

Cultural Codes in the Teaching of Russian as a Foreign Language

Códigos culturales en la enseñanza del ruso como lengua extranjera

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Contents

1. Introduction
2. The first phase: the "text of life" as a fairy tale
3. The second phase: the poetics of Russian symbolism
4. Musical code
5. Anthropomorphic code
6. The code describing human traits of character
7. Conclusion

Acknowledgements

References

ABSTRACT:

A primary concern of the article is a set of problems associated with the study of cultural codes employed in teaching Russian as a foreign language. The authors propose to use heterogeneous texts describing Russian culture and everyday life routines as a teaching material, i.e., the literature of Russian symbolism and advertising texts promoting perfume products. The main concern of the article is a detailed description of "decoding" mechanisms of literary and advertising texts. There is much evidence that this approach offers promising opportunities for foreign students studying Russian to understand elitist and mass cultural texts.

Keywords: cultural code, Russian as a foreign language, literature, advertising, text, culture

RESUMEN:

El artículo se centra en un conjunto de problemas asociados con el estudio de los códigos culturales empleados en la enseñanza del ruso como lengua extranjera. Los autores proponen utilizar textos heterogéneos que describan la cultura rusa y las rutinas de la vida cotidiana como material de enseñanza, es decir, la literatura del simbolismo ruso y textos publicitarios que promocionan productos de perfumes. El artículo se enfoca en una descripción detallada de los mecanismos de "decodificación" de textos literarios y publicitarios. Hay mucha evidencia de que este enfoque ofrece oportunidades prometedoras para que los estudiantes extranjeros que estudian ruso entiendan textos culturales elitistas y de masas.

Palabras clave: código cultural, ruso como lengua extranjera, literatura, publicidad, texto, cultura

1. Introduction

Recently, there has been a renewed interest in teaching Russian as a foreign language. There is a growing body of literature that shows that foreign Bachelor Degree students studying Russian as a foreign language and majoring in philology experience difficulties

studying both the cultural phenomena of Russian art and the events of everyday culture in Russia. In 1992, Yu.M. Lotman defined culture as a "collective intelligence and collective memory", i.e., "the memory common to the space of a given culture. It is ensured, firstly, by the presence of some constant texts and, secondly, by the unity of codes, or by their invariance, or the continuity and regular nature of their transformation" (Lotman, 1992, pp. 328). Evidence suggests that important types of Russian national cultural texts are fictional literary texts and advertising texts which are necessary attributes of modern life.

Undoubtedly, a dominant feature of understanding culture is the ability to read its "texts", to master its grammatical and semantic code or, more precisely, codes, to communicate with culture. Interestingly, mythological thinking is central to the entire process of encoding the cultural text. With the help of Russian literary texts of the early 20th century and modern Russian advertising texts, it seems promising to describe the features of decoding cultural codes necessary for foreign students. The theoretical hypothesis of the paper is the assumption that the study of different types of cultural texts will allow us to present the intellectual space of a typical modern Russian person more widely and more diversely. This theoretical hypothesis has many practical applications connected with teaching Russian as a foreign language.

The current data highlight the fact that the greatest challenge for foreign students studying the subject "Russian literature of the 20th century" is the poetics of the texts of Russian symbolism, the mechanisms of their construction. The main obstacle of these blurred uncertain texts is the fact that the meaning of these works cannot be clearly interpreted, their language is encoded and needs a certain "decoding". In fact, the symbolists tried to create a special poetic language that would be understandable only to the few chosen ones. The most important feature of the poetics of symbolist prose is the complex polygeneticity and heterogeneity of its images and plots. Moreover, in the artistic organization of symbolist texts, these source texts themselves perform the function of main interpreters, i.e., they themselves help decipher mythological, literary, and other types of works.

