Description of Linguocultural Concept of “Education” in German and Russian Linguistic Consciousness

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a comparative linguocultural and linguocognitive analysis for the purpose of characterizing national and cultural characteristics of the concept of “Education” in the German and Russian linguocultural communities and making a reconstruction of the mentioned concepts with a reference to modern scientific and journalistic texts, lexicographic definitions, survey data, as well as wide historical context. It gives lexica-semantic characteristic of basic concepts in synchronism and diachrony. At the same time this work presents the picture of changes in the structures if basic concepts at different historical periods: the Age of the Enlightenment, epoch of German Empire, epoch of Peter the Great and Russian post revolution time. Basing on lexicographic analysis and discourse analysis we define some basic conceptual characteristics of the phenomenon of “Education” (“Bildung” / “Obrazovanie”) and they are described according to the groups combined by one and the same semantics. The conclusion of the article shows that the concept of “Education” changes constantly and nowadays is greatly influenced by social, economic, political and cultural factors that lead to its transformation both in German and Russian linguocultures.

Keywords: Concept; conceptual sphere; conceptual feature; connotations; linguocultural community

1. Introduction

This article presents intermediate results of the research work conducted by a group of professors in the frame of the research project by Russian Humanities Scientific Fund and is devoted to the study of conceptual basis of Higher

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Education in Russia and Germany. The main purpose of the following research is to reveal basic characteristics of the concept of “Education” (“Bildung” / “Obrazovanie”) as an element of German and Russian national conceptual spheres and reconstruction of this phenomenon in German linguocultural area. In this article, following V.A. Maslova (2013), the concept is understood as “lingu-mental formation with partly verbalized cultural meaning, having name/names in language and including meaning, cultural connotations, idea and image which lies in the basis of nomination”.

The cultural concept of “Education” had been a significant phenomenon at various historical times of German and Russian linguocultural communities. And during the whole German and Russian history the meaning of this concept was under changes connected with important periods of European history and educational reforms of that time. The latest significant reform in the system of German education was the signing of Bologna declaration in 1999 with the aim of creating European Higher Education Area. Besides formal activities Bologna process meant changes in education ideology and it led to certain problems both in Russia and in Germany. These problems can partly be explained by the fact that new realities were forming new relations and the need of re-thinking of former ideas about the phenomenon of academic education, interfering the system of established conceptual values. The transformation of the established concept goes on during the period of reforms more intensively and this leads to discomfort and disapproval of the representatives of this or that cultural community. This subjective negative attitude can be traced in the process of discourse analysis together with objective assessment and criticism of certain facts.

Applied significance of this research could be found in the possibility to make a sort of contribution in scientific prognostication of further development of the basic concept of “Education” (“Bildung” / “Obrazovanie”) in German and Russian linguistic consciousness. Such projection is really important under conditions of strengthening of scientific and educational cooperation between Russia and Germany as well as Russia participation in European Higher Education Area.

2. Objectives, methodology and research design

Methodology of the research is based on the idea of multiple-aspect concept. The practical purpose of the analysis is the structuring of the German concept of “Education” at two levels: conceptual and figurative (axiological) ones. At each level, the concept is described in the aspect of synchronism and diachrony. The initial point of the analysis is revelation of conceptual / definition and value / axiological characteristics. In order to reveal these characteristics the authors used the methodology, which includes etymological analysis that helps to follow the historical development of the concept and the dynamics of its semantic characteristics; definition analysis of nominative lexemes “Bildung” / “Obrazovanie” with the aim to define their significant semantic characteristics; the study of syntagmatic and paradigmatic relations of nominative lexemes, as well as empirical methods: informants’ survey (interview method) and associative experiment to verify the data found as a result of cognitive data analysis, finding of additional characteristics and language objects for the concept of “Bildung” and “Obrazovanie”. To pursue this aim, the survey was conducted. The informants were the representatives of the German and Russian cultures at the age of 24 to 45. All of them either study or teach at the universities of Russia and Germany.

