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**The mass media of Britain and Spain: Russian president's image
in the light of cultural linguistics**

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the problem of culture-significant lexemes used to describe the image of Russian Federation President V.V. Putin. English and Spanish speaking authors, who are native representatives of their countries' linguaculture, use these language units. The relevance of the research work is reasoned not only by the number of native speakers and the idea of two cultures study, but also by the high frequency of proper name *V. Putin* usage in the texts devoted to the Russian Federation.

The purpose of the research is to study the linguacultural aspect of the culture-significant lexemes used to describe V Putin's image in British and Spanish mass media texts. The main idea of the research is to find out the culture-significant lexemes' specific features in the English and Spanish mass media texts.

Different methods of scientific research are used. These methods include: the method of continuous sampling, descriptive method and content analysis method. There is a connection between the culture-significant lexemes and the native speakers' linguistic view of the world. The analysis of culture-significant lexemes leads to the deeper understanding of two nations' culture; allow defining both cultural similarities and differences of Anglo-Saxon and Spanish authors' linguaculture in the process of V. Putin's image description.

Keywords: the language of mass media; cultural linguistics; Spain; Great Britain; the image of RF President VV Putin; culture-significant lexemes

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Introduction

A new science, cultural linguistics, appeared at the end of XX - the beginning of XXI century. The works of V.V. Vorobyov (Vorobyov, 2008), N.D. Arutyunova (Arutyunova, 1999), V.A. Maslova (Maslova, 2001) and others, formed a large theoretical database for a new humanitarian discipline. Some linguists considered to be the first to define the theoretical idea of language and culture connection. Wilhelm von Humboldt studied the ties between nation's spirit and its language (Humboldt, 1985). Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf devoted their researches to the description of interrelations between ethnos, its culture and the way it is represented in the language (Sapir, 2007; Whorf, 1956). Prominent Russian linguists E.M. Vereschagin and V.G. Kostomarov found out that to use a language properly, it is necessary to have a vast knowledge of cultural details (Vereschagin, Kostomarov, 1990). V.A. Maslova came to the study of cultural linguistics after having a degree in psycholinguistics and the text expressiveness. All the aforementioned linguists' approaches prove the possible variety of language and culture studies.

In American and European linguistics the new discipline is called *cultural linguistics* (Palmer, 1996) or *ethnolinguistics* (Underhill, 2012), which, according to Duranti (Duranti, 2009) is a humanitarian science which develops in a speedy way. B. Peeters, like many other scientists, define it as "a general area of research on the relationship between language and culture" (Peeters, 2016).

V.A. Maslova approaches to a language as a cultural phenomenon. She points out that it is possible to find a display of the culture in some culture-significant lexemes (Maslova, 2001 : 8). The scientist separates the terms of "ethno linguistics" and "cultural linguistics." She stresses that metaphors, phraseological units and other language units contain an important cultural information. In the focus of our attention are the culture-significant

lexemes (later: CSL) used to describe the image of V. Putin.

Main part

The Russian Federation (hereinafter RF) president V. Putin is much spoken about. British and Spanish mass media, especially the newspapers (*The Guardian, Foreign affairs, Daily Express, El Espanol, El Mundo, El Diario*) often devote their articles to the details of his life and to his actions as the country's political leader.

The two languages (English and Spanish) have been selected on purpose. On the one hand, they are world languages, which are spread all over the world. They are represented in the systems of several variants. Instituto Cervantes points out that there are more than 580 million speakers of the Spanish language in the world (Instituto Cervantes, 2019). On the other hand, English and Spanish belong to the Indo-European language family.

Current research thematic justification is backed by the contexts with CSL, taken from recently published articles dealing with the British and Spanish authors' reactions to the RF government resignation, which took place on the 15 of January in 2020, and V Putin's proposition to amend the current RF's constitution. In the research, the CSL have been described from linguistic and cultural points of view.

Methods

On the first stage of the research, the continuous sampling method was used to form the factual material body compilation. Then, in the course of selected linguistic units description and interpretation, the contextual, lingua-stylistic and content analysis methods were used.