There is an increasing evidence that for Russian symbolism, myth creation had been an attempt to create new art that would be identical to myth (in the narrow sense of the word). The myth for the symbolists, especially for the younger ones, was the embodiment of people's collective consciousness. Simultaneously, the goal of symbolists' creativity was the desire to become a myth. One of the most ambitious projects of symbolist myth-making was an attempt to create a universal "text-myth", based on the idea that reality was akin to the features of an artistic text. This assumption might be further developed by the fact that usually a text served as a model of extratextual reality. However, from symbolist perspective the world presented itself as a hierarchy of texts. The highest level of this hierarchy belonged to the universal text reflecting the mythological nature of the world. The universal text further actualized itself in "texts of life" and in "texts of art". We strongly believe that before turning directly to the analysis of literary texts, a reasonable approach is to demonstrate the general mechanisms of myth-making in the culture of European modernism. At the beginning stage of exposure to the literature of Russian symbolism and the poetics of symbolist texts, foreign students must master a naiver model of such texts' construction.

Now we proceed to the description of phases of myths' interpretations.

2. The first phase: the "text of life" as a fairy tale

One of the dangerous ideas of symbolism was the idea of "life creation", the creation of a "text of life." At the core of "life creation" is the notion that the Creator is the supreme Absolute who is above his art and everything in the world. Therefore, he creates not only remarkable works of art, but also one more work – his own life, and this should be his best work. One of the greatest examples of symbolist "texts-life" is the life of A. Rimbaud, a genius French poet-symbolist. The son of a peasant woman, Rimbaud already at the age of 15 was writing brilliant poetry, and at the age of 17 he already became a member of the Paris Commune. Then – almost ten years before the proclamation of symbolism – he created symbolist works. At the age of 19, Rimbaud wrote his last work, the prose cycle "The Season

in Hell" (1873). In it, he cursed all his symbolist creativity, literature in general. After that the brilliant young man did not write a single line. In 1880, he went to Africa, took part in a dangerous trip to Ethiopia, lived in poverty. He demonstrated amazing abilities in learning African languages, and even tried to write scientific articles. In the 1880s, with the advent of symbolism, fame and recognition came to him. But that was not enough for Rimbaud, he embarked on the creation of the text of his life. After ten years of his life in Africa, Rimbaud fell ill with an incurable disease, in 1890 he came to France, and at the age of 37 he died in a hospital in Marseilles. For symbolists the life of A. Rimbaud was a proof of the idea that the best creation of a genius was an extraordinary, heroic life. To clarify and detail the concept of the "text of life", it is important to consider the "text-life" of A. Rimbaud from the point of view of the artistic text oriented to the structure of the fairy-tale narrative.

The results of the comparison of the plot scheme "text-life" of A. Rimbaud with the narrative model of a fairy tale indicate that in the narrative structure of the poet's life there are lines of similarity with the simplest components of a fairy tale plot. In the 20th century, V.Y. Propp described the functions of these fairy tale components in his research. One of our findings proves the idea that in his "text-life" A. Rimbaud acts as a lonely and almost rootless person. Structurally, the "text-life" of the poet, like a fairy tale, breaks up into three blocks, each block represents a form of Rimbaud's quest on the way to his mythological "home". The quest includes the stages which are as follows: the arrival in Paris, his involvement in creative work, his participation in the Paris Commune (a "preliminary test"); Rimbaud's confrontation with misunderstanding, injustices of life – his works were not published, his work was of no interest to anybody, the rejection of literature, his departure to Africa (a "basic test"); hard life in Africa, disease, home-coming (an "additional test").

Another important finding is the idea that the spatial structure of A. Rimbaud's "text-life" corresponds to the logic of the narrative myth associated with the initiation rite: "your place" (house) --- the path --- the border crossing --- "another's place" – home-coming. There is a growing body of literature indicating that in archaic systems initiation accords with the idea of the death of a person and his birth. In the "text-life" of A. Rimbaud, the semantic content of the motivation for initiation can be presented in the way which is as follows: 1) his arrival in Paris with the purpose of obtaining the initiatory information; 2) the cyclic path which served for creative freedom and recognition; 3) his life in Africa; 4) Rimbaud's return to France. It is interesting to note that in all cases of this study there is the construction of the symbolist "text of life" by analogy with the structure of the fairy tale narrative. This fact leads us to another important conclusion that myth-making contains both a prototypical mythological basis, and a fairy tale, the latter has clearly manifested itself in the spatial organization of texts. The most interesting finding is that the concept of symbolism about myth-making as an "art-like" text of life makes it possible to say that any myth-making, firstly, can be regarded as a text, and, secondly, it is based on a folklore-mythological tradition.

