

## **Cultural Specificity in “State” Senses Representation in Modern English**

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Objectives: Under the cognitive linguistic framework the paper discusses the relationships between culture and language within the integrated theory of knowledge representation in language (N.N. Boldyrev). Based on the assumption that cultural knowledge takes an important place in human’s conceptual system this paper focuses on revealing culture-derivative “state” senses and aims at defining language means of their representation in modern English. Methods: The language units representing the interpretative stative function of linguistic cognition form the category of linguistic stativity, which is analyzed with the help of the Prototype theory. The method of cognitive-discursive interpretant provides revealing cultural specificity in “state” senses representation in modern English. Findings: The result of the analysis states that cultural specificity appears on the systematic and discursive levels. The system of the English language abounds in lexical and syntactical ways of expressing culture-specific “state” senses. Among the most numerous are phraseological units, motion verbs reinterpreted in connection with inner organs, emotive interjections, English proverbs and sayings as verbalizations of psychologically significant states. Improvement: The study of cultural specificity in “state” senses representation in modern English contributes, on the one hand, to explaining the correlation between language and cognitive structures and, on the other – to issues of intercultural communication.

**Keywords:** *culture-bound interpretation; stative meaning; stative conceptualization and categorization; category of stativity*

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## 1. Introduction

The relations between culture and language have recently been in the centre of empirical as well as theoretical investigations. For the sake of brevity we limit evaluation of different approaches to this problem (Sharifian, 2007; Michael, 2015; Through the language glass, 2010), but focus on what is important for this paper. Mainly, our starting point is psychological investigations by L.Vygotsky and A. Luriya which result in the idea of considering culture as some kind of depository of cognitive forms. They prove that language plays a special role providing the symbolizing level of cognition with means of abstracting and generalizing. The variety of characteristics of the real world correlates with the depth and degree of structuring of cultural cognitive forms which are represented in language - “an essential instrument and component of culture whose reflection in linguistic structure is pervasive and quite significant” (Langacker, 1999: 16). Thus, according to L.Vygotsky, culture is a cognitive structure comprising collective knowledge “packed” in language forms which express culture-bound ways of fundamental senses verbalization.

The aim of the present paper is to reveal cultural specificity in the ways the English language interprets and reinterprets the knowledge about different states of objects and events of the world. The process of conceptualization leads to forming the STATE concept which, as a complex propositional structure, is the result of the main cognitive mechanism of forming the system of basic conceptual characteristics – abstracting. It’s important to mention that states have no referents in real world, they are always the states *of* something, they are abstract notions containing inferential knowledge, they depend on their bearer. That is, when we observe the world, we see its objects as being *in* particular states. Consequently, they can’t be conceptualized without reference to some other thematic domain, e.g. *Her health leaves much to be desired*. The stative meaning of abstract noun *health* is interpreted as *human wellbeing* within the conceptual-and-thematic domain HUMAN STATE and subdomain PHYSICAL STATE. Judging by the examples of different states, we can say that they aren’t permanent properties of objects, they are relatively stable (Gasser 2006). So, the main conceptual characteristics of STATE

are “stability”, “duration”, “the passive bearer of the state”, “generalized activity”, “localization in space” (Pavlova, 2016). Taking into consideration all the facts mentioned, it becomes obvious that STATE can be defined as a modus concept giving the opportunity of interpreting its contents in different ways which consequently depend on sociocultural knowledge of the interpreter. Thus, STATE performs as a concept-function, language means of its representation are united on the basis of interpretative stative function of linguistic cognition forming the category of linguistic stativity. Antecedence of realization of stative function, predicativity and conceptual relatedness with the cognitive domain are the principal criteria for defining the centre and periphery of the category of stativity. Cultural specificity is revealed both in language system and discourse.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2 we provide the methodological perspective by using the method of prototypical analysis to structure the category of stativity, and the method of cognitive-discursive interpretant analysis to reveal cultural specificity in “state” senses interpretation. In section 3, we present the results of the research of cultural specificity in “state” senses interpretation. Section 4 provides a conclusion.

