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Analysis of Structural-Semantic and Cultural Aspects in English, French and Russian Anecdotes

Análisis de aspectos culturales y semántico-estructurales de anécdotas en ruso, francés e inglés

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RESUMEN

El propósito de este estudio es identificar y comparar las características estructurales, semánticas y culturales de las anécdotas para revelar sus similitudes y diferencias en los idiomas inglés, francés y ruso. Basado en el análisis de un pequeño corpus de anécdotas, el presente estudio exploratorio pretende identificar tipos de relaciones léxicas como la homonimia, la polisemia y la paronimia y sus características lingüísticas. Los hallazgos muestran que una característica común del humor nacional ruso, inglés y francés, puede considerarse una crítica.

Palabras clave: Análisis comparativo, análisis estructural-semántico, anécdota, humor.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to identify and compare the structural-semantic and cultural features of anecdotes to reveal its similarities and differences in the english, french and russian languages. Based on the analysis of a small corpus of anecdotes, the present exploratory study intends to identify types of lexical relations such as homonymy, polysemy, and paronymy and their linguistic features. The findings show that a common feature of russian, english, and french national humour can be considered as criticism.

Keywords: Anecdote, comparative analysis, humor, structural-semantic analysis.

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INTRODUCTION

Humour refers to a particular type of comic, blending mockery and sympathy and reflects the nature of human life and behaviour, history of society, countries, nations, religion, and politics, life philosophy of society, and social and economic structure of the world. Jokes, anecdotes, and caricatures are just some vivid examples of the illustrative embodiment of humour. Since humour comes mostly in the form of anecdotes, this genre is analyzed in the study.

Despite the considerable amount of previous studies on humour (Weisgerber: 1973, pp. 157-172; Ibrahimova et al.: 2017, pp. 626-633; Yang et al.: 2017, pp. 1454-1474) and lexical relations (Gilmudtinova et al.: 2016, p. 7; Gafiyatova et al.: 2016) there has been relatively little research in the identification of structural-semantic and cultural similarities and differences in anecdotes of different languages. This fact opens up a new perspective for discussion and investigation of this specific area. In this regard, the current study aims are to identify and compare the structural-semantic and cultural features of anecdotes in English, French and Russian languages to be able to reveal the peculiarities of national values, humour, and character in the representation of the three peoples within this genre (Svanberg et al.: 2019, pp. 96-119). Drawing on it, the research questions of the current study are the following:

- 1) What kind of structural-semantic and cultural features do English, French, and Russian anecdotes have?
- 2) Are there any similarities and differences in the three languages concerning the structural-semantic and cultural features of anecdotes? If yes, what are these?

METHODS

The selection of anecdotes for the study was based on their similar and different linguistic characteristics in the semantic field, focusing attention on types of lexical relations: homonymy, polysemy, paronymy (Yilmaz et al.: 2016, pp. 195-198; Yusupova & Dunaeva: 2016; Aarons: 2012). It was analyzed 10 English, 10 French, and 10 Russian short anecdotes.

The method of structural-semantic analysis was applied to investigate the specifics of semantic language based on the use of polysemantic words, homonyms, paronyms, word-formative models, and changing the phonetic shape of words. As an illustration, sample analysis is given the structural-semantic analysis of anecdotes. It was identified how many types of lexical relations were found in the short anecdotes. Comparative analysis was used to define the context of English, French and Russian anecdotes on the ground of six narrative elements of anecdotes and to reveal the peculiarities of national values and character in the representation of the three peoples (Petersen et al.: 2019; Wardhana & Hati: 2017, pp. 64-68).

RESULTS

The data obtained from this study revealed that the phenomenon of homonymy, polysemy, and paronomasia received different distributions in the English, French, and Russian languages. The structural-semantic analysis of homonyms demonstrated that the full homonyms are most frequently encountered in the English and French anecdotes as the phenomenon of conversion and short word-forms: The police officer had a fine time with the traffic violator.

The anecdotes of the French language include mostly homophones. It shows a simplification of consonant groups and the total reduction in length of words due to the loss of the sound [ə]: *Le serpent mord ET C'est la mort sûre* [It's the snake that bites its tail]. However, such anecdotes can meet in the English language with different designations on a letter, having the same vowel, consonant sound, or diphthong. Homofoms are a

visible feature in the Russian language aided by the presence of multiple forms of the same words and for English that is due to the conversion. Here, the example of the Russian anecdote:

- Что делаешь, Василий Иванович?
- Оперу пишу, Петя.
- Но ты же нот не знаешь?
- Ничего, оперпоймет.
- [– What are you doing, Vasily Ivanovich?
- I'm writing the opera Petya.
- But you don't know the notes, do you?"
- Never mind, an authorized operative will understand.]

