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How to Catch a Unicorn?  
The Image of the Russian Language  
from Lomonosov to Wierzbicka<sup>1</sup>

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*It is particularly dangerous if people use an academic approach to find something they want to find.*

*Dal'*

At the time when the Soviet empire was collapsing, satirical monuments to folklore characters were erected in various places. Examples include Čížik-Pyžik (Sankt Petersburg), the Unknown Student (Saratov) and Rabinovič (Odessa). At the same time, resistance against modernization expressed itself in a revival of the old symbols of national identity. Examples are the new monuments to General Ermolov (Stavropol'e), Dzeržinskij (Podmoskov'e), Stalin (Yakutia; Oblast Saratov; Belarus) and Andropov (Petrosavodsk). In 2003, a stone polyhedron was set up in the square of a staniza in Kuban (Region Krasnodar). Engraved on it was a quote by Turgenev: "Oh great, mighty, true and free Russian language!". Now the reader may wonder to which of the two types of monuments described above – the

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ones referring to folklore or the ones commemorating the “strong hand” – the one in Kuban belongs?

The person who initiated the monument, “an aide to the Ataman for culture of the Cossack community in Mostovskoi”<sup>2</sup>, saw the monument as a “symbol of reference to the Russian language, which has united a multitude of peoples on a huge part of the globe over many centuries”<sup>3</sup>. When reading this, one has to keep in mind that at the time when the project was discussed and implemented (2002 to 2003), Krasnodar region was the third largest region in Russia in terms of population, but the one with the worst instances of discrimination against ethnic minorities: Having made sure that Moscow would support them, and relying on help from the Cossacks, the regional leaders started to openly and directly intimidate “strangers” and to expel them from the region. At the same time, Russian mass media propagated the necessity of defending the Russian people and Russian culture, and the Russian parliament passed a law confirming the leading position of the Russian language and the Cyrillic alphabet. What is also notable is the context in which the Kuban Cossacks’ initiative was mentioned: “Last week, the Russian president’s wife, Ljudmila Putina, participated in the all-Russian conference on problems of the modern Russian language, which took place in Sochi. Well-known Russian writers, linguists, journalists and teachers all agreed that our ‘great and mighty one’ [that is, the Russian language] is in need of support today. The participants were informed about the new federal program called ‘The Russian language in the regions of Russia’. In fact, a separate regional program in support of the Russian language had been set up in Kuban even before that. In Mostovskoi rayon, a granite monument, which was meant as a symbol of love and

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<sup>2</sup> Степанова Л. Памятник русскому языку // Кубан. новости (Краснодар). 24.05.2002.

<sup>3</sup> Степанова Л. Идея установки памятника русскому языку нашла поддержку в Америке // Кубан. новости (Краснодар). 24.12.2002. Cf. also: “...A monument to the language that unites all inhabitants of our country irrespective of their nationality and religious beliefs, the color of their skin or the shape of their eyes.” (Степанова Л. Язык мой – друг мой // Кубан. новости (Краснодар). 24.05.2003).

reverence for the Russian language, was erected on October 19, the day when Pushkin's lyceum in Zarskoje Selo was founded"<sup>4</sup>.

Is it really appropriate to quote Turgenev's dictum in support of these objectives? At first sight, it is not, because it does not describe the Russian language as a means of international communication and as something to be supported, but rather as a language with characteristics that set it apart from other languages. A Western slavacist who analyzed commonplace statements about the Russian language made by Russian men of letters and linguists during the period from the 18th century to the 1980s noted that glorification of the Russian language during the Soviet era was not really compatible with the Marxist idea of friendship between peoples<sup>5</sup>. The Soviet Marxists themselves, however, did not see a contradiction here, because friendship between people did not mean mutual sympathy between equals, but rather a claim to the loyalty of the defeated. Unlike their Western counterparts, who practiced assimilation, they saw submission as acculturation, an ideologem that took root even before Marxism itself. Thus, the preface to the "History of the Russian State" by Karamzin says that the Russian people "discovered previously unknown countries by introducing them to the general system of geography and history and enlightening them to believe in God, while avoiding the violence and the atrocities that are committed by other supporters of Christianity in Europe and

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<sup>4</sup> Памятник языку // Крестьянин (Ростов-на-Дону). 23.10.2002.

<sup>5</sup> Jachnow H. Ist das Russische eigentlich eine besondere Sprache? // Slavistische Linguistik 1986. München, 1987. S. 218. The author points out that statements by Soviet linguists claiming the superiority of the Russian language above others either lack comparisons with others or are built on incorrect assumptions, such as the opinion that Russian orthography – unlike English or French – was based on the phonetic principle. (This opinion can be found in the following book: Исаев М. И. Социолингвистические проблемы языков народов СССР: Вопр. яз. политики и яз. стр-ва. М., 1982. С. 152.) He asks whether the excessive praise of the mother tongue as *rich, great, strong, mighty, flexible* and so on, which is not supported by any scientific arguments, is in fact caused by an unconscious complex of linguistic inferiority (Jachnow H. Op. cit. S. 220, 226–227).

America and relying exclusively on their giving an example of the better". In Soviet times, grateful "foreigners" were expected to step forward with declarations in this vein. Thus, poems by Gamzatov from Daghestan were fairly popular: "Neither abuse nor violence / Was used here. I can confirm: /It was not Ermolov's Rus' that defeated us. / The Caucasus was captivated by Puškin's Rus'". In a country, however, in which people sneered at the accent and the mistakes of the Russian-speaking inhabitants of the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Baltic states, not everybody was in a position to separate the Rus' of the Caucasian bard from the Rus' of the Caucasian hangman – particularly because Moscow made sure that the latter was not forgotten: For many years, the carefully guarded monument to Ermolov adorned the center of Groznyj, representing the imperial fist that hit the Caucasian mountain ridge. And in 2008, an initiative by the Terek Cossacks resulted in a new monument to Ermolov being erected in Stavropol region (in spite of Chechen protests). One may assume that this monument bears witness to a similar mindset as the monument to the Russian language erected by the Kuban Cossacks in the Caucasian foothills.

While the phrase "true and free" in Turgenev's praise of the Russian language can be considered as a reference to Puškin's words about priests who do not depend on earthly power: „The wise men do not fear the mighty lords, / And they do not need any gift from these lords; / True and free is their prophesying language / And a friend to the heavenly will"<sup>6</sup>, the phrase "great and mighty" is a part of a rich tradition of narcissism in language, according to which the Russian language is predestined to be the language of the mighty. This tradition dates back to the times when the Russian language competed with Old Church Slavonic, Latin and French. From Lomonosov's days, men of letters writing in Russian have proclaimed its functional and esthet-

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<sup>6</sup> See also: Keil R. D. Der Fürst und der Sänger: Varianten eines Balladenmotivs von Goethe bis Puškin // Studien zur Literatur und Aufklärung in Osteuropa: Aus Anlaß des VIII. Internationalen Slavistenkongresses in Zagreb. Gießen, 1978. S. 263.

ic superiority to other languages<sup>7</sup>, and Trediakovskij claimed to have found Slavonic roots in European toponyms and ethnonyms<sup>8</sup>. For example, he stated that the word *Etruscans* (*getruski*) was derived from the Russian „хитрушки“ („Schlau-meier“) – „because these people practiced the sciences of these days“<sup>9</sup>.

