

# Ethno-cultural specificity of images of language consciousness of contemporary Russians (viewed behind the background of the English)

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We understand culture as a system of consciousness linked with the particular ethnic community, and consciousness – after A. N. Leontiev – as an image of the world inherent in people belonging to this particular culture. Such an approach makes meaning (in psychological sense), which is acquired in the process of socialization, the most important constituent of consciousness.

The analysis<sup>1</sup> of formal structure of the nucleus of language consciousness of the contemporary Russian and English people (the words belonging to the nucleus are linked with the greatest number of other members of associative net, represented in the thesauri of Russian and English) shows that they are similar in this respect (see table 1).

The analysis of the contents of language consciousness nucleus and comparing the Russian against the English seems to be most interesting. It is important to show several peculiarities (see tables 2, 3).

Table 1

Parts of speech	Language	
	Russian	English <sup>2</sup>
Nouns	60 %	56 %
Adjectives	20 %	12 %
Adverbs (+ prepositions in English)	10 %	16 %
Pronouns	7 %	6.6 %
Verbs	6 %	8 %
Particles	3 %	1.3 %

<sup>1</sup> The analysis is based on the materials of «Russkij Associativnij Slovar» (Karaulov et al., 1994, 1996) and «The Associative Thesaurus of English (Kiss et al., 1972).

<sup>2</sup> See Zalevskaya, 1981.

**Table 2**  
The Nucleus of Russian Language Consciousness

Rank	Word-reaction	The number of stimuli, having caused the reaction
1	человек (person)	773
2	дом (house /home/)	593
3	нет (no)	560
4	хорошо (well)	513
5	жизнь (life)	494
6	плохо (badly)	465
7	большой (big)	453
8	друг (friend)	410
9	деньги (money)	367
10	дурак (fool)	352
11	много (much)	332
12	радость (joy)	300
14.5	дело (cause)	299
14.5	думата (to think)	299
14.5	все (all the people)	299
14.5	хороший (good)	299
17	день (day)	290
18.5	лес (wood)	289
18.5	любовь (love)	289
20	работа (work /job/)	288
21	говорить (to speak)	287
22	быстро (quickly)	279
23	жить (to live)	273
24	есть (to eat)	269
25	ребёнок (child)	267
26	стол (table)	259
27	дорога (road)	257
28	мой (my)	256
29	разговор (talk)	254
30.5	плохой (bad)	253
30.5	идти (to walk)	253
32	мужчина (man)	249
33	мир (world)	248
34	свет (light)	246
35	дерево (tree)	241
36	я (me /I/)	239

**Table 3**  
The Nucleus of English Language Consciousness<sup>3</sup>

Rank	Word-reaction	The number of stimuli, having caused the reaction
1	me	1087
2	man	1071
3	good	881
4	sex	847
5	no	805
6	money	750
7	yes	743
8	nothing	713
9	work	686
10	food	676
11	water	669
12	people	664
13	time	630
14	life	629
15	love	622
16	bad	615
17	girl	581
18	up	565
19	car	550
20	black	549
21	what	545
22	house	539
23	out	535
24	death	518
25	home	501
26	nice	483
27	red	477
28	now	461
29	hard	451
30	white	450
31	woman	445
32	bed	432
33	school	431
34	help	427
35	pain	426
36	sea	425

<sup>3</sup> See Zalevskaya, 1981.

Rank	Word-reaction	The number of stimuli, having caused the reaction
37	долго (long /adv./)	230
38	парень (guy)	228
39	женщина (woman)	223
40	книга (book)	223
41	счастье (happiness)	216
42	красный (red)	214
43	вода (water)	212
44	очень (very)	209
45	белый (white)	208
46	далеко (far /adv./)	207
47	старый (old)	206
48	всегда (always)	201
49	он (he)	200
50.5	сделать (to have done)	199
50.5	солнце (sun)	199
52.5	время (time)	198
52.5	мальчик (boy)	198
54	машина (car)	196
55	зелёный (green)	191
56.5	море (sea)	188
56.5	кино (cinema)	188
58.5	муж (husband)	183
58.5	нельзя (one cannot)	183
60	город (city)	182
61	маленький (small)	181
62	ответ (answer)	180
63	чёрный (black)	178
64	девушка (girl)	177
65.5	боль (pain)	174
65.5	товариш (comrade)	174
67	предмет (object /thing/)	172
68.5	домой (home /direction/)	171
68.5	собака (dog)	171
70	ночь (night)	171
71.5	вместе (together)	166
71.5	ничего (nothing)	166
73	хлеб (bread)	164
74	его (his)	155
75	путь (way)	150

