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Research article

Foreign humanitarian students' perception of a precedent name in the Russian discourse

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Abstract. The high recognizability of the precedent names among the native speakers of a particular linguistic culture has led to the relevance of studying these linguistic units in the aspect of foreign language teaching, where considerable attention is paid to the formation of linguistic-cultural competence. The aim of the work is to study the peculiarities of precedent name perception in the Russian language discourse by humanitarian foreign students. The materials of the research included adapted and original texts, Internet memes with precedent names. The subject of analysis was precedent names from literary works and movies. The nature of the material under study necessitated the use of the continuous sampling method. Twenty-seven precedent names from fiction and journalistic texts, from Internet memes were used. Further processing of the obtained results was carried out with the help of descriptive, contextual and semantic analyses. A total of seven tasks were offered to recognize precedent names in fiction, journalistic and educational texts and to correlate the precedent names with their characteristics and sources. It was proved that the indicator of the attractiveness of precedent names in Russian language teaching is the interest of foreigners in characters that are highly recognizable by native speakers, the reference to sources significant for native speakers, and the possibility to correlate them with the precedents from their native linguistic culture. The authors describe the specifics of selecting significant precedents for native speakers of a particular linguistic culture and suggest compiling a linguistic-cultural commentary on the language units studied, considering the realities of the country of the language under study. Moreover, the high interest of foreign students to the memes containing precedents shows the research perspective in terms of defining the principles of selecting the precedents and developing appropriate methodological recommendations.

Keywords: Russian as a foreign language, precedent phenomena, Russian-language academic discourse

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Introduction

Semantization of linguistic-cultural units is often necessary during the process of studying Russian as a foreign language. Differences in semantic perception of the same lexemes by representatives of different cultures, as a rule, draws students to personal experience, arouses emotions and interest. Presenting information in the learning discourse at the emotional level is characterised by high assimilation.

The highest results in studying Russian as a foreign language are achieved with live communication with native speakers. It is learning in a language environment that has the advantage, as it allows to observe different cultural manifestations of the language, removes the language barrier even for the most uncertain students and contributes to the “natural” increase in vocabulary. “As we learn and interpret the world around us, we analyze or generalize new information” (Riabykh, 2021: 94). Communication between foreigners and native speakers may be limited and incomplete due to intertextual moments that make it difficult to perceive live speech, often with quotations or references to precedents (Berkov et al., 2000: 29).

The main unit of learning in the country of the studied language is most often not a text, but a discourse (Pugachev, 2011: 76). It is through it that students are immersed in the language environment (Barkhudarov, 1958: 15). Such a discourse can be defined as an educational discourse through which students are introduced to the theoretical aspects of the Russian language, “the national characteristics of the country of the language being studied”, allowing them to “form a conceptual and linguistic picture of the world”, exercise in the practical application of the acquired knowledge (Strelchuk, Bezrukova, 2022: 226).

E.B. Ushakova notes that “each individual culture looks and perceives the same thing differently, while the word is an expression of sensual, psychological perception in the language-creating process” (Ushakova, 2016: 138). It has been empirically established that a large vocabulary and knowledge of the rules does not guarantee high-quality and effective communication. “Modern linguodidactics has finally stated that the goal of the educational process is not just teaching, but the education of the individual. And education is the formation of the personality by entering the culture, teaching a dialogue of cultures, mastering the language through culture and culture through language” (Maslova, 2020: 33).

One of the sources of linguistic-cultural information are precedents. A.R. Chudinova calls precedent texts the expressors of mentality and national culture of the people (Chudinova, 2016: 22). “A precedent unit objectifies a certain cognitive context, revealing its genetic connection with a linguistic and/or communicative prototype, has the status of derivability – acts as either a derived or a deriving language sign at all linguistic levels” (Golubeva, 2022: 95).

