

UNDERSTANDING THE IMAGE OF A SNAKE IN DIFFERENT LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL PICTURES OF THE WORLD

COMPREENENDO A IMAGEM DE UMA COBRA EM DIFERENTES IMAGENS LINGÜÍSTICAS E CULTURAIS DO MUNDO

COMPRENDER LA IMAGEN DE UNA SERPIENTE EN DIFERENTES CUADROS LINGÜÍSTICOS Y CULTURALES DEL MUNDO



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ABSTRACT: The article discusses idiomatic expressions that function in the language of different peoples (Russia, China, etc.). The analysis of phraseological units helps to understand the worldview and perception of the surrounding reality by a particular nation. The originality of the linguistic picture of the world is formed based on the language of each nation separately, and it is the study of idiomatic expressions that contributes to the cognition of this linguistic picture of the world of a particular people. Since human life and the animal world are closely intertwined and interrelated, it is the study of zoonyms used in phraseological units that helps to better explore and understand the culture of different peoples. Moreover, it is zoonyms that are most often used in the phraseological fund of any language, since folklore (proverbs, sayings) is the main source that replenishes languages with idioms. This article examines the image of a snake, which functions in the phraseological units of different peoples, the analysis of this image made it possible to reveal that in the linguistic picture of the world, different peoples have formed an ambivalent attitude towards this image.

KEYWORDS: Phraseological unit. Linguistic picture of the world. Snake.

RESUMO: O artigo discute expressões idiomáticas que funcionam na língua de diferentes povos (Rússia, China etc.). A análise das unidades fraseológicas ajuda a entender a visão de mundo e a percepção da realidade circundante por uma determinada nação. A originalidade da imagem linguística do mundo é formada com base na língua de cada nação separadamente, e é o estudo das expressões idiomáticas que contribui para a cognição dessa imagem linguística do mundo de um determinado povo. Devido ao fato de que a vida humana e o mundo animal estão intimamente interligados e interrelacionados, é o estudo dos zoônimos usados em unidades fraseológicas que ajuda a explorar e entender melhor a cultura de diferentes povos. Além disso, são os zoônimos os mais utilizados no fundo fraseológico de qualquer língua, já que o folclore (provérbios, ditados) é a principal fonte que reabastece as línguas com expressões idiomáticas. Este artigo examina a imagem de uma cobra, que funciona nas unidades fraseológicas de diferentes povos, a análise dessa imagem permitiu revelar que, na imagem linguística do mundo, diferentes povos formaram uma atitude ambivalente em relação a essa imagem.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Unidade fraseológica. Imagem linguística do mundo. Cobra.

RESUMEN: El artículo analiza expresiones idiomáticas que funcionan en la lengua de diferentes pueblos (Rusia, China, etc.). El análisis de unidades fraseológicas ayuda a comprender la cosmovisión y la percepción de la realidad circundante por parte de una nación en particular. La originalidad de la imagen lingüística del mundo se forma sobre la base del idioma de cada nación por separado, y es el estudio de las expresiones idiomáticas lo que contribuye al conocimiento de esta imagen lingüística del mundo de un pueblo en particular. Debido al hecho de que la vida humana y el mundo animal están estrechamente entrelazados e interrelacionados, es el estudio de los zoónimos utilizados en unidades fraseológicas lo que ayuda a explorar y comprender mejor la cultura de los diferentes pueblos. Además, son los zoónimos los que se usan con mayor frecuencia en el fondo fraseológico de cualquier idioma, ya que el folclore (proverbios, refranes) es la fuente principal que repone los idiomas con modismos. Este artículo examina la imagen de una serpiente, que funciona en las unidades fraseológicas de diferentes pueblos, el análisis de esta imagen permitió revelar que en la imagen lingüística del mundo, diferentes pueblos han formado una actitud ambivalente hacia esta imagen.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Unidad fraseológica. Imagen lingüística del mundo. Serpiente.

Introduction

The originality of this or that nation, its culture, attitude, worldview, its picture of the world – all this is reflected in the language and expressed through the language (POLIKARPOV *et al.*, 2022).

For many centuries, human life has been closely connected with the animal world. This fact determines the presence in the language of various idiomatic expressions, comparisons of human behavior with this or that animal (BAIRD *et al.*, 2016). Therefore, in the phraseological fund of any language, a significant part of units contains a zoomorphic component. The only difference is that each language has its own characters – specific images of animals. In this respect, the image of the snake is interesting.

Problem statement

This article raises the problem of the functioning of zoonyms in the idioms of different peoples of the world, in this particular case the image of a snake is considered, which has been formed in different linguistic pictures of the world on the basis of phraseological units. The image of a snake in Slavic and Celtic mythologies, in Russian and Chinese cultures is analyzed, the influence of pagan and Christian worldview systems on the understanding of the image of a snake in various linguocultures is studied (OKHRIMENKO *et al.*, 2022).

