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# TRAINING, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

*'The crucial differences which distinguish human societies and human beings are not biological.*

*They are cultural'*

*- Ruth Benedict*

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# TRAINING, LANGUAGE AND CULTURE

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# Introduction to Issue 4(3)

by Co-Editor Barry Tomalin

Welcome to Issue 3(4) of Training, Language and Culture. This issue offers insightful research on Arabic, Chinese, Greek, German and English languages and cultures drawing on a diverse range of methodological frameworks and an impressive repertoire of scientific approaches.

Two articles explore language use, one among female university teachers in Saudi Arabia and the other the use of soubriquets or nicknames and the importance of being familiar with them as aids to building cultural awareness. In *Do Saudi academic women use more feminised speech to describe their professional titles? An evidence from corpus*, Reem Alkammash and Haifa Al-Nofaie examine how female Saudi academics describe their occupational titles. In a study of CVs extracted from two Saudi universities they found that more female academics use male gender markers to describe themselves, because they feel it gives them more credibility in the academic market but the practice does not vary according to academic discipline. The authors compare this practice with the gender markers in other languages, such as French, German and Polish, and stress the danger of feminine gender markers as impeding the empowerment of women in gender-specific languages.

In *Soubriquet nomination as referred to cultural awareness and intercultural competence*, Elizaveta A. Vishnyakova and Olga D. Vishnyakova examine the origins and functions of soubriquets and how they are used to give insights into national and regional culture, and illustrate that teachers' and students' knowledge of them is a significant addition to cultural awareness.

Politically correct political discourse is the subject of Ludmila L. Baranova and Natalia L. Kriakina's paper which analyses the general and specific use of what they call 'safe' political language in

US and UK government speeches. In the paper titled *'Safe' political discourse: Linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic perspectives*, the authors use examples from international corpora of American and British English to demonstrate how politicians from both countries use set expressions, refer to 'milestone' events and try to make a positive impression, the Americans tending towards slightly more informal style than most of their British counterparts. The study concludes by noting the degree to which speeches depend on a traditional style of discourse while adding on new forms and peculiarities to suit the times.

In *Claiming and displaying national identity: A case study of Chinese exchange students in Russia*, Wei Ye and Ni'ao Deng examine the emerging perceptions of national identity within the context of Covid-19 among Chinese exchange students in Russia. The study answers two key questions of whether the experience of studying in Russia has changed Chinese students' national identity, and whether the Covid-19 pandemic has influenced their own perceptions about their country as it relates to China's success in combatting the virus. The discussion falls into four themes, which are sense of belonging, national pride, national superiority, and critical reflection, and concludes by stressing that international students' perception of national identity could offer valuable analysis and recommendations for the suitable design of interventions and future training programmes.

We live in challenging times, when we are not sure about the status of schools and universities reconvening as more cases of Covid-19 appear possibly leading to a second wave of the pandemic. Nikolaus Katsaounis is timely in his paper on *Language and the pandemic: The construction of semantic frames in Greek-German comparison*. In the paper, based on Greek and German native speakers in Greece, he analyses the differences and commonalities of structuring concepts in the face of the Coronavirus, using a frame-semantic approach.

Last but definitely not least, *Language and cognitive science: How language affects reasoning and memory* by Jean Langlois examines the influ-



ence of neuroscientific research and how it has clarified the relationship between language and culture, particularly in how we remember and how we express what we remember. Cognitive science has become an increasingly important part of linguistic and cultural research in recent years (see the review of Mai Nguyen-Phuong-Mai's *Cross-cultural management: With insights from brain science* in TLC Vol. 3 Issue 4), and Jean Langlois thoroughly analyses its influence through case studies, especially in what linguists and neuroscientists describe as the Verbal Overshadowing Effect.

Another exciting issue featuring new scholarship from Russia, Western Europe and the Middle East, complemented by recent book reviews and, as is customary, ICC, EUROLTA and RUDN University news.

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# Original Research

## Do Saudi academic women use more feminised speech to describe their professional titles? An evidence from corpus

by Reem Alkhamash and Haifa Al-Nofaie

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*The use of gendered occupational titles by women in higher-education settings has rarely been discussed either in the Saudi context or at the international level. This study investigates how Saudi women academics tend to represent themselves in their titles, in particular whether they use Arabic feminine or masculine markers. A corpus of 558,474 CVs was extracted from CVs published on Saudi women academics' websites at the two largest Saudi universities: King Saud University and King Abdulaziz University. The data gathered was analysed quantitatively. The frequencies of gender markers attached to positions' titles were analysed by adopting a corpus-based variationist linguistics. The findings reveal that the majority of Saudi women academics use more masculine markers in their academic titles than feminine gender markers. The study finds that both type of institution and the hierarchy of the academic discipline plays a significant role in the tendency to use masculine markers with the professional title, however, the academic discipline has no significant effect on the usage of masculine form. This study provides a cross-linguistic review of the use of gendered markers in other languages, such as French, German and Polish. It compares its findings with the findings of available international studies, a point that contributes to the significance of this study. It is hoped that this study will shed light on linguistic practices that should be reflective of policies that aim to empower Saudi women. This study contributes to a growing research of language and gender that focused on the linguistic representation of the titles of professional women and how grammar can be reflective of practices that are hindering women's empowerment in gender-specific languages.*

**KEYWORDS:** Arabic, self-representation, gender marking, occupational title, professional identity, higher education, sociopragmatics



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The use of generic masculine forms to refer to women is indicative of asymmetric usage of gender marking and is an example of masculine bias,

wherein women are perceived to hold a lower position than men in the social hierarchy (Cheshire, 2008). Damanhoury (2013) investigates the perception of Saudi women based on linguistic rep-

representations and whether this perception is reflective of their position in society. In particular, she investigates terms of address and references to women as well as the use of generic masculine forms to refer to professional women and other women in the Arabic language. The qualitative study uses interviews to understand the perception of females and finds the existence of linguistic sexism in Arabic to be the result of the marginalisation of women, which in turn is a product of social norms. Arabic poses a complex case in which masculine forms prevail in both everyday speech and formal correspondence (e.g. Damanhour, 2013), while more classical Arabic resources tend to distinguish between males and females. For example, many Quranic verses address males and females separately by their masculine (*Almuminoon*, meaning *male believers*) and feminine (*al muminaat*, meaning *female believers*) forms. On the other hand, we still find classical evidence of the use of the generic masculine plural form referring to both males and females. For instance, the masculine form *Almuminoon surah* (meaning *believers*) is directed at both males and females.

Hellinger and Bußmann's (2001, 2002, 2003) *Gender Across Languages* series offers linguistic analyses of masculine generics used in more than 30 languages from various language families. German is one such language, using masculine nouns to refer to mixed-gender groups; for example, the masculine plural *einige Lehrer* (*several teachers*) is used to refer to a group of male and female teachers. Hellinger and Bußmann (2001, 2003, 2003) find that feminine forms refer exclusively to females in German. Formanowicz and Sczesny (2016) argue that there are two strategies for reducing gender stereotyping in language use: neutralisation and feminisation. Neutralisation refers to the use of gender-unmarked forms to replace masculine forms, for example, the use of *police officer* instead of *policeman*. Feminisation refers to the use of a feminine form to increase the visibility of female referents, for example using *he* or *she* instead of *the applicant*.

Through traditional, discourse-oriented studies of discursive-constructed identities – be they indi-

vidual, collective, social, situational or personal – we have learned that the processes of identity formation are subsumed by many discursive practices such as indexicality, local occasioning, positioning, dialogism and categorisation (De Fina, 2011). As Bucholtz and Hall (2005) note, such processes aid researchers in unravelling 'how human dynamics unfold in discourse, along with rigorous analytic tools for discovering how such processes work' (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005, p. 607). Indexicality refers to the indexing of specific personas and groups, such as the use of stance markers and style features, in the analysis of some linguistic features (see Johnstone, 2009). Other linguistic means of self-representation include the use of entire linguistic systems to index certain identities (see Gal & Irvine, 1995; Schieffelin et al., 1998). In sum, the construction of identity in discourse is a common research strand which articulates the linguistic means which formulate discursive practices of identity formation.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 2.1. Construction of professional identity

Investigating professional identity has been the focus of many studies, namely, experimental, longitudinal studies as well as studies investigating the professional identity in gendered workplaces. In longitudinal studies, the focus has been on self-conception and the development of gendered professional identities (Cech, 2015). Cech (2015) finds that women engineers' conception of their profession is affected by the professional culture around them. In any professional culture, there are systems of meanings, rituals and symbols that are linked to traits of professional identity (Cech, 2015). The formation of professional identity is affected by individual differences, graduate training, cultural perspectives and ideology (McGowen & Hart, 1990). Some research has found that linguistic forms affect how children and adolescents perceive professions. For example, Vervecken et al. (2015) find that, in French, when professions are presented in the masculine form, men are viewed to be more successful in stereotypically masculine jobs and women are more successful in stereotyp-



ically feminine jobs. The results of their study, which used word pairs to learn more about the perception of stereotypical feminine and masculine professions, show more balance between the genders in ratings of competency; both genders are found to be competent. However, the study finds that children and adolescents perceive stereotypically masculine professions to be less warm than stereotypically feminine professions (Verweken et al., 2015). Feminisation of occupation has been correlated with occupation devaluation (Cacouault-Bitaud, 2001), and the use of masculine titles is correlated with prestige (Glick et al., 1995).

Similar to many male-dominated enterprises such as finance or law enforcement, academia is found to be perceived as a male-dominated workplace. Some studies have looked at the use of feminine forms in women's representation of their professions in higher education. For example, Lipovsky (2015) finds that French women have become more willing to use feminine job titles on their CVs and that the use of masculine job titles by females is determined by type of institution, occupational field and profession. In another context, Formanowicz and Sczesny (2016) find that Polish women psychologists prefer to use masculine professional titles because they may be devalued if they represent themselves as using feminine marker. This is common in languages where feminisation is novel (Formanowicz & Sczesny, 2016). In terms of hiring, Formanowicz et al. (2013) investigate how the evaluation of Polish women applicants is influenced by the grammatical form in which their profession is presented. Across three studies, female applicants using a job title in the grammatically feminine form on their CVs were evaluated less favourably than both male and female applicants using a grammatically masculine form.

According to previous research, academia is perceived as a male-dominated workplace in which success is associated with stereotypically male traits (Wynn & Correll, 2017). The feminisation of job titles in academia has not received sufficient attention, and research on this topic is scarce. One study conducted in Argentina by Per-

ona (2009) finds that the feminisation of job titles has become more tangible in higher education (HE). The improved gender equality reported in this study is attributable to the increased number of women working in HE. However, a thorough search reveals no studies on the feminisation of job titles in HE in Saudi Arabia. The purpose of this paper is to examine the feminisation of academic job titles in the Saudi Arabian context, where women have been receiving more support recently.

## 2.2. Saudi women in higher education

Since 2013, Saudi Arabia has undergone social and political changes, with the number of female leaders increasing. There are now 34 Saudi universities at which women comprise at least 40 percent of the academic staff (Darandari, 2018). The recent Saudi trend of placing women in academic leadership positions has given them greater authority and contributed to the shifting position of women in the workplace. Male and female academics are now given equal opportunities to pursue higher education. As a result of women's change in position, the use of masculine forms has changed. The topic of gendered job titles in HE is therefore timely, due to the rapid political and social changes in Saudi Arabia.

It is worth noting that women's dissatisfaction with the low number of women leaders in higher education has been a universal issue and is not linked to a particular country or culture (Burkinshaw & White, 2017). Haifa Jamal Al-Lail (2020) of ACE commented on Vision 2030: *'Vision 2030, a roadmap to the future created by King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, specifically calls for a vast improvement in the status of women, driven by a new focus on education, openness, and equality. No one is so naïve as to think that the status of women in Saudi Arabia will change overnight, but Vision 2030 is not a public relations campaign. It truly offers real hope and encouragement for Saudi women.'*

Since the government's announcement of its strategic goal of women's empowerment, many governmental institutions have increased in female-occupied leadership roles. In Saudi higher

education, new positions have been created and women have participated more in decision-making. Of the newly created titles, the Vice Presidency for Female Student Affairs is one of the most remarkable. To fill the position, the Ministry of Education asked Saudi universities for nominations. The Minister of Education then announced the appointment of 14 Vice Presidents for Female Student Affairs, and the new position was the highest position for women in Saudi Universities. The main responsibility of the Vice President for Female Student Affairs is to supervise administrative and academic work on female campuses and to coordinate with other Vice Presidents at each Saudi university. A recent study conducted by Al-subaie and Jones (2017) and based on data from the Saudi Ministry of Education found 61 female deans at Saudi universities, compared to 330 male deans; this indicates a high gender gap of 269. The status of each Saudi university in terms of female dean appointments is determined by its president's decision to empower female leadership. A female dean is the head of the deanship or college and is in direct contact with male and female staff and students. These developments in Saudi women's position in higher education raise questions as to how Saudi women academics (i.e. professors, associate professors, assistant professors, lecturers and teaching assistants) represent themselves. Therefore, the goal of the present study is to investigate this phenomenon as it concerns the use of job titles in CVs.

### 2.3. Sociopragmatics and pragmatic variability

The focus of sociolinguistics is the relation of variations in linguistics to social and cultural factors, such as age, class, gender and ethnicity. Sociolinguists have paid attention to the pragmatic features of language in interaction, a focus now known as sociopragmatics. The term 'sociopragmatics' was first adopted by Leech (1983) to illustrate how pragmatic meanings reflect '*specific local conditions on language use*' (Leech, 1983, p. 10). Leech (1983) provides the example of politeness as investigated across different cultures and language communities – a study of particular in-

*'Since the government's announcement of its strategic goal of women's empowerment, many governmental institutions have increased in female-occupied leadership roles. In Saudi higher education, new positions have been created and women have participated more in decision-making'*

terest due to the variability in the principles of politeness – and states that its sociopragmatic analysis should account for various social situations and social classes. He distinguishes general pragmatics from sociopragmatics, stating that the latter is concerned with '*how communication of pragmatic meaning involves speakers' presentation of their identities*' (Leech, 1983, p. 159). Linguistic strategies such as word choice, prosody, tone of voice, degree of grammatical complexity and interactional routines transmit the identities of speakers while they perform identity. In self-representations, people display their identity by constructing themselves through pragmatic choices (LoCastro, 2013), and they do so by self-representations of features such as social roles (e.g. project manager) or group memberships (e.g. female, academic or Muslim) (Spencer-Oatey, 2007).

The theoretical framework which underpins the field of sociopragmatics is interactional sociolinguistics (IS) (Bailey, 2008; Schiffrin, 1995). IS, developed by John Gumperz in his efforts to establish a general theory of language and society, generally focuses on the meanings of face-to-face interactions, taking into consideration the sociocultural knowledge of interlocutors (Bailey, 2008). Language use and identity form an important sociopragmatic topic of IS, and the focus of IS is not limited to interactional meanings obtained from audio- or video-recorded data, but also includes communicative written works which express the participants' identities. For example, Martiny (1996) investigates forms of address in French and Dutch from a sociopragmatic angle. The forms of

address studied include nicknames, generic proper names, occupational titles, honorific titles, kin titles, terms of endearment, offensive terms and common, generic nouns. Employing a model of sociopragmatic variability, in particular the statement that *'language varies according to speakers' age, class, education, religion, ideology, sex, etc.'* (Braun, 1988, p. 18), Martiny (1996) argues that variability in address forms is affected by social class and can show *'language-specific and subgroup-specific tendencies'* (Martiny, 1996, p. 774). Recent sociopragmatic research has investigated the relationship between gender and language. Research following the interactional strand investigates the use of sociopragmatic strategies in workplace interactions (Baxter, 2010; Holmes, 2006). Many such strategies are analysed in terms of perceived masculine norms associated with establishing powerful status, such as leading meetings, authorising decisions, issuing bald directives and disputing others' statements. Other sociopragmatic strategies are viewed as following perceived feminine norms, meaning that they lean towards acting politely, for example, expressing approval, hedging to express disagreement and providing positive feedback (see Holmes & King, 2017).

Palander-Collin and Nevala (2011) investigate the sociopragmatic aspect of references to people in texts. They state that the choice to refer to a person by their first name (e.g. Mary) or by their academic position title (e.g. Professor Smith) takes into consideration people's social roles and relations.

Lipovsky (2015) investigates whether legislative reforms in France (namely, antidiscrimination and equal-opportunity laws) have an effect on French women's selection of occupational titles. The focus of Lipovsky's (2015) study was to investigate the selection from a second-wave feminism perspective. In other words, since French nouns may be feminine or masculine, are professional women more inclined to use feminised occupational nouns to represent themselves? The study finds that, in the selection of occupational titles, French women present their professional identity by how they construct their gender. Representing their pro-

fessional identity with feminised nouns means that 'linguistic and social equality for women in the workplace' has been achieved in France (Lipovsky, 2015, p. 97).

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

This paper investigates whether Saudi women academics tend to use language to represent their professional titles using gender-fair language by using the feminine morpheme or gendered language by using the masculine morpheme in their choice of professional title. The paper specifically analyses the gender-marking selection of Saudi women academics in light of recent developments in Saudi policy empowering women in the workplace. Considering recent research in language and gender indicating that the prevalent use of feminine nouns in gendered languages is indicative of a changing society (Formato, 2019), this study explores whether the changes in Saudi society have any bearing on the language use of Saudi academic women. The extent to which demographic factors (i.e. Saudi women academics) may explain the practice of gender marking in Saudi women's academic discourse will be investigated. A corpus of 558,474 CVs was extracted from CVs published on the websites of Saudi women academics at the two largest Saudi universities. The frequency of gender markers attached to academic titles in these CVs was analysed.

A corpus of CVs of Saudi women academics was compiled. CVs were chosen for the study because they contain self-representation in the form of the professional identities of their authors (De Fina et al., 2006; Dyer & Keller-Cohen, 2000). This study's analysis of CVs is meant to test whether Saudi women academics prefer to use masculine or feminine gender markers attached to their academic professional titles. As previous studies have found that quantitative analyses may reveal variation of use, the present study considers whether the variation is statistically significant and whether certain demographic variables may affect certain preferences of gender markers. As the study adopts a corpus linguistic approach, it follows Baker's (2010) holding that, in studying linguistic varia-



tion, language users may be categorised by demographic. These categories serve as explanatory variables in sociolinguistic studies. Baker (2010) provides examples of demographic variables used to explain results in sociolinguistic studies, including gender, age, social class, occupation, geographical location and sexual orientation.

It is standard practice at Saudi universities for teaching faculties to publish their CVs on the uni-

versity's website for the purposes of networking. In order to analyse CVs systematically, a corpus was established as follows: (1) Saudi universities were stratified by region, and the largest universities with CVs available online were chosen; (2) relevant data were collected from the university websites, and two corpora were created and stored offline for accessibility; (3) CVs were categorised by pertaining colleges.

Table 1  
*Corpus size*

NAME OF UNIVERSITY	NO. OF COLLEGES	CORPUS SIZE
King Abdulaziz University	14	307,905
King Saud University	13	250,569

Table 1 represents the corpora of CVs of Saudi women academics from the two largest Saudi universities. Outdated CVs are a possible weak point in the data. Also, some CVs lacked the previous experience of women academics and listed only their names and a brief description of their current positions. The study took an inclusive approach and included any information which increased the chances of finding linguistic variation in the use of titles. Some faculty members were more prone to have an updated English CV and a short Arabic CV; these include those working in the departments of medicine, pharmacology and medical science. The CVs for this study were collected from 14 colleges from King Abdulaziz University and 13 colleges from King Saud University.

With a sociopragmatic approach to analysing variation of the use of gender markers in academic position titles, this study's design applies corpus-based variationist linguistics methodology (CVL) (see Baker, 2010; Szmrecsanyi, 2017). The variables identified for this study are: academic fields, rank of academic position and type of university.

The first variable of the study reported in this paper is academic fields. Work opportunities in STEM fields are most likely to be in a mixed-gender work environment. There is a high male-to-

female ratio in these fields' teaching staff. For humanities, education and social science fields, there are more female teaching staff than male teaching staff, and work opportunities are most likely to be in segregated work environments (see El Nagdi & Roehrig, 2019).

The second variable is rank of academic position. Policy reform which advocates for increasing work opportunities for Saudi women involves blue-collar jobs (Alkhamash, 2016). These jobs were occupied by females, and no evidence is found for the use of masculine form in these job titles. Although the lowest ranks of such occupations are now feminised, academic occupational titles have never been linguistically investigated.

The third variable is type of university. The included universities, King Saud University and King Abdulaziz University, share the same status in Saudi higher education. Both are well-established and top-ranked and are the oldest universities in Saudi Arabia. Many studies have compared both universities due to the similarities between them (see e.g. Shaker & Babgi, 2009). The research question for this study is: what gender-marking practices do Saudi women academics use in the selection of their titles at the two largest Saudi universities?

In the construction of its hypotheses, this study was informed by Lipovsky's (2015) research, which finds that type of institution, field of work and profession determine gender-marking practices that professional women use to represent themselves in their CVs. This study has one hypothesis for each variable.

Hypothesis 1 concerns the field of work variable: women academics who work in the fields of engineering, computer science, science, medical science and health science use different gender-marking practices than those who work in the fields of the humanities, education and social sciences.

Hypothesis 2 concerns the variable of rank of academic position: women academics who are assistant professors, associate professors and full professors use different gender-marking practices than those occupying the assistant teacher and lecturer positions.

Hypothesis 3 concerns the type of university variable: women academics who work at King Abdulaziz University use different gender-marking practices than those who work at King Saud University.

The semiotic factor is about significant variation of linguistic expressions in accordance with the paradigms, objectives, concurrence, and incongruity of perceptions about linguistic options used to designate objects and phenomena, awareness and adjustment of choices by communicating entities.

