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THE IMAGE OF RUSSIA IN THE BRITISH EVERYDAY DISCOURSE

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the linguistic analysis of the results of the public-opinion poll held by the authors with British respondents. Using the method of free associations the authors reveal the semantic groups of words and metaphors which verbalize the image of Russia in the discourse in question. It gives the opportunity to define the place of the concept. Russia is the British language picture of the world as well as its estimation of the British people and lays the foundation for the comparative analysis of the representation of the concept Russia in different linguocultures and discourses.

Keywords: language picture of the world, toponymic concept, association, mass media, seme, metaphor, contrast, ambivalency.

One of the most important notions of modern cognitive science and linguoculturology is that of the language picture of the world. This picture represents people's perception and knowledge of the world in the verbal form and is affected by physical and cultural experience. It has both universal and specific national features because different nations have different history, ways of life etc. It is especially true for such fragments of this picture which are called toponymic (geographical) concepts, i.e. names of countries, cities and so on. It goes without saying that, for example, English and Russian people have different associations with the name of our country and the investigation of these associations can show the place of the corresponding concept in the modern British language picture of the world. It will also give the opportunity to know the opinion of the British people about our country and to compare it

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with our own ideas about Russia. This linguistic investigation is topical for cognitive science and linguoculturology as well as for politicians and journalists.

It's quite obvious that any concept, including the concept *Russia* is shaped in the process of the circulation of the corresponding lexeme in the discourse, i.e. in communication. One of the most important types of the discourse is the everyday one because all people are participants of it. This discourse is usually realized as a dialogue and can be described as spontaneous and subjective [2]. It is dependent on other types of discourses and in particular the mass media one (the ways of representation of the concept *Russia* in the British mass media discourse were described in our article [3]) In accord with it we can put forward the following working hypothesis: the verbal representation of the concept *Russia* in the British everyday discourse reflects the contrastive perception of this concept formed, on the one hand, under the influence of mass media and films, and, on the other hand, under the influence of the individual experience and peculiarities of people's perception.

To verify this hypothesis we used the method of free associations. Our 78 responders (29 female and 49 male ones) were British people of 3 age groups: 12-29 (35 people), 30-49 (31 people) , 50-70 (12 people). All of them are representatives of the middle class (doctors, teachers, actors, students, businessmen etc.). 3 of these respondents had no associations with Russia, 29 got their information from mass media and the Internet, 23 had cultural background at school, university or from books, 17 have Russian friends or visited Russia.

Most of first spontaneous associations (about 48%) with the lexeme *Russia* were connected with geopolitics and politics. It's quite natural as people get a lot of information about Russia from mass media which lay special emphasis on political life. These associations included the size of our country (The biggest country in the world (Steve, 20, student)) and its power and influence (Russia was split up at many countries, but still is very big and powerful (Oli, 26, student)). The respondents also used corresponding zoomorphic and game metaphors, while speaking about Russia:

Russia is a bear. Very strong and big (Kari, 26, student).

Russia is playing the great game again. It wants power and to be recognized as a powerful country (C. Roberts, 54, clerk).

Russia, though finding herself on the defensive sanctions, holds all the cards (S. Volk, 45, journalist).

Only 2 respondents had contrastive associations with Russia, considering it a weak country:

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Russia wants to be seen as a global superpower but always plays the victim (truk10, 23, internet blogger).

Russia far more than 70 years has been for me the Soviet Union. So it will be. It was our enemy but now it is too weak to be a contestant for Britain (K.Lang, 65, retired).

Due to the British and American mass media a lot of political associations with Russia were negative, verbalized with words and atropomorphic metaphors having in their semantic structures such semes as *threat, aggression, war, terrorism, suspicion*. For ex.:

Russia is a threat and it is using the power it has (mainly oil and gas) to re-establish in everyone's eyes (G. Wolfe, 59, retired).

Russia is an aggressor. British government should do something to stop it (H. Casey, 66, retired).

I'm sure Russia is the country which will start WW III (E. James, 41, analyst).

Russia is an exporter of terrorism and should be treated accordingly (Polzfilamon, 25, internet blogger).

He finds Russia suspicious and Russia makes a mistake by making enemies among Europe and the USA (Ms. Lindholm, 31, history teacher).

For the British respondents the foreign policy of Russia is inseparable from its president, whose name arouses mainly negative associations. For instance, D. Sagramos (37, lecturer) opposed the positive characteristic of Russia to the negative one of its leadership:

Russia is big, strong with a huge human potential. It had a positive contribute in the world's culture. But its leadership triggers negative emotions.

The impact of mass media here is quite obvious, which, according, to Ms Willis (55, teacher), "tries to mar Russian's image because Putin has become too strong and influential." As a result, while speaking about Putin the respondents used words having such semes in their semantic structure as *aggression, revenge, fascism*. For ex.:

The Russian politics and Vladimir Putin are very aggressive (Dr Walsh, 37, chemistry teacher).

Beware the Russian bear. Putin will exact some kind of revenge. I hope that revenge will take economic form not military (R. Sage, 37, internet blogger).

Russia under Putin will have the same fate as Germany under Hitler (M. Bould, 34, clerk).

