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Горелова Олена Володимирівна – викладач кафедри теорії та практики перекладу і німецької філології МДГУ ім. Петра Могили. Коло наукових інтересів – взаємовплив національної ідентичності, мови та літератури

Language as a Reflection of National Identity

У статті досліджується питання національної ідентичності як особливого типу світогляду, що вміщує поняття національного характеру, національної історії, традицій, вірувань тощо, та її вираження крізь призму мови за допомогою вивчення семантики слів на прикладі національних реалій.

The article explores the matters of national identity as a special world view which encompasses such notions as national character, national history, traditions, beliefs, etc., and its expression through the prism of the language with the help of the study of word semantics by the example of words-national phenomena.

The question of identity is rather crucial nowadays as it is a critical component of the formation of an individuality of a nation. For people it is important to preserve their identity, which to some extent can be called a special world view, i.e. religious beliefs, culture, customs, and traditions which have been formed during the whole period of the existence of the community. These can be expressed in all spheres of life: political, economic, scientific, etc.

As Homi Bhabha points out the study of language and literature and the construction of nations are intrinsically connected. He argues: "to study the nation through its narrative address does not merely draw attention to its language and rhetoric; it also attempts to alter the conception of the object itself" [5].

Language is one of the fields of social life, where identity is seen most distinctly, as it is the reflection of the nation's consciousness. It reflects all the components of life, every day reality, mentality, and the way of thinking of the people. It manifests traits of 'national character' and at the same time also assists the process of building up the very identity.

Developing a sense of self is an essential part of every individual becoming a mature person. Each person's self-conception is a unique combination of many identifications, identifications as broad as *woman* or *man, Catholic* or *Muslim,* or as narrow as being a member of one particular family. Although self-identity may seem to coincide with a particular human being, identities are actually much wider than that. They are also collective – identities extend to countries and ethnic communities, so that

people feel injured when other persons sharing their identity are injured or killed. Sometimes people are even willing to sacrifice their individual lives to preserve their identity group(s). People who share the same collective identity think of themselves as having a common interest and a common fate.

Identities are constructed on the basis of various traits and experiences. Many of those characteristics are open to different interpretations. Race is a good example. Skin color is an important marker of identity in many societies, but in others it is of minimal importance.

Some traits are fixed at birth, such as parental ethnicity and religion, place of birth, and skin color. Other traits may be acquired or modified later, such as language spoken, religion practiced, clothing worn, or food eaten.

Many identities, then, are not based on ascribed traits but on shared values, beliefs, or concerns, which are varyingly open to acquisition by choice. This includes shared religious adherence – indeed, members of many religious communities proselytize to win converts to their faith. This is also true for political ideologies, attachment to particular pieces of land, or practicing a particular way of life.

Identities vary in many other ways. They are self-designations and also attributions made about other persons. They can endure for generations or change with shifting situations. They can exclude or include. And since everyone has multiple identities, their relative importance and compatibility differ in various times and circumstances [6].

Every human being, in addition to having their own personal identity, has a sense of who they are

in relation to the larger community – the nation. It is one of the most influential doctrines in history that all humans are divided into groups called nations.

The national identity refers both to the distinguishing features of the group, and to the individual's sense of belonging to it. A very wide range of criteria is used, with very different application. Small differences in pronunciation may be enough to categorize someone as a member of another nation. On the other hand, two people may be separated by difference in personalities, belief systems, geographical locations, time and even spoken language, yet regard themselves and be seen by others, as members of the same nation. Nationals are considered to share certain traits and norms of behavior, certain duties toward other members, and certain responsibilities for the actions of the members of the same nation.

Nevertheless, according to Anne-Marie Thiesse it is easy enough to draw up a list of the symbolic and material items which any real nation needs to possess: a history establishing its continuity through the ages, a set of heroes embodying its national values, a language, cultural monuments, folklore, historic sites, distinctive geographical features, a specific mentality and a number of picturesque labels such as costume, national dishes or an animal emblem [10].

Still the concept of national identity is rather ambiguous. For example, when one deals with Ukrainian identity, there are several factors that may be regarded as relevant. What are we as citizens of the Ukrainian state? What are we as members of the Ukrainian ethnic group? What are we as speakers of the Ukrainian language? What are we as persons socialized into the Ukrainian "national" habitus and culture? What are we as the Ukrainian nation? It has been a common phenomenon to unite these questions under the theme of national identity. However, when strictly defined, the questions point to different phenomena. In this sense national identity is an umbrella concept which does not have only one empirical referent [6].

