

The Myth of the “Russian Soul” Through the Mirror of Language (1)

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Abstract

This paper aims at a linguistic description and evaluation of the myth of the Russian soul. This myth is a prominent cultural stereotype centered on mental, emotional, and spiritual concepts. The specific goal of this paper is to project the linguistic “image” of the Russian soul, which consists mainly of emotions, onto the corresponding cultural myth which exists in Russian literature and philosophy, as well as in Russian folk belief. Such a superimposition should reveal whether linguistic evidence does in fact support the Russian soul myth. To test the linguistic specificity of Russian emotions, they are contrasted to their English-language counterparts. The English language material is based on American English since all my informants were American. Literary sources and corpora were also used. The task at hand requires a new framework for a cross-linguistic study of emotions and such a framework is proposed. As distinct from traditional word-to-word contrastive analysis, the proposed approach involves comparing entire emotion “clusters,” i.e. all linguistic means of expressing a particular type of emotion in a given language. The paper also touches upon certain related fields of emotion studies, namely neuropsychology and physiology, as they provide valuable insight into the similarities and differences between the linguistic model of emotions and their scientific counterparts. These fields also provide explanations for the similarity and variation in conceptions of emotions as they are attested across different languages and cultures.

Introduction

The current paper deals with certain issues extensively researched in ethnolinguistics. This branch of linguistics is a field that studies the relationship between language and culture. It looks at the way perception and conceptualization influence language and examines variation across cultures. By connecting culture and language, ethnolinguists explain the similarities and differences of mentality inherent in different languages.

The analysis presented in this paper is both a continuation of recent studies in ethnolinguistics and a departure from them. It is an attempt to examine Russian cultural mythology, stereotyping, and introspection concerning feelings and emotions through their reflection in language. The focus on the conceptualization of emotions is easy to explain: emotions are in many ways the “hub” of the Russian *linguistic worldview*, “the way of conceptualizing reality inherent in a given language” [Apresjan 2000: 103]. This is also the core of the myth of the existence of a “mysterious Russian soul,” a concept which forms at least as important a part of Russian cultural mythology as the myth of Moscow as the third Rome.

The project aspires to accomplish this task from an angle that has not been previously explored. The novel research method here proposed aims to consider related fields of knowledge (such as neuropsychology), as well as to extend the focus of analysis from individual emotion words to entire emotion clusters (please see the precise definition of the “emotion cluster” below). The method questions assumptions about the Russian linguistic worldview which have become commonplace in ethnolinguistic studies dealing with the “Russian soul”.

I will begin with a brief overview of the “Russian soul” stereotype as it has emerged and crystallized in culture, concentrating in particular on its emotional components. Then I will consider the existing linguistic evidence that supports the belief that the “Russian soul” is something special, a part of the Russian linguistic worldview, and a reflection of the emotional world of the Russian people. Finally, I will present my own approach to the study of emotions in the Russian language, as well the results of this study.

1. The “Russian soul” stereotype

For centuries, Russians have viewed themselves as having a very special emotional and spiritual world. Their perennial introspection, as well as perceptions of Russians articulated by outside observers have resulted in what might be called the “Russian soul stereotype.” According to this stereotype, Russians are “warm-hearted,” “emotional,” “irrational,” “collectivistic,” “fatalistic,” “humble,” “subservient,” “reckless,” “freedom-loving,” “compassionate,” “ruled by longing,” “spiritual,” “mystical,” “passive,” “submissive,” “direct,” “open,” “sensitive,” “lazy,” and so forth.(2) There are natural differences of perception between the famous “Russian soul” (*russkaia dusha*) as

viewed from inside the culture and its image as seen from outside. Still, there is a unity of perception. One example is the contrast between the esoteric concept of the Russians as humble and the exoteric view of them as subservient. Although the concepts differ in terms of positive and negative coloration, the two images are fairly consistent with each other and overlap in their depiction of Russian emotionality and mentality.

The stereotype of the Russian soul has been created, perpetuated, and disseminated by writers, poets, and philosophers, including Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol, Dostoevsky, Blok, Tsvetaeva, Rozanov, Berdiaev, Fedotov and many others. Because of its ubiquity, the myth of the Russian soul has frequently come under scholarly scrutiny. Allusions to and reflections upon the Russian soul in philosophy, culture, literature, folklore, and art, as well as its scholarly descriptions, are too numerous to list in this paper. For a more comprehensive analysis and list of sources see Rancour-Laferriere [1995], who defines “Russian soul” as predominantly masochistic and prone to self-mortification, self-humiliation and undue sacrifice. This author also provides a plethora of facts from Russian history and culture and quotes from literature to support his thesis.

To substantiate his view of Russians as people who are inherently passive and enjoy suffering, Rancour-Laferriere refers in particular to the dominance of certain types of characters and leitmotifs in Russian art, especially literature and folklore. These include the prevalence of certain practices, rituals, and sects within the Russian branch of Christianity; the pervasiveness of certain behavior patterns in everyday life; peculiarities of political and historical development; and the prominence of certain words in the Russian language, such as *sud’ba* (fate, destiny). In addition to his own generalizations about Russian mentality, the author also quotes various Russian and foreign writers, historians, travelers, and philosophers who have come to similar conclusions about the Russian soul, namely that:

Russians like to suffer;

Russians are compassionate towards suffering;

Russians are generally passive, accept their fate, and humbly accept suffering.