Results and discussion

First, it is necessary to begin with the CSL' definition survey. The results show that there is no unity in the defining of culture-significant lexemes, moreover every linguist seems to understand their nature in his own specific way. Several authors use the term *culture-specific items* (Aixela, 1997, Davies, 2003), others - *cultural words* (Newmark,

2003) or *culture-bound phenomena* (Newmark, 2003, Baker, 1992, Robinson, 2003). The term *realia* is also frequently used (Leonaviciene, 2010, Maksvytyte, 2012: 50-56, Mikutyte, 2005, Robinson, 2003: 187-191), and also *non-equivalent lexemes* (Gudavičius, 2009). We are going to stick to the term CSL in describing the selected body of factual language material.

It's necessary to refer to Mona Baker's definition of "source-language words that express concepts totally unknown in the target culture" for better understanding of the CSL's nature (Baker, 1992: 21). V.V. Kabachki and E.V. Beloglazova in their book "Introduction to linguaculturology" offer their own CSL classification. They define polyonyms as world civilization general elements, met in many cultures; idionyms - linguistic units, assigned to specific culture elements of the native speakers; xenonym - linguistic units, assigned to specific culture elements of the outer, foreign cultures" (Kabachki, Beloglazova, 2012: 27).

The researchers explain that the CSL can be not only nonequivalent, but also culturally specific and general language units. Based on the authors' theoretical work, we shall figure out the CSL general description, then find out the cultural values specifications of the nation, to which the author belongs, detect its main features and come to the conclusion about the RF president's description and the situations he is mentioned in.

British newspapers *The Guardian*, *Foreign affairs* and *Daily Express* offer interesting contexts for the search.

Luke Harding titled his article *Dmitry Medvedev: the rise and fall of the Robin to Putin's Batman*, which was published on the 15 of January, 2020 in *The Guardian* (Harding, 2020: 5). In the title, the author draws a metaphorical analogy between the former RF Prime Minister, D. Medvedev, and president's management and famous Anglo-Saxon culture comics' characters Batman and Robin, which have been famous since 1940s. Batman is a famous superhero and Robin is a "miracle-boy", the superhero's ally. During

the daytime Batman follows the life of aristocrat and philanthropist. But at night he fights the world enemies wearing a bat costume (Chernov, 1996: 78). It is obvious that the author of the article hints that V. Putin and the main character Batman have the same characteristics, especially in the habit of fighting different villains. This feature may be understood as an allusion to the legends about white horse knights. Idionym has obvious positive connotation.

There is another article in the same newspaper issue, published on the 16 of January 2020, which was written by Andrew Roth. The text is devoted to the end of V. Putin's presidential term. In the article, there is a context, which is interesting from cultural point of view.

Balancing those interests has become crucial with Putin entering the twilight of his presidency, and as the infighting has intensified (Roth, 2020: 4).

It is interesting to compare the dictionary definition of the lexeme *twilight* with its contextual semantics. Cambridge dictionary gives the meaning: "the soft glowing light from the sky when the sun is below the horizon, caused by the reflection of the sun's rays from the atmosphere; a period or state of obscurity, ambiguity, or gradual decline" (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). However, the article describes V. Putin political career. For the current research, it is important to identify the logic, reasons and the process of comparing *twilight* with the end of V. Putin's presidential term. Another meaning of the word *twilight* in Cambridge dictionary is "the period just before it becomes completely dark", a common natural phenomenon, which has become a basis for comparing the last part of V. Putin's period of time being a head of the state. The noun *twilight* is widely used in a great number of Anglo-Saxon art pieces: the series of Stephenie Meyer's novels *Twilight* (2005), Rodman Serling's science-fiction TV-series *Twilight zone* (1959), which has become a set expression in the English language (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). The additional

meaning has acquired negative connotation, which has been transferred to the studied context. A. Roth considers the end of V Putin's presidential terms - not a good idea. Comparing it with *twilight*, the period of obscurity. Every member of the English-speaking world understands the connotation, feeling the direct allusion to the books and films.

Stephen Sestanovich is a well-known author of the newspaper *Foreign affairs*. In the issue of the fourth of March 2020, he published an article, analyzing the discussion of RF Constitution change.

Vladimir Putin could be crowned 'Supreme Ruler' in constitutional shake up (Sestanovich, 2020: 4).

