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Determination of National Specificity of Perceiving the Concept “Learning” in German and Russian through the Association Experiment*

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Abstract. *The article attempts to determine the national specificity of the concept “learning” in German and Russian by means of free association experiment. In the experiment, intermediate school students from different types of institutions of learning in Germany and Russia took part. The resulting associate words made it possible to reveal the general and nationally specific in the conceptual sphere of the students, and also to determine the attitude towards German and Russian teaching of schoolchildren. The scientific novelty is as follows: the concept “learning” is first analyzed from the standpoint of revealing the national specificity of the linguistic means of its verbalization in the German and Russian linguistic world-image. The relevance of this article is determined by the high importance of the concept “learning” for German and Russian cultures of language, as well as the need to study vocabulary from the perspective of presentation of cultural values.*

It was found with the help of experimental method that in the sphere of concepts the German school students realize the lexical and semantic variant of the lexeme Lernen – human activity, which consists in mastering knowledge and mastering skills and abilities. The acquisition of a profession or specialty as a variant of the lexical and semantic meaning of the lexeme Lernen is imagined by the pupils of German schools to a far lesser degree, and the perception of this concept in the meaning of “being a student of an educational institution” is presented quite insignificant and implicit in the conceptual sphere of German students.

Keywords: concept, sphere of concepts, learning, association experiment, associate words, connotation.

Introduction

Scholars in cultural linguistics and psycholinguists assign a special role to association experiment as one of the most important research methods. The career of culture and language is always society, personality, and, therefore, they cannot exist outside of society. Language and culture have inherent contradiction “dynamics—static”, language and culture are subjects to certain regulations adopted in this cultural society. The investigations of manifestations of the national in the psychological type of the representatives of a particular nation, in domestic literature occupy a central place in home and foreign science. One of the key concepts in this field of research is the concepts of national identity and national character. National identity is a socially and politically oriented materialization of a certain historical and psychological genotype (national character) for a given social group within a particular period. National character is a complex of spiritual and psychological traits, qualities and characteristics that has developed throughout the existence of culture and the specific for each given historically stable community which defines the type of world perception and thinking, forms, means and methods of social

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Determination of National Specificity of Perceiving the Concept "Learning" in German and Russian through the Association Experiment, Astra Salvensis, V (2017), no. 10, p. 151-156. organization that are most preferable for a given community, as well as the most probable types of personal and social complexes and types of psychological compensation.¹

Concepts governing our thoughts have influence on our everyday activities.

These concepts include our feelings, our behaviour and our attitude to other people into a unified system.² However, each society has its own system of ideas about reality, its own view of the world, a special type of national identity and national character.

Methods

We made an attempt to reveal in what sense the lexical meanings, fixed by academic dictionaries, and the additional meanings, revealed through analysing the linguistic means representing the concepts "Lernen" and "Учеба" (Learning) in German and Russian are stored in the minds of the speakers of these languages. In order to study the mental characteristics of the society, the associative-semantic field of the stimulus word was analysed for the purpose of isolating the underlying layer of the analysed concept. In this regard, a free association experiment was conducted. In a free experiment, 80 speakers of the German language took part and the same number of the Russian language speakers aged from 10 to 15 –the schoolchildren of various types of educational institutions in Germany and Russia. In this experiment, we deliberately examine the students of secondary school to establish a correlation of associations of representatives of German and Russian linguistic images of the world, since it is this period of schooling during which the students are on approximately equal footing and it is possible to talk about the relevance of the data obtained. During the processing of the answers, they were divided according to the base layer and the interpretation field. All associates were characterized as frequency ones if they sprang up to many native speakers, and single ones if they were comprehended in the answers of the informants no more than twice.