Whether one agrees with this view of the Russian people or not, it is noteworthy that the myth of the Russian soul, unlike other areas of scholarly interest, is still present in the everyday discourse of ordinary Russian people. It is as though the stereotype keeps reproducing itself in different historical periods and under varying social conditions. Stimulus

comes both “from above” in the form of a national ideology, and “from below” as a product of people’s own self-perception. In other words, the myth is alive and thriving, even if the stereotype is often regarded ironically or dismissed as ridiculous. It has become a popular cliché, perpetuated in the everyday discourse of the Russian people. “Russian soul” is an entry in Wikipedia and also the subject of countless sites and blogs, seminars and articles, both serious and ironic. A Google search for “*russskaia dusha*” produces hundreds of thousands of entries.

Glancing at contemporary Russian culture and discourse, one glimpses many facts that fit into this popular model of Russian mentality. There are many indications that the stereotype still exists and remains important. Without aspiring to provide a comprehensive picture, let us give a few representative quotes from different contemporary sources which illustrate some components of the Russian soul stereotype:

(a) Component “Russians like to suffer”; consider the following lines from a prominent Russian contemporary poet, Olga Sedakova:

Я скажу, а ты не поверишь,
как люблю я ночь и дорогу,
как люблю я, что меня прогнали
и что завтра опять прогонят.
(О. Сedaкoвa, Кoнь).
[I will say, and you will not believe me
How much I love the night and the road,
How much **I love to have been chased away,**
And **to be chased away again** tomorrow].
(O.Sedakova, Stallion).

On a different note, see the Russian joke (*anekdot*) which explores different national stereotypes and focuses on masochistic suffering [Shmeleva and Shmelev 2002: 80-81] (I provide an English retelling of the joke, as it is rather long and language seems far less important here than the plot itself – VA):

“A ship sustained a shipwreck and there were three groups of survivors – French, English, and Russian. They ended up on three different uninhabited islands. In each group there were three people, two men and one woman. After several years, the three islands with survivors were discovered. On the first island there were three French survivors. They were happily living in two houses, one man and the woman as a married couple, and the second man as a bachelor. On a tree there was a schedule: January: Jean – husband, Pierre – lover; February: Pierre –

husband, Jean – lover, March: Jean – husband, etc. On the second island there were three houses. Each was inhabited by one British person, sullen and unhappy for lack of communication. They weren’t acquainted with one another because there was nobody to introduce them. On the third island there were Russians. There was **unhappy** Olga who married one man, but loved the other man and all three were *suffering* [*muchalis*]’.

(b) Component “Russians possess a mysterious Russian soul which it is difficult or impossible to understand, especially for a foreigner”; consider a quote from an article published in “Pravda.ru” – the internet heir of the famous Soviet newspaper, which brings to mind the well-known Slavophile argument about a special “Russian path”:

Часто можно слышать о загадочной русской душе. Но что это такое? Чем русская душа отличается от других ...

Северная природа приучила русского человека к терпению. *Терпение и труд всё перетрут*. Многие иностранцы путают это качество русского человека с бессловесностью, забитостью, рабской покорностью ...

Многие проблемы в России возникают из-за того, что те, кто приходит к власти в нашей стране, не понимают русской души, не имеют русской идеологии. Они стремятся насадить у нас европейские порядки, приглашают к нам иностранных экспертов, которые с умным видом излагают свои теории.

(А. Падчин, Загадочная русская душа, Pravda.ru, 01.12. 2004).

[One often hears about the mysterious Russian soul. But what is that? How is the Russian soul different from others? ...

The Northern environment has taught the Russian man patience. *Patience and diligence will wear everything away*. Many **foreigners confuse** this property of a Russian person with **numbness**, being cowed, **slavish submission** ...

Many problems arise in Russia because those in power **do not understand the Russian soul**, do not possess Russian ideology. They try to introduce European order here, invite **foreign specialists** who expound their theories with a look of intelligence on their faces]. (A. Padchin, Mysterious Russian soul, Pravda.ru, 01.12. 2004, last visited 03.03.2009).

The same stereotype is explored, ironically, in another *anekdot* [Shmeleva and Shmelev 2002: 129]:

Что говорят женщины разных национальностей, проведя ночь со своим поклонником? Немка: «Когда мы поженимся»? Француженка: «А Пьер был лучше». Русская: «А душу мою, Федя, ты так и не понял»...

[What do women of different nationalities say after having spent the first night with their boyfriend? German: “When will we get married?” French: “Pierre was better”. Russian: “As for my **soul**, Fedya, you **haven’t understood it**”].

Consider also ironic portrayals of the “Russian Soul” by ex-patriots in the Russian blogosphere [<http://www.siberianlight.net/do-you-have-a-big-russian-soul>] (last visited 03.03.2009): “Could such a country, such a history, produce an ordinary soul? The kind of soul that an ordinary country produces? Of course, not. Such a country could only produce the Big Russian Soul”.