For more detailed reconstruction of this concept, discourses of different types were used – scientific and journalistic ones. Pursuing the aim the material for the research was taken from articles published in 2014 in the popular German weekly newspaper “Die Zeit” and on its official site zeit.de as well as publications from the internet resource NovoArgumente in the “Bildung” section. To reconstruct the Russian concept of “Education”, publications from “Literaturnaya Gazeta” (Literature newspaper) and “Uchitelskaya Gazeta” (Newspaper for teacher) from 2009-2014 were used as well as articles published in the scientific-pedagogical journal “Vysshee Obrazovanie v Rosii” (Higher Education in Russia). The research area of the analyzed articles corresponded to the concept under study.

3. Structure and dynamics of the German concept of “Bildung”

According to German and Russian researchers (Andreev, 2009; Dzurinskiy, 2000; Herman, 1992; Menze, 1975) the most active formation of the cultural concept of “Bildung” was going on during two periods, particularly in the age of the Enlightenment and neo-humanism (1770-1830) and during the ruling of emperor Wilhelm I (the second
half of the XIX century). Serious changes touched the structure of this concept after the end of the Second World War under the existence of two German nations. The formation of the Russian concept of “Education” was influenced by the events of the XVII century and the beginning of the XIX century, starting from the reforms by Peter the Great and after, while there was borrowing and adaptation of the European idea of higher education (Andreev, 2009) as well as vital changes of the system of education in post-revolution epoch.

The development of the German concept of “Education” could be to some degree traced using the method of analysis of dictionary definitions, which are given in competent German dictionaries published at different times. So, G. Koebler (1995) in “Deutsches etymologisches Wörterbuch” (Etymological dictionary of the German language) states that the first meanings of the noun “Bildung”/ Education (ahd. bilidunga / bildunga, mhd. bildunge) in the Old High German period (the XI century) were “Widerschein”, “Abbild” (“reflection”), and “Vorstellung, Vorstellungskraft” (“imagination, the power of imagination, dreams”), which can be found in works by some linguists. In the Middle High German period, the noun acquired abstract meaning “Schöpfung”, “Bildung”, “Gestalt” (“creation”, “making”, “image”). This meaning is recorded in all competent dictionaries, particularly in “Deutsches Wörterbuch” (Dictionary of the German language) by Y. and W. Grimm (1971) and “Etymological dictionary of the German language” (Etymologisches Wörterbuch des Deutschen) by V. Pfeifer (1995). Later semantic structure of the word became wider and led to the appearance of such meanings as “form”, “view”, and “picture”. “Grammatisch-kritisches Wörterbuch der Hochdeutschen Mundart” (Etymological dictionary) by J. Ch. Adelung (1999 - 2001) gives these meanings of the noun Bildung via references to the verb “bilden”: “1. Einem Körper seine äußere Gestalt geben<...> 2. Die Gestalt einer Sache nachahmen, abbilden<...>” / “1. To shape, to form the object<...> 2. To copy the form of the object<...>”.

“Deutsches Wörterbuch” (Dictionary of the German language) by Y. and W. Grimm (1971) records several meanings of the noun “Bildung”: “formatio>, “institution” (“establishment”, “organization”), and such meanings as “cultusanimi”, “humanitas” (“development of spiritual traits”, “humanity”), it means the development of moral traits, decency, and good conduct. The idea of moral education is described in the works of many German scientists, and representatives of German classic philosophy. In particular, Hegel’s philosophy presents an educated person as a person who is able to overcome himself and to act according to the spirit and rules of his people and nation: “In praktischer Hinsicht ist ein gebildeter Mensch ein sittlicher Mensch” / “Practice- educated person is a moral person”. In such understanding “education is intellectual development which gives the possibility to control one’s actions and emotions” (Dörpinghaus, Poenitsch, Wigger, 2012).


From the end of the XVIII till the mid of the XIX century, ideas about the education system as well as about the meaning of university education had changed. It was a transition from the medieval type of university to the classical type – one for research. People with university education had great influence equal to the authority and representation of upper bourgeoisie. They carried authority mainly because they reached social status not by birth but thanks to their professional knowledge. It corresponded to the ideas of that period, enlightening ideas and spiritual-moral ideals of neo-humanism: individual development, personality training and improvement. The ideal of education was not in “…saving different knowledge, but in more versatile personality development” (Hermann, 1992). Therefore, during that period the concept of “Bildung” gained such characteristics as “personality development”, “self-perfection”, “self-education”, and “the ability to reflect and self-criticize”.