Taken as such, this apologia for one's native language is not a unique characteristic of the Russian flavor of the ideology of national superiority<sup>10</sup>. What is so specifically Russian about it are the arguments – references to the extension of the sounding board: “The language by means of which the Russian empire reigns over a large part of the world gains a natural richness,

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<sup>7</sup> See: Русские писатели о языке: Хрестоматия. Л., 1954, 1955; Русские писатели о языке (XVIII–XX вв.). Л., 1954; Поэты о русском языке. Воронеж, 1982, 1989; Русские писатели XVIII–XIX веков о языке: Хрестоматия. М., 2000, 2006; Русские писатели о языке: Хрестоматия. М., 2004; Прямая речь: Мысли великих о рус. яз. М., 2007.

<sup>8</sup> For examples and an analysis, see: Клубков П. А. Этимологии Тредиаковского как факт истории лингвистики // *Humanitāro zinātņu vēstnesis Daugavpils universitāte*. 2002. № 2. С. 58–68.

<sup>9</sup> Slavophile etymologists arrived at similar conclusions: Thus, Volanskij wonders whether “it was the name of the Russian Getes (*Gety russkie*), who conquered parts of Italy in prehistoric times, that formed the basis of the ethnic name of the Etruscans” (quoted from: Классен Е. И. Новые материалы для древнейшей истории славян вообще и славяно-руссов дорюриковского времени в особенности с легким очерком истории руссов до Рождества Христова. СПб., 1995. С. 85).

<sup>10</sup> We would like to mention the following examples for recently published monographs on this topic: Merlin-Kajman H. *La langue est-elle fasciste?: Langue, pouvoir, enseignement*. Paris, 2003; Stukenbrock A. *Sprachnationalismus: Sprachreflexion als Medium kollektiver Identitätsstiftung in Deutschland (1617–1945)*. Berlin, 2005. Among contemporary versions of nationalism in language, the Chinese one seems to be closest to the Russian one (for an analysis, see for example: Schulte B. „Für den Fortschritt der Menschheit“: Die chinesische Kulturlinguistik erfindet sich selbst // *Neue China-Studien*. Bd 1: Zwischen Selbstbestimmung und Selbstbehauptung: Ostasiatische Diskurse des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts. Baden-Baden, 2008. S. 239–259) as well as – to a certain degree – the Japanese one. Western academics – notably with the exception of Anna Wierzbicka – generally consider these theories as unprofessional (cf. Алпатов В. М. Японские стереотипы в отношении языка // *Стереотипы в языке, коммуникации и культуре*: Сб. ст. М., 2009. С. 102).

beauty and strength from the power of this empire, and is second to no other European language”, states Lomonosov in his “Short Guide to Rhetoric”<sup>11</sup>. A few years later, in his “Russian Grammar”, he goes even further: “great before all others in Europe”<sup>12</sup>. The Russian language, which is considered as immanent to the Russian space, is equated with the Russian people and described as the embodiment of strength and greatness – fully in unison with the famous conclusion: „Should not the hero exist here, where there is enough space for him to develop his powers and to roam around?”<sup>13</sup>. On the same note, Bestužev-Marlinskij compared the Russian language to Herakles<sup>14</sup>, Ševyrev to Il’ja Muromec<sup>15</sup>, Nadeždin gave it the epitheta “mighty”, “strong”,

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<sup>11</sup> Ломоносов М. Полн. собр. соч. М.; Л., 1952. Т. 7. С. 92.

<sup>12</sup> “The Russian language, which rules over many other languages, is great before all others in Europe – not only because of the huge areas it reigns over, but also because of its own comprehensiveness and richness” (Ломоносов М. *Op. cit.* С. 391). See also: „...Jamais langue n’a occupé une aussi vaste étendue” (<Лекция Кюхельбекера о русской литературе, прочитанная в Париже в июне 1821 г. > // *Лит. наследство.* М., 1954. Т. 59, ч. 1. С. 368); “The Russian language is that strong, mighty language, which sounds across the endless expanses of our great home country, from the mountain ridges of the Sayan to the White Sea and the Black Sea” (Надеждин Н. И. *Литературная критика. Эссеистика.* М., 1972. С. 405). Cf. also the parallelism of territory and language in Sluckij’s poem „Родной язык” (“Mother tongue”): “The history of our home country / is extensive, and deep as well / because of the huge territory / but also because of the lure of the language”.

<sup>13</sup> Гоголь Н. В. Полн. собр. соч. М.; Л., 1951. Т. 6. С. 221.

<sup>14</sup> “Our language can be compared to a baby who is sound asleep: He produces harmonic sounds, or sighs about something; but hardly ever does a flash of thought cross his face. It is a baby, I say, but it is like new-born Alcides, who killed a serpent while still lying in his cradle! And is he going to sleep forever?” (Бестужев-Марлинский А. А. *Соч. М.*, 1958. Т. 2. С. 546). See also: “Though the Russian language may be rich, strong, healthy and wonderful by nature, it is currently still in its early childhood <...> may it surpass all other languages in value” (Ломоносов М. *Полн. собр. соч. М.; Л.*, 1954. Т. 5. С. 95).

<sup>15</sup> “What has happened to the Russian language? / What crazy tricks does it play! <...> It is a hero, this Il’ja Muromec, / Sung into sleep on the ice under frosty whirlwind / Who idled away his time at home in the darkness of centuries / He arose thanks to the skillfulness of the fisherman / And intoned the song of God and the tsar – / Raised in the northern cold / He turned from the singer of winter in his home country and the icy Alps / Into a hero, all grown strong /

“powerful” and wrote about its “sthenic muscles” and the “brave, gigantic energy”<sup>16</sup>, while Gogol’ proclaimed: “Our language is a giant!”<sup>17</sup>. This anthropomorphization of the Russian language and this way of equating it with the Russian people (according to Turgenev, “one cannot but believe that such a language should have been given to a great people!”) lead to the connotation of the meaning „народ” („people”) in the word *язык* (*language*) and the popular belief in a relationship between the words *слово* (*word*) and *славяне* (*Slavs*).

