

The Results of Associative Experiment among Russian and Tatar Speakers on Basic Concepts of Human Life

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Abstract

This article represents the results of a free associative experiment held among 50 Russian and 50 Tatar native speakers. The respondents (aged 18-80) are of different social status and have different level of education for greater credibility of the experiment. The stimuli for the experiment were the basic concepts of human life in general (любовь/мэхэббэт“love”, деньги/акча“money”, дети/балалар“children”, власть/власть/хакимият“power”) and also ones specific to Russian and Tatar national cultures (совесть/вөждан“conscience”, честь/намус“honor”, терпение/сабырлык“patience”, душа/жан“soul”, тоска/сагыш“melancholy”, народ/халык“people (nation)”). As the result, we came to the conclusion that general concepts like “love”, “soul” and some others have similar representation in Tatar and Russian linguistic world-images, though some concepts of social domain like “money” and “power” are perceived by Russians and Tatars in a different way, probably, due to the difference of historical ways, social and cultural peculiarities. Also the adherence to different religions is seen through the stimuli given.

Key words: Free associative experiment, World-image, Concept, Tatar national culture, Russian national culture

INTRODUCTION

Before holding an associative experiment, we analyzed theses on the key notions and concepts of Russian and Tatar linguistic world-images. In the Russian picture of the world the leading concepts are «свобода» “freedom”, «воля» “will”, «душа» “soul”, «тоска» “melancholy”, «совесть» “conscience”, «справедливость» “justice” (A. Vezhbitskaya [1], N. D. Arutyunova [2], I. V. Kucheruk [3], D. S. Likhachev [4]), in Tatar - «ана» “mother”, «ата» “father”, «моң» (lacunary word that can be translated as sadness, melancholy, melody, harmony), «сагыш» “melancholy”, «гуй» “wedding” “celebration”, «ил – дөнья» “world”, «жер» “land”, «күңел» (lacunary word that can be translated in many ways – soul, fun, etc.), «йорт» “home, house”, «намус» “honor” [5]. R.

Kh. Khairullina considers the nouns “road” and “wind” conceptually important for the Russian people: “a Russian is an eternal wanderer” [6]. D. F. Sanlyer concludes on the basis of the analysis of phraseological units that the concepts of “conscience”, “upbringing”, “morality”, “family hearth”, “soul” and “decency” are the most important for Tatar consciousness [7].

As it comes from the survey on ethno-linguistic peculiarities of Russian and Tatar linguistic world images by A. R. Mordvinova [8] Russians and Tatars share a number of values (teamwork, friendship and mutual help, respect to labor, etc.) and concepts (soul, honor, etc.), but still the analysis of ethnolinguistic peculiarities of both linguistic world images shows that despite the long cohabitation on one territory, there is a great difference between them. In this research the attempt was made to reveal the difference of perception and world-images of Russians and Tatars through the most universal and common concepts of human life, the ones that most easily and vividly demonstrate the attitude towards the basic phenomena of human life and human personal qualities. 10 stimuli were chosen: 1) любовь/мэхэббэт “love”; 2) деньги/акча “money”; 3) дети/балалар “children”;

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4) совесть/вѳждан “conscience”; 5) честь/намус “honor”; 6) терпение/сабырлык; “patience” 7) душа/жан “soul”; 8) тоска/сагыш “melancholy” (translation is approximate); 9) народ/халык “people (nation)”; 10) власть/власть/хакимият “power” (in the Tatar language there are several words that denote “power”, one of them is borrowed from Russian, that is why “власть” is given twice. Still we thought it necessary to add the word “хакимият”, as it denotes governmental power and reaction to this very phenomenon represents the greatest interest for us).

Methods: 100 respondents took part in the experiment: 50 were native Russian speakers, 50 – native Tatar speakers (stating Tatar as their mother tongue). All the Tatar speakers were bilingual with Russian as the second language. It should be noted that investigators faced the problem during the process of choosing Tatar respondents. There were many of those who refused to take part in the survey due to weak knowledge of literary Tatar (stating Tatar as their mother tongue). Some of those who participated admitted it was quite difficult because in their everyday life they speak predominantly Russian.