(c) Component “Russians are lazy”; consider the analysis of contemporary Russian anecdotes dealing with national stereotypes in [Shmeleva and Shmelev 2002: 75]:

В русских анекдотах образ *русского* часто включает традиционно приписываемые русским отрицательные черты. Русские в русских анекдотах бывают представлены как пьяницы, готовые на все за бутылку; они ленивы, абсолютно равнодушны к работе, к профессиональному успеху, к семье и детям...

[In Russian jokes the image of the *Russian* often includes negative traits traditionally ascribed to Russians. Russians in anecdotes are often portrayed as drunkards ready to give up everything for a bottle; they are **lazy, absolutely indifferent to their job**, their professional success, their family and children...].

(d) Component “Russians are fatalistic”; consider the ironic reflection of this part of the stereotype in the following anecdote, which imitates a math problem:

Из пункта А в пункт Б выехал поезд. Навстречу ему одновременно из пункта Б в пункт А выехал другой поезд. Дорога одноколейная, но они не встретились.

Вопрос: - Почему?

Ответ: - Не судьба!

[A train leaves from point A to point B. Simultaneously another train leaves from point B to point A. There is only one track on the railway but they don't meet.

Question: Why?

Answer: **It was not fated**].

(e) Component “Russians value the collective over the individual”; consider blog discussions about Svetlana Bakhmina, former lawyer of the oil company Yukos, posted while she was in prison for “economic crimes” and was awaiting court decision on her request for parole (she was freed in May 2009). There had been much online public support for her, mostly generated because she was expecting a child (she gave birth

in prison). However, there were also quite a few voices against her early release, mostly driven by the rhetoric of the collective, namely that it is not worthwhile supporting the cause of *one individual* person; consider one of the bloggers on the site bakhmina.net:

С чего это такая трогательная забота об одной из тысяч преступниц? ...
Ложь это всё, а не милосердие, если только одну Бахмину выпускать.
[Why this touching concern about **one of the thousands** of female criminals?
It's all lies, and not mercy to release her **alone**].

Examples can be multiplied a thousand fold. Some stereotypes pertaining to the traditional view of the Russian mentality as it has been portrayed from the XIX century onward still play an important role in contemporary society. Some continue in their original form and some are parodied. Nonetheless, they persist.

Interestingly, only a few of the above ethnic traits are the subject of jokes about the Russians told by non-Russians. In Estonian jokelore, for example, the Russian love of vodka and the homeland are acknowledged as typical national features, while fatalism, “soulfulness”, collectiveness are completely ignored. Moreover, in an Estonian joke about a Russian, a German, and an Estonian, it is the Estonian who is seen as inherently communal [Laineste 2008: 16]. This demonstrates that ethnicities are portrayed differently in their native jokelore, where they are the primary focus of reflection, than in the jokelores of other ethnicities where they have “outsider” status.

2. Previous ethnolinguistic research

If we examine how the “Russian soul” stereotype has been treated in ethnolinguistics, we see that its study has been based on the assumption that languages both reflect and shape their speakers’ mentalities. This idea goes back as far as Humboldt’s work and the Sapir and Whorf hypothesis. In recent decades this notion has been thoroughly explored and substantiated by extensive material from a variety of languages. The breakthrough work of Wierzbicka [Wierzbicka 1990, 1991, 1992, 1999] has opened up a new avenue of research, both by breaking away from a long-held tendency towards Anglo-centricity and by developing a semantic apparatus and terminology for this task. Work describing emotion concepts in languages through reference to prototypical scenarios has been especially important [consider also Iordanskaia 1972, 1984].

The cognitivist work of Lakoff and Johnson [1980] and later their followers [Kövecses 1990] was another significant contribution to the field. It has shown the importance of the *linguistic metaphor* (as opposed to literary metaphor) as a tool for gaining insight into how people conceptualize and understand things. Examples include the fact that people view “up” as good, “down” as bad, “goals” as journeys, “feelings” as physical processes. This is attested by numerous linguistic expressions (“upper class,” “I’m feeling down” = ‘in a bad mood’, “My goal is in sight,” “He finally exploded” = ‘of anger’), etc. Linguistic metaphor plays a particularly important role in the linguistic conceptualization of emotions. Since emotion words refer to inner states which are very difficult or impossible to verbalize directly, people often resort to metaphor to speak about their feelings, likening something unknown to a familiar phenomenon. Thus feelings are frequently conceptualized through metaphors of physical sensations (e.g. anger is heat, passion is intoxication, etc.).

Slavic languages (and, in particular, Russian) have enjoyed considerable ethnolinguistic attention. In a way, analyzing language from the point of view of its culture- and linguo-specificity has become standard practice for specialists in synchronic semantics, especially in the Russian semantic tradition. For instance, in the Moscow School of Semantics, the study of the so-called “linguistic picture of the world” constitutes a very significant area of research [Apresjan 1995, 2000, 2006].

The last decade has seen a burst of interest in ethno-specific *key words* – “words which are particularly important and revealing in a given culture” [Wierzbicka 1997: 15] and *key ideas* – “a kind of semantic leitmotif, each of which is expressed by many linguistic means of diverse nature: morphological, word-formative, syntactic, lexical and even prosodic [Apresjan 2006: 34-36].