Results

As a result of the free association experiment among the German students of gymnasium, consolidated school, non-classical secondary school and basic school, the following associations to the lexeme *Lernen* were obtained:

1. among the school children of Hauptschule (basic school): Lehrer (17), Bildung (15), Schule (13), Projekt (13), Schüler (11), Klasse (10), Vorteile (10), Klassenverband (8), Wissen (8), Spielen (7), gemeinsam (6), Lesen (3), Zeit (3), Unterricht (3), Internet (3). As one can see from the data obtained, the pupils of

¹ E.V. Varlamova, E.A. Tulusina, Z.M. Zaripova, V.L. Gataullina, "Lexical Semantic Field as One of the Keys to Second Language Teaching," in *Interchange. A Quarterly Review of Education*, XX (2016), p. 1-11.

² A. F. Mukhamadiarova, R. A. Ayupova, R. A. (2016) . "Concept "Love" in American and Tatar Female Poetry", in *Interchange. A Quarterly Review of Education*, XX (2016), Special Issue, p. 234 – 241; E. V. M. I. Gafiyatova, "Solnishkina Multi-word lexical entries in lsp dictionaries: Theoretical considerations," in *Journal of Language and Literature*, V (2015), no. 2, p. 71-75.

the basic school associate learning with concrete concepts, persons more closely (*Lehrer* - teacher, *Schüler* - pupils, *Klassenverband* - class community, etc.). On the whole, one can observe meliorative connotative meanings among this group of respondents.

2. among the students of Realschule (non-classical secondary school): Beruf (18), auswendig (15), gemeinsam (15), Kooperation (13), langweilig (11), schwer (10), Freizeit (6), lange (6), eigen (6), sozial (3), Bildung (3), verstehen (3). The students of non-classical secondary school are focused on getting a profession (Dannhäuser)³, which cannot but be reflected in the language - the most frequent association is the lexeme *Beruf* (profession). In this group of respondents, one can also note the presence of pejorative assessments of studying (*langweilig* - boring, *schwer* - hard, *lang* - long). Besides, one can observe the desire for cooperation, joint efforts (*gemeinsam* - joint, *Kooperation* - cooperation).

3. among the students of Gymnasium (gymnasium): Einsatzmöglichkeiten (17), Motto (16), Vorteile (15), Projekt (15), Fremdsprachen (14), Computer (14), mobile (15), erfolgreich (14), Forschen (13), Neu (13), Mathematik (12), kollegial (12), Gedächtnis (10), Motivation (10), gefördert (7), Wissen (6), Spaß (5), Freizeit (5), erfolgreich (4), Leben (3), muss (3) interkulturell (5). Obvious in this group of the respondents is a larger number of associates with reference to the lexeme *Lernen*, which indicates a higher grade of intellectual growth of schoolchildren. In addition, here we can observe predominantly abstract nouns (*Motto* - motto, *Vorteile* - advantages, *Forschen* - research, *Gedächtnis* - memory), which also indicates the generality, structuredness of gymnasium students' linguistic world image.⁴ Meliorative assessments of the learning process prevail in this group.

4. among the schoolchildren of Gesamtschule (consolidated school): viel (18), auswendig (16), voneinander (16), müssen (14), etwas (13), Englisch (13), Fehlern (13), siegen (11), Schüler (11), verstehen (11), gemeinsam (10), schwimmen (8), neu (7), Schule (6), schnell (4), Vokabeln (4), Neu (3), Fürchten (3), Demokratie (3). Consolidated school is a mixture of different types of schools "under the same roof", which is partially reflected in the language. Also, quite often the respondents point to democracy, freedom, cooperation in learning, however, the associations that objectify pupils' fears and obligations towards parents, teachers and society on the whole are more frequent (Tremml).⁵ In the Russian language, a similar experiment was conducted with the students of comprehensive secondary schools, schools with enhanced coverage of certain subjects that constitute the

³ Albin Dannhäuser, *Schule besser machen. Pädagogische Positionen – Politische Postulate*, Sankt Petersburg, 2003, p. 174.