It can be proved that the verb *to be crowned* is a CSL for every British subject. Cambridge dictionary gives neutral definition: "to put a crown on someone's head in an official ceremony that makes that person king or queen" (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). Nevertheless, in the context the connotation is revealed. Great Britain is an island consisting of England, Wales and Scotland, belonging to the United Kingdom, being a constitutional monarchy with two legislative houses (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). The representative of the Anglo-Saxon culture has a certain attitude towards monarchy and monarchs, which can be traced in the polls of the population and the articles devoted to them. The article of Tom Clark, published in *The Guardian* on the 24 of May, 2012 can be given as a proof (Clark, 2012: 3). He states that the record popularity of a monarch among the population of the United Kingdom is 69%. Britain's leading independent social research institute NatCen runs the monarch popularity level during the population poll in 2016. The result was - 73% of British "remained in favour of the monarchy" (Chieri, 2016: 2). Therefore, the author S. Sestanovich as a representative of Anglo-Saxon culture wants the readers to find out positive connotation in the described context of V. Putin's "coronation".

Daily Express is a highly popular British newspaper. It is one of the leaders in the mass media industry. That is why it pays much attention to the level of the information given in the articles and controls the information sources. In the issue published on the 18 of March, 2020 we find an article of Josh Saunders, with a CSL for the scientific analysis.

Vladimir Putin has been outed as a long-term fan of the Fab Four (Saunders, 2020 : 2).

According to James E. Miller's article in Britannica, *Fab Four* is an alternative name for Liverpool music quartet *The Beatles* (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). The band is called cynosure for the generation of 1960. Its members are included in the list of crucial rock musicians (Encyclopedia Britannica, 2020). The extreme popularity of The Beatles does not decrease even nowadays. In *The Guardian*, issue of 29 of January, 2014 Al Aronowitz writes about the band's colossal impact on the music industry development, not only in Britain, but also in the USA and the whole world (Aronowitz, 2014: 1). A representative of any cultural background reacts to the band's mentioning with strict positive attitude. Due to this fact any person who is a fan of the band, automatically becomes a good person himself. The worldwide love of The Beatles is a universal cultural feature, which is understood by everybody.

Based on the British authors' attitude towards the image of V Putin description, we can conclude that the general description approach turns to be positive. In addition, we shall move on to the Spanish newspapers articles and the Spanish-speaking authors' usage of CSL.

The point of the research is to find out the representatives of another culture's reaction on the same political events and to reveal the CSL in the Spanish newspapers.

Spanish journalist Pedro F. Barbadillo publishes many articles in the electronic version of the newspaper *Periodista digital*. In the issue of 10 of March 2020 he published

an article to reflect the political events in the RF.

Vladimir Putin sera zar eterno de todas las Rusia (Barbadillo, 2020).

There is a CSL in the title of the article. Which connotation does this monarchy-connected allusion acquire in the Spanish culture? To answer this question we need to refer to the factual material connected with the Spanish people attitude towards monarchy. In the Spanish newspaper *El Diario*, issue of the 16 of May 2018, there was an article devoted to the description of the Spanish people survey's results. It was mentioned that less than a half of Spanish population is for monarchy and 52% of them are for referendum to create a republic (El Diario, 2018: 2). Another Spanish newspaper *El Pais* in its issue of the 22 of November 2018 published an article of Pablo Iglesias, who described the protest against monarchy which spread all over Spain in 2018 (Iglesias, 2018: 4). These articles show the Spanish population's negative attitude towards the current political situation in the country and consequently, the connotation of the CSL in the analyzed context is negative, whose meaning is additionally intensified by the usage of an adjective *eternal*.

Jose Ramon Bauza is an author of the article, published on the 25 of January 2020 in the newspaper *El Espanol*.

En este momento entro en escena Vladimir Putin, una decisidn que ha marcado los ultimos veinte anos de la historia rusa (Bauza, 2020: 3).

