

UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL VALUES AND ATTITUDES THROUGH CULTURAL SEMANTICS: TOLERANCE VS. TOLERANTNOST**

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Abstract

As numerous studies have shown a lot of words which seem to be semantic equivalents and are given as such in bilingual dictionaries have certain semantic differences (Gladkova, 2010, Goddard and Wierzbicka, 1995, 2014; Karasik, 2012; Wierzbicka, 1992, 2014; Zaliznyak, Levontina and Shmelev 2012, to name but a few). This is not surprising, as language is an essential part of culture and reflects its values and attitudes. These partial equivalents may create difficulties in communication and translation since their similarities are deceptive, and their culture specific elements are not obvious. The cultural components can be revealed through meticulous semantic, functional, and discourse analysis which can give important information about the differences between cultures and societies. We believe that the lexemes that contain information about the 'deep culture' (Guirdham 1999: 50), i.e. cultural values and attitudes, worldview, and social organization are of particular importance for understanding contemporary societies. The study explores the words dealing with social relations, namely the words expressing (in)tolerance in English (BrE and AmE) and Russian focusing on their similarities and differences. The data were taken from English and Russian bilingual dictionaries, definition dictionaries, British National Corpus (BNC), and Russian National Corpus (RNC), as well as British, American and Russian newspapers. The study implemented contrastive semantic, definitive, discourse and cultural analyses. The results show that the semantics of these words contain cultural components which reflect different types of cultures that which vary in power and ideology. The study confirms that it is increasingly important to consider the axiological, psychological, and social aspects of language in an intercultural perspective as the results of such interdisciplinary linguistic studies supplement the data of the social and cultural sciences.

Keywords: cultural semantics, semantic equivalents, social values and attitudes, tolerance, intolerance

1 INTRODUCTION

Language is an essential part of culture and reflects its values and attitudes. As numerous studies have shown, studying language is a way to learn more about mentality of people of a particular culture, their values, attitudes and relations (Gladkova 2010, Goddard and Wierzbicka 2006, 2014, Karasik, 2012,

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Wierzbicka, 1992, 2014; Zaliznyak, Levontina and Shmelev 2012; Larina, Mustajoki and Protassova, 2016, to name but a few). There are enormous differences in the semantic structuring of different languages and these linguistic differences greatly influence how people think (Goddard, Wierzbicka, 1995: 37). The study of the words defining social values are of particular importance for interdisciplinary studies as the knowledge of their culture specific semantics contributes to understanding social relations in a society.

A lot values created by mankind throughout history have become universal. However, their significance and place in the hierarchy of values varies across cultures. This fact determines the originality and uniqueness of each culture. The basis of each culture is formed by an inherent system of values which ultimately determines the culture of the society concerned. Over the last decades tolerance has come to the foreground of Western culture and has become one of the dominant values.

Tolerance guarantees all kinds of diversity and makes cooperation between different social, religious, cultural groups and individuals possible. Civilization actually has managed to survive thanks to the value of tolerance. Historically it is an alternative to violence and conflicts caused by opposite ideological positions, attitudes and ways of life.

At the same time this value has become ambiguous and even contradictory in the modern society. However, the understanding what tolerance means is very important, as the contemporary view of tolerance affects life at the social and individual level (Furedi, 2011). Besides tolerance is a culture specific notion. Cultures differ in the approach to tolerance and its degree. But it does not mean that tolerance should be regarded as a mark of superiority of high tolerant nations over less tolerant nations as there are cultural reasons for those differences. According to Hofstede (1984, 1991), weak uncertainty avoidance cultures (mostly individualist) are more tolerant, while high uncertainty avoidance cultures are less tolerant and more conservative.

Comparing the English and Russian cultures we can find that this notion is of different value. Tolerance is a well-known distinguishing feature of British and American cultures. The first known use of the word *tolerance* dates back to the 15th century (Merriam-Webster). In Russia the idea of tolerance was never popular. It was identified with Christian humility and precepts such as one should *love one's neighbor, not resist evil, bear one's cross* (Mikhailova, 2005). Russian philosophers did not consider tolerance as a specific feature of Russian mentality. In the Soviet state tolerance as respect for people of other political views was an inappropriate attitude.