The first step to the system of data analysis was determining the frequency of feminine and masculine titles (that refer to women) in the corpora of this study. Sketch Engine analysis software was used to upload each college corpus in the two universities. Each professional title was then searched, and concordance lines were checked manually to validate the feminine or masculine use. Frequencies of feminine and masculine forms were reported. In determining the frequency of occurrence of feminine and masculine professional titles, tokens were counted manually and then double-checked via a computer search. Cross-tabulations and a chi-squared test were employed to identify the statistical differences (if any) in the use of feminine

*'This study reveals that the masculine form used for academic positions is dominant. Associate Professor is not used in the feminine form; no evident feminised variation is witnessed in the corpus for Associate Professor. There are rare cases of feminising the title Full Professor and even rarer cases of feminising Assistant Professor. Only the titles Assistant Teacher and Lecturer have been used variably in the corpus'*

and masculine self-representation. The results were explained in terms of how linguistic practices are reflective of social practices.

#### 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

This study reveals that the masculine form used for academic positions is dominant. *Associate Professor* is not used in the feminine form; no evident feminised variation is witnessed in the corpus for *Associate Professor*. There are rare cases of feminising the title *Full Professor* and even rarer cases of feminising *Assistant Professor*. Only the titles *Assistant Teacher* and *Lecturer* have been used variably in the corpus. However, it is clear that masculine marking dominates feminine marking in academic titles across all disciplines. The main results are summarised in Tables 2, 3 and 4.

Table 2 shows the results pertaining to the professional field variable. Clearly, there are no significant differences in the use of gender marking for academic titles between types of academic field. This means that Saudi women academics' preference for particular, gendered academic titles (masculine or feminine) is not determined by their disciplines. This refutes Hypothesis 1 stating that Saudi women academics in the fields of engineering, computer science, science, medical science and health science use different gender-marking practices in professional titles compared to those who work in the humanities, education and social sciences.

**Table 2**  
*Observed frequencies in the use of gender marking in academic positions by type of scientific field*

TYPES OF SCIENTIFIC FIELDS	MASCULINE MARKING	FEMININGE MARKING	ROW TOTAL
Engineering, computer science, science and medical and health sciences	2,067	390	2,457
Humanities, education and social sciences	1,950	791	2,351
COLOUMN TOTAL	4,017	1,181	4,804

Note: The chi-square statistic is 1.2244. The p-value is .2685. The result is not significant at  $p < .05$

The results concerning the variable of academic rank are shown in Table 3. The level of academic rank is found to significantly influence the use of gender marking ( $p$ -value  $< .00001$ ). This confirms Hypothesis 2, which states that Saudi women academics who occupy top academic levels such as Assistant Professor, Associate Professor and Full Professor positions used different gender-marking practices than those who occupy lower positions

such as Assistant Teacher and Lecturer. The feminine marker for the titles of Professor, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor is used only 8 times across the corpora, while the masculine marker is used 1,822 times. Although the feminine marker is used more frequently with lower academic positions (Assistant Teacher and Lecturer, 783 instances), masculine position titles remain dominant for these positions (2,206 instances).

**Table 3**  
*Observed frequencies in the use of gender marking in academic positions by academic ranks*

ACADEMIC RANK	MASCULINE MARKING	FEMININGE MARKING	ROW TOTAL
Top level: assistant professor, associate professor and full professor	1,822	8	1,830
Lower level: assistant teacher and lecturer	2,206	783	2,989
COLOUMN TOTAL	4,028	791	4,819

Note: The chi-square statistic is 548.9369. The p-value is  $< .00001$ . The result is significant at  $p < .05$

**Table 4**  
*Observed frequencies in the use of gender marking in academic positions by type of university*

TYPE OF UNIVERSITY	MASCULINE MARKING	FEMININGE MARKING	ROW TOTAL
King Abdulaziz University	3,017	409	3,426
King Saud University	1,016	380	1,396
COLOUMN TOTAL	4,033	789	4,822

Note: The chi-square statistic is 169.2716. The p-value is  $< .00001$ . The result is significant at  $p < .05$

As seen in Table 4, there is significant variation in using feminine markers between the two universities investigated ( $p$ -value < .00001). Clearly, masculine marker use is statistically different between women academics at King Abdulaziz University and King Saud University. This supports Hypothesis 3, which states that Saudi women academics who work at King Abdulaziz University use different gender-marking practices compared to those who work at King Saud University.

## 5. DISCUSSION

Since the increasingly-prevalent use of feminine nouns in gendered languages is indicative of a changing society (Formato, 2019), this study investigates whether the changing Saudi society – particularly, the attention paid to women’s status in the country – has influenced the language use of Saudi women in academia regarding CVs. The quantitative analysis of gender representation in professional identity is useful in describing trends in Arabic language usage. Furthermore, such quantitative analysis determines which factors may have contributed significantly to variation of usage. This method of analysis is not without limitations. For one, the analysis in this study did not consider the views of Saudi women academics and their justification for the predominant use of masculine language. Interviewing a sample of Saudi women academics could contribute to an understanding of their awareness of their language choices and their attitudes towards the feminisation of job titles in general.

The results of this study reveal that the majority of Saudi women academics tend to use masculine markers in their job titles. The overall trend in usage relies heavily on masculine markers in academic titles in these women’s CVs, with some fluctuation of usage in the lower ranks, where the feminisation of titles is more common. The study finds that academic women who are in the lower rank in the academic career use feminised professional titles, while academic women who are in higher rank in their academic career use masculine forms in their professional titles. These findings seem to be in accordance with Lipovsky’s (2015) study,

which claims that type of position affects women’s choice of masculine or feminine titles on their CVs. Lipovsky’s (2015) analysis finds that French women associate the use of masculine markers in job titles with prestigious occupations, and explains that women tend to prefer the masculine form as a way to valorise their occupation. Similarly, Saudi academics who hold higher academic degrees prefer to use masculine titles rather than feminine ones. This could be due to a perception of prestige associated with the masculine titles as found in other research (e.g. Glick et al., 1995). The findings may indicate a hierarchy of perceived prestige which leads to the prevalence of masculine forms in higher academic positions. Also, contrary to the belief that the feminisation of job titles cultivates agency for professional women in highly regarded professions, this finding may suggest that Saudi academic women might not be aware of the effect of feminising their titles when it comes to representing their professional identity. It might also mean that there is a prestigious association of top-level academic positions with masculinised titles, a belief that might be held by Saudi women academics.

In testing the second hypothesis, regarding the relation between type of gender marking and academic field, the results show that Saudi women academics in scientific fields do not use gender markers differently than those in the humanities, education or social science. This finding is in contrast with studies suggesting that women in STEM fields are more aware of gender bias in the workplace (El Nagdi & Roehrig, 2019).

This study found a significant relationship between type of institution and the use of gendered job titles. King Saud University, one of the oldest universities in the country, was established in 1957, and King Abdulaziz University was established later in 1967. The two universities are in different locations, which does seem to influence their female employees’ use of gendered titles. It could be that the two universities bear many similarities, as they are located in the largest cities of Saudi Arabia and have the largest number of Saudi academics. This finding is also in line



with Lipovsky's (2015) conclusion suggesting that institution type actually determines the use of gendered job titles.

All Saudi universities work under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education, which moves steadily towards achieving the country's Vision 2030 and drawing attention to the empowerment of women. As such, Saudi universities are expected to work in tune with this vision. Recent examples of the empowerment of female academics at some universities include hiring female academics in leadership positions. Although masculine gender markers are dominant in the analysed CVs, feminisation of some job titles is also apparent. The type of institution and the level of academic position appear to be a factor affecting the feminisation of job titles. Future studies may compare the number of feminised job titles at Saudi universities over the years and thus measure institutional changes in terms of the linguistic variations in professional titles.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study investigated the linguistic representation of professional titles of Saudi women academics in relation to three factors: type of profession, type of academic field and type of institution. Similar to other existing studies on gendered titles, this

research sought to study a male-dominated context; no such studies have considered the repercussions of continuing to use masculine gender marking in occupational titles associated with women. At the international level, feminisation of job titles in higher education has been discussed in a few contexts (Formanowicz & Sczesny, 2016; Lipovsky, 2015); however, this issue has not been widely examined.

Further research on this topic will lead to a better understanding of the impact of women's empowerment on their linguistic representation through their academic and professional titles. Linguistic representations of women in professional settings have rarely been discussed in the context of Saudi higher education or at the international level.

The study finds that masculine gender marking dominates the women academics' CVs. The majority of Saudi women academics use masculine markers to represent their academic positions. It was found that type of institution and the level of academic position have a significant effect on the women academics' choice of gender markers. The findings suggest that we have yet to wait for a linguistic change in the form of using feminised professional titles which reflects national policies aimed at empowering Saudi women.

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# Original Research

## Soubriquet nomination as referred to cultural awareness and intercultural competence

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*The article deals with the analysis of the English soubriquet nomination in terms of its linguo-cultural potential realisation in reference to cultural awareness and intercultural competence development in language education process. Soubriquets can be used to pass cultural information and knowledge represented in language and speech. On the basis of complex methodology that integrates linguistic and linguo-cultural approaches to soubriquets within the English-speaking communities, nicknames are considered as part of cultural historical continuum, including their variation properties. The analysis of media materials serves to penetrate into the sphere of linguo-cultural peculiarities of soubriquet nominations used in political discourse to persuade and manipulate target audience by means of memes encoded by the linguistic units in question, presented in discourse to pass evaluative and cultural information within new discursive formats, reflecting current trends in the communicative processes. The use of soubriquets in literary works implies the reader's cultural awareness that facilitates recognition and understanding of cultural contexts, which becomes important for intercultural competence development as it reflects typical characteristics of a given culture realised in language manifestations.*

**KEYWORDS:** *soubriquet, cultural awareness, intercultural communication, background knowledge*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of teaching languages as the process of intellectual and professional competencies development in its complexity is closely connected with the development of cultural awareness and intercultural competence issues. The use of the creative potential of language to express cultural notions is determined by the correlation of

linguistic and cultural knowledge, important for cultural awareness and intercultural competence theoretical bias and practical application as basic constituents of the communicative process.

In this study the notion of cultural awareness is considered in a broad sense, not only in reference to linguistic and behavioural etiquette norms of certain communities, but also in terms of cultural



knowledge possession, used to implement successful communication in various fields. The notion of intercultural competence concerns the integrity of cognitive, communicative and cultural skills in reference to the ability of human beings to take part in the interactions that are supposed to meet the social and pragmatic expectations of the representatives of communicating cultures.

Thus, while taking into consideration the linguistic phenomena that belong to various domains of language functioning, we proceed from the premise that each of them corresponds to certain cultural peculiarities, recognised in the process of communication. Soubriquets (or nicknames) are a result of soubriquet nomination that lies in the field of secondary nomination. Soubriquets occur when a certain linguistic unit is used as the name for a new object or phenomenon in accordance with some similar properties of signified objects and phenomena, that can be realised both at the level of form and at the level of meaning. Soubriquet nomination is based on the use of imagery to express evaluation induced by attitudes towards the object of nomination and involves further expansion of linguistic meanings through their transformations to create new secondary names (nicknames), some of them based on semantic and structural modifications.

Linguistic meanings of nicknames may contain cultural nuances, connected with stereotypes and metaphorical representation specifics, typical of linguo-cultural communities, which is particularly important for cultural awareness development and successful communication skills acquisition.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The study relied on research by well-known linguists, culturologists, methodologists and scholars, specialists in intercultural communication. Analysis of soubriquet nomination, within the scope of proper names, is distinguished as the particular area in terms of linguo-cultural studies (Delahunty, 2003; Morgan et al., 1979). Units of secondary nomination are closely connected with linguistic, cultural and conceptual world view presentations, both explicitly and implicitly, thus being subject to

*'Soubriquet nomination is based on the use of imagery to express evaluation induced by attitudes towards the object of nomination and involves further expansion of linguistic meanings through their transformations to create new secondary names'*

the analysis with special reference to cultural meanings transferability and translation (Bracaj, 2015; Constantin, 2013; Holden & Von Korfleisch, 2004). Much attention is paid to associative connections between English-speaking cultures and the corresponding aspects of home cultures referring to the dynamics of correlation between linguistic and cultural issues (Alexandrova, 2015; Crowther & De Costa, 2017; Ter-Minasova, 2017).

Ter-Minasova (2017) states that intercultural communication presents itself as both the scientific field and academic discipline, concerned with the process of world view formation and establishing contacts within the frames of mutual understanding between people. The importance of promoting cultural awareness through language learning and understanding cultures is discussed in a number of scientific disquisitions (Constantin et al., 2015; Davitishvili, 2017; Ficzer, 2014; Gulbinskiene & Lasauskiene, 2014; Liton & Qaid, 2016). Some of the manuals are aimed at teaching students to appreciate the impact of cultural patterns on intercultural communication and the ability to communicate in various fields of human activity (Lustig & Koester, 2020; Skrinda, 2020). Malyuga and Tomalin (2017) discuss communicative strategies and tactics of speech, paying particular attention to functional pragmatic speech peculiarities in English varieties within intercultural business discourse. Topical issues that concern teaching and learning intercultural communication as well as intercultural awareness in multicultural communities are taken into consideration from both theoretical (Deardorff, 2009; Palmer, 2018; Susilo et al., 2019; Winkelman, 2018; Yang, 2017) and practical points of view (Holling & Govan,

2015; Mayfield, 2020). In this respect, the boundary between linguistic and cultural knowledge is considered to be hardly discernible and presents an important problem of cognitive nature (Keesing, 1979, p. 14-15), as the ability of discourse production and understanding is based on the linguistic skills as well as knowledge of the world (Van Dijk, 2014).

Despite a lot of literature on the subject, not so much attention has been paid to the linguo-cultural approach to the phenomenon of soubriquet nomination in terms of linguistic and cultural knowledge acquisition aimed at cultural awareness and language proficiency, as well as intercultural competence development.

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

#### 3.1. Research material

The study material was retrieved from the English language sources, both lexicographic and reference, as well as the mass media discourse, in order to analyse culturally significant phenomena and corresponding linguistic means, important for students' background knowledge acquisition with reference to the global cultural continuum.

Most of the examples from the scope of the media deal with public figures' outstanding qualities evaluation and description by means of nicknames. Some of them are devoted to election campaigns and social events, represented in the traditional and newly emerging communication formats of passing information using the Internet, such as quizzes and questionnaires, as well as asynchronous, postponed online interactions (Jurida et al., 2016), such as discussion forums and surveys. English varieties referring to ethnicity, social and territorial divisions, along with their use as the means of international communication are subject to discussion in the course of the study.

The most complicated area of the analysis are soubriquets in fiction, embodying fancied words concerned with imagery and stylistic effect production via literal and metaphorical, sometimes camouflaged (Baranova, 2019) manifestations, relying on cultural and cognitive context. The material is taken from *The Go-Away Bird* and *The Por-*

*tobello Road* by Muriel Spark (Spark, 1984) that may be used as the source of linguo-cultural information for learners of English to extend their knowledge and world-view at the global and culture-specific levels. This also concerns possession of background knowledge, intellectual development of a personality and understanding of the peculiarities of linguistic consciousness. These works represent not only vivid examples of soubriquet coinage, but also lie in the mainstream of the intertextual tradition in the use of nicknames, created in accordance with various models and certain contextual functions.

#### 3.2. Methods and techniques

In the course of the investigation, characterised by its integrative nature, the complex of methods have been used, according to the main purpose, which deals with cultural awareness and intercultural competence development in the language learning process, with a special focus on English soubriquet nominations as a reliable research source.

Thus, the following methods and techniques have been used: (1) lexicographic analysis that concerns with definitions borrowed from dictionaries; (2) semantic structural analysis that deals with the formation of linguistic meanings; (3) semantic functional analysis, which deals with the semantic manifestations of linguistic units in their dynamics; (4) linguo-stylistic and (5) functional-stylistic analyses, which help investigate the stylistic potential of linguistic units in language and actual speech; (6) contextual analysis, referring to context varieties that reveal the semantic and environmental specificity of language; (7) discourse analysis, which takes the linguistic, extralinguistic and linguistic-cognitive peculiarities of the units in question into consideration; (8) linguistic semiotic and (9) general semiotic analyses, both referring to the semiotic status of soubriquets in language, speech and extralinguistic reality; and (10) linguo-cultural analysis, which deals with culturally significant information and knowledge of a specific and global character, relevant to cultural awareness and intercultural competence development issues.

*'Anthroponymic nicknames reflect national-cultural mentality by means of associative and figurative linguistic meanings due to individual or collective cultural preferences and the basic values of the society'*

#### 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

##### 4.1. Soubriquet nomination as part of the cultural historical continuum

Because of its evaluative characteristics, a nickname can be regarded as an important axiological element of discourse and an indicator of attitudes of society to an individual, created on the basis of outstanding features of the object of nomination. Evaluative properties of anthroponymic nicknames may be realised both at the explicit and implicit levels of expression. Evaluation can be regarded as the most important functional, semantic and pragmatic quality of the units in question. Anthroponymic nicknames reflect national-cultural mentality by means of associative and figurative linguistic meanings due to individual or collective cultural preferences and the basic values of the society. In terms of the linguo-cultural approach, a nickname is a repository of cultural and linguistic information passed on to subsequent generations. While taking into consideration the social characteristics of a secondary name, which, in contrast with the official name and surname, is peripheral in its status, it should be mentioned that motivational factors are of vital importance, as the first stage of nickname emergence within a social-cultural environment is primarily subjective. In this regard, a special role is played by ethnic and territorial nicknames that serve to express interpersonal and intergroup relations, created in accordance with common associations, such as colour of skin (*darky, black, red-skin*), attributes of material culture (*blue-bonnet, kiltie, blanket-Indian*), associations related to food traditions (*potato-eater, frog-eater, hans-wurst*), thus encoding socially significant and sometimes subjectively evaluative information in coordination with the scale of cultural values.

Most collective soubriquets function as stylistically neutral units, which in the course of time have lost their expressive colouring and are now used to indicate the object as belonging to a certain layer or group of society. Many of them are common nouns and may indicate any member of a given linguo-cultural community, serving as manifestations of a stereotypical approach to soubriquets.

Apart from the problem of evaluation, soubriquet nominations present a special interest from the cultural point of view due to their historical and linguistic development. Many of them are used as proper names to refer to real or fictional people, e.g. John Bull, Uncle Sam, Johnny Canuck, etc. Problems may arise in connection with their meaning, origin and functioning. For example, the etymology of the word *canuck* has not been clarified so far and, according to some sources, is associated with the Latin word *canis* ('a dog'), which goes back to the early modes of travelling in the northern parts of the country. In lexicographical sources the word *canuck* is defined as an informal soubriquet, as in 'a Canadian, especially one whose first language is French' (West, 2006, p. 194), and is also referred to the notion of French Canadian, sometimes used as a disparaging term (Hornby, 1974, p. 124). Johnny Canuck is a collective nickname possessing various evaluative connotations. In the 1970s in the United States it was associated with people from Quebec and had an extremely offensive, pejorative colouring that signified low social status. As for positive evaluative connotations, it is accepted by the Canadians, who consider it to be related to the Canadian cultural uniqueness. Cultural information associated with this particular soubriquet is usually linked to a comic book image of Johnny Canuck that appeared in Canada in 1869 that later made the character be perceived as a World War II hero. For thirty years, up to the early 20th century, Johnny Canuck has been the main character of editorial cartoons, and is still accepted as a personified image of Canada, used in various spheres of representation. For example, The Vancouver Canucks, a professional ice hockey team in the NHL, used Johnny Canuck as their logo until 1970. This sort

of cultural linguistic material tends to be regarded as an important piece of information for the learners' cultural awareness development and should be considered a precious part of background knowledge for establishing intercultural contacts, in the case of situations where appropriate communication tactics and strategies are applied.

Many collective nicknames are used as nominations of residents of certain areas, territories or states, and although their linguistic representations bear various inherent connotations, their stylistic colouring may not be evidently manifested in everyday speech, as in *cockroach* referring to a resident of New South Wales, *crow eater* referring to South Australian residents, or *coat hanger* used to refer to the citizens of Sydney (Allan, 2013). Some of the nicknames are associated with geographical position, historical events, situations significant for a given society, real or fictitious, characterising the specificity of culture and uniqueness of linguistic consciousness.

Extensive use of contractions within the scope of soubriquet nomination can be regarded as one of the current trends typical of the English-speaking community. Abbreviation is designed to use the most effective and heuristically justified linguistic means to convey the message in the most semantically capacious, optimised way, which can be analysed in terms of neology. A New Zealand anthroponymicon incorporates abbreviations like *ocker* or *Aussie* (Australian), *Sa* (a native of Samoa), *dally* (a native of Yugoslavia), *bro* (brother), *cuz* or *cuzzy* (cousin as referred to Maori), *JAFa* (Just Another Friendly Aucklander).

The tradition, typical of English-speaking communities, of using nicknames in everyday speech goes back to ancient times when soubriquets began to emerge as the result of the reality-specific cognitive division, due to the peculiarities of linguistic consciousness, among which are reliance on individual experience and individualised perception of the world associated with concealment of subjective evaluative representations, emotions and categorical attitudes along with uniqueness and certainty of assessment, as well as manifesta-

tions of humorous, ironic or sarcastic overtones, accompanied by the propensity for allegorical comprehension of the reality, to a certain extent determined by old folk and religious customs to use names that disguise and encrypt the entities behind them.

Among the nicknames of an individual nature, political nicknames and nicknames of public figures deserve particular attention. For example, nicknames of American political leaders are widely spread and reflect the most prominent characteristics of outstanding people having to do with their origin, occupation, race, nationality, education, modes of behaviour and political activities, as in *Handsome Frank* (Franklin Pierce), *Boatman Jim* (James A. Garfield), *Peanut Farmer* (Jimmy Carter), *Bush Original* (George H. W. Bush), *Wild Bill* (Bill Clinton), *Puppet Jones* (Doug Jones), *Evan McMuffin* (Evan McMullin) (List of nicknames of United States Presidents, 2020; List of nicknames used by Donald Trump, 2020). The cultural historical aspect of the material presented deserves particular attention from the point of view of its linguistic and cultural peculiarities as in order to understand most of them the possession of certain background knowledge is needed, which may serve as an incentive to penetrate into the cultural historical and social context of the community in question. For example, *Wild Bill*, used by Donald Trump while mentioning Bill Clinton, alludes to the 19th century American Old West personage, famous for his notoriety, involvement in gunfights and fabricated tales he told about himself, James Butler Hickok, known as 'Wild Bill' Hickok, which in a sense may be associated with certain aspects of Clinton's personality.

