

*Oleksandr Kourdish**

NATIONALLY-CONDITIONED RITUALS OF INTERCOURSE IN AMERICAN AND BRITISH CULTURE

У статті досліджуються національно-марковані форми спілкування, узвичаєна поведінка та заботони, пов'язані з народженням і хрещенням дитини в американській та британській культурі.

Language is a unique sign system. It's a universal means of communication, part and parcel of any manifestations of social life. Language preserves the unity of a nation in a historical succession of generations uniting people in time, geographical and social space.

Being one of the characteristic features of a nation, language is a component of national culture. No two national cultures are similar in every way, each national culture consists of national and international elements. Study of a foreign language presumes not only mastery of a new code and new way of verbal expression of thoughts but also familiarity with a source of knowledge of national culture of a people [2, 3]. In this case, language is regarded in close connection with facts of social life of its creators and informants, with their history, geography, mode of culture, and literature. The sum total of this knowledge constitutes the world of the language being studied. It's impossible to entirely grasp language phenomena without penetration into this world [17].

An anthropological approach to language forms the basis of study of links between language and culture. Language always embodies singularity of the whole nation, its spirit [6]. These ideas were further developed in various humanities, for example, in interdisciplinary investigations of area studies [12, 19, 21, 22], linguoculturology [5, 15, 16], intercultural communication [17], ethnolinguistics [18, 24], sociolinguistics [25], ethnopsycolinguistics [9, 15], ethnopsycosemantics [11].

Admitting the existence of the link between language and culture a lot of researchers turn to a lexico-semantic level of language because the units of this level immediately respond to changes in all spheres of human activities [1, 2, 3, 17].

Words which possess special cultural-specific meanings reflect not only lifestyle, typical of a definite body of informants, but their way of thinking as well [1, 17]. Conceptual systems moulded in the consciousness of representatives of a certain linguocultural community form the basis of semantic systems of various languages. Linguistic research often points out significance of versatile factors, which are common to all humankind, for formation of conceptual systems: 1) the unity of material world, fundamental living conditions; 2) the common main line of human activities under conditions of earthly civilization; 3) the affinity of perception mechanisms of surrounding reality by the human race [8].

Regardless the above-mentioned common conditions, in the life of each nation there exist peculiar realities of culture, way of life, environment, inherent in this particular nation. These realities meet partial or complete lacunae in other cultures (and conceptual systems) [7, 17, 20, 23].

* доцент кафедри англійської мови природничих факультетів Київського національного університету імені Тараса Шевченка

All these realities are reflected in language in the form of language designations of these inherent elements of civilization, which bear cultural imprint (in national verbal images).

Cultural-specific words [1] are conceptual tools, which reflect the previous experience of the nation relative to actions and meditation about various things in a definite way; they favour perpetuation of these ways.

Immense significance of appellation, which most vividly reflects national cultural peculiarities of the concrete nation of informants, is proved by the fact that a great number of terms have been coined to designate them: non-equivalent and partially-equivalent vocabulary [2, 10], realities [4, 13, 25], lacunae [14], background vocabulary [12, 19], national verbal images [13], culture rhemes [5].

Researchers regard semantics of these words as an area where language and culture come into the closest contact.

Semantic systems of various languages and separate elements of these systems contain non-coincident elements, some national-specific information, known only to this given national-cultural community of people.

The article describes nationally-marked forms of intercourse, routine behaviour and superstitions connected with the birth and baptising of a child in American and British culture.

Actually, superstitions are found all over the world. They are sometimes esteemed as part of a cultural heritage. Or they may be considered a trivial curiosity – adding more interest to life. In the Western world, superstitions are usually taken with proverbial grain of salt.

In America's and Britain's multinational society, different social traditions and sets of values exist together and are generally respected.

Many people believe that luck plays an important part in their lives. People learn superstitions while they are children, and though few adults will admit to being superstitious, many act on superstitions out of habit. Most superstitions are centuries old, and America and Great Britain are no exception.

Daily life is full of lots of things we believe are lucky or unlucky but few of us actually know where these beliefs came from.

