Phraseological Picture of Stepmother in the German and Russian Languages

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ABSTRACT

The aim of the paper is to identify and describe the synergetic correlation between the “language” of culture and the semantics of the paremiological unit. The main task of the research is to interpret the figurative basis, establish the ethno-cultural content and identify the national-value parameter of paremias with the key lexical units of the lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “macheika (stepmother)” in German and Russian languages of the world. The research is based on the data of etymological, explanatory, phraseological, cultural and colloquial dictionaries of German and Russian languages. The use of linguistic and cultural approach to modeling lexical-phraseological system involves the use of complex methods, in particular definitional analysis, comparative, comparative-historical, as well as the method of cultural contrast, which allows finding general and specific features of the lexeme “die Stiefmutter” and “macheika (stepmother)” as a cognitive-cultural components of the paremiological fund of German and Russian languages, revealing national- valuable traits and defining a system of stereotypes, images, references, represented in the worldview and world understanding of representatives of Russian and German linguistic cultures.

Keywords: Phraseological Picture, German and Russian languages, Stepmother, Ethnic linguistics

Introduction

Currently, the general trend of studying phraseology is associated with cognitive and cultural components that allow determining how language meanings are formed and transmitted [Alefirenko, Zimin, Fedulenkova, Dobrovolsky, Melervich, Mokienko, 2016; Anokhina, Latypova, 2015; Dronov, 2018; Sternin, 2020; Shimko, 2016].

Modern studies on comparative linguistics indicate irrefutably that there are clear attempts to consider phraseological and paremiological units in the ethno-linguistic aspect – in the aspect of the participation of language as an anthropological phenomenon that reflects the spiritual culture of native speakers of a particular language [Nifanova, Popova L.G., Popova N.V., Shatilova L.M., Savelyeva E.B., Lineva, 2019; Novikova, Popova, Shatilova, Biryukova, Guseva, Khukhuni, 2018; Polyakova, Skitina, Shabanova, 2017; Rudneva, Shimko, Korotkova, 2019; Shatilova, Borisoa, Kasatkina, 2018; Shatilova, Kasatkina, Mushkina, 2020; Shimko, Korotkova, Rudneva, Yashina, 2020; Skitina, Polyakova, Shabanova, 2017; Skitina, Polyakova, Shabanova, 2018; Zheltukhina, Vikulova, Serebrennikova, Gerasimova, Borbotko, 2016]. The ethno-linguistic value of these units lies in the fact that they reflect the mental views of the nation, morality, moral foundations and criteria of the people, their intelligence and wisdom.
The means of embodying the national-cultural specificity of phraseological and paremiological units is the figurative basis, and the way to indicate this specificity is the interpretation of the figurative basis in the sign national-cultural space of this language community. This interpretation is the content of the national-cultural connotation. The national-cultural specificity of semantics, that is, the super conceptual meaning of the word, due to extra linguistic factors, is most clearly manifested in the sphere of peripheral semantic components, as well as in its implicit representation. Because cultural information is contained in the internal form of these units, it seems appropriate to study it not only from a linguistic point of view, but also from an ethnic one. Contamination of these aspects allows determining the idea of the world of the people who speak this language, the features of its national character, rituals, traditions, beliefs.

**Aim, objectives**

The aim of the study is to identify and describe the synergetic correlation between the “language” of culture and the semantics of the paremiological unit in the German and Russian pictures of the world.

The objectives of the study are:

1. Study of ethnolinguistic verbalization of paremiological units with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha (stepmother)”;  
2. Definition of the ethno-cultural content of the image of the stepmother in the German and Russian phraseological pictures of the world;  
3. Establishing the national value parameter in paremiological units with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha (stepmother)” in the aspect of comparative ethnolinguistic analysis.

**Materials and methods**

The material for the study, based on which a comprehensive analysis was carried out, is the data of etymological, explanatory, phraseological, cultural, and colloquial vocabulary dictionaries of German and Russian languages.

The main methods of linguistic research of paremiological units with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha (stepmother)” using the linguistic and cultural approach to modeling lexical and phraseological systems were the following methods: definitional analysis, comparative, comparative-historical and the method of cultural contrast.

**Results and discussion**

We will conduct an ethnolinguistic description of German and Russian paremiological units with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha (stepmother)” in order to determine their national and cultural characteristics.