Being the classic of narcissism in language, Turgenev’s panegyric became the model of two other well-known hymns from Soviet times: The confession: “...You alone are my help and support”, which is originally addressed to the native language, is reflected in Esenins “Letter to Mother”: “You alone are my help and my joy”, and the epitheta *великий*, *могучий* and *свободный* (*great*, *mighty* and *free*) were used in the national anthem of the USSR: „Unbreakable union of freeborn republics / Great Russia has welded forever to stand! / Created in struggle by will of the peoples / United and mighty, our Soviet land!”<sup>18</sup>. Interestingly enough, the word *единый* (*united*) in the last verse is sometimes replaced with *великий* (*great*) – as if the original praise of the language was still present as an undertone in the hymn to the empire.

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And together with it he boomed under the storm of the waterfall” (Шевырев С. П. Стихотворения. Л., 1939. С. 87–88).

<sup>16</sup> Надеждин Н. И. *Op. cit.* С. 395, 405, 416, 420.

<sup>17</sup> Гоголь Н. В. Полн. собр. соч. М.; Л., 1952. Т. 12. С. 34.

<sup>18</sup> The intertextual relationships between the two hymns – to the Russian language and to the Soviet Union – are described in: Keipert H. «Великий, могучий, правдивый и свободный русский язык»: Zu Vorgeschichte und Nachwirkung eines Russisch-Stereotyps // *Słowianie Wschodni: Między językiem a kulturą*. Kraków, 1997. S. 195. Cf. also the equation of the Russian language – as mighty and true – with the Russian people and the Soviet Union in Jašin’s poem „Русский язык” (“The Russian language”): „Like the Russian people, it has many faces / And is as mighty as our state. <...> Unambiguous and direct, / It is like truth itself”.

Portraits of the Russian language that were written in the post-Soviet era perpetuate these older images. The creators of the so-called new chronology utilize the hypothesis about the Slavonic origin of the Etruscans<sup>19</sup>, and a philosopher of language states that the „depopularization of the [Russian] people and the delexicalization of the [Russian] language are of the same nature“<sup>20</sup>. The equation of language and people can also be found quite often in academic essays (or rather essays whose look and feel as well as their place of publication and the place of work of their authors suggest an academic background) that promote the ideas of Neohumboldtianism.

This school of thought, which postulates a dependency between the way the speakers of a language think and act and the specifics of the grammar and lexis of this language, is mainly connected with the names of Edward Sapir and Benjamin Lee Whorf, who created the hypothesis of linguistic relativity (referred to below as HLR), and Leo Weisgerber, who conceived a “content-related grammar” and promoted the idea that language structures our apprehension of reality, which is still popular in linguistic works of this school of thought<sup>21</sup>. Starting in the 1960s, the works of the Neo-Humboldtianists have been subject to systematic criticism: Studies about the reasoning powers of children who have not yet learnt to speak, about aphasics, deaf-dumb per-

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<sup>19</sup> See: Носовский Г. В., Фоменко А. Т. Империя: Русь, Турция, Китай, Европа, Египет: Новая матем. хронология древности. М., 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999, 2000, 2003. Ч. 4, гл. 15: Исчезновение загадки этрусков.

<sup>20</sup> «Любовь» усохла на три четверти: Михаил Эпштейн – о невозврате кредитов русскому языку: [Интервью Е. Дьяковой] // Новая газ. 15.07.2009. Regarding the post-Soviet equation of the Russian language with the Russian people in descriptions of the decline of language as a disease see: Eismann W. Kultur und Sprache in Russland // Kultur-Wissenschaft-Russland: Beiträge zum Verhältnis von Kultur und Wissenschaft aus slawischer Sicht. Frankfurt am Main u. a., 2000. S. 76–79.

<sup>21</sup> Weisgerber’s theory was acknowledged in the USSR in the 1950s (for a history of its reception, see: Radchenko O. A. Weisgerberiana sovetica (1957–1990): Ein Versuch der Metakritik des Neuhumboldtianismus bzw. der Sprachinhaltsforschung // Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft. 1992. H. 2.2–3, S. 193–211), however his works did not get translated into Russian until the early 1990s.



sons, and animals helped to confirm the opinion that thinking is independent of language, which is now generally accepted in the scientific community. The examination of the arguments in favor of HLR showed, for example, that Whorf's ideas regarding the language of the Hopi Indians<sup>22</sup> as well as the popular claim that the Eskimo language has a multitude of words for 'snow'<sup>23</sup> are simply wrong. Consequently, the interest in HLR gradually subsided during the 1980s. In 1984, a follower of Weisgerber still believed in a bright future for his mentor's ideas<sup>24</sup>. Twenty years

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<sup>22</sup> See: Gipper H. Gibt es ein sprachliches Relativitätsprinzip?: Untersuchungen zur Sapir-Whorf-Hypothese. Frankfurt am Main, 1972. S. 212–235; Malotki E. Hopi time: A linguistic analysis of the temporal concepts in the Hopi language. Berlin u. a., 1983. These discoveries did not prevent Gipper from continuing his support of Neo-Humboldtianism – and Wierzbicka from declaring: „But what matters is not whether Whorf's specific examples and analytical comments are convincing. (As far as these are concerned, there is now general agreement that they are not; in particular, Malotki [1983] has shown that Whorf's ideas about the Hopi language were misguided.) But Whorf's main thesis that 'we dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages,' and that 'we cut nature up [in ways] codified in the patterns of our language,' contains a profound insight which will be recognized by anybody whose experiential horizon extends significantly beyond the boundaries of his or her native language" (Wierzbicka A. Understanding cultures through their key words: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese. Oxford u. a., 1997. P. 7). What is so interesting about this is that in writing this Wierzbicka uses a strategy that she describes as typical for the Russian language in other texts (see, for example: Wierzbicka A. Semantics, culture and cognition: Universal human concepts in culture-specific configurations. New York u. a., 1992. P. 404–406): From a merely grammatical point of view, Whorf is relieved of the responsibility for his own errors; rather, he is described as a victim of certain forces that misled him ("Whorf's ideas about the Hopi language were misguided").

<sup>23</sup> See: Martin L. Eskimo words for snow: A case study in the genesis and decay of an anthropological example // *American anthropologist*. 1986. Vol. 88, no. 2. P. 418–423; Pullum G. The great Eskimo vocabulary hoax and other irreverent essays on the study of language. Chicago, 1991. Ten years after this theory had been shown to be a misconception, a Russian linguist remarked: "...The Eskimo language has a variety of names for snow" (Падучева Е. В. Феномен Анны Вежицкой // Вежицкая А. Язык. Культура. Познание. М., 1996. С. 21); this relapse is mentioned in: Gebert L. Immagine linguistica del mondo e carattere nazionale nella lingua: A proposito di alcune recenti pubblicazioni // *Studi slavistici*. 2006. Vol. 3. P. 225.

later, however, most linguists consider it as obsolete<sup>25</sup>. At least this is how things stand in Western linguistics. In the post-Soviet Russian academic community, HLR has become quite an influential doctrine, which shows in the steadily (particularly from the middle of the 2000s) increasing number of publications that utilize the corresponding terms and references for exclusively decorative purposes.

