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Bulgarian and Russian congruent idioms as indices of culturally specific conceptualizations

Nataliya A. Lavrova¹, Jelena Danilović Jeremić²,
Alexander O. Kozmin³

^{1, 3} *Moscow State Institute of International Relations MGIMO University,
Moscow, Russian Federation*

² *University of Kragujevac, Kragujevac, Serbia*

¹ *n.lavrova@inno.mgimo.ru*

² *jelena.jeremic@filum.kg.ac.rs*

³ *a.kozmin@inno.mgimo.ru*

Abstract. By virtue of common ancestry, Russian and Bulgarian have a lot of shared linguistic and cultural grounding. However, unique cultural conditions have given rise to set expressions that embed unique, culturally specific conceptualizations and cognition. This implies that although many Russian-Bulgarian idioms are structurally and semantically isomorphic, most of them embed conceptual elements that are unique to Bulgarian and Russian linguacultures. Taking this tenet as the premise for our research, we see its main aim in demonstrating that despite structural and semantic parallels between Russian and Bulgarian set expressions, the majority are repositories of unique, culturally specific conceptualizations and thus reflect cultural cognition which is not the same across Russian and Bulgarian native speakers. The hypothesis of the research is that despite the semantic and structural congruence between Bulgarian-Russian idioms, the emergent cultural cognition has a bearing on the conceptual content conveyed by structurally and semantically isomorphic idioms. This difference reflects underlying conceptual differences in cultural cognition. The main methods of the research are (1) the conceptual-associative experiment, (2) random sampling, (3) linguistic experimentation, (3) the one-tailed T-test statistical analysis. From the Russian-Bulgarian Dictionary of Idioms (*Russko-Bolgarskiy Frazeologicheskiy Slovar'*) by K. Andrejchina (edited by S. Vlahov), 100 idioms were selected through random sampling. These idioms were interpreted by 50 native speakers, who were matched on such parameters as age and socio-economic background: all are university graduates, with the mean age of 32 years. The statistical tool one-tailed T-test substantiated the working hypothesis and revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in culturally specific conceptualizations embedded in congruent Bulgarian-Russian idioms. Avenues for further research include the following aspects of investigating culturally specific conceptualizations connected with idiomatic language. Associations with idioms from two distantly related or unrelated languages could be compared in order to find out to what degree linguistic proximity has a bearing on the amount of comparable or divergent associations. Research could also be carried out in such a way that cross-generational differences between associations elicited from older and younger generation of speakers of two or more languages are compared and intergenerational inconsistencies are plotted on a diagram so that a picture of the relevant differences emerges.

Keywords: culturally specific conceptualization, isomorphism, associations, cultural connotation, Bulgarian, Russian

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1. Introduction

In December 2020, the first QS Summit on Linguistics and Modern Languages was held jointly with the RUDN University, which provided rationale for the comparative studies of languages and cultures. During the Summit, it was emphasized that "the problems of intercultural communication have become particularly important and relevant in the context of globalization, which encourages intensification of intercultural contacts" [1. P. 304].

In "Comparing languages and cultures: Parametrization of analytic criteria", a paper published as a result of the Summit, Lewandowska-Tomaszczyk argues in favour of "a complex set of areas of reference in cross-linguistic analyses of meanings" and considers it essential to explore words' and phrases' "culture-specific and connotational properties, defined in terms of a parametrized set of semasiological as well as onomasiological properties" [2. P. 343]. The study encourages a "multifocused analysis of linguistic forms and considers linguistic, psychological, cultural and social domains to identify the cultural conceptualizations of the analysed forms" [2. P. 343].

Research on the inherent link between language, culture and cognition has a long history (see [3–7]). Most authors agree on the idea that language, culture and cognition are connected in such a way that language can be viewed as a primary mechanism for storing and communicating cultural cognition. Cultural Linguistics is thus an epistemology and an open-ended set of procedures for "data collection and analysis aimed at a better understanding of the cultural conceptualizations embedded in language" [8. P. 60].

Due to the shared linguistic past, Bulgarian and Russian exhibit a significant number of overlapping features in phraseology: В. *който не работи, не трябва да яде*, R. *кто не работает, тот не ест* (lit. *Who does not work, should not eat*), В. *кротко агне от две майки суче*, R. *ласковый телёнок двух маток сосет* (lit. *A kind calf sucks two mothers*), В. *който рано става, на него и Бог дава*, R. *кто рано встает, тому Бог дает* (lit. *Who wakes up early, God will give them (what they need)*), В. *изляза от играта*, R. *выйти из игры* (lit. *to back out of the game*), В. *като две капки вода приличам на някого*, R. *быть похожими как две капли воды* (lit. *to be as like as two drops of water*), В. *забивам клин*, R. *забивать клин* (lit. *to put a wedge (between smb.)*). These and suchlike idiomatic expressions are called 'congruent' in relevant literature [9]. The term implies that two linguistic units from two languages share both form (structure) and meaning (sense), which is reflected in phraseological dictionaries, where such units are registered as crosslinguistic equivalents. On closer inspection, however, comparable or nearly identical set expressions may embed culturally specific conceptualizations and reflect divergent cultural cognitions. Taking this tenet as the

premise for our research, we see its **main aim** in demonstrating that despite structural and semantic parallels between some, if not most, Russian and Bulgarian set expressions, many of them embed unique, culturally specific conceptualizations and thus reflect cultural cognition which is not the same across Russian and Bulgarian native speakers. Putting it differently, although many of the Russian-Bulgarian idiomatic glosses are regarded by dictionaries as translational equivalents, on a deeper level, that is, on the level of cultural cognition, they reveal statistically significant differences in conceptualization.

