

# Ethnopsycholinguistics and its opportunities for solving pedagogical tasks of teaching russian as a foreign language

## Etnopsicolingüística y sus oportunidades para resolver tareas pedagógicas de la enseñanza del ruso como lengua extranjera

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#### ABSTRACT:

The article attempts to determine the essence of ethnopsycholinguistics (EPL) as a relatively new science that studies culturally conditioned features of linguistic consciousness. The authors focus on the possibilities of ethnopsycholinguistics as a comparative study of the same units of language in different cultures, which testify to the specific ways of familiarizing with and understanding the outside world by representatives of these cultures. The authors exemplify it with a concept of "honor" in Russian culture: from medieval Rus to modern times. The specifics and advantages of using the means of ethnopsycholinguistics in the context of the multiethnic and multicultural community of Russia are revealed with the purpose of mastering educational programs by students for whom Russian is not a mother tongue.

**Keywords:** ethnopsycholinguistics, linguoculture, linguistic consciousness, the concept of "honor", culture, national linguocultural community, the Russian language.

#### RESUMEN:

El artículo intenta determinar la esencia de la etnopsicolingüística (EPL) como una ciencia relativamente nueva que estudia las características culturalmente condicionadas de la conciencia lingüística. Los autores se centran en las posibilidades de la etnopsicolingüística como un estudio comparativo de las mismas unidades de lenguaje en diferentes culturas, que dan testimonio de las formas específicas de familiarización y comprensión con el mundo exterior por parte de representantes de estas culturas. Los autores lo ejemplifican con un concepto de "honor" en la cultura rusa: desde la Rus medieval hasta los tiempos modernos. Los detalles y las ventajas de utilizar los medios de etnopsicolingüística en el contexto de la comunidad multiétnica y multicultural de Rusia se revelan con el propósito de dominar los programas educativos de estudiantes para quienes el ruso no es una lengua materna.

**Palabras clave:** etnopsicolingüística, lingüística, conciencia lingüística, concepto de "honor", cultura, comunidad lingüística nacional, lengua rusa.

# 1. Introduction

The modern scientific paradigm is constantly replenished with new human sciences, which are based on "old-fashioned" humanities: philosophy, psychology, linguistics, culturology and, of course, national history. Modern MAN, perceptive, thoughtful and sensible, cannot stop looking for, creating, developing multiple approaches, various methodologies and methods of cognition of the historical and socio-cultural reality. Everything new that is being created in modern times must be holistic, i.e. multicomponent, systemic and integral. This means that any new direction should be considered and assessed by representatives of numerous schools and sciences from different positions and points of view. In turn, this involves interaction and integration of different disciplines that will predetermine the further development of a new science as such.

Ethnopsycholinguistics is a relatively new science that primarily studies culturally conditioned features of linguistic consciousness. Besides, ethnopsycholinguistics focuses on studying the image of the world and its changes from "one culture to another".

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## 2. Methods and techniques of applying ethnopsycholinguistics as a new field of modern science

Now it is safe to talk about a new stage of the development of scientific thought, at least in the field of humanitarian knowledge. Many well-known scientists define this period as a stage of neopositivism. There is no doubt that ethnopsycholinguistics (EPL) falls into the category of new sciences about Man, who is in the continuous process of communications, who, according to W. von Humboldt, "intertwines and interweaves inward" language, culture, philosophy, history, linguoculture with the purpose of determining his/her place in the world, his/her identity and belonging to the modern world, the human race (Lotman 1994).

Bearers of a particular culture, using the data on the core of linguistic consciousness, have the opportunity to supplement the traditional philosophical and linguistic analysis of this culture, as well as look at cultural differences from the standpoint of the systemic nature of the image of the world of a particular culture. Only in this case we get an idea of significance or insignificance of the revealed differences. The further development of EPL is not so much a purely psychic (psychoneurological) phenomenon as a sociocultural phenomenon "associated with the active process of creation of meaning and underlying semantic systems, which are different in nature, including the linguistic system" (Stepanyuk 2015). Along with neopsycholinguistics and psycholinguistics, through structurally-semantic modeling, EPL gives grounds to talk about the existence of different perceptual styles of comprehension of world objects peculiar to different cultures, in particular, cultures of English-speaking and Russian-speaking communities, in the perception of various aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication.