Nicknames based on metaphorical structures, including those, which by analogy contain names of other politicians or public figures, are widely used to express attitudes towards a personality or concept (including sports teams names, music bands, pseudonyms) by producing memes and singling them out semiotically (Aslan, 2018; Vishnyakova & Alexandrova, 2015) within the frames of evaluative (negative or positive) representations in politics (Akbar & Abbas, 2019; Van



Dijk, 2017). In the political media discourse, concerned with election campaigns and corresponding events, one may come across examples like *Heartless Hillary*, *Crooked Hillary* (Engel, 2016), *Barack O'Change Obama*, *Obama bin Laden*, or *Barack Saddam Hussein Osama* (Obama nicknames, 2010) and many others. Donald Trump, in order to debunk Hillary Clinton's public image, called her *America's Angela Merkel*, whose name was associated with migration policy in Germany and unacceptable in some social and economic circles (Schultheis, 2016).

With regard to current trends in information representation in the Internet, quizzes, questionnaires, surveys, forums, microblogging and social networking services like Twitter, as well as special websites, concerned with identifying and collecting nicknames are used for the purpose of promoting certain attitudes and creating stable evaluative stereotypes. This phenomenon deals with direct and indirect reference manifestations in the communicative space, which in the English-speaking linguo-cultural community goes back to various long-standing traditions and techniques, including provoking a rival before the fight. In this respect, the analysis of socio-cultural manifestations at the level of mass culture, with special reference to the Internet abilities mentioned (Shifman, 2013, p. 365) contributes to widening cultural knowledge on the basis of information arrays processing (Surbhi, 2016).

A vivid example of both meliorative and pejorative evaluative representations by means of soubriquets can be adduced as referring to Condoleezza Rice, fondly nicknamed *Black Flower in the White House* (Ryan, 2011), and scornfully characterised as *Brown Sugar*, which is associated with the slang meaning of the collocation (Vishnyakova et al., 2019, p. 71): *'Bush's nicknaming proclivity is noted enough to have attracted a variety of satire, including a New York Times humour piece and a Doonesbury strip where 'Condi' is admonished with the phrase 'Careful, Brown Sugar'* (Trudeau, 2004).

Thus, political media discourse can be regarded as a fertile field for nicknames investigation. Political

soubriquets used as manipulative instruments by politicians, in the course of time, due to frequency of occurrence, became part of national lexicon and are used as prototypical bases for new nicknames bearing new meanings and connotations of their own. In terms of cultural awareness and intercultural competence, the phenomenon in question is closely connected not only with background knowledge and understanding cultural traditions, but also with culturally and politically correct social and linguistic behaviour in certain contexts and situations.

#### 4.2. Soubriquet nomination in fiction

The use of anthroponymic nicknames realised in literary art is by no means related to motivational issues that concern both linguistic and cultural cognition properties, closely connected with their contextual and discursive characteristics. In this regard, an important role belongs to the symbolic function of soubriquets, which may correspond to the process of soubriquet nomination based on the parameter of similarity, at the same time playing the role of a key stimulus for the narration development on the symbolic basis. For instance, in Muriel Spark's *The Go-Away Bird* one may come across the intertextual phenomenon that alludes to the corpus of family nicknames, used in Kenneth Graham's *The Wind in the Willows*. Some of her characters were nicknamed after those in *The Wind in the Willows* (e.g. *Rat*, *Mole*, *Toad*), others named from as yet unaccountable sources (e.g. her uncle *Pooh-bah*, and *the Dong*). The Du Toits could not quite follow the drift of Daphne's letters from England when she read them aloud, herself carried away the poetry of the thing: *'Rat,' she would explain, 'is Henry Middleton, Molly's husband. He's in the navy'; 'Next week-end, while Linda was away, several Pattersons relations arrived. Molly, Rat, Mole, and an infant called Pod. Mole was an unattached male cousin. Daphne expressed a desire to see Cambridge. He said it would be arranged. He said she would probably be in London soon. He said he hoped to see her there. Aunt Sara stuck a pin in the baby's arm, whereupon Molly and Rat took Daphne aside and*

*'Soubriquet nominations present a special interest from the cultural point of view due to their historical and linguistic development'*

*advised her to clear out of the house as soon as possible'; 'She decided to take a job in the autumn, and to cut out the fortnight's motoring tour of the north with Molly, Rat, and Mole which she had arranged to share with them'.*

Another group of family nicknames in Muriel Spark's story is based on onomatopoeia as referred to one of the character's (*Pooh-bah*) disease symptoms: *'She herself adored Pooh-bah with his rheumatism and long woolen combies'; 'Daphne went for walks with Uncle Pooh-bah. She had to take short steps, for he was slow'; 'Linda and Daphne had to sit by a one-bar electric fire in the library if they wanted to smoke; Pooh-bah's asthma was affected by cigarette smoke'*. Thus, the use of these units in the function of nicknames is aimed at attaining certain artistic goals due to the need for a vivid, realistic, as well as ironic description of the environment in question, which alludes to the traditional social routine, verbally represented even at the level of nicknames borrowed from the literature of the past, and opposed to the metaphorical meaning of *The Go-Away Bird's* key concept of the story. The narration concerns with the description of social-historical events referring to some members of the English-speaking communities, travelling from one part of the world to another, acquiring new knowledge of the world and some features of multicultural mentality.

The phraseological fund of language serves as an important culturally determined source of soubriquets. For example, in the story *The Portobello Road*, the well-known concept of 'a needle in a hay stack' is used as the central issue of the plot, where its main character, who found a needle in a haystack and pricked her finger, and later was killed in a haystack, received a situational nickname *Needle*, that becomes the key component of the story and its major symbol. In the course of

narration, it acquires new shades of meaning, undergoes semantic transformations and conceptually carries association with a whole range of new meaningful features within the context, represented by such units as 'blood', 'pain', 'secret', 'murder', 'love', etc., being semantically and functionally located around 'a needle in a hay stack' concept and the soubriquet *Needle*, which stands for the real name of the girl. The system of proper names in the story also includes names and nicknames, all of them symbolic and playing important roles from the literary creative point of view.

Interestingly, some of the characters are represented by their real names, with complicated associative relations between the original meanings of the units in question and the characters' nature and behavioural peculiarities, while other characters go by their nicknames, contextually and semantically concerned with their personal features with regard to the meaning of phraseological units performing as key concepts within the literary space of the story. For example, *Skinny* (John Skinner) gets involved in the situations conceptually correlated with the phrase 'to pierce one's skin with a needle' content structure as referred to his relations with *Needle*: *'I got engaged to Skinny, but shortly after that I was left a small legacy, enough to keep me for six months. This somehow decided that I didn't love Skinny so I gave him back the ring'; 'But it was through Skinny that I went to Africa.... Skinny vouched for me, he paid my fare, and he sympathised by his action with my inconsequential life although when he spoke of it he disapproved'; 'After the war Skinny returned to his studies. He had two more exams, over a period of eighteen months, and I thought I might marry him when the exams were over'; 'I visited Skinny twice in the two years that he was in the sanatorium. I told Kathleen after my last visit. Maybe I'll marry Skinny when he's well again'*. Within the artistic space of the story, soubriquets, as opposed to usual names, are regarded as direct and truthful reflection of the characters' nature, indicating the 'anthroponymic boundary' between the nicknames realness and the names falseness, which reflects one of the outstanding characteristics of

Muriel Spark's artistic method and creative vision that later found representation in various, even unpredictable, spheres of social communication (Lopez, 2020).

Thus, the profound background knowledge in reference to proper names etymology and functioning provides deep understanding of the explicit and implicit meanings of a literary work, which supplies important cultural and philological information to the reader for the sake of their literary and cultural intelligence.

## 5. CONCLUSION

The problem of linguistic knowledge and knowledge of the world correlation as applied to intercultural competence and cultural awareness development deals with the analysis of linguistic meanings and structures, as well as corresponding contexts that express more or less vividly represented cultural phenomena and processes. Soubriquet nominations can be regarded within these terms as the linguistic cultural material that suits the didactic purpose under consideration as the linguistic, cultural and conceptual world view properties in their integrity are manifested by their meanings, both semantic and evaluative.

Research in the field of soubriquet nominations as part of a cultural historical continuum shows that much attention can be given to dynamics of the historical and social development of linguo-cultural communities, including linguistic and cultural variation properties, as referred, for example, to the English language, in which a number of its varieties characterised by their cultural reality interpretations are presented. For the process of cultural awareness and intercultural competence, along with language proficiency development, the status of English as the means of international communication should be taken into consideration as well. In this regard, possession of cultural background knowledge in terms of the functioning of various layers of language is particularly important. The analysis of the cultural potential of soubriquets may serve to illustrate the ways language is used in linguo-cultural communities and social areas under consideration.

Current trends in the semantic and semiotic development of linguistic units observed in soubriquet nominations use within the political discourse deserve special attention from the point of view of cultural awareness formation as it deals with the requirements of clear understanding of new tendencies in human communication in general and political communication in particular, referring to the interaction of traditional issues and new concepts within the society under consideration. This is because a nickname that presents evaluation not only expresses and forms the subjective attitude to a personality in a given situation but is also used as a means of meme production encoded by the word, which penetrates into the minds of the target audience and functions as a widespread informational unit in the society. This observation is closely connected with the problem of the word image and its symbolic role in manipulating individuals and societies, as referred to different types of cultures and communities, as well as the new formats of information and knowledge procession and dissemination, vitally important for the development of cultural awareness and intercultural competence.

The analysis of literary sources, in which soubriquets are used to achieve a certain artistic goal, seems to be the most complicated area in terms of adequate interpretations and understanding taking into consideration the author's literary intentions along with cultural and conceptual background that helps decode the artistic message. The use of proper names in a literary work, nicknames among them, plays a significant role in the process of inspiring the reader to acquire cultural background knowledge, which also can be used both in further communication and new knowledge formats possession.

It should be emphasised, that the notion of cultural knowledge, which is significant for intercultural competence and cultural awareness development, covers not only the issues of cultural phenomena and the specifics of their representation in the linguistic meaning but also the entire cultural background of the existence and functioning of linguo-cultural communities.

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# Original Research

## 'Safe' political discourse: Linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic perspectives

by Ludmila L. Baranova and Natalia L. Kriakina

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*The study seeks to identify the main tendencies in the use of politically correct language from the linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic perspectives. The paper offers an overview of the ways in which political correctness is expressed in the British and American political discourse. The study is corpus-based; the contexts illustrating theoretical hypotheses are borrowed from three large-scale corpora of the corresponding variants of English (British National Corpus, Corpus of Contemporary American English, and Hong Kong Baptist University Corpus of Political Speeches). The study relies on the linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic paradigm supplemented by discourse analysis. Research results indicate that British and American political discourse has both general and culture-specific features. Speakers from both the USA and the UK tend to refer to milestone events their audience is well-acquainted with. They use a wide array of general notions, as well as specific terms and set expressions depending on the impression they wish to make on their listeners. American politicians appear to be inclined towards using less formal lexis such as 'opposing the nation's enemies' and 'political rivals', whereas their British counterparts tend to choose more formal terms and expressions. Modern political discourse is characterised by continuity: it is inextricably connected with the previous stages in its development, while at the same time acquiring new peculiarities and taking new forms.*

**KEYWORDS:** *political discourse, political correctness, linguo-cultural studies, corpus studies, pragmalinguistics, communication, euphemism*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

At the present stage in the development of linguistics, the need to create an effective model of public political statement becomes evident. It would allow a politician to consider not only extralinguistic factors reflecting the dynamics of so-

cial change, but also the pragmatic characteristics of the linguistic devices used. To achieve this goal, it is essential to correlate the statement with a broad non-linguistic context. Obviously, political speeches need to be relevant to the audience and the communication situation. Considering the gen-

eral and particular characteristics of the latter leads to establishing effective interaction between politicians and their audience and achieving the politicians' intended goals.

Thus, modern political rhetoric is a complex phenomenon that implies not only the interaction between the speaker and the addressee, but also the specific communication situation. This paper intends to analyse the way political correctness – or 'sensitive language' (Western, 2016) as it is sometimes referred to – is expressed in British and American political discourse. The relevance of this research is determined by the increasing interest in an interdisciplinary approach, when language is studied not in isolation, but in close connection with a multitude of factors connected with its evolution and use.

The theoretical significance of the paper is conditioned by its contribution to a broader field of knowledge, namely philological hermeneutics and discourse studies. It is of the essence to understand the role that politically correct expressions play in modern society, as well as the extralinguistic factors which determine their use. Only full understanding of these issues will provide the basis for a deeper insight into the functioning of the English language. Besides, the combination of diachronic and synchronic approaches adds to a more thorough comprehension of this phenomenon.

As far as practical relevance is concerned, study findings can be used in teaching English to advanced students (speakers of other languages) and can be integrated into seminars and lecture courses in lexicology, comparative cultural studies, cognitive linguistics, to mention only a few.

## 2. MATERIAL AND METHODS

The study material comprises entries taken from three large corpora of American and British English: the British National Corpus (BNC), Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA), and the Hong Kong Baptist University Corpus of Political Speeches. The study focuses on speeches by presidents and politicians from both the UK and the USA, as well as books and articles by more than 20 writers and journalists from such maga-

zines and newspapers as *The USA Today*, *The Washington Post*, *National Review*, *History Today*, and other authoritative publications. Reference sources included five online dictionaries: The Macmillan Dictionary, The Merriam-Webster Dictionary, The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary, and The Cambridge Dictionary. Research methods are centred around the linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic paradigm, supplemented by discourse analysis.

## 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 3.1. The notion of political correctness: basic approaches

As far as the modern perception of PC is concerned, one can find a variety of definitions paying special attention to different aspects of this notion.

The Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines being politically correct as '*conforming to a belief that language and practices which could offend political sensibilities (as in matters of sex and race) should be eliminated*' (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020d).

The Cambridge Dictionary says that '*someone who is politically correct believes that language and actions that could be offensive to others, especially those relating to sex and race, should be avoided*' and that '*a politically correct word or expression is used instead of another one to avoid being offensive*' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020a).

The Macmillan Dictionary states that '*politically correct language or behaviour is not offensive, especially to people who have often been affected by discrimination or unfair treatment*' (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020e).

One can observe a feature that is common in all these cases, as every definition highlights the necessity of avoiding discrimination and verbal violence.

Notably, PC is closely related to the concept of tolerance, which, in its turn, is often defined as '*willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them*' (Cambridge Dictionary, 2020b) or as '*sympathy or indulgence*

for beliefs or practices differing from or conflicting with one’s own’ (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020e). The issues of correlation between political correctness, tolerance, and ways of their linguistic manifestation have been in the focus of scholars’ attention for some time (Valentine, 1998; Karam, 2011).

A few words should be said about euphemisms being part of political correctness as a concept. Euphemisms can be regarded as a classic example of non-offending and ‘polite’ words. As Baranova (2015) observes, ‘it would be erroneous to believe that the use of euphemisms is confined to some particular kind of discourse’ (Baranova, 2015, p. 99), so euphemisms are universal in almost every sphere of life. The main similarity is in a certain contradiction between the expression plane and the content plane of both a euphemistic and a politically correct expression.

However, it has been pointed out that euphemisms are not likely to retain their ‘subtle’ meaning over time. As cited by Hughes (2011), Michel Bréal, a French philologist, comments on this in his book *Semantics: Studies in the Science of Meaning*, stating that words often come to possess a disagreeable sense as a result of euphemisation.

Traditionally, euphemisms were classified according to their functions and depending on how long they have existed in a language. Reformatsky (1996) also remarked that euphemisms in general can be organised into two groups: the old ones, or taboo words (*to die, to kill, death, etc.*), and the new ones, whose very form is aimed at performing the etiquette function (*to pass away, to go to heaven, to go to our rest, etc.*).

### 3.2. The notion of discourse and political discourse

As the term ‘discourse’ is one of the central issues in the present paper, it is important to outline the main approaches to the understanding of this term. It is also of the essence to state which of the numerous definitions of discourse forms the theoretical background of the research in question. In the past decades, a significant number of scholars have sought to define this notion, so it would seem

*‘Thus, modern political rhetoric is a complex phenomenon that implies not only the interaction between the speaker and the addressee, but also the specific communication situation’*

logical to compare their interpretations and single out the one relevant to this study.

Arutyunova (1990) regards discourse as ‘speech immersed in life’ and ‘a coherent text in conjunction with extralinguistic, pragmatic, sociocultural, psychological and other factors’ (Arutyunova, 1990, p. 136-137). This point of view correlates with Karasik’s (2000), who claims that discourse is ‘a text immersed in the situation of communication’ (Karasik, 2000, p. 5). Kubryakova and Aleksandrova (1999) interpret discourse as a cognitive process connected with speech production. They define text as a result of the speech production process and lay particular emphasis on its completeness. These interpretations provide the deepest insight into how the notion of discourse is understood in the present paper.

As for the pragma-linguistic perspective, Widowson (2004) added ‘situation’ to the relationship between ‘text’ and ‘discourse’. Therefore, he regarded discourse as the unity of a particular text and the situation accompanying it. In this paper, special attention will be given to the third component, i.e. discourse, which is inextricably connected with pragmatics.

Numerous papers devoted to discourse and all of its aspects prove that it has become a paradigm applicable to various fields of the humanities. For example, Van Dijk (1993) mentions illocutionary functions and other pragmatic properties among the levels and dimensions of discourse that appear in a number of contexts, including the political one. Pragmatics as one of the main issues discourse analysis should be focused on is also mentioned by Romero-Trillo (2008).

Sheigal (2000) claims that discourse may be considered to be political if at least one of the three components (the subject, the receiver, or the



very content of the message) belongs to the sphere of politics. The scholar also singles out four functions of political speeches (the integrative function, the inspirational function, the performative function, and the declarative function). She believes that the first one is closely connected with the image of the speaker who identifies him- or herself with the whole nation. It is expressed mostly by using personal pronouns, as in *we* that can be also opposed to *they* and their derivatives (Zupnik, 1994).

An interesting linguo-cultural comment can be discussed here. Urban (1988) singles out six variants of rendering *we* in American political discourse: *we* of the President, *we* of the Ministry of Defence, *we* of the President's administration, *we* of the US Government, *we* of the USA, and, surprisingly, *we* of the USA and USSR considered together.

As far as the British political system and discourse are concerned, one can examine a treatise written by Iñigo-Mora (2004). She has analysed the strategies of using personal pronouns (*we*, *our*, *us*) during a session in the House of Commons. The researcher names four types of these strategies depending on the way a politician treats their listeners: the excluding type (*'my political party and I'*), the including type (*'you and I'*), the parliamentary society type (*'the parliamentary society and I'*), and the general type (*'the whole British nation and I'*).

The second (inspirational) function according to Sheigal (2000) consists in encouraging the audience and may be expressed by several linguistic means: lexical items referring to novelty and development, comparative and superlative adjectives.

When implementing the third (performative) function, the speaker poses himself or herself as possessing a particular social and/or political status. Pragmatically, this function is aimed at emphasising the leader's personal involvement in the situation. All words and phrases used are perceived emotionally because the speaker shows that he or she is well aware of the fears and worries of an average person.

*'The expressive function is implemented mostly by means of numerous metaphors and/or comparisons complementary to the politically correct words and phrases, and stressing their importance by accompanying them in the communication context'*

The fourth (declarative) function is implemented through the topoi of duty (with such keywords as *must*, *obligation*, *duty*, *responsibility*) and work (expressed by means of *task*, *effort*, *service*, *work*, *challenge*, *measures*, and other lexical units bearing on this idea). It means that the speaker should announce the principles he or she intends to follow.

There is also a fifth function, which is not included in the list compiled by Sheigal (2000) – the expressive one. Akhmanova (2007) defines 'expressivity' as 'the presence of expression', i.e. '*expressive figures of speech that distinguish it from stylistically neutral speech and make it metaphoric and emotionally coloured*' (Akhmanova, 2007, p. 523-524). In the present paper, the term 'expressivity' and the expressive function itself will be considered in accordance with this definition. The expressive function is implemented mostly by means of numerous metaphors and/or comparisons complementary to the politically correct words and phrases, and stressing their importance by accompanying them in the communication context. This particular function will be commented on in the next section of this paper.

## 4. STUDY AND RESULTS

### 4.1. General observations

The list of politically correct words and expressions subjected to analysis in the research forming the basis for the present paper was compiled based on Rawson's (2003) book *Dictionary of Euphemisms and Other Doubletalk* offering a substantial number of politically correct and euphemistic expressions. The list consists of 26 words and word combinations, their number being

determined by Zipf's law, which was discovered in the 1930s. It says (as applied to linguistics and linguo-statistics) that any lexical array includes a relatively small number of types (word forms), which generate the majority of contexts. In reference to word catalogues, it means that the shortest but representative enough lists may comprise around 30 words. However, for objective reasons a limited number of cases is discussed in the present paper.

It is also worth mentioning the theory of speech acts and their classification before proceeding with the analysis of the adduced examples. Searle (1999) sets up a hypothesis that there are five main types of illocution (what the speaker intends to convey). He lists them as follows: representative illocution (including assertive illocution), directive illocution, commissive illocution, expressive illocution, and declarative illocution. This study and the examples given in the tables below refer mainly to representative illocution (which describes certain situations and the attitude people have toward them) and expressive illocution (conveying the psychological state of the speaker, as in apologies, gratitude, condolences, reproaches, surprise, or indignation).

The examples which follow are supplied with a series of contexts borrowed from various corpora and/or other sources. Each table is annotated with

definitions from one or more dictionaries and information on the general number of corresponding contexts in the aforementioned corpora. As pointed out by Telia (1996), language only uses the expressions associated with the national standards and stereotypes. Therefore, it may be not totally out of place to supply the tables with some historical-social overview. It is especially important in cases where the interstate relations or important political events are mentioned. This provides ground for linguo-cultural analysis, which accompanies the majority of examples. It should be reiterated that only a few instances of politically correct words and expressions are analysed below, due to the requirements imposed on the size of the publication. However, in this research all of the 26 politically correct words and word combinations mentioned above have been subjected to analysis.

