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LINGUOCULTURAL ASPECT OF THE STUDY OF LANGUAGE UNITS

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ABOUT ARTICLE

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Abstract: This article explores the linguacultural aspect of language units, emphasizing their role as carriers of cultural meanings. Linguoculturology is presented as an interdisciplinary field connecting language with national worldview and identity. The study analyzes language units such as idioms, proverbs, speech etiquette forms, and kinship terms as linguacultural units. It provides comparative examples from English and Russian to show how meaning is shaped by culture. The work draws on theoretical contributions from scholars like Maslova, Karasik, Teliya, and Vorobyev. Idioms and proverbs are shown to reflect cultural metaphors and traditional values. Speech etiquette and kinship terms highlight social structures and politeness norms. The article stresses that literal translation often leads to communicative failure without cultural adaptation. It concludes that language learning and translation require both linguistic and cultural competence. Overall, the study underlines the importance of cultural literacy in cross-cultural communication.

Introduction. Language is not merely a system of signs; it is a reflection of the worldview, values, and cultural heritage of its speakers. Linguoculturology is an interdisciplinary branch of linguistics that studies the intricate relationship between language

and culture. It examines how language units — such as words, idioms, proverbs, and speech etiquette formulas — reflect and transmit the cultural values, beliefs, and worldview of a particular linguistic community. According to Maslova (2001), language units function as symbols of national mentality and mirror the collective cultural consciousness of the speakers.[6;87] Zakirova (2021) further introduces the concept of linguocultural units lexical items that encode culture-specific knowledge, emphasizing the non-equivalence and context dependency of these units in cross-cultural communication.[10]

The development of linguoculturology as a scientific field is closely associated with the works of notable scholars such as V.V. Vorobyev, N.D. Arutyunova, Y.S. Stepanov, V.A. Maslova, V.I. Karasik, V.N. Teliya, and others, who have significantly contributed to shaping its theoretical foundations. Their research has highlighted the fact that language is not neutral; it transmits deeply embedded national values, historical memory, and social behavior patterns through even the smallest language units. Without knowledge of the cultural background, direct or literal translation of such units can lead to misinterpretation, communication failure, or even cultural misunderstanding. Therefore, the linguocultural approach promotes a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of language as a reflection of the cultural worldview of its speakers.

Moreover, linguoculturology emphasizes the dynamic nature of language as it continuously evolves alongside cultural changes. Language units not only preserve historical and cultural traditions but also adapt to contemporary realities, reflecting shifts in societal values and worldviews. This adaptability makes linguocultural units vital tools for intercultural communication, as they provide insights into how different communities perceive and interpret their experiences. Understanding these nuances allows for more effective dialogue and fosters mutual respect in our increasingly globalized world.

In this regard, the study of linguocultural elements becomes especially important in fields such as translation studies, language teaching, and intercultural communication. Educators and translators must not only be linguistically competent but also culturally aware in order to convey the full meaning of language units across cultural boundaries. For instance, idiomatic expressions like “spill the beans” in English or «вешать лапшу на уши» in Russian cannot be translated literally without losing their cultural and communicative effect. Thus, mastering linguoculturemes requires an understanding of both linguistic structure and the cultural context in which the expressions are embedded.

Main part. The emergence and development of linguoculturology as a distinct field of study can be attributed to the foundational works of numerous scholars, including V.V.

Vorobyev, N.D. Arutyunova, Y.S. Stepanov, V.T. Klokov, V.A. Maslova, V.I. Karasik, V.N. Teliya, N.F. Alefirenko, V. Avramova, I.G. Olshansky, V.M. Shaklein, E.E. Yurkov, E.N. Zinovieva, G.V. Tokarev, V.I. Tkhonik, N.Y. Fanyan, A.S. Mamontov, R.G. Tirado, A.A. Gorodetskaya, V.V. Krasnykh, and A.G. Khrolenko. V.V. Vorobyov says that linguoculturology is an academic discipline that studies national-cultural specific rules for the organization of speech communication, showing spirituality, «catholicity» of the people, reflected in the language, this collection of knowledge about national-cultural specificity of language.[9;586]

Language units are not only tools of communication but also carriers of culturally embedded meanings. These units often take the form of idioms, proverbs, phraseological expressions, speech etiquette formulas, and culturally loaded vocabulary. Their meanings and connotations are shaped by the values, beliefs, traditions, and historical experience of a particular speech community.

Idioms are among the most culturally marked language units. Their figurative meanings often cannot be deduced from the meanings of individual words. In many cases, direct translation results in misunderstanding or loss of meaning due to different cultural conceptualizations.