Now the greatest contribution to the study of the linguistic-cultural significance of precedent phenomena has been made by B.D. Gudkov, I.V. Zakharchen-

ko, V.V. Krasnykh, G.G. Slyshkin. They define the concept of “culture code”, i.e. “a secondary sign system which uses different material and formal means to encode the same content, reducible as a whole to the picture of the world, to the worldview of a given society” (Slyshkin, 2000: 45). In such a context, special attention should be paid to iconic personae for this or that linguistic culture. The situation from precedent to its name is one of the central components of the linguistic personality cognitive base. The situation translates the spiritual cultural code and demonstrates moral values. It is implied that the cultural code is axiological and creates a reference vector for culture development and cultural values formation (Krasnykh, 2001: 19).

“Precedentiality is a universal category of precedent thinking which is the base for modern humanitarian and social knowledge” (Golubeva, 2022: 89). The use of precedent most often follows a certain algorithm: the situation of precedent phenomenon application – the “call” for the thought-image – the construction of one's own statement with the precedent. The associative “call” is made of the arsenal of morphemes and lexemes, which is limited only by the speaker's lexicon and the level of culture.

“Precedent units ‘come into play’, making the event they represent ‘come to life’, which is activated in the mind of the listener” (Golubeva, 2022: 93). We should note that both personal and collective associative appeals are based on cognitive activity. Traditional (collective) precedents are the result of habitual, ordinary understanding, which builds on cognitive models, that are usually verbally expressed.

According to D.B. Gudkov, “the status of precedent names belongs to those individual names that are part of the cognitive base” (Gudkov, 2003: 187). “A precedent name is a unit of linguistic consciousness, embodied in the form of a complex sign of culture and linguistic culture” (Yan, 2022: 36). The persistent understanding of precedent names is obvious to most representatives of the linguistic cultural environment. Their image is formed by an ethnically determined judgment of a cultural object belonging to that linguistic-cultural community. Its high recognizability in the cultural environment indicates its linguo-didactic potential.

Experts argue that “the study of this topic requires a systematic approach rather than looking at lists at a certain level of proficiency in RFL” because “without analyzing a sufficient number of precedent names, statements, and texts, a representative of another culture cannot understand either the motivations behind the behavior of characters in literary works (as well as characters in films and plays) or the responses of Russian speakers in certain situations” (Andryushina, 2011: 651).

The study of precedent phenomena is not systematized in contemporary RFL teaching methodology, whereas “it is a possible way and key to uncovering a fragment of the national cultural space” (Yan, 2022: 40). It is recommended to

present these linguistic units at an advanced stage of learning when foreign students already have some knowledge and a sufficient vocabulary. At the initial stage, foreign students meet the precedent names, but they cannot guess their additional meaning, their connection with a certain image in the consciousness of native speakers. At this time, they learn these lexical units as well-known personalities or characters of works, without any additional linguistic-cultural commentary. For example, in the Russian language textbook by V.E. Antonova, M.M. Nakhabina, A.A. Tolstoy “The road to Russia (basic level)”¹ there is a text about the famous scientist M.V. Lomonosov, whose name is precedent for native speakers, associated with the image of a very smart person. There is also information about the great Russian writer A.S. Pushkin, the precedent meaning of his name is associated with a certain type of appearance. In addition, textbooks on Russian as a foreign language² also contain the precedent names of fairy tale characters, including Snegurochka (‘Snow Maiden’), Krasnaya Shapochka (‘Little Red Riding Hood’), Cheburashka, etc.

While teaching Russian to foreigners, teachers use additional authentic materials, such as video clips, presentations, audio materials, etc., with precedent phenomena. For example, a popular and well-known to foreign students cartoon “Masha and the Bear” contains the precedent names *Masha* and *the Bear*, which in the minds of native speakers correlate with a strong fatherly and patient friendship of the Bear in relation to the naughty little girl Masha.

The high recognizability of the precedent name among the native speakers of this or that linguistic culture caused the relevance of studying this linguistic unit in the aspect of teaching a foreign language, where considerable attention is paid to the formation of linguistic-cultural competence. However, the linguo-didactic potential of a precedent name in the topic under consideration needs to be studied in terms of peculiar perception both in the form of textual material and memes, which are widespread on the Internet.