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## 3. Results

The worldview as a fundamental component of culture can be recognized as an object of EPL, while the consciousness of bearers of an ethnic culture can be a subject of EPL. Since consciousness is not subject to direct study, it can only be studied through various forms of its dementalization, for example, through one of such forms – linguistic consciousness, which appears as "the image of the world of a particular culture, which is mediated by language" (Bubnova et al. 2017).

EPL is rooted in Russian psycholinguistics of the mid-twentieth century, which, in turn, is based on the cultural and historical school of L.S. Vygotsky, A.N. Leontiev's theory of activity and theories of other Russian scientists who made a great contribution to Russian and world psychology. In Russian psycholinguistics, language is viewed as an activity structure consisting of two languages: "an internal, conceptual language, in which the work of the intellect is performed, i.e. the search for and processing of information, and which has no relation to any specific ethnic language, and an external, formal language intended for communication (mutual understanding) with other bearers of the same culture. Their functioning forms a phenomenon, which is called "consciousness" (Zhinkin 1982). In this case, language is understood as a tool, by which an internal thought can be translated into an external word, mutual understanding is reached and defined by the generality of knowledge of the bearers of one culture. This

knowledge is acquired by an individual in the process of socialization and must be extracted from his/her memory at the right time (Telia 1999).

In modern linguistics, a direction is actively developing, in which the same concepts are studied in different linguocultures, which makes it possible to characterize the specifics of the worldview of speakers of a particular language (Yakovleva 1994). Thus, considering the fact that the information about the world lies in systemic meanings of words, there is a point in the comparative study of the same units of language in different cultures, indicating different ways of familiarizing with and understanding the outside world by representatives of these cultures.

A.N. Leontiev and V.P. Zinchenko distinguish *two layers* in the structure of the image of consciousness: *reflexive (or reflexive-contemplative) and existential ones*. The formation of consciousness begins with the *existential layer*, where verbal meanings arise by means of the biodynamic tissue. "Behind a word of the mother tongue there is a lot of knowledge and skills associated with an object of culture defined by this word, and when we speak the language of another culture, as a rule, we can acquire knowledge only. A word of the MOTHER TONGUE carries the potential energy of living action, while a word of a foreign language does not possess such potential energy" (Bubnova et al. 2017). For example, the words from the song: "... red carnation is a companion of anxiety..." remind the Russian of the history of the country, revolutionary events, military victories, red banners fluttering in the wind, i.e. the events of our country's history are perfectly correlated in the semantic plane and with muted beauty of the flower and, of course, with its color. However, if we express the same in English – *red flowers*, there will be no such associations. In this case, a foreign language will be suitable only to ascertain the fact of red color. The verbal-color worldview is already being carefully studied by scientists.

The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis indicates that languages fix and express the phenomena of the surrounding reality in a different way and, as a result, speakers of different languages have different attitudes to certain events of reality. This means that associations fixed in the language are preferable to its speakers and may not appear if the language is foreign. "The historical events of a particular state, customs, manners and lifestyle of each people, their culture and traditions – all these extralinguistic factors have no less influence on the speaker's consciousness..." (Tretyakova 2017). Words in the mother tongue, when passing from specific to abstract language, acquire a certain symbolic meaning, which is often understood only by its speakers.

The existential layer of consciousness of a speaker creates the conditions for the formation of *the reflexive layer* in consciousness. The layer of reflection is much more complicated than the existential one, as it includes all existential levels plus linguocultural, ethnopsycholinguistic, philosophical and other characteristics. However, according to W. von Humboldt, this layer allows scientists to "trace the features of the nation's development and the formation of national thinking through language" (Humboldt 2000), and, in turn, language represents the "spirit of the people".

The reflexive layer may be illustrated through the concept of "honor". In modern Russian society there is a clear tendency of increasing the interest in the problems of morality and ethics, which is certainly connected with the task of fostering patriotism, set by the Russian President V.V. Putin.

As part of EPL, it seems necessary to focus on at least three aspects:

- understanding of the Russian concept of the word "honor";
- the study of the influence of Russian history on the internal content of this concept;
- modern idea of this concept in Russia.

Let us conduct the following analysis.

The Russian idea of honor arose in Ancient Rus, in the feudal period of the development of society as a moral requirement typical of the estate, which was of the greatest social significance. Such requirement prescribed the way of life and actions that were not of a nature to affront the dignity of a certain estate or class (Toropova 2013). Until the 10th century, the word "honor" was interpreted only from the standpoint of military glory and after the adoption of Christianity it acquired religious connotation.

