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Research article

Corpus explication of semantics of the dichotomous concept “Life – Death” in the Russian linguistic picture of the world

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Abstract. The conceptual dyad “Life – Death” in the Russian linguistic picture of the world is analyzed. The relevance of the research is conditioned by the existential significance of the studied phenomenon in the axiological field of the Russian linguistic picture of the world. The aim of the study is to conduct corpus analysis of the conceptual dyad “Life” and “Death”. The research material includes 70 poetic units containing the nuclear lexemes “Life” and “Death” in the Russian National Corpus. The poetic units are semantically complete contexts of poems by Russian poets (M. Tsvetaeva, M. Voloshin, S. Esenin, Z. Gippius, etc.). Descriptive method, conceptual analysis, method of linguistic-cultural commentary, contextual analysis, corpus method were applied. It was concluded that the concepts “Life – Death” reconstruct the dominant features of the Russian linguistic picture of the world, which is characterized not only by qualitative heterogeneity, but also by a certain bipolarity in the subject's behavior (agenticity vs passivity, providentiality vs activity, etc.). Such semantic parameters of the concepts “Life” and “Death” were established as transience and uncontrollability of life; life as an element, where a person is not an active subject, but an object for external forces; transience of life and its unpredictability; belief in life after death; death as a transition to otherness. The explanatory context for adequate commenting of conceptual meanings is formed.

Keywords: poetic text, conceptual dyad, concept, basic universals, contextual analysis, precedent text

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Introduction

The interconnection between language and culture is investigated in cultural linguistics, a synthesizing science, which began to develop actively in the 1990s. Seeking to substantiate the methodological framework of cultural linguistics,

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V.M. Shaklein proves that the linguistic-cultural approach can be effective in an individual's adaptation to a new sociocultural space (Shaklein, 2012); for us this approach is an epistemological “starting point”.

Cultural linguistics studies cultural phenomena imprinted in the linguistic system, which allow us to join the spiritual quest of a certain nation, its life teleology. It has a significant explanatory potential, which, according to E.S. Kubryakova (Kubryakova, 2007), is an important principle of modern science (the category of explanativeness).

The basic unit of cultural linguistic is the cultural concept – a “mental cell”, a “quantum of meaning”, which is fundamental for our internal thesaurus. A concept is both an individual and a pre-individual phenomenon. Unlike the notion, the concept is sensually labeled, emotive, archetypical. The analysis of certain concepts is the reconstruction of the essential meanings necessary for joining a certain culture. Concepts have a long history of study in Russian linguistics. As cultural and linguistic phenomena they are studied in the works of V.N. Telia (2004), Yu.E. Prokhorov (2009), V.V. Vorobyev, V.A. Maslova (2008), V.I. Karasik (2002), V.V. Kolesov (2006), V.V. Krasnykh (2003), A.A. Zalevskaya (2005), M.V. Pimenova (2004), etc.

A. Wierzbicka believes that the repertoire of any culture contains basic universals – concepts that are constantly retranslated in the process of intergenerative transmission (Wierzbicka, 2021, 2022). Such concepts include the dyad “Life – Death”. The dichotomous concept “Life – Death” has been studied by a number of scholars. The existential essence of the concept is shown in the work by Ho Sen Te (2001). Its semantic structure in Russian paremias is described by M.M. Loginova (2016). A.V. Prokhorova writes about the bipolarity of the concepts “Life” and “Death” (Prokhorova, 2018). The researchers conclude that the conceptual dyad “Life – Death” refers to the existentials (M. Heidegger) of the linguistic picture of the world, therefore, they can provide data on the values of the culture of this or that ethnos.

The conceptual semantics is usually studied on the material of a text corpus. The possibilities of corpus linguistics have been investigated in domestic science by a number of scholars (Chilingaryan, 2021; Novospasskaya, Lazareva, 2021; Bilá, Ivanova, 2020). To identify the usual meanings of the concept, it is advisable to use the paremiological fund of the language. However, individual-author definitions of nuclear lexemes, in particular, poetic texts, can also provide significant results. The explication of conceptual semantics on the basis of a text corpus is an actual field of interdisciplinary research; they mark the level of the actual pragmation of the linguistic personality, which forms the integral national picture of the world of an ethnos (Remchukova, Kuzmina, 2022; Remchukova, Sokolova, 2020; Krasnykh, 2020; Ufimtseva, Balyasnikova, 2021).

The poetic text is included in a global intertext as a paradigm and is intensionally actualized. It can be considered as an individual representation of the studied concepts.