3. The second phase: the poetics of Russian symbolism

Prior studies have shown that the structure and style of literary texts carry more diverse references to "the other person's word" and represent a certain form of a literary experiment. There is much evidence that the most difficult of such experimental texts are the works of the theoretician of Russian symbolism, the writer Andrei Bely. We strongly believe that the consideration of the poetics of Andrei Bely in 1905-1908 will allow not only to identify the basic structure-forming principles of constructing experimental prose, but also to trace the features of symbolist poetics' transformation. Already in his early prose A. Bely was influenced in a certain way by the traditions of folklore narration (Oshchepkova, 2015). It should be emphasized that his works do not contain a genetic link either with a certain fairy tale or epic story, or with individual folklore images and motifs. This study proves it that the works by A. Bely indicate a deep correlation with the folklore tradition in the very type of literary narrative, since the works by A. Bely are wholly possessions of his literary epoch. These results further support the idea that the analysis of traditions' actualization in the mythological folklore narrative in his works will allow us to present in more detail the specifics of their experimental character. The study of literary "myth texts" (i.e., in the story

"The Silver Dove") created by the theoretician of symbolism Andrei Bely allows us to describe the poetics of these texts from several standpoints which are as follows: 1) there is a strong correlation between the poetics and the logics of plot development in both folklore and myth; 2) poetics is the result of synthesis and interpenetration of fairy tale and mythological structures in one text, the archetypal basis of which manifests itself in the plot and spatial organization, in the deep semantics of the narrative; 3) poetics is determined by the principle of styling the entire text under a fantastic manner, rising from the folklore tradition; 4) poetics includes elements of ritual conspiracy tradition, refracted in the style of the text. This study demonstrates that the narrative structure of the literary "text-myth" is marked with polygeneticity, which recreates firstly the poetics of the folklore tradition.

Now we proceed to the description of Russian cultural codes. To show the codes of Russian everyday life, we introduced the elective course "Language Codes of the Cultural Daily Routines in Modern Russia". The course "deciphers" the language of advertising texts in detail. In the advertising text, various types of figures of speech function simultaneously. Our major finding is that figures of speech form microsystems, containing the words of one semantic field, used in metaphorical meaning. A key aspect of our focus was the analysis of perfume advertising. When analyzing the structure of perfume advertising, we have identified the fragrance description codes which are as follows: a calendar code, an "anthropomorphic" code, a musical, a natural, and a code describing human traits of character. We understand a code as a kind of microsystem of figures of speech built in one semantic key.

4. Musical code

Musical code is one of the most stable metaphors of the advertisement language used to promote perfume. Musical code helps describe the fragrance of perfume. In the texts, one comes across a lot of musical terms which are as follows:

- *a note* ("The initial *notes* of aroma – an unusual combination of blueberries, angelicas and peonies – organically intertwined with heart notes, which combined magnolia, corundum, saffron ...");
- *aria* ("The companion of the central floral *aria* is the chord of the star anise with leaves of verbena");
- *duet* ("The citrus notes of grapefruit and lemon are the first to sound here, supplemented with Szechuan pepper, and this *duet*, like magic, reveals an extravaganza of colors");
- *ensemble* ("Verbena leaves illuminate the *ensemble* with freshness" and "White Fire is a clean and delicate aroma, simple and silver, like a child's carefree smile, innocent, gentle, caressing. The initial notes of green leaves, air and fresh ice pass into the *ensemble* of Chinese jasmine, fern and white amber, ending with sandalwood and musk");
- *symphony, composition* ("Cedar, lilac, mandarin, jasmine, amaryllis – clear and transparent components, which create an extraordinary *symphony* ... ", "Accento festive *symphony* begins with a bright burst of citrus notes, made with a delicate hint of pineapple. An unusual *ensemble* of jasmine, iris and pink pepper gives the fragrance a special sensuality");
- *accord* ("And the composition is finished with warm *accords* of patchouli, amber, musk, and vanilla" an *accord* from a violet root, peach and frivolous vetiver");
- *hymn* ("APOM is the abbreviation of the English word combination "A Part of Me", that is the part of us that we give to others. This *hymn* to the beauty and sensuality of Oriental women sounds refined on the skin);
- *range* ("In the heart is a whole *range* of delicate and sensual notes of white lotus, pink pepper ...");
- a *melody* ("Intensive perfume water is a completely new *melody*, in which the sweet sweetness of cotton candy fuses admirably with gourmet notes of vanilla and essential oil of the Bulgarian rose");
- *music* ("OPERA's special intoxicating aroma is the genius creation of the great composer of aromas, a playful and light *melody* that fills all around with wonderful fragrant *music* ... ");
- *accompaniment* ("The fragrance of the flowers of the fiery tree kindles your desire, and under the brilliant *accompaniment* of the damask rose and the Kashmir tree you are moving towards a seductive goal"), "L'Amour, the exciting and joyful hymn of femininity, sounds under the new *accompaniment* ...");

- *voice, soprano* ("In the initial notes of the aroma, the soft white peach's *voice* softly sounds in combination with the gentle *soprano* of the Calabrian bergamot, echoed by the quiet melody of the Mediterranean clementine"), etc.

In ancient times, all the fragrances were concentrates of natural substances, mostly of vegetable origin. Soon people learned to mix several fragrances according to a certain rule, i.e., aromas should harmoniously combine, enriching and filling each other. The confusion of aromas is like the mixing of musical sounds which then can turn into a melody. That is why the components that make up the aromatic composition are called notes, perfumes are compared with the music, and the process of developing perfumes is compared with composing the music.

Consider the following example of perfumer's work description. "True perfumer works as a composer: he takes notes known to all and makes from them amazing unique melodies. Extracting "sounds" from flowers, creating a symphony of fragrances, the composer-perfumer gives his art to connoisseurs of beauty".

Perhaps the metaphorical convergence of fragrance and music stems from the desire of copywriters to present perfume as an area of fine and high art, having the same ancient traditions and requiring a perfumer of great skill. The very creators of fragrances call themselves maestros.

One of the meanings of the verb "to hear" is "to recognize by the way of sensation; feel, hear, notice". No wonder they say that they "hear a fragrance", but do not feel it. It is likely that in its origins, this metaphor interacts with the generality of the method of transmission and propagation through the air of both smell and sound.

5. Anthropomorphic code

A key aspect of "anthropomorphic" code is that it strongly resembles the disclosure of fragrance. Several reports have shown that perfumers distinguish three stages of fragrance's disclosure. Any smell is a physical phenomenon: slow and gradual transition of matter from a solid or liquid state to a vapor state. Usually, immediately after the application of perfume, fresh "green" flavors come first, i.e., plant and citrus notes. This stage lasts 5-10 minutes. Then, in the fragrances, the so-called notes of the heart of the fragrance reveal themselves, i.e., floral, fruit, spicy, and woody. The duration of this stage is from one and a half hour to three hours. Finally, musky, amber scents, fragrances of heavy balms, resins, mosses evaporate. The duration of this phase is from three to eight hours.

Interestingly, when describing a perfume, advertising texts represent the fragrance as a creature that has "a head" (head note), "a heart" and "a tail", i.e., a special tail, "A splash of joy, happiness and enjoyment of life ... This is the way a love story begins ... The juicy fruit notes are sweet carambolas. Exotic kiwi sparkle in the refreshing wave of jasmine tea and make up the head note of the fragrance. Love is incomprehensible. So, in the heart of the fragrance, there is a playful yellow tulip, a solar lily and immortelle, a symbol of permanence and reliability. All of them come to life in a surprising manner. The tail launches the sound of a passionate call of musk sound, after that sensual whisper of bamboo and the rustle of silky oak come."