⁴ Th. M. Gather, *Meine Klasse, meine Schüler; ein überkommenes Bild*, Sankt Petersburg, 2000; Th. M. Gather, A. Rakhimova, A. Sharipova, Z. Zaripova, I. Gurianov, "The Realization of Binary Opposition Joy/Sorrow in Contemporary German Fiction Discourse," in *Review of European Studies*, VII (2015), no. 6, p. 65 – 96.

⁵ Alfred K. Tremml, *Allgemeine Pädagogik: Grundlagen, Handlungsfelder und Perspektiven der Erziehung*, Stuttgart - Berlin – Köln, 2000, p. 305.

Determination of National Specificity of Perceiving the Concept “Learning” in German and Russian through the Association Experiment, Astra Salvensis, V (2017), no. 10, p. 151-156. specialization and the students of gymnasiums. As a result, the following associate words were obtained to the lexeme *Учеба*(*Learning*):

1. among the pupils of comprehensive secondary schools: *заниматься*/ study (15), *домашнее задание*/ home assignment (15), *ЕГЭ* (14), *чтение* /reading (12), *понимать* / understand (10), *ошибки*/ mistakes (10), *сложно*/ difficult (8), *усталость* / fatigue (8), *интересоваться*/ be interested in(6), *стараться* /try (5), *списывать* / crib from (5) *прогуливать* / playtruant (3).The stimulus word has a neutral emotional colouring in this group of the respondents, although pejorative reactions can be noted.

2. among the students of comprehensive schools with a strong focus on certain subjects learning: *классmates* (17), *teacher* (17), *grades* (16), *cognition* (15), *examination* (14), *stress* (12), *home assignment* (10), *subjects* (10), *knowledge* (7), *headache* (7), *success* (5), *school uniform* (5), *boring* (3), *textbook* (3), *crib from* (2), *break* (2). During analysing the answers of this group of respondents, we noted a high grade of correlation of responses with the first group of respondents.

3. among the students of gymnasia: *учитель*/ teacher (18), *одноклассники* /classmates (17), *школа*/ school (15), *ЕГЭ*/ Centralized Testing(15), *знания* /knowledge (15), *домашнее задание* / home assignment(13), *интернет*/ the Internet (11),*класс*/ class (10), *решать задачу* / accomplish a task (9), *память*/ memory(7), *думать* / think (6), *умения и навыки* / skills and experiences (5), *исследование*/ investigation (5), *доказывать свою точку зрения* /prove one’s own point of view (3), *внимание* / attention (3), *профессия*/ profession (3). In this group of the respondents, associations that bond learning with knowledge, acquiring knowledge, skills and experience were revealed.

Comparing and summarizing the obtained data, we distribute them according to levels that designate sensation, perception, representation and concept, thus getting the following summary data (см. табл. 1а, б):

Table 1a. Associative structure of the concept “Lernen”

	Associations
Sen sation	langweilig (12), stressig (11), müde (9), interessant(5)
Perc eption	Kenntnisse (9), Schwierigkeiten (9), Freude (6)
Rep resentation	Einsatzmöglichkeiten (17), Lehrer (17), Motto (16), Wettbewerbsvorteile (15), Projektarbeit (15), Bildung (15), Fremdsprachen (14), Computer (14), erfolgreich (14), Schulen (13), gemeinsam (13), Kooperation (13), Forschen (13), Neu (13), Mathematik (12), kollegiales Lernen (12), Schüler (11), Klasse (10), Gedächtnis (10), Motivation (10), gefördert (7), Wissen (6), Spaß (5), Freizeit (5), Leben (3), Unterricht (3), Internet (3)

Concept	Freizeit (6), Existenzsicherheit (4), eigene Bildung (6), soziale Bildung (3), verstehen (3), Fürchten (3), Demokratie (3)
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Table 1b. Associative structure of the concept “Учеба”