English Idiom	Meaning	Russian Equivalent	Note
Spill the beans	To reveal a secret	<i>Выдать секрет / Проговориться</i>	Literal translation sounds strange in Russian
Bite off more than you can chew	To take on too much	<i>Взяться за дело не по плечу</i>	Similar idea, but different imagery
To add fuel to the fire	To make a bad situation worse	<i>Подливать масла в огонь</i>	Close equivalent; similar metaphor

These examples illustrate how figurative language reflects culturally specific ways of seeing the world. As Karasik (2002) states, idioms are a "mirror of a nation's conceptual worldview" [3;75]. The above examples clearly demonstrate that idioms function as linguoculturemes — stable language units whose meanings are deeply rooted in national culture and worldview. These expressions often embody conceptual metaphors, which vary significantly across languages and reflect culturally specific experiences and modes of thinking.

As noted by V.I. Karasik, "an idiom is not just a phrase, but a fragment of a national conceptual worldview that has undergone linguistic fixation" [3;75]. In this view, idioms encode value systems, behavioral norms, and mental stereotypes characteristic of a particular society. For example, the English idiom "spill the beans" relies on a metaphor of secret information as

something physically contained and then revealed. However, such an image does not exist in the same form in Russian, where a more straightforward verb like *проговориться* is used, meaning "to accidentally speak."

Moreover, Teliya (1996) highlights that idioms form part of the phraseological picture of the world, serving as cultural signs that reflect a community's collective experience. She emphasizes that these signs cannot be fully understood or translated without considering their socio-cultural background.[7; 130–133]

In translation or foreign language acquisition, this poses significant challenges: learners and translators must move beyond the literal meaning and delve into the cognitive and cultural layers encoded in idioms. Ignoring these aspects often leads to miscommunication, pragmatic failure, or cultural dissonance. This challenge is not limited to idioms alone — it equally applies to proverbs, which, like idioms, serve as condensed expressions of popular wisdom. Proverbs are often culture-bound and reflect the traditional values, norms, and beliefs of a society, making their interpretation and translation heavily dependent on cultural competence.

English Proverb	Russian Equivalent	Cultural Insight
The early bird catches the worm	<i>Кто рано встает, тому Бог подает</i>	Both emphasize the value of being early and proactive
Don't put all your eggs in one basket	<i>Не клади все яйца в одну корзину</i>	Almost identical; metaphor carried across cultures
Curiosity killed the cat	<i>Любопытной Варваре нос оторвали на базаре</i>	Russian version uses a character and is more dramatic

The imagery used in these proverbs often reflects each culture's history, folklore, and mentality. For example, the Russian proverb about "Varvara" contains a moralistic tone rooted in folk tradition, whereas the English version is more general and metaphorical [7;132]. The comparison of proverbs clearly demonstrates the cultural specificity of figurative language. As V.N. Teliya notes, proverbs are a form of collective cultural memory that encapsulate a nation's social experience and moral values through metaphorical language[7;142]. These expressions are not universal; rather, they are formed under the influence of a specific cultural and historical context. According to V.V. Vorobyev (1997), proverbs belong to the category of *linguoculturemes* — stable language units that reflect key cultural concepts and behavioral norms accepted within a particular speech community. They serve as verbal representations of culturally significant phenomena, such as diligence, curiosity, or caution, and often carry prescriptive or moralistic meaning [9; 45–46]. In the case of "Curiosity killed the cat" versus "Любопытной Варваре нос оторвали на базаре," we see how different cultures encode the

same concept (warning against excessive curiosity) using culturally familiar symbols and narrative styles. The English version uses a generic, metaphorical image (a curious cat), while the Russian version invokes a character (Varvara) and a vivid folkloric scene, indicating a stronger didactic tradition in Russian proverbial discourse.

These differences highlight the importance of cultural competence in interpreting and translating proverbs, as their meaning often lies beyond literal equivalence and resides instead in shared cultural knowledge and symbolic understanding.

Speech etiquette units are linguistic elements used in greetings, apologies, requests, and expressions of gratitude. These units are strongly shaped by the social norms and cultural expectations of politeness in a given society.

Function	English Example	Russian Equivalent	Cultural Note
Greeting	How do you do? / Nice to meet you	<i>Очень приятно</i> / <i>Здравствуйте</i>	Russian often more formal, especially with strangers
Apology	I'm sorry / Excuse me	<i>Извините</i> / <i>Простите</i>	Russian distinguishes between formal/informal forms
Leave-taking	Take care / See you soon	<i>До свидания</i> / <i>Всего хорошего</i>	Russian farewells often express best wishes

As noted by Misaatova (2019), politeness strategies vary significantly across cultures: English tends toward indirectness, while Russian prefers clarity and formality, especially in official contexts [4; 45–49]. The differences in speech etiquette between English and Russian reflect the broader cultural frameworks of politeness embedded in each language. According to Brown and Levinson's (1987) theory of politeness strategies, cultures can be broadly categorized into those favoring negative politeness (indirectness, deference, and minimizing imposition — typical of English-speaking cultures) and those favoring positive or formal politeness (emphasizing respect, hierarchy, and clarity — often seen in Russian and many Slavic languages) [1;61-68].