Let us compare the proverbs of the compared languages with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha (stepmother)”. We turn to the table (see Table 1):

*Table 1 – Explicit representation of the lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha (stepmother)” in German and Russian paremias*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>German</th>
<th>Russian</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was der Bär im Walde, ist die Stiefmutter doheim (literal translation: “that the bear is in the forest, the stepmother is at home”).</td>
<td>V lesu medved’, a v dome machekha (What the bear is in the woods, the stepmother is at home).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

We compare the paremias “Was der Bär im Walde, ist die Stiefmutter doheim” and “V lesu medved’, a v dome machekha” (What the bear is in the woods, the stepmother is at home). Let us find out the composition of the basic words, which include “der Bär” and “medved” (bear). We will conduct an etymological excursion of these lexical units.

The lexeme “der Bär” in Germanic languages was used to denote “a bear”: Middle High German – “ber”, Old High German – “bero”, Dutch – “beer”, English – “bear”, Old Icelandic – “björrn”, Swedish – “björn”. In addition, in Old Icelandic – “berin” had the meaning of “Bruin”. Probably, there was a fear that if you call a dangerous animal by its name – “bear”, it will be irritated or show excitement. Therefore, the Germans replaced the ancient name ‘bear’ with a euphemism. Let us compare the colloquial expressions of the Indo-German vocabulary. In ancient times, the bear was a favorite prey of hunters, as it was considered the king of the forest. Also in folk legends, fairy tales, proverbs and
tales, it occupied an important place. In animal tales, it was referred to as ‘Bruin’. According to the Greco-Roman traditions, this word was used for the nomination of the constellation [Duden. Etymologie, 2015, S. 69–70]. In modern German and colloquial speech, the word “der Bär” (a bear) is used in the meanings: “a predatory beast with thick hair, with a dense body and a short tail”, “ironic: female genitals”, “technical: a hammer, a woman (copra), a pile driver”, “er ist ein richtiger Bär”, “er ist plump wie ein Bär” – “he is a real bear; he is strong [clumsy] like a bear”, “wie ein Bär” – “very strong, ‘scary’, ‘jemandem einen Bären aufbinden’ – “to tell someone tall tales [nonsense]; ‘to cheat’ someone”, “den Bären machen” – “to be on someone’s lead (like a bear at a fair)” [Duden. Universalwörterbuch, 2018, S. 255; Devkin, 1994, p. 100].

Let us find out the etymology and modern meanings of the word ‘medved’ (bear)”, as well as its interpretation in Russian culture.


The semantics of the word “medved” (bear)” used in modern Russian have the following meanings: ‘a large predatory omnivorous animal with long hair’, ‘figurative: a clumsy, awkward person’, ‘colloquial, obsolete: bear fur, bear fur clothing’ [Ushakov, 2016, vol. 2, p. 169].

The bear in the views of the Russians is close to the wolf, with which it is united by similar demonological beliefs.

The origin of the bear folk legends is associated with a man whom god turned into a beast as a punishment for his crimes. The bear was a miller who offended guests at a wedding or weighed people with a false measure. It was a man who decided to frighten Christ: in an inverted casing, he jumped out from under the bridge and threw himself at his feet. A man who hid under a sheep’s skin and did not want to shelter God was turned into a bear; a baker who dared to go out to Christ with his hands smeared in dough, or kneads bread with his feet. God turned a man into a bear for killing his parents, for inhospitality, or for a thirst for power that would inspire people with fear and awe.

The human origin of the bear is also reflected in the beliefs. It was believed that if you remove the skin from the bear, it looks like a man: the male – like a man, and the female bear – with a breast like a woman. The bear has human eyes, feet and fingers; it can walk on two legs, washes, feeds, nurses and loves his children, prays, rejoices and grieves like a man, understands human speech and sometimes speaks himself, fast all the Christmas fast: sucks his paw. Like people, it is not indifferent to honey and vodka. It is a “thinker” and endowed with reason, but as they say, “there are a lot of thoughts in the bear, but it will not go away”. Hunters see proof of its human origin in the fact that the dog barks at the bear and at the person in the same way, not as at the beast.

Like a wolf, a bear can only pick up a cow with God’s permission, and it attacks a person only at the direction of God, as a punishment for the sin it has committed. It attacks women only in order to take them to live with him. It is believed that from the coupling of a person with a bear, people with heroic strength are born.