In the following, however, we will not discuss these works, in which Sapir and Whorf have formally replaced Marx and Engels, but rather works that are actually created in the wake of HLR. These works are by no means homogenous: The authors hold different opinions regarding the degree to which language influences the apprehension of reality and the behavior of its native speakers. What unites moderate and radical proponents of HLR is the predominant or exclusive interest in the “concepts” (or “key words”, “key terms”, “culturemes of language”), which are considered as constitutive for the “Russian mentality” (or “Russian way of thinking”, “Russian linguistic worldview”, “Russian model of the world”).

This interest developed in the wake of Wierzbicka’s works about the key words of national cultures. Western linguists tended (and still tend) to consider these works as rather unprofessional. The reason probably is that they are based on a comparison of phantoms, namely national characters, and that these constructions are then quoted as proof, for example, for the typically Russian nature of Dostoevskij and Evtušenko. Also, the corpus of examples on which the analysis is based is not homogenous and representative in scope, but consists of individual, arbitrarily selected sources that belong to completely different discourse types created at different times<sup>26</sup>. In post-Soviet Russia, Wierzbicka’s works are seen quite differently: The heirs of the Western dis-

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<sup>24</sup> See: Gipper H. *Leben und Werk Johann Leo Weisgerbers // Schriftenverzeichnis Leo Weisgerber: Leo Weisgerbers zum 85. Geburtstag*. Münster, 1984. S. 11–32.

<sup>25</sup> See: Roth J. *Methodologie und Ideologie des Konzepts der Sprachgemeinschaft: Fachgeschichtliche und systematische Aspekte einer soziologischen Theorie der Sprache bei Leo Weisgerber*. Frankfurt am Main, 2004. S. 480.

course considered Wierzbicka's version of the HLR as the latest fashion in international science, and their enthusiasm was shared by the neo-Slavophiles, who felt that the terms used in HLR could be utilized very well in discussions of "русскость" ("Russianness"). While the scientific discourse in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was characterized by polemic fights between advocates of universalist ideas about language and ideologists proclaiming a „particular path“ and the special status of the Russian language (such were the discussions between the supporters of Karamzin and the supporters of Šiškov, as well as – at a later point in time – between proponents of academic science and Slavophil linguists<sup>27</sup>, the first Russian Humboldtians<sup>28</sup>), the Humboldtian doctrine was consol-

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<sup>26</sup> See, for example: Sériot P. Oxymore ou malentendu?: Le relativisme universaliste de la métalangue sémantique naturelle universelle d'Anna Wierzbicka // Cahiers Ferdinand de Saussure. 2005. № 57. P. 23–43; Weiss D. Zur linguistischen Analyse polnischer und deutscher „key words“ bei A. Wierzbicka: Kulturvergleich als Sprachvergleich? // Berührungslinien: Polnische Literatur und Sprache aus der Perspektive des deutsch-polnischen kulturellen Austauschs. Hildesheim u. a., 2006. S. 233–257; Baldauf E. Zu einigen Aspekten des russischen Heimatbegriffs: *Rodina* bei A. Wierzbicka und in russischen Kulturgeschichtlichen bzw. lexikografischen Untersuchungen // Anzeiger für slavische Philologie. Graz, 2006. Bd 34. S. 23–40.

<sup>27</sup> See, for example: Гаспаров Б. Лингвистика национального самосознания: (Значение споров 1860–1870 гг. о природе рус. грамматики в истории филос. и филол. мысли) // Логос. 1999. № 4. С. 48–67.

<sup>28</sup> Sériot refers to the method developed by Konstantin Aksakov (who created a theory of the Russian verb) as Humboldtian: „Il s'agit d'une critique très nette de la position rationaliste d'identification entre logique et grammaire, qu'Aksakov remplace par le principe humboldtien d'identité entre la langue et la pensée: la langue n'est pas l'expression de la pensée, mais son incarnation“ (Sériot P. Une identité déchirée: K. S. Aksakov, linguiste slavophile ou hégélien? // Contributions suisses au XIII<sup>e</sup> congrès mondial des slavistes à Ljubljana, août 2003. Bern, 2003. P. 277) and finds certain similarities between the ideas of Aksakov and Wierzbicka (see: Sériot P. Oxymore ou malentendu? P. 33–34). In this context, however, one needs to keep in mind that neither Wierzbicka nor her supporters are familiar with this facet of the history of Russian linguistics; among the Neo-Humboldtians, Kolesov was the only one who thoroughly analyzed the works of the Slavophiles and publicized their ideas even during Soviet times. He considered the Slavophiles as “the first ones who wanted to reveal the specifics of the Russian mentality in speech forms” (Колесов В. В. Русская ментальность в языке и тексте. СПб., 2007. С. 52).

dated in Russian academic linguistics of the 20<sup>th</sup> century by the Russian neo-Slavophiles as well as the proponents of a neo-Western attitude.

The basic prerequisite of HLR – namely that different peoples have distinct worldviews and national characters, and that these differences are reflected in language – is taken for granted in the works of the Russian proponents of HLR. A typical example of an essay in this vein might read like this: “We know that language constitutes a clear representation of the character and world-view of a people, for example with regard to its lexical parts”<sup>29</sup>; “It is a well-known fact that the representation of the world in the language of a people reflects the national character and the specifics of this people’s worldview”<sup>30</sup>.

And this is what the conclusions drawn from these assumptions look like: Native speakers of Russian are more emotional as native speakers of English<sup>31</sup> or Bulgarian<sup>32</sup>; they consider anxiety as something negative, while native speakers of German believe that anxiety can also be useful<sup>33</sup>; they tend to see the influence of a higher power in everything that happens, which is also reflected in the sacral character of the root of the noun *удивление*, whereas the English equivalents – *surprise*, *wonder* – bear witness to the more representational, agentive and individualist character of the English language awareness<sup>34</sup>; Spanish sci-

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<sup>29</sup> Шмелев А. Д. Национальная специфика языковой картины мира // Булыгина Т. В., Шмелев А. Д. Языковая концептуализация мира: (На материале рус. грамматики). М., 1997. С. 482.

<sup>30</sup> Певная Н. П. Дискурсивное описание русского концепта „достоинство“ // Acta linguistica. 2009. Vol. 3. С. 72.

<sup>31</sup> See: Тер-Минасова С. Г. Язык и межкультурная коммуникация: (Учеб. пособие). М., 2000. С. 158.