The aim of the research is to study the peculiarities of the perception of the precedent name in the Russian-language discourse of foreign humanitarian students.

Materials and methods

The materials of the study consisted of adapted and non-adapted texts, memes from the Internet with precedent names. The nature of the material under study necessitated the use of the continuous sampling method. The analysis of

¹ Antonova, V.E., Nakhabina, M.M., & Tolstykh, A.A. (2009). *The road to Russia (basic level)* (4th ed.). Moscow: Lomonosov Moscow State University Center for International Education; St. Petersburg: Zlatoust Publ. (In Russ.)

² Antoshkina, O.B. (2020). *Russia – my love: Textbook on the Russian language for foreign students (elementary level)* (1st ed.). Moscow: Training Center of the Russian Language, Moscow State University. (In Russ.); Dolmatova, O., & Novachats, E. (2019). *Tochka Ru* (3rd ed.). Moscow: Byuler O.A. Publ. (In Russ.)

the sites with precedent names identified a number of highly recognizable linguistic units from literary works and movies. The search was based on several precedent fairy tale names with analogues in other linguistic cultures (for example, Buratino – Pinocchio).

This was followed by the study of the results of the search for precedent names in the media on the Internet. Memes with precedent names were selected with the help of search for images with popular memes in the Google.

The subject of the analysis included mostly well-known, culturally significant precedent names from Russian folk tales and fairy tales (11 items), European author's tales (12 items), precedent names referring to the characters of literary texts (10 items), historical figures (2 items), movies (3 items), animated films (2 items).

The selected materials formed the basis for developing tasks on precedents for subsequent descriptive, contextual, semantic analysis of students' results. A total of seven tasks were offered for recognition and correlation of precedent names with their characteristics, sources in fiction, journalistic and educational texts.

International students of the Philological Faculty of Peoples' Friendship University of Russia from India, Belarus, Moldova, Uzbekistan, Jordan, Kazakhstan, China, Venezuela, and Senegal participated in the study. A total of forty people took part in the study.

Results

The indicator of precedent name attractiveness in Russian language teaching is its high recognizability, linguistic-cultural potential, reference to the sources significant for native speakers, correlation with the corresponding precedent from the students' native linguistic culture.

According to the results of the tasks, foreign students recognize more precedent names from the Internet in comparison with characters from fiction and iconic historical figures.

The study results demonstrate a relatively effective linguistic guesswork in the perception of a precedent name in a foreign audience. Even when the meaning was understood significant difficulties, there was a correct attribution of the name to the precedents, due to the context. In a number of cases, understanding the meaning of a precedent name did not require a connection to their source. At the same time, the name was not deprived of its precedent status, since in these situations a nationally predetermined representation was significant.

The most successful interpretation of precedent phenomena was in the case of maximum coincidence of the author's meaning with the meaning extracted in the process of perception. We should remember that any image can carry several different pictures of the world, formed by different cultures and mentality. Correct linguistic-cultural cognitive schemes are necessary for the successful assimilation of the studied language.

The study showed that foreign students in a number of cases can perceive the precedent names with the help of the context and without additional commentary from the teacher. Such names as the Traveling Frog, Sleeping Beauty, and *Neznaika* ‘Know-Nothing’ were successfully semantized by humanitarian students with the help of their lexical meaning, which is on the surface and can be easily understood.

When using a precedent name in Russian as a foreign language lessons, the teacher should not only include it into the teaching material, but also give an appropriate linguistic-cultural commentary. In such a way, in the future foreigners will know all the components of precedence and be able to use them competently in their speech.

Learning precedent phenomena in a foreign audience, in particular the precedent names, prevents errors in communication, misunderstandings, helps in mastering the Russian language and culture, country-specific information. Such knowledge allows teachers to form a Russian picture of the world.

Discussion

In order to investigate the perception of the precedent name by foreign students, seven tasks were made up. They became the basis of the training discourse. Let us consider them in more detail.