The bear is the brother of the sylvan. It is sometimes called the sylvan or devil of the forest. Some forest spirits have the appearance of a bear. At the same time, the evil spirit is afraid of the bear. The devil runs away from him. The bear can defeat and expel the merman. He can smell the witch in the house. With the help of it, damage was removed from the house and from livestock. In order to prevent the “dashing brownie” from entering the cattle, a bear’s head was hung in the stable, and when the brownie was naughty, a bear was introduced into the stable. “Your own” brownie, caring for cattle, can have the appearance of a bear. Similar to the beliefs about werewolves, there are stories of witches turning wedding participants into a bear. It is said that under the skin of a dead bear, hunters found a bride or matchmaker, a woman in a saraďan.

The image of the bear is inherent in the marriage symbolism of fertility and fecundity. The wedding is foreshadowed by the roar of a tame bear introduced into the house, as well as a podbludnaya song (a Russian folk song associated with Yule divination) about the bear. The bear that the girl dreamed foreshadows her fiancé. The bear symbolizes the groom in wedding songs. At a wedding, in order to make young people kiss, they shout: “Bear in the corner!”, “I love Peter Ivanovich”, the bride must answer and kiss the groom. If the bride is forced to look into the eyes of a bear, then by its roar you can determine whether she is a virgin or not. When the bride turned out to be non-virgin, they sang that she was “torn” by a bear. It was believed that a woman would be cured of infertility if a tame bear stepped over her. The idea of fertility is associated with the custom of masquerading as a bear in wedding, Yuletide and Shrovetide rites.

Eastern Slavs believed that the bear goes into the den for the Exaltation of the Cross; in winter, at Xenia-poluzhimnitsa or Spiridon-solstice it turns in the den on the other side, and rises on the Annunciation, or Vasiliev day. According to the idea of the Serbs, Bulgarians, Hutsuls and Poles, the bear comes out of the den on Candlemas to
look at the “born” sun (for the poles, this is the day of the holy mother of god, also called “bear”). If it sees his shadow that day, it returns to its den and sleeps for another six weeks.

When meeting a bear, so that it does not touch, they pretend to be dead, and the woman shows it her breasts. To protect the cattle from the bear, they, like the wolf, are sometimes invited to a Christmas or New Year’s dinner; do not make the first pasture of the cattle on the day of the week on which the Annunciation fell. South Slavs celebrate special “bear days” for protection from the bear: on St. Andrew, Sava and Procopius. On these days, boiled corn is left in the yard for the bear at night, bread is thrown into the chimney, cattle are not harnessed, they do not go to the forest, they do not mention the bear, and they do not make or clean shoes.

Bear fur is used to fumigate women in childbirth and patients with fever. A sick child is dragged through the bear’s jaws. Eating the heart of a bear is cured of all diseases. Bear fat is smeared on the forehead to have a good memory. The bear’s right eye is hung around the child’s neck for bravery. Claws and wool are used as an amulet [Slavic mythology, 2019, p. 159–177].

In the semantic aspect of the lexical units “der Bär” and “medved’ (a bear), there is a similarity in the presence of meanings: “predatory beast”, “clumsy man”.

Let us comment on the image of the bear within the cultural traditions of the German people.

According to ancient Germanic beliefs, the bear was considered the originator of the human race. In mythology, it appears as a deity, as an ancestor, founder, totem, guardian spirit, healer spirit, master of the lower world.

The meaning of the bear is determined primarily by the external likeness of a person, which was interpreted by the mythopoetic consciousness as evidence of their common origin, or origin from each other. The bear rite is understood at the level of mythological images and corresponding plots – about the cohabitation of a woman lost in the forest with a bear or about the coupling of a bear with a hunter.

In Norse myths, god Odin is mentioned in the form of a bear (Bor). Berserkers were warriors who wore bear skins and apparently went on a rampage when drugged; sometimes they were perceived as animal-like creatures of a mixed type, like “werewolves”. Among the Celts, the goddess Artio was the patron of wildfowl, and her attribute was a bear.