2. Literature review

Research by Cherneva [10] is a comparative analysis of Russian and Bulgarian idioms with numerals as their most salient components. Some of the conclusions the author comes to are that the sheer number of Bulgarian idioms with a quantifying element is approximately twice as large as in Russian. Apart from that, Bulgarian develops a much more ramified system of synonymous idioms with numerals: cf. R. *одного поля ягоды, с одного куста ягоды, одного дуба желуди; одним лыком шить, одним миром мазаны* vs B. *говорим на един (и същ) език, едно хоро играем, на един огън се горим, на един ръжен се печем, в едно гърне плюем, в един дол ходим/да берем дренки/ за раци/*. Most of the numerical idioms in Russian and Bulgarian express blended concepts of both degree and quality of such abstract categories as beauty, wealth and mental acuity. Another important finding of the research by Cherneva is that most Bulgarian and Russian idioms are semantically and structurally isomorphic, which is explained by the shared historical and cultural past of the two nations: cf. R. *сидеть в четырех стенах* – B. *между четири страни*; R. *как дважды два четыре* – B. *като две и две четири*; R. *на один зуб (зубок)* – B. *колкото за единия ми зъб*; R. *одним глазом* – B. *с едно око*; R. *один шаг от чего* – B. *(на) една крачка*; R. *в двух словах* – B. *с две думи*; R. *ноль внимания* – B. *нула внимание*; R. *вторая натура* – B. *втора природа*.

Numbers 5 and 9 are more prominent in Bulgarian idioms, while numbers 4 and 7 are more conceptually salient in Russian idioms (R. *за семью замками* – B. *заклучен с девет ключа*). Number 1 seems to be the most productive in both languages. Idioms with numerals from several semantic-phraseological fields predominate, the most productive of which are space (R. *один шаг* – B. *една крачка*), time (R. *в два счета* – B. *докато (да) преброя до три*), measure (R. *семь потов сошло/сойдет* – B. *излизат/излязат три пота от някого*), behaviour (R. *сгибаться/согнуться в три погибели* – B. *свивам се/свия се на два ката*), feelings (R. *на седьмом небе* – B. *на седмото/деветото небе*) and qualities (R. *от горшка два вершка* – B. *две педи от земята*; R. *два сапога пара* – B. *вземи /хвани/ единия, че удари /цапни/ другия*). One of the important findings of Cherneva's research is that Bulgarian and Russian idioms may be to a greater or lesser extent at odds with their dictionary definitions, which demonstrates that idioms are emergent entities subject to conceptual reinterpretation depending on interlocutors' pragmatic needs. As a result of her analysis, the author

argues that a comparative and cultural analysis of set expressions from two or more languages facilitates code-switching and is conducive to efficient intercultural communication, which should potentially lead to a more tolerant attitude to representatives of different cultures as well as to a geocentric rather than an ethnocentric attitude.

Bagasheva [11] examines cultural conceptualizations embedded in English idioms with the keywords *mouth*, *lips*, *tongue* and *teeth* and their counterparts in Bulgarian. By drawing on several corpora, Bagasheva presents sets of comparable data from the two languages and discusses some similarities and a significant number of differences in conceptualizations based on these body part terms. According to the author's research, in both languages the opening of the mouth is conceptualized as communication, surprise and foolishness, while the closing of the mouth is associated with reticence and refusal to engage in social interactions. The conceptual differences include social awareness in English and broken dreams and expectations in Bulgarian. In English, communication is seen as a socially regulated activity that involves self-reflection and premeditation. By contrast, in Bulgarian, communication is described as a leisurely and unselfconscious interaction. Bagasheva's study illustrates differences in cultural conceptualizations of what is supposedly a universal construct – the human body.

According to Kövecses [12], differences in intercultural metaphorical conceptualizations may be explained by the broad and diversified notion of context. It ultimately gives rise to a unique intra-cultural conceptualization, which (at least in some way) will differ from conceptualizations prompted by a comparable linguistic item in another language. The types of context singled out by Kövecses include situational, discursive, conceptual-cognitive and bodily. From this follows that if two or more isomorphic idioms are regularly reproduced in two different cultures in more or less different contexts, it is only to be expected that over time different cultural conceptualizations will emerge that are reflexes of different cultural cognition.

The research by Bila & Ivanova focuses on the inherent link between language, culture and ideology, and emphasizes that "in the network of the relationships between humans, language and culture, humans are defined as biological, social and cultural beings with all these aspects closely bound together and constituting a single integral, inseparable package" [13. P. 221]. That means that social and cultural practice is *volens nolens* reflected in language.

The research by Nelyubova, Hiltbrunner & Ershov investigates the reflection of Russian and French basic values in proverbs. Based on the fact that each nation has a certain hierarchically organized set of values, which only partly coincides with other cultures, the authors believe that it is important to identify both their universal and culture-specific features. According to the researchers' hypothesis, the thematic classification of proverbs may directly or indirectly reveal the values of a particular nation, and the quantitative correlation of proverbs related thematically illustrates this hierarchy of values: "a bigger or smaller number of proverbs on a certain topic indicates the degree of their importance in the consciousness of native speakers of a corresponding linguistic community" [14. P. 224].

The method of linguistic and axiological analysis used by the researchers and the findings of the research suggest that language reflects the most salient cultural concepts, which may be rather dissimilar across cultures: while *advice*, *trouble*, *love* and *expectation* are linguistically, culturally and conceptually salient for Russian speakers, *animals*, *exchange*, *daily routine* and *religion* are, apparently, some of the key cultural concepts for the French.