The relevance of the study is conditioned by the ontological significance of the studied conceptual dyad for the formation of ideas about the Russian linguistic picture of the world. Being a basic universal of culture, the conceptual dyad “Life – Death” accentuates the categories, cultural scripts, scenarios, taboos significant for the ethnos. For the adequate explication of conceptual meanings, the vertical context is involved – the background knowledge, where the meanings of the concept are adequately unfolded.

The aim of the research is to explore the conceptual complex “Life – Death”, in the Russian linguistic picture of the world on the basis of the poetic text corpus.

Materials and methods

This paper develops the idea that the corpus of poetic texts, which have the properties of reproducibility and expressiveness, can serve as a material for "extracting" conceptual knowledge. According to researchers, "linguistic images that integrate real representations of the world picture and the author's emotional attitude to them synergistically create the ethno-cultural aura of the artistic text" (Abdelhamid et al., 2023).

The material of the work were poetic units containing the lexical component “Life” and “Death” in the Russian language. We have considered and analyzed 70 contextual units of such authors as S.A. Klychkov (“You are going to die so soon...”), V.V. Kamensky (“The shore is a desk...”), S.A. Esenin (“They are drinking here again, laughing and crying”), Z.N. Hippius (“Even a playwright cannot keep up...”), Y.N. Verkhovsky (“Once our stream was a river...”), K.K. Vaginov (“Among night brilliant wanderings”), A.A. Bely (“Me...”), E.G. Bagritsky (“The Great Mute”), A.E. Adalis (“The landscape is curly, deep, undulating...”), M.A. Voloshin (“On the shoals of the unknown sea...”), M.I. Tsvetaeva (“As poignant, as so...”) and others. All the textual units cited were selected from the National Corpus of the Russian Language¹.

The research methods were descriptive method, conceptual analysis, method of linguistic-cultural commentary, contextual analysis, corpus method.

Results

Life and death in Russian linguistic culture are inextricably linked. The analysis of the precedent texts with the nuclear lexemes “Life” and “Death” revealed the following differential features of the conceptual dyad:

1. Life is the main value of human existence; it is manifested in everyone and everything – nature, people, the unity of all things. Death, on the contrary,

¹ The Russian National Corpus. (In Russ.) Retrieved July 13, 2022, from https://processing.ruscorpora.ru/search.xml?env=alpha&api=1.0&mycorp=&mysent=&mysize=&mysentsize=&dpp=&spp=&spd=&ct=&mydocsize=&mode=poetic&lang=ru&sort=i_grtagging&nodia=1&text=lexform&ext=10&req=>жизнь

is compared to a thief: the motif of night thievery signals its unexpectedness. The emotion associated with life is love, with death – fear.

2. Life is a “merry-go-round”: it indicates a change in the modus operandi of life perception; it is multidimensional and changeable.

3. Life can be “ruined” by irrational actions, affective behavior.

4. Life is bizarre, diverse, unpredictable. A person cannot predict it. The transience and uncontrollability of life are its differential conceptual features.

5. Life as an element, where man is not an active subject, but a passive one, controlled by external forces. Life as “entrance” (birth) is connected with death as “exit”. The iconic stages of human life presented in unity.

6. The motif of the illusory nature of earthly life and faith in “eternal life”. Life as a period; the motif of aging and fading. Death is anthropomorphic, its key features are ruthlessness and justice: everything has its time on earth.

7. Life as torment. The motive of suffering and overcoming. Realization of the value of life from the position of the present to the past. The past as a topos of memories and insight. The emotion associated with life is sorrow; fear of death as the unknown. Both life and death have meaning if one shares them with others; otherwise, they are meaningless.

Discussion

The psychology of any nation is conditioned by many factors. These are the specifics of geoclimatic conditions of ethnos existence, historical and social context, and cultural background. As V.O. Klyuchevsky notes, man permanently adapts to nature and adapts nature to himself; in this two-way interaction national character is developed, as well as energy, aspirations, feelings and relations between people (Klyuchevsky, 1990: 54).

The natural context of the Russian people's existence determined such a trait as collectiveness, which is expressed in a joint living: harsh winters, short and arid summers, limited daylight hours did not allow people to survive in isolation. According to V.E. Kupchenko, the psychological features of the ethnos were influenced by such factors as:

- wide continental space;
- the monotony of the landscape, which contributed to a relatively homogeneous distribution of social roles.

Prolonged “wandering”, peculiar to the ancient Slavs, was caused by various circumstances (such as fires) and fostered disregard for comfort in the Russians (Kupchenko, 2012: 29).