#### 4.2. Case study

1. *[Our] boys ('fighting men')* (HKBU – 1 occurrence, BNC – 53 occurrences, COCA – 436 occurrences). Boy – a male child; a son; a young man (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020a); a male child from birth to adulthood; a son; an immature male (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020a); a male child, or a male person in general; a son (Longman Dictionary, 2020a).

Table 1  
Politically correct use of the word 'boys' referring to fighting men

DATE	SPEAKER / TITLE / CORPUS	CONTEXT
1943	Franklin Roosevelt, 'State of the Union Address' [HKBU]	<i>I have reason to know that <b>our boys</b> at the front are concerned with two broad aims beyond the winning of the war.</i>
1985-1994	The Daily Mirror [BNC]	<i>'<b>OUR BOYS</b> GET COVER': British troops in Sarajevo are now armour-plated against the snipers.</i>
2012	The Quarterly Journal of Military History [COCA]	<i>'They had better start selective service', (Appalachian) Alabama representative Luther Patrick joked, 'to keep <b>our boys</b> from filling up the army'.</i>
2015	Danny Duncan Collum, 'U.S. Catholic' [COCA]	<i>As America's real-life invasion of Iraq turned disastrous, our dream leader, Bartlet, often got tough with the terrorists, but always brought <b>our boys</b> home by the end of the episode.</i>

Contexts borrowed from the corpora to illustrate this expression prove that there is a close connection between the national political discourse and the ways in which a country is represented from the military point of view. This example may be regarded as one of the most interesting ones in the list, for it consists of a regular pronoun and a very frequently used word *boys*. The resulting expression depends heavily on the context because it is only through the use of words like *front*, *war*, *army*, and *invasion* that the listener would understand what is actually meant.

Speaking about *our boys* refers to the implementation of the integrative as well as the performative function of public speeches. The expression

appeals to the emotions of the audience and demonstrates that the speaker/writer considers him- or herself to be a regular citizen. This enhances the effect the statement produces on the listeners/readers. The expressive function is manifested here to some extent as well.

2. *Developing (countries)* (HKBU – 70 occurrences, BNC – 989 occurrences, COCA – 4708 occurrences). Developing country – a country that is poor and does not have much industrial development; now preferred to be used instead of ‘third world country’ (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020b); a country that is changing its economy from one based mainly on farming to one based on industry (Longman Dictionary, 2020b).

Table 2

*Politically correct use of the word combination ‘developing countries’ referring to poor countries*

DATE	SPEAKER / TITLE / CORPUS	CONTEXT
1924	Calvin Coolidge, ‘Second Annual Message’ [HKBU]	<i>Legal authority for a thorough reorganisation of the Federal structure with some latitude of action to the Executive in the rearrangement of secondary functions would make for continuing economy in the shift of government activities which must follow every change in a <b>developing country</b>.</i>
1963	John Kennedy, ‘Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union’ [HKBU]	<i>Nothing we could do to help the <b>developing countries</b> would help them half as much as a booming U.S. economy.</i>
1968	Lyndon Johnson, ‘Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union’ [HKBU]	<i>But unless the rapid growth of population in <b>developing countries</b> is slowed, the gap between rich and poor will widen steadily.</i>
1979	Jimmy Carter, ‘The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress’ [HKBU]	<i>We are building the foundation for truly global cooperation, not only with Western and industrialised nations but with the <b>developing countries</b> as well.</i>
1982	Ronald Reagan, ‘Radio Address to the Nation on International Free Trade’ [HKBU]	<i>In fact, both developed and <b>developing countries</b> alike have been in the grip of the longest worldwide recession in post-war history.</i>
1995	William Clinton, ‘The President’s Radio Address’ [HKBU]	<i>Finally, Mexico serves as a model for <b>developing countries</b> from Latin America to Asia that are completing the transition to free markets and democracy.</i>
2007	George W. Bush, ‘The President’s Radio Address’ [HKBU]	<i>Under my proposal, by the end of next year, America and other nations will set a long-term global goal for reducing greenhouse gases. And to meet this goal, we must help <b>developing countries</b> harness the power of technology.</i>
2010	Barack Obama, ‘Address Before a Joint Session of the Congress on the State of the Union’ [HKBU]	<i>We’re helping <b>developing countries</b> to feed themselves and continuing the fight against HIV/AIDS.</i>

The complex notion of a developing country implies the idea of a state that has not yet reached a satisfactory level of economic and social development. In political discourse, this word combination is used to denote a considerable number of regions that are in a less privileged position as compared with industrially developed ones. The expressions are accompanied by such words and phrases as *change*, *the gap between rich and poor*, *recession*, *the fight* referring to unrest, dangers, and risks. Nevertheless, a positive tendency can be traced: since 1995, contexts have included the words *model*, *democracy*, *goal*, *power*, *development*, *assistance*, *investment*, and *capital*. Politicians have changed their viewpoint, and the aforementioned states are described as having some potential for further development.

3. *Event [of something]* (HKBU – 315 occurrences, BNC – 1322 occurrences, COCA – 3003 occurrences). Event – something that happens, es-

pecially something that involves several people; an organised occasion such as a party or sports competition (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020c); an outcome; the final outcome or determination of a legal action; a postulated outcome, condition, or eventuality; a noteworthy happening; a social occasion or activity; an adverse or damaging medical occurrence; any of the contests in a programme of sports; the fundamental entity of observed physical reality represented by a point designated by three coordinates of place and one of time in the space-time continuum postulated by the theory of relativity; a subset of the possible outcomes of an experiment (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020b); something that happens, especially something important, interesting or unusual; a performance, sports competition, party, etc. at which people gather together to watch or take part in something; one of the races or competitions that are part of a large sports competition (Longman Dictionary, 2020c).

Table 3  
*Politically correct use of the word ‘event’*

DATE	SPEAKER / TITLE / CORPUS	CONTEXT
1953	Dwight Eisenhower, ‘Inaugural Address’ [HKBU]	<i>This basic law of interdependence, so manifest in the commerce of peace, applies with thousand-fold intensity in the <b>event</b> of war.</i>
1960	1960 Democratic Party Platform [HKBU]	<i>We will establish and maintain food reserves for national defense purposes near important population centers in order to preserve lives in <b>event</b> of national disaster, and will operate them so as not to depress farm prices.</i>
1960	Richard Nixon, ‘Presidential Debate Broadcast from New York and Los Angeles’ [HKBU]	<i>Mr. Von Fremd, it would be completely irresponsible for a candidate for the presidency, or for a president himself, to indicate the course of action and the weapons he would use in the <b>event</b> of such an attack.</i>
1980	1980 Democratic Party Platform [HKBU]	<i>A stand-by gasoline rationing plan must be adopted for use in the <b>event</b> of a serious energy supply interruption.</i>
1985	Ronald Reagan, ‘Radio Address to the Nation on Foreign Policy’ [HKBU]	<i>Now, in closing, I want to talk about the tragedy of the Mexican earthquake, which has brought a great outpouring of sympathy and offers of assistance from the American people. We greatly admire the bravery and resolve of the Mexican people to dedicate all their resources to overcome this calamitous <b>event</b>.</i>
1997	William Clinton, ‘The President's Radio Address’ [HKBU]	<i>Our two peoples who experienced so much together are experiencing this sad <b>event</b> together. Diana was not ours, but we grieve alongside you.</i>



According to the dictionary definitions, the word *event* may be also perceived as a regular one. It needs to be specified by adding an adjective or a noun that would clarify its nature (some common collocations are *of war*, *of national disaster*, *of <...> attack*, *calamitous*, and *sad*). These words and word combinations allow us to assume that in political discourse the expressions including the component *event* are used mainly in negative contexts. This hypothesis may be confirmed by the fact that a certain number of negatively coloured synonyms (*tragedy*, *tragic death*) precede this word in the above-mentioned contexts.

4. *Interrogation* (HKBU – 5 occurrences, BNC – 340 occurrences, COCA – 3925 occurrences). *Interrogation* – the process of asking someone a lot of questions in an angry or threatening way, in order to get information (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020d); the process of asking questions formally and systematically; the process of giving or sending out a signal for triggering an appropriate response (Merriam-Webster Dictionary, 2020c); the process of interrogating (asking a lot of questions for a long time in order to get information, sometimes using threats) someone (Longman Dictionary, 2020d).

Table 4  
*Politically correct use of the word 'interrogation'*

DATE	SPEAKER / TITLE / CORPUS	CONTEXT
1918	Woodrow Wilson, 'Sixth Annual Message' [HKBU]	<i>Clearly determined conditions, clearly and simply charted, are indispensable to the economic revival and rapid industrial development which may confidently be expected if we act now and sweep all <b>interrogation</b> points away.</i>
2008	George Bush, 'The President's Radio Address' [HKBU]	<i>The main reason why this program has been effective is that it allows the CIA to use specialised <b>interrogation</b> procedures to question a small number of the most dangerous terrorists under careful supervision.</i>
2008	George W. Bush, 'The President's Radio Address' [HKBU]	<i>The bill Congress sent me would deprive the CIA of the authority to use these safe and lawful techniques. Instead, it would restrict the CIA's range of acceptable <b>interrogation</b> methods to those provided in the Army Field Manual.</i>
2008	George W. Bush, 'The President's Radio Address' [HKBU]	<i>Limiting the CIA's <b>interrogation</b> methods to those in the Army Field Manual would be dangerous because the manual is publicly available and easily accessible on the Internet.</i>
2008	George W. Bush, 'The President's Radio Address' [HKBU]	<i>The bill Congress sent me would not simply ban one particular <b>interrogation</b> method, as some have implied.</i>

The word *interrogation* may be included in the group of formal politically correct terms. However, two out of five dictionaries that have been used for the present research define *interrogation* as the process of asking someone in an angry or threaten-

ing way. In other words, this particular word started to lose its external ambiguity and euphemistic colouring. Further analysis has also demonstrated that *interrogation* is not infrequently combined with the words *method* or *procedure*. These lexical

items specify the process described by the PC core word and make its meaning more explicit. Moreover, in the present-day American media *enhanced interrogation* is also used, referring to torture.

5. *Underprivileged* (HKBU – 23 occurrences, BNC – 75 occurrences, COCA – 460 occurrences). Underprivileged – not having as many advantages or opportunities as most other people (Macmillan Dictionary, 2020f); deprived through social or economic condition of some of the fundamental rights of all members of a civilised society; of or relating to underprivileged people (Merriam-Webster Dic-

tionary, 2020f); very poor, with worse living conditions, educational opportunities etc. than most people in society (Longman Dictionary, 2020e).

The word *underprivileged* has got a great deal in common with the word *underdeveloped*. The main difference is that it is more likely to be accompanied by positively coloured lexical items and refers to a group of people who do not have any rewarding experience but deserve it. It is supported by such words and word combinations as *protection, a rewarding experience in a healthful environment, to meet the needs, to benefit, and economic growth*.

Table 5

*Politically correct use of the word ‘underprivileged’ referring to people having fewer opportunities than most people in a society*

DATE	SPEAKER / TITLE / CORPUS	CONTEXT
1960	1960 Democratic Party Platform [HKBU]	<i>We shall seek to bring the two million men, women and children who work for wages on the farms of the United States under the protection of existing labor and social legislation; and to assure migrant labor, perhaps the most <b>underprivileged</b> of all, of a comprehensive program to bring them not only decent wages but also adequate standards of health, housing, Social Security protection, education and welfare services.</i>
1960	1960 Democratic Party Platform [HKBU]	<i>As part of a broader concern for young people we recommend establishment of a Youth Conservation Corps, to give <b>underprivileged</b> young people a rewarding experience in a healthful environment.</i>
1964	Lyndon Johnson, ‘Annual Message to the Congress on the State of the Union’ [HKBU]	<i>These programs are obviously not for the poor or the <b>underprivileged</b> alone.</i>
1980	1980 Democratic Party Platform [HKBU]	<i>The Democratic Party is committed to a federal scholarship program adequate to meet the needs of all the <b>underprivileged</b> who could benefit from a college education.</i>
1980	1980 Republican Party Platform [HKBU]	<i>Faster growth, higher incomes, and plentiful jobs are exactly what the unemployed, the <b>underprivileged</b>, and minorities have been seeking for many years.</i>
2005	George W. Bush, ‘The President’s Radio Address’ [HKBU]	<i>As Ms. Miers rose through the legal ranks, she also put in long hours of volunteer legal work on behalf of the poor and <b>underprivileged</b>, and served as a leader for more than a dozen community groups and charities.</i>

## 5. DISCUSSION

The analysis of the material has shown that there are a number of peculiarities in both American and British political discourse and ways of manifesting political correctness in each of them. There are five key points that have been singled out:

- (1) politically correct words and expressions have a relative ability to act as euphemisms;
- (2) inaugural addresses stand out among other genres of political statements;
- (3) political discourse involves the implementation of the integrative, inspirational, performative, declarative, and expressive functions;
- (4) the description of various events in political speeches has certain linguo-cultural peculiarities;
- (5) political discourse may include both the speaker's style and conventional politically correct words and expressions.

There are also several differences between the above-mentioned national variants of political discourse. First, American politicians are more likely to address their listeners as a nation. To achieve this, they use the word *nation* or other words denoting the whole population. Personal pronouns (*we*) are also widely used. This technique is used in order to unite the audience and make it believe in common values.

Second, American politicians often oppose the American nation to its political enemies or representatives of other states. In the material under consideration, opposing various groups of people is used to highlight the difference between good and evil, those who need protection and those who are ready to grant it.

Third, American political discourse is characterised by a more frequent use of informal lexis. This pattern is especially evident with regard to the examples where some national threats or dangers are discussed.

As far as British political discourse is concerned, it would be interesting to comment on the role played by quotation marks. In the written variant of the aforementioned discourse this stop usually signals either that the word or expression is used tentatively, or that it belongs to someone else.

*'Speakers from both the USA and the UK tend to refer to the milestone events their audience is well-acquainted with, and use a wide variety of general notions, specific terms and set expressions depending on the impression they wish to produce on their listeners. At the same time, however, American politicians have proved to be more inclined to oppose the nation to its enemies and representatives of other countries'*

The aforementioned features were singled out on the basis of the analysis conducted from both linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic perspectives. Their number is limited, yet they confirm that every national discourse has its functioning peculiarities and should be considered from several angles.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The present research sought to find out what exactly the notion of political correctness is and how it is used in the American and British political discourse from the linguo-cultural and pragma-linguistic perspectives. The research has shown that politically correct words and their combinations are employed to produce a certain effect on the audience.

American political discourse is slightly different from its British counterpart, yet a considerable number of common tendencies have been singled out. Speakers from both the USA and the UK tend to refer to the milestone events their audience is well-acquainted with, and use a wide variety of general notions, specific terms and set expressions depending on the impression they wish to produce on their listeners. At the same time, however, American politicians have proved to be more inclined to oppose the nation to its enemies and representatives of other countries. Several speakers have used more informal lexis, especially when referring to some threats or dangers that the nation is exposed to.

The pool of statements delivered by British politicians and articles written by various British journalists is less voluminous due to the size of the British National Corpus and the fact that it was the only corpus of British English used in the course of this research. Nevertheless, it was possible to extract contexts for almost every item on the list. The study has found that generally British politicians are less willing to use word combinations and prefer choosing the formal variants of politically

correct items (especially those regarded as terms). One of the implications of this study suggests that modern political discourse is characterised by continuity: it is inextricably connected with the previous stages in its development, and at the same time acquires new peculiarities and takes on new forms. Undoubtedly, this may serve as a basis for further research. The development of corpus linguistics and pragma-linguistics can give a powerful impetus to the studies conducted along these lines.

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# Original Research

## Claiming and displaying national identity: A case study of Chinese exchange students in Russia

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*This study describes the emerging perceptions of national identity within the context of Covid-19 among nine Chinese exchange students in Russia. Qualitative data were mainly collected from interviews, complemented by WeChat group discussions, moment updates, comments and repatriation reports. Participants were exposed to cross-cultural contexts, their group membership (i.e. being a Chinese) triggered the reflection on national identity. Meanwhile, the Covid-19 pandemic influenced their thinking towards how they feel about China and others. Thematic findings related to the participants' awareness of national self, which manifested through their observations about the pandemic; politics, patriotism, lifestyle, education and diversity were discussed. This study reveals a strong emotional attachment to homeland among the less studied China-Russia exchange student cohort. Although China's success in combatting the Covid-19 heightened their sense of national pride, the participants were also found to critically reflect on their daily encounters and attempt to engage in social changes. The study showed the pervasiveness and expansion of identity work in the study abroad setting, suggesting greater attention to be paid to the opportunity for student self-discovery and rational thinking in the tertiary education.*

**KEYWORDS:** national identity, Covid-19, Coronavirus, cross-cultural interaction, China-Russia exchange students, imagined community



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

According to Fong (2004), teenagers in Dalian were frustrated with financial prospects offered in China and believed that the wealthier western countries were superior for an expectation of wealth. Shuping Yang, a graduating senior from China, delivered a speech at her commencement

ceremony at the University of Maryland (UMD) in May 2017, in which Yang sincerely praised the 'sweet air' and 'freedom of speech' in America as compared to her experiences back home (Phillips, 2017). Chinese teenagers' identification with a global imagined community deemed China inferior and it would seem that Chinese youth lack a

strong national identity. However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, China's efforts and contributions in epidemic prevention compared to other countries triggered an intense discussion by contemporary Chinese youth on the Internet. The Chinese people evoked strong emotions towards raising self-awareness and national pride with some obvious resentment towards other countries.

Contemporary Chinese youth has been categorised as the 'post-80s' (*balinghou*) and 'post-90s' (*jiulinghou*) which has become known as the 'wedge generation' for their unique stature between the old and the new China. They gradually helped to open the nation with their fresh and liberal views (Ash, 2016). Obviously, this can permanently change a country's image in the way it sees itself (Anholt, 2010). A positive national identity may be an antecedent of a positive international image. A significant question arises of how a generation sees their country and themselves during the backstop of a global pandemic. From the national level, emphasising loyalty to the 'nation' and constructing the personal political self-definition emerge as the dominant way to boost social solidarity (Rosenblatt, 1964). This research focuses on a particular subset of Chinese international students. Compared to their peers in the homeland, these cohorts developed stronger cross-cultural tolerance and empathy, as well as an increasing self-confidence and independence (Black & Duhon, 2006; Kitsantas & Meyers, 2001).

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In late modernity, as Block (2007) pointed out, national identity is '*no longer seen as fixed at birth and tied to one's birthplace*' (Block, 2007, p. 866); conversely, it is fluid and dynamic, which can be negotiated and reconstructed through daily events to explain present-day phenomena (Billig, 1995; Puri, 2004; Smith, 2003, 2004).

Existing studies have demonstrated the positive impact of travelling abroad to study on students' national identity. For example, Wong (2009) investigated how international students who had left Hong Kong for at least 7 years and aged from 28-30 perceived their own national identity after

*'However, during the Covid-19 pandemic, China's efforts and contributions in epidemic prevention compared to other countries triggered an intense discussion by contemporary Chinese youth on the Internet. The Chinese people evoked strong emotions towards raising self-awareness and national pride with some obvious resentment towards other countries'*

returning to Hong Kong. Respondents reported that they looked at China in a more positive light and altered their perception from a somewhat pessimist view of being Chinese to a prouder cultural ambassador. A similar conclusion was arrived at by Gao (2011), who found a growing sense of nationalism among Chinese students who joined a yearlong study programme in the UK. In her study, the Chinese learners tended to affirm and often displayed their cultural affinity to their home country. Zhao (2019) also found that Chinese international students tended to promote China's national image in the US by sharing the positive attributes of China while avoiding the less positive images. Most of the research indicated that Chinese international students often found themselves increasing their nationalism even more while abroad.

Other researchers provided support for the variation of identity work related to foreign studies. Phases of the national identity development have been identified, i.e. from admiration to antagonism towards alien things, then reach conciliation between the national and global (Gu, 2010; Gao et al., 2016), some eventually stepped into global citizen identity (Hachtmann, 2012; Hendershot & Sperandio, 2009).

Zhang (2017) showed more complex and diverse forms of national identity among overseas students in New Zealand. There, Chinese students' national identity can be categorised in three ways as depicted by the three modes of kites: Honour-Based Kites indicating that students appeared to

identify with China; Criticism-Based Kites that illustrated a more rational and objective attitude toward China and Chinese-self; and Recluse-Based Kites showing preference to escape from the reality of China as they felt hopeless to change that reality. As Ward (2001) indicates, the development of identity in cross-cultural situations does not necessarily follow a linear or unidirectional course. There are also close relationships between demographic variables and acculturation in the cross-cultural communication process (Zheng et al., 2004). For example, changeability of identification reduces with age; length of residence is actually an indicator of the process of acculturation; cultural identification is related to the region of origin (mainland China, Taiwan, Hong Kong); significant differences of culture identity are found across a student status (undergraduate, postgraduate and visiting scholars).

The national identity is an important part of how study abroad students think of themselves and link to psychological adjustment and well-being (Savicki & Cooley, 2011). Hence, diverse research subjects need more attention. Such as short-term Chinese exchange students and those in the less popular destination countries. Previous research mainly focused on overseas Chinese students in popular countries (Gao, 2011; Wong, 2009; Zhao, 2019; Barriball & While, 1994) and lacked enough research on other less popular countries. The 2019 White Paper on China's Overseas Students published by New Oriental Education & Technology Group detailed responses from 6,228 students and parents showing that the US, the UK and Australia have become the main destination countries for Chinese students (Wei, 2019). Naturally, more attention has been paid to popular English-speaking countries and less research on less popular countries, such as Russia. Russia differs greatly from English-speaking countries in language, history, culture, national characteristics and customs, etc. So, a question arises: how do Chinese students deal with their national identity issues in Russia? A research into Chinese students in Russia might provide a different perspective on national identity research.