The author uses a CSL, which at first sight has a connection with theatre world and nothing more. However, in the serious analytical article devoted to politics, the usage of theatre world term becomes meaningful. The definition of the noun *scene* in Cambridge dictionary gives neutral meaning: "a part of a play or film in which the action stays in one place for a continuous period of time" (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). The context examination reveals a connotation, formed on the theatre role in the Spanish culture. It is said in the Spanish-Russian

cultural dictionary-guide, that *escena* - is "scene, theatre scene in a literature script or drama piece, or a place where the action of the play takes place" (Volkova, Dementyev, 2006: 222). We can assume that J.R. Bauza uses the CSL as an allusion to the rich inheritance of Spanish culture classical art, especially the country's literature works of Lope de Vega, Garcia Lorca, Miguel de Servantes etc. The importance of Spanish theatre and classical literature for the system of cultural values has been shown in the articles of many Spanish writers. The editorial of Spanish weekly *El Cultural* described the act of resistance, that Spanish classical theatre is experiencing now and mentioned the works of world-famous Spanish writers (El Cultural, 2009: 5). In his interview to *El Pais* Juan Mayorga compared Lope de Vega, Garcia Lorca and Ramon Maria del Valle-Inclan with "the peaks that are difficult to reach" (Vidales, 2018: 1). In Spain the row of associations with theatre always, have positive connotations. The CSL itself extrapolates the positive connotation to author's attitude towards the RF president image.

In the same article of J.R. Bauza there is another CSL which is worth scientific attention.

Putin, al que previsiblemente nombrarian presidente vitalicio del Consejo de Seguridad, continuaria siendo el verdadero poder en la sombra (Bauza, 2020: 3).

Cambridge dictionary defines *the shadow power* as follows: "the shadow government is a family of conspiracy theories based on the notion that real and actual political power resides not with publicly elected representatives but with private individuals who are exercising power behind the scenes" (Cambridge dictionary, 2020). The meaning of the set expression is general. In the enlarged context of the article and knowing the cultural background of the author, who is Spanish, we can identify the connotation. According to the Spanish-Russian cultural dictionary-guide, *sombra* is

defined as “bullring spectators’ seats, located in the shadow side” (Volkova, Dementyev, 2006: 537). Furthermore, the Dictionary explains the comfort of such seats due to the *corrida* (Volkova, Dementyev, 2006: 183). The show usually starts in a sunny, hot time of a day, leading to the higher prices for shadow seats than for the seats under the direct sunlight (Volkova, Dementyev, 2006: 537). So, in Spanish culture the location in shadow is associated not only with stealth but also with comfort. The author of the article places V. Putin into a stealth location, in a more comfortable and privileged place.

El Mundo is a popular Spanish newspaper. In its issue of the 30 of January 2020 there is an article written by Xavier Colas.

Putin dijera hace dos semanas que queria cambiar la Carta Magna rusa (Colas, 2020: 2).

The CSL *Carta Magna* refers to “a document, giving the British people their rights of political freedom” (Sacca, 2010: 520). The historical and cultural background of the fact is the legal document was written in 1215 because of the barons’ rebellion against king John. The nobility fought against high taxes and the weakening of the king’s power. It is also mentioned that *Carta Magna* is considered to be the source of British constitutionalism (Sacca, 2010: 520). As a result, the attitude of Anglo-Saxon people towards this document has to be clear for a Spanish author. A document has to be respected and followed as a source of law and political freedom of the nation. In the article, there is an allusion to the situation with V Putin, who is trying to amend the corresponding Russian document - the RF Constitution. During the political discussion in Russia and in Europe it turned out that, the reaction to the political decision of the president is not unanimously positive. That is why the Spanish author’s connotation is negative.

Conclusion.

In the course of our scientific research 100 articles of the most popular British and

Spanish newspapers have been analyzed. We have chosen 8 contexts with CSL used by different British and Spanish authors to describe V Putin’s image. The results of our scanning reveal that Anglo-Saxon culture representatives tend to use CSL in the newspaper texts more often than Spanish ones, which can state their more solid and tight link to culture and historical background.

Summing it up, it is necessary to stress one more specific feature in using CSL while describing RF president’s image. British authors tend to use the CSL connected with TV-series, books, music band titles due to the culture and historical reasons. At the same time, Spanish authors seem to use CSL connected with classical art and literature to describe the same situations. Despite the fundamental difference between two linguacultures, there are areas of similarity in CSL usage: language units, which are connected with nature phenomena (*twilight, sombra*), Spanish author’s using the words describing Anglo-Saxon culture reality (*Carta Magna*).

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