The factors that formed the “Russian soul”, according to D.V. Olshansky, are as follows:

- lagging behind in civilizational development;
- attitude to private property;
- Tatar-Mongol yoke;

- serfdom;
- hostile environment (Olshansky, 2002: 118).

Fear of an external enemy contributed to the development of the principles of collectiveness, sense of community and sobornost. The community was considered the cell of the social order. This was the world of the Russian man, as T.G. Stefanenko writes (Stefanenko, 2006: 117).

Individualism is not peculiar to the Russian national character. Its characteristic features are submission to certain rhythms of life, breadth, generosity, pity, kindness. Climate affected the ethnic worldview: farming depended on harsh weather conditions and determined the appropriate pace of life. Winters were favorable for reflection and “thinking”; unpredictable summers made people think about the correspondence between the expected and the real, giving rise to the idea that not everything is in a person's hand, plans may not come true, and a random coincidence of circumstances is probable. Periods of inactivity in winter (often long) caused the need for activity in spring and summer. Hence the “spontaneity” of the Russian character, the uneven distribution of forces: “The Russian man harnesses long but rides fast”.

The character of the Russian man was also affected by the dual faith, which combined paganism with orthodoxy. The latter influenced the ethical code of the Russian man, his attitude to life and death.

Being objectified in the cultural context, the categories of life and death are no longer perceived in the aspect of biological meanings: they pass through the stages of mythologization and aestheticization, gradually being transformed into value concepts. Their dialectical unity is undeniable: their existence is interdependent, their semantic connotations form a zone of intersection, and their semantics is sometimes interchangeable: sometimes “life” is constituted as “death”, sometimes the opposite happens.

It is generally believed that life and death are in stable opposition, which affects other value categories – beginning and end, time and eternity. Human life, indeed, has its beginning and end; an additional (but essential!) attribute is the idea of immortality, and in this sense earthly life is opposed to eternity. In this case, the concept “Life – Death” is closely related to the concept “Soul”.

These categories can often be substituted by related ones; thus, the “place” of life in the conceptual field of culture can be taken by “love”, “eternity”, “being”. Consequently, these categories are not isolated, they actively interact with other axiologemes, resulting in the new constellations of meanings.

Life and death are not only opposing forces; they represent a dialectical unity, a balance of the universe. In accordance with the strong or weak position of one of the categories in linguistic units, the modality of culture is formed: the opposition between life and death is fixed in a certain way in stable combinations, rituals, and ceremonies. It becomes a motif realized at the plot level; it becomes a characteristic feature of the actors of the aesthetic space of literature; it “shines through” the semantic layers of symbols and metaphors.

According to Hegel, “pure life is being” (Hegel, 1976: 154). Russian philosophy agrees with this thesis: “We know that true being is in the unity of death and life, destruction and creation, pleasure and suffering, and that the unhappiness of the world is in the disconnectedness of all this, caused by its slow cycle”².

As V.V. Kolesov notes, pagan ideas about the integrity of being contain the equipollence of equivalent boundaries: the understanding of the self and the death of consciousness, the event, the absolute of Good and Evil, the predicates of Life and Death (Kolesov, 2006). This inseparability of polar categories gives birth to the metaphysical freedom with which “the Russian people go towards death” (Ilyin, 1997: 458).

The distinction between consciousness as Being and life proper came with Christianity. It is noteworthy that the word *jizn’* ‘life’, borrowed from Old Slavonic texts in the 11th century, originally meant spiritual life. Biological existence was denoted by another word – *jivot* ‘belly’.

In the linguistic consciousness of the Russian people, death is the vital energy of time and motion, personified in an anthropomorphic feminine being who sees everything, notices everything, hears, laughs, cries; she is memorable, merciless, impartial (Kondratyeva, 2000).

Thus, the dyad “Life” – “Death” is basic for the Russian linguistic picture of the world (moreover, it is universal). Regardless of a person's ethnicity, social parameters, and existence context, it is a “key” cell of the mental thesaurus.

In order to differentiate the key parameters of the concepts “Life” and “Death” in the Russian linguistic picture of the world, we analyzed the nuclear lexemes on the basis of the Russian National Corpus. Since the volume of the main corpus exceeds the objectives of this study, we are focusing on the poetic subcorpus. Elements of poetic texts are the closest to paremiological units due to their precedence, their stable presence in the cognitive base of language consciousness carriers and their “solid form”.

Now we are presenting the differential features of these lexemes, revealed through the context.

The lexeme “life”. The subcorpus³ contains 10,120 documents, 13,951 entries. It is impractical to analyze all the syntactic constructions included in the subcorpus within the framework of the present work. We will focus on 60 examples of the works that are the most representative.