Diedrichsen in her research "Linguistic expressions as cultural units. How a cultural approach to language can facilitate the description of modern means of communication and expression" [15] argues in favour of including cultural aspects in the description of communicative interaction. Since a linguistic sign is a cultural unit, in order to use it properly, a speaker relies on communicative experience with this unit within a culture. For efficient intercultural understanding and communication, it is crucial to have access to three knowledge sources. The first is semiotic knowledge, the second is common-ground knowledge, and the third knowledge source involves culturally shared cognitive conceptualizations on which word meanings and other linguistic conventions are founded. These three knowledge sources are established through daily interactions and learning processes within a culture. The findings of Diedrichsen's research suggest that, among other things, interpretation of set expressions invoke these three knowledge sources, to which native speakers of a language have mental access, either consciously or only sub- or preconsciously. Apparently, associations prompted by idioms are to a large extent influenced by these knowledge types, of which dictionary meanings (i.e. semiotic type of knowledge) are only one part of the equation. Arguably, the other types of knowledge may cause a certain divergence or inconsistency in idioms' interpretation, which may well turn out to be at odds with dictionary definitions of idioms. An associative-interpretative experiment is thus a useful analytical tool to explicate conceptual elements that are part of cultural conceptualization and cognition.

Kabakchi & Proshina use the term "culturonym" with reference to culture-bound words and phrases that on the surface seem to be cross-linguistic equivalents. The authors explore binary words in two or more languages that are often associated with each other in translation. However, they guard against their consideration as conceptual and cultural equivalents. The paper discusses examples of "binary polyonyms ('universal' culturonyms) whose meaning depends on the context of the situation and, therefore, is differently received in diverse cultures; binary analogues, whose equivalent selection is based on scrutinizing the dictionary entry and on the knowledge of the cultural background, and binary interonyms that partly help translators and partly interfere with their work, being deceptive cognates differing in their referential or connotational meanings" [16. P. 166].

In his research "A cognitive and pragmatic perspective" Senkbeil [17] combines central ideas from Intercultural Pragmatics and Cultural Linguistics to re-think an issue that has been amply discussed in various branches of linguistics: idioms, "phrasemes", and other forms of fixed-form figurative language when used in intercultural communication. He argues that an interaction-oriented approach needs to think beyond the description and mapping of idioms in different

languages and cultures, and apply both pragmatic and cognitive linguistic approaches to explain if and how idiomatic language works or fails to work in intercultural communication. The research is a deductive-experimental study that uses questionnaires for speakers of various native languages and tests the cross-linguistic understanding of English idioms by speakers of other languages for whom English is a lingua franca. These experiments show that an appreciation of both the embodied and pragmatic-interactional dimensions of idioms promises insights into how figurative language and fixed-form expressions are understood and used successfully or unsuccessfully in intercultural communication and why.

Schröder [18] sets out to investigate how exchange students cope with their cross-cultural experience and intercultural communication. Among other things, the author focuses on the blends that may inadvertently arise in students' set expressions, which is a result of intercultural and cross-linguistic interference. For example, the Bulgarian idiom *дишам във врата на някого* is frequently misinterpreted by Russian students as conceptually coinciding with a structurally comparable Russian idiom *дышать в спину*. However, the equivalence is spurious: the Bulgarian idiom corresponds to the English expression *to breathe down smn.'s neck*, while its closest Russian counterpart is *стоять над душой*. This shows that non-native speakers of closely related languages may follow the lane of least resistance and primarily rely on the idioms' underlying image, searching in their mental lexicon for a close match. This strategy, however, is not an efficient way of interpreting idioms from another language.

Stoyanova [19] sets out to compare Russian and Bulgarian idioms with moribund or obsolescent elements. She argues that these idioms may not be regarded as conceptually congruent, despite a similar or even identical structure. According to the author, many of the idioms that are marked in phraseological dictionaries as cross-linguistic equivalents at best can be considered as analogs, since many of the constituent elements of Bulgarian idioms are archaic in modern Russian. This means that what is perceived to be a neutral idiom in Bulgarian by *Bulgarian* speakers, may seem to be lofty and high-flown to *Russian* speakers. The reverse situation is much rarer, since the stylistic relation between Russian and Bulgarian lexis is such that many of the old-fashioned Russian words belong to the neutral register in Bulgarian. True or complete idiomatic equivalence between closely related languages, according to Stoyanova, exists not as frequently and is not as regular as bilingual phraseological dictionaries seem to suggest. The author sets the agenda for reconsideration of the dictionary practice of treating idioms as truly equivalent. New criteria, based on informants' associations are needed to verify idioms' additional, conceptual elements and intercultural equivalence. The Russian idiom *точить лясы*, for example, is thus not truly equivalent to the Bulgarian idiom *чеша си езика*, at least because in Russian there is its closer counterpart *чесать языком*. The Russian word *лясы* is both a historic and an archaic word, not used outside this idiom. Moreover, most Russian speakers are not aware of its meaning.

The research by Maltseva [20] compares emotive Bulgarian and Russian idioms with the words *сердце (сърце)* and *душа (душа)* as their primary compo-

nents. The author's findings suggest that although these words are the basic images that denote and give access to feelings and emotions in Russian and Bulgarian, the component *душа* is more frequent and therefore conceptually more salient in Russian newspapers, while the word *сърце* features more prominently in Bulgarian periodicals. This finding poses a two-sided problem when collecting associations with relevant idioms. First, despite being structural and through metaphorical extension semantic equivalents and treated as such in bilingual phraseological dictionaries, such idioms are unlikely to elicit comparable associations, at least in some speakers. This is due to a multiplicity of factors, whose analysis needs to be done on a more sound empirical basis. Second, although the words *душа* and *сърце* (as well as Bulgarian *сърце* and *душа*) can be viewed as synonyms in their transferred, metaphorical meaning, the word *душа* denotes a more intangible, immaterial entity, while *сърце* is associated with a concrete body part and is thus more material than the elusive *душа*. The conceptual salience as well as relative frequency of the word *душа* in Bulgarian and the infrequency as well as the obsolescent nature of the word *душа* in Russian may also partly influence Bulgarian speakers' associations with idioms whose central image is created due to the presence of the word *душа*.