The result of the reform of education, held in Germany in XIX century, was in the establishment of the humanistic gymnasium in its classical type, the aim of which was to bring up a personality capable of self-knowledge. University, in turn, focused on Humboldt’s principle of “the unity of education and research” (“Einheit der Forschung und Lehre”). It should be mentioned that changes, which touched the comprehension of university education phenomenon in the European area at that time, had a great impact on forming the idea of the role of Russian universities, which were in the process of being established during that period.

Later meanings of the word “Bildung” are “das Ausgebildetsein, erworbenes Allgemeinwissen” (“completed education, gaining general knowledge, qualification”) and “gutes Benehmen” (“good conduct”) (Duden, 1989). The
appearance of these meanings is probably connected with socio-cultural changes that started in the second half of the XIX century. During that time because of fast economic development in Germany capitalistic class in society was formed. There could be distinguished social class of entrepreneurs striving for social recognition and trying to underline their importance. Education became one of the ways to enhance the prestige, to demonstrate somebody’s belonging to higher noble strata. Quoting the famous German educationalist and philosopher of the end of the XIX century F. Paulsen, U. Herrmann (1992) described the following characteristics of an educated person of the ear of Wilhelm I: an educated person was supposed to be a person who didn’t do manual work, had a taste in clothes, was aware of the rules of etiquette and was able to keep up a conversation on any topic. One of the characteristics of an educated person was knowledge of foreign languages - French, Italian or Greek and the ability to use foreign words with correct pronunciation and with right meaning in conversation. The main condition for recognition and success in the society was the fact of finishing classic school / gymnasium and obtaining of appropriate document. U. Herrmann (1992) states that traditional education turned into visual characteristic, indicator of high status [Ibid].

Concept of “Bildung” at this period includes such characteristics as erudition, knowledge and experience in these urgent problems and the result of the education is not only the knowledge gained but person’s ability to act in different situations, ability to assess, criticize, and analyze (Herrmann, 1992).

In this way, lexicographical analysis that had been done under the history-cultural context let us define a range of basic conceptual characteristics of the phenomenon “Bildung”. The defined characteristics can be classified in the following groups or “semantic models” under general semantics (Elizova, 2014).

1. “Education” – “Personality development”. This group comprises such characteristics as “self-perfection”, “self-education, ability to analyze, reflection, self-criticism”, “broadmindedness”. According to data of informants’ survey these characteristics form the core of the German concept of “Education” and dominate the mind of the representatives of the German linguocultural community. As for Higher Education, this concept is characterized by the presence of the idea about scientific work that is independent and free as possible and which corresponds with the ideal of humanistic education by W. Humboldt. In some articles, university is metaphorically compared with “Ivy Tower” («Elfenbeinturm»). According to this metaphor, academic education in Germany is supposed to be theoretical abstract process as science for science sake and its development.

Mentioned above conceptual characteristics do not always agree with basic principles of Bologna Process and this fact greatly interferes with painless conduct of corresponding reforms in the sphere of Higher Education. This contradiction can be fully showed with the help of the following quotation: “Der Bologna-Prozess will Bildung ökonomisieren und delegitimiert damit die humanistische Vorstellung von der Erkenntnis als Selbstzweck” (Jütte, 2013) / “Bologna process restructures education along the lines of economics and in this way contradicts humanistic idea of knowledge as an end in itself”. At the modern time of reforming education is characterized by the authors of modern articles as “ein erstrebenswertes Ziel” (“the purpose to achieve”); “Investition von Zeit und Aufwand zur Erreichung einer möglichst vorteilhaften Beschäftigung” (investment of time and energy in getting the most beneficial work place). Critical attitude is usually expressed with the help of metaphors and epithets. For example, the process of education at university after reforms is estimated by the authors of analyzed articles as “formalisierter Betrieb” (organized enterprise), and the conditions in which universities work under new rules that formalize the process of education and the activity of Higher School is described with the use of relative metaphors: “Und es bleibt die ärgerliche Frage, ob nicht auch die Hochschulräte Instrumente sind, die Freiheit der Wissenschaft zu untergraben” [Ibid] / “Disappointing question is left without answer, whether university Councils are just the tools with the help of which science freedom is tend to be destroyed”.