I fear death like a thief in the night, / In everybody, in everything I love the golden life (S.A. Klychkov. “You are going to die so soon...”). In the above context, the following semantic elements of the construct are differentiated: fear

² Karsavin, L.P. (1919). *Saligia* (p. 79). Petrograd. (In Russ.)

³ All examples given in the article are taken from the poetic subcorpus of the Russian language on the queries “life”, “death”. Retrieved September 8, 2022, from https://processing.ruscorpora.ru/search.xml?env=alpha&api=1.0&mycorp=&mysent=&mysize=&myse nsize=&dpp=&spp=&spd=&ct=&mydocsize=&mode=poetic&lang=ru&sort=i_grtagging&nodia=1&t ext=lexform&ext=10&req=жизнь

and love, with an emotional component. Life is the main value of human existence; it is no coincidence that it is attributed with the epithet “golden”, meaning in the language of symbolism “sacred”, “good”. Life is manifested in everyone and everything – in nature, people, the unity of all things. Death, on the contrary, is compared to a thief: the motif of night thievery signals its unexpectedness. The emotion associated with life is love, with death fear is associated. The context *Our life is a merry-go-round / In Cumach country (V.V. Kamensky. Surf in Sukhum: “The shore is a desk...”)* testifies to the fact that life is changeable. The metaphor “merry-go-round” indicates the change of modus operandi of life perception; it is multidimensional and unstable. We find similar meanings in the context of *Not even a playwright can keep up / with what life itself will invent (Z.N. Gippius. Stray Dog: “Not even a playwright can keep up...”)*: life is whimsical, diverse, unpredictable. Man cannot predict it.

It is not by chance that we have built an appropriate theoretical basis for our conceptual analysis: the perception of life by the bearer of Russian linguistic picture of the world is determined by the attitude to it as a series of “accidents”, predetermined, nevertheless, by an impersonal Fate. Despite the fact that life is given to a person from above, it can be transformed by the acting subject. This is confirmed by the example: *They feel sorry for those foolish, young, / That ruined their lives in the heat of the moment (S.A. Yesenin. “They are drinking here again, fighting and crying...”)*. Life can be “ruined” by irrational actions, affective behavior. *I was disenchanted with drinking and dancing / And losing my life without looking back (S.A. Esenin. “The blue fire swept by...”)*. The context gives the following characteristics: life can be lost if one treats it thoughtlessly. The script is a meaningful approach to the time given to man. Life as love.

The providential nature of the native speaker's perception of life is testified in the context: *Life swept him away with a stormy wave – / And I am sorry for him (Y.N. Verkhovsky. Two Crosses: “Once our stream was a river...”)*. The semes in the content of the construct are the transience and uncontrollability of life; life as an element, where man is not an active subject, but a passive one, controlled by external forces. Life has a length limited by two chronological “points”: birth and death: *And we enter life, whence the exit is death (K.K. Vaginov. “Among the night brilliant wanderings...”)*. The fact that death is perceived as the “denouement”, the “finale” of individual destiny, is shown in the context: *Because: Difficult is / Life / For everyone – / With one denouement (Andrei Bely. Sung to the guitar: “Me...”)*. The epithet to the life is “difficult”: it is associated with hardships and suffering. Death is not named directly; it is represented by an alternative nomination – “denouement”. It is noteworthy that denouement is, in the strict sense, a term that signals the end of a certain event (sequence of events) in the narrative. It colours life with a touch of drama. Despite the fact that life is difficult and unpredictable, death is also undesirable before the due time: *Life does not want to live... but often / Death does not want to die! (M.I. Tsvetaeva. Pedal: “How piercing, just as...”)*. Implicit information: Despite the hardships,

life has value. It can be understood in the highest meaning of the Path, which is attributed to additional characteristics: separations and meetings as components of the semantic complex: *“The life is the rail! Don’t cry!”* (M.I. Tsvetaeva. *The Shout of Stations: “The shout of stations: don’t leave!”*).

The semantics of life through the “related” concept “love” is actualized according to the principle of semantic substitution *Love means life* (M.I. Tsvetaeva. *“I’m catching the movement of lips...”*). Nevertheless, life can also be perceived as a topos unsuitable for human existence: *Life is a place where one cannot live* (M.I. Tsvetaeva. *“A sparse mane...”*). In this case, the spatial dimension of life is realized, attributed with negative characteristics: life is hard, impossible.

