

Comparative lexicon of drinking in Russian and British English

The present paper addresses the question whether there is any difference between Russian and (British) English everyday speech with respect to the treatment of drinking alcohol.

Words related to drinking alcohol constitute one of the largest semantic fields of Russian everyday speech. The attention Russian everyday speech and folklore pay to this sphere of life can be related to the specific features of Russian culture, in which there is a tradition to celebrate all important events by extensive drinking and eating.

The vocabulary of Russian everyday speech contains words describing all aspects of the situation of drinking alcohol, i.e. nouns denoting alcoholic beverages (*бормотуха, бухалово, водяра, шампусик*), feasts (e.g. *вечеринка, гулянка, пирушка*), alcoholics (e.g. *алкаш, выпивоха, забулдыга*), adjectives and idioms describing the state of being drunk (e.g. *бухой, косой, поддамый; пьяный в стельку / в зюзю; под газом*). Especially numerous are verbs, which demonstrate rich and quite often absolute synonymy characteristic of everyday speech.

Verbs of drinking can be classified into three major groups, namely:

1. verbs describing a single act of drinking), e.g. *ахнуть, бухнуть, смазать*, most of them being the result of semantic extension along the semantic pattern ‘to hit - to swallowing alcohol in one gulp’;

2. verbs describing the process of drinking:

a) drinking big quantities of alcohol , e.g. *глушить, жрать, хлестать*;

b) drinking big quantities of alcohol for a long time: *гудеть, квасить*;

3. verbs describing the consequences of having drunk a lot, i.e. the state of being heavily drunk, e.g. *набраться, нагрузиться, надраться*.

The distribution of parts of speech constituting the semantic field of drinking alcohol in English everyday speech is quite different from that in Russian. Nouns denoting alcoholic beverages and alcoholics are much fewer. Verbs describing an act or a process of drinking are quite few, too; besides, there are no verbs derived by means of semantic extension. However, in contrast to Russian everyday speech, adjectives describing various aspects of the state of being drunk, such as the looks of the drunken person (e.g. *pie-eyed, stewed, sloshed*) the physical condition (e.g. *bladdered, loaded, paralytic*) psychological state (e.g. *lit up, maudlin, zonked*), are numerous, cf.:

	nouns		verbs	adjectives
	alcoholic	alcohol	To drink alcohol / to drink to the point of becoming drunk	drunk
Russian	9	more than 3	More than 40	5
English	3	7	6	More than 30

I argue that Russian and English everyday speech respectively emphasize different aspects of drinking. Whereas Russian everyday speech focuses on the very act of drinking alcohol, English everyday speech concentrates on the resulting state. The difference in emphasis reflects the difference between Russian and British culture: for the Russian culture the quantity of alcohol one has drunk is important, while for the British culture the state of being drunk is relevant. An indirect evidence that it is so can be found in (K.Fox 2005: 261-264).