Despite the numerous cross-linguistic Bulgarian-Russian idiomatic equivalents, such as R. *душа болит* – B. *душата ми боли*, R. *сърце болит* – B. *сърцето ми боли*, R. *до глубины души волновать* – B. *вълнувам се/поразявам до дъното на душата*, R. *душа/сърце переворачивается* – B. *сърцето/душата ми се преобръна*, R. *кошки на сердце скребут* – B. *сърцето ми се свива*, R. *вымотать душу* – B. *вадя душата*, R. *сърце кровью обливается* – B. *кръв капн от сърцето*, R. *сърце не на месте* – B. *сърцето ми се свива*, translational idiomatic equivalence cannot be equated with conceptual and intercultural equivalence.

In their previous research, Lavrova and Nikulina [21] established that Russian speakers frequently misunderstand Bulgarian idioms, relying on the underlying image in a comparable Russian idiom. Thus, the Bulgarian idiom *излизам (вън) из кожата си* corresponds to the English expression *to be beside oneself with anger*. The Russian counterpart with a comparable underlying image *лезть из кожи вон* is a false friend with the meaning 'to make an utmost effort to achieve smth'. The concept of despair is conveyed by somatic idioms in both languages: cf. B. *клювам нос*, R. *повесить голову*. However, the Russian idiom *клевать носом* has the primary meaning of feeling sleepy. All the three idioms have the underlying metonymical basis from which different implications were drawn by different linguistic communities. This can be explained by the universal character of some conceptual metaphors and by the local interpretation of specific-level metaphors.

The overview of literature on intra- and intercultural understanding and interpretation of idiomatic language has revealed that crosslinguistic equivalence of many idioms is spurious, and that a host of linguistic and extralinguistic factors has a bearing on both the form and meaning of idiomatic language. These are such factors as local interpretation of apparently universal cognitive metaphors

(B. *клювам нос*, R. *клевать носом*), the development of material culture and artifacts (R. *зол как сокол*, B. *зол като пушка*), different symbolic and metaphorical meanings of words naming body parts and numerals (R. *сепдце*, B. *сърце*), and a very broad notion of context, which could be regarded as an umbrella term that encompasses all the other factors. These factors, apparently, give rise to a certain divergence in intercultural conceptualizations and cognition.

3. Hypothesis and research questions

The **hypothesis** of the research is thus that despite the semantic and structural congruence that exists between glosses of Bulgarian-Russian idioms, the emergent cultural cognition has a bearing on the conceptual content conveyed by structurally and semantically isomorphic idioms, so much so that a statistically significant difference in conceptual content of Bulgarian and Russian idioms can be postulated, which reflects underlying conceptual differences in culturally specific conceptualizations and cognition.

The main **research questions** are as follows:

1. What are some of the unique, culturally specific conceptualizations that reflect cultural cognition which is not the same across Russian and Bulgarian native speakers?
2. Can these culturally specific conceptualizations be organized into thematic groups?
3. What is the degree of semantic transparency of Russian and Bulgarian idioms?
4. What are some of the reasons for culturally specific conceptualizations?
5. In what way can dictionary entries in phraseological dictionaries be enhanced, given the findings of the research?

4. Methodology: data collection and procedure

As the main method of the research the **conceptual-associative** experiment developed by F. Sharifian is adopted. As recommended by Sharifian [8], the study includes two stages: the association stage, in which idioms are used as prompts to elicit conceptualizations in participants; and the interpretative stage, in which responses given by the participants are analyzed in an attempt to define the cultural conceptualizations that these responses appear to instantiate. Sharifian argues that stimulus words and phrases elicit responses that reflect associative links in the conceptual system. Associative responses to a stimulus reflect elements and aspects of conceptualization in an individual's conceptual system. When the task is administered to a number of subjects from a certain speech community, similarities and clusters in associative responses are likely to reveal cultural conceptualizations. The participation of native speakers is crucial because their associative responses are informed by an emic, i.e. culture-specific source.

In accordance with the main aim of the research, 50 Russian-Bulgarian pairs of idioms were selected through the method of random sampling from the Russian-Bulgarian Idiomatic Dictionary by K. Andrejchina (edited by S. Vlahov) (*Russko-Bolgarskiy Frazeologicheskiy Slovar'*) [22]. Given that the relations between linguistic items from two languages are two-way, to ensure the validity of the experiment, we compared the definitions of the selected idioms in the *Bulgarian-Russian Dictionary* by Sumsкая & Havanskaya [23], the *Phraseological Dictionary of the Bulgarian Language* by Banova & Dimova [24] and the *Comprehensive Phraseological Dictionary of Russian* [25]. Since all the definitions seemed to match, the selected 50 idiomatic pairs (100 idioms in total) were considered to be legible candidates for the experimental research. In order to elicit associations, 25 Russian and 25 Bulgarian native speakers were asked to participate in the experiment. All the participants are of comparable age and socio-economic background: all are graduates of Moscow and Bulgarian Universities with the mean age of 32 years. This age bracket and pool of participants ensure that relatively modern conceptualizations are tested in the experiment.