<sup>32</sup> See: Васева И. Отражение национального характера в языке болгар и русских // Динамика языковых процессов: История и современность: Сб. науч. тр. София, 2004. С. 86–92.

<sup>33</sup> See: Бутенко Е. Ю. Концептуализация понятия „страх“ в немецкой и русской лингвокультурах: Автореф. дис. на соиск. учен. степ. канд. филол. наук. Тверь, 2006.

<sup>34</sup> See: Дорофеева Н. В. Удивление как эмоциональный концепт: Автореф. дис. на соиск. учен. степ. канд. филол. наук. Волгоград, 2002.

entific thinking, in turn, is considered to be characterized by “straightforward logic, an analytic approach, fragmentarity, segmentation and exact categorization”, while the following characteristics are said to be typical for Russian thinking: “synthesis, holistic perception, seeing interdependences between different phenomena, striving for higher levels of experience”<sup>35</sup>; “...The metaphorical structure of the concept [*sin*] with representatives of Russian and French communities is analogous. The main difference is that the concept in the Russian linguistic culture contains the additional metaphorical projection of *secret*”<sup>36</sup>; “Like the Japanese, the Russian mentality has a tendency towards ‘psychological unification’. With the Russians, however, it is of a different type. <...> according to Russian cultural norms, people should not only speak their minds. They should also have what they are saying pass through their own consciousness”<sup>37</sup>.

The lack of understanding on behalf of the Western academic community with regard to the new trend in Russian linguistics led Wierzbicka, whose *key words* had opened a Pandora’s box, to differentiate her own position from the one of her Russian supporters: In reaction to their statement that a language “forces” certain “worldviews, stereotypical behaviors and psychological reactions” on its speakers, she says: „I personally would not say ‘forces’, but rather ‘suggests’”<sup>38</sup>. She dismisses the allegation that by comparing languages she was also comparing national characters: “I never talked about a Russian or any other ‘national

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<sup>35</sup> Копылова Т. Р. К определению понятий *коммуникация* и *comunicaci6n*: (О некоторых особенностях науч. мышления) // Вестн. Удмурт. ун-та. Филол. науки. 2007. № 5 (2). С. 64.

<sup>36</sup> Семухина Е.А. Концепт „грех“ в национальных языковых картинах мира: Автореф. дис. на соиск. учен. степ. канд. филол. наук. Саратов, 2008. С. 19.

<sup>37</sup> Чернышева А. Ю. Грамматические показатели русской ментальности // Русская и сопоставительная филология: Лингвокультурол. аспект. Казань, 2004. С. 279–282.

<sup>38</sup> Вежбицкая А. Имеет ли смысл говорить о „русской языковой картине мира“?: (Патрик Серио утверждает, что нет) // Динамические модели: Слово, предложение, текст. М., 2008. Р. 185; see also p. 179.

character”<sup>39</sup>. This is strange – not only because the term *national character* occurs multiple times, for example in her book “Semantics, culture, and cognition”<sup>40</sup>. (Though one must say that in more recent works Wierzbicka tends to put the unfortunate term in inverted commas<sup>41</sup> or avoid it completely – probably following some Western colleagues’ suggestion<sup>42</sup>.) It is also strange because, according to the HLR, the national language shapes the national character, which means that comparing national languages necessarily means comparing national characters, and consequently it is not really relevant that the latter are not mentioned explicitly, but hide behind the pseudonyms of “mentality” and “culture”.

However Wierzbicka was also faced with criticism by Russian colleagues: Not all her statements about the Russian national character were considered as sufficiently favorable, “that is”, founded on academic arguments. Her conclusions regarding Russian irrationality, abulia and fatalism were considered as “drawn under the pressure of subjectivism and prevailing ideological stereotypes”<sup>43</sup>, as being “somewhat superficial”<sup>44</sup> or “somewhat exaggerated”<sup>45</sup>, or as being a consequence of “a violently manipulated character”<sup>46</sup>, rather than being based on “sub-

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<sup>39</sup> Вежбицкая А. Имеет ли смысл... С. 183.

<sup>40</sup> Cf. also the subtitle of: Wierzbicka A. Australian b-words (*bloody, bastard, bugger, bullshit*): An expression of Australian culture and national character // *Le mot, les mots, les bons mots / Word, words, witty words*. Montreal, 1992. P. 21–38.

<sup>41</sup> See, for example: Wierzbicka A. Russian “national character” and Russian language: A rejoinder to Mondry and J. Taylor // *Speaking of emotions: Conceptualisation and expression*. Berlin, 1998. P. 49–54.

<sup>42</sup> See: Weiss D. Op. cit. S. 234.

<sup>43</sup> Тарланов З. К. Русское безличное предложение в контексте этнического мировосприятия // *Филол. науки*. 1998. № 5–6. С. 73. The criticism of Wierzbicka’s ideas regarding Russian and English syntax that is expressed in this text is supported by: Keijsper C. Typically Russian // *Russian linguistics*. 2004. Vol. 28, № 2. P. 192; Gebert L. Op. cit. P. 223.

<sup>44</sup> Шмелев А. Д. Национальная... С. 489.

<sup>45</sup> Шмелев А. Д. Русский язык и внеязыковая действительность. М., 2002. С. 460.

<sup>46</sup> Колесов В. В. Op. cit. С. 43.

stantial phraseological material of a synchronous or diachronous character”<sup>47</sup>.

The latter criticism is particularly typical for the years after 2000. Whereas Neo-Humboldtian ideas had mainly been promoted in academic essays in the previous decade, the growing number of supporters of HLR now started to write in literary genres as well. As a consequence, two clearly differentiated positions developed, being characterized by an essayistic approach and an academic approach, respectively. In the essayistic texts, the ideological substrate of HLR is obvious, and the idea of Russian uniqueness is promoted quite openly. The texts (for example textbooks on cultural studies and cross-cultural communications) describe the specifics of the Russian character: The foreigners who work with these books are asked to read excerpts from works about this topic that were written by ideological representatives of Russian nationalism (Ivan Il'in, Oleg Platonov and others) and to complete exercises like the following: “Fill in the gaps with words from the following list: *specific, characteristic, typical*. Love of freedom and search for the truth are \_\_\_\_\_ of Russian people. Resourcefulness, acuteness, artificiality are \_\_\_\_\_ of Russian people”<sup>48</sup> or “Choose the adjectives you can use to describe Russian people.” The “correct” answers are: *kind-hearted, gloomy, passionate, merry, meek, patient, generous*<sup>49</sup>.

The other group, which followed an academic approach, was worried because “the idea of the linguistic worldview has recently become very popular, but it has also been weakened. Some

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<sup>47</sup> Андромонова Н. А., Балабанова И. Я. Синтаксические отношения как универсалии // Сопоставительная филология и полилингвизм: Сб. науч. тр. Казань, 2003. С. 28.