3. Russian key-words

According to different sources, Russian key-words comprise numerous items. These include culturally prominent concepts, presumably telling of the Russian mentality and of Russian folk self-perception. Such concepts are often untranslatable into other languages except by means of analytic explanations. Examples include: *avos*’ (perhaps with luck), *dusha* (soul), *sovest*’ (conscience), *zhalost*’ (pity), *toska* (feeling sad and hopeless because of yearning for something

unattainable), *sud’ba* (fate/destiny), *istina* (the Truth, gospel-truth), *drug* (friend), *volia* (unrestrained physical freedom) [Wierzbicka 1997: 55-84, Apresjan 2000: 102-10, 104-127, Bulygina and Shmelev 1997: 481-495], *maiat’sia* (to hang about for a long time, yearning), *tomit’sia* (to yearn, to languish), *neprikaiannost’* (the state of not knowing what to do and where to be, and feeling bad because of that) [Shmelev 2002: 404-410]. Key-words also include function words such as connectives, e.g. the conjunction “*a*” which means both “and” and “but” [Zalizniak and Mikaelian 2005: 158-159].

The existing criteria for singling out key-words include such parameters as:

- *frequency* of use; e.g., the frequency of the word *sud’ba* is 83 occurrences per million words (National Corpus of Russian Language) as compared to 28.7 total per million for its two English correlates *fate* and *destiny* counted together (British National Corpus);

- *prominence* in language; e.g., the Russian word *sovest’*, in comparison to its English correlate “conscience”, displays a much greater integration into the overall system of language. Unlike English “conscience,” Russian *sovest’* is conceptualized in a number of linguistic metaphors. In the Russian linguistic picture of the world, *sovest’* is viewed as “a strict judge” who forbids immoral acts. This is attested by such regular collocations as *Sovest’ mne ne pozvoliaet etogo sdelat’* (My conscience doesn’t allow me to do it), *Sovest’ vosstaet protiv etogo* (My conscience opposes it). *Sovest’* as judge also has an inherent moral instinct and can therefore guide people’s behavior. This is seen in expressions such as *golos sovesti* (the voice of conscience), *velenie sovesti* (the dictates of conscience). *Sovest’* can mete out punishment: *Sovest’ gryzhet, muchaet, terzaet, glozhet, ne daet pokoia* (Conscience gnaws, tortures, torments, eats away, gives no peace). *Sovest’* can grant pardon: *spokojnaia sovest’*, *chistaia sovest’* (tranquil conscience, clean conscience) [Apresjan 1995: 353-354];

- *untranslatability* into other languages by simple means. Certain words are absent from many Russian-English or English-Russian dictionaries. Examples include *maiat’sia* (to feel restless while doing nothing in particular and moving from place to place, often in a closed space) and *neprikaiannost’* (the state of unattachedness to any particular occupation or place; lack of the ties and connections that people usually have, such as a job, a family). While some (e.g., Oxford’s Russian-English dictionary) do provide translations, none of the suggested words reflects all semantic aspects of a complex concept. Suggested translations

for *maiat'sia* such as “suffer,” “languish” reflect only the aspect of feeling bad, while “loaf” reflects only the state of doing nothing, and “loiter about” reflects only doing nothing and staying in a certain place. The only way to truly “translate” such words, therefore, is by means of an analytical semantic definition like those provided at the beginning of the paragraph. Words can have different degrees of untranslatability; e.g., the word *toska* (feeling sad and hopeless because of yearning for something unattainable) can be rendered, depending on the context, by a variety of lexical means, including but not limited to “anguish,” “heart-ache,” “yearning,” “longing,” “weariness” (these examples come from the English and Russian versions of Nabokov’s “Lolita”). The fact that all these words are legitimate, context-dependent translations means that *toska* is not entirely untranslatable; English lacks one word that would render all the semantic components that are present in this synthetic Russian concept.

In a similar vein, words which supposedly define the typical personality traits of the Russian people are characterized by a more frequent co-occurrence with the adjective *russkii* (Russian). In the article with the intentionally humorous title “С чисто русской аккуратностью” [With purely Russian neatness] Plungian and Rakhilina [1996] give this and other co-occurrences as examples of impossible collocations. Indeed, data from the Russian National Corpus does seem to substantiate the claim that certain characteristics are viewed as more Russian than others; consider *rusaskaia dushevnost'* (Russian soulfulness) - 2 occurrences, *rusaskaia udal'* (Russian gallantry) - 16 occurrences, *rusaskaia zhalost'* (Russian pity) - 5 occurrences,(3) *rusaskaia toska* (Russian sadness/yearning) - 20 occurrences, *russkii fatalism* (Russian fatalism) - 3 occurrences, *russkoe smirenie* (Russian humility) - 4 occurrences. Conversely, there are no collocations such as “Russian neatness,” “Russian punctuality,” “Russian honesty,” “Russian love of liberty” (*svobodoliubie*), etc.