In this article we focus on the word *tolerance* in Russian and English aiming to reveal semantic and functional similarities and differences. The data were taken from English and Russian bilingual dictionaries, definition dictionaries, British National Corpus (BNC), and Russian National Corpus (RNC) respectively, as well as British, American and Russian newspapers.

The contrastive analysis of the usage of the words *tolerance* vs *tolerantnost'* and *terpimost'* and their derivatives was conducted through critical discourse analysis (CDA) focused on power and ideology (van Dijk 2009) and cultural discourse analysis (CuDA), which "treats meaning as an ongoing commentary that is immanent in actual communication practices" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 174).

2 THE WORD 'TOLERANCE' AND ITS RUSSIAN EQUIVALENTS

In the modern multicultural world, the word *tolerance* which has become widely used and fashionable, reflects the importance of the very problem of interpersonal, social and intercultural interaction of members of society.

The English word *tolerance* has got two translation equivalents in Russian – *terpimost'* and *tolerantnost'* – which differ in origin, semantics, connotations, and usage. The word *terpimost'* is original. It originates from the Old Slavic language and proceeds from the verb *terpet'* ('to stand / bear / endure something painful or unpleasant'). The word *tolerantnost'* is a rather recent borrowing. The dictionary of foreign words first recorded the noun *tolerantnost'* in 1937. The derivative adjective *tolerantnyi* was first fixed in the explanatory dictionary of the Russian language by Ushakov in 1935-1940. Since the end of the 20-th century the word *tolerantnost'* has been widely used in social and political discourses, nevertheless the English word *tolerance* is still translated as *terpimost'* in some bilingual dictionaries (e.g. NERD, RED).

The definitions of these words also differ. In English *tolerance* is "willingness to accept behaviour and beliefs that are different from your own, although you might not agree with or approve of them": This period in history is not noted for its religious tolerance. Some members of the party would like to see it develop a greater tolerance of/towards contraripoints of view (CED). In Russian *terpimost'* is "ability to put up with someone, smth., treat indulgently with someone <http://www.classes.ru/all-russian/dictionary-russian-academ-term-80109.htm>

The Russian words *terpimost'* and *tolerantnost'* are given in dictionaries as synonyms (DRS), though they cannot be considered semantic equivalents. *Terpimost'* is a psychological state. Semantically it approaches the verb reconcile ('stop persisting, submit to circumstances'). *Tolerantnost'* is a much broader concept. It emphasizes social and rational aspect of relations. This is a tolerant attitude to other opinions, beliefs, ways of life etc. In the Russian ethics *terpimost'* is assessed negatively, as it usually assumes tolerance to something bad and is associated with the concept of *forgiveness* (Sternin, Shilikhina 2001). This negative connotation is reflected in the dictionaries ("*not a too strict relation to someone's fault*").

Semantic analysis of the Russian adjectives *terpimyi* and *tolerantnyi* reveals the same differences. As Gladkova (2010), *tolerantnyi* is a characteristic of a person's relationship to another person, whose behavior he considers to be bad; the attitude of a *tolerantnyi* person is mainly aimed at people whose behavior is deviant from social norms, but it does not necessarily personally affect the subject of relations (Gladkova, 2010, p.165). In other words we may say, that *terpimost'* indicates to some emotional involvement, while *tolerantnost'* is associated with distancing, *terpimist'* is a more personal attitude, while *tolerantnyi* is more social.

Another interesting difference between the English and Russian words concerns the number of derivatives. The English language possesses a large word family which expresses the idea of tolerance: (in)tolerance (intolerance), toleration, tolerationist, tolerant, intolerant, tolerable, intolerable, tolerably, intolerably, intolerability, to tolerate. In Russian there are only three corresponding words – *tolerantnost'* (n.), *tolerantnyi* (adj.), *tolerantno* (adv.). There is no verb similar to 'tolerate'. This asymmetry shows that the borrowed word *tolerantnost'* has not been completely adapted by the Russian language. It also supports the idea that a concept, which is important to a culture, gets a broader representation in the corresponding language and vice versa.

3 DISCURSIVE DIFFERENCES OF TOLERANCE VS. TOLERANTNOST'

To have a better understanding of social values and attitudes it is necessary to implement discourse analysis to see what people say about tolerance and how they use this word. According to Carbaugh "as people communicate with each other, they are saying things literally about the specific subject being discussed, but they are also saying things culturally, about who they are, how they are related, what they are doing together, how they feel about what is going in, and about the nature of things" (Carbaugh, 2007, p. 174).

