

The Symbolism of the Birch Tree in Russian Culture

Wang Qi

Belgorod State National Research University, Russia

Abstract

The article is devoted to the study of linguistic and cultural features of phraseological units with a phytonym component "birch" in the Russian language. Language contains knowledge about the culture of the people, their moral and ethical values, which are reflected in the semantics of culturally marked language units of different levels. The perception of the surrounding world and its individual elements plays an important role in the ontogenesis of linguacultural studies. At the non-linguistic level, images of plants are associated with emotions, at the linguistic level - with the translation of these emotions in the form of connotations in the semantics of stable expressions. It is revealed that stable expressions convey knowledge about the culture of the people, fixed in the national consciousness, broadcast fragments of the linguistic picture of the world, and express attitudes to certain objects, phenomena, or events. It is proved that the ability of stable expressions to transmit cultural knowledge allows access to the consciousness and mentality of the nation through the analysis of linguistic data.

Keywords: Language and culture, linguistic units, Idioms, phytonym, semantics.

Introduction

Linguoculturology is considered one of the new paradigms of modern linguistics. As a new scientific paradigm, it is characterized by several stages of formation, when, separating from linguistic and country studies, the object and subject of research, its own principles of analysis of linguistic material were approved and categories were developed.

The peculiarity of linguoculturology is determined by the fact that the new paradigms of modern linguistics, having finally strengthened their positions in linguistics of the XXI century, assume not so much complementarity as deep implicit interaction of linguistics, psychology and culturology at the level of general methodology and particular methods. (Arsenteva, 2014, p. 39).

At the current level of scientific development, many studies are conducted at the junction of several sciences. Psychologists realize that further study of the brain and the processes that occur in it will be possible only as a result of the integration of a number of related sciences. In many scientific theories, the question is put forward: a person receives information about the world around him, but how is this information reflected in his brain? What is the process of obtaining information, its processing by the brain and the formation of value-semantic interpretation?

Scientists assume that

The objectivity of knowledge is always both the result of the cognitive activity of the subject and the reflection of being... the content of the subject becomes the objective

content of the concept, enters the subject's knowledge base and determines his behavior. (Anderson, 2014, p. 321).

In this regard, a problem was posed: how is the process of internal representation of knowledge and what are the mechanisms of reflection of the world in human consciousness. Researchers D.R. Anderson (2014), who is working on the theory of cognitive neuroscience, wrote a lot about this; an American psychologist, one of the creators of cognitive psychology U. Neisser (1981), R.L. Solso (2006).

For current research, it is important to note the details of the process of forming meanings and values. This process consists of several stages. The essence of the first stage is that semantic attitudes are directed to a certain object or phenomenon of the real world. Further, this object or phenomenon is gradually filled with a new meaning, essential for a certain person or society. Gradually, meaning becomes important for a certain person or society, and begins to motivate their activities. Over time, a group of objects or phenomena of the real world is formed, which are filled with new meanings. Later, a value-semantic space is formed for a certain person or society. According to scientists working in different areas of science, the process of forming meanings has different foundations: "Human life is the process of forming meanings" (Jakobson, 1969, p. 75), "So, reading means the process of forming meanings stimulated by the text ..." (Khismatova, 2005, p. 15), "The center of semantic education is the system of personal meanings. ... the individual's attitude to universal timeless meanings is an art capable of influencing the consciousness and the process of forming semantic formations of the individual" (Mosunova, 2021, p. 97), etc.

Values can be represented differently in a language. In accordance with the criterion "the degree of representation of spiritual values in the language", there are: universal values, which many peoples adhere to. In the life of a certain society, national values are recognized,

they are characterized by a material orientation and specific attitudes to behavior. This type of values forms the uniqueness of the culture of a people, which distinguishes it from the ethno-culture of another people.

In addition to these two large groups of spiritual values, there are several small, but no less important, types of values. Group values reflect the stereotypes of behavior, attitude to objects and phenomena of the real world, characteristic of groups of people united by age, profession, place of residence, etc. Values that are instilled in the family are called family values. The family itself is regarded as a value in the culture of many peoples (Znskov, 2021, p. 16).

Methods

To study the theoretical and practical research material, both general scientific methods of analysis and synthesis, induction and deduction were used. The organization and generalization of the theoretical material were carried out using the method of metalinguistic analysis. The description of the corpus of factual material was carried out using the methods of definitional and contextual analysis, systematization and classification of linguistic material.

Results and Discussions

The most beloved tree of Russian people has long been the birch. In ancient times, people called it the tree of four deeds: the first thing is to illuminate the world (the lightest birch splinter); the second is to observe cleanliness (the birch broom in the bath was clean); the third is the cry to comfort (the creak of the cart was comforted by birch tar); the fourth is to heal the sick (an infusion of birch buds was treated for all sorts of ailments).