Rank	Word-reaction	The number of stimuli, having caused the reaction
37	dog	419
38	never	415
39	of	413
40	old	402
41	book	401
42	paper	399
43	down	398
44	green	395
45	in	388
46	person	387
47.5	fir	37
47.5	to	37
49	rubbish	374
50	light	373
51	dead	371
52	ship	369
53	music	363
54	noise	360
55	cold	352
56.5	woman	351
56.5	you	351
58	men	345
59	happy	340
60	drink	339
61	head	337
62	hair	336
63	great	333
64	tree	332
65	church	331
66	fear	330
67	boy	328
68	horse	326
69	it	322
70.5	war	321
70.5	word	321
72	fool	316
73	friend	311
74	fat	309
75	fun	306

1. Language consciousness of the contemporary Russian centres on a PERSON. The person is *good* (22)<sup>4</sup>, *kind* (20), *intelligent* (15). The **person** is a *friend* (10). **Person** is associated first of all with the *face* (12), *name* (7), *back* (6), *hands* (5), *surname* (5), *head* (4), *heart* (4).

2. The notion of FRIEND occupies one of the central places in the image of the world of Russians. Friend is viewed as *faithful* (69), *reliable* (9), *forever* (2), *till death* (1). **Friend** for Russians is *the best* (20), *sweet* (12) and *the only* (9). He/she has been a **friend since childhood** (33). By the way, in the language consciousness of Russian children the notion of **friend** comes to be one of the basic ones by the age of 10 (Beresneva et al., 1995).

Russian language consciousness is in a way person – and friend – centred. A Russian is in need of another person, who is differentiated from him, a friendly person whom he is ready to perceive as good and close to himself.

We come across quite a different picture in the language consciousness of the contemporary English. The notion of FRIEND occupies only 73 place in the nucleus of their language consciousness (with Russians it is the 8) and is characterized with different emotional colouring. **Friend** is associated with *enemy* (22), *foe*, *adversary* (9), then comes *girl* (4) and *good* (4). Reaction *friend* is frequently given to the stimuli **acquaintance** (135), **companion** (67), **college** (50), **buddy** (36), **neighbour** (69), **ally** (35).

3. In the nucleus of language consciousness of both the Russian and the English the same 4 colours are present, but their position in the nucleus and their sequence are different. With the Russian the colours are going in such order: **red, white, green, black**. With the English – **black, red, white, green**. I would like to stress, that colour as a feature of the objects, belonging to the real world, is far more important for the English than for the Russian. The rank of colours in the list of 75 basic notions of language consciousness is like this: with the Russian – 42 **red**, 45 **white**, 55 **green**, 63 **black**; with the English – 20 **black**, 27 **red**, 30 **white**, 44 **green** (see tables 2, 3).

4. The most significant notions in the Russian language consciousness are: **home (house), life, friend, money, joy, cause, day, wood, love, job (work), table, talk**; in the English language consciousness – **sex, money, work, food, water, time, life, love, car, house, death, home**. The most frequent evaluations with the Russian are: **well, badly, much, quickly, far**, and the most frequent qualities are **big, good, bad, old** (with the English – **good, nothing, bad, now, never, down, happy, great**). The actions, typical of the Russians are: **to think, to talk, to live, to walk, to have done** (of the English – **to work, to help, to drink**).

5. An integral quality of the Russian mentality is an urge toward evaluation, attributing qualities to things. Most frequently the objects of the real world are estimated as BIG (big house, big friend, big man, big fool, big table). Actions are characterizes mostly with the word WELL (to live well, to sing well, to rest well, to do smth. well, to talk well, to think well).

The way of evaluation also has its peculiarities as far as the Russian and the English are concerned. In the nucleus of language consciousness of the Russian we see the next couples of evaluations: WELL – BADLY, GOOD – BAD, BIG – LITTLE, QUICKLY – SLOWLY, and the positive evaluation is preferable. In the nucleus of language consciousness of the English only one couple of evaluations is present: GOOD – BAD.

6. Russian language consciousness is oriented on itself and on another person, who is viewed first of all as a friend, as a good man. We can say that Russian language consciousness

<sup>4</sup> The numbers in the brackets show the frequency of word-reaction to the particular stimulus in «Russkij Associativnij Slovar».

is friend centred, so the Russian live more within their «internal space», and the English are oriented into the «external world».

7. It is possible to assume that though the formal structure of the nucleus of language consciousness of the Russian and the English is similar, they are based on entirely different images of the world. It is also possible to suppose that the systematic character of language consciousness (of the Russian and the English), revealed through the analysis of the materials of associative experiment, belongs to the sphere of collective unconscious and each separate speaker is not obligatory aware of it, though it, no doubt, influences their behaviour and the perception of different culture.

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