4. Russian key ideas

As many researchers suggest, typically Russian key ideas include the following: “uncontrollability of events by their subject,” “the influence of somebody else’s will on events,” “the impersonal, vague, inscrutable, mysterious character of that will,” “the subject’s passivity in the face of that will” [Wierzbicka 1992: 73, 395, 428-435, Zalizniak and Levontina: 1996: 239, Bulygina and Shmelev 1997: 491, Shmelev 2002:

135]. The linguistic data supporting these claims include a number of lexical items, such as *sud’ba* (fate/destiny), *ne sud’ba* (it is not fated), *avos’* (perhaps with luck), *pust’* (let it be), etc. All these words include a reference to some outside power which influences the outcomes of people’s actions more than the agents themselves. There are also grammatical means, in particular impersonal constructions such as *Mne ne rabotaetsia* (I don’t feel like working, lit.: to-me it doesn’t work), *Ego ubilo molniei* (He was killed by lightning.: lit.: him it-killed by lightning), which also point to belief in an outside power as the agent responsible for what happened or is happening to the subject [Babby 1975: 182-185, Wierzbicka 1996: 67-68, Apresjan 2006: 36-39].

A similar key idea is postulated in Zalizniak, Levontina, and Shmelev [2005], namely that the Russian language pictures doing things as inherently difficult. They base their argument on an analysis of the Russian verbs *sobirat’sia/sobrat’sia* (to get around to doing something), Russian verbs with the prefix *za-*, e.g. *zanesti* (to bring on one’s way), *zaiti* (to drop in one’s way) and the adverb *zaodno* (while you are at it).

In this context, it is interesting to consider the Slavic folklore concept of “fate” as presented in Tolstaia [2008: 347-352]. The author interprets the semantic core of Slavic “fate” in the light of its grammar and syntax. Tolstaia connects the semantic idea of inexorability and unavoidability inherent in the Slavic concept of ‘fate’ with the fact that most Slavic nouns meaning ‘fate’ derive from corresponding verbs, e.g. *sud’ba* from *sudit’* (to judge), *dolia* from *delit’* (to divide into shares), *rok* from *rech’* (to speak), etc. Such verbal derivation explains the “verbal”, “perfective”, “completed” nature of “fate.”

Wierzbicka also points out the overall emotionality that is typical of Russians and is consequently reflected in language [Wierzbicka 1996: 38, 50-55]. On the morphological level, emotionality is manifested in the profusion of diminutive and augmentative suffixes which carry different undertones of attitude; compare various possible forms of the Russian name *Ekaterina*: *Katia*, *Katen’ka*, *Katiusha*, *Katiunia*, *Katenok*, *Katenysh*, *Katiukha*. Lexically, emotionality is displayed in directness of expression of both negative and positive opinion; consider the frequency of the Russian words *podlets*, *merzavets*, *negodiai* (bastard, scoundrel), or *prekrasnyi* (beautiful) in comparison with their English counterparts (75 total occurrences per million for *podlets*, *negodiai*, *merzavets* as opposed to 2 per million for “bastard,” “scoundrel”; 190 for *prekrasnyi* versus 127 for “beautiful”). In this connection, one can consider also Zalizniak, Levontina, and Shmelev [2005] on exceeding Russian

emotionality and wideness and generosity of the Russian soul as reflected in the use of such lexical items as *rodnoi* (one's own), and the ritual usage of kinship terms with regard to strangers, such as *sestrenka* (little sister), *bratok* (little brother), *babulia* (little granny), *vnuchka* (granddaughter), etc.

The Russian word *dusha* (soul) has itself been construed as evidence of Russian spirituality and "soulfulness" [Wierzbicka 1991]. In this connection, consider also the rich representation of the *dusha* concept in Slavic folklore [Tolstaia 1999: 162-167]. Russians have also been portrayed as prone to pity. The Russian concept of *zhalost'* (pity) is assumed to be positively colored and more central in the linguistic worldview than its English correlate, *pity* [Wierzbicka 1990, Levontina 2004]. In addition, a Russian key idea is the great value attached to vast spaces, physical freedom, and reckless courage [Shmelev 2000]. Consider the following passage:

Все названные выше факторы сплелись воедино и определяют причудливую "географию русской души" (выражение Н.А. Бердяева). ... И не удивительно, что эта "*широта* русской души" интересным образом отражается в русском языке и, в первую очередь, в особенностях его лексического состава. Многие из слов, ярко отражающих специфику "русской ментальности" и соответствующих уникальным русским понятиям, ... такие, как *тоска* или *удаль*, ... как бы несут на себе печать "русских пространств" [Shmelev 2000: 357-367]. [All the above-mentioned factors have become intermingled and define the intricate "geography of the Russian soul" (Berdiaev's term)... This "*wideness of the Russian soul*" is interestingly reflected in the Russian language, first of all, in its vocabulary. ... Many words which strongly reflect the peculiarities of the "Russian mentality" ... such as *toska* (indefinable sadness/yearning) and *udal'* (reckless courage) – seem to carry an imprint of the "Russian spaces"].

Ethnolinguists have proposed different explanations of the nature of the "Russian soul." Yet all agree that the Russian language acts as its mirror and that, by studying the reflection in this mirror, one can get a good idea of the phenomenon itself. Perhaps not coincidentally, linguistic research on Russian key words has produced what appears to be evidence for most components of the "Russian soul" myth. It shows that the Russian reliance on fate seems to be substantiated by the salient concepts of *sud'ba* (fate) and *avos'* (perhaps with luck). Russian compassionate warm-heartedness is illustrated by the prominence of *zhalost'* (pity) while Russian slowness in springing into action appears in the apparently untranslatable *sobirat'sia* (to get around to doing

something). Russian sensitivity finds its reflection in the concept of *obida* (offence, hurt feelings), while Russian humbleness appears in the concept of *smirenje* (humility). In all these instances, Russian data are ethno- and linguospecific and thus not translatable into other languages.