For instance, many Americans are inclined to think that if you walk under a ladder, you'll have a bad luck. (*Pragmatists would say that you don't walk under ladders in case they fall on you. One belief is that the ladder forms a triangle with the floor and the ground and, depending on who you speak to, this either represents a holy symbol from Egyptian times or the holy trinity from Christianity. Either way, walking through that triangle, violates it and brings back luck.*) If a girl catches the bride's bouquet after a wedding, she'll be next to marry. (*Perhaps one of the most practiced yet least appreciated of Western superstition is at weddings where traditional forms are followed without realizing their significance. The bride's veil is to protect her from bad spirits who are jealous of happiness. Similarly, the bridesmaids are there as decoys to distract the bad spirits. Rice and wheat, thrown after the ceremony, have always been a symbol of richness. And wedding rings are gold and plain, a symbol of eternity, and are worn on the left ring finger because it was believed that a vein run from that finger to the heart.*) If you break a mirror, you'll have seven years' back luck. If you talk of the devil he'll appear. If you see a small spider you'll get a lot of money. If a witch points at you you'll die. If you scratch your left hand, you'll give money away. If you touch wood, your good luck will continue. If you hear an owl in the night your friend will die. If a black cat crosses your path you'll have a good luck. (*In Egyptian times, black cats were respected and one of their goddesses even took the form of a cat. In post Christian times, the black cat is considered even for its association with witches. Ironically, a black cat walking towards you is considered lucky while one walking away is said to be stealing your luck.*)

Here is a set of well-known superstitions in the United States about birth of a child.

If a child was born on a stormy night, which was accompanied by rain and a strong wind she is believed to have a violent character. If a heavily pregnant woman sees a hare she might give birth to a child with a harelip. If you put an axe under a lying-in woman's bed it will make her delivery easier. A newborn should always be protected from moonlight. There are some superstitions which exist both in American and Ukrainian culture: if a newborn drenched you all over it's a sign of good luck. To kiss a newborn on the lips is an omen of back luck.

In the United States friends of a newborn's mother often arrange a special party. At this party it's customary to give presents appropriate to the occasion. The ceremony of giving presents is called a *baby shower*. *Baby showers* are also arranged for fiancées and pregnant women.

In Great Britain, approximately 730.000 children are born annually. The number of children in the average British family is 2.4. Today, *the birth rate* has dropped significantly in comparison with the *baby boom* period in the 1960s–'70s.

Every year about 4 million newborns come into the world in the United States. *Infant mortality rate* is 7.2 per 1,000 newborns. This figure is very high in comparison with Great Britain and other highly-developed countries though it is lower than a few years ago. Such a high mortality rate is accounted for by the fact that medical care is very expensive. Actually, it is beyond reach for low-income groups. Infant mortality rate for whites is 6 per 1,000 newborns (the same as in Great Britain) and 14.2 per 1,000 newborns for Afro-Americans who are usually poorer than whites.

In the United States and Great Britain, just like in many countries *family planning*, the use of contraceptives are extremely widespread. A lot of couples prefer *starting a family* later. In the United States every third and in Great Britain every sixth newborn has a mother who is after 30.

In all states of America abortions became legal in 1973, in Great Britain they have been legal since 1967. In both countries debates between sticklers and strong opponents of abortions are still under way. To draw the attention of the public to this problem, the most radical American opponents of abortions kill doctors, who perform such operations, and plant bombs in clinics.

During pregnancy future mothers (and sometimes fathers) attend *prenatals* (they are called *antenatals* in Great Britain). Women can decide where and how they will give birth to a child. In Great Britain they can choose between *a maternity wing* and a delivery at home. Most Americans have a delivery at a *hospital birthing centre*, where a home-like atmosphere is re-created. Americans decide who the child will be delivered by. (They can choose between an *obstetrician* and a *midwife*.) The father of a child is often present and lends a hand during the delivery. Some women prefer a *natural birth*.

In the United States, after deliveries (like in other medical cases) the percentage of claims against the wrong treatment is rather high in litigation.

Birth of a child (like all over the world) is a great event. Relatives and friends come to see a mother and a newborn. They bring flowers, presents and congratulatory postcards. Parents choose a name for their newborn and sometimes put an announcement of the newborn's name, weight and date of birth into a local newspaper.

Later, a ceremony of baptizing is held. In Great Britain, parents must notify a *local registrar* of the birth of their child and get a *birth certificate*. In the United States birth, of a child is registered at a local court. In Great Britain, working women are granted a partly paid eighteen week *maternity leave*. During this leave they reserve the right to resume their work. The granting of *maternity leave* in the United States depends on each concrete employer. Some women worry that if they take time off for *maternity leave* their career will suffer. There exists insignificant financial help to needy mothers, but Americans think that if a couple can't maintain a child they shouldn't procreate. Some women give up their jobs, others come back to their offices and recommence their career.