In terms of the research methods, previous research on national identity mainly relies on a semi-structured interview (Dolby, 2001; Gao, 2011; Wong, 2009; Zhao, 2019) for its advantages in focusing on the specific experience and perceptions of individuals engaged in real life (Barriball & While, 1994). People express deep personal feelings and opinions documenting mundane details of daily life on social media (Bazarova & Choi, 2014). It is constructive for researchers to update and diversify the method of data collection.

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

For a better understanding of a Chinese student's national identity, it is necessary to presuppose an answer to a more fundamental question. What is identity? An 'identity' is shorthand for ways of talking about the self and the community (Bhavnani & Phoenix, 1994). Stable identity, such as national identity, develops through a process of experimentation, reflection, and observation. When students are exposed to a foreign culture, a crucial question relating to national identity is how the national 'we' (in this case, we the Chinese) is constructed (Savicki & Cooley, 2011).

This study is concerned with the national identity of study abroad Chinese students and the possible utility of Social Identity Theory (SIT) heuristic frameworks for the investigation of developmental processes. Meanwhile, the data is actually much more complex than might have been anticipated from the perspectives of SIT. In brief, SIT (Tajfel, 1978; Tajfel & Turner, 1986) is based upon the observation that individuals belong to many different social groups (e.g. gender, national, ethnic, occupational, social class, etc.). SIT postulates that in-group favouritism and out-group prejudice derives largely from favourable comparisons (Bennett et al., 1998). In a country context, the home country is typically considered the focal in-group, whereas foreign countries represent the out-groups (Shankarmahesh, 2006; Verlegh, 2007).

Because Chinese exchange students have a diverse range of national attachment, it is necessary to explain briefly the concepts of nationalism, patriotism, and national identity by drawing on SIT



and related psychological research. National identity refers to *'the importance of national affiliation as well as the subjective significance of an inner bond with the nation'* (Blank & Schmidt, 2003, p. 296). It is the citizen's subjective recognition of belonging to a nation, as well as the feeling of national pride (Stryker & Serpe, 1982).

Patriotism implies not only a sense of national belonging but also a specific set of beliefs and meaning attached to the nation (Huddy, 2013). Patriotism is a deeply affective attachment to the nation (Conover & Feldman, 1987, p. 1) or the *'degree of love for and pride in one's nation'* (Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989, p. 271) in a more positive side of national attachments. Nationalism goes beyond a simple sense of national superiority to include uncritical conformity and blind adherence to national values (Schatz et al., 1999).

In China, national identity is also closely linked to education. Since 1991, the Chinese State Education Commission has advocated a new sense of belonging to the nation in terms of an emotional link with the homeland. A revised school curriculum now includes territory, language, and cul-

ture among Chinese students from which three perspectives were constructed: the five thousand years of ancient civilisation, the recent one hundred years of anti-imperialist resistance, and the present great power status (Suresh, 2002).

With the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic and China's success in reigning in the virus, this study will look at the study abroad students' national identity during a worldwide health emergency and any influences occurring to affect the students' way of thinking about their country.

This study will try to answer two questions. (1) Does the experience of studying in Russia change a Chinese student's national identity? (2) Has the Covid-19 pandemic influenced Chinese students' thinking towards how they feel about their country as it relates to China's success in combatting the virus?

### 3.1. Participants

Nine Chinese undergraduate students who studied abroad in Russia during the 2019 spring semester agreed to join in this study. Most of them have no prior overseas experience (Table 1).

Table 1  
*Participants' information*

PSEUDONYM	AGE	GENDER	MAJOR	OVERSEAS EXPERIENCE
Josh	22	Male	Business English	Australia, Russia, Thailand
Angie	22	Female	Business English	Thailand, Russia
Mark	21	Male	English	Russia
Heather	22	Female	Business English	Russia
Ana	21	Female	Business English	Russia
Katie	21	Female	English	Russia
Julie	22	Female	English	Russia
Robyn	22	Male	English	Russia
Hannah	23	Female	English	Russia

### 3.2. Data collection

Data was collected from 24 February, 2020 to 25 April, 2020, when students were under self-quarantine. Online video interviews were first conducted via WeChat instant messaging tool,

supplemented by participants' group chat, WeChat moment updates, comments and repatriation reports, as they offer a well-rounded understanding of their real-time thoughts during their study abroad (Tables 2 and 3).

Table 2  
*WeChat group information*

PARTICIPANTS	DATE	TOPIC
Hannah, Josh, Ana, Robyn	27 Feb, 2020	Comparison of COVID-19 solutions offered in China and other countries
Ana, Mark, Katie	24 Apr, 2020	
Hannah, Julie, Mark, Robyn	7 Feb, 2020	Unforgettable experience in Russia

Table 3  
*Interview information*

NAME	LOCATION	DATE	DURATION	MODE OF COMMUNICATION
Josh	W City	24 Feb, 2020	32 min	Video telephone
Angie	H City	25 Feb, 2020	22 min	Video telephone
Mark	X City	24 Feb, 2020	34 min	Video telephone
Heather	W City	24 Feb, 2020	43 min	Video telephone
Ana	W City	27 Feb, 2020	34 min	Video telephone
Katie	W City	25 Feb, 2020	30 min	Video telephone
Julie	W City	24 Feb, 2020	24 min	Video telephone
Robyn	E City	26 Feb, 2020	37 min	Video telephone
Hannah	H City	27 Feb, 2020	41 min	Video telephone

The interviews were conducted in Mandarin, later transcribed and translated into English and processed by Nvivo 12. In this research, based on the complicated and emotional attachment toward ‘we’ and ‘others’, a crucial question relating to national identity is how the national ‘we’ is constructed. The discussion falls into four themes.

**4. STUDY AND RESULTS**  
**4.1. Sense of belonging**

Upon returning to China, the students demonstrated a clear indication of a sense of belonging and an emotional attachment about feeling ‘at home’. This illustrates the development of self-consciousness as a Chinese citizen both ‘here’ and ‘there’. The data suggests that the students believed they had a stronger sense of belonging toward China when they were in Russia. They stressed the importance of emotional identification with China for the subjective discursive construction of na-

tional identity in the individual interviews.

Excerpt 1. *When I was in China, I took it for granted that I was Chinese, and I did not have such a strong emotion about being Chinese. In Russia, the identity of Chinese was of great significance to me. No matter where I am, I am always Chinese* (当在中国时, 我就理所当然的认为我时中国人, 也没有特别强烈的情感, 去了俄罗斯之后, 才发觉中国人这个身份对我特别重要. 今后无论我在哪, 我首先的是个中国人) (Angie, Interview, 26 Feb, 2020).

In group chat, when one participant recalled an unpleasant experience abroad, she expressed a similar idea.

Excerpt 2. *When I was in Russia, the locals were very friendly and the teachers and classmates got along very well. However, I do not belong here and it is not my home. In fact, I do not have a sense of belonging* (虽然在俄罗斯那段期间, 当地的老师, 朋友对我很友善, 但是我总觉得自己不属于这里, 不是我的家, 总没有归属感) (Mark, WeChat Group, 24 Feb, 2020).

For these students, gaining a sense of identity and belonging is vitally important. During the interviews, the students often used the phrase 'at home'. Most of the respondents gave 'home' a variety of meanings ranging from the parental home to a regional framework of reference to the state as a whole. These students retained a strong sense of loyalty to China based not on the idea of an imagined community, but on the idea of an imagined family, which illustrated that they regarded China as their conceptual 'home' (Fong, 2004). This sense of home was more prominent on repatriation. In Russia, their minority status as a Chinese within the dominant host culture decides that they needed to heighten awareness of their own group membership to seek a sense of belonging. Therefore, the narratives of their identities emphasised being Chinese (Probyn, 1996).

#### 4.2. National pride

National pride is a high-frequency key word in interviews. When our questions turned to what determined their sense of national pride, the students listed economic achievements, social progress, and culture achievements.

Excerpt 3. *After living abroad, I miss China's infrastructure and developed transportation. China is really better than foreign countries in many aspects, such as Alipay, Taobao, and high-speed rail* (在国外的時候, 就特別想念國內的生活, 完善的基础設施, 便捷的交通。中國的確在一些地方比國外做的好, 比如支付寶, 淘寶和高铁) (Mark, Interview, 24 Feb, 2020).

We also looked at the students' WeChat moments which further illuminated the pride they have in China when comparing some things to Russia.

Excerpt 4. *While studying Russian history, I learned that Russian history is less than a thousand years old. Compared with China, I am particularly proud of my motherland's history* (在学习俄罗斯历史時, 我了解到俄罗斯的历史才不到一千年。与中国五千年历史文化相比, 我为祖国的历史感到特别自豪) (Katie, Comment on WeChat Moments, 15 Apr, 2019).

Some students boastfully compare their 'five thousand years' of history with Russian 'a thousand years'. Some seemed to attach great import-

ance to their native culture and claimed its outright superiority over the other country. Consciously or unconsciously, they were comparing their experiences in Russia and China. These comparisons made them realise the advantages of China, which they rarely noticed at home, which contributed to a more positive view of China. SIT postulates that in-group favouritism is a consequence of subjective identification. The attitude toward their own nation will change in a comparative context, with different dimensions being selected depending on the comparison of out-groups that are available in the prevailing context (Bennett et al., 1998).

#### 4.3. National superiority

A feeling of national superiority (Hechter, 1987; Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989) is a vital characteristic of nationalism. As Covid-19 spread all over the world, China's epidemic was under control while the situation in foreign countries, such as the US, was getting worse. The participants discussed China's situation in a group chat.

Excerpt 5. *Other countries should learn from China's governance methods. After all, this time China handled it best. Strongly urge other countries to imitate China's attitudes and practices. If those countries remain blindly confident for a long time, this will lead to self-destruction* (其他国家应该借鉴中国的治理方法。毕竟, 只有这次中国才能做到最好。强烈呼吁其他国家模仿中国的态度和做法, 如果那些国家已久盲目自信, 那就自身自灭吧) (Josh, WeChat Group, 27 Feb, 2020).

Excerpt 6. *The American system is inferior to China. No country in the world is comparable to China. Those countries talk about human rights every day. In this case, only China can control it* (美国的制度确实不如中国。世界上没有哪个国家能与中国媲美。这些国家每天都在谈论人权。在这种情况下, 只有中国可以控制它)。

When it comes to the latest international news about other governments' measures, most students expressed national superiority with statements such as 'we are the best' and 'other countries should take action like ours as soon as possible'. In the light of the origin of Covid-19 and the in-

sulting term, the 'China virus', the following statement is widely and actively supported among the students.

Excerpt 7. *In the past two days, there were rumours that the new type of the Coronavirus did not come from China at all. You see, the American flu was earlier. They did not check it out, and then it spread to China. When we checked it out, we are the convenient whipping boy* (这两天有传闻说新型冠状病毒根本不是来自中国, 你看, 美国流感比我们早, 但是他们没有检查出来, 然后传到中国, 被我们检查出来了, 我们中国就得背锅) (Robyn, Comment on WeChat Moments, 27 Feb, 2020).

To the extent that larger, nearer and more powerful outgroups are more threatening, ethnocentric, and nationalistic hostility is more strongly directed against larger, nearer, and more powerful outgroups (Sumner, 1906, p. 12). This statement indicates that they harbour antipathy toward outgroups, such as the US, the potential powerful imagined enemy.

SIT provides initial reasons to some of the principal ideas that characterise national identity, such as sense of belonging, national pride and superiority. In this study, the data is actually much more complex than might have been anticipated from the perspectives of SIT which results in in-group favouritism or out-group denigration or both. The following part will focus on a related theory by drawing on related research to make sense of students' national identity.

#### 4.4. Critical reflection

The acknowledged advantages of China did not blindfold the participants, as most students also noticed the strengths that Russia had in some areas.

Excerpt 8. *After living in Russia, the Russian awareness of the pursuit of art and beauty is worthy of our study. I lived in a remote city, where the architecture was very distinctive. However, I get aesthetic fatigue by looking at the seamless sameness of the buildings in China. While pursuing high-speed economic development, often there is a price to pay* (在俄罗斯生活了一段时间之后, 俄国人对艺术和美的追求值得我们学习。我住在一个偏远的城市, 那里的建

*'Social Identity Theory (SIT) postulates that in-group favouritism is a consequence of subjective identification. The attitude toward their own nation will change in a comparative context, with different dimensions being selected depending on the comparison of out-groups that are available in the prevailing context'*

筑非常有特色。但是, 我已经对中国千篇一律的建筑审美疲劳了。不过也能理解在追求高速经济发展的同时, 往往要付出一定的代价) (Julie, Interview, 24 Feb, 2020).

Excerpt 9. *Russia is a well-educated nation. When the hall is full of people, everyone queues in an orderly manner without making noise. In the four months of my life, I find even if there was a traffic jam, I have never heard the driver's irritating horn. At the same time, in the street, the car must be a courtesy to pedestrians, and pedestrians will not randomly cross the road. At this point, it is worth learning* (俄罗斯民族的公民素养。大厅里挤满了人, 大家都有序的排队, 没有吵闹。生活的四个月里, 即使堵车, 我也未曾听到司机烦躁的鸣笛声, 同时, 在街上, 汽车一定是先礼让行人, 同时行人不会随意乱闯马路。在这一点上, 值得我们学习) (Hannah, Personal Report, 4 July, 2019).

Teacher-student relationships and social manners were also appreciated by the participants.

Excerpt 10. *After studying in Russia for a while, I can intuitively feel the difference between the Chinese and Russian education models. In China, the system promotes the 'duck-feeding' teaching that has teachers dominating the lessons and has students as notetakers. In Russia, the class atmosphere is relatively active and relaxed, and the interaction between students and teachers is more frequent. Although I prefer the Russian way, I know China has a large population and lacks educational resources. Therefore, it is unrealistic for China to adopt an education method like Russia. What is more, with the reform of the education system, China will solve the education soon* (在俄罗斯学习了一段时间之后, 我可以直观地感受到中俄教育模式之间的差异。在中国, 老师在教室里占主导地位, 而学生只做笔记。



*'Exposure to intercultural interactions, diversity-related courses and observations of the host country offered Chinese students an opportunity to (re)examine their national identity'*

在俄罗斯，课堂气氛相对活跃和轻松，师生之间的互动更加频繁。尽管我更喜欢俄罗斯的方式，但我知道中国的国情不允许，中国人口众多，缺乏教育资源。中国采取像俄罗斯这样的教育方法是不现实的。而且，随着教育体制的改革，教育问题肯定会很快得到解决) (Josh, Interview, 24 Feb, 2020).

Exposure to intercultural interactions, diversity-related courses and observations of the host country offered Chinese students an opportunity to (re)examine their national identity. Compared to Russia, they admitted that China's shortcomings were obvious and inevitable. They are willing to learn from Russia. They developed a scale of constructive patriotism defined as 'an attachment to country characterised by critical loyalty' and 'questioning and criticism' driven by 'a desire for positive change' (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153).

In the Covid-19 situation, a wave of anger and grief flooded Chinese social media site Weibo (weblog) when news of Dr Li's death broke late on the 7th of February (Yu, 2020). Intense discussions were raised among the students.

Excerpt 11. *The hot search about the death of Dr Li Wenliang, from the continuous surge to the disappearance of all, ridiculous freedom of speech. We want freedom of speech* (关于李文亮医生之死的热搜，从持续暴涨到全部消失，可笑的言论自由。我们想要言论自由) (Julie, WeChat Group, 7 Feb, 2020).

Excerpt 12. *Behind every social platform, there is a pair of watching eyes and any sensitive words must be deleted* (在每个社交平台的背后，都有一对眼睛可以直接看，所有相关的单词和单词都必须删除) (Mark, Comment on WeChat Moments, 7 Feb, 2020).

According to the respondents' reaction, they blend a love of country with political efforts directed at a change in the status quo. To our relief, on March 5, 2020, Dr Li was accorded martyr status for sacrificing his life in combating Covid-19 by the National Health Commission, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, and the

State Administration of Traditional Chinese Medicine (China identifies 14 Hubei frontline workers, 2020). To some extent, the youth's patriotism can lead to a positive civic consequence and active political involvement (Rothi et al., 2005). On the other hand, their demonstrated reflexivity proved the link between political involvement and constructive patriotism (Schatz et al., 1999, p. 153).

## 5. DISCUSSION

Turning now to the two research questions mentioned at the beginning of this paper.

(1) Does the experience of studying in Russia change a Chinese student's national identity? National identity is often invisible in the homeland where nationality is seen as the norm. Once uprooted from a comfort zone and becoming the 'other', 'being Chinese' is invigorated and salient. Hence, when study participants were placed into cross-cultural contexts, their group membership (i.e. being a Chinese) triggered the reflection on national identity. The participants demonstrated a clear sense of national pride when China outweighed Russia in some respects. Inglehart (1997), in his 'scarcity hypothesis', held that in a country where economic and material resources are relatively scarce, individuals pursue the goals of economic development, material abundance and tend to have a strong national identity. Such observation is applicable to people in China, who are keen on nationalism and patriotism. Studying in Russia as an advanced industrial country, research participants enhanced their subjective values of national identity by comparing the levels of socio-economic development in homeland and abroad. Meanwhile, they also acknowledged the strength of the host country and were willing to learn from Russia in critical reflection.

(2) Has the Covid-19 pandemic influenced their thinking towards how they feel about their country as it relates to China's success in combatting the virus? The respondents expressed a sense of superiority about China's rapid response to contain the outbreak, while other governments floundered. The favourable comparison largely consolidates national identity, which in return, would enhance

the solidarity and cohesion in a national group (Richards, 2013) and eventually help the country out of the crisis. However, the out-group prejudice on the international issue incites discrimination and xenophobia. In the longer term, stigmatisation and discrimination might have a negative impact on Chinese youth's interaction with the diverse world where different ideas and cultural norms exist. The participants' attitude of anti-discrimination in the world-wide context and their appeal for the 'freedom of speech' expressed their desire for a positive social change, which implies their noticeable growth from passive audiences to future proactive social engagers.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Previous research on interculturality also shows convincingly that contact with other cultures alone is not sufficient to dispel stereotypes; stereotyping tends to impede deeper learning and cross-cultural development, and even encourage hostility (Ye & Edwards, 2018; Kinginger, 2008; Tusting et al., 2002). Hence conscious reflection and re-entry guidance are particularly important for overseas returnees, when in-depth contact with host residents is absent (Ye, 2017). At the individual level, a student's national identity affects intercultural communication. Negative attitudes toward some or all outgroups and boasting itself superior may be potential barriers to effective intercultural interactions (Thomas, 1996). Therefore, Chinese international students' concrete expression on national

identity could offer valuable analysis and recommendations for the suitable design of interventions and future training programmes. Given the positive effects of national identity, Chinese educators could encourage international programmes aimed at maintaining a sense of national identity in cross-cultural interaction.

However, this study is limited by the comparatively small sample data size and less diverse demographic backgrounds. The findings can hardly be generalised, but this did not hinder this research to shed light on other similar settings and provide empirical evidence for tertiary educators and exchange programme organisers. Therefore, further research may wish to use large-scale sample sizes and choose different regions and various educational backgrounds of the participants. Additionally, an investigation of exchange students' own perceptions of their national identity before and after studying abroad is particularly recommended.

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## Appendix

### *Interview questions*

(1) What was it like to be a Chinese when you were in Russia?

当在俄罗斯的时候，你是如何看待中国人这个身份？

(2) What is the difference you observe between China and Russia?

你观察到中国和俄罗斯有何不同？

(3) While you were in Russia, how did you describe yourself to people you met?

你在俄罗斯的时候，你是如何向他人描述自己的？

(4) Do you look at China differently while or since leaving Russia?

在俄罗斯时或离开俄罗斯时，你是否看待中国有和不同？

(5) What is your most unforgettable moment in Russia?

在俄罗斯时，你最难忘的时刻是什么？

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# Original Research

## Language and the pandemic: The construction of semantic frames in Greek-German comparison

by Nikolaos Katsaounis

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*This paper aims to provide an insight into the way native speakers of different first languages (L1) who live in the same country and are therefore influenced to the same degree by the current Covid-19 pandemic (e.g. share the same everyday experiences and are confronted with the same linguistic input in the same context) frame Covid-19 related events. More specifically, a comparison between the framework of L1 speakers of German and L1 speakers of Greek, all residing in Greece during the pandemic. Our goal is to unveil commonalities and differences in the structuring of concepts using a frame-semantic approach. In order to investigate the frames that are indexed when talking about experiences, topics, and concepts newly introduced by the Covid-19 pandemic, we chose to build a small bilingual corpus based on participants' answers in surveys in the respective languages. We use preliminary data to evaluate the feasibility of the theoretical as well as the methodological approach. This paper presents the pilot phase of a broader project whose final conclusions will be available in 2021.*

**KEYWORDS:** *frame semantics, corpora, cross-linguistic analysis, Covid-19, pandemic*



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Covid-19 pandemic has posed a plethora of challenges, social and otherwise. These challenges are also expressed in the introduction of new experience in our everyday lives as well as the introduction of new vocabulary in our everyday talk. Newly introduced vocabulary and the concepts it represents in the context of the Covid-19 situation has spurred the need for more research in the field. Some sociolinguistic studies

(Piller et al., 2020) as well as the construction of relative corpora (Davies, 2020) are already underway.

In light of this, and considering that cross-linguistic differences in conceptual representation have not yet been sufficiently explored (Pavlenko, 2009), or better yet, not sufficiently explored outside the field of bilingualism, we aimed for a project that would combine the above parameters. We have hence chosen to research how speakers

of different L1s, who experience the pandemic in the same broad social context, frame Covid-19 related concepts and situations. In other words, one of our main questions is: can words in different languages index the same frame, as long as the speakers experience the same environment?

To approach this matter, we employed Frame Semantics as a tool of investigating the representation of concepts in different languages, as they are constructed by speakers who have common lived experiences. The study focuses on L1 speakers of German as the experimental group (see 5.1.) and attempts to answer some of the key questions regarding the framing of Covid-19 related events, situations, objects, etc.: (a) do the semantic roles assigned in the phrasing of Covid-19 related events differ between speakers of different L1s residing in the same linguistic environment?; (b) in which linguistic context are Covid-19 related concepts represented in the everyday discourse of native and non-native speakers?; (c) how Covid-19 related concepts and their wordings are incorporated in everyday experience of native and non-native speakers and which semantic frames they activate regarding specific experiences?