<sup>48</sup> Перевозникова А. К. Россия: Страна и люди: Лингвострановедение: Учеб. пособие для изучающих рус. яз. как иностр. М., 2006. С. 164, 170, 178 и далее.

<sup>49</sup> Штельтер О. В этой маленькой корзинке...: Игры на уроке рус. яз. СПб., 2004. [Вып. 1]. С.11, 63. Cf. also the telling headings and subheadings in textbooks such as: Сергеева А. В. Какие мы, русские? (100 вопросов – 100 ответов): Кн. для чтения о рус. нац. характере. М., 2006, 2010; Соловьев В. М. Тайны русской души: Вопросы; Ответы; Версии: Кн. для чтения о рус. нац. характере для изучающих рус. яз. как иностр. М., 2001, 2002, 2003, 2009.

authors start out from a few isolated examples and come to far-reaching conclusions about the ethno-specific worldview and even about specific national characters". Consequently, they suggest that authors who single out "ethno-specific" lexemes should be guided by criteria such as the impossibility of translating these lexemes into other languages by means of similarly simple lexemes. Also, the "degree of ethno-specificity" should be considered, which is the higher the more linguistic means can be used to express a "key idea" and the more diverse these means are<sup>50</sup>.

Rules of this type are of about as much practical use as instructions for catching a unicorn. But let us assume for a moment that national worldviews are not a phantom and that it is possible to reconstruct a national linguistic worldview based on key words. (Note that supporters of HLR prefer the term "reconstruction" to others, such as "modeling".) To what extent is it realistic to believe that it is possible to single them out based on the characteristics ascribed to them by HLR, namely untranslatability, frequent occurrence and the ability of being used in phrases?

By declaring that a certain word is a key word because it is used in idioms, and by quoting proverbs as "proof" of the meaning of certain moral principles for the Russian linguistic worldview, the Neo-Humboldtians ignore the holistic character of phrases (from a syntactical as well as a semantic perspective), that is, the missing individuality of the meanings of the individual components<sup>51</sup>, the international nature of most proverbs<sup>52</sup> as

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<sup>50</sup> Апресян Ю. Д. Основания системной лексикографии // Языковая картина мира и системная лексикография. М., 2006. С. 35.

<sup>51</sup> Thus they tell us (with the aim of supporting the idea of the uniqueness of the Russian soul) that the English equivalents to Russian idioms containing the word *душа* do not contain the word *soul*, but other words: *душа моя!* – *my dear!*; *жить душа в душу* – *to live in perfect harmony* (see: Гунина Л. А. Этноспецифические концепты как отражение национального характера // Изв. Рос. гос. пед. ун-та им. А. И. Герцена. СПб., 2009. № 97. С. 174).

<sup>52</sup> For example, a Russian linguist illustrates her theory that the Russians dislike deceitfulness and appreciate loyalty and a sense of duty by quoting from the Bible – without noticing that these phrases are by no means specifically Russian (see: Eismann W. Gibt es phraseologische Weltbilder?: Nationales und Uni-



well as their ambivalence. (For most proverbial sayings, there exists another one that states the exact opposite<sup>53</sup>.) Finally, average native speakers of a language typically know only a fraction of these moral rules; and even if they were aware of all proverbs that exist in the given language, this would not mean that they would necessarily follow the corresponding rules.

The number of occurrences as a criterion for singling out key words is explained as follows: "...In the modern Russian national corpus, the word *судьба* occurs 230 times per one million words, while for its French equivalent *destinée* the corresponding number according to the French national corpus is 27 per one million words"<sup>54</sup>. The word *судьба* is defined as a frequently occurring word in the Russian language and consequently considered as a key word for understanding the Russian worldview – and the only reason for this is that the word *destinée* is used less often in French texts. However what would the supporters of this theory do if somebody found out that comparable terms in other languages were used even more often than the Russian word? Would this not mean that the interpretation of its meaning for the Russian worldview would have to be revised? Also, it is not quite clear why the author chose these particular words for the comparison, rather than comparing all Russian and French lexemes that have comparable meanings<sup>55</sup>. The latter approach would be the more desirable because the word *судьба* is

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versales in der Phraseologie // Wer A sagt, muss auch B sagen: Beiträge zur Phraseologie und Sprichwortforschung aus dem Westfälischen Arbeitskreis. Hohengehren, 2002. S. 117).

<sup>53</sup> Thus, attempts to prove the stereotypes that Russians are generous and Germans are thrifty by linguistic means are disproved by multiple Russian proverbs that praise economy and multiple German proverbs in which avarice is deplored (see: Eismann W. Gibt es... S. 119).

<sup>54</sup> Вежбицкая А. Имеет ли смысл... С. 181.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. also the fact that in literary texts that were written in Russian the word *судьба* occurs more frequently than in texts that have been translated from Russian to English. However this relationship changes if synonyms are also considered (see: Zaretsky Ye. Über einige ethnologische Mythen (am Beispiel des Russischen) // Acta linguistica. 2008. Bd 2, № 2. S. 39–54).

defined as a key word, which means that it should not have an equivalent in any other language at all.

The classic variant of Neo-Humboldtianism assumes that words are untranslatable by definition<sup>56</sup> and sees language as a reality between being and consciousness that is specific for every language community (cf. Weisgerber's concepts of "Zwischenwelt" and "Sprachgemeinschaft") and the conceptualization of reality as completely determined. Language communities are turned into monads, and any interaction between them is declared to be an illusion (the idea that this interaction could be real after all must consequently be considered as a consequence of the *harmonia praestabilitata*). This position is fairly common among Russian linguists; cf., for example: "For a long time, it has been a well-known fact that the meaning of words is not the same in different languages (even if dictionaries suggest an artificial relationship between such words for want of something better"<sup>57</sup>; "Neither in relation to the expression form nor in relation to the content form (meaning) can the texts of the original language and the texts in the translation language – or even parts of them – be considered to be identical in principle"<sup>58</sup>.

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<sup>56</sup> This is in line with Humboldt's words: "I would say that any attempt at translation is an attempt to solve an impossible task. The reason is that translators must necessarily fall into either of two traps: Either they keep as closely as possible to the original – at the expense of the taste and language of their own nation, or they consider the specifics of their own language – at the expense of the original. Striking a balance between these two is not only difficult, but virtually impossible" (*Verzeichniss der von A. W. v. Schlegel nachgelassenen Briefsammlung. Nebst Mittheilung ausgewählter Proben des Briefwechsels mit den Gebrüdern von Humboldt, F. Schleiermacher, B. G. Niebuhr und J. Grimm / Hrsg. A. Klette. Bonn, 1868. S. VI*).