5. The proposed approach

While the above-described contrastive framework has proven to be extremely effective in dispensing with Anglo-centricity and has produced impressive empirical results, I would like to propose a somewhat different approach. Its purpose is to create a semantic typology of emotion concepts that would account both for cross-linguistic differences *and* similarities. There are also some general methodological questions that arise. It is true that all cultures are unique and that their peculiarities are reflected in language. It is not clear, however, to what extent language can serve as an objective mirror of culture. In other words, to what extent it is possible to draw inferences about a cultural or national mentality based on linguistic facts such as the existence of certain untranslatable words. Direct untranslatability is a regular phenomenon across languages, yet it in itself cannot serve as an indication that speakers of these languages do indeed view the world differently.

The notion of linguistic salience, which is fundamental to the contrastive ethnolinguistic framework, is not entirely transparent either. First of all, the frequency of a word in a language as compared to the frequency of its translation in another language is not necessarily a proof of greater salience. It is often the case that a concept expressed by one polysemous word, or a word with a more general meaning, is expressed by several words in another language. Such is the case, for example, with the Russian word *sud'ba* (lit. destiny, fate), which corresponds to English “destiny,” “fate” and sometimes even “life”: *Chelovek s interesnoi sud'boi* (A man with interesting life).

Other linguistic factors that are often considered an indication of a word's salience, such as the number of derivatives of a word, are not always reliable criteria either. Languages are bound to vary in this respect because of differences in the richness of their grammatical and lexical systems and such variation occurs irrespective of how central or marginal the concept in question might be. Thus, while Russian *obida* (offence, hurt feelings) certainly has more derivatives than the English “to feel hurt,” [Levontina and Zalizniak 2001: 308], this does not prove the greater importance of the respective concept for the Russian

linguistic worldview. Rather, it serves as another illustration of a general difference between Russian and English morphological and lexical systems. The Russian language has richer morphology while English has a richer vocabulary. This results in the wide range of meanings that are expressed by various derivatives of *obida*, e.g., *obidchik* (offender, wrongdoer), *obidchivyi* (touchy, difficult, stuffy, huffy, easy to take offence, sensitive, vulnerable), *obizhat'sia* (to be aggrieved, to take offence, to cherish a grudge, to resent, to sulk). English produces the same effect by the abundance and diversity of lexical expression (see also below).

Another problem with the contrastive line of argument is the fact that English often serves as a universal benchmark. Thus, the absence of exact English translations of certain expressions is taken as evidence of a concept's cross-linguistic uniqueness. Additionally, judgments concerning translatability are based mostly on dictionaries. This limits the search for equivalents as dictionaries mostly provide equivalents within the same part of speech only. The use of bilingual speakers and parallel corpora can provide more flexibility. For example, though the proverbial Russian *avos'* (perhaps with luck) might not be directly translatable into English, there are lexical items in English that express similar unjustifiably optimistic reliance on good fortune instead of striving to achieve one's goals. Examples include "happy-go-lucky," "counting on a miracle," "blind faith in divine providence," "pot-shot," "hit-or-miss," etc. Thus, one cannot claim that this concept is entirely absent from English. Sometimes, the problem with the so-called untranslatability merely boils down to finding an appropriate equivalent in a broader morphological, syntactic, or lexical context.

Another problem with word-to-word cross-linguistic comparison is the fact that things are viewed in relative isolation and outside the language system. How valid is the statement that Russians have conceptualized *smirenje* (humility) as their primary attitude toward life? One could find as much evidence supporting the claim that Russians have conceptualized indifference as their primary attitude to life [consider the discussion of these two concepts in Shmelev 2002: 374-378]. There are common conversational expressions that express the indifference idea: *plevat' na chto-libo* (not to give a damn about something; lit. to spit on something), *pofigizm*, especially in the collocation *Russian pofigizm* (Russian indifference; lit. Russian not-giving-a-damnism) - 400 occurrences per 140 million in the Russian National Corpus, etc. There is no objective way to show that the concept

of *smirenje* is more prominent in the Russian language than the concept of *pofigizm*: the former is frequent in religious texts, while the latter is frequent in the conversational register. And there is no objective way of determining which one is more important or central.

Even if we do establish objective linguistic and statistical criteria to prove relative salience of concepts, there is a bigger philosophical issue: what does salience prove? Specifically, in the much-discussed area of emotions, is it possible, as Levontina and Zalizniak [2001: 306] suggest, to draw inferences about differences in actual emotional experiences on the basis of different conceptualization? Can one establish that “the emotion of *obida* is specific to the Russian language”? It is impossible to give an answer to this philosophical and neuropsychological question in one paper. After all, every individual feels differently and yet all humans are biologically the same. In fact, the discussion of the relationship between language and emotion has been going on for centuries in many domains, not just linguistics. Rougemont summarized the dilemma in his well-known book *Love in the Western World*. He stated: “‘Everything changes except the human heart’, say the old sages but they are wrong. Metaphorically speaking, the human heart is strangely sensitive to variations in time and place” [Rougemont 1956].