In the first task, students had to identify a precedent name in one of the two texts, whose precedence was set in the context describing the characteristic appearance of this precedent. Both texts were taken from Leo Tolstoy's fairy tale “Golden Key, or the Adventures of Buratino”. Here is one example:

– *In that case, her name is **Malvina, or the girl with blue hair.***

– *Ha-ha-ha! – Harlequin rolled again and released Pierrot three slaps on the back of the head. “Listen, most respectable audience... Are there really girls with blue hair?”³*

The results of the first task showed that 27% of the students were able to correctly find the text with the precedent name *Malvina*. 23% pointed to the precedent name *Harlequin*, which is to some extent correct, because Harlequin can be a precedent, but not in the proposed text. And 50% of the students could not recognize the precedent name. Some respondents found it difficult to answer and skipped the task.

The second task was aimed at working with journalistic texts. The students had to read passages from newspapers (“Argumenty i Fakty”,⁴ “Kommersant”,⁵ “Izvestia”⁶), with precedents, find them and determine their source. Here are some examples:

³ Tolstoy, L.N. (2020). *Adventures of Buratino, or the Golden Key*. Moscow: Malysh Publ. (In Russ.)

⁴ Argumenty i Fakty: Official website. Retrieved from <https://aif.ru>

⁵ Kommersant: Official website. Retrieved from <https://www.kommersant.ru>

⁶ Izvestia: Official website. Retrieved from <https://iz.ru>

1. Do we have our own **Kutuzovs** and **Suvorovs** today, who are ready to give their lives for Russia? – Yes, we do. But what a paradox! In our country, if a person is a patriot, they immediately label him a “nationalist” or a “chauvinist”.⁷

2. Some people imagine that the governor is a kind of **Buratino**, who can be influenced, somehow sharpened to suit their interests.⁸

3. Manson is now the mimimi kind **Cheburashka**... Intellectual retardation is evident.⁹

The results of the second task gave us the following data: the majority (69%) correctly identified the precedents, but not all of them indicated the sources. 65% correctly identified the precedent name *Cheburashka*. This suggests that this character is quite well-known in different countries. It was recognized even by those students who have a low level of Russian language proficiency. No less popular name is *Buratino*. It was recognized by 51% of the students. There were also such answers as: “Manson”, “these texts have only one precedent name – *Buratino*”, “Russia”, etc.

The third task was as follows: *Read the dialogue. Find the precedent name. Give a description of it.* This task tested the students' ability not only to find the precedent name in the dialogue, but also to determine its meaning from the context. Here is the example:

– Wow, that's great! I would love to go on your tour. And I moved to a new apartment, so I had to find a new job. I'm now a fitness trainer at the gym. I have a lot of workouts every day and hardly any free time. I still haven't even unpacked since moving.

– Yeah, I can see that you've become quite **Diuimovochka** ‘Thumbelina’, you've lost so much weight... I can see that you spend a lot of time working out. If you want, I'll help you unpack your new house.

– Oh, that's just great. I'd really appreciate it! Can you come drop to my place on Friday night?

Analysis of the third task results showed that 65% of the students gave the correct answer – *Diuimovochka*. Several students incorrectly indicated the precedence of the name *Pauline*, so we can conclude that they do not understand the difference between names with and without precedent coloring.

In the fourth task, students had to look at memes containing precedent names, find the precedent phenomenon, and compose their own dialogues or statements with it.

⁷ Glazunov I. (2006, February 8). Totalitarian democracy is coming? *Argumenty i Fakty*, (6). Retrieved May 15, 2023, from <https://archive.aif.ru/archive/1647358>

⁸ Pertsev A. (2017, December 26). The area of limited reconciliation: How the character of the Murmansk governor turned regional politics upside down. *Kommersant*, (241). Retrieved May 15, 2023, from <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/3507750>

⁹ Maltsev I. (2014, June 29). Enemy of society. *Izvestia*. Retrieved May 15, 2023, from <https://iz.ru/news/573150>

Here is an example of a dialogue composed by a student from India:

– *Sorry, I'm late, I'll be there in ten minutes.*

– *Okay, that's okay, I'll wait, Hachiko waited, and I'll wait too.*

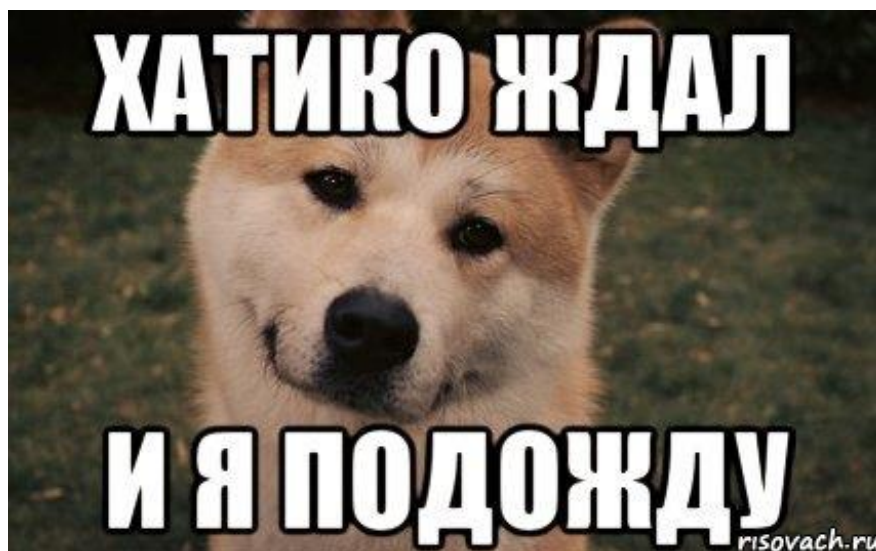


Figure 1. Meme on the film “Hachiko”.
The inscription: “Hachiko waited, and I will wait”

Source: retrieved May 16, 2023, from https://pikabu.ru/story/kak_ya_otkryival_ip_v_polshe_6065530



Figure 2. Meme on the film “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson”.
The inscription: “It’s elementary, Watson!!!”

Source: retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://vk.com/amfet1>

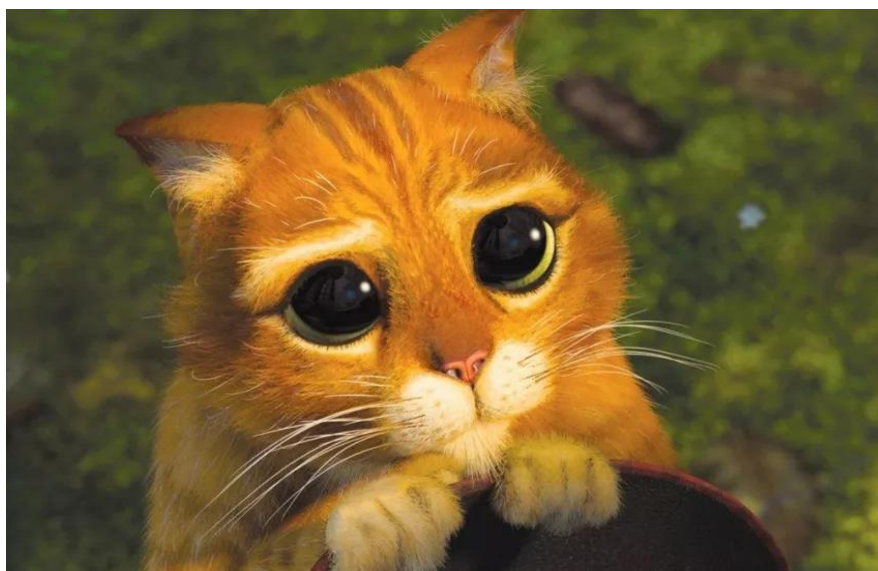


Figure 3. Meme on the film “Shrek”

Source: retrieved May 16, 2023, from <https://www.meme-arsenal.com/create/chose?type=all&tag=шрек>

In the fourth task, all the students correctly recognized the precedent name *Hachiko* and even indicated that it was associated with expectation and loyalty, but less than half (40%) composed dialogues with the correct use of *Hachiko* precedent name.