The participants were given approximately an hour in order to supply associations with each of the 50 idioms. This means that answers to the stimulus words were nearly spontaneous, which is in keeping with the parameters developed for associative experimentation [26]. Since all the participants knew English (were advanced or proficient speakers of English), the task was formulated in English as follows: *Please give 7 to 10 associations with the following Bulgarian/Russian idioms. You have 60 minutes to complete the task. If you are unsure about the meaning of an idiom, put the mark UN (=unsure) next to this idiom. Please, do not consult any dictionary if you do not know the meaning of an idiom. Note: you are to give your associations with each idiom, not its meaning (!).*

It was crucial that participants do not consult any dictionary if they were unsure about the meaning of a particular idiom. In this case, they were to put the abbreviation UN next to the relevant idiom. This was important so that we could factor this in into our statistical analysis. The number of associations that we asked to come up with (7–10) is explained by the fact that, on the one hand, we did not want to limit the participants in the number of associations that could potentially be triggered by idiomatic expressions. On the other hand, a very small number of associations, for example 2 or 3, were thought to be not enough to draw conclusions about cultural conceptualizations. Therefore, this number (neither too small, nor too big), which is the approximate number of items stored in the short-term memory, seemed to be optimal, given that we did not want to prolong the experimental procedure or to drain the participants' mental and physical resources.

The second part of the experimental procedure was the interpretative one, in which we analyzed the conceptual elements embedded in the associations. A rider is in order as regards the terms "concept", "conceptual element" and "cultural conceptualization". Following Sharifian, this research is done within the framework of Cultural Linguistics, which uses the term "culturally specific conceptualization" as a culturally sensitive synonym of the term "cultural concept" – a unique combination of semantic components singled out on the basis of an associative

experiment and reflecting a difference in cultural practices embedded in culturally specific values and beliefs. The detailed distinction of the terminological difference between all these notions is beyond the scope of the present research. Suffice it to say that, following Sharifian, we believe that concepts are end products of conceptualization, the latter being more processual and fluid in nature. However, we do use the term "conceptual elements" when interpreting associations triggered by the Russian and Bulgarian idioms, which we believe populate both concepts and conceptualizations.

To match Russian and Bulgarian idioms on as many parameters as possible, the same aspectual verbal pairs were chosen as the main words of an idiom: mostly perfective aspect, as it seems to be more common and less marked in both Bulgarian and Russian idioms. We obtained 2483 unique associations for Russian idioms and 2005 unique associations for Bulgarian ones. Subsequently we organized them into two groups: those corresponding to dictionary treatment and therefore (relatively) transparent and those representing respondents' idiosyncratic associations. Having done that, we established that respondents' associations fall into several distinct thematic groups, different for speakers of Russian and Bulgarian. Next the one-tailed T-test was applied to figure out whether the inter-group variation exceeds intra-group variation and whether the discrepancy is statistically significant. The test compares two sets of comparable, yet hypothetically divergent data, and is meant to establish whether the number of additional, culturally specific associations is random (i.e. explained by respondents' individual and idiosyncratic associations) or non-random (i.e. systematic, statistically significant and explained by culturally specific conceptualizations). Interrater reliability was ensured by analyzing all the associations separately, then together, paying closer attention to cases on which we seemed to disagree, although these were conspicuous by their absence.

5. Results

The associations and connotations that became conspicuous after the analysis of data and that are absent from dictionary definitions of *Russian* idioms belong to 4 groups: love and attachment, criminal context, material comforts, school and university life.

Idioms that have engendered least divergent associations among Russian subjects are those traced back to a specific source or precedent, such as the Bible, mythology or history of Russia. These idioms are conceptually congruent across Russian speakers, probably, because they are not exposed to their divergent usage and seem to mutely agree on their meaning and usage (*ахиллесова пята, заколдованный круг, стоять/смотреть как истукан, строить козни, пуп земли, как Мамай прошел*). The idiom that was marked "unknown" by most of the subjects is the jocular expression *кусочек с коровий носочек*. However, since only this idiom was marked throughout as "unknown", we may assume that in general contemporary native speakers of Russian are aware of idioms and their meanings. Interpreting the idiom *кусочек с коровий носочек*, most participants came up

with associations that are directly opposed to the idiom's actual meaning, mentioning among their associations a small rather than big size. Two idioms (*как Мамай прошел* and *падать в ноги*) have engendered explicit associations with Russia and its history: the first was marked as "part of the history of Russia during the Mongol-Tartar yoke"; the second refers to a more general context of the past, when Russia was a monarchy and when humble peasants and commoners were supposed to kneel before the tzar or higher nobility when they asked them for a favour or apologized for gross misdemeanour. Two idioms (*во всей нагоде* and *шитый белыми нитками*) seem to have developed unstable or positive connotations, in contrast to their fixed dictionary meanings, which mark them as explicitly negative. Apparently, here we witness the activation of a cognitive (and in all probability cultural) metaphor in which whiteness and absence of clothes are equated with the truth. The idioms that are associated with financial security are *иметь твердую почву*, *вольная птица* and *выбить почву из-под ног*. Here two more cognitive metaphors seem to be at work: "freedom is financial security" and "financial security is firm ground".

Idioms systematically associated with criminal context or illicit behaviour are *краем уха* and *краем глаза*. This information is absent from dictionary definitions of these idioms.

Idioms that are associated with love and attachment are *мизинца не стоит* and *растопить лед*. Although these connotations are not mentioned by dictionary definitions, subjects interpret them as having a narrower scope of notion, primarily connected with close interpersonal relationships. Idioms that were explicitly associated with school and student life are *каша в голове* and *детский лепет*. Both engender such associations as absence of knowledge and poor marks. The idiom *теплое местечко* reveals a broader scope in subjects' associations than its dictionary meaning. Most subjects produced associations with a family circle, hearth, sleep, rest and love.