Interesting examples from recent work include Ekman’s research which suggests cross-cultural universality of feelings and variation in their display [1999: 301-317]. Also interesting is psychological research on individual, social, and national differences in aspects of emotional experiences [Scherer 1988, Scherer, Wallbott and Summerfield 1987, Oatley and Jenkins 1996]. The growing use of neuroimaging in the study of emotions is also important. Still, differences in feeling and emotion from culture to culture will not be reliably tested any time soon. Though not attempting to give a definitive answer to such complicated questions as cross cultural differences in emotion, the current paper aspires to provide some further clues in this direction.

The proposed framework incorporates the scenario-based semantic approach in which emotions are broken up into simpler elements, such as feelings, desires, evaluations, circumstances. This approach was originally proposed by Iordanskaia [1972, 1984] and Wierzbicka [1999]. It was adopted by some psychologists [such as Shweder 2004]. It is also a derivative of the conceptual, metaphor-based approach of cognitive semantics [Lakoff and Johnson 1980, Kövecses 1990, Emanatian 1995, Kövecses 2000].

For linguistic data, I rely not only on dictionaries and literary sources, but on the spoken language and the language of mass discourse. I also use native speakers' judgments, especially those of bilingual English-Russian speakers. Parallel literary texts (such as Nabokov's *Lolita*) as well as linguistic corpora (e.g., Russian National Corpus, British National Corpus, American National Corpus) are likewise used to elicit the necessary data.

The overall linguistic framework of my description is the Integral Language Description (IDL), a model which strives to achieve perfect theoretical coordination between lexicon and grammar [Ju. D. Apresjan 2000]. In practice, IDL involves creating descriptions of linguistic items that reflect all their relevant linguistic properties: semantic, pragmatic, syntactic, communicative, combinatorial. To create an IDL description of emotion clusters that would produce conceptual maps of emotions that are as complete as possible, I attempt to consider all linguistic means of expression of a particular emotion, or at least their representative majority. For each emotion cluster these include:

a) different parts of speech - nouns (fear), verbs (to fear), adjectives (fearful), adverbs (fearfully), impersonal predicatives (Russian *X-u grustno* (X is feeling sad; lit. to X it is sad), *X-u strashno* (X is feeling scared; lit.: to X it is scary);

b) linguistic reflection of different aspects of emotion – emotional states themselves (horror), causation of emotion (to horrify, horrible), emotionally-driven behaviors (to get cold feet), physiological manifestations of emotions (to shake with terror, to vomit with disgust), behavioral manifestations of emotions (to run away in fear, to strike in anger), properties associated with proneness to certain emotions and emotional behaviors (cowardly, irascible, touchy), properties associated with inability to experience certain emotions (fearless, pitiless), ethical or other evaluation of emotional states, associated behaviors and properties (cowardly, shameless, compassionate, bleeding-heart), an acceptable or conventional verbal expression of emotion (thank you for gratitude, I'm sorry, I feel bad, I feel for you for "pity").

The methodological novelty of my approach is in its scale: rather than comparing individual parts of the system, such as separate emotion terms, I propose to compare entire systems in the form of "emotion clusters". Each emotion cluster, such as "sadness," "anger," "fear" is represented by many "members", e.g. "sorrow," "sadness," "grief," "blues," "depression," etc. for the "sadness" cluster in English, "anger," "fury," "wrath," "irritation," etc. for the "anger" cluster in English,

“fear,” “terror,” “horror,” “panic,” “afraid,” “scared,” etc. for the “fear” cluster in English. By analyzing clusters instead of individual terms, we are able to reconstruct the system of emotion conceptualization in a particular language, which can later lead to creating a semantic typology of emotion conceptualization. For example, after we have described the types of “anger” in one language, we can use the resulting “thesaurus” as a tool to approach another language and to look for similarities and differences in its conceptual map. For example, both English and Russian have explicitly incorporated the following types of anger in their conceptual systems: “justified” anger (indignation, *negodovanie*), “strong uncontrollable anger” (rage, *beshenstvo*), “mean anger” (venom, *zloba*), “nerve-wrecking anger” (irritation, *razdrazhenie*), but English has also a type of “helpless disappointed anger” (frustration), which Russian lacks. These different types of “anger” refer to different situations, different intensities of feelings, different types of experience, different ethical evaluations and other real-life variables. Linguistically, each type of “anger” corresponds to a certain semantic structure, a certain arrangement and combination of semantic elements. The fact that different languages have singled out similar combinations of meanings as separate concepts gives credence to the hypothesis that “conceptual mapping” of emotion clusters can be a valid tool in cross-linguistic analysis.

By cross-linguistic “superimposing” of conceptual maps, one is able to capture a holistic picture of the emotional universe, where both the universality and the differences displayed across languages can be seen. I have analyzed 11 emotion clusters in English and Russian, including the five emotions considered “basic” in most psychological and physiological studies – “fear,” “anger,” “sadness,” “disgust,” “joy” (basic emotions), “shame,” “offence,” “pity,” “pride,” “envy/jealousy,” “gratitude.”