	Associations
Sensation	усталость (11), переживание (5), нервозность (3)
Perception	мучение (15), трудности (11), радость (5)
Representation	занятие (22), трудности (21), посещение уроков в школе (20), исследование (18), экзамены (17), ЗУН (15), самообразование (13), усилия (12), знание (10), повторение (9), обучение профессии (8), свет (7), продвижение вперед (7), оценки (5), будущее (5) выполнение домашнего задания (6), старание (4), рост (3), плод (3), объяснение (2), запоминание (2), ответ (2), решение задачи (2), зубрежка (2), анализ (1), интернет (1), решение (1)
Concept	развитие (28), совершенствование (22), взросление (7), ум (4), уверенность в завтрашнем дне (3), осознание (2), вложить все силы и старания (1)

Discussion

The symmetry of the “layered” structure of the concepts “Lernen” and “Учеба” in German and Russian lies in the presence of all components: sensory, perceptual, imaginative and conceptual. The core of both concepts is figurative-conceptual (that is, at the level of representation and concept).

Most associates have a positive or a neutral connotative meaning (63%), although at the level of sensations the pejorative component of meaning is pronounced: difficulties, fatigue, stress (37%). Specific for the German linguistic image of the world is a purely practical directedness in learning, as evidenced by the most frequent associations *Einsatzmöglichkeit* (the possibility of using in everyday life), *Wettbewerbsvorteile* (competitive advantages), *Motivation* (motivation), as well as the desire to work in a team: *kollegiales Lernen* (joint learning), *Projektarbeit* (project work), *gemeinsam* (together). In general, such aspects of learning as initiative, working ability, freedom of the inner “self”⁶ are noted. The Russian linguistic image of the world emphasizes the emotional-psychological opposition: the complexity of the process of learning consists in pleasure, satisfaction about the results.

⁶ B. Frommelt, *Universität in öffentlicher Verantwortung*, Tillmann, 2000, p. 163-176.

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In each sphere of concepts, one can thus observe special, specific traits inherent in a given nation.⁷ For example, the project form of teaching German schoolchildren in gymnasiums is reflected in the presence of this associate word in the German language and its absence in the Russian language. Obviously, German and Russian school children have more pleasant associations that are induced by the stimulus word related to development, admission to higher education institutions, learning process, as well as the improvement and self-improvement of a person (Tremel). However, one can encounter quite often the reactions related to people’s fears that are associated with this stimulus word, which allows us to conclude that the concepts “Lernen” and “Учеба”(Learning) are polar - the process of improvement and growth, on the one hand, and the hidden fear of threat, on the other .

Conclusion

Comparing the verbal associations of German and Russian respondents with the meanings listed in the dictionary entries, we obtain the following results:

In the sphere of concepts of the German school students, the lexical and semantic variant of the lexeme *Lernen* is primarily realized - human activity, which consists in acquiring knowledge and mastering skills and abilities. The acquisition of a profession or specialty as a variant of the lexical and semantic meaning of the lexeme *Lernen* is perceived by pupils of German schools to far lesser degree, and the perception of this concept in the meaning of “being a student of an educational institution” is quite insignificant and implicit in the conceptual sphere of German students.

In the sphere of concepts of Russian students, the lexical-semantic variant of the lexeme *учеба* is also objectified as a cognitive activity of the trainees, aimed at mastering the sum of knowledge, skills, abilities and methods of learning activity. For Russian students “to learn means, first of all, “to master, acquire knowledge, skills”. “Learning” in the meaning of “being a student of an educational institution” is perceived by schoolchildren to far lesser extent. In the conceptual sphere of Russian school children, the perception of this concept in the sense of “the acquisition of a profession or specialty” is presented quite insignificant and implicitly.

⁷ S. R. Nailieva, G. I. Olegovich, T. Y. Antonovna, "Contextual use of phraseological units with transparent inner form in the English and Russian languages and the use of statistical programmes in their study," in *Journal of Language and Literature*, VI (2015), no. 1, p. 248-252.