From the etymological point of view, the word "honor" is considered as "honor, respect,

reverence, glorification". Let us recall the Tale of Bygone Years and the Laurentian Chronicle. In the Tale of Bygone Years, an option of obtaining booty on the battlefield is clearly seen, i.e. a purely material aspect: "And Olga sent to the Drevlians, and she said to them: "If you really ask me, then send the best men to follow your prince with great honor, otherwise Kiev citizens will not let me in".

The Laurentian Chronicle is another matter: "Christ our God, the Son of the living God, glory to Him and power, honor and repentance", i.e. it is a non-material option, but it symbolizes respect, veneration of parents, power and God.

In fact, both these meanings had dominated until the 18th century, when there were fundamental changes in the semantic composition of the word "honor". Discursive changes developed in line with historical events – reforms of Peter the Great, the influence of European knightly traditions and the golden age of nobility. A concept of noble morality transformed the word "honor" into its most important element, emphasizing the semantic immateriality of the meaning of this word. The concept of "honor" became one of the main markers of the public elite – nobility, and preserved this status throughout the 18th and 19th centuries. "The assertion of honor as the main behavior-setter" became an ideal of noble culture (Leontiev 1972). "Honor" is correlated with the ideas of unselfishness, loyal service, devotion and sincerity towards the monarch, the Motherland and the people. However, "honor" is also a great advantage within one's own class, among friends and relatives. "Serve right, to whom you will swear, and remember the proverb: take care of your clothes as they are new and of your honor when you are young", – the father instructed young Petrusha Grinev in "The Captain's Daughter". "Honor" could not be harmed and smirched; it was to be fought for and defended. Suspicion of the loss of this advantage entailed the danger of losing the class and, perhaps, national identity; for the Russian nobility, this was tantamount to the loss of life. As the well-known saying goes: "Die, hussar, but do not lose your honor". A.P. Sumarokov wrote about it as follows: "And true honor is to console the unfortunate, not expecting rewards for yourself" ("On honesty" from the "Satires" collection).

In the 20th century, the meaning of the word "honor" was fundamentally rethought in Russia. An idea of class proletarian honor appeared. Honor was a quality associated with the unconditional requirements of the state, party, professional group. Honor became a professional or military concept. "Man of honor", "honor of a Soviet officer", "spend your life with honor", – all these and other similar expressions indicate that a person who has lost honor, i.e. he/she lives not in compliance with the laws of this society and state, simply "dies" for the history of this state.

It should be noted that in European countries in Modern Times and especially in the 20th century, the notion of "honor" was replaced by the notion of dignity. The democratic regime, numerous freedoms gradually formed an autonomous citizen with individuality and a certain kind of dignity. The notion of "honor" as a collective (class, professional, guild) concept was replaced by individual connotations peculiar to an individual person. At the same time, honor, as rules-based socially approved behavior of a person, remained a personal choice, which was reflected in the language structure, i.e. in the choice of the content component. Not "honor means this", but "I understand "honor" in this way".

In modern Russia, initially prone to collegiality and collectivism, individualistic values take root hard and slowly. For the Russian, to gain honor is possible only in interaction with other people, following the state ideology and, of course, without neglecting the law. In psycholinguistics, L.S. Vygotsky considered the meaning of words in Russian as the unity of communication and generalization. On the one hand, a word exists in the real process of communication in the system of "self and other", on the other hand, "the inner side of the word, its meaning appears as a psychoanalytic equivalent of generalization as a mental image inseparable from the subject (Yaroshevsky & Vygotsky 1993). The above phrase reflects the complexity and depth of the Russian language, which virtually does not allow separating paradigmatic relations from syntagmatic ones.

Paradigmatic relations are relations among the elements of language in the system. They arise in the paradigm. In this case, a paradigm means a group of linguistic units united on the basis of a common dogmatic or lexical feature. In turn, syntagmatic relations are determined in speech. A syntagma is any sequence of linguistic elements connected by the "defined-defining" relation. Paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations are merged in a "language-speech" tandem.

Language and speech are different and simultaneously present a coherent whole. Linguistic and speech meanings are closely merged in the linguistic sign, where the linguistic meaning is an invariant of the speech meaning. In most European languages, they are easily separable. An outstanding Swiss linguist F. de Saussure first suggested to separate language and speech and successfully did it, showing the high flexibility of European languages within the integrating fields.