Why is the issue of national identity so important? Identity determines the meaning of our existence. We, as a nation, cannot possibly achieve anything beyond the limits defined by our identity. Are we a rich or a poor nation? Perceptions differ. And this means that we have differing views of one aspect of our national identity. To behave as a member of a rich nation where the majority of the people are poor shows a very poor sense of one's own identity and the identity of the nation [7].

Some would argue that 'national identity' is merely a construct, designed to maintain the *status quo*, the existing ordering of power in society. Price admits that "*National identity ... becomes ... the often elegant collection of images that the government (or a series of interest groups)*

manufactures or encourages to keep itself in power". He claims that there are three extant definitions of national identity:

- Instrumental model - "*the collection of myths, ideas and narratives used by a dominant group or coalition to maintain power in society*".
- Essential model - the belief that "*American-ness, German-ness, Russian-ness are all proper deeply rooted national identities and each has a unique historical essence.*" Supporters of this approach believe that institutions and symbols (such as flags) protect and "*give form to these identities*".
- Pluralistic model - Price notes that in many countries a "*state protected pluralism*" has evolved "*in which ethnic and religious groups are protected, often through explicit legal requirement*" [8].

Bernhard Giesen defines national identity as a three-sided phenomenon. It is a complex constituted by contextual everyday-life understanding, historical processes of interaction, and symbolical (discursive) codes.

In an empirical connection, it is reasonable to concentrate on the third dimension mentioned by Giesen. Identity is a phenomenon dependent on communication and use of language. People interpret their everyday lives and processes of interaction with the aid of symbolical codes. The codes reduce the complexity of reality and transform alien into familiar. As far as collective identity is concerned, nobody interprets it alone: the codes of collective identity are in themselves a collective phenomenon.

Thus, it is useful to study collective identity as a complex of discursive expressions: as symbols and narratives. This approach is in principle "minimalistic" and "agnostic". The researcher does not have to ask what some nation's national identity "really" is. He studies national identity as claims and expressions that people have produced about themselves. Very often the concept of national identity is used in this sense: collective identity is not that which integrates or separates people as groups. On the contrary, it consists of discursive expressions for the observations that people make about (real or imagined) sameness and difference.

Research on identity focuses on such constructions as on symbolical codes. Research on national identity does not deal with the properties of a nation. Instead, it deals with expressions of these properties [6].

National identity, i.e. the symbolical codes through which characteristics of the nation are produced, is part of the process of nationalism. In national identity the nation is suffused with characteristic features through which its members can identify themselves and distinguish themselves

from others. In other words, from the viewpoint of nationalism, national identity is a process of evolving of such symbolical structures which help to decode nation as "our" (its members') community [6].

'Reality' is always encoded, or rather the only way we can perceive and make sense of reality is by the codes of our culture. There may be an objective, empiricist reality out there, but there is no universal, objective way of perceiving and making sense of it. What passes for reality in any culture is the product of the culture's codes, so 'reality' is always already encoded; it is never 'raw'.

Semiotic analysis is a way of looking at the world around us in a structured, scientific way, so that we realize that the signs and symbols we encounter have a culturally determined basis, rather than occurring naturally through mere coincidence. Signs (which encode the reality) are the basic tools of semiotics. It has been said by C.S. Pierce, that "a sign...is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect..." and "a sign is always marked by an intention of communicating something meaningful" [9].

The sign systems we use are not somehow given or natural. They are a development of our culture and therefore carry cultural meanings and values, cultural 'baggage'. They shape the consciousness of individuals, forming us into social beings.

Since the codes we use are located within specific cultures, it should not be surprising that those codes express and support the social organization of those cultures. Thus they can act as modifiers and expressions of different identities (national, cultural, ethnic, etc.)

The most habitual conception of the symbol is connected with the idea of some substance (contents) which, in turn, serves as the plane of expression for another, as a rule, culturally more valuable, substance (contents). At the same time, the symbol should be distinguished from reminiscence or the citation as in them the "external" plane of the substance-expression is not independent, and is some kind of sign-index referring to some more extensive text, to which it is in analogical (metonymic) relation. The symbol, both in the plane of expression and in the plane of substance (contents), always represents some text, that is possesses some uniform meaning enclosed within it and distinctly expressed border allowing clearly to single it out from the surrounding semiotic context. The last circumstance is to our mind especially vital in regard to the ability «to be a symbol».

