conceptual analysis also contributes to the development of communicative competence, i.e., the development of speech skills and abilities in the process of a comprehensive study of the concept, mastering the terminology and vocabulary of socio-political content, and their practical application in the professional field. During the lesson, the motivation to learn a foreign language increases through reading and discussing authentic media texts. In addition, students master the methodology of conceptual analysis: with the help of dictionary definitions, they compare, generalize and systematize the information received to determine the conceptual content of the concept under study; by reading, analyzing, and discussing media texts, the cognitive features of the concept under study are revealed; within the framework of the project, the model of the soft power of the country under consideration is explored, the features of the concept are identified and a scheme is drawn up in particular for the use of lexemes-representatives.

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