The precedent name *Sherlock Holmes* was familiar to more than half of the students (72%). The recognition occurred after the precedent statement “It’s elementary, Watson!” The survey showed that a part of the respondents did not know the Russian actor V.B. Livanov (1980), represented in the meme, as Sherlock Holmes. The image of the famous detective from the detective stories by A.K. Doyle is associated by the majority of students with the image of the actor Benedict Cumberbatch from the British version of the series (2010). According to three students, the statement from the meme belongs to Sherlock Holmes, played by the American actor Robert Downey, Jr.

The meme with the precedent name *Cat in Boots* was not recognized by the majority of Asian representatives. 30% of the students said that they had not seen this animated film, but they had seen the cat with big eyes quite often on the Internet, so it was not difficult for them to compose a dialogue with the precedent name. The results of this task allowed us to conclude that foreign students more easily recognize and understand the precedent names, which became famous thanks to the Internet, and perform tasks with them with great interest. This is due to the fact that foreign students are well-versed in the global network, so precedents from the Internet are known to foreigners and more understandable.

In the fifth task, students had to understand the meaning and identify the source of the following precedent names:

- Bormental Ivan
- Akaki Akakievich Bashmachkin
- Chatsky Alexander
- Tatyana Larina
- Rodion Raskolnikov
- Tchichikov
- Judushka Golovlev
- Anna Karenina
- Shvonder
- Mitrofan

Only five students (12.5%) answered this task correctly or partially correctly. All the precedents were taken from fiction texts, which once again confirms our opinion about the lack of familiarity of modern foreign students with Russian fiction.

The sixth task was as follows: connect the characteristics with the precedent names. Here is an example:

1. Tortilla the Turtle
2. Karabas Barabas
3. Artemon
4. Fox Alice
5. Pinocchio
6. Kolobok
7. Malvina
8. The traveling frog
9. Sleeping Beauty
10. Neznaika

- A. A person who sleeps a lot can fall asleep anywhere.
- B. A cunning man
- C. A slow man
- D. A man with bright hair
- E. A person who travels a lot, often changes places of residence
- F. A spiteful person
- G. A conscientious, honest person
- H. A simple-minded man
- I. A foolish man
- G. A person who is overweight. A person who has eaten too much

The results of the sixth task showed that 60% of the students recognized Sleeping Beauty. This precedent name usually does not cause difficulties, because students can intuitively understand its characteristic by the name itself. Alice the Fox was correctly perceived by the majority (55%). Tortilla the Turtle was correctly correlated with the characteristic “slow person” by fifteen students (37.5%). The Traveling Frog did not cause difficulty for foreigners; all gave the correct answer, correlating it to a person who travels a lot. The biggest problem was

caused by the precedent name Pinocchio. As the first tasks show, foreign students recognize it quite easily, but do not understand it. 12% of the students correlated Pinocchio with a gullible person who is easily deceived.

In the final task students had to correlate fairy tale precedent names with the area of their origin: Russian folk tales, Russian author's tales, European author's tales. Here is an example:

1. Turtle Tortilla
2. Karabas Barabas
3. Artemon
4. Fox Alice
5. Pinocchio
6. Kolobok
7. Malvina
8. The Traveling Frog
9. Sleeping Beauty
10. Neznaika

A. Russian folk tale

Б. Russian author's tale

B. European author's tale

The results of the analysis of the last task showed that students from China found it difficult to distinguish between Russian and European precedent names and to determine the source of the precedent. Chinese culture is quite different from Russian and European cultures, especially it is true for proper names. For example, in China many people know the plot of the fairy tale Cinderella, where the main character is a girl named Yesyan (姑娘 from the words *ash* and *girl*). However, students in the perception of the Russian and European versions of the name Zolushka and Cinderella, also formed from the word *zola*, did not have appropriate associations with the Chinese name. In our opinion, a possible reason is the absence of the Russian word *zola* and the English word *cinder* in the lexical minimum of the B2 level.