Unlike Russian subjects, Bulgarian participants interpreted some of the idioms literally, with the comment *Аз го разбирам буквално*, although such interpretations were in the absolute minority and therefore statistically dismissible (less than 2 %). Yet other associations by Bulgarian native speakers included idiomatic expressions and showed native speakers' deep awareness of the idiomatic meaning. Such idiomatic synonyms testify to entrenched paradigmatic links in Bulgarian speakers' mental lexicon: cf. *намирам се между два огъня – между чука и наковалнята съм*; *омагьосан кръг – пари при пари отиват, едно зло никога не идва само*. However, these associations were also in the minority. Unlike Russian speakers, Bulgarian subjects were more ready to admit their hesitation as to the possible 'correct' associations they should provide: some subjects indicated the percentage of their lack of certainty, ranging from 10 to 30 percent. This can be explained by the fact that in order to give associations with a set expression, one should be aware of its meaning in the first place. Another important finding is that Bulgarian speakers considered about 10 % of the idioms to be old-fashioned and explicitly stated so in their comments. This did not occur with the Russian idioms.

Additional conceptual elements absent from dictionary treatment of Bulgarian idioms fall into the following 3 groups: temptation (*съблазн, изкушение*), error, mistake (*грешки*), protection (of oneself or another person) (*опазване*).

The statistical tool one-tailed T-test substantiated the working hypothesis and revealed that there is a statistically significant difference in cultural conceptualizations embedded in congruent Bulgarian-Russian idioms.

Table 1 illustrates additional Russian associations sorted out by groups and compared to associations that are not in contrast with dictionary meaning. The first graph of the table correlates with the degree of idiomatic transparency and is organized in ascending order.

Table 2 contains additional Bulgarian associations sorted out by groups and compared to associations that are not in contrast with dictionary meaning. The first graph of the table correlates with the degree of idiomatic transparency and is organized in ascending order.

Table 3 illustrates the degree of inter-group variation in the participants' responses, separately for Russian and Bulgarian idioms.

Table 1

Additional associations sorted out by groups and compared to associations that are not in contrast with dictionary meaning (absolute numbers for Russian associations)

Idiom	Associations compatible with dictionary meaning (degree of idiomatic transparency, in ascending order)	Group 1 "love"	Group 2 "crime"	Group 3 "material comforts and finances"	Group 4 "school and university life (education)"
Кусочек с коровий носочек	101	-	14	112	-
Иметь твёрдую почву под ногами	102	23	-	34	-
Быть на распутье	106	-	48	-	29
Сбиться с пути	108	45	21	20	45
Горькая пилюля	109	102	98	21	76
Вольная птица	109	21	97	134	-
Тёплое местечко	111	-	68	145	-
Ахиллесова пята	112	123	89	21	-
Растопить лёд	112	385	-	7	14
Белыми нитками шитый	112	123	125	101	98
Пустить козла в огород	117	-	98	87	111
Со всеми потрохами	117	145	-	-	-
Не находить себе места	118	127	24	34	-
Краем глаза	119	78	211	45	117

Idiom	Associations compatible with dictionary meaning (degree of idiomatic transparency, in ascending order)	Group 1 "love"	Group 2 "crime"	Group 3 "material comforts and finances"	Group 4 "school and university life (education)"
Пуп земли	123	24	43	107	-
Не первой молодости	124	119	-	34	21
Во всей наготе	126	26	28	29	2
Вставлять палки в колеса	127	38	109	23	98
Запретный плод	128	107	-	26	27
Задира́ть нос	134	25	32	12	76
Как истукан (стоять, сидеть)	134	-	28	30	216
До мозга костей	136	118	73	-	12
Мизинца не стоит	145	167	15	12	34
Камень преткновения	156	211	197	114	116
Подруга жизни	167	39	4	-	36
Падать в ноги	167	121	34	109	27
Искры из глаз посыпались	176	16	318	18	34
Вогнать в пот	178	120	-	56	-
Получить по заслугам	182	45	324	211	196
Выйти из игры	189	18	412	148	-
Легко отделаться	193	72	108	98	79
Детский лепет	198	-	27	-	397
Обивать пороги	200	98	18	87	-
Драная кошка	201	117	14	98	34
Выбить почву из-под ног	201	108	19	-	-
Каша в голове	214	18	-	13	394
Вогнать в краску	216	97	-	98	86
Между двух огней	218	114	29	104	54
Строить козни	218	114	211	18	56
Иметь зуб	225	-	394	180	194
Краем уха	234	86	123	16	112
Из любви к искусству	234	45	-	-	45
Бередить рану	234	-	23	-	47
Как Мамай прошел	234	-	136	124	111
От мала до велика	254	-	18	-	-

Idiom	Associations compatible with dictionary meaning (degree of idiomatic transparency, in ascending order)	Group 1 "love"	Group 2 "crime"	Group 3 "material comforts and finances"	Group 4 "school and university life (education)"
Подливаче масло в огън	265	118	28	67	65
Восходяща звезда	273	-	-	-	6
Расправяне крила	284	96	-	97	56
Сравняване с земята	297	-	403	29	211
Закълдован кръг	345	-	67	94	93

Table 2

Additional associations sorted out by groups and compared to associations that are not in contrast with dictionary meaning (absolute numbers for Bulgarian associations)

Idiom	Associations compatible with dictionary meaning (degree of idiomatic transparency, in ascending order)	Group 1 "temptation" (<i>съблазн, изкушение</i>)	Group 2 "error, mistake, faux pas" (<i>грешки</i>)	Group 3 "protection" (<i>опазване</i>)
Изгряваща звезда	24	18	22	38
Не струва колкото малкия ми пръст	32	11	64	12
Омагьосан кръг	45	32	85	21
Разперя криле	56	12	-	64
Кроя козни	61	95	-	34
С крайчеца на ухото	65	64	65	-
Другарка в живота	65	31	-	73
Избяга почвата изпод краката	70	-	51	22
Наливам масло в огъня	70	21	43	14
Горчив хап	71	33	54	-
Сякаш Мамай е минал	76	-	103	89
Топло местенце	76	57	-	114
Сбъркам с пътя	76	87	91	3
Не мога място да си намеря	77	13	-	97