## 2. Methodological basis

With the help of prototypical analysis we structure the category of stativity in the English language according to the above mentioned criteria. The central place in this category is taken by the words of category of state which realize such prototypical characteristics, as stability which can continue without changing at least for some time and passivity of the bearer of state. Antecedence of realization of stative function is of crucial importance for considering the words of category of state being central. These words are not numerous, they represent such semantic categories as **emotional state** (e.g. *ablush, aflutter, afraid, aghast, agog, ashamed, aware*), **physical state** (*akin, alive, asleep, awake*), some **specific states** (*ablaze, abloom, afire, aflame, aglow, alight,*), **location in space, the state of motion, the state of activity** (*aground, ajar, askew, adrift, afloat, astray, astir*). So, the central place in the category of stativity is defined by such syntactical prototypical characteristic as functioning as predicatives only,

grammaticalization of stative meaning makes the words of category of state unable to function as attributes, thus, unable to represent the category of quality e.g. *He is asleep* – a state, compare with e.g. *He is happy* – a state, *He is a happy man* – a quality. However, according to Vendler's classification, states include habits, abilities, occupations, relations, etc. (Vendler, 1967). It happens so, because the conceptual system of native English language speakers conceptualizes habits, occupations, relations, etc. as containing a stative meaning. E.g. relations are the states which have more than one participant (Gasser, 2006). So, conceptual-and-thematic domains within which words with stative meaning are interpreted throw light on cultural specificity and witness that culture sometimes can leave its marks exactly where we can't expect it as such.

The method of cognitive-discursive interpretant, which is understood as a "research tool served as the basis for interpreting the world and construing it in discourse" (Boldyrev, Dubrovskaya 2015: 27) gives the opportunity of revealing culture-bound "state" senses and language mechanisms of their forming. As human conceptual system is viewed as emergent, "dynamic and situated" (Barsalou, 2012: 251), every time we want to express any stative meaning we construe an utterance according to our personal knowledge of language units, grammar, etc. as well as our sociocultural knowledge.

### 3. Discussion

According to the modus character of the category of state we suggest that interpretative stative function should be expressed by various language means; cultural specificity of stative meaning can be revealed both on lexical and syntactical levels. For confirming or disposing this hypothesis a set of examples (app. 500 contexts) expressing the stative meaning was collected from different sources (BNC, COCA, Longman dictionary of contemporary English, Oxford dictionaries, on-line versions of British and American newspapers and magazines, fiction of the 20th and 21st centuries). As a result of the analysis in accordance with the way cultural specificity is expressed we distinguish between the lexical and syntactical types.

Among the lexical ways of representation of culture-specific "state"

senses there are the following:

- the states of high psychological significance (health, illness, laziness, happiness, fear, anger, surprise, sadness, embarrassment, excitement, guilt, pride in achievement, satisfaction, shame, annoyance, etc.) are vividly represented in **phraseological units** (*twiddle one's thumbs, feel under the weather, be as fit as a fiddle, be in hog heaven, be down, wait for the sun to shine, be on the lookout, fear as the devil fears the holy water, etc*) (1).

1. *Everyone sat around looking embarrassed and **twiddling their thumbs** as usual.* (Oxford)

The state of being bored (1) (because one has nothing to do) is the result of secondary interpretation of useless activity – rotation of one’s thumbs round each other with the fingers linked together (Oxford). Cultural specificity of being bored (this state is a ground in L. Talmy’s terminology) in this example is revealed through the way the conceptual system expresses it – *twiddle one’s thumbs* - (activity is a figure) in the English language. In general, this sentence gives the information about the integrated state of embarrassment and boredom which is perceived as gestalt. But it is not widely spread and psychologically important that’s why there is no direct nomination for it. According to (Nagornaya, 2015: 7) we can speak about culture-specific ways of representing inner states, or bodily sensations, to be precise, in English. It consists in using medical terms (names of inner parts of the body, inner processes, etc.) in interoceptive discourse, for example, *get one’s bowels in an uproar* which means inchoative state of *losing one’s temper* (Ibid).

- **motion verbs** used with some inner human organs:

2. *My heart is suddenly **galloping** with nerves* (S. Kinsella)

3. *My stomach **swirled** like a whirlpool* (T. Parish)

Examples (2) and (3) are bright representatives of the culture-specific ways of expressing interoceptive states in the English language. We can’t but agree that a large amount of motion verbs (*run, race, gallop, turn, flip, roll, swirl, etc.*) in the result of recategorization are used to highlight inner states.