The respondents were asked to give as many reactions to the stimuli as they wanted.

RESULTS

- 1) For the respondents with Russian as the native language (hereinafter R.), the most frequent reaction to the word «ЛЮБОВЬ» “love” was the word «СЕМЬЯ» “family”. For respondents with Tatar as their native language (hereinafter T.) – «ЯРАТУ» “to love” (as in the Tatar language the words “love” and “to love” are not cognate) and «ИѳРӘК» (“heart”) that witnesses about stronger connection between the concept of “heart” and the concept of “love” in the Tatar language consciousness, rather than in Russian one, though in both languages there are plenty of idioms that reflect this connection. For R. frequent reactions were also «МУЖ/ЖЕНА» “husband/wife” and «ВЕРНОСТЬ» “fidelity”, for T. – «ГАИЛА» (“family”), “бәхет” (“happiness”) and «ХИС» (“feeling”).
- 2) Comparison of the reactions of R. and T. to «ДЕНЬГИ/АКЧА» «money» stimuli revealed the following: for R. money is primarily associated with power, opportunities and success, then associations such as “wealth” and “work” are equally presented (in contradiction with the statement of N. V. Ufimtseva – “labor and money are hardly connected in the minds of Russians” [9]). The most frequently mentioned association with “акча” is “байлык” “wealth” (together with the synonym “муалык”), that is money
- for T. is primarily associated with its amount and only then – with the opportunities provided by it (“ирек”, “азатлык” “freedom” “мѳркинлек” “opportunity”, “кѳч” “power” etc.). To a much lesser extent, the link between “money” and “work” is expressed, however, it is curious that there are numerous associations with trade («сату-алу» “trade”, «кибет» “shop”), which are not expressed among R. Here it will be appropriate to note that the Tatars have been known as gifted and successful tradesmen since ancient times.
- 3) The main associations with the concept “дети/балалар” “children” of R. and T. are the same: “счастье/бәхет” “happiness” and “радость/шаталык” “joy”. The only difference is the prevalence of the association “happiness” among R., most likely due to the set phrase “children are happiness”. The associative series of R. and T., in general, is almost the same: “улыбка/елмаю” “smile”, “солнце/кояш” “sun”, “смысл жизни/яшәүнең мәгънәсе” “meaning of life”, «заботы/борчылу» care, etc. T. gave the following unique associations that are specific to the Tatar linguistic consciousness – «бакча» “garden” (comes from “балалар бакчасы” – “kindergarten”) and “бармак” “finger” (“Биш бармакның кайсысын тешләмә – барыбер авыртачак” “It does not matter what of five fingers hurts – it still hurts” is a Tatar proverb where fingers are associated with children, any mother loves all her children and the problems of any of them hurt).
- 4) Comparing reactions to the «совесть/вѳждан» “conscience” stimulus, we have identified the commonness and frequent occurrence of associations linked with the purity of conscience among both R. and T. (the words чистый “pure”, чистота “purity” are the most wide-spread reactions of R., «чиста», «саф», «пакълек» “pure” “purity” for T.) and the pangs of conscience (R. – “муки” “tortures”, “вина” “guilt”, “тяжелая ноша” “heavy burden”, “мучения” “torment”, «газап», “жәфа”, “интектерү” “torment”, “авыр” “heavy”). For R. “inner voice” repeated reaction is unique (among the reactions given by T., it or its synonyms does not occur), for T. – «дѳреслек” “truthfulness” (that is frequently presented).
- 5) The reactions to «честь/намус» “honor” for R. are characterized by the connection with the semantic field “militarymen” - “hussar”, “officer”, “militaryman”, etc., also this notion is referred to the category of masculine qualities (among T. a single reaction is presented). Among T. the notion is not associated with the military sphere, the most frequently mentioned reaction is “чиста” “pure”, “чисталык” “purity”; in general, all the reactions are a list of positive human qualities, and also the novel “Намус” (“Honor”) by

the famous Tatar writer G. Bashirov listed. The connection between the notion of “honor” and the military world in the linguistic consciousness of R. can be easily explained in terms of history – being a military man (especially in pre-revolutionary and Soviet Russia) was very honorable, so it was reflected in lots of novels and movies as the key notion that determines the actions of the characters. What concerns Tatars – in tsarist Russia the Tatars served in the army, but, as a rule, were simple soldiers, not officers. Military affairs were not so important for them.