<sup>57</sup> Корниенко А. В. Дискурсивный анализ: Учеб. пособие. СПб., 2008. С. 23.

<sup>58</sup> Иванов А. О. Безэквивалентная лексика: Учеб. пособие. СПб., 2006. С. 8. See also: „The socio-cultural factor, that is, the socio-cultural structures on which the structures of language are based, finally undermines the idea of an 'equivalence' between words in different languages that have the same meaning (in the sense that they refer to equivalent environmental objects and phenomena).“ (Тер-Минасова С. Г. *Op. cit.* С. 63); some statements by Russian Neo-Humboldtians even sound solipsistic, for example, that „the term ‚living beings‘ in the Russian version of language includes plants, animals, humans, and God, while elementary forces, substances, products, and objects are considered as

If one applied the logic of HLR consistently, one would also have to consider synonymy and bilingualism as an illusion. If we consider synonymy as a compilation of various ways of expressing the same content, this necessarily means that the content must be independent of the form, which is the direct opposite of one of the principles of HLR. Neo-Humboldtians typically ignore that fact that there are people who are fluent in more than one language. If they do address this topic, they may state something like “learning a foreign language is <...> accompanied by something close to personality dissociation” or “bilingual people have two linguistic worldviews in parallel, and in people who speak foreign languages the secondary linguistic worldview is superimposed on the primary one, that is, the one associated with the native language”<sup>59</sup>. This statement is the more remarkable because it was made by the Dean of the faculty for foreign language of Lomonosov University (Moscow). The text does not describe the actual occurrence of more than two worldviews in one and the same person, and (hopefully) this occurrence has not been noted in reality either.

From a Neo-Humboldtian perspective, a word that has been defined as a keyword is untranslatable because it does not have an exact equivalent in any other language. In this context, only lexemes of the same grammatical nature are considered as exactly equivalent. Thus, an individual word must be translated exclusively by another individual word and by no means by a combination of words<sup>60</sup> – which is contrary to what translators

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‘not living’ (Пименова М. В. Принципы категоризации и концептуализации мира // *Studia linguistica cognitiva*. М., 2006. Вып. 1: Язык и познание: Методол. пробл. и перспективы. С. 184). There is hardly any reason why one should not agree with this statement – however why is this dichotomy of ‘living vs. not living’ considered as something specifically Russian?

<sup>59</sup> Тер-Минасова С. Г. *Op. cit.* С. 48, 63. Cf. also: Алефиренко Н. Ф. *Лингвокультурология: Ценностно-смысловое пространство языка*. М., 2010. С. 87–88.

<sup>60</sup> See, for example: “...a concept is a ‘concept’ exactly because it cannot be translated into another language by means of a single equivalent word” (Ворка-

have practiced for centuries<sup>61</sup>. As far as other languages are concerned, the authors refer either to languages in general or to “Western languages”, but do not provide any more detailed explanations. To prove that an equivalent for a certain word is missing from the vocabulary of a given other language, they compare meanings in monolingual and bilingual dictionaries, but do not analyze the approaches translators actually use when faced with this word. In actual fact, however, translators do not work with isolated words, but rather with their concrete usages, and a word in a dictionary is not the same as a word used in a statement. Thus, the word *пошлый* has multiple dictionary meanings and can be translated by a variety of possible equivalents in English. In any concrete statement, however, only one of these meanings is present (or possibly a few, but not all), and consequently the word can be translated by one or more words out of a list including *kitschy*, *ordinary*, *vulgar*, *commonplace*, *flat*, *mediocre*, *narrow-minded*, *primitive*, *petty* and *titillating*.

To prove that a certain word is untranslatable, the supporters of relativity in language also make use of etymologic dictionaries. However different inner forms of words in different languages cannot serve as proof of untranslatability, because speakers of a language consider the inner form of a word only if they are made aware of it (for example in a pun or a poem). Nor would it be appropriate to quote Potebnja in this context<sup>62</sup>, because this renowned philologist, who wrote a lot about the development processes of inner forms, believed that recollections of the inner forms would disappear as soon as a speaker enters the

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чев С. Г. Концепт как „зонтиковый“ термин // Язык, сознание, коммуникация. М., 2003. Вып. 24. С. 5).

<sup>61</sup> Thus, the substantive *капризница* is considered as missing from the German language because it is translated by means of the adjective *launenhaft* (see: Бердникова Е. В. Лексическая лакунарность в аспекте межкультурной коммуникации: Автореф. дис. на соиск. учен. степ. канд. филол. наук. СПб., 2006. С. 13).

<sup>62</sup> Cf., for example: Жакупова А. Д. Осознание филолексики представителями русской и болгарской языковых культур // Болгар. русистика. 2008. № 3–4. С. 22–25.

stage of fluency in a language<sup>63</sup>. This leads us to the question whether it is really necessary to prove that this or that word is untranslatable by thoroughly examining its inner form and treating every speaker of this language as a Chlebnikov or Cvetaeva [Note from the translator: These are two Russian authors who are particularly fond of the idea of inner forms of words.], if real differences are so very obvious even in the outer structure of words? If any difference in language was meaningful, and if all of these differences bore witness of some „ethnospesificity“<sup>64</sup>, one would not necessarily need a comparative analysis of lexis and grammar; instead, phonetics and graphics should be sufficient. In other words, a person who uses the word *destinée* rather than *судьба* must by definition be unable to understand the secret of Russian fate because the phonemes are different (as well as the letters and the number of syllables).

No matter in which ways languages may differ – to the Russian Neo-Humboldtians, any difference bears witness to the superiority of the Russian language over all others. If, for example, translators choose from a multitude of different words when translating the word *пошлость*, this shows the extraordinary semantic load the Russian lexeme carries. If the opposite is the case, that is, if a concept is represented by a multitude of Russian words and few words in other languages, this is interpreted as a sign of the enormous richness of the Russian vocabulary. The following example shows how reliable these constructions are: When elaborating on the well-known hypothesis that the Russian language has a wider variety of words for expressing grief and sadness than other languages, a Russian author stated that in situations in which speakers of Russian can choose from six different words (*печаль, грусть, скорбь, тоска, уныние* und

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<sup>63</sup> See: Потебня А. А. Мысль и язык. Харьков, 1913. С. 138, 171–174.

<sup>64</sup> See, for example: “...In language, everything has its meaning (even the fact that some languages have the concept of grammatical gender – which means, for example, that the Russian word for ‘pencil’ is masculine, while the word for ‘feather’ is neutral for some reason). Meaning is related to the determining role that language has played (and still plays) when this meaning comes into existence, and it reflects the worldview of a people” (Радбиль Т. Б. Основы изучения языкового менталитета: Учеб. пособие. М., 2010. С. 22).