2. Education – Civility. The group unites such characteristics as “erudition”, “culture”, “right behaviour”, and “good manners”. Reconstruction of the above-mentioned characteristics is always made by bright metaphors: “Mit den Monaten wird der arme Autor immer dünnhäutiger, man spürt das als Leser, ein beleidigter Bildungsbürger wird von schlechtem Benehmen genauso gequält wie von falschem Satzbau” (Schmidt, 2014) / “Some months later poor author becomes more and more sensitive, the reader feels it, bad manners put insulted intellectual to the same torture as the wrong word order”.

3. Education – Status indicator. The group includes indication of “elitism”, “prestigiousness”, “and guarantee of success”. Collocation of the word “Bildung” with verbs genießen, besitzen / habe (ad verbum, “enjoy”, “possess”, “have”) in the German language points out that abstract meaning can metaphorically be understood as valuable
object. Data of informants’ survey and “Die Zeit” journal articles analysis also prove that Germans regard classical school finishing and further getting of higher university education nowadays as a condition for successful career in future. Prestigiousness of university education in comparison with special one can indirectly be expressed, for example, with the help of antithesis: “Überfüllte Unis, leere Werkbänke: Was läuft schief im deutschen Bildungssystem?” (Schmidt, 2014) / “Overcrowded universities, Empty workshops. What is going on in the German system of education?”.

4. Education – the basis of moral features. This group can include such characteristics as “nobleness”, “decency”, “good principles”.

5. Education – Professional education. The details of this group can be given after emphasizing such characteristics as “gaining the abilities and skills on specialty”, “qualification”, “professionalism in certain field”. Described characteristics are updated in attributive word-combinations “berufliche Bildung”, “umfassende Bildung”, “mangelnde Bildung” ( “professional education”, “broad / thorough education”, “inadequate education”) and so on.

It should be mentioned that the same characteristics can be found in the meaning of the word “Ausbildung” (“professional education”), for the concept of “Bildung” and “Ausbildung” are in subsumption relation, where “Bildung” is a common noun to “Ausbildung”. Thereafter, in some contexts, there could be synonymous use of both concepts, more often it could be used speaking about professional scenery and labor market. However, more often concepts of “Bildung” and “Ausbildung” are opposed to each other because of updating of those conceptual characteristics which the first word has got but the second one has not: “Bildung statt Ausbildung” (Janssen, 1998) / “Education instead of professional education”.

Different meanings of the concepts of “Bildung” and “Ausbildung” cause their distinct division in the minds of German native speakers into “practical” - “academic”. The concept of “Ausbildung” is connected with gaining practical skills (“ausbilden zum Kraftfahrer”), while the concept of “Bildung” has wider range of conceptual characteristics among which the basic ones are those which are included in the previously described group “Personality development”. Perhaps, that’s why the representatives of German intelligentsia have a little bit alerted attitude towards new culture-specific concept “zweistufiges Bildungssystem” (two-level system of education), and especially towards Bachelor Degree that means mostly practice-oriented education at the university.

The analysis of compound words and word-combinations with the component “Bildung”, which are more often can be found in the text of German mass media, let us make the following conclusions. Lexeme “Bildung” can be found in official names of person, institution that deal with the problems of educational policy: this means that education is regarded as socially important phenomenon. Very often lexeme “Bildung” collocates with German nouns: Ideal (ideal), Bedürfnis (need), Niveau (level), Grad (grade). We can make a conclusion that “Bildung” is understood as something desired and significant and its “amount” can achieve a certain level. The analyzed lexeme can also collocate with metaphorically changed nouns. Interpretation of such nouns let us reveal the hidden but fixed characteristics of lexeme “Bildung” and the concept. For example, in collocations with German noun Lücke (gap), Weg (way, road) the process of education is understood as a sort of space. A metaphoric image is created: education is a road where one can find gaps and pits. The collocation of lexeme “Bildung” with German noun Reise, Urlaub gives reason to suppose that in metaphorical understanding German native speakers have an idea about education as something that brings pleasure and makes you good. In modern German journalistic discourse, education is presented as a value, integral part of developed democratic nation.