Nevertheless there are some (very few) controversial opinions about foreign policy of Russia and its leader. For ex.: JJI39

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(27, internet blogger) believes that "Russia is not the aggressive party, the US is" and Mike (65, retired) states that "Putin is acting as a head of state not childish as Cameron and Obama". The following game metaphor is also a kind of compliment to our president: "Putin not Washington holds the cards and plays them".

However negative characteristics of V. Putin prevailed including those which concern the home policy of our country and its leader. According to Colodran (32, internet blogger), "Russia is being dragged in the mud by Putin". In the respondents' opinion the present political regime in Russia can be characterized as dictatorship and restoration of Stalinism:

I can't understand Russian people who are ready to bear Putin's politics. I think revolution is a bad idea, but dictatorship should be punished (Vr Maclead, 47, retired).

Putin's stalinization of Russia (Rob, 24, student).

Due to the British mass media the respondents characterized our country as the state of corruption, criminality and mafia:

A country with a highly corruption rate (Ms Vint, 29, PE teacher)

Russia is a very expensive country. No idea how people live in this corrupted country with organized crime (Mike, 42, teacher).

Corruption is everywhere (O. Bullough, writer).

Russian military exercises on the Ukraine boundary were compared by one of the respondents (I. Morris, 55, writer) with the mafia's custom of putting a horse's head in one's bed as a message:

Russia sends a message by means of its military exercises. A bit like the Mafia putting a horse's head in your bed. Sometimes though, exercises are a cover for an invasion, as the Russians have recently shown (I. Morris, 55, writer).

Both mass media and films help to form strong negative political stereotypes connected with Russia in minds of British people. Some respondents were quite aware of this fact:

In England we know they (Russian people) are shown quite stereotypical. Bad guys who make bombs (D. Moran, 43, actor).

Russia is a strange country. We got used to think about it as an evil empire (Mike, 65, retired).

In America movies Russians are always villains especially in spy thrillers. They explode, make bombs and drive by tanks. It is impossible to kill them (Casey, 16, pupil).

L. Pickock (32, columnist), who is married to a Russian stated that the inevitable jokes about Russia include the opinion about Russian people as the part of the mafia and part of the "baddy" crowd in movies.

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We see, that the above-mentioned stereotypes were verbalized with words which have the following semes in their semantic structure: *bad, evil, war, destruction*.

Our poll also revealed some negative non-political associations with Russia and Russian people, verbalized with words having such semes in their semantic structure as *drunkenness, madness, rudeness, inhospitality, coldness, unfriendliness, impulsiveness, toughness*:

Russian people are madmen. Videos about car crashers seem scary and odd because they were shot on dashcam (Paul, 15, pupil).

Russia is very inhospitable and people drink a lot there (B. Sim, 37, businessman).

Russians are impolite and impulsive people. They don't follow our social norms in Europe (Mr Maclead, 47, retired).

Russia is dangerous not only outside but as well as inside:

They say that Russia is a dangerous country to come because of its government laws (E. John, 68, singer, producer).

Russia is a dangerous country to visit except Moscow. There are always wars in the South. I would never travel there (R. Fairfax, 59, teacher).

So, again we see the associations of our country with danger, though not connected with the foreign policy.

However the respondents had positive associations with Russian culture and spirituality and sometimes (rarely) with good nature of Russian people. They verbalized these associations with words having such semes in their semantic structure as *beauty, loveliness, loyalty, culture, art, science, education* etc. For ex.:

Great Russian composers and the music they have written (38, piano teacher).

Russian's literature and ballet. The titles in theatres posters always include Russians surnames (Mrs Parker, retired).

You have a rich and diverse theatre culture. And there are theatres everywhere (T. Hiddleston, 37, actor).

Very beautiful women and very loyal (Graham, 27, student).

Russia is a colourful and beautiful place to visit. A country with a rich history and which is glorious and amazing (Mr Mole, 30, PE teacher).

Some characteristics stressed contrasts typical of Russian people:

Russians are so contrastive (Ann, 45, student).

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Russian people are incredibly stubborn, very spiritual, have amazing minds, but they are cold (D. Moran, 43, actor).

Russians are lovely but tough people. They are quite aggressive and are ready to fight for their interests (Alex, 25, student).

There were also stereotypical neutral associations such as Red Square, matreshka, maslenitza (41, doctor), balalaika (Ann, 26, student), the Kremlin, Hermitage (John, 13, pupil). A lot of respondents associate Russia with cold and frost.

The results of the public-poll opinion and its linguistic analysis demonstrate the ambivalency of the concept *Russia* in the British picture of the world where it is presented, on the one hand, as an empire of evil, aggressor, threat to the world stability, exporter of terrorism, a corrupted country which is dangerous to visit and which is inhabited by crazy, stubborn, unsociable, cold and aggressive people and, on the other hand, as a peaceful, powerful, state which is worth visiting, a country with rich cultural traditions, outstanding scientific inventions, clever and educated people. The sources of negative associations are mainly mass media and films, whereas the sources of positive ones are personal contacts with Russian people, visits to our country, concerts of Russian actors, singers and dancers, books of fiction by Russian writers. Now we have the foundation for the comparative linguistic analysis of the representation of the concept *Russia* in different linguocultures and discourses.

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