Since the field of research as well as the above questions are broad and require careful study, we opted for a pilot phase. This paper gives a brief insight into the theoretical background and the methodology of the pilot phase.

## 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

As this study intends to investigate the relation between language and the pandemic and specifically the construction of related semantic frames, we should firstly see what frames are.

In cognitive psychology, the basic units of knowledge are concepts. Linguists approach the meaning behind the use of natural languages with the aim of discovering the logic and structure behind the relations that interact in a given system. The study of the mind is interested in the thought process and the cognitive mechanisms behind specific phenomena, such as categorisation, memory, learning, and decision making. The link between intentional thought, understanding of

content and theoretical integrated knowledge constitutes one of the main philosophical challenges, and especially the relationship established between the reality of the human being and what is referred to as context of its reference, broadening in the process the notion of the context. In Minsky's (1975) and Barsalou's (1992a) theory of frames there is a collaboration between linguists, cognitive scientists and philosophers in order to create a unified understanding of the categorisation of concepts.

Frame semantics, usually ascribed to Fillmore (1975, 1977, 1982, 1985), describes the conceptual meaning of language and content not as a phenomenon in isolation to its environment, but as part of a system of knowledge. Fillmore (1982) defines frames as knowledge developed in a consistent structure, exercised on a daily basis. This perspective allows us to view that knowledge of word semantics as, in part, knowledge of the individual structures and linguistic environments in which the word is developed.

Thus, semantic frames give us the opportunity to understand the lexical meaning of the word through the pre-existing system of beliefs and ideas. Therefore, a holistic knowledge of the way a word is used is absolutely necessary in order to understand its meaning. A semantic frame consists of a structure of related meanings in a coherent way: without the knowledge of the whole structure, it is impossible to understand its entity on its own. A frame is produced from each word, particular to each usage. For example, the frame Commercial Transaction forms an immediate connection with words such as *buy*, *sell*, *goods*, and *money*.

The feature list approach (Fillmore, 1975) is viewed as a common systemic way of modelling knowledge representation. This includes creating a list of the range of features or attributes associated with a particular meaning or use. Adopting this perspective, there is a hypothesis that e.g. the concept of car has a range of features or attributes associated with it, that relate to its parts (wheel, tire, windscreen, bonnet, boot, steering wheel, engine and so on), as well as the requirement of pet-

*'The link between intentional thought, understanding of content and theoretical integrated knowledge constitutes one of the main philosophical challenges, and especially the relationship established between the reality of the human being and what is referred to as context of its reference, broadening in the process the notion of the context'*

rol and gas for its functionality, the necessity of a license in order to drive it and so on. However, one of the problems of modelling knowledge solely in terms of feature lists is the fact that most of human knowledge is established through the formation of relative structures. For example, we view the engine as the part that puts the car in motion. We also associate the turning of the wheels with the usage of the engine and the consumption of gas. Moreover, we know that the vehicle won't start unless a driver starts the ignition and drives it. Thus, a serious problem with viewing a concept as a straightforward list of features is the omission of a way to integrate the components of the list. A way of overcoming this shortcoming is through the theory of frames. Since Bartlett's (1932) theory of schemata, representation in terms of frames is, in cognitive psychology, the traditional way for modelling knowledge. A recent version of this theory proposed by Barsalou (1992a, 1992b) defines frames as complex conceptual structures that are used to 'represent all types of categories, including categories for animates, objects, locations, physical events, mental events and so forth' (Barsalou, 1992a, p. 29). According to this view, the basis for representing knowledge can be found in frames, in their ability of continually updating and modifying the ever-changing human experience, and their usefulness in reasoning and generating new inferences.

The semantic frame is a structure of knowledge playing a required role in understanding a specific word or a lexical composition. For example, Fill-

more (1982) argues that in order to understand the related group of words *buy, sell, pay, spend, cost, charge, tender, change*, and so on, access to a Commercial Event frame is needed to provide 'the background and motivation for the categories which these words represent' (Fillmore, 1982, p. 116-117). The Commercial Event frame includes participant roles, attributes including the word structures of *buyer, seller, goods* and *money*. In comparison, *pay* is considered 'trivalent', which means that it requires three participants: the buyer, the seller and the goods.

While semantic frames like the Commercial Event frame describe knowledge as independent from the speech event, Evans and Green (2006) add a second layer to frames which gives us the opportunity of framing the use of word meaning in an appropriate context. This type of frame is called Speech Event frame. This way of framing knowledge allows the schematisation of context in an interactive way, contributing to the interpretation and understanding of particular word structures and lexical constructions.

For example, we have Speech Event frames for fairy tales, academic lectures, conversations, obituaries, official reports, horoscopes and business letters, among others. The schematic knowledge of styles and language use is contained in these Speech Event frames. It is necessary to point out that while these frames are described as 'Speech Event frames', they don't exclusively relate to forms of speech, but also to events of written language. Each one of these forms provides a way of creating a frame for each type of interaction (written or spoken), without disregarding the choices that dictate the interaction, such as language, vocabulary, grammatical constructions and style of expression.

Indeed, many lexical items indicate a specific Speech Event frame, such as the well-known English expression *once upon a time*, which precludes the generic Fairy Tale frame, creating a frame of certain expectations. Speech Event frames are then considered as organised knowledge structures that are embedded in the cultural environment of the communication process.



### 3. THE PANDEMIC AS SCENE

The Covid-19 pandemic has taken the world by surprise. This unprecedented situation has exposed humans around the globe to new experiences and set new chronotopic boundaries (in the Bakhtinian sense), in which these experiences are lived, shaped into and expressed through language.

In order to closely investigate how the different elements of these pandemic-defined experiences are framed in language, we first needed to define the nature and topoi of these experiences. With regards to the nature of pandemic-related experiences we must first ask what the conditions for such experiences are. As mentioned above, the Covid-19 pandemic can be viewed as a quasi-universal experience, since the macro-conditions set by this natural as well as social phenomenon are the same for all affected people: fear, sickness and death. Meso-conditions, from policies to collective knowledge and attitudes, are situated in the respective societies, embedded in the respective cultures and can thus differ, while micro-conditions are relative to the individual. In addition to the above categorisation we need to locate pandemic-related experiences. Where do they lie and what triggers them? To answer this question, we adapted an ontological approach to the notions of scene and situation. Such an approach complies with the frame semantic methodology that we implemented for the purposes of this research, in the sense that situations are semantic nets: the words used for describing a situation are contextually limited and so are the indexed semantic roles and frames.

Drawing upon Devlin's (2006) situation semantics and adopting the notion of scene as superordinate to situation (Almeida et al., 2018), we categorised the pandemic and the resulting macro-, meso- and micro-conditions based on the following relation: the Covid-19 pandemic as a social phenomenon (a health crisis) formed a specific dynamic environment for all affected humans and processes alike that in our research is described as a scene. The pandemic as a scene has the following characteristics: it extends in time, yet 'remains the same, even when constituent entities change' (Almeida et al., 2018, p. 29). The term

*'As mentioned above, the Covid-19 pandemic can be viewed as a quasi-universal experience, since the macro-conditions set by this natural as well as social phenomenon are the same for all affected people: fear, sickness and death'*

'constituent entities' reflects the aforementioned meso- and micro-conditions and can be interpreted as the different situations within the scene: *'Each situation in a scene is a [...] part of the scene, forming a unified whole in time. [...] a scene [...] involves a (temporal) succession of situations [...] involving the objects in the scene'* (Almeida et al., 2018, p. 29). Since situations represent qualitative changes within the scene, the scene has proportionally the same properties with the situations that constitute it. Hence, the situations that constitute the Covid-19 pandemic scene and the frames we use to index them may reveal the properties of the scene. Such an analogy could prove to be helpful for revealing relations between scene and situations and between the corresponding frames and for drawing generalisable conclusions about meaning and language use for the frames that we are researching.

The described categorical cognitive modelling served as a basis for designing the survey, especially the part that we obtained the data for frame analysis. Section 3 *Covid-19 topics and discourses* presents the participants with different situations in the sense described above (Questions 1-10). The reasoning behind this was to examine (a) if certain situations evoke certain frames; (b) if evoked frames correspond to one or more situations; and (c) if relations between frames correspond to relations between situations. Answers to the above questions are expected to be available upon completion of the project as a whole. From a methodological point of view, the distinction between situations and the handling of one situation per question by the participant made both meaning retrieval and context boundaries easier to pinpoint, which in turn made frame analysis easier.

#### 4. WHAT DOES A CROSS-LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS HAVE TO OFFER?

As discussed above, the Covid-19 pandemic has had a severe impact upon human existence, behaviour and policies at a global level. But to assume that every country and everyone is affected the same would be an overstatement. This means that while the conditions of the pandemic at a macro-level produce the same effect on every party and every aspect, the conditions of the phenomenon at a meso-level may differ from country to country. One could therefore easily hypothesise that the Covid-19 pandemic discourses differ from society to society and that they are shaped by local parameters, such as (a) local (standard) language; (b) common input of information about the subject (and thus common knowledge of the subject); (c) common experiences regarding the implemented policy responses, the societal, economic and psychological aftermath, etc.

One of the main goals of the project is to examine if and to what extent language alone plays a role in shaping the Covid-19 pandemic discourses. For this reason, the methodology described below is structured in such a way that all aforementioned parameters do not differ, except for the language. We have therefore obtained data from native speakers of different first languages (L1), for whom all other parameters are the same. In that respect, a cross-linguistic frame semantic analysis could produce fruitful results, since frames are structured representations of concepts and concepts are verbalised by words, phrases or sentences in a specific linguistic system. Another question that can be addressed while using a cross-linguistic frame semantic analysis is if and to what extent words, phrases or sentences in a specific language are anchored in culture. A comparison of frames that relate to the same semantic situation but are expressed in different languages and thus anchored in different cultures may provide new insights on the meaning of culture-specific words. The means of the described cross-linguistic frame semantic analysis and the following comparison between 'universal' and culture-specific frames will be discussed as follows.

#### 5. DATA AND METHODOLOGY

##### 5.1. Obtaining the data set

The project consists of a series of phases. This paper discusses the pilot phase as an evaluative stage mainly of the means of data collection. Due to the nature of the data that we aimed for (written responses to opinion questions) and the implementation of both qualitative and quantitative methods, a pilot phase was needed in order to evaluate the relevance of a small specialised corpus with regard to frame semantics.

In order to examine the emergence of Covid-19 related frames in the discourse of native speakers with different L1s that experience the pandemic in the same environment, we chose the following profile of participants: Greek and German native speakers that reside in Greece during the pandemic and thus experience the same conditions regarding the force of the pandemic, preventative measures, media input, etc. An important participation restriction that should be mentioned here is that all German and Greek participants should not be bilingual. The group of German participants serves as the experimental group, while the group of Greek participants, who reside in an environment where their L1 is spoken, is the control group. The variable to be examined is thus language usage and the framing of concepts.

German participants were required to reside in Greece during the pandemic and their knowledge of Greek will be taken into account in the analysis but was not required. Greek participants were not required to have any knowledge of German. German and Greek participants received the same survey with only minor differences regarding the knowledge of Greek by German participants.

Apart from the aforementioned reasons for a cross-linguistic approach, we considered the working languages of both annotators upon choosing Greek and German, in order to provide reliable results from the frame analysis.

##### 5.2. Design and distribution of the surveys

As already discussed, the survey was the chosen method of data collection. A semi-structured survey was distributed in both Greek and

German to the respective native speakers/participants in electronic form. Simple random sampling (SRS) was the method of choice regarding the distribution of both surveys, although the number of the Greek frame population was expected to be higher than the number of the German frame population. The surveys collected are fully anonymised. Since this paper presents the pilot phase of the project, the distribution of both surveys is still ongoing and is expected to be until October 2020.

Both surveys consist of three sections. Section 1 contains demographic questions about e.g. gender, age group, education, etc. Section 2 contains questions about the languages spoken by the participants as well as the language(s) in which the participants inform themselves about the pandemic. Section 3 contains 10 open-ended tasks in the form of a question. The produced genre is opinion writing/opinion statement. This genre was selected, because semantic frames are experience-based schematisations, which means there is a correlation between genre and semantic roles (Paltridge, 1997; Roth & Lapata, 2015). Apart from that, presenting a genre-specific writing outcome for analysis ensures that all sentences will have similar organisational/syntactic properties. The tasks are controlled and so the participants are asked to answer each question with at least one complete sentence. Since each question addresses a specific situation, as part of the Covid-19 scene, setting the limit to one sentence per answer serves to compare the indexed semantic roles and/or frames between the two languages/cultures.

### 5.3. Cross-linguistic frame semantic analysis as method

The pilot phase has rendered a bilingual corpus (Greek/German) consisting of 600 sentences. After evaluating the preliminary results, the corpus is expected to reach a minimum of 2000 sentences. The research is based on a small-scale specialised corpus, since a variation between genres that would require a much larger corpus is not relevant to the study. Another reason for choosing to build and work on a small-scale specialised corpus is

that, unlike FrameNet, which is based on the analysis of lexical units (LU) in one or the other language, the analysis of our context-specific corpus is oriented less on identifying lexical items (and their organisation in the lexicon) and more on semantic features, i.e. on frame elements (FE). Since semantic features often ‘provide a generalisation over [...] specific lexical items’ (Fisher & Riloff, 1992, p. 47), the frequency of FE can be tested even by means of a smaller corpus – a hypothesis that remains to be tested.

Having discussed the appropriateness of a small corpus, we need to describe the methodological steps of the project. Since this is still an ongoing process, the steps taken thus far are part of the pilot phase.

1. Dependency-parsing of both the Greek and the German corpus, in order to obtain distributional information. For this, we used the Greek Dependency Treebank and the ILSP Dependency Parser for Greek texts (Prokopidis et al., 2011). For the German corpus we used the dependency version of the TüBa-D/Z treebank (Telljohann et al., 2005) in combination with the Zurich Dependency Parser for German (ParZu) (Sennrich et al., 2009).

2. Based on the obtained distributional information we are in the process of drawing out distributional preferences (syntactic patterns, fillers, etc.) for LUs that we investigate as part of a frame.

The above steps were implemented to all sentences that were extracted from the surveys in the pilot phase. Sentence sampling will be implemented in later phases. Examples of specific LUs that were drawn out from the corpus in the pilot phase are shown below.

The methodological steps, based on which the encoding, annotation and frame analysis will take place in the upcoming phases, are described as follows.

1. Steps 1 and 2 of the pilot phase will take place for the whole corpus.

2. Sentence sampling. Here, the pilot phase will serve as preliminary scanning for the semantic-syntactic combinations of specific LUs, in relation to specific (at that point speculated) frames. The

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frequency of patterns as well as the typical and atypical meaning of LUs will also be taken into account for the analysis at a later stage. A verification and expansion of the combinations is expected based on the extension of the corpus in this phase.

3. Encoding and annotation of sample sentences. After studying the semantic-syntactic combinations of the sampled LUs, we will select the possible FE configurations for those combinations.

4. Analysis of frames. Each LU will be assigned a frame based on the possible FE configurations.

5. Investigation of analogy or correspondence of frames between Greek and German.

## 6. PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

After implementing steps 1 and 2 to all gathered data of the bilingual corpus we isolated dominant lexemes for every situation. Here, we present a sample of sentences from the Greek corpus regarding the LU φθίνω [to decrease] and look for corresponding frames in the German corpus. The sample sentences are answers to Question 10, where participants are asked about the future of the pandemic (examples from the Greek and German corpus):

(a) [...] [μακροπρόθεσμα] θα φθίνει η έξαρση [της πανδημίας] / [...] [in the long run] the outbreak [of the pandemic] will decrease;

(b) [...] [σιγά σιγά] θα φθίνει ο ιός / [...] [slowly] the virus will decrease;

(c) [...], (dann) wird die Pandemie eingedämmt / [...] the pandemic will be contained.

(d) [...], dass man die Pandemie bald eindämmen wird / [...] that the pandemic will soon be controlled.

In examples (a) and (b) the verb φθίνω indicates two different framesets, since the syntactic-semantic properties in (b) trigger a distinction. There is only one semantic role in (b), while (a) is realised in two. This leads to the creation of two framesets:

(1) φθίνω (a) ‘μειώνομαι’ [to lessen] / s.r.1: οντότητα σε ύφεση [entity in decline] / s.r.2: φαινόμενο [phenomenon];

(2) φθίνω (b) ‘αποδυναμώνομαι’ [to become weaker] / s.r.1: φαινόμενο [phenomenon].

In examples (c) and (d) the verb eindämmen [to curb] also indicates two different frames:

(1) eindämmen (c) ‘dämpfen’ [to downscale/μετριάζω] / s.r.1: Phänomen [phenomenon];

(2) eindämmen (d) ‘kontrollieren’ [to control/ελέγχω] / s.r.1: der Verantwortliche [the one in charge] / s.r.2: Phänomen [phenomenon].

Although in those particular examples there is no sufficient prima facie evidence of semantic analogy between the two languages, the need for a deeper cultural approach should be stressed.

## 7. LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE WORK

A considerable limitation that was already visible in the pilot phase of the project is that the lexical choices that participants – even participants with the same L1 – employ to express their opinion on specific domains (e.g. Covid-19 related situations) differ between participants. Furthermore, the difficulty to ensure that the sentences chosen for annotation are representative of the language is greater, when the data derives from survey participants that might not use the standard form of a language. The above result in a minimisation of the usefulness of the corpus at hand.

In order to overcome this obstacle, we need to envisage a Covid-19 corpus, both in German and Greek, that could be used to cross-examine the relevance, grammaticality, etc. of the participants’



responses. Some projects for the English language are already underway (Covid-19 Open Research Dataset CORD-19 and the Coronavirus Corpus) but there is still more to be done regarding the German and the Greek language. As far as the cultural aspect is concerned, a limitation that derives from working with and comparing multilingual data with regards to framework is that the comparison is often based on the linguistic intuition of the researcher, since translation and cultural equivalents undergo contextual restrictions, as well as differences in connotations and collocations, etc.

and are not easy to pinpoint. Since meaning is often – or always one could argue – anchored in culture, there is a need to re-evaluate emerging frames under the scope of culture. For this, we propose the incorporation of Natural Semantic Metalanguage cultural scripts (Wierzbicka, 1996) as part of the methodology. There is a growing interest in analysing the framework behind culture-specific words (Wierzbicka, 2010; Goddard, 2012; Jiang et al., 2016; VanNoy, 2017) and examining the universalities of human experience, without disregarding the differences between L1s and C1s.

## APPENDIX

### Survey. Language and the Pandemic: The construction of semantic frames in Greek-German comparison

You will need approximately 15-20 minutes to complete this survey.

**Research aims.** The main aim of this research is to examine the way native speakers of different first languages (L1) who live in the same country and are thus influenced to the same degree by the Covid-19 pandemic, share the same everyday experiences and are confronted with the same linguistic input in the same context, frame Covid-19 related events.

**Who is running the project?** The study is led by researchers at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki and the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (for further information contact the lead researcher at [katsaounis@del.auth.gr](mailto:katsaounis@del.auth.gr)).

**Participation requirements.** Participants should be native speakers of German who are born in Germany and currently reside in Greece. Years and status of residence as well as knowledge of Greek will be asked but are not as such a reason for not participating. Participants should have experienced Covid-19 preventive lockdowns and/or social distancing measures from the time these were imposed up and onwards.

**Participation restrictions.** Participants should not be bilinguals (either German-Greek or German-other language). Both parents of the participant should be German.

**Data management.** In accordance with the Code of Ethics in Research of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) and the Code of Ethics and Good Practice of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA), collected data are anonymised. Participants will not be asked their names. Each answered survey will be assigned a code, so that the data can be assessed comprehensively. The code will not be related to an identifiable natural person.

**Survey deadline.** The survey will be open until August 28th, 2020.

#### Consent form

- I have read the information provided about the study.
- I understand that the project is compliant with the Code of Ethics in Research of the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (AUTH) and the Code of Ethics and Good Practice of the National and Kapodistrian University of Athens (UoA).
- I understand why this study is being done.
- I understand what it means for my results to be used in this study.
- I understand that there will be a code assigned to my answers without making me identifiable.
- I understand that my participation in this project is entirely voluntary and that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time.
- I understand that my personal details will not be used in the study.

I have read the above and consent to taking part in this study.

- yes
- no

**Section 1. Personal information**

You will be asked questions about yourself.

- |   |  |  |
|---|--|--|
| <p>1. What is your gender?<br/>– female<br/>– male<br/>– different identity</p>   | <p>2. In which age group do you belong?<br/>– 18-30<br/>– 31-45<br/>– 46-65<br/>– 65 and above</p>   | <p>3. Where in Greece do you currently reside?<br/>– inner urban area<br/>– outer urban area<br/>– local centre in rural area<br/>– rural area close to urban area<br/>– sparsely populated rural area</p> |
| <p>4. Where in Germany were you born?<br/>– inner urban area<br/>– outer urban area<br/>– local centre in rural area<br/>– rural area close to urban area<br/>– sparsely populated rural area</p> | <p>4. Where in Greece were you born?<br/>– inner urban area<br/>– outer urban area<br/>– local centre in rural area<br/>– rural area close to urban area<br/>– sparsely populated rural area</p> |  |
| <p>5. What is your level of education?<br/>– primary<br/>– secondary<br/>– bachelor degree<br/>– master's degree<br/>– doctoral degree</p>  | <p>6. What is your political orientation?<br/>– right wing<br/>– centre<br/>– left wing<br/>– other<br/>– prefer not to say</p>  | <p>7. What is your yearly income (approx.)?<br/>– 1.000-5.000E<br/>– 5.000-10.000E<br/>– 10.000-20.000E<br/>– 20.000-40.000E<br/>– 40.000E and above</p>   |
| <p>8. How many years are you situated in Greece?<br/>– 0-2<br/>– 2-5<br/>– 5-10<br/>– 10 and above</p>  | <p>8. No equivalent question.</p>  |  |
| <p>9. In your household do you reside together with Greeks (e.g. spouse)?<br/>– yes<br/>– no</p>  | <p>9. No equivalent question.</p>  |  |

**Section 2. Language**

You will be asked questions about the languages you speak and use in everyday life.