4. Structure and dynamics of the Russian concept of “Obrazovanie”

Because of the carried out research, it was possible to make a conclusion that the structure of the concepts of “Education” (“Bildung” / “Obrazovanie”) is formed by the universal conceptual characteristics that are general for Russian and German worldview. However, according to data of informants’ survey and context analysis the place in the structures taken by universal characteristics of the concepts under study differs. The reason is probably is in the fact that educational system in Russia and Germany had developed under different circumstances. Revealed relevant characteristics of the Russian concept of “Education” could be presented in the following order of their less significance.
1. Education – Professional Education. Therefore, Higher Education in Russia was formed during the epoch of Peter the Great under the circumstances that university education was equal to service and its main aim was gaining professional skills, systematic knowledge. This conceptual characteristic dominates the mind of the representatives of the Russian linguocultural community. This idea of education can be found in “Tolkovii slovar russkogo yazika” (Explanatory Russian Glossary) by S.I. Ozhegov and N.Y. Shvedova (1999).

2. Education – Personality Development. An important place in the structure of the concept of “Education” in the mind of Russian native speakers is given to such characteristics as “self-development”, “self-perfection”. The importance of this component can be proved by the analysis of the Russian publications devoted to the theme of the quality of education. There one can find such correlations as “education of high quality – creative atmosphere, creative potential, intellectual potential, developing education, and training for creative personality” and so on.

3. Education – Status Indicator. Such characteristics as “prestigiousness”, “status”, “conditions for career development” can be related to semantic core of the “education” concept that was formed in Russian linguocultural community. These conceptual characteristics were found while analyzing articles context devoted, first, to the idea of getting education abroad. “Education” correlates in this case with such meanings as “prestigious job”, “successful career”, “demand for”, “career prospects”.

4. Education – Civility. According to the definition given in “Tolkovii slovar zhivogo velikorusskogo yazika” (Glossary of the great living Russian language) by V.I. Dal (1989-1991), an educated person is a person “scientifically developed, well-bred, with good manners, who is aware of the customs of high society”. Nevertheless, the data of informants’ survey allow supposing that such conceptual characteristics as “civility”, “culture”, “good manners”, “sophistication”, “refinement” nowadays is not prevalent yielding in their importance to above-mentioned characteristics of the concept under study. The origins probably should be searched for in post-revolution period when general access to education was accompanied by destroying of the formed traditions and ideas in the Russian system of education. It should be stated that in modern time transformations have seriously touched this very group of characteristics of the Russian concept of “Obrazovanie”. If according to the dictionary definitions “intelligentsia” are people of mental or intellectual work, having education and special knowledge in various fields, then almost all informants underlined that a person who got education is not for sure to have intelligence (Ozhegov & Svedova, 1999).

The analysis of compound words and word-combinations with the component “Obrazovanie”, found in the articles devoted to this problem in Russian periodicals published in 2014, let us make a general conclusion about cognitive understanding of the concept under study. “Education” is described as certain social sphere, as not uniform thing that has no outlines with constant reforming activity directed to implementing of certain plans and ideas, which are not always real but often arguable and people competent in this sphere conduct this activity. Education as a social sector is characterized by a system of institutions that deal with scientific and educational activity.

5. Conclusion

Therefore, we can make a conclusion that some events, connected with current educational reforms in Russia, in particular, the introduction of State exam, acquire negative connotations as they are regarded by Russian society as potentially contradictory ones to the formed concept. This can be proved by such language means as metaphors, hyperbolas, antithesis and others: “School will train creators but not consumers” (Mazurova, 2008).

Summing it up, it should be said that concept of “Education” (“Bildung” / “Obrazovanie”) is a complicated multiple – aspect phenomenon that had been formed and transformed in both countries under the influence of historical, socio-cultural and political contexts. Inside German and Russian concepts of “Education” several identical semantic groups were included: “personality development”, “civility”, “status indicator”, “professional education”, “moral features development”. Each of them includes a set of conceptually important characteristics. The carried out research work showed that neither German nor Russian basic concept of “Education” is static, for nowadays, they are under the impact of social, economic, political and cultural factors that lead to their transformation both in German and Russian linguocultures. The analysis of critical essays devoted to modern reforms in the sphere of education in Germany and Russia, revealed negative attitude to the processes and phenomena that contradict the view of the concept under study that rooted in national thinking and in this way confirmed their importance.
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