Birch belongs to the Birch family; it is a genus of shrubby and deciduous plants that (attention!) they are widely distributed throughout the northern hemisphere. And in Russia, birch is one of the most common trees, at the moment we know more than 100 species of birch that grow in Russia. Birch is almost the most common tree in this geography. Birch was used by Slavic peoples for thousands of years for the construction of houses, fortresses, prisons, for the manufacture of a wide variety of household items. Ancestors have been surrounded by birches literally throughout the history of Russian people. The birch is a universal symbol, as it is now customary to say – multicultural. After all, birch grows in Scandinavia, and indeed throughout northern Europe, so it occupies a significant place in the culture of peoples of the Finno-Ugric community (Prandi, 2004, p. 97).

What sacred concepts did the Slavs put into the symbol of birch? From the word "birch" comes "berezha", and from here already "amulet". A single-root (probably a derivative) word "bereginya" meant the guardian spirit of a person (in particular, a child). Bereginya was also called a forehead braided bandage made of leather, which did not allow the hair to be disheveled. At the same time, the birch originally pointed to the feminine, more precisely, the girlish beginning. Birch was considered the tree of the goddess Leli, who personified youth, beauty, spring, and first love. Birch is a symbol of "warm", kind, it radiates peace, tranquility, harmony. The Russian word "Birch" is very ancient. In various languages, this word was an adjective and meant "light" and "white". According to other sources, this word appeared at the beginning of the VII century from the verb "protect". During paganism, the ancient Slavs had the goddess Bereginya - a symbol of fertility and a defender of people, was considered the mother of all spirits (Prandi, 2004, p. 15). Initially, the birch was a symbol of fertility and health, and in the following centuries it became associated with girlish beauty and feminine, just as oak and poplar became associated with masculinity.

Birch, as one of the most ancient symbols of the Russian people, is a frequent lexeme in Russian linguoculture. In the Russian language, there are many set expressions - phraseological units, with a component-phytonym "birch". In addition to phraseological units, there is a large group of proverbs in the Russian language with a phytonym component "birch".

The research was devoted to the study of the semantics of these phraseological units and proverbs, the analysis of which allows us to identify the values of the Russian people embedded in them. Birch stands in the first place in the number of lines dedicated to it by Russian poets, and poets of the first half of the XIX century more often turned to oak and pine, and from the second half of the XIX century the poetic cult of birch begins. Russian poets, writers, artists, composers often refer to the concept of "birch", which means that it occupies an important place in the linguistic consciousness of Russian people and, therefore, can claim to be a concept of Russian culture. Folklore texts, works by A. Pushkin, A. Fet, S. Yesenin, M. Tsvetaeva, A. Prokofiev, K. Simonov, M. Bubennova, A. Dementieva, A. Kuindzhi, M. Nesterova, V. Feldman.

To clarify the main lexical meaning of the word "birch", let us turn to the Dictionary of the Russian Language edited by S. I. Ozhegov: "Birch is a deciduous tree with white bark" (Ozhegov & Shwedova, 2000).

Now consider the etymology of the word. "Birch" is a word of common Slavic, Indo-European character (compare Latvian *VE ^V*, Old Norse *VLEYK*, Old German *VSHKA*). And it goes back to the Indo-European *VIEYEO* -a suffixal derivative of *VIEY* -light, clear, formed from the same root *VIE* - white. The tree is named after the white color of the bark. But in some places birch meant "tree".

Thus, V.I. Dahl (2020) in his dictionary indicates that "in St. Petersburg, the birch turned into a common name for every deciduous tree" (p. 83). According to the Great Soviet

Encyclopedia, about 50 species of this tree grow on the territory of Russia, while there are more than 100 of them in total. There are two main types of white birch - fluffy and warty with weeping branches, like girlish braids. This tree is the most common of the forest tree species in Russia, which is confirmed by numerous toponyms and hydronyms: Berezovka (up to 10 rivers), the villages of Berezovka, Bereznyaki, Berezovoye, Berezyanka, Berezki, Berezensy (there are almost in every district and region, an associate of Peter I A. Menshikov was exiled to Berezovo with his family). Russian surnames derived from the word "birch" are also common: Berezkin (the hero of the story Yu. Nagibina "Children sculpt from snow"), Berezovsky, Berezin, Berest.

Naturally, the presence of the name "birch" in Russian stable combinations and phraseological units: birch porridge, birch stump, slender as a birch.

Folk art is a part of national culture, and, according to Yu.S. Stepanov, a concept is a clot of culture in a person's mind, therefore, interest in folk customs, proverbs, riddles is natural, because they record the human experience and the attitude of the people to the birch (Sergeeva, 2018).

Birch was considered the patroness of young virgins. It is no accident that in Russia they put together a riddle where a birch and a girl merge: "There is Alyona, a green handkerchief, a thin camp, a white sundress" (birch) and a stable comparison: slender as a birch. Birch is associated with the legends of the Berendeyev kingdom.

There is information that some tribes of Slavs who lived on the territory of western Russia and Belarus buried people in birch bark, maybe that's why birch was considered a receptacle for the souls of the dead (Sergeeva, 2018). It is not by chance that in churchyards, cemeteries ("After all, the same birch makes noise. / Above my mother's grave", N. Rubtsov), on the graves of soldiers who died defending Russia, birch trees grow.