Information about the “people-bears” is available in Hittite texts. Such motifs as “the bear is the son of the heavenly god”, “moving the bear from heaven to earth”, “the bear and fertility” allow including the image of the bear in the schemes of the so-called Basic Myth. The concept of the bear as the spirit of vegetation was reflected: Rye Bear, Straw bear, Oat bear. In Saxony, it was believed that the bread crown gives birth to a son-a bear, who sits in the last sheaf.

Since 1280, it acts as a symbol of Berlin, is depicted on the coats of arms of German and Swiss cities, for example, Bern, Berenstein, Heiming, Bernau and others.

In the popular consciousness of the Germans, the bear is associated with physical strength, good health, rudeness, rage, anger, bad manners, grumpiness, bad temper, peevishness, laziness [Biedermann, 1996, p. 164; Makovsky, 2015, p. 46 – 47].

The bear in Russian culture, as shown by an earlier ethnolinguistic commentary, symbolizes strength, danger, rage, laziness.

Based on the above, we conclude that the image of the bear in the compared pictures of the world has an ethno-cultural identity.

Consequently, the image of the stepmother in the paremias of paremiah “Was der Bär im Walde, ist die Stiefmutter doheim” and “V lesu medved’, a v dome machehka (In the forest the bear, and in the house the stepmother)” correlates with the zoomorphic code of culture, which includes stable stereotypical ideas about the bear. At the same time, the bear acts as a symbol of predation, cruelty, and danger.

The image of proverbs is based on a zoomorphic metaphor, which is characterized by the likeness of actions or characteristics of humans and animals.

The paroemas “Was der Bär im Walde, ist die Stiefmutter doheim” and “V lesu medved’, a v dome machehka (In the forest the bear, and in the house the stepmother)” express the concept of the stepmother as a dangerous, cruel woman.

In the German phraseological picture of the world, the image of the stepmother is associated with indifference, callousness: “Was hilfts, sein Leid der Stiefmutter zu klagen (What helps to lament his suffering to the stepmother)”. Let us analyze this paremiological unit from an ethnolinguistic perspective. Let us denote the words-components that form the image of the stepmother – “hilfts (helps)”, “das Leid (suffering)”, “klagen (lament)”. Let us turn to their etymological commentary.

The verb “hilfts (helps)” from “helfen” of general German origin was found in Middle High German – “helfen”, Old High German – “helfan”, Gothic – “to help”, Swedish – “hjälpa” and had correspondences in the Baltic group of languages: Lithuanian “selpit” – “to help, support, promote”. Further formation is unclear [Duden. Etymologie, 2015, S. 332]. In the modern use of the word “helfen (help)”, the following meanings can be distinguished: “to provide
assistance, aid or human support to someone', 'to contribute to the achievement of goals, to be useful' [Duden, Universalwörterbuch, 2018, S. 815]. In colloquial German, the lexeme “helfen” has additional phraseologically related meanings: "ich kann mir nicht helfen, aber" – ‘sorry, but...; nothing to do...’; “ich werde [will] dir helfen!” – joking: "well, wait, I’ll get you!", “jemandem auf die Beine [Sprünge] helfen” – ‘help someone get back on their feet’, “jemandem aus der Patsche [Klemme, aus dem Dreck] helfen” – ‘help someone out of trouble [predicament]’, “jemandem über den Berg helfen” – ‘help someone cope with something’, ‘was hilft es’, ‘es hilft alles nicht’ - ‘what’s the use [the point] is that...; what can you do’ [Devkin, 1994, p. 299].

According to the etymological dictionary of K. Duden, the word “das Leid (suffering)” was used in Germanic languages in the following meanings: Middle High German – “leit”, Old High German “leid” – ‘oppression, suffering, illness, trouble’, Dutch “leeft” – ‘grief, suffering’, Old English “læd” – ‘suffering, grief, torment’, Swedish “leda” – ‘boredom, disgust’ [Duden. Etymologie, 2015, S. 479]. In modern German and colloquial speech, the lexeme “das Leid (suffering)" means: “deep mental suffering as a result of misfortune”, ‘injustice, evil caused to someone”, “(es ist) immer das alte Leiden mit jemanden/ein paar-” – ‘constant torment with someone/something’, “eine lange Leiden” – ‘joking; a pole, a calanche (about a very high person)”, “wie das Leiden Christi aussehen” – ‘look like fear of god, to have a sickly [pitiful, miserable] appearance’ [Duden. Universalwörterbuch, 2018, S. 1109; Devkin, 1994, p. 456].