However, it is much more difficult to implement such separation within "the great and mighty Russian language", and sometimes it is impossible to do it at all. For example, in different cases the already mentioned word "honor" can carry historical, psychological-emotional, ontological, axiological, phenomenological, epistemological and other meanings, which are virtually inseparable at the level of speech and language and do not require lexical-semantic support. I.R. Galperin noted this semantic unity and presented it in his concept of "superphrasal unity", when the notion of unity can be concentrated in a word that is not backed up by a sufficient number of phrases. Russian philologists proposed to strengthen this concept by the concept of coherence. Coherence allows establishing the unity of meanings, emphasizing the meaning of a separate utterance or even its hypermeanings with "the subsequent construction of the general content of a speech act" (Stepanyuk 2015).

Surprisingly, the problem of hypermeanings subjected to the rigorous analysis only in the 20th century was known even in Ancient Rus. Reverting to the word "honor", the question Princess Olga asked the captured and deceived Drevlians, whom she intended to subject to painful execution for the death of her husband, Prince Igor, should be noted: "Is honor good for you?" This phrase includes absolutely everything: malicious irony, thirst for revenge, the concept of honor in Princess' opinion, a psychological emotion of victory over the Drevlians, the triumph of justice (as Olga understands it) and the trajectory of future political steps, by which Olga is preparing to restore the honor of Prince Igor killed by the Drevlians. What language, other than Russian, can actually express a storm of emotions, demonstrate a complex ontology of feelings and give an axiological assessment of the event in a single word? In this case, Princess Olga acts as a bearer of linguistic consciousness, a representative of linguoculture, a strong-willed person with power, engaged in communications that correspond exactly to the historical period.

Based on the scientific heritage of V.N. Teliya and his idea that man – a person in the totality of his/her manifestations is the basic category of culture, let us come up with the answer to the question posed by culture, and to which it responds "whether a certain quality, property, action, behavior, etc. is worthy or unworthy of a person" (Kemerov 2004). Teliya considers Homo Loquens the basic category of linguoculture – "a person, one of whose activities is speech activity (Kemerov 2004). A person is formed and develops in the process of socialization. This process forms human consciousness as a specifically human form of reality reflection and a supreme type of psyche (Leontiev 1972). The image of the world is represented in two images: 1) an individual image of the world, i.e. the ethnic one, 2) a national-cultural image of the world, based on a prototype of world culture or CULTURE OF THE WORLD, refracted through the prism of socially developed linguistic meanings, concepts and knowledge.

The intergenerational transmission of culture, its values, assessments, attitudes, preferences, prohibitions plays the main, but not the only role in the formation of an individual worldview. In this case, each person is culturally conditioned and therefore always bears an imprint of the culture, in which he/she was brought up. Culture includes not only language, but also certain patterns of behavior, techniques, practices, imitations that can change with a change in the historical and social context (Lotman 1994, Rabadanov 2012).

The process of formation of the national cultural layer of consciousness, which is based on a prototype of world culture, is much more difficult. This layer is most often formed only under the influence of the language, and often this language is spoken by a completely different ethnos. In this case, Russia is in a fortunate position, since our country existed and exists based on the multinational culture. In this case, communications enriched the language, deepened many concepts, improved activities, formed diverse cultural traditions. A Russian turned out to be both an object and a subject of language, culture, linguoculture, communication. This means that a Russian, as Homo Loquens and a representative of his/her culture and linguoculture, did not cease to be a representative of the Culture of the World. N.A. Berdyaev put it well: "A person enters humanity through the national identity, as a national

person, not an abstract person, as a Russian, a Frenchman, a German or an Englishman. A person cannot jump over the whole stage of existence, otherwise he/she would become poor and empty. A national person is more (not less) than just a man, he/she has human features and individual-national traits" (Berdyayev 1993).

Therefore, a modern Russian citizen can be safely referred not only to Homo Loquens, but also to Perceptive, Thinking, Cultural Man – Man as a symbolic representative of native and world culture. Russia can be considered as the national-linguocultural community, since the Russian community is multiethnic and multicultural. Indeed, Russian culture has long gone beyond the boundaries of a separate ethnos and even beyond the limits of a single nation or confession. Since culture is closely linked with communications, in the process of which a single cultural community is formed, implemented and reproduced, it is obvious that breakdown or reduction of communications (through sanctions or other actions) harms the world culture and reduces the ability of mankind to replenish its experience, to acquire new cultural meanings (Lotman 1994, Rabadanov 2012).