The following factors such as fixed stress, the use of capital letters for differences in the meaning of two similar words and conversion impact on the wide circulation of the anecdotes with homographs in the English language: While travelling, Jack pissed off everyone in the group with his stupid anecdotes. They finally deserted him amidst the journey. Now Jack is amidst the desert of Sahara. The frequent use of homonyms in the anecdotes is observed in the French and English languages promoted by French or English semiotic autonomy words and French grip. For example, Les Anglais Sont très gentils entre eux. Car Souvent Ils se dissent: "merci de Votre bon thé" [The English are very nice to each other because they often say to themselves: "thank you for a good tea"].

As a result of structure-semantic analysis of the anecdotes based on paronymy, it was found that this phenomenon is extra-linguistic and, due to this feature, receives the same development in the three languages. Consider the anecdotes below:

- 1) Presently, I am working with a landscaping company as a dirt compressor. It is just a tamp job.
- 2) Une petite fourmi Rencontre Une Grosse Fourmi ET Elle Lui dit: -Ben, Vous Alors, Vous êtes fourmidouble [A little ant meets a big ant, and she says to her: -Well, you are double ant].
- 3) Лев обращается к Тигру: - Ну, как новый укротитель?
- Пожурем – увидим...

[The lion addresses the tiger: "How did you like your new tamer?" – "Let's wait and see", he said, chewing something.]

Polysemy has become common in all three languages due to the development of lexical polysemy. However, polysemy is most typical for the English anecdotes, showing both lexical and grammatical ambiguity as well. There is the following example:

- "Don't go", said the manager. "I promise there's a terrific kick in the next act".
- "Fine", was the retort, "give it to the author".

The presence of the interlocutor that he misunderstood the replica is based on the polysemy of the noun 'kick'.

The comic technique is primarily used in the creation of anecdotes to enhance the comic effect. The analysis of the different types of anecdotes determined that comic techniques such as 'contrast' and 'deviation from the norm' are particular for the anecdotes because they are based on the principle of disappointed expectations (contrast) or comic shock (Davies: 1990). The first type is characterized by a sharp clash of wordplay where the initial understanding is suddenly changed by another: Раньше носили платья до пола, а теперь – до признаков пола [Before, dresses used to be worn to the floor, but now – to the distinctive-feature of the gender]. However, the phenomenon can be superficially surprising and understandable in a comic shock:

-Девушка, как вы прекрасны в этом
вечернем туалете!

- Мужчина, вы что себе позволяете?!

Закройте дверь!

[- Lady how beautiful you are in this evening gown ("вечерний туалет"; "туалет"- "toilet")!

- Man, what are you doing? Close the door!]

The following comic techniques can be expressed by contrast and deviation from the norm, and grotesque, exaggeration, parody, surprise and contradiction, as well. It appears the technique 'contrast':

- Как вам нравится мой новый муж?

- Вам все идет.

[-How do you like my new husband?

-Everything suits you.]

The next anecdote is based on the technique 'grotesque': Elle S'est acheté UN téléphone portable, parce Quelle ne rentre plus Dans les cabines téléphoniques [She bought a cell phone because she doesn't fit into the phone booths anymore]. The English example represents the technique 'deviation from the norm': A bloke went out for a walk. He comes to a river and sees another bloke on the opposite bank. "Yoohoo" he shouts, "how can I get to the other side?" The second bloke looks up the river then down the river then shouts back, "You are on the other side".

Further, considerable attention is given to the specific cultural characteristics identifiable in English, French, and Russian anecdotes.

Comparative analysis of English, French, and Russian humour showed some national-cultural specificity in the context of the anecdotes. The English national humour is characterized by such features as restraint, integrity, the focus on small details, the prevalence of the wordplay, and pantomime. The French national humour is distinguished by straightness, the prevalence of the wordplay, sarcasm, and self-criticism. The Russian national humour is based on irony, social protest, self-criticism of a global nature and world problems, and the prevalence of ethnic humour. There is an example of self-criticism:

- Простите, вирусский?

- Судя по зарплате - да.

["Excuse me, are you Russian?"

- Yes, according to the salary.]

The distinctive features of English national character in the anecdotes can be considered as diligence, patriotism, traditionalism, conservatism, realism, respect for authority and the rule of law, individualism, kindness, sluggishness, politeness, and calmness. As an example of the English people's persistence and discipline, the anecdote is given below: Doing a job right the first time gets the job done. Doing the job wrong 14 times gives you job security. The next anecdote points out the peculiar features of the French national character such as belief in abstract ideas, levity, indiscipline, frankness, passion for new things, tenderness, eternal romantic nature, the tendency to increase expressiveness, optimism, and kindness:

- Quelle est la différence entre un

Homme et Paris?

- Paris est Toujours Paris!

[- What's the difference between a man and Paris?

- Paris is always Paris!]

The Russian national character is formed such lines as the dependence of public priorities from the modern government, the destruction of authorities, and the tendency to increase expressiveness, straightness, and pessimism. The following anecdote ridiculed the attitude of an employee to work:

Если русский человек решил ничего не делать, то его не остановить. [If a Russian person has decided nothing to do, there is no stopping one.].