The comparative analysis of the usage of the words tolerance vs *tolerantnost'* and *terpimost'* and their derivatives was conducted through critical discourse analysis (CDA) and cultural discourse analysis (CuDA). The combined methodology enabled us to reveal the attitude of English and Russian people to the notion of tolerance and find some semantic peculiarities of the nominations of this phenomenon in the languages under the study.

First of all the results have confirmed that the Russian words *tolerantnost'* and *terpimost'* are not complete equivalents. The original Russian word (*terpimost'*) deals with the psychological aspect. The adjective *terpimyi* can be combined with the limited number of words mostly with the words *chelovek* (person), *character* (personality), *strana* (country), i.e. it characterizes an object which can literally or metaphorically experience feelings:

- (1) ... *on proyavlyaet sebya, kak bolee myagkii i terpimyi chelovek—v otlichie ot svoikh ottsa i deda.* (...he manifests himself as a softer and **tolerant** person unlike his father and grandfather) (RNC).
- (2) *Malen'kaya strana Gollandiya, stol' terpimaya k chuzhestrantsam, perezhivaet shok* (A small country Holland, so tolerant of strangers, has been shocked) (RNC).

The word *tolerantnyi* (and its gender forms) demonstrate a much broader scope of combinations. Besides *tolerantnyi chelovek* (person) / *narod* (people), we found *tolerantnyi gorod* (city); *tolerantnaya strana* (country) / *natsiya* (nation) / *kul'tura* (culture) / *atmosfera* (atmosphere) / *literature* (literature) / *gazeta* (newspaper); *tolerantnoe obshchestvo* (society) / *otnoshenie* (attitude) / *povedenie* (behaviour) / *slovo* (word) / *obrashchenie* (address form):

- (3) *Ya tolerantnyi chelovek i odinakovo rovno otnoshus' ko vsem natsional'nostyam* (I am a tolerant person and have an equal attitude to all nationalities) (RNC).
- (4) *Zapadnaya tolerantnaya kul'tura prodolzhaet udivlyat' tsivilizovanniy mir svoim raznoobraziem.* (Western tolerant culture continues to amaze the civilized world with its diversity) (RNC).
- (5) *Atmosfera v zale tolerantnaya i zhizneradostnaya, kakuyu redko gde vstretish'* (The atmosphere in the hall is tolerant and cheerful, which does not happen often) (RNC).

The English word *tolerance* and its derivatives are used in more various contexts and word combinations which shows that they have a broader semantics than the Russian word *tolerantnost'*: *tolerant partner, tolerant smile, tolerant mood, tolerant understanding, tolerant depiction, tolerant internationalism, unique tolerance, prostitution tolerance zone, message of tolerance, tide of tolerance, tolerance for the fake news, tolerance for nonsense, etc.*

It can go with different evaluative adjectives:

- (6) *It was Britain's **hopeless tolerance** which allowed Anjem Choudary's hate to thrive* (The Telegraph, 17.08.2016)
- (7) *The Economist - Japan has a **deep tolerance** for bribery...* (The Economist, 13.06.2016)

In Russian discourse in contrast to English *tolerantnost'* can have negative evaluation and go with such adjectives as *preslovutaya* (notorious), *khvalionaya* (vaunted):

- (8) ***Preslovutaya** «tolerantnost'» zamenila khristianstvo* (The notorious "tolerance" has replaced Christianity) (RNC).
- (9) ***Preslovutaya** «tolerantnost'» sdelalas' religiei vmesto khristianstva.* (The notorious "tolerance" has become a religion instead of Christianity) (RNC).
- (10) *Vot vam i **khvalenaya** tolerantnost', kotoruyu tak yarostno trebuetsya ot svoikh chlenov Evrosoyuz!* (Here is the vaunted tolerance that the European Union so fiercely demands of its members!) (RNC).

Another interesting difference concerns the frequency of the usage of the words under the study. Though we have not conducted a thorough quantitative analysis, our observation shows that in English discourse the word *tolerance* and its derivatives occur much more frequently than in Russian. It can be used more than once in the same sentence:

- (11) - *So what's it like when your hometown — supposedly the most **tolerant city** in the nation — **turns intolerant** toward you?* (New York Post, 11.12.2016).
- (12) *“Either choice undermines **tolerance**, but at least showing **intolerance** to the **intolerant** preserves a domain of **tolerance**. It seems absurd to **tolerate** the **intolerant** for that undermines **tolerance** itself. But **intolerance** of **tolerance** of course terminates **tolerance**, too”* (Minow, 2007, p. 460).