In ancient times, the year began not with a Christmas tree, but with a birch tree. The name of the first month of the year was berezozol - April (from birch and zol/zel - green). And now the name berezen has been preserved in the Ukrainian language, in Czech - brezen, in Belarusian sakovnik from "juice" (in the northern lands at that time the birches were not green, but the movement of juice began in them). The "birch" new year existed until the middle of the 19th century, when the beginning of the year was postponed to September, at the time of harvest. However, the birch holiday remained, they celebrated the end of spring field work. During the spring holiday of Semika, birch trees are chopped, eggs are painted yellow, loaves and muffins are prepared. At dawn, young people placed birch trees in houses, streets, courtyards, girls put on birch brooms. In the Tula province, the Semitsky birch was called a godmother, and in the Zamoskovsky villages a man with a birch in his hands is called a godfather, and a girl in a wreath is called a godmother. In the old days, old people went to meet Semik on the graves of their parents, from here the young people went to the groves to curl wreaths of birch trees, worshipped, baptized the cuckoo, sistered, swapping crosses, danced around the birch, sang: "In the field the birch stood, / In the field the curly stood;/ There is no one to break the birch, / There is no one to break the curly" or "My birch, little birch! / My birch, white, / My curly birch" until late at night, so the people call the birch cheerful, cheerful (Znskov, 2021, p. 16).

In many places, the Semitsky-Trinity holiday ended with the fact that the developed birch was cut down, thrown into water or rye. The birch had to transfer its plant power to the earth or water. Today, the holiday of the birch tree is preserved in some villages of Russia, on Trinity many people go to birch groves, parks to sit under a birch tree, Orthodox churches are decorated with green birch branches on this big holiday. Girlish dances around the birch formed the basis of the world-famous choreographic ensemble "Birch". Many folk customs have been associated with this tree since ancient times. So, there was a beautiful wedding

ceremony, according to which, on the wedding day, a birch tree was placed for the bride, entwined with ribbons, which was called "beauty". The bride hid behind the "beauty", when the groom arrived, he had to redeem both the bride and the "beauty". Another interesting role of birch in wedding ceremonies: if the girl was willing to get married, she gave the matchmaker a branch of birch, and if she refused, she sent a branch of pine, spruce, oak. Until relatively recently, the phraseology birch porridge had two meanings associated with rituals: 1) spring ritual porridge with birch buds for the birch holiday; 2) ritual beating (Stonier, 1997). Today, the first meaning is almost lost, and the second is used in speech in a modified form.

Стройная как берёзка (*slender as a birch - about a fragile girl*) - comparison, phraseological unit.

The structure of phraseological unit consists of adjective + adverb + noun.

The study of the semantics of the expression establishes that it has a connotative sema indicating the values of the Russian people. Birch, like a tree with a thin trunk, has become a symbol of a slender, fragile girl. There are two types of values in the semantics of phraseological unit: moral values and aesthetic values. Moral values - birch-the girl is pure and immaculate, her behavior is impeccable. She is a role model, a feminine ideal. The symbol "birch" embodies the aesthetic values of the Russian people: beauty, shyness, softness of character, slimness, fragility. According to the criterion "the degree of representation of spiritual values in the language", the phytonym symbol "birch" represents a national group of values characteristics of the Russian people, only partially accepted by other Slavic peoples.

Как пень берёзовый (*like a birch stump – a stupid person (figuratively, vernacular, dismissively)*) - comparison, phraseological unit.

The structure of phraseological unit consists of adverb + noun + adjective.

The formation of the semantics of phraseological unit is based on the result of the process of semantic expansion: a stump is an incomplete tree, part of a tree. A stump has part of the characteristics of a birch tree > (about a person) a person who has only a part of the mind of a normal person. Connotative semes are gradually formed: "rude", "dismissive". Phraseological unit is a rude expression characteristic only of the vernacular and can be used in specific communicative situations, indicating the social status of the speakers, because educated people will not use expressions of such a reduced level.

Дать/отведать березовой каши, выпороть кого-либо розгами/быть выпоротым, исхлестанным березовыми розгами (give/taste birch porridge; flog someone with rods/be flogged, whipped with birch rods) - metaphor, phraseological unit.

The structure of the phraseological unit consists of a verb + adjective + noun.

The semantics of the phraseological unit is formed on the basis of the metaphorical transfer of the meaning "birch branches, rods" > "porridge". In Russia, the upbringing of the younger generation was often carried out together with power techniques when rods were used. It was believed that the use of force and the pain that comes during the spanking process improve the educational moment and contribute to the assimilation of the lesson. It is worth noting that such educational practice with the use of rods was widespread throughout Europe and was often used. So, in some private schools in England, it is used to this day.

Conclusion

Summing up, it should be emphasized once again that language is a unique phenomenon, which is a repository of data about the culture of the people, about their values. One of the most important functions of language is to transmit information about cultural values from generation to generation. Russian culture values are fixed and stored in the semantics of language units of different levels of the Russian language. Russian phraseological expressions are the most valuable information about the values of the Russian

people, which is stored in the semantics of Russian phraseological expressions. By studying them, we gain access to the treasury of Russian culture, which came from ancestors.

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