Symbols represent one of the most stable elements of a cultural continuum [2].

Each essential cultural object, as a rule, acts in two aspects: in the direct function, serving the certain circle of concrete public needs, and in

"metaphorical" when its features and characteristics are transferred to the broad range of social facts, the model of which it becomes.

With the word "machine", for example, we connect certain scientific and technical notions. However, when we read Anna Karenina's words about her husband «the malicious machine» or we say «the bureaucratic machine ", we use the concept of "machine" as model of a broad range of various phenomena, which, as a matter of fact, have nothing to do with the machine itself. It is possible to distinguish quite a number of such concepts: "house", "road", "bread", "threshold", "stage", etc. The more essential the direct role of the given concept in the system of the given culture is, the more active is its metaphorical value which can behave extremely aggressively, at times becoming the image of all real [1].

All of this, as we can clearly see, is intrinsically connected with the language, which is in fact a sign system, where every word can be regarded as a separate symbol, expressing both national and cultural identities. That can easily be proven.

Jamake Highwater, an American Indian, recollects his childhood when he was forced to study English as the second language with the Blackfoot language being his native one. As a kid he favoured one bird which in his language was called *meksikatsi*. A teacher of the English language told him that *meksikatsi* was not called *meksikatsi*, even though that was what his people had called that bird for thousands of years. The bird appeared to be called "duck". "I was very disappointed with English. I couldn't understand it. First of all, the bird didn't look like "duck", and when it made a noise it didn't sound like "duck", and I was even more confused when I found out that the meaning of the verb "to duck" came from the bird and not vice versa". Jamake Highwater is not able to understand the meaning of the word as he is of a different national identity which hindered his acceptance of different values and different world view. From this example it becomes clear that the world view of the Blackfoot Indians, a representative of whom the author is, drastically differs from the world vision of the 'white' people who speak English. Every people names things that surround them daily according to the their own vision of the world. The Blackfoot Indian tribe called the bird *meksikatsi* because of the bird's characteristics they identified. In the Blackfeet language it meant "pink-colored feet".

"We are born into cultural preconception that we call reality and that we never question. We essentially know the world in terms of that cultural package or preconception, and we are so unaware of it that the most liberal of us go through life with a kind of ethnocentricity that automatically rules out all other ways of seeing the world. As I came to

understand English better, I understood that it made a great deal of sense, but I never forgot that *meksikatsi* made a different kind of sense. I realized that languages are not just different words for the same things but totally different concepts, totally different ways of experiencing and looking at the world."

Language is of vital importance for the formation of a nation and thus national identity, as it is the mirror of the mentality and consequently the instrument to impose it and represent it on the world arena.

Language is the phenomenon which preserves all the historical changes as it develops and lives along with the nation or ethnic group it belongs to and thus absorbs and reflects all the alternations which take place in the society. This can be well traced with the help of etymology which shows us the way the words develop and the way different shades of meaning and connotations appear as a result of which a word may become polysemantic or acquire a completely different meaning. Let's take for example the word *knight*.

The monolingual English dictionary gives the following definition of the word *knight*: 1. A man who has been awarded the highest or second highest class of distinction in any of the four British orders of chivalry, i.e. honors for service or merit awarded by the Queen or the Government. 2. historical:

- In medieval Europe: a man-at-arms of high social status, usually mounted, serving a feudal lord.
- Thesaurus: cavalier, chevalier, gentleman, thane, Knight Templar, knight-at-arms, knight errant.

3. historical:

- The armed champion of a lady, devoted to her service.

Knight comes from the Old English *cniht* "boy, youth, servant," common W.Gmc. (cf. O.Fris. *kniucht,* Du. *knecht,* M.H.G. *kneht* "boy, youth, lad," Ger. *Knecht* "servant, bondsman, vassal"), which is of unknown origin. It acquired the meaning "military follower of a king or other superior" around 1100. It began to be used in a specific military sense in Hundred Years War, and gradually rose in importance through M.E. period until it became a rank in the nobility in the 16th century. The verb meaning "to make a knight of (someone)" appeared c.1300. *Knighthood* is O.E. *cnihthad* "the period between childhood and manhood;" sense of "rank or dignity of a knight" is from c.1300 [11].