Based on the analysis of the anecdotes it was found that Russian and French people have some similar characteristics, for example, the susceptibility to mistrust authorities and the tendency to increase expressiveness, while Russian and English people are having only one shared characteristic: individualism. It is possible to say that Russian and French people have common features. The evidence for this is that Russian enjoyed the French literature in the XVIII century and their culture.

The obtained results from this study showed that alcoholic drinks and food are common topics of anecdotes. As for English national alcoholic drinks, whiskey, beer, and wine are popular. In France, it is wine, and in Russia it is vodka. There is a stereotype which determines English and French attitude to drinking as the drinking culture. The Russian drinking culture is not yet developed, and it became the subject of the anecdotes. Find the examples below:

- 1) - Каждый день я хожу в магазин и покупаю водку. Доктор, скажите, яshopолик?
[Every day I go to the shop and buy vodka. Doctor, am I a Shopaholic?]
- 2) - How did you return from the whisky tasting at the pub yesterday?
- As lightning!
- That fast?
- Nope - more or less like the shape - in zig-zag!
- 3) - Le Miel de l'amour qu'on boit jusqu'à se griser.
- C'est cela que l'on nomme le vin de l'été.
[- The honey of love is we drink until we get drunk.
- That's what we call Summer Wine.]

The topic 'food' has national features and characteristics such as the importance of etiquette, the problem of weight, the habit of eating out among the English people: a taste for good food and passion for restaurants and cafes. The habit of eating out among the French and Russian people shows simplicity (bread – the criterion of fullness) and the habit of power-house. The importance of etiquette played out in the following English anecdote:

The drowning man is screaming to the passerby: "Excuse me, Sir, I'm sorry to bother you, but I wondered if you wouldn't mind helping me a moment as long as it's no trouble of course".

Here is the example of the anecdote in which the object becomes the exquisite taste of French language: La France C'est le pays du Fromage, autant de fromagesque de jours Dans l'année pour en manger – 365 variétés [France is the country of cheese, as many kinds of cheese as there are days in the year to eat it – 365 varieties]. Given attention to all examples of the anecdotes, it is possible to say that the peculiarities of national values in the representation of the three people reveals an essential role in international connection, regarded as key to the perception of ethnical 'world vision'.

DISCUSSION

The findings on structural-semantic and cultural features English, French and Russian anecdotes have, it has been shown that linguistic features such as conversion, semiotic autonomy words, fixed stress, and grip effect on the prevalence of the anecdotes using one of this linguistic phenomena. The application of polysemy and homonyms are frequently observed in English anecdotes while Paronymys are equally employed in all

three languages owing to extra-linguistic factors. Moreover, the analysis of the corpus undertakes cultural features and some national cultural specificity, reflecting national humor and values of three ethnicities.

To answer the second research question of the study (whether there any similarities and differences in the English, French and Russian languages about structural-semantic features of the anecdotes), it was found that the Russian language has less typical the anecdotes with using the full homonyms because of the predominance of the long word-forms in the language. Homophones are spelled, however, the pronunciation is different in Russian. It expresses differently in English and French, using the ambiguity of words and phrases based on a small semiotic autonomy of words. As for the French language, homophones are met in the anecdotes very seldom. It is since the phenomenon of conversion has not got wide distribution in this language. However, homographs are even more rarely used in the anecdotes because of the fixed stress. Thus, it can be suggested that the greatest number of anecdotes is based on homonyms in the English language.

Regarding similarities and differences of cultural features in the anecdotes, the corpus showed that criticism can be seen as a common feature of Russian, English, and French national humor. Despite Russian, English and French humor include the highest form of humor as a pun. As for the national character of the three languages, it was found that the Russian and French people have some similar characteristics such as mistrust authorities, individualism, and the tendency to increase expressiveness. Only one shared characteristic was revealed between Russian and English people and this is individualism. Besides, there are similar features of English and French nationalities which are characterized by individualism and kindness. Furthermore, the English, French and Russian anecdotes reflect the formation of the national picture in the semantic organization of the humorous text. Thus, it represents different national values and etiquette norms in the three cultures which should be acknowledged to avoid difficulties incomprehension of the national humor.

CONCLUSION

The present genre-based case study has identified important issues in the genre of anecdotes. Associations existing between the meaning of the words, or their lexical or semantic relations can be formed in the humorous texts and can create a humorous effect on the reader. Based on structural-semantic and comparison analyses, it may be claimed that English anecdotes are characterized by frequent usage of wordplay as the lexical wealth of the English language includes the availability of homonyms. The examples of the French and Russian anecdotes are increasingly based on polysemy.

Anecdote's comprehension within the limits of cultural dialog plays a significant role in international communication. The study of national humor specificity, character, and values enables us to define the differences in cultural mentalities as well as to find out facts that would help to be a successful participant in a conversation. It is recommended that further research should be undertaken in the following areas: the emotional basis of anecdotes (metaphor, epithet) and the use of anecdotes stereotypes.

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