кручина) speakers of German have only two words (*Trauer* und *Traurigkeit*) at their disposal. In a German version of her text, however, the author herself, without even noticing it, used not two, but nine different words (in addition to *Trauer* and *Traurigkeit*, these were *Betrübnis*, *Wehmut*, *Gram*, *Schwermut*, *Verzagtheit*, *Mutlosigkeit* and *Niedergeschlagenheit*)<sup>65</sup>.

One might think that the key words of a language could be determined quite easily by means of lexical analyses based on the criteria of “frequency”, “phraseological character” and “untranslatability”. However the corresponding publications contain no such analysis. Rather, the authors always know the key words in advance – it is as if they were building a target around an arrow that had already been shot. In addition, the frequency argument works only if the word *судьба* is compared with *destinée* rather than with other Russian substantives, because there the word *судьба* is only at number 181, whereas the word *дело* (issue, topic) comes in fourth and can be found in significantly more idioms than any of the words considered as key words. Other than words like *судьба*, *удаль* and *авось*, however, *дело* cannot be considered as a key word because this would be incompatible with the alleged tendency of Russian people towards contemplation. It would be considered as unprofessional if somebody suggested that words like *матрешка* and *самовар* are key words – in spite of the fact that these words are really untranslatable and consequently not “translated”, but “transliterated” as *matryoshka doll* and *samovar*. Instead, the supporters of this theory insist that the words *удаль* and *авось* are untranslatable. This shows that on top of what has been said above, these criteria, whose usefulness has not been proved and cannot be proved, are used very selectively.

The only reason why certain words are singled out as key words is the Neo-Humboldtians’ belief in ethnic stereotypes.

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<sup>65</sup> See: Fomina S. Emotionskonzepte und ihre sprachliche Darstellung in deutschsprachigen und russischen literarischen Texten: Am Beispiel der deutschen, österreichischen, schweizerischen und russischen Literatur // Trans: Internet-Zeitschrift für Kulturwissenschaften. 2004. Juni. № 15.

[http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/06\\_1/fomina15.htm](http://www.inst.at/trans/15Nr/06_1/fomina15.htm)

Though Wierzbicka rejects allegations to the effect that her works are built on stereotypes and defend these stereotypes, she still states that “some of them can reflect the experience of many ordinary people – if only in a rough and generalized form” and that “the results of the analysis may coincide with a certain stereotype in a certain point”<sup>66</sup>. The Russian Neo-Humboldtians mention this aspect even more openly: “...At the level of everyday consciousness, what is usually called mentality has been perceived as an absolute reality of our existential experience since time immemorial. We are convinced of this by artefacts of popular culture, such as jokes about national specifics, phraseologisms, proverbs and other sayings as well as the venerable philosophical, cultural, and literary tradition”<sup>67</sup>; “The analysis of the Russian lexis makes it possible to draw conclusions regarding the Russian worldview <...> and to give the discussions about ‘Russian mentality’ an objective basis, without which discussions of this type often seem to be mere speculations”<sup>68</sup>.

In effect, they are saying that the ethnostereotypes represent a reality, and that the task of linguistics is to provide academic respectability to their propaganda. Is there a need for linguistics of this type in today’s Russia? Judging by the degree to which “culturology in language” has permeated Russian humanities and education, one cannot but answer in the affirmative. Be it by accident or not – narcissism in language as well as attempts at proving the myth of untranslatability (which is a pseudonym for the allegation that it is not possible for the Russian mind to open up to Western ratio) are accompanied by a decline in the authority of the Russian language in former Soviet colonies and half-

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<sup>66</sup> Вежбицкая А. Имеет ли смысл... С. 185.

<sup>67</sup> Радбиль Т. Б. *Op. cit.* С. 47.

<sup>68</sup> Шмелев А. Д. Национальная... С. 481. Vgl.: „The Neo-Humboldtian philosophy of language became <...> the first attempt at transferring the metaphysical discussions about the specifics of national characters and worldviews into the area of practical and linguistic research with the aim of creating a real basis for a new renaissance of W. von Humboldt’s ideas“ (Радченко О. А. Язык как мирозидание: Лингвофилос. концепция неогумбольдтианства. М., 2006. С. 288).

colonies, by a proliferation of isolationist rhetoric and by growing xenophobia in the Russian society.

Does anybody in Russian linguistics protest against HLR? Not against the doctrine as such; criticism is limited to isolated and infrequent remarks, which seemingly go unheard<sup>69</sup>. In any case, the Russian linguistic community thinks that it is much more important to protect their object of study against ignorant intrusions from outside. Thus, a leading Russian linguist recently objected quite resolutely against any attempts at ‘proving’ that the word ‘Etruscans’ derives from the sentence “это русские” (“These are Russians.”). In the same lecture, however, he gave the matter an optimistic turn by stating that the attempts of these amateurs at being accepted as academics were a sign of the fact that “the psychological positions of the humanities are still

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<sup>69</sup> This makes it even more important to quote examples of this criticism: “... When we look at proverbs, which culturologic linguists often consider as axiologic micro-manifests of the speakers of a language, the result of an explicit removal of the ‘cultural meanings’ are quite often mutually exclusive statements. (It is a well-known fact that for every pun that somehow alludes to the laziness of a people one can find another pun that refers to the industriousness of this very people.) In general, language is not a textbook on national psychology. Phenomena in language can be explained by cultural, social and political conditions; nevertheless one should not expect a linguistic system to give an explicit and systematic ‘representation’ of the maxims of any speaker of this language” (Березович Е. Л. Язык и традиционная культура. М., 2007. С. 13); “When analyzed in more detail, a priori equation of the phraseology of a given language with specific national characteristics is by no means undisputable. <...> Most idioms, as well as other metaphorical lexical units, hardly ever have absolute equivalents in other language. The reason for this lies not so much in their national cultural specifics, but rather in the fact that the method of nomination is different. <...> Differences in phraseology in different languages can be described in purely semantic terms without any need to resort to the idea of national cultural specifics. <...> it is obvious that general conclusions regarding the specifics of the mentality of a people can hardly be drawn based on phraseologic materials. <...> Contradictory moral concepts do exist in the idiomology of very many languages. Considering this, it does not really make sense to compare the mentalities of different peoples based on information about their respective phraseologies. On the other hand, it is not appropriate either to declare one of these moral concept as the most important one for a given people and give it the status of a culture-specific concept” (Баранов А. Н., Добровольский Д. О. Аспекты теории фразеологии. М., 2008. С. 251–253, 256, 257).



grounded comparatively firmly in our society"<sup>70</sup>. This is indeed something to take comfort from.

*Translated from German by Stephanie Anschuetz*

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<sup>70</sup> Зализняк А. А. О профессиональной и любительской лингвистике // Наука и жизнь. 2009. № 1. <http://elementy.ru/lib/430720>

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