Research questions

In what way is the image of a snake perceived in the modern Russian tradition? What positive characteristics did the image of a snake have in mythology and the views of the ancient Celts? What transformations are the snake image undergoing in European culture? What is the characteristic of the image of a snake in the culture of Ancient China?

Purpose of the study

The objectives of this study are to identify the images with which the snake is associated in the Russian and European linguocultural systems. The authors of the study make an attempt to determine the meaning of the snake image in Chinese culture. Exploration of the image of a snake within the framework of Christian ontology is one of the central tasks of this study.

Methods

The methods used in the work are descriptive, component, comparative analysis. Descriptive analysis allows for a comprehensive study of Russian, English and Chinese phraseology; component - to identify the similarities and differences in terms of content, lexical and grammatical composition and the figurative component of phraseological units; comparative - to compare the semantics, lexical and grammatical structures, figurative components of phraseological units and identify the national and cultural specifics of each of them.

Results and discussion

A snake is one of the most ancient mythological images. Even a cursory observation gives a directly opposite assessment and attitude towards the image of a snake in the Western and Eastern traditions. This is one of the key characters in the system of ideas about the animal world, it reflects the main characteristic features of reptiles (JUMAYEVA, 2020). A detailed analysis of proverbs, sayings, phraseological units, beliefs, signs, which used to exist and still existing, folk rituals that would be common and survived to this day etc. Let us observe an ambivalent attitude towards this image (TURAPOVA, 2021). A snake is an ambiguous character: it combines masculine and feminine, water and fire symbolism, negative and positive principles (a wife and a husband are a snake and a grass-snake); it is poisonous and healing. A snake is both an unclean creature and a source of evil, but at the same time it can help a person. In the Russian common imagination, the snake is a living personification of everything unclean, arousing disgust mixed with horror, everything evil, crafty, harmful (POLIKARPOV *et al.*, 2022).

The modern Russian tradition also, on the one hand, associates the image of a snake with negative character traits, such as cunning, viciousness, and on the other hand, a snake is a symbol of wisdom (TORRICO *et al.*, 2018).

Snake worship, widespread among many peoples, has never been characteristic of the spirit of the Russian people. At the most primitive stage of development, folk Russia always treated a snake as a lower (albeit gifted with cunning wisdom) being, that did not allow Russia's mighty spirit, aspiring from earthly limits to heavenly fields, to seek in a reptile an object of deification.

Works of the Russian folk word – epics of the Kiev period – have preserved the images of heroes who fight in single combat with the embodiment of everything evil, enslaving “imposing tribute on the city of the Russian Orthodox Christian, demanding in their caves earthly daughters and Russian wives to be eaten and mocked by Tugarin snakes, Tugarin snakes, mountain snakes” (WORTH, 2016; TRAFÍ-PRATS, 2017).

In the epic tale about Dobrynya Nikitich, these words describe the appearance of the “fierce beast of Gorynychishche”:

There is no wind – a cloud has been blown,
There is no cloud – only rain is raining,
There is no rain – sparks are pouring in:
Thunder is thundering, and the lightning is whistling!
The Snake-Gorynychishche flies,
With about twelve snake trunks... (BALTABAEVA, 2022).

In Russian culture, a snake acts as a stereotypical image. It is cold, devoid of emotions and kind feelings, has a magical gaze of unblinking eyes, which bewitches the victim and causes it to be numb.

There is an idea of the extraordinary vitality of a snake: a killed snake supposedly can come to life. This idea goes back to the physiological characteristics of a snake (it periodically sheds its skin). The idea of a snake puts poison in a snake's tongue – a sting (< to sting), which is considered deadly. Preparing for an attack, a snake makes sounds similar to hiss.

“The snake is dying, but all the potion is snatching!” – people talk about evil, greedy people for unrighteous gain; “No matter how much you hold the snake, one should expect trouble from it!” – about the evil ones; “To feed the snake to one’s grief!”, “To warm the snake in one’s bosom!” – about black ingratitude; ...“The flatterer under the words – the serpent under the flowers!” – about a pretender flatterer; “Looks like a snake from behind his bosom” – about a sullen, overly suspicious person; about slander – “Slander-snake from under the bush will bite!”, “Slander has a serpentine sting”, “If you see a snake, you get around it, if you hear slander, you won't leave!”, “It is better to live with a snake than with an evil wife!”, “A crafty matchmaker is a seven-headed snake!”