Russian linguistic picture of the world contains the belief in a transient earthly life, which is not life proper: true existence begins beyond the threshold of death. However, earthly life is elemental: *life is a whirlpool* (Sasha Cherny. *Political Sonnet: “The harsh Dante did not despise the sonnet”*).

In order to identify the characteristics of the concepts “Life” and “Death” as a dyad, we also analyzed the following units of the subcorpus: *Life plunges us into sorrow, and death / plunges into fear* (M.M. Kheraskov. *The Venetian Nun: “Here are the walls where my beloved lives!..”*).

We see that the emotion associated with life is sorrow; fear of death as the unknown. However, when life and death are experienced by others (the motif of collective experience), they make sense: *Neither for me, nor for others! The life and death of the avaricious are unbearable* (A.E. Izmailov. *The Dying Dog: “The old Sultanka is ill...”*). Life and death are indissoluble; in a strict sense, they are a conceptual pair. In M.Yu. Lermontov we read: *That life and death – are all the same!!!* (M.Yu. Lermontov. *The Corsair: “Friends, look at me!..”*). The unity and equivalence of life and death are also presented in the contexts: *That life and death are the same for us, – / I will have time to tell you* (I.I. Kozlov. *“Who knows the distant and beautiful land...”*); *That life and death are equal for us* (K.N. Batiushkov. *Traveler and homebody: “Having traveled around the world...”*). In this case we see that life and death are equally important, essentially significant for human existence. Life and death as metaphysical “fields” of human ontology at the level of motifs are presented in V.G. Benediktov’s text: *Life and death / Through all the paths on the earth / Since time is immemorial / In the world walk as two dear, / But dissimilar sisters* (V.G. Benediktov. *“Through all the paths on the earth...”*).

Life and death are manifested as related categories, fundamentally different in their form, but not in their essence: *When both life and death are links in the same chain* (P.F. Yakubovich. *“No friendly hand, no loving glance...”*).

Life and death and in this case are actualized within the context as elements of a single process, alternating with each other.

Consequently, “Life” and “Death” should be considered as units of a conceptual complex (conceptual pair), as their meanings mutually attribute each other.

Conclusion

The conceptual equipment of any culture includes the categories of life and death, as they are related to the conceptualization of ethnos existence. Depending on their perception, the axiological system and ideals of the ethnos are formed; both in everyday and philosophical perception life and death are presented in the form of antinomy; both concepts are opposed in linguistic units of different levels. Moreover, “life” is evaluated positively, and “death” is ambivalent.

Life and death in the poetic texts considered on the basis of corpus units represent a semantic unity. Life, as our analysis has shown, requires effort, responsibility, and activity; it is difficult, sometimes impossible for a person, but death even in this case is not desirable before the certain time. Death is perceived by Russian poets as transcendent: it is a transition to Eternity, to true existence. This interpretation is connected with the religious understanding of death and eternal life.

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Научная статья

Корпусная экспликация семантики дихотомического концепта «Жизнь – Смерть» в русской языковой картине мира

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Аннотация. Анализируется концепт-диада «Жизнь – Смерть» в русской языковой картине мира. Актуальность исследования обусловлена экзистенциальной значимостью изучаемого феномена для формирования целостного представления об аксиологическом поле русской языковой картины мира. Цель – корпусный анализ концептуальной диады «Жизнь» и «Смерть». Материал исследования составили 70 поэтических единиц, содержащих ядерные лексемы «Жизнь» и «Смерть», из Национального корпуса русского языка. В качестве поэтических единиц взяты семантически полнозначные контексты стихотворений русских поэтов (М. Цветаевой, М. Волошина, С. Есенина, З. Гиппиус и др.). Применялись дескриптивный метод, концептуальный анализ, метод лингвокультурологического комментирования, контекстуальный анализ, корпусный метод. Определено, что на базе концептов «Жизнь» и «Смерть» становится возможной реконструкция доминантных черт русской языковой картины мира, которая отличается не только качественной гетерогенностью, но и определенной биполярностью в поведении субъекта (аген-

тивность vs пассивность, провиденциальность vs активность и т. д.). Установлены такие семантические параметры концептов «Жизнь» и «Смерть», как скоротечность и неконтролируемость жизни; жизнь как стихия, внутри которой человек выступает не активным субъектом, но объектом, над которым властвуют внешние силы; скоротечность жизни и ее непредсказуемость; вера в посмертное существование; смерть как переход в инобытие. Сформирован объяснительный контекст для адекватного комментирования концептуальных значений.

Ключевые слова: поэтический текст, концептуальная диада, концепт, базисные универсалии, контекстуальный анализ, прецедентный текст

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