Knight is the English term for a social position originating in the Middle Ages. In Great Britain and the Dominions, knighthood was a non-heritable form of gentility, but not nobility. In the High and Late Middle Ages, the principal duty of a knight was to fight as, and lead, heavy cavalry; more recently, knighthood has become a symbolic title of honor given to a more diverse class of people, from mountain climber Edmund Hillary to musician Paul McCartney. By extension, "knight" is also used as a translation of the names of other honorable estates connected with horsemanship, especially from classical antiquity.

The history of knighthood involves, therefore, the history of the social institution, which began somewhat differently in the various European regions; the history of the word, and the corresponding terms in French and Latin; and the history of the technology which made heavy cavalry possible.

Knighthood is designated by the title Sir (e.g. Sir Tom Jones) or Dame (e.g. Dame Judi Dench) within the Commonwealth of Nations. The French title "Chevalier" or the German "Ritter" are usually used in Continental Europe. Outside the Commonwealth, the title is respected but may carry less gravitas, and thus may or may not appear, for example, in the mass media and other publications. There are technically differing levels of knighthood (see Order of the British Empire), but in practice these are even more symbolic than the title itself today and thus only express the greatness of the recipient's achievements in the eyes of the Crown [11].

Thus, the word *knight* reflects history, values and traditions of the British nation. Although this word can be easily translated into Ukrainian, for the Ukrainian people it has nothing to do with their own nation, history, and beliefs. The word, which is much closer to the Ukrainians, is the word "*vytjaz'*" ("витязь"). And though it has a somewhat similar meaning with the word *knight*, to translate it from the Ukrainian language into the English one with the help of *knight* would be, to our mind, inappropriate as it doesn't fully reproduce the meaning and the values connected with this word. The word "*vytjaz'*" denotes a genuine Slavonic notion. It represents a complex unity of history, mentality, and world vision of the Slavonic folks. Thus, it is extremely difficult, to our mind, to find an appropriate translation in the English language in order to be able to preserve its national coloring. Along with the word *knight* other variants are possible, such as *hero, champion, warrior*, but none of them fully express the conception of this notion by the Ukrainian people. The same concerns such Russian words as "ratoberts" and "bogatyr'", which are very often associated with the perception of "*vytjaz'*", and translated into English as *hero* and *warrior*, which again only partially and too generally reproduces their original meaning.

There is such a notion as words-national phenomena, i.e. words which denote things typical only for the given culture/nation. The problem

mentioned above most often concerns words-national phenomena, which don't have any analogies in other cultures and thus are hard to be translated. Leonid Cherkassky explored several words-national phenomena and their translation into other languages and dealt with most typical mistakes made by translators as a consequence of misinterpreting and misunderstanding [4]. The words-national phenomena most often refer to the following categories: ethnographic ones from the range of everyday life and household; meals and national cuisine (for example, *pyrogi*, *kalach*, *borshch*, etc.); social and political ones, such as ranks for example (e.g. *perpetual titular counselor*); words-national phenomena left from the Soviet times (e.g. *majovka*); folklore and tales, etc. Folk tales is the most interesting category, as heroes and characters from such stories, which are developed, told and retold during hundreds of years most distinctly express a person's identity. Let's take for example the most widely known folk tales character "baba yaga". This character is rather often translated into the English language as "*witch*", but in fact does not express the concept of the character in full. She is not simply a conjurer and she is not always wicked; she happens to have a somewhat contradictory nature. This character originates from one of the spirits of the forest who possesses some supernatural powers. In addition, in Ukrainian and Russian folk tales she is tricked and taught a lesson, sometimes punished, but never killed unlike the witches of many other country's folk tales, where the witches have to be defeated (e.g. the German tale of Hansel and Gretel). Another interesting thing concerning this character is that in the Russian language her full name, which is more of a nickname and characterizes her main features, has a rhyme to it which ads to the special poetic spirit and feeling created in the Russian folk tales. In order to maintain this national coloring it would be necessary to preserve the rhyme and the nickname the way it exists in the Russian language, but at the same time one also needs to provide an explanation - *Baba-Yaga, the old hag, the bone-leg.*

There is a whole number of different folk characters, which represent Slavic beliefs, that also do not have any analogies in other languages. *Tryaseya*, for instance, is one of them. It is one of the twelve sisters who represented different illnesses in the Slavonic tradition. Its name comes from the Russian word *to shake* and denotes *fever*.

Examples of words-national phenomena are numerous and all of them reflect peoples national and cultural identity as they are, as we have

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