The image of a snake in mythology and the views of the ancient Celts had positive characteristics: here it was associated with fertility, healing, and also with the Otherworld. So, Sirona, the goddess of the Celts of Gaul, associated with healing, was depicted with a snake twisted around her arm. Due to its wriggling movements, the snake was often associated with

flowing water. One of the legends about the hero Finn McCumall tells that he learned to kill water snakes.

In the mythology of the Celts, there were various legends associated with snakes. The most famous of them tells the story of Meikh, the son of Morrigan. There was a prophecy that he would bring troubles and misfortunes to Ireland. He was born with three hearts in his chest, one for each hypostasis of his mother's character, and in each of these hearts there was a snake. This was revealed after he had been killed and Dian Keht, the god of healing, opened his body. Two snakes were immediately burned, but the third one, according to the legend, managed to escape and became a huge snake, which was later killed by the same Dian Keht. Thus, it was possible to prevent the fulfillment of the prophecy of troubles and misfortunes for the whole of Ireland.

In European culture, among the mythological creatures, the dragon stands out separately. The dragon is a winged (flying) serpent, a mythological creature, represented as a combination of elements of different animals. It usually has a head (often several heads) and a body of a reptile (snake, lizard, crocodile) and wings of a bird (WAHEDI, 2019).

Researchers believe that the dragon can be considered a further development of the image of the serpent. The main signs and mythological motives associated with the dragon, in the main outlines, coincide with those that characterized the mythological snake. Like a snake, the dragon was usually associated with fertility and the water element, as the owner of which he acted.

The dragon was also considered the patron saint of treasures, which could only be obtained after killing the dragon (in the Germanic myth of Sigurd or Siegfried, etc.). Common to all mythologies in which the dragon acts as a separate character, is the myth of the killing of the dragon by a hero (or deity), who thereby frees the water swallowed by the dragon, guarded treasure and kidnapped people (most often a girl). The mythological motive of the battle of the hero-snake-fighter with the dragon (serpent) later became widespread in folklore, and then penetrated into literature in the form of the legend of St. George who defeated the dragon and freed the captured girl (KHUDOYBERDIEVNA, 2021).

In most of the mythological plots among various peoples, the dragon acts as a positive beginning, as an assistant giving people water and wealth: in ancient Chinese mythology, a winged dragon helps a cultural hero (the founder of the Xia dynasty) – the dragon drags its tail along the ground and thereby determines the paths along who need to dig canals for water supply. Historically, the helper-dragon is traced back to the myth of a dragon tamed by heroes

who harness it to a plow (ASKAROVICH; KHUDOYBERDIYEVNA, 2021). The dragon, interpreted as an assistant, can bring treasures to people. As noted by researchers, the further use of the fantastic image of the dragon (in particular, in the mythologies of East and Southeast Asia, as well as in later European culture) was associated with the aesthetic role of this symbol in art as well.

Christian ideology had a great influence on European culture (both Russian and English). It is under the influence of Christianity that an unclean, devilish nature is attributed to the snake/dragon. The snake is insidious, vindictive, ungrateful and dangerous, it can strike unexpectedly.

In the Biblical Encyclopedia we find: “The devil is called a serpent and an ancient serpent” (Rev. XII, 9, 14, 15), probably to indicate his deceit and malice, as well as the fact that, enticing Eve to taste the forbidden fruit and break the duty obedience to God, he took on the form of a serpent, in which form is described in the Holy Scriptures (Gen. III, 1 et seq. II Cor. XI, 3). The serpent serves as an emblem for the holy writers of malice (Matt. XXIII, 33), ferocity (Ps. LVII, 5; Proverbs XXIII, 32) and deceit (Gen. XLIX, 17). “Here I will send on you serpents, basilisks, against which there is no spell” – says the Lord (Ier, VIII, 17). In Holy Scripture, the following types of snakes are mainly mentioned: asp (Ps, CXXXIX), deaf asp (Ps. LVII, 5, 6), basilisk (Ps. XC, 13), dragon (Is. XIV, 29), flying serpent (the word *flying* probably indicates the speed and suddenness of the movements and attacks of this breed of snakes) (Is. XXXIV, 15), echidna (Is. LIX, 5, Matt. III, 7 XII, 34, etc.).

The image of a snake in the culture of ancient China receives the opposite characteristic. Totemistic performances played an important role. Thus, the Yin tribes considered a swallow to be their totem, the Xya tribes considered a snake as their totem. Gradually, the snake transformed into a dragon (Lun), commanding rain, thunderstorms, water elements and connected simultaneously with underground forces, but the bird transformed, probably into feng huang – a mythical bird – a symbol of the empress; the dragon became a symbol of the sovereign.