Idiom	Associations compatible with dictionary meaning (degree of idiomatic transparency, in ascending order)	Group 1 "temptation" (съблазн, изкушение)	Group 2 "error, mistake, faux pas" (грешки)	Group 3 "protection" (опазване)
Парченце колкото на крава носленце	77	35	50	-
Намирам се на кръстопът	78	92	51	22
Не в първа младост	78	108	13	-
Слагам пръти в спиците	81	43	32	21
Съшит е с бели конци	91	32	112	12
Като истукан (стоя, седя)	92	87	99	-
Намирам се между два огъня	93	54	-	97
С всички партакешии	97	2	50	51
Пъп на земята	100	78	32	55
Падам в краката	102	-	54	112
В цялата си голота	103	65	75	-
Волна птица	103	9	-	6
Ахилесова пета	103	95	74	91
Детинско ломотене	104	-	124	112
Излиза от играта	106	-	78	123
Одрана котка	106	-	17	-
Искри изскочиха от очите	108	10	101	12
Главя козел за градинар	109	76	106	43
Дигам нос	111	55	69	-
До мозъка на костите	112	-	-	-
Имам зъб на някого	118	69	40	20
Лесно се отърва	119	12	63	96
С крайчеца окоето	121	64	42	89
Протривам прага	122	-	11	41
Получа (си) заслуженото	125	87	214	-
Разтопя леда	134	214	118	13

Idiom	Associations compatible with dictionary meaning (degree of idiomatic transparency, in ascending order)	Group 1 "temptation" (съблазн, изкушение)	Group 2 "error, mistake, faux pas" (грешки)	Group 3 "protection" (опазване)
Карам някого за се изпоти	140	-	-	-
Имам твърда почва под краката си	147	-	-	61
Накарам някого да си пусне боята	158	112	76	-
Забранен плод	166	171	32	11
От малко до голямо	187	-	10	-
Изравня със земята	204	-	-	46
Каша (ми) е в главата	205	-	214	-
От любов към изкуството	205	18	-	95
Развреждам рана на някого	209	-	-	-
Камък на преткновениято	235	176	114	23

Table 3

Results of the one-tailed paired T-test analysis of inter-group variation in associations with idioms produced by 25 native speakers of Russian and 25 native speakers of Bulgarian

Difference Scores Calculations for Russian		
Treatment 1 N1: 50 $df1 = N - 1 = 50 - 1 = 49$ M1: 173.66 SS1: 182303.22 $s21 = SS1/(N - 1) = 182303.22/(50-1) = 3720.47$	Treatment 2 N2: 50 $df2 = N - 1 = 50 - 1 = 49$ M2: 276.5 SS2: 1623614.5 $s22 = SS2/(N - 1) = 1623614.5/(50-1) = 33134.99$	T-value Calculation $s2p = ((df1/(df1 + df2)) * s21) + ((df2/(df2 + df2)) * s22) = ((49/98) * 3720.47) + ((49/98) * 33134.99) = 18427.73$ $s2M1 = s2p/N1 = 18427.73/50 = 368.55$ $s2M2 = s2p/N2 = 18427.73/50 = 368.55$ $t = (M1 - M2)/\sqrt{(s2M1 + s2M2)} = -102.84/\sqrt{737.11} = -3.79$ The <i>t</i> -value is -3.78788. The <i>p</i> -value is .000131. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

Difference Scores Calculations for Bulgarian		
Treatment 1 N1: 50 $df1 = N - 1 = 50 - 1 = 49$ M1: 108.46 SS1: 108022.42 $s21 = SS1/(N - 1) =$ $108022.42/(50-1) = 2204.54$	Treatment 2 N2: 50 $df2 = N - 1 = 50 - 1 = 49$ M2: 133.08 SS2: 300043.68 $s22 = SS2/(N - 1) =$ $300043.68/(50-1) = 6123.34$	T-value Calculation $s2p = ((df1/(df1 + df2)) * s21) + ((df2/(df2 + df2)) * s22) = ((49/98) * 2204.54) + ((49/98) * 6123.34) = 4163.94$ $s2M1 = s2p/N1 = 4163.94/50 = 83.28$ $s2M2 = s2p/N2 = 4163.94/50 = 83.28$ $t = (M1 - M2)/\sqrt{(s2M1 + s2M2)} = -24.62/\sqrt{166.56} = -1.91$ The <i>t</i> -value is -1.90768. The <i>p</i> -value is .02968. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

6. Discussion

The least culturally divergent turned out to be those idioms which are traced back to a well-known, common source, such as mythology or the Bible. Apparently, cross-culturally shared (universal) knowledge of a source on the basis of which a specific idiom emerged is a factor that is conducive to conceptual congruence: such idioms are not prone to develop unique, culturally specific conceptualizations. Conceptual divergence is more apparent when idioms containing names of body parts (somatic idioms), parts of nature or names of animals are offered for interpretation. This seems to suggest that both natural and artificial cultures influence cultural cognition. However, idioms associated with *natural* culture (names of nature parts) triggered fewer differences in associations than idioms associated with *artificial* culture: names of tools and every-day objects. This can arguably be explained by a more universal character of natural objects and phenomena, which cannot be manipulated by humans and cannot be easily put to different uses, unlike artifacts, which, although were created for comparable reasons in both cultures, with time might have been put to various uses and have thus given rise to different conceptual metaphors, which engendered unique, culturally specific conceptualizations. This finding is in keeping with the main tenet of Cultural Linguistics, according to which meaning is largely a matter of conceptualization and is culturally constructed.