- 6) Comparison of responses to the “терпение/сабырлык” “patience” stimulus made it possible to identify the following differences in the linguistic consciousness of the two nations: many T. gave a synonymous association «түземлек», the following nationally unique associations were mentioned: «ураза» “uraza” (Tatars are Muslims), “алтын” golden and “сарытөс” yellow color - obviously, from the proverb «Сабыртыбе – сарыалтын» “the result of patience is pure gold”. For R. often mentioned associations are «спокойствие» «calmness», «сила» “strength”, «труд» “labor” and «мука» “torment” (T. gave these associations, especially the latter, much less often), as well as their derivatives and synonyms.
- 7) Both for R. and T. the connection between the concepts of «душа/жан» “soul” and the sphere of something religious and elevated, and also with death is characteristic: «Бод» “God”, «бессмертие» “immortality”, «нематериальное» “immaterial”, etc. for R.; for T. – «Фәрештәләр» “angels”, “югары” “high”, “акнур” “white light”, “үлем” “death”. The most frequently mentioned associations for R. are «Бод» “God”, «чистая» “pure”, «светлая» “bright”, for T. - “үлем” “death”, “күңел” (lacunary word that can be translated in many ways – soul, fun, etc.) It is considered to be one of the key notions of the Tatar world images as it is presented in 173 Tatar idioms [10].
- 8) What concerns the concept «тоска/сагыш» “melancholy”, the associative experiment showed the following results: for R. the most frequent reactions are “sadness” and “loneliness”, for T. - “күзашылар» “tears”, “кайгы” “grief” и “моң” “sadness”. Color associations are of great interest - for R. melancholy is green, for T. - “сары” - yellow. Both T. and R. had associations “autumn”, “autumn rain”.
- 9) In relation to the concept of «народ/халык» “people (nation)”, R. and T. showed several different visions of the world picture: for T. the concept of “people” is primarily “кешеләр” “people”, but it also reflects the people’s inseparability from their land - the association “ил” “land”, “Motherland” is one of the most frequently

mentioned. In the linguistic consciousness of T., the importance of unity is more evident than in R.’s one. It is often referred to as «бердәмлек/гомумилек» “unity”, «милләт» “nation” as well as traditions - «традицияләр», “traditions”, “Sabantue” (folk Tatar celebration). For R. the main associations with the concept “people” - is «толпа» “crowd” and «общество» “society”.

- 10) In the analysis of reactions to the «власть/власть/хакимият» “power” stimulus, more negative attitude toward the authorities is evident from R.’s side – the most frequently mentioned associations are “corruption”, “money”; In the linguistic consciousness R. power is tightly connected with its bribability, there is a negative attitude towards politics and politicians - “dirt”, “meanness”, “bureaucracy”, “violence”, “parasites and even “goats” (has negative connotation in Russian, insulting word). T. Analysis of T.’s responses showed complete absence of such reactions (exception – «начарлык» “evil”), as the most associations belong to the semantic field of “administrative management” - “житәкче” “executive”, “дәүләт” “state” (most frequently mentioned), “идарә” “management”, “административ бина” “administrative building” etc. Thus, it can be concluded that the concept of governmental power in the Tatar language does not have negative connotation.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained allow assuming that there is no considerable difference between Russian and Tatar mentality in terms of family life, but there is one in terms of social life.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the results of the associative experiment, we can draw the following conclusions about the features of the linguistic consciousness of the Russian and Tatar national language personality:

- 1 The concepts “love”, “children”, “soul”, “conscience” have almost identical reflection in the Russian and Tatar world-image.
- 2 There are obvious significant differences in the perception of such aspects of social life as “people”, “power”, “money” by the Russian and Tatar national personalities.

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