The current study found that in this advertising text, copywriters personify the fragrance. It appears to be a living being not only because it has organs and parts of the body, but also it is "capable" of experiencing the feelings, e.g., the feeling of love. The head note describes the birth of love, the sweet-flowering period. Here we see a green color (kiwi, jasmine tea), symbolizing youth, spring. However, blue color (wave) is usually associated with the purity of a man. It can be assumed that sweet carambolas and exotic kiwi are a woman and a man who play, flirt (the idea is evident from the verb "to sparkle") with each other.

It is interesting to note that in the heart of the fragrance the relationship goes to a different level. Here, yellow light dominates. Yellow is given as a symbol of "ease in dealing with people. It means sociability, curiosity, easy adaptability, and the ability to enjoy the opportunity to please and attract people to yourself." At this stage, unlike the first one, one already senses the seriousness of the relationship, the depth of feelings. The presence of an

immortelle in the composition of the smell tells us about this.

In the third accord, i.e., in the tail, aroma and intimate notes begin to sound. The fragrance includes musk which is an animal essence with a tender, dry and slightly animal smell. It increases sexual attractiveness, stimulates the production of hormones, which speaks of the already awakened instinct, i.e., propagation.

The present study has determined that in other advertising texts of perfume, the fragrance wears "clothes" with attractive descriptions which are as follows. "Fresh, daring, and bewitching fragrance, attractive, like a dress with a deep cut, incredibly refined, gourmet, enveloping you ...", "Guerlain presents a new dress in the perfume wardrobe La Petite Robe Noire - chic, airy, glamorous, magnetic dark blue color, embroidered with seductive gourmet notes", "The sparkling flower fragrance Miss Dior Blooming Bouquet is like a dress embroidered with thousands of miniature flowers."

This study has identified that some advertisers resort to such words as "Perfume", "Perfumed water" written with the capital letter. Obviously, they call fragrances with proper names which also represents the fragrance as a kind of "a living being".

Now we proceed to the analysis of definitions of some words from a specialized perfume dictionary. The perfume dictionary offers the following definitions of the words popular in perfume dictionary and denoting "the parts of the body". "Head" – one is talking about the head note, when the first smelling impression appears while using alcohol perfume products. "The heart" is a note that determines the tone of the smell of perfume. As far as "tail" is concerned, perfumers use this term to convey the olfactory sense of the smell of air left by a passing scented person. This study has set out that semantically "head" and "heart" are two completely different terms in perfumery, i.e. their direct meanings differ from the ones used in perfumery contexts. The most obvious finding to emerge from this study is that these two sets of meanings prove the idea that these words are homonyms, rather than the same words with different meanings.

6. The code describing human traits of character

The investigation of cultural codes has shown that the brightest code, used for the advertisements of fragrances, is a special code describing human character.

In the texts advertising perfume, copywriters paint the image of a woman for whom this fragrance will be. They describe in detail her personality traits of character, lifestyle, dreams, and talents. The result is an ideal image of a modern, bright, successful, seductive personality. Compilers of advertisements are trying to ensure that the buyer forms an opinion that if she purchases their goods, she will become the same as the character in the advertisement.

Three images (types) of women stand out in the graphic image: the image of a confident self-sufficient woman (business lady), the image of seduction and the image of a young girl. Now we proceed to the analysis of advertisements with the code describing business ladies.

"The heroine of Femme fragrance is self-confident, openly talking about her desires. She prefers to keep the pace of the time, rather than indulge in nostalgia". "A bright temperamental and audacious fragrance creates the image of a woman leader who is able to take risks and entice others with her inexhaustible energy", "Her image is a modern, dynamic, confident woman," "Cool, woody fragrance is for modern women who feel the taste for life, and her intelligence allows them to feel comfortable in a rapidly changing world." In today's world, a woman wants to build her own life, climb the career ladder, do her favorite things, be successful and stay in demand. Advertisers promise that the smell will help their customers achieve a significant place in society, to reach heights in any business. This image stems from the confidence in her strength, activity, determination in the business sphere. People call such women business ladies.