Some Americans hire a babysitter or a *daycare provider* (In Great Britain, *daycare providers* are called *child-minders*.) who looks after several children or send them to a *daycare centre*, which is sometimes called a *nursery school*. In Great Britain, well-to-do families invite *nannies* who live with these families. The British name for *daycare centers* and/or *nursery schools* is a *day nursery*.

Nowadays, when in most families both parents work, when there exist a lot of *single-parent families* as a result of divorces or other reasons, older children often return from school to an empty house or apartment. These children are called *latchkey kids* or *latchkey children*. These kids (they sometimes have keys to their flats placed round their necks) have to let themselves into their houses or flats and look after themselves, especially after returning from school, because both parents are out at work. Classes at school usually last till 3 o'clock p.m. in the USA and till 4 o'clock p.m. in Great Britain, the *work day* (Br E *working day*) is usually over at 5 o'clock. Needy families are usually paid modest *child benefit*. In Great Britain, *child benefit* is less than fifteen pounds a week per one child.

References

1. Вержбицкая А. Понимание культур через посредство ключевых слов. // Семантические универсалии и описание языков. М., 1999.
2. Верещагин Е.М., Костомаров В.Г. Язык и культура: лингвострановедение в преподавании русского языка как иностранного. – М., 1983.
3. Верещагин Е.М., Костомаров В.Г. Лингвострановедение и принцип коммуникативности. // Лингвострановедческое описание лексики английского языка. – М., 1983.
4. Влахов С., Флорин С. Непереводимое в переводе. – М., 1980.
5. Воробьев В.В. Лингвокультурология (теория и методы). – М., 1997.
6. Гумбольдт В. Характер языка и характер народа. // Язык и философия культуры. – М., 1985.
7. Колшанский Г.В. Соотношение субъективных и объективных факторов в языке. – М., 1975.
8. Комлев Н.Г. О культурном компоненте лексического значения слова. // Вестник МГУ. Сер.: Филология. 1966. №4.
9. Крюков А.Н. Фоновые знания и фоновая коммуникация. // Этнопсихоллингвистика. – М., 1988.
10. Мамонтов А.С. Язык и культура: основы сопоставительного лингвострановедения: Автореф. дис. д-ра филол. наук. – М., 2000.
11. Ольшанский И.Г. Этно(психо)семантика и национально-культурное своеобразие языков. // Проблемы этносемантики. – М., 1998.
12. Ощепкова В.В. Культурологические, этнографические и типологические аспекты лингвострановедения: Автореф. дис. д-ра филол. наук. – М., 1995.
13. Ощепкова В.В. О подготовке переводчика и педагога к межкультурной коммуникации. // Актуальные проблемы постдипломного профессионального лингвистического образования. – М., 1998.
14. Сорокин Ю.А. Метод установления лакун как один из способов выявления специфики локальных культур: Художественная литература в культурологическом аспекте. // Национально-культурная специфика речевого поведения. – М., 1977.
15. Сорокин Ю.А., Марковина И.Ю. Культура и ее этнопсихоллингвистическая ценность. // Этнопсихоллингвистика. – М., 1988.
16. Телия В.Н. Метафоризация и ее роль в создании языковой картины мира. // Роль человеческого фактора в языке: Язык и картина мира. – М., 1988.

17. Телия В.Н. Русская фразеология. Семантический, прагматический и лингвокультурологический аспекты. Языки русской культуры. – М., 1996.
18. Тер-Минасова С.Г. Язык и межкультурная коммуникация. – М., 2000.
19. Толстой Н.И. Язык и народная культура: Очерки по славянской мифологии и этнолингвистике. – М., 1995.
20. Томахин Г.Д. Фоновые знания как основной предмет лингвострановедения. // Иностранные языки в школе. 1980. №4.
21. Томахин Г.Д. Америка через американизмы. – М., 1982.
22. Томахин Г.Д. Теоретические основы лингвострановедения: Автореф. дис. д-ра филол. наук. – М., 1984.
23. Томахин Г.Д. Теоретические основы лингвострановедения. // Вопросы языкознания. 1986. №6.
24. Томахин Г.Д. Реалии-американизмы: Пособие по страноведению. – М., 1988.
25. Уорф Л.В. Наука и языкознание. О двух ошибочных воззрениях на речь и мышление, характеризующих систему естественной логики, и о том, как слова и обычаи влияют на мышление. // Новое в лингвистике. Вып. I. М., 1960