The verb “klagen (lament)” was common in Middle High German – “klagen”, Old High German – “klagnn” and meant “to talk about grief or suffering”. This meaning arose from the custom according to which criminals protested the accusation by shouting, and the court determined the guilt by the human cry [Duden. Etymologie, 2015, S. 408]. In modern German, the word “klagen (lament)” corresponds to the semantics: “to say about grief”, “to complain about something”, “to express dissatisfaction in a sad tone”, “to notify someone”, “to regret the loss”, “about birds): to make a plaintive sound”, “in the speech of hunters): about individual animals: to experience fear from a weak moan”, “to file a complaint”, “colloquial: I cannot complain; I do not complain”, “colloquial (exclamation of displeasure): God knows what!” [Duden. Universalwörterbuch, 2018, S. 994; Devkin, 1994, p. 375].

Consequently, the lexical analysis of the composition of the word components revealed this 'the indifferent attitude of the stepmother to the grief of the unborn child'. Let us explain this quality of the stepmother’s character from a cultural point of view.

According to ancient German legends, the stepmother is depicted as an evil, indifferent woman. The origins of this phenomenon go back to the Middle Ages, when the family between husband and wife was a complete division of responsibilities for maintaining the house. In this regard, after the end of mourning, male widowers immediately married. At the same time, unequal marriages were not allowed. Therefore, they married a woman who had children. New wife sought to improve the lives of their children, infringing the rights of foster ones: they were not allowed into the house, left to sleep on the street, were forced to work, and starved.

In an aristocratic family, the stepmother was jealous of the beauty, youth, and wealth of her stepdaughter and often used black magic against her, ordering the court hunter to dishonor the young beauty in order to deprive her of the right to inheritance. After that, the girl who lost her honor was transcribed as a nun and sent to a monastery [Why in literature stepmothers are always portrayed as evil women, Electronic resource].


In the Russian mentality, squalor can be caused by injury or ugliness, but it can be the result of damage or internal vice. It covers the mind and body, without affecting the soul and spirit; it benefits a man of courage.

In the initial view, it implies a complete lack of wealth; in the popular consciousness, the lack of material prosperity is reinterpreted as a form of manifestation of the subject’s closeness to God, and therefore the poor will be accepted in any house, his words are listened to, as God can speak through his mouth. Not everyone is able to preserve their honor and dignity in squalor, as well as in wealth, and therefore a smart person seeks to avoid both extremes [Kolesov, 2014, vol. 2, p. 411].

In general, the parenia ‘Dostotok – mat’, ubozhestvo – machekha (Prosperity – a mother, misery – a stepmother)” explicates the concept of a stepmother as a woman with low moral and spiritual qualities because in Russian culture the stepmother is the embodiment of a false basis, a bad source and a cruel attitude to non-native children. Unlike the mother, the stepmother is always a stranger, so she is potentially dangerous. Her own children...
are always nice and dearer to her, and non-native children suffer a bitter fate. It disrupts the harmony of life and lets in a cruel, hostile world [Kolesov, 2014, vol. 1, p. 432].

So, having considered the proverbs with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha” (stepmother) in the aspect of comparative ethnolinguistic analysis, we note the general and specific features that are manifested in German and Russian. We will draw the conclusions in the form of diagrams.

Diagram № 1

**General and specific meanings of the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha” (stepmother) in German and Russian paremias**

- cruel
- dangerous

Diagram № 2

**Specific values of the key lexeme “die Stiefmutter” (stepmother) in German paremias**

- indifferent

Diagram № 3

**Specific values of the key lexeme “machekha” (stepmother) in Russian paremias**

- having low moral and spiritual qualities

**Conclusions**

Thus, the use of an ethnolinguistic approach within the comparative aspect of German and Russian paremiological units with the key lexemes “die Stiefmutter” and “machekha” (stepmother) allowed:

1) To find out the ethnic purpose of the image of the stepmother: in the compared pictures of the world, this image symbolizes cruelty and danger. At the same time, in German, the stepmother is associated with indifference, and in Russian – with low moral and spiritual qualities;

2) To reveal the national-value features of representatives of Russian and German linguistic cultures;

3) To determine the system of stereotypes, images, standards, represented in the worldview and world understanding of native speakers.