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <p>10. Is German your native language?<br/>– yes<br/>– no</p>   | <p>10. Is Greek your native language?<br/>– yes<br/>– no</p> |
| <p>11. How would you assess your knowledge of Greek?<br/>– natively like<br/>– advanced level<br/>– intermediate level<br/>– elementary level</p> | <p>11. No equivalent question.</p>                           |
| <p>12. How did you learn Greek?<br/>– at an institutional setting (language school, private lessons, etc.)<br/>– by interacting with natives</p>  | <p>12. No equivalent question.</p>                           |
| <p>13. How often do you use Greek in your everyday life?<br/>– always<br/>– most of the time<br/>– sometimes<br/>– rarely<br/>– never</p>         | <p>13. No equivalent question.</p>                           |

14. Do you speak foreign languages (other than Greek)? If so, which one(s)?

15. How often do you use your foreign language(s) (other than Greek) in your everyday life? If you have answered 'no foreign languages' in the above question, you might disregard this question.

- always
- most of the time
- sometimes
- rarely
- never

16. Where do you get the Covid-19 related information?  
 – always through German media, never through Greek media  
 – mainly through German media, rarely from Greek media  
 – sometimes through German media, sometimes through Greek media  
 – rarely through German media, mainly through Greek media  
 – never through German media, always from Greek media

16. Where do you get the Covid-19 related information?  
 – always through Greek media, never through foreign media  
 – mainly through Greek media, rarely from foreign media  
 – sometimes through Greek media, sometimes through foreign media  
 – rarely through Greek media, mainly through foreign media  
 – never through Greek media, always from foreign media

### Section 3. Covid-19 topics and discourses

You will be asked to answer the following questions about certain Covid-19 related topics by writing at least one COMPLETE sentence.

Question 1: What are your thoughts about the origins of the pandemic?

Question 2: What are your thoughts about managing the pandemic through individual responsibility?

Question 3: What are your thoughts on the role of the government managing the pandemic?

Question 4: What are your thoughts on the opening of schools during the pandemic?

Question 5: What are your thoughts on the role of the media covering the pandemic?

Question 6: What are your thoughts about the production of a vaccine?

Question 7: What are your thoughts about the role of a mask as a preventative measure?

Question 8: What are your thoughts about the post-pandemic economy in Greece?

Question 9: What are your thoughts about the role of medical specialists conveying Covid-19 related information to the public?

Question 10: What are your thoughts about the future of the pandemic?

You are asked to write down 5-10 keywords that you related to the Covid-19 pandemic and the situation you currently experience.

Thank you for participating!

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# Original Research

## Language and cognitive science: How language affects reasoning and memory

by Jean Langlois

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*In the last twenty years or so neuroscience and linguistics, language and culture have become increasingly interconnected, as we seek to understand the influence of language on behaviour and the way we think and express ourselves. Neuroscience is the study of how the brain and mind work and cognitive science applies that study to how we use language to express our thoughts and feelings and also how our mental faculties work. One of these faculties is memory. How do we recall and express what has happened in the past and even assuming we can remember it at all? The purpose of this paper is to examine how cognitive science has clarified the relationship between language and culture in particular in the way we remember things and express our recollections, using experiments based on facial recognition. In the process the paper demonstrates how language and culture influence our cultural processes and the importance of cognitive science as a part of language and cultural study.*

**KEYWORDS:** cognitive science, Verbal Overshadowing Effect, linguistics, logics, culture, memory, neuroscience



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### 1. INTRODUCTION

At the crossroads of studies on language and culture and studies in cognitive science, we propose in this paper to show how scientific research has been able to show that language (and in particular verbalisation) and culture (through the impact of values and grids of representations) have an impact on the cognitive processes of memory. This paper focuses on two case studies conducted by cognitive scientists: the Verbal Overshadowing Effect and on the study of the language describing colours used by different communities.

### 2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Cognitive science constitutes an interdisciplinary scientific discipline which has as its object the description, the explanation, and the simulation of the mechanisms of human, animal or artificial thought, and more generally of any complex system that deals with the processing of information capable of acquiring, retaining, using and transmitting knowledge (Bazalgette & Langlois, 2020). Cognitive science is therefore based on the study and modelling of various phenomena such as perception, intelligence, language, attention

and, of course, memory. Cognitive sciences jointly use data from the six sub-disciplines that compose it: neuroscience, computational linguistics, cognitive anthropology, cognitive psychology, the philosophy of cognition and artificial intelligence (Bazalgette & Langlois, 2020).

Memory can be defined as the process that allows information to be retained for later re-use. Unlike behaviourist learning, the notion of memory emphasises the structures and processes that mediate between the acquisition of this information and its effects on behaviour. It is the subject of numerous works in cognitive science, from the point of view of psychology, linguistics and neuroscience (Frankland et al., 2019).

The scientific literature defines memory as a universal process. Memory is defined as a cognitive process which functions in the same way whatever the language or the culture of the individuals concerned. The strongly mathematised aspect of cognitive science studies, which require in-depth knowledge of statistics, seems to have limited the cultural and linguistic study of cognitive phenomena which would benefit from analysis in terms of these specificities (Frankland et al., 2019).

### 3. MATERIAL AND METHODS

Cognitive sciences are experimental sciences by definition. Postulating that language or culture has an impact on cognitive phenomena should therefore not be an injunction or a belief but a potential working hypothesis which obviously needs to be tested. The aim of this paper is to analyse a neuroscientific case study of a linguistic strategy called the Verbal Overshadowing Effect (VOE) and to explore differences in the way that different languages describe colour.

## 4. THE VERBAL OVERSHADOWING EFFECT

### 4.1. Background

In June 1990, in the academic journal, *Cognitive Psychology*, two cognitive neuroscientists from the University of California, Santa Barbara, Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990), described for the first time what would be soon coined by linguists and neuroscientists, the 'Verbal Overshadowing

Effect' (VOE). In their paper Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) presented a series of experimental studies where participants were asked to watch the video of a burglary. This was called the encoding phase. Half of the participants had to describe verbally the face of the burglar, the other half had to think up a distractive task (the control group). In the end, all the participants were asked to identify the burglar from among 8 facial photographs (the face of the burglar and 7 random faces).

The results showed a significant difference in the percentage of good recognition between the two groups: 38% in the participants in the verbalisation group versus 64% in the participants in the control group. Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) explained the deleterious effect of the verbal description of a face on the process of remembering. The mere verbal description of the memory of the face altered its subsequent recall.

This spectacular result can be analysed in relation to the 'classic' nature of the situation. A witness of a crime is quite naturally led to describe verbally what he or she has seen. Thus, one possible application of this study could be to prevent any witness of a crime from describing in words the figure of the perpetrator or of the mischief the observer witnessed. According to Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990), the VOE effect results from the process of recoding the representation of the face. People are instructed to verbalise what is not a non-verbal stimulus from memory. The words 'cast a shadow over' the memory, making it less clear, producing, as the analysts described it, a 'verbal over-shadowing'.

Particularly striking, this study questioned the protocol of recognition of the suspect as it was used by US police officers. As a single scientific study is never enough to prove something, several scientists began to test the robustness of the so-called Verbal Overshadowing Effect. In a literature review of the various VOE studies, Meissner and Brigham (2001) have shown that the effect is generally marked and is present in adults, children, and adolescents (see also Dehon et al., 2013). Among these studies, an international replication of the experiment in 2014 gathered together a

large team of high-level researchers. The results were published in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*.

#### 4.2. VOE and colour

An important question is whether the VOE phenomenon is confined to the memory of faces or whether it is a more general phenomenon. The literature shows that individuals have a specific memory for recognising human faces, and that these mechanisms differ in many ways from those implemented with other stimuli. To answer this question, Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) tested the phenomenon with another stimulus: colour. In their experiment target colours (red, blue and green) were first presented to participants, for five seconds. Then, the participants were divided in three groups. They had to carry out a special task for thirty seconds. The first group had to write a precise description of the colour they saw. The second group had to simply visualise it silently. The last group had to write down the greatest possible number of cities in the United States. Finally, all the participants carried out a recognition test which consisted in identifying the memorised target colours presented from among five distracting stimuli sharing a great visual similarity with the target. The results of this study show that the percentage of good recognitions was 33% for the first group, 64% for the second and 73% for the last group. Thus, as with faces, the verbal description of the memory of a colour significantly reduces memory performance.

#### 4.3. The 'cross-cultural' variation

Since the 1990s several cognitive scientists have analysed how language use can vary according to cultural background. The result is the development of the concept of 'cross-cultural variation'. The concept has been described in all areas of human cognition (Jahoda & Krewer, 1997). The cross-cultural differences in behaviour identified in the field of cognitive anthropology and psychology provide useful starting material for studies which test the hypothesis of the neural basis of cultural experience-dependent plasticity, in other words,

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the way that the linguistic expression of experience can be manipulated by variations in cultural background.

Language is definitely one of the most prominent domains of cross-cultural variation research. As Nida (2003) pointed out, there is not always a one-to-one relationship between language and culture but an individual's language(s) and cultural experience are inextricably linked. Language-specific phonology, syntax and orthography (McBride-Chang & Kail, 2002; McBride-Chang et al., 2005; Cheung et al., 2001) influence other aspects of language, such as language learning. By comparing pre-reading and literate children who speak alphabetic and non-alphabetic languages of different levels of phonological complexity, Cheung et al. (2001) found that both orthography and phonological complexity impact phonological awareness.

Several studies have started to identify the neural correlates of cross-linguistic differences (Kochunov et al., 2003; Bolger et al., 2005).

Colour categorisation has a predictable cross-linguistic structure related to the physiology of the human visual system despite the wide variation of colour categories in different languages (Abramov & Gordon, 1994; Kay & McDaniel, 1978). This would suggest that colour perception and categorisation is determined by physiology rather than linguistics. Several studies have suggested, on the contrary, that linguistic colour categories directly influence the processes of colour recognition, memorisation and discrimination (Roberson et al., 2005). This would mean that language could influence higher-order aspects of the process of colour perception.

Research into the impact of culture in cognitive processes provides further information about the malleability of the neural regions underlying the cognitive functions. As shown by Nisbett and Miyamoto (2005), perceptual domains such as context sensitivity and visual illusion susceptibility have also been found to vary cross-culturally (see also Segall et al., 1963).

Several studies in cognitive science have shown that the cognitive task of figure perception could be determined to a certain point by culture. For example, a famous study by Segall et al. (1963) tested individuals from 17 different cultural groups and found substantial differences between the different groups regarding geometric optical illusion susceptibility. The authors deduced that cross-cultural variation in susceptibility to the illusions could be related to certain perceptual habits acquired in different ecological and cultural environments. Rectangularity, for example, was arguably widespread in the urban environments common among the European groups. It was much less widespread in the plains and equatorial forest dwellers of several non-European groups.

Probably the most productive area of cross-cultural variations is social cognition. Two theoretical frameworks have dominated this sub-field: the classification of cultures as either individualistic or collectivistic (Triandis, 1995; Kagitcibasi, 1996), and the classification of individuals as having either an interdependent or independent self-construal (Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Killen & Wainryb, 2000).

#### 4.4. VOE and the five senses

As Meissner and Brigham (2001) point out, several previous studies on VOE suggest that this effect appears to be specific to the verbal description of the face that must be recognised later. Brown and Lloyd-Jones (2003) showed that the task of describing any object would not result in changes to the facial recognition performance of the suspect. The phenomenon of the verbal overshadowing, initially discovered with tasks involving recognition of faces and colours, was replicated with other stimuli with strong perceptual dominance. In

these studies, stimuli were presented in different perceptual registers: the auditory register with the recognition of voice or music (Perfect et al., 2002; Vanags et al., 2005), the visual register with the recognition of images of mushrooms (Melcher & Schooler, 2004) or the evaluation of distances (Fiore & Schooler, 2002), and the taste/olfactory register with the evaluation of the taste 'qualities' of fruits (Wilson & Schooler, 1991) or the recognition of the taste of wines (Melcher & Schooler, 1996). In the study by Wilson and Schooler (1991), for example, the two researchers asked participants to taste five strawberry jams and rank these jams according to their taste qualities. These five jams had previously been the subject of a ranking established by specialised tasters and recruited by a food magazine. Participants in this group were asked to justify their assessments by making a written list of the reasons why they liked or disliked these jams and to reflect on and analyse the reasons for their choices (experimental group). Participants in the control group tasted the different strawberry jams and then ranked them, but they did not list or analyse the reasons for their preferences. The results reveal that the participants in the control group proposed rankings that most closely match those established by professional tasters, compared to participants who verbalised the reasons for their choice. According to the two authors, the translation with words of the sensory experience would have degraded the memory trace of the initial perceptual experience. Thinking about the reasons for a choice would induce a focus of attention on certain irrelevant criteria, which would be detrimental to subsequent recognition.

#### 4.5. Neuroscience and linguo-cultural theory

As well as analysing the impact of the Verbal Overshadowing Effect on the way language is used to describe experiences recalled from memory, cognitive science research has also questioned some of the commonly held principles of cultural difference. One example is the individualism vs. collectivism (IC) framework, which has been used to explain cross-cultural differences in causal attribution, motivation, emotion and even visual per-



ception. Research into IC has been frequently criticised because these concepts are applied too broadly and they are often not treated as independent constructs but as two ends of the same continuum (Schwartz, 1990; Fiske et al., 2002).

Oyserman et al. (2002) performed a meta-analysis of IC studies and found that individualism and collectivism are quite independent constructs. They do not seem to stand up to measurement technique variation. Last but not least, they are not closely aligned with the supposed East/West dichotomy (Westerners are not reliably more individualistic and less collectivistic than Easterners).

Despite these criticisms a large number of published articles on cross-cultural studies employed the IC hypothesis in their explanation of cross-cultural differences (Hui & Yee, 1994).

Recent publications in the field of neuroscience tend to indicate that the IC framework could continue to be a prominent paradigm in cross-cultural studies. Nevertheless, future studies in cognitive science could investigate with more precision plausible neural correlates of the impact of the cultural environment on language and behaviour by paying careful attention to the presentation of critical epistemological analyses of the IC framework (Bjornsdottir & Rule, 2018). The hypothesis of differences between interdependent versus independent selves has been supported by extensive behavioural data but also more recently with neural evidence (Heatheron et al., 2006).

#### **4.6. Neural evidence of the impact of culture on cognitive tasks**

Markus and Kitayama (1991) tried to show that people have either an independent or an interdependent self-concept. Individuals with independent or individualistic self-concepts have a certain way of defining who they are that is based on individual uniqueness and how they compare to others. In contrast, individuals who analyse their environment and social experiences with interdependent self-concepts define themselves through their membership and belongingness to the group. The language they use to do this is different and susceptible to misunderstanding.

People who come from rather independent cultures, such as the United States or the UK, tend to have a more independent self-concept, while those from interdependent cultures, such as in East Asia, tend to have a more interdependent self-concept (Markus & Kitayama 1991; Sui et al., 2007; Triandis, 1995).

According to several cognitive science researchers, the medial prefrontal cortex (mPFC) and the posterior cingulate cortex (PCC) are implicated in the self-referential network (Heatheron et al., 2006; Northoff et al., 2006). Cultural factors could have an impact on the modulation of activation in these areas of the brain.

Researches conducted with Chinese individuals show that both self-referential and mother-referential encodings activate mPFC in these participants. This strongly suggests that the Chinese concept of the self could include or overlap with that of the mother (Han & Northoff, 2009; Zhang et al., 2006). As Zhang and Zhu show in several studies (Zhang et al., 2006; Zhu & Zhang 2002; Zhu et al., 2007), these preliminary results could provide a potential explanation for the similar enhancements in memory for mother and self that occurs when Chinese individuals are tested and that does not occur when the individuals tested are Western participants. Westerners tend to demonstrate a quite different result showing increased mPFC activity for self-judgments and a reduced mPFC activity for mother-judgments (Zhu et al., 2007).

As often in science, other experiments have indicated the possible limitations of this neural evidence. Studies do not always support the hypothesis of a cultural difference in self-concept. Ray et al. (2010) conducted an fMRI investigation with American participants from various ethnicities. They had to complete an adjective judgment task (self, mother, valence and font). They were also tested using a self-construal scale measuring self-construal style in terms of independence and interdependence (Singelis, 1994). The study showed results that were contrary to expectations. Those with an interdependent self-construal style exhibited greater use of mPFC and PCC during self-relevant judgments than mother-relevant judgments.

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## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. The interference hypothesis of the recoding process

As often in science, no explanation is perfectly consistent for the VOE in face recognition. A careful study of the literature reveals three main hypotheses (Chin & Schooler, 2008; Smith & Flowe, 2015):

- the interference hypothesis of the recoding process (Meissner et al., 2001);
- the hypothesis of the change in deionic criteria (Clare & Lewandosky, 2004);
- antagonisms between remembrance and recognition.

The interference hypothesis of the recoding process is originally a simple reflection of the article of Schooler and Engstler-Schooler (1990) in *Cognitive Psychology*. Meissner and his colleagues developed it in 2001 (Meissner et al., 2001). Later, Chin and Schooler (2008) tested the validity of this hypothesis. At the time they called it the 'content hypothesis'.

The hypothesis of re-encoding interference, or 'content hypothesis', describes the same attempt at explanation: the verbal process of the description of a face would result in a representation in the verbal memory (or 'verbal code') which would interfere with the original representation of the same face in the visual memory (or 'visual code') (Brandimonte & Collina, 2008; Meissner & Brigham, 2001; Meissner et al., 2001; Schooler & Engstler-Schooler, 1990).

What would support such an explanation is that during the stage of the verbal description, an individual has the possibility to make errors or give erroneous or approximate information during the

process of the verbal description. The subsequent stage, the recognition performance of a target-face, would be greatly deteriorated because the individual would not remember enough of the original image and be able to describe the details (Finger & Pezdek, 1999; Kitagami et al., 2002; Meissner, 2002; Meissner & Brigham, 2001; Meissner et al., 2001; Meissner et al., 2008).

The interference hypothesis of the recoding process is reinforced by other results from recent studies. Meissner, Smith and Flow (Meissner, 2002; Meissner & Brigham, 2001; Meissner et al., 2001; Smith & Flowe, 2015) have shown, for example, that the degree of detail required in the verbal description would further accentuate the poor performance of subsequent visual recognition. The VOE is all the more important when participants make a detailed description and not a free recall where the mass of inaccurate information will tend to be higher.

As strong as this hypothesis might be, several studies have shown its limitations. It is based primarily on the link between the quality of the verbal description and the facial recognition performance after the description. As several researchers show, this correlation is not always found in VOE experiments (Kitagami et al., 2002; Schooler, 2002; Wickman & Swift, 2006). Moreover, the simple fact of asking a tested individual to describe any face (for example, 'describe me the face of a loved one') before proceeding to the recognition of the target face seems to generate significant performance decreases (Schooler, 2002; Brown & Lloyd-Jones, 2002, 2003; Dodson et al., 1997).

Some authors, such as Clare and Lewandowsky (2004), criticise the work on the VOE for basing their statistical analyses essentially on the number of correct identifications of the suspect and not considering the type and distribution of recognition errors made by the participants.

These researchers were therefore interested in the number of false acknowledgments in the responses collected (in this case, the 'distractors' were designated in place of the suspect) and the conditions of the experiment. Their results allowed

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them to propose a new hypothesis that would explain the VOE and which is more focused on participants' response patterns. This is the hypothesis of changing decision criteria (Clare & Lewandowsky, 2004).

### **5.2. The hypothesis of the change of decision criteria**

Directly inspired by Signal Detection Theory (SDT) (Tanner & Swets, 1954), Clare and Lewandowsky (2004) hypothesised that the VOE might correspond to the change in participant response criteria during the task of recognition. The verbal description of the target face would engender what cognitive scientists call a more 'conservative attitude' of participants in their responses, not only in terms of the choice of descriptive elements that define the suspect but also regarding 'what it is not'. Individuals would thus give less correct identification of the target (lower number of hits, revealing the VOE) (Clare & Lewandowsky, 2004; Mickes & Wixted, 2015).

In the hypothesis there is a re-encoding interference through which the individuals tested would have their visual memory deteriorated by the process of verbal description. In the hypothesis of the change of decisional criteria Clare and Lewandowsky (2004) propose to go much further since they try to analyse how the specificities of the verbal description will be used by these individuals as a new grid for reasoning and judgment during the visual stage. Individuals who have been subjected to the verbal description task would adopt these criteria during the subsequent visual stage.

The literature describes this hypothesis as the 'change' of criteria of decisions (Clare & Lewandowsky, 2004; Mickes & Wixted, 2015). Nevertheless, it is misleading since it is not really about 'change'. The hypothesis does not explain that the visual memory is changed radically but that there is a 'slip' and a 'superposition' that generates the antagonisms in the criteria. To describe this hypothesis, it is preferable to use the less ambitious but more exact application of 'the hypothesis of the evolution of the decision criteria'.

### **5.3. The hypothesis based on the antagonisms between the processes of remembering and recognition**

As Davies and Christie (1982) explained, there are two different types of processes in verbal description and visual reconstruction tasks: remembering and recognition. The first process refers to the verbalisation of the memory of the witness or the victim. The second process involves building step by step the most optimal reconstruction of a key element (the crime scene, the face of the criminal, the cap he wore, etc.) by a series of adjustments. The robot portrait traditionally involves both types of processes. A description would be considered useful to build the sketch (more or less advanced) of the portrait of the criminal. The interviewee must then 'reconstruct', step by step, and in a composite way, the face of the criminal (Tanaka & Farah, 1993).

Remembrance and recognition of visual information are known to be eminently different mental processes. As Baddeley (1990) explains, the neural mechanisms corresponding to these two types of tasks are detected at different lobe levels. Face recognition is holistic in nature and tends to be improved if learned (or coded) in a holistic way, for example by attributing personality traits to that face. Conversely, the recognition is degraded when a face is encoded according to its physical attributes (Berman & Cutler, 1998).