- **verbs of location** (*lie, rest, stand, sit, etc.*) which in the process of recategorization can gain their culture-specific stative meaning. Such verbs are generally used with non-typical referents. For example, the verb to sit (4)

has the typical referent - a living being (*a man, animal, etc.*), changing the conceptual-and-thematic domain HUMAN BEING for LIFELESS THING in the result of metaphorical interpretation: it clears up culture-specific mode of localization in space:

4. *The money **sits** untouched in a bank account.* (COCA)

- **emotive interjections** which are defined as sounds existed in a language as word-like forms (Goddart, 2014: 53). They show culture-mediated ways of expressing various emotional and cognitive states (5). Moreover, emotive interjections reveal qualitative differences in the kinds of emotions they express. For example, “surprise”- related interjections are *Wow!* and *Gee!* For momentary bewilderment the English say *Gosh!* (Ibid: 57):

5. ***Gee**, Linda looks great at fifty!* (BNC)

Among the syntactical ways of representation of culture-specific “state” senses there are the following:

- **English proverbs and sayings** illuminate culture-specific ways of verbalization of psychologically significant states. Let’s consider some examples:

6. ***Zeal** without knowledge is a runaway horse.* (Longman)

7. ***Envy** shoots at others and wounds herself.* (Longman)

Metaphoric interpretation of negatively evaluated states in examples (6) and (7) is based on stereotyped knowledge about *a runaway horse* and *pain* as a result of *wounding* correspondently.

- **constructions** which represent peculiar ways of conceptualizing interoceptive states (8), cognitive states (9), emotional states (10), etc. For example:

8. ***The stitch in her side** burned painfully and her legs ached.* (Oxford)

9. *You could spend half a day **making up your mind** what to order.* (Oxford)

10. *I hope my mum hasn’t heard about this, or she’ll be **doing her nut**.* (Oxford)

Example (8) shows English culture-specific way of conceptualizing interoceptive state (*a sharp sudden pain in the side*) as event with the centre in the inner organ (compare with Russian: *u menja bok kolet* – *I have a pain in my side*). In example (9) the process of deciding is conceptualized as a result of specification - a cognitive mechanism of “state” senses forming.

The inchoative emotional state of becoming extremely angry or agitated, going into rage (10) is verbalized by action construction which semantics reveals cultural specificity.

The examples of culture-bound “state” senses are not so numerous on discursive level. They are mainly determined by interpretative potential of nationally-specific place names (as in example 11) and geographical position and climate of the country (12), for example:

11. *Oh, terrible! It was Clapham Junction in there (coming out of the room).*

The interpretation of example (11) can be successful only if the individual conceptual system contains the culture-specific knowledge about what Clapham Junction is. The stative meaning of chaos is interpreted with the basic knowledge about Clapham Junction as a railway station in the south of London which has the most amount of railway platforms than any other, considered to be the busiest in Europe, and the railway lines come all over the place that is why it is obvious for Londoners if you ever go to Clapham Junction you will get lost, you will miss your train probably because you won't find the right platform. The chaotic “state” sense is profiled as the best suitable to characterize the situation in the room and represented in discourse by such language mechanism as direct nomination by precedent phenomenon “Clapham Junction”.

12. *The move is part of a government initiative to discourage migrants from leaving their countries of origin in the first place by showing that Britain is a cold place for those whose asylum applications are rejected (The Guardian).*

In example (12) the stative meaning of unfriendliness and inhospitality to illegal immigrants is interpreted through propositional structure **Britain is a cold place** which can be understood as a fact of geographical location without given sociocultural context. Within it the climatic characteristic of place – *cold* – transferred from thematic-and-conceptual domain NATURE into SOCIAL STATE and “state” sense of being inhospitable is represented in discourse by discursive metaphor which “contingent on language use, arise in the context of language use” (Evans’s term) (Evans, 2013: 82-83). Speaking about language mechanisms of “state” senses forming it is necessary to note that the number of metaphors is prevailing and it can be

easily explained (Ritchie, 2013; Black, 1993; Croft, 2006; Mac Cormac, 1990).

#### 4. Conclusion

We all view the world through the looking glass of language and states of objects and events of this world, being a product of our cognition, emerge cultural specificity. Language makes it possible to obtain culture-specific knowledge about different states through its forms, which are united on the basis of interpretative stative function of linguistic cognition. STATE as an interpretative linguistic knowledge format represents universal and culture-specific “state” senses. According to the results of the employed analysis we distinguish between the systematic and discursive levels of culture-bound “state” senses representation. On the systematic level there are lexical and syntactical ways of expressing culture-bound stative meaning. Metaphoric representations abound on both levels because metaphor is considered to be a basic cognitive and linguistic mechanism of forming sense, “without metaphor the lexis of unperceivable worlds wouldn’t exist” (Teorija, 1990: 9). Metaphoric conceptualization and categorization of different states are culture-mediated and directed by the cultural environment a man lives in.

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