6. Findings

As it is not possible to give a detailed account of the findings concerning Russian emotion concepts made by previous researchers, I will report general conclusions and illustrate the method employed in the current paper by providing a comprehensive analysis of one emotion cluster, namely *zhalost'*, or “pity” (considered a typically Russian emotion). The proposed analysis re-evaluates the linguistic basis for

many claims about the “Russian soul” and develops general principles for describing emotions.

1) The myth of the Russian soul would predict that “moral masochism” should generate an abundance of positively evaluated terms for “unpleasant” emotions and that terms for “pleasant” emotions should be few. However, as cross-linguistic Russian-English analysis shows, the prevalence of “unpleasant” emotion terms is not unique to Russian; it is a universal linguistic tendency (compare 37 “unpleasant” emotion terms to 3 “pleasant” in German in [Mel’čuk and Wanner 1996]). This follows a wider linguistic tendency to explicitly mark deviations from the norm rather than the norm itself. This tendency has a biological explanation: unpleasant basic emotions, such as fear, disgust, anger, have an evolutionary survival value and so there is a greater need to label this type of emotion than emotions of the pleasant variety.

2) Further, emotion metaphor reveals substantial universality across the two languages. Although there are many language-specific metaphors, like “to turn green” for “jealousy” or “to feel blue” for “sadness,” there are a number of emotion metaphors that demonstrate consistency across unrelated languages. These metaphors define entire emotion clusters, rather than their single representatives. The following emotion metaphor patterns appear to have certain cross-linguistic universality: “fear is cold”(to get cold feet); “anger is heat” (to boil); “offense is pain” (hurt feelings, wounded pride); “empathy is pain” (compassion, to feel bad for somebody); “jealousy is pain” (to be torn by jealousy); “remorse is pain” (pangs/pricks of conscience); “love is addiction” (to be addicted to somebody); “love is sweet taste” (to be sweet on somebody); “bad is bitter” (bitter disappointment, to be bitter) as well as some others. Neurobiology provides an explanation for this tendency: many emotion metaphors have biological basis. Thus, “fear” involves actual lowering of the body temperature, while “anger” is accompanied by a heightened body temperature. Feeling “hurt” and feeling “empathy” activate pain centers in the brain. Undergoing the emotional effects of the end a love relationship activates the same neural pathways as narcotic withdrawal, etc. [Gallese 2001, Singer et al. 2004, McDonald and Leary 2005]. This biological universality, corroborated at least partly by language, applies to “pity,” a supposedly culture-specific emotion, and provides support for the theory that certain emotions are indeed present in some form in all cultures and that no language can claim uniqueness in its treatment of emotion terms. This is an argument against the myth of the Russian soul.

3) Yet there still seems to be extensive cross-linguistic variation of emotion conceptualization, starting with the word *dusha* (soul) and proceeding through every emotion cluster. Indeed, Russian *dusha* is more embracive than the English “soul,” covering meanings found in English both “soul” and “heart;” e.g., *dobraia dusha* (a kind soul); *liubit’ vsei dushoi* (to love with all one’s heart), *v glubine dushi* (deep in one’s heart), etc. However, the case where one word in language A corresponds to two or more words in language B is a regular phenomenon, not limited to the spiritual or emotional sphere. It is often the case with Russian and English, English having a more specialized vocabulary and Russian having words with more general meanings; e.g., *maslo* in Russian and “butter” and “oil” in English.

Furthermore, there is no single emotion term in Russian that is an exact equivalent to its English counterpart. To give one example, English “happy” is not exactly the same as Russian *shchastlivyi*. “Happy” is, in some usages, close in meaning to “pleased:” consider “I’m not happy with this decision.” “Happy,” in this phrase, could not be translated as *shchastlivyi* and would need to be translated as *Ia nedovol’na etim resheniem*. But if we look at the entire field of “joy” in Russian and English, we will discover that most meanings can be rendered across languages in some form and do not, therefore, reflect culture-specific emotional experiences.

4) Overall, the Russian-English comparison of the emotion “clusters” “fear,” “disgust,” “sadness,” “offence,” “shame,” “empathy,” as well as more general emotion “fields”, such as “feeling bad” and “bitterness” reveals a different distribution of Russian-to-English discrepancies than was previously thought. Traditionally, Russian language was considered peculiar as concerns “sadness”, represented by the “uniquely Russian” emotion of *toska* (longing, yearning, depression) and “empathy”, represented by the “uniquely Russian” emotion of *zhalost’* (pity). However, the “cluster”-to-“cluster” comparative analysis of emotion metaphors and prototypical scenarios in which emotions occur, as well as of neuropsychological data has returned the following results (the comparison of “pity” clusters is presented in detail in the Appendix):

a) while Russian *toska* cannot be translated into English consistently, English language possesses its own unique “sadness” term, which is equally salient both in language and culture – “blues.” The term “blues” refers to a feeling that can be as painful and occur as unexpectedly and without outside cause as *toska*, thus undermining the

myth of the “Russian soul” as being more prone to strong unmotivated sadness. Also, the fact that the synthetic term *toska* involves a complex setting and describes a feeling occurring in a number of different circumstances, such as loss of someone loved, absence of someone loved, depressing surroundings, overall lack of