The next image is a seductive woman. This image is very popular in the texts advertising perfume. This is because many women use fragrance as a powerful tool to attract the opposite sex. Now we proceed to the analysis of advertisements with the code describing seductive women.

"Its owner is an independent woman, exciting, impudent and unpredictable. She is a brilliant intriguer, insidious and merciless, passionately throwing herself into forbidden embraces. Like a mysterious Carmen, at a glance she subjugates men's souls. And behind her, wherever she is, her fragrance flows: it is attractive, enveloping, requiring attention". "The desire to approach him draws you, the temptation of an easy victory is born in your soul, ignites the body and exposes the senses. Do not doubt, forget about the obstacles – your chosen one is before you, so enslave him!"

Copywriters draw the image of a beautiful, experienced charmer, who perfectly possesses all the skills and is a real master of seduction art.

Interestingly, in some advertisements, text writers compare their fictional image with the famous literary character of Prosper Merimee – Carmen. In the novel this heroine is treacherous, changeable, lying, ruthless and cruel. But this is not the main thing. Readers appreciate her inner strength, pride, respect for herself and the desire for personal freedom. Copywriters choose this specific image, because Carmen is a bright, multifaceted personality that can conquer the heart of any man. Many women would like to be like her in something.

On top of that, copywriters often call their image a brilliant intriguer. The dictionary gives the following definition of an intrigue: "An intrigue is a hidden act, usually unseemly, to achieve some goals." A schemer is engaged in intrigues. As a result, we receive a demonizing character. But in this context, the aim of the intriguer is to charm a man. In addition, the woman receives such attributes as independent, exciting, unpredictable, brilliant, bold, insidious, and merciless. Therefore, copywriters create a modern image of a female vamp who is very popular with men.

In the advertising texts of perfume, the image of a business woman and a female vamp can be combined. Consider the following example, "a new feminine fragrance "Woman's" by Guy Mattiolo created for a sensual, passionate, intelligent, confident woman, she day after day confirms her right to individuality, openly expressing her true feelings and emotions", "It is the fragrance of women who know what is the charm and attractiveness that ensure success in life."

The third image of a young girl is radically different from the previous two, "A fresh and tender, delicate bouquet is woven from the cool notes of flax, peony and "metallic rose" ... The fragrance is for a young girl whose beauty and tenderness resemble the beauty of an unbudded flower". "She adores sweets – their mouthwatering, playful accords, a simple opportunity to feel like a mischievous girl, she is crazy about chocolate. Chocolate boosts her spirit so easily!"

These perfumes are for a young audience or those who want to return to a carefree youth. Flowers and chocolate are main notes used in the composition of the fragrance. They represent a light, delicate, mouth-watering scent. The beauty of the girl is like an unbudded flower. She is distinguished by tenderness, fragility, she can even be like any child and play pranks. Perhaps, with the passage of times, this young girl will turn into a business woman or a woman-vamp. One of the significant findings to emerge from this study is that copywriters choose for their product the image of a specific woman, depending on her age, nature, and goals of life.

7. Conclusion

The purpose of the current study was to describe productive ways to use the artistic material in correlation with the archetypal structure of the fairy tale narrative. This material is useful when studying the poetics of symbolism in a classroom with foreign students learning Russian as a foreign language. This description will make it possible to clarify the conception of the symbolist "text-myth" as rather ambiguous, not confined only by the framework of literature, and at the same time acquiring a deep cultural character. Also, the acquisition of the cultural language of perfume products helped foreign students to reveal the following codes for the description of the fragrance: musical, "anthropomorphic", the code describing human traits of character.

These findings have significant implications for teaching Russian as a foreign language

because they help foreign students develop a clearer understanding of the cultural concept of Russia and provide many opportunities for considering the structural features of the poetics of any texts of art.

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[Index]

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