Chinese mythology is replete with snake myths. The most archaic is the cycle of myths about the progenitor of Nui-wa, who was presented in the form of a halfman-halfsnake (or dragon), she was considered the creator of all things and people. According to one of the myths, she sculpted people from loess and clay. Nui-wa also appears as a kind of demiurge. She mends the collapsed part of the firmament, cuts off the legs of a giant tortoise and props the four limits of the sky up with them, collects reed ash and blocks the flood of water. Legends about the

cultural hero Fu-si were more widespread, Fu-si and Nui-wa are depicted as a pair of similar creatures with human bodies and intertwined snake (dragon) tails, which symbolizes marital intimacy.

The Chinese mythological system is characterized by countless mythological characters. The first cursory acquaintance with this system allowed us to conclude that most of the significant characters in Chinese mythology either originate from the dragon or are in "kinship" with it. It should be noted that in the Chinese mythological system, there are dragons of various kinds and ranks, headed by Lun-Wang.

Lun-Wang ("king of dragons") is the master of the water element. According to early texts, Lun-Wang is a creature that stands out from other dragons for its extraordinary size. In late folk beliefs, Lun-Wang is often regarded as the lord of the elements, to whom the god of thunder Lei-gong, the goddess of lightning Dian-mu, the god of wind Feng-bo and the owner of rain Yu-shi are subordinate. Chinese artists often painted Lun-Wang in the form of an old man with a staff, the knob of which is decorated with the head of a dragon. Lun-Wang's cult was extremely widespread in old China. There were temples dedicated to him in almost every city, every village, near rivers, lakes, river crossings and wells. His intercession was requested by sailors, fishermen, farmers, as well as water carriers, who believed that underground springs in the wells were controlled by Lun-Wan and connected somewhere underground with the sea. During a drought, the statue of Lun-Wan was taken out of the temple and exposed to the sun, and during a flood it was worn to show Lun-Wan the extent of the disaster and to bring him to shame. If this did not help, then the statue was drowned in water. Chinese emperors assigned various titles to Lun-Wang, and sometimes demoted him in rank, issued decrees about Lun-Wang's exile to distant lands, etc.

The image of a snake (dragon) is somehow present in the legends of the most significant personalities in Chinese mythology, and in a later period - in historical figures. For example, there are legends about the miraculous birth of Guan-Di (the god of war and the god of wealth) from the blood of the dragon executed by the Jade Sovereign Yu-di. The blood was collected by a Buddhist monk into his cup. According to another version, before the birth of Guan-Di, a dragon circled over the house of his parents.

Thus, the image of a snake in Western and Eastern cultures initially carried positive characteristics. Later, European culture experienced the strongest influence of Christian ideology, in which the snake has negative characteristics. In the eastern tradition, the images of the snake and the dragon are still quite clearly separated, and in the mass consciousness the

image of the snake has mostly negative characteristics (but there are also positive ones), but the dragon acts only as a positive character.

Conclusion

M.M. Makovsky notes that the snake was a symbol of the Universe. Lat. *anguis* "snake", but Czech *had* "snake", Russian *gad* "snake", but avest. *gaēpu-* "Universe"; OE *weoreld* "Universe", but **uer (m)* - "snake" (Lat. *aer* "snake") + **edhla* "snake" (English *adder* "snake": also, Swedish *eld* "fire"); Russian *zmeya*, but old North: *heimr* "Universe"; Hittite *illuyanka* - "snake", but English *eel* "eel" > "snake" (Hittite *ila* "ladder to the sky") + avest. *anghu* "Universe".

The snake symbolized the World Mind: Old Ind. *ahi-* "snake", but Gothic *aha* "mind"; OE *maða* "worm, snake", but alb. *mend* "mind, intellect"; Ind-Europ. **ag-*, **og-* "snake", but **og -men*: Russian *um*; Russian *zmeya* < **ghem (d)* -, **ghend*, but Irish. *cond* "mind".

The snake was considered the progenitor of all life on earth: Russian dial. *schur* "earthworm" (> "snake"), but Russ. *pra-schur*; lat. *senex* "old": in this word we have in front of us a negative particle *se-* (used for reasons of taboo) + the root, represented by the English "snake" (in its turn, this latter root is a taboo formation with negation from the root represented by Old Ind. *ahi* "snake"; Latin *anguis* "snake", but French ancient "old, ancient"); Lat. *vetus* "old": this word consists of a negative particle *ve-* (used for reasons of taboo) + root, represented by OE. *tosca* "frog"; Russian *staryj* "old" is a formation with s-mobile and an inserted *t* in front of the vowel from the root, which we find in Irish *aer* "snake"; Old North *gammal* "old", but Russian *zmeya*; Russian dial. *schur* "worm", but Greek. *γερων* "old" (**ker*), Russian *prashchur* "ancestor".

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