Synthesising the contributions of the previous literature, Wells and Hasel (2007) explain that the recognition of a face would be optimised if the interviewee is asked to remember, beforehand, the

context in which this face was seen. In addition, the identification of individual facial features is facilitated by presenting these features on a full face (Tanaka & Farah, 1993; Tanaka & Sengco, 1997).

Information retrieval can also be improved. For example, the production of verbal descriptions is facilitated when a face is coded by its physical characteristics, rather than in the form of one or more personality judgments. In 2007, the Wells research team of the University of Iowa showed that recalling information on a face could be more accurate and complete if the interviewee does not experience a break when describing the subject face and can make multiple attempts at remembering (Wells & Hasel, 2007).

## 6. CONCLUSION

Language and culture have a consistent influence on the development of the self. Culture is often described as a lens for the apprehension of one's environment (Gutchess & Indeck, 2009; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). As shown with the VOE case-study, language plays a significant role in the process of memorisation and recognition. Individuals apprehend their environment with words and concepts. Words, grammar and the values we attach to them can explain the variabilities of rep-

resentations between different individuals. People often speak the same language but they always do not mean the same precise things. This complexity of communication between people of the same language and culture is made even more difficult when the communication is between people with different cultural backgrounds. The cultural background informs our experiences and our cognitive functions, such as memory.

It is now impossible to ignore the impact of language and culture on cognitive processes. Research in neuroscience and cognitive science allows us to understand the psychological and physiological processes that underlie the cognitive tasks of individuals. Cognition is often viewed as a set of universal processes. However, it seems that this belief is largely unfounded.

Cognitive science, as an experimental science, is based on working hypotheses which combine successive observations of previous experiences and theoretical propositions. Considered for a long time by researchers as a simple intuition or as an original hypothesis, the impact of language and culture on cognitive processes has become a subject of great importance for cognitive scientists who can now soundly rely on evidence from neuroimaging.

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# Review

## Close encounters of a cultural kind: Lessons for business, negotiation and friendship (a review)

Original work by Richard D. Lewis published by NB Books 2020

Reviewed by Barry Tomalin

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Richard Lewis, Chair of Richard Lewis Communications in the UK, world-leading intercultural consultant and creator of the Lewis model of intercultural interaction is the author of a number of influential books on the role of culture in international business, notably *When Cultures Collide*.

His newest book is different. Part memoir and part experiences of the people he has met on his travels around the world as a language teacher and cultural consultant, its forty-nine short chapters offer vignettes of friends and colleagues and people of different nationalities he has met and dealt with in the UK, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Portugal, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Greenland, China, Japan, North and South Korea, Hungary, Romania, Russia, Tunisia, Belize and the USA. What is common to each is the stories of individuals in intercultural situations and environments and how they behave. It is a rich store of reading materials written in a conversational style and accessible, I would suggest, to teachers, students of CEFR B2+ and above and an excellent source of critical incidents for use in cultural training.

As Milton Bennett, interculturalist and creator of the famous Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) explains in his excellent and informative preface, Lewis is writing about individuals, not countries or cultures, but shows how individuals display personal attitudes and behaviours that are characteristic of people who come from particular countries or regions. This does not mean everyone who comes from that country or region is like this (stereotyping) but that a general style of behaviour or type of attitude may exist that some members will reflect in how they deal with others. A pertinent example is a Lufthansa airline pilot steering his aircraft through mid-Atlantic turbulence on his way from Frankfurt in Germany to Boston in the US. His passengers were mainly German and American. Over the aircraft public address system the passengers received in German a fairly detailed assessment of the weather causing the turbulence, re-assurance on the technical quality and efficiency of the engines and the action the pilot intended to take to avoid the air turbulence. In English, the US passen-



*‘Used appropriately, according to nationality or environment, teachers and trainers can adapt many of these stories as critical incidents to discuss relationships between people from different cultures and how they can deal with each other. They can also use chapters as the basis of extensive reading exercises at upper intermediate and advanced level to explore cultural differences and appreciate situations from another’s point of view’*

gers got this. ‘As you can see we are on a bit of a roller coaster. So just sit back, tighten your seatbelts and enjoy the ride’. In cultural terms you could use the generalisation, many Germans are more process-orientated and value more detailed technical information whereas many Americans are more results-oriented and just need to feel reassured that the pilot knows what he (it was a ‘he’) is doing and that the result will be successful. The relaxed general description of the turbulence as ‘a bit of a roller coaster’ and the advice to ‘sit back, tighten your seatbelts and enjoy the ride,’ was all the reassurance they needed.

Lewis has travelled worldwide and speaks twelve languages (ten European and two Asian) and has experience of running language schools and directing language school chains all over the world. However, he has especially deep experience of Finland and Japan, and this is reflected in many of the stories in the book. Thus, a number of stories concern Japanese politeness.

When he was living in Tokyo a house near him caught fire early in the morning. It was made of wood, and burned to the ground. The following day the owner of the house called on Richard Lewis and all his neighbours with presents to apologise for the discomfort to their sleep caused by the fire. At a loss to know how to respond, Richard Lewis and his wife sent a letter of commiseration to the owner, as did his neighbours down the

street. There are many stories like this in the book. Marina Dzashi, anchor person on Russia Today and host of International Business Ethics used to live and work in Japan and especially enjoyed Lewis’s stories of the differences between Western and Eastern business cultures, especially regarding relationship building and communication.

As for the Finns, many are noted for being quite taciturn and tend to be modest about their achievements. Lasse Viren, an Olympics winning long distance runner did an English course at Riversdown House, Richard Lewis’s training centre in the southwest of England. At the end of their course students were asked to make a presentation or write an essay to conclude their studies. Lasse Viren chose an essay. Richard Lewis asked Viren’s teacher how she judged the essay. ‘*Very creditable*’, the teacher replied, ‘*and quite interesting. Only one funny thing though... He never mentioned running.*’

Used appropriately, according to nationality or environment, teachers and trainers can adapt many of these stories as critical incidents to discuss relationships between people from different cultures and how they can deal with each other. They can also use chapters – many are very short, just one and a half pages – as the basis of extensive reading exercises at upper intermediate and advanced level to explore cultural differences and appreciate situations from another’s point of view.

As Bennett says in his preface, we no longer need to travel to experience cultural difference. It has come to us through the globalisation of business, hyperconnected communication, immigration, and political and climate change refugees. ‘*The frontier of intercultural communication is now next door.*’

Marina Dzashi endorses Bennett’s observations. ‘*This book*’, she writes, ‘*full of real-life stories and critical incidents, is an excellent guide that will give you the right set of tools to understand people from a reality that may be vastly different from yours and will help you develop what the world sometimes needs most of all, cross-cultural empathy.*’ Developing intercultural empathy is what it is all about.

# Review

## Soft power: The new great game for global dominance (a review)

Original work by Robert Winder published by Little, Brown Book Group 2020

Reviewed by Dominique Vouillemin

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*Soft Power: The New Great Game for Global Dominance* is a background book for teachers of language, cultural studies, as well as diplomatic studies and politics. Its twenty chapters cover the USA, the UK, Western and Central Europe, Russia, Australasia, South America, India, Africa, China and Japan. Its central thesis is that a country's international reputation depends on cultural customs and practices that have nothing to do with politics. It looks at a country's or a region's arts, sciences, export products, social customs and values to build a picture of what makes outsiders value it – or dismiss it. For teachers of European languages, Arabic, Chinese and Japanese it is a fascinating collection of detailed and in many cases revealing information.

Impeccably researched, its twenty chapters include two on the US, three on the UK, two on France, two on the Gulf, two on China and on Japan, and one each on Germany, Russia, India and Africa. The book's appendices also rate top world countries according to their international reputation as measured by the Portland Soft Power 30 and the Monocle rankings.

In international relations studies, soft power is a term coined by Harvard Professor Joseph Nye as a contrast to hard power. Hard power describes the use of military force to build national influence and soft power describes the use of other means to 'get people to like you' and 'persuade them to want to do what you want.' Many leading countries around the world have built international 'soft power' influence through international broadcasting, cultural activities and cultural institutes, education and scholarships as well as through foreign aid and support in disaster areas worldwide. Examples would be Russia's Russia Today international broadcasting service, the work of Britain's British Council and the BBC World Service, the American university scholarship schemes inviting overseas visitors to spend time in the US and learn to appreciate its culture and values, and even China's recent international offers of free personal protection equipment to help combat the Covid-19 virus.

Ultimately, concludes Winder, a country's international reputation which attracts foreign currency, investment, encourages exports and helps build in-

ternational influence depends less on cultural institutes, scholarships and broadcasting and more on a country's culture – how it represents itself and what others think of it. What he describes as 'likeability' is a key factor.

Soft power impact is affected by history but also by recent events, and Winder is good at describing the impact of Brexit on British national image as well as the influence of the ISIS sponsored massacres in France, the influence of immigration in Southern Europe and the commercial scandals in Germany and Switzerland and the way they are seen to have affected international standing of the countries involved. In this respect the book is not just a historical analysis but is able to bring the story right up to date, even to 2020 with discussion of the effect of Covid-19 on national image.

A particularly good example is China's response to the Corona virus. After the initial breakout of the disease in Wuhan it was the first country to impose complete lockdown measures and the closure of shops and public spaces and then was the first country to offer equipment and other support to Italy and other countries affected by the virus. Its rather authoritarian style of government allowed it to put cities in lockdown whereas many other countries were more reluctant in the early stages of the pandemic although many followed later on.

A key factor in a country or region's soft power influence is its history, often preserved and displayed in other countries' galleries and museums, frequently of the colonial powers such as the UK and France who took them when they occupied and colonised them. In his chapters on the Arabian Gulf Winder is fascinating on researchers into ancient history who discovered how much learning and even some of the stories in the Old Testament of the Christian bible actually originated in ancient civilisations, particularly the kingdom of Gilgamesh in Mesopotamia (nowadays spread across Iraq, Kuwait, Syria and south-eastern Turkey). He also discusses how much of what we know nowadays as Western civilisation derived from Greek and Roman philosophy actually emanated from Alexandria and the Middle East.

Robert Winder identifies five key soft power lessons in history. First, as he puts it, the past is hard to kill. The past, admired in ancient monuments, galleries, museums and academic research tells a story that can be revived and resuscitated. The second lesson is that when the past is revived, for example through the Black Lives Matter campaign or awareness of the colonial roots of artefacts admired in Western museums, as Winder says, it doesn't always bring glad tidings. The third lesson is that 'soft power' image is often not an alternative to 'hard power' persecution and military conquest but a consequence of it. Winder points out, as described above, that the largest 'soft-power' reserves in museums are held by nations who subjugated others. The fourth lesson for Winder is that nations who subjugate others by violence often leave the least behind them when they fall and he cites the examples of Germany in the Second World War and the Islamic Caliphate. The fifth lesson is the one that Winder describes as the most troubling. Soft power is not necessarily a force for good. As he says, to the extent that soft power is a weapon it can be used for good and ill. One example he chooses is the damage caused by international terrorism by al-Qaeda and ISIS, which has caused immense damage to the international image of the Middle East despite the efforts of Gulf countries to resist it. Interestingly enough, Winder makes the point that terrorism's most effective ally is information technology. The movement's ability to project itself through social media and the footage of its attacks broadcast internationally on social media have had a major impact on its range of influence and its image.

A final dimension of soft power is, inevitably, politics. As we have seen, soft power can be cultivated through the use of institutional facilities such as international broadcasting, cultural institutes and scholarship programmes. The People's Republic of China is an excellent example. Its Global TV service broadcasts around the world in English. Its Confucius Institutes operate in 140 countries around the world, based in universities and providing native speakers for schools to run conversation classes in Mandarin. In 2019 there were

*'Soft power impact is affected by history but also by recent events, and Winder is good at describing the impact of Brexit on British national image as well as the influence of the ISIS sponsored massacres in France, the influence of immigration in Southern Europe and the commercial scandals in Germany and Switzerland and the way they are seen to have affected international standing of the countries involved'*

over 500 institutes aimed, as Xi Jinping said, to 'tell the China story well, showcase China's role as a builder of world peace.' As well as official initiatives there is also China's history, its culture and its art and, of course, its cooking. Chinese restaurants are ubiquitous in every country in the West.

In terms of international aid, China's Belt and Road initiative has organised and paid for massive infrastructure development in emerging economies. However, in some cases, the result has been to load many receiving countries with massive national debt in order to pay back Chinese loans.

Unfortunately, China's authoritarian stance over Hong Kong and the Uighur community in Xinjiang and its increasingly forthright, some would say aggressive, approach to foreign affairs, has also negatively impacted its national image. In addition, some Western governments have expressed strong reservations against what they consider cybercrime and breaches of cybersecurity, allegedly originating in China. So soft power can be a tool for development and growth but can be set back, albeit temporarily, by political and economic developments. Robert Winder shows how this can affect soft power images in Europe and the Americas as well as Asia.

In summary, if you are interested in world cultures and the cultural backgrounds of the communities whose language you are teaching or want to know how soft power operates and achieves its effect in establishing and raising international reputation and influence, Robert Winder's book is an informative and interesting read with lots of relevant and useful examples and case studies. It is probably best on the US, the UK and Western and Southern Europe but has interesting points to make about the rest of the world as well, particularly terrorism in the Middle East and China's Belt and Road initiative.



# News & Events

## ICC News

by Barry Tomalin  
ICC Board Member

### Online Training

Inevitably, teaching and teacher training has been quiet since April due partly to the summer break but mainly to Covid-19 and the consequent lockdown. However, since every cloud has a silver lining, the online training service has exploded, particularly using Zoom and Google Meet.

However, we are conscious that online learning cannot do the job on its own as training course and university participants really value the face-to-face contact of conferences and summer schools.

### ICC Annual Conference to Be Held Online for the First Time

One casualty of the Covid-19 epidemic has been the ICC-annual Conference in Belgrade, first postponed and now moved to take place online on October 17, 2020. The conference will be one day long, from 10 AM to 4:30 PM CET and culminate in a virtual party at the end. Conference sessions will be recorded and made available online.

A key focus of the conference will be how teachers have coped and are coping in the Covid-19 context and what the future holds for language teaching and training once the pandemic has passed. Short and to the point presentations will be followed by an online open discussion where the participants can share their experiences of teaching in the time of Covid-19.

Speakers already booked include Susanna Slivensky of the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe, Barry Tomalin on

the value of language learning as access to international employment, Rob Williams, former president of ICC, Emma Abbate, Marijana Prodanovic and Elena Yakovleva with Ruben Agadzhanian.

To find out more about the conference, the presentations and joining instructions, please visit <https://icc-languages.eu/conference>.

### ICC Webinars – Online Breakthrough

Finally, to take advantage of the demand for online learning ICC has introduced a series of monthly online webinars on aspects of language and cultural training.

The first hour's webinar on the Business of Culture was presented by Barry Tomalin on August 27th and the recording and slides are accessible online at <https://icc-languages.eu/webinars>.

The next webinar on September 17th was hosted by Rob Williams of the University of Westminster on Teaching Discourse Management in the Classroom, followed on October 7th by Elizabeth Mickiewicz of the University of Coventry on Collaborative Online Learning (COIL) in the Language Classroom.

ICC-Languages intends to hold monthly one-hour online webinars, usually in the third or fourth week of the month, so if you would like to contribute your ideas and experiences of language learning and teaching please contact our President, Ellinor Haase, at [ellinor.haase@icc-languages.eu](mailto:ellinor.haase@icc-languages.eu). Whether you're at home or at school or university we wish you a happy and productive autumn.

### The CEFR Companion Volume

The CEFR Companion volume broadens the scope of language education. It reflects academic and societal developments since the publication of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and updates the 2001 ver-

sion. It owes much to the contributions of members of the language teaching profession across Europe and beyond. A 'must-have' manual intended to promote quality plurilingual education, facilitate greater social mobility and stimulate reflection and exchange between language professionals for curriculum development and in teacher education. Read more at <https://icc-languages.eu/common-european-framework-of-reference-for-languages-learning-teaching-assessment-companion-volume>.

## EUROLTA News

by Myriam Fischer Callus  
EUROLTA Coordinator

### EUROLTA Face-to-Face and Online

The demand for language training especially for immigrants is increasing and therefore so is the demand for qualified teachers, and EUROLTA has published a special training manual free of charge for EUROLTA centres and also available to independent institutions at a price of €250.

EUROLTA trains all language teachers, not just English teachers, and is very good at raising the standards of language teaching for adults and has had particular success in training teachers to help immigrants learning the language of their adopted country.

It is also responding to demands for online EUROLTA training offered by EUROLTA training professionals.

To become a EUROLTA centre at €750, to buy the EUROLTA training manual at €250, or to get online EUROLTA training, contact Myriam Fischer Callus at [callus@t-mobile.de](mailto:callus@t-mobile.de).

EUROLTA is an internationally recognised teacher training programme to train you to teach languages using up-to-date methodologies. You can take the programme to gain the skills and knowledge you need as a language teacher; to make you a more confident and more competent language teacher; and to enhance your employment prospects.

## RUDN University News

by Elena Malyuga  
Editor-in-Chief TLC

### 9th International Research Conference Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication

September 24-25, RUDN University hosted the 9th International Research Conference *Topical Issues of Linguistics and Teaching Methods in Business and Professional Communication*. The conference was supported by University of Nottingham (UK), University College London (UK), University of Rome Tor Vergata (Italy), University of Granada (Spain), St.Cyril and St.Methodius University of Veliko Tarnovo (Bulgaria), University of Delhi (India), Rajasthan Technical University (India), Yerevan State University (Armenia), The French Institute, CampusFrance Information Centre, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge Assessment English, Macmillan Education, LanguageCert (UK), ICC – the International Language Association (Germany).

The conference was dedicated to the 20-year anniversary of the Department of Foreign Languages of the Faculty of Economics and focused on the main areas of research carried out at the department:

- (1) topical issues of teaching foreign languages for business communication;
- (2) modern tendencies of profession-oriented foreign language teaching;
- (3) integration of new information technology into the practice of foreign language teaching in non-linguistic higher educational institutions;
- (4) strategies for teaching translation in non-linguistic higher educational institutions;
- (5) intercultural business communication;
- (6) topical issues of modern applied linguistics.

Conference reports were delivered by leading experts in linguistics and linguodidactics. The list of participating experts included:

Elena N. Malyuga (Russia), Head of Foreign Languages Department, Faculty of Economics, Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, Academician of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, Doctor of Linguistics, Professor, Chair of the Organising Committee;

Michael McCarthy (UK), Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics at Nottingham University, one of the founders of Corpus Linguistics;

Barry Tomalin (UK), Professor at Birkbeck College, London University, Professor at the British School of Leadership and Management, Glasgow Caledonian University London, author of textbooks on Business English;

Wayne Rimmer (UK), Doctor of Philology in Applied Linguistics, Coordinator of the International Association of Teachers of English as a Foreign Language (IATEFL), author of teaching materials and resource books published by Cambridge University Press;

David Krašovec (France), PhD, Assistant Professor at the Department of Language Training for State Administration Personnel, Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration;

Tatyana A. Dmitrenko (Russia), Academician of the International Teacher's Training Academy of Science, Doctor of Education, Professor, Department of Foreign Language Teaching Methodology, Faculty of Foreign Languages, Moscow State Pedagogical University, member of the Organising Committee;

Tamara B. Nazarova (Russia), Doctor of Linguistics, Professor, Department of English Language Studies, Faculty of Philology, Lomonosov Moscow State University, member of the Organising Committee;

Maria V. Ivanova (Russia), Doctor of Linguistics, Professor, Academician of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, Dean of the Full-Time Faculty of the Federal State Budgetary Educational Institution of Higher Education 'A.M. Gorky Literary Institute';

Eugenia V. Ponomarenko (Russia), Academician of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, Doctor of Linguistics, Professor, English Language Department, Moscow State Institute of International

Relations of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (MGIMO University), Vice-Chair of the Organising Committee.

Specialists representing 42 Russian and international universities took part in the sub-forums of the conference.

### **RUDN University's Faculty of Economics Is One of the Top 4 Places in Russia to Learn Marketing**

The RBC portal has released a series of publications on education in Russian universities and included the Faculty of Economics at RUDN University into the Top 4 places in Russia to learn marketing. Lana Pinyaeva, managing partner of the Rights Business Standard consulting company, was among the experts who answered the main questions concerning higher education.

*'While a single diploma used to be enough, it is now preferable to deploy competencies in multiple areas of expertise for a successful career,'* the marketing expert emphasised.

In leading Russian universities, specialised marketing departments are rare. Therefore, for those who have chosen this specialty, Lana Pinyaeva also advises to look closely at the faculties of Sociology and Management. Exclusively for the RBC project, she singled out several universities offering the most outstanding quality of training in these areas. Among the top four is Peoples' Friendship University of Russia.

*'Here marketing is one of the majors taught at the Faculty of Economics. And this, I think, is a great combination. Economic expertise is useful for all kinds of specialists, especially when they grow up to become managers,'* says Pinyaeva. According to her, university students can get an internship at the largest international FMCG companies.

### **20th Meeting of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Educational Cooperation**

September 8, the 20th meeting of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Educational Cooperation was hosted in the format of a videoconference. The event was chaired by the Deputy Minister of Science and Higher Education of the Russian

Federation Dmitry Afanasyev and the Deputy Minister of Education of the People's Republic of China Tian Xuejun. Peoples' Friendship University of Russia was represented by Vice-Rector for International Affairs Larisa Efremova.

The parties summed up working results and discussed plans for the near future. In recent years, the export of educational services in the two countries has grown significantly, mutually beneficial ties between educational organisations have expanded, and the interest in learning Russian and Chinese has heightened. By 2020, the scope of bilateral exchanges between Russia and China has reached 100,000 people. The participants identified the main guidelines for joint work to develop

and strengthen educational cooperation in 2020. The deputy ministers noted that in the current unstable epidemiological situation, it is imperative to develop new joint online technologies to provide quality remote educational services to students, and draw up electronic educational resources in Russian and Chinese.

The Subcommittee also noted the strengthening of educational cooperation between Russia and China within the framework of SCO and BRICS in a multilateral format during Russia's chairmanship of the SCO in 2019-2020 and BRICS in 2020.

The next meeting of the Russian-Chinese Subcommittee on Educational Cooperation will be held in 2021 in Russia.



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