In Russian, the distinction between “извините” and “прости” shows an awareness of social hierarchy and familiarity. Similarly, greetings and farewells like “Здравствуйте” or “Всего хорошего” are not merely functional but carry strong cultural values of respect, well-wishing, and formality. English, on the other hand, often emphasizes neutrality and informality, especially in casual or professional communication. As Misaatova (2019) points out, such

etiquette units function not only as markers of politeness but as linguocultural signs that reflect societal expectations, communication norms, and interpersonal distance[4;45-49].

Misinterpreting or misusing these units can lead to pragmatic failure, where a message is grammatically correct but socially inappropriate. For example, using overly casual greetings in Russian formal settings may be perceived as disrespectful, while excessive formality in casual English contexts may come across as distant or unfriendly.

Kinship terms also reflect deep-rooted social structures and cultural values. While some may appear equivalent, the connotations and usage contexts often differ.

Term	English	Russian	Comment
Mother-in-law	Mother-in-law	<i>Тёща / Свекровь</i>	Russian distinguishes by relation to husband or wife
Godfather	Godfather	<i>Крестный отец</i>	Strong religious significance in both cultures
No direct equivalent	—	<i>Кум / Кума</i>	Russian term reflects Orthodox tradition, absent in English

Karagulova et al. (2025) emphasize that such kinship-related terms are "not merely relational but ideological", encapsulating roles, expectations, and even stereotypes within a given culture [2; 33–42].

Because linguoculturemes are deeply tied to cultural context, their translation requires interpretive competence, not just linguistic accuracy. For instance, translating the idiom "to let the cat out of the bag" literally into Russian (выпустить кошку из мешка) would sound unnatural and confusing.

Instead, translators must find functional or culturally appropriate equivalents. Similarly, in foreign language education, learners must be taught not only vocabulary and grammar, but also the cultural meanings and communicative roles of these expressions.

As Mustafoyeva (2025) notes, ignoring the linguocultural component can result in "linguistic fluency without communicative adequacy"[5;19, 26].

Kinship terminology is a highly culture-specific area of vocabulary that reflects not only family relations but also societal structure, gender roles, and traditional norms. As Karasik (2002) notes, these terms often function as conceptual signs, encoding cultural expectations and social functions that go far beyond biological relationships.[2; 33–42]

For example, while English uses one term — mother-in-law — Russian distinguishes between тёща (wife's mother) and свекровь (husband's mother), indicating how patrilineal and matrilineal roles are linguistically marked. Similarly, the culturally embedded terms кум and кума, common in Orthodox Slavic cultures, reflect spiritual kinship and social obligation, which have no direct counterpart in English. As Karagulova et al. (2025) emphasize, such kinship terms are “not merely relational but ideological,” revealing the underlying cultural scripts of family and social life.[2;33,42]

This culture-bound nature of language becomes even more evident in translation. Many linguoculturemes, especially idioms and kinship terms, resist literal translation. For instance, the English idiom “to let the cat out of the bag” makes little sense when translated word-for-word into Russian (выпустить кошку из мешка), as the metaphor is not culturally shared. This illustrates that successful translation is not a matter of linguistic equivalence, but of cognitive and cultural adaptation.

According to Mustafoyeva (2025), effective intercultural communication and language learning must integrate cultural literacy. Linguistic fluency alone is insufficient without understanding the cultural meanings, pragmatics, and social functions of language units. She warns that “ignoring the linguocultural component can result in linguistic fluency without communicative adequacy” — a common problem in language education and machine translation alike[5;19-26].

Conclusion. In conclusion, the study of language units from a linguocultural perspective reveals that language and culture are inseparable components of human communication. Every idiom, proverb, or term carries within it fragments of a nation's worldview, traditions, and social norms. Linguoculturemes serve not only as linguistic elements but also as cultural signs that preserve collective experience and identity. Understanding their meanings requires awareness of the historical, social, and cognitive context in which they function. Therefore, linguoculturology provides a valuable framework for exploring how linguistic forms reflect and transmit cultural consciousness across generations.

Moreover, the findings of this study highlight the necessity of integrating cultural competence into translation, foreign language teaching, and intercultural communication. Literal translation or language learning without cultural interpretation leads to communicative misunderstandings and the loss of meaning. To achieve true communicative adequacy, speakers, translators, and learners must move beyond linguistic structures and grasp the cultural values encoded in language. Hence, developing linguocultural awareness fosters not

only linguistic accuracy but also empathy, respect, and effective interaction in today's globalized multicultural world.

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