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## **4. The applied aspect of EPL – on the issue of teaching Russian as a foreign language**

In the modern world, EPL is not a shelter for intellectuals and not a tribute to fashion. EPL methods help resolve one of the main contradictions of the world socio-cultural situation, namely: the contradiction between globalization and glocalization. In the 21st century, the world remains diversified, divided into local cultures and simultaneously a single whole. Inside the Russian Federation there is also a state of tension between the federation as a whole and as a place for development of different peoples, ethnic groups, groups, religions, cultures and, of course, languages.

The role of Russian as a language of interethnic and intercultural communication in modern Russia has grown by times. We are convinced that the task of preserving and advancing the Russian language, including in terms of this function, is the task of the national security of the Russian Federation. Russia has always been a multinational, multicultural and, therefore, multilingual state, where it is necessary to maintain a balance between Russian and other state republican, official, regional, national languages, i.e. to support the functioning of the harmonious national and linguocultural community (Anderson 1992, Brand 1996, Carrol 1993, Damasio 1994, 2000).

But today in the global world, open for the exchange of information and resources, including human resources, there is an urgent need for civilized acceptance of labor migrants from near and far-abroad countries. Therefore, the problem of adaptation and integration of newcomers and their inclusion in the Russian national-linguocultural community is of special importance. A significant number of migrants eventually bring their families and children to the country of residence. According to Russian laws, their children have the right to receive education. It is necessary to create conditions conducive to their adaptation in the Russian society for these children, as well as for foreign students coming to Russia to receive education. It's no secret that the prestige of higher education received in Moscow, St. Petersburg and other large cities of Russia remains high in many near and far-abroad countries.

Hence, there is a specific pedagogical task: to teach Russian to people for whom it is not a native language. A learner experiences great difficulties in understanding the lexical (word), orthoepic (pronunciation), and syntactic (sentence structure) spheres of the foreign language. And it is not just about the knowledge of rules and orthograms. The native language has accumulated for ages the activity and mental experience of the people who created it. According to EPL, the language structure determines the structure of thinking of representatives of the ethnos and, in turn, speech skills determine the specificity of their mental processes. As we noted above, all this is manifested in the perception of separate images-signals, typical of some cultures and incomprehensible or alien to other cultures. For example, Ilya Muromets in the Russian epic and Sozyrko in the Alanic epic; birch in Russian culture and lotus or wormwood in Kalmyk culture – definitely have different meanings for representatives of these cultures (Telia 1999).

But what is especially important is that general becomes single, particularly in the experience of an individual: an infant, then a child, a teenager, a young man, an adult. Individual

experience accumulates and, accordingly, is reflected in the language and consciousness of an individual. Changing the place of residence, a child appears in the alien language environment, which is sometimes felt as "different", but sometimes as "hostile". The teacher's task is to realize this cognitive difficulty for the child and help to gradually transform a sense of hostility of an "alien" into a feeling of "different". "Different", not being hostile, can be understood and become "one's own" by internalizing, according to the terminology of L.S. Vygotsky. In this case, it is very important that a child familiarizes both with the grammar of the Russian language and with its ethnopsycholinguistic nature. For example, with all-Russian symbols surpassing the role of just Russian cultural and historical objects. Such are Moscow, the Kremlin, the cruiser Aurora, Pushkin, Tchaikovsky, Peter I, the Battle of Stalingrad, 28 Panfilov Heroes, Yuri Gagarin and much more (Lotman 1994).

That is why EPL methods, which unite culture, psyche and language, should be primarily used in teaching Russian as a foreign language. Teachers of both general education and higher schools need to learn the basics of EPL (Telia 1999).

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## 5. Conclusion

Any event of language and culture as a whole cannot be considered in the 21st century as "atomic", i.e. devoid of the world historical socio-cultural context. It can be considered only within the context of achievements of the entire world civilization and only against this background. Research in this area cannot be episodic and non-systematic. This is a multicomponent and kaleidoscopic process, single and holistic due to its internal connectivity. We suppose that it is possible to consider all these requirements by studying and examining the most complex processes through the prism of EPL. While acknowledging the old and traditional disciplines, new cognitive mechanisms should not be ignored. Ethnopsycholinguistic conceptual models provide an opportunity to consider languages, cultures and humanity in the context of a single "basic conceptosphere – conceptosphere of culture". The latter does not exist without its main actor – *"Creative, formative personality and the main repository of its value content – natural language"* (Zykova 2015).

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