The word *tolerance* appears frequently in newspapers' headlines:

- (13) *Can Trump tolerate dissent?* (The Washington Post, 21.11.2016)
- (14) *Jessica Gomes calls for tolerance after immigration ban* (Daily Mail, 03. 02. 2017).
- (15) *A Victory for Tolerance* (The New York Times, 16.11.2017)
- (16) *U.S. tolerance of Putin emboldens world's oppressors* (Washington Post, 18. 06. 2013) .

Concerning the attitude to tolerance our analysis shows that in English discourse it is mostly positive, while in Russian it is controversial.

On the one hand the Russians have a very positive attitude to tolerance which they view as a characteristic of an educated person and a feature of Russian mentality:

- (17) *Kul'turnyi chelovek – tolerantnyi chelovek* (A cultured man is a tolerant person)
- (18) *Kak izvestno, khoroshie kachestva rossiyan — eto vysokii uroven' intellekta, sposobnost' nestandartno myslit', izobretatel'stvo, tvorchestvo, poisk istiny, tolerantnost', svobodomyслиe* (As it is known, good qualities of Russians are a high level of intelligence, the ability to think outside the box, inventing, creativity, searching for truth, **tolerance**, free-thinking) (RNC).

On an official level tolerance is proclaimed by the president, deputies and other officials as a value which should be taught and developed:

- (19) *Neobkhodimo, chtoby odnim iz klyuchevykh ponyatii v nashem obshchestve stala tolerantnost', — prizval prezident, napominaya, chto Rossiya vyshla uzhe na vtoroe mesto v mire posle USA po chislu pribyvayushchikh migrantov.* (It is necessary that tolerance becomes one of the key concepts in our society," the president called, recalling that Russia has come second in the world after the United States in terms of the number of arriving migrants) (RNC).

- (20) *Predmet «tolerantnost'» voobshche stoilo by vvesti v shkole na postoyannoi osnove, — skazal deputat.* (The subject of "tolerance" in general should be introduced at school on an ongoing basis, the deputy said) (Izvestia, 21. 08. 2012).

At the same time the word *tolerantnost'* is still alien and it is often associated with other countries (*Gernam tolerance, British tolerance, French tolerance, Dutch tolerance, European tolerance, etc.*). It is ambiguous for many people, who do not understand its meaning and are reluctant to use it. In the context of ethnic tolerance the word *internationalism*, which was one of the main values and achievements of the Soviet time, is preferred.

- (21) *Sprashival u svoikh levyykh priyatelei: pochemu vy upotrebyaete slovo «tolerantnost'» vmesto traditsionnogo «internatsionalizm»?* (I asked my leftist friends: why do you use the word "tolerance" instead of the traditional "internationalism"?... Even to give a clear definition of what this most "tolerance" cannot. (Izvestia, 20.02. 2014).

The negation of tolerance in this context could be explained by the difference between the two notions. Being internationalist means that you not only accept other cultures but also respect them. Being tolerant means that you admit the existence of other cultures, not necessarily accepting and respecting them (Ex. 22, 23).

- (22) *Sovetskii internatsionalizm Rossiya poteryala, nichego vmesto nego ne pridumala (ottogo slovo «tolerantnost'» stalo neprilichnym).* (Russia lost the Soviet internationalism, and did not invent anything in its place (because of that the word "tolerance" has become indecent) (RNC).
- (23) *Globalizm ne priemlet ponyatiya «internatsionalizm», tol'ko «tolerantnost'»—terpimoe otnoshenie, no ne uvazhenie.* (Globalism does not accept the notion of "internationalism", only "tolerance" which is an acceptable attitude, but not respect) (RNC).

In Russian view tolerance can be excessive (*izlishnyaya, chrezmernaya*) and in this case it is harmful and dangerous and can be compared with the most dangerous weapon (ex.26). Russians consider themselves good-natured and tolerant if only the tolerance is not imposed on them excessively and does not destroy their traditional values (ex. 27):

- (24) *Evropeiskaya tolerantnost' i oburevaemost' pravami cheloveka vyshla za granitsy razuma.* (European tolerance and the obsession with human rights have gone beyond the human sense) (RNC).
- (25) *No tolerantnost', osobenno evropeiskii ee vid, inogda priobretaet takie strannyye formy, chto spasat' uzhe nado ot nee.* (But tolerance, especially its European kind, sometimes acquires such strange forms that it is already necessary to save it from it) (RNC).
- (26) *Tolerantnost', kak okazalos', samoe strashnoe oruzhie massovogo porazheniya, po sravneniyu s kotorym dazhe termoyadernoe oruzhie – detskie igrushki.* (Tolerance, as it has turned out, is the most terrible weapon of mass destruction, compared to which even nuclear weapons are children's toys) (RNC).
- (27) *Russkie po nature svoei – dobrodushnye i tolerantnye – esli im ne navyazyvat' etu tolerantnost' v chrezmernyykh kolichestvakh nasil'no.* (Russians by nature are good-natured and tolerant if they are not imposed this tolerance in excessive amounts by force) (RNC).

The negative attitude to the notion of tolerance is expressed by some representatives of the Russian Church. They consider that tolerance brought to an absurdity will lead to the destruction of traditional morals and freedom of speech, and result in the degeneration of mankind. As Archbishop Vsevolod Chaplin, head of the Synodal Department for Relations between Church and Society said, "Tolerance in its ultimate expression is death to freedom of speech, thought, the death of morality, the unification of people, the transformation of a person from a free-thinking creature into a mechanism with prescribed functions," (RIA Novosti, 2012.05.10).

Our analysis shows, that the reason for this contradictory approach to tolerance lies in the fact that Russians distinguish between ethnic, national, religious tolerance which they support and tolerance of such social phenomena as homosexuality, same-sex marriages etc. to which they are less tolerant. The statement of the Russian ministry of culture illustrates this: "...the term "tolerance" in its modern sense does not allow a clear division between racial, national and religious intolerance, on the one hand, and intolerance of social phenomena that are alien and dangerous from the point of view of Russian society and its inherent values, on the other hand, which leads to the inexpediency of using the term "tolerance" for the purposes of conducting state cultural policy (Izvestia, 2014.04.10).

4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Social values can be understood better through linguistic studies. Almost every word has its cultural semantic component which can be revealed through a detailed study based on contrastive semantic, functional, and discourse analysis.

Our study has shown that the value of tolerance, which has become a fashionable phenomenon of modern life, is ambiguous and contradictory. The index of tolerance in a society is culture specific. In so called I-cultures it is higher than in we-cultures. This fact can be explained through cultural differences, as I-cultures value individuality, independence, personal freedom and non-imposition, while in we-cultures people value interdependence, involvement and feel more responsible for what is happening around them (Larina, Ozyumenko 2016; Larina, Ozyumenko and Kurteš 2017). Another reason is the distinction between in-group and out-group members which is typical for we-cultures and does not exist in I-cultures. It makes it difficult for people from we-cultures to accept those who are different (in political, sexual, behavioral, and other aspects).

Although historically the idea of tolerance existed in Russian culture, it had other forms of expression. The differences in semantics show culture specific attitudes to tolerance and those who are different. As our analysis has shown, Russians are traditionally tolerant of ethnic and religious differences, though due to their culture, they are not always tolerant of other people's opinions and behavior, which is manifested at the communicative level as well (Larina 2015). Being representatives of we-culture, they value the common opinion and shared attitudes and values.

The excesses with tolerance in the West (rejection of the words *mother, father, Christmas, Christmas holidays*) has made the Russians develop a negative attitude of Russians towards the term *tolerance*. The borrowed word *tolerantnost'* is still alien in the Russian language, it does not have as many derivatives as the English word has and it is used less frequently. However, it is promoted by politicians and public figures as a value that needs to be adopted and developed.

The study contributes to the understanding of social cognition and relationships in English and Russian cultures and confirms that it is important to consider the axiological, psychological, and social aspects of language in an intercultural perspective as the results of such interdisciplinary linguistic studies supplement the data of the social and cultural sciences.

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- DRS – Dictionary of Russian Synonyms (Slovar' russkikh sinonimov) <http://www.classes.ru/all-russian/russian-dictionary-synonyms-term-85628.htm>