It is also worth noting that all the students were able to correctly identify the source of the precedent name *Sleeping Beauty*, which is logical, because this precedent has a large number of different variations (in movies, cartoons, memes, etc.). Some students did not know that the source of this precedent name was a fairy tale, but unmistakably said that it was a European source.

Conclusion

Despite the richness and diversity of concepts and judgments inherent in a particular ethno-cultural community, the central, basic concept always remains over-individual, with a generally accessible and comprehensible character of judgment, which includes the experience of generations, as well as awareness of the phenomena that are familiar and popular in the given environment.

The precedent name in the aspect of teaching Russian as a foreign language undoubtedly has linguistic-cultural potential, contributes to the formation of linguistic-cultural competence in foreign students, allows a deeper understanding of the Russian mentality. The inability to extract a precedent name from the text or to decipher it can lead to communicative failure.

Summarizing the above-mentioned, we emphasize that the precedent phenomena and their variety – precedent names in Russian as a foreign language classes contribute to the study of Russian culture, immersion in the cultural environment. In order to fully develop the methodology of teaching Russian as a foreign language with the use of precedents, further research into this issue and a deeper elaboration of the principles of presenting precedent names in Russian as a foreign language lesson are necessary.

The inclusion of images and their contexts that dominate in the linguistic and cultural environment of native speakers, with corresponding linguistic-cultural commentary, seems important for foreign humanitarian students, which will allow to obtain an image that does not contradict the cognitive structure formed in a different cultural environment.

In the process of teaching, for any individual, those cognitive images and their interpretations that were formed at earlier stages in the native cultural environment are most significant. This brings clarity to understanding the difficulties of correctly interpreting a precedent phenomenon. At the same time, the interpretation of artistic images implies a whole sequence of interdependent cognitive images and their meanings.

The conducted research showed a sufficiently high interest of foreign students in studying precedent names of Russian linguistic culture.

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Научная статья

Восприятие прецедентного имени в русскоязычном дискурсе иностранными студентами гуманитарных специальностей

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Аннотация. Узнаваемость прецедентного имени среди носителей языка той или иной лингвокультуры обусловила актуальность изучения данной языковой единицы в аспекте обучения иностранному языку, где значительное внимание уделяется формиро-

ванию лингвокультурологической компетенции. Цель работы – исследование особенностей восприятия прецедентного имени в русскоязычном дискурсе иностранными студентами гуманитарных специальностей. Материалы исследования составили адаптированные и неадаптированные тексты и интернет-мемы с прецедентными именами. В качестве предмета анализа выступили прецедентные имена из литературных произведений и кинофильмов. Характер исследуемого материала обусловил применение метода сплошной выборки. В работе использовано двадцать семь прецедентных имен из текстов художественного и публицистического стилей и интернет-мемов. Обработка полученных результатов осуществлялась на основе описательного, контекстологического, семантического анализов. Всего предложено семь заданий на распознавание прецедентных имен в художественном, публицистическом и учебном текстах на соотнесение прецедентных имен с их характеристиками, источниками. Доказано, что индикатором привлекательности прецедентного имени в обучении русскому языку является интерес иностранцев к персоналиям, которые высокоузнаваемы носителями языка, отсылка к значимым для носителей языка источникам, возможность соотнесения с соответствующим прецедентом из родной лингвокультуры. Описана специфика отбора значимых прецедентов для носителей той или иной лингвокультуры, предлагается составление лингвокультурологического комментария к исследуемым языковым единицам с учетом реалий страны изучаемого языка. Кроме того, высокий интерес иностранных студентов к мемам, содержащим прецеденты, говорит о перспективности данного направления исследования с точки зрения определения принципов их отбора и разработки соответствующих методических рекомендаций.

Ключевые слова: русский язык как иностранный, прецедентные феномены, русскоязычный учебный дискурс

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