Different conceptual elements associated with at least one idiom – *подпыза жизни* – must have been caused by its allusive, intertextual nature: there is a well-known eponymous Russian play, which means that Russian speakers who are aware of its existence might have additional associations, absent from associations provided by Bulgarian speakers. Potentially, these additional associations brought about by the possible allusive, intertextual nature of Bulgarian and Russian idioms

are also a factor that may have a bearing on cultural conceptualization and cognition. Another factor partly responsible for differences in cultural conceptualizations is that although all the idioms are structurally and semantically isomorphic, due to close etymological links between Russian and Bulgarian some of the structural elements of idioms are old-fashioned or moribund in one language and are neutral in the other: cf. R. *горькая пилюля, во всей наготе, камък на преткновението, кроя козни*. This finding is in keeping with research by Stoyanova [19]. The divergence in some conceptual elements singled out from the associations provided by Bulgarian and Russian participants might also have been caused by the fact that some idioms, although they are in the minority, have two meanings (R. *заколдованный круг, подливать масло в огонь, вогнать в пот*). For some speakers, associations with one but not the other meaning might have been more prominent and conceptually salient. Yet another possibility is that a blended host of associations might have arisen, caused by amalgamation of two or more meanings of an idiom.

Some of the **limitations** of the research, which do not compromise its findings, are as follows. First, as is frequently the case with associative-interpretative tasks, some of the idioms offered for interpretation may not have been part of the participants' mental lexicon, i.e. they may have been unfamiliar or only vaguely familiar with the idioms. In all likelihood, these idioms were marked by the participants as unfamiliar (=UN). Second, the primary image at the basis of direct, non-figurative meaning of an idiom may have led the participants up the garden path, triggering associations with this primary image, which has little or nothing to do with the idioms' current figurative meaning. Apparently, this explains, why some subjects interpreted some idioms literally rather than metaphorically. Another limitation is that most Bulgarian speakers to some extent know Russian, whereas the majority of Russian speakers do not know Bulgarian. This bilingual asymmetry may have partly influenced the interpretation by Bulgarian speakers of the idioms, although this is only a speculation that needs to be checked against robust empirical data.

7. Conclusion

Additional conceptual elements singled out as a result of our research open a window onto cultural cognition of the two lingacultures. For the modern generation of Russians, these turn out to be *interpersonal relations, finances, criminality* and *education*. Three out of the four are current cultural values that rank high on the desirability scale. Criminality stands apart in that it is not a value per se, but rather a potential or actual threat that ranks high on the conceptual salience scale and is something to be feared and avoided. For Bulgarians, the idea of taking a misstep (*a faux pas*) seems to be a rather daunting perspective. As *temptation* is closely connected with wrongdoing, Bulgarian speakers seem to be very concerned about protecting their own or other people's integrity.

Research findings are relevant for contemporary translation studies (TS), which should be "organized along cognitive, sociological, anthropological, technological and economic lines" focusing on "a range of social, cultural, ideological and political aspects which have an influence on translators' choices" [27, P. 466].

Research findings call for a compilation of an updated version of a new bilingual (Russian-Bulgarian or Bulgarian-Russian) idiomatic dictionary. This could be done in two ways. First, the conceptual elements singled out in the experimental research could be taken into account when modern definitions of idioms are given. Second, alongside a definition of each idiomatic phrase, dictionary-writers could also supply some conceptual elements associated with each and every idiom in order to raise dictionary users' awareness of the newly emerging cultural conceptualizations which are part of collective cultural cognition.

Avenues for further research include the following aspects of investigating culturally specific conceptualizations connected with idiomatic language. Associations with idioms from two distantly related or unrelated languages could be compared in order to find out to what degree linguistic proximity has a bearing on the amount of comparable or divergent associations. Research could also be carried out in such a way that cross-generational differences between associations elicited from older and younger generation of speakers of two or more languages are compared and intergenerational inconsistencies are plotted on a diagram so that a picture of the relevant differences emerges.

It is genuinely hoped that the findings of the present research will be of benefit to the highly prolific field of Cultural Linguistics and could stimulate further interest in comparative-typological research.

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Information about the authors:

N.A. Lavrova, Dr. Sci (Philology), professor, Moscow State Institute of International Relations MGIMO University (Moscow, Russian Federation). E-mail: n.lavrova@inno.mgimo.ru

J. Danilović Jeremić, PhD, assistant professor, University of Kragujevac (Kragujevac, Serbia). E-mail: jelena.jeremic@filum.kg.ac.rs

A.O. Kozmin, Cand. Sci (Philology), associate professor, Moscow State Institute of International Relations MGIMO University (Moscow, Russian Federation). E-mail: a.kozmin@inno.mgimo.ru

The authors declare no conflicts of interests.

Информация об авторах:

Лаврова Н.А. – д-р филол. наук, профессор кафедры английского языка № 3, МГИМО МИД России (Москва, Россия). E-mail: n.lavrova@inno.mgimo.ru

Данилович Еремич Е. – канд. филол. наук (PhD), доцент кафедры филологии и искусств факультета английского языка, Крагуевацкий университет (Крагуевац, Сербия). E-mail: jelena.jeremic@filum.kg.ac.rs

Козьмин А.О. – канд. филол. наук, доцент кафедры английского языка № 3, МГИМО МИД России (Москва, Россия). E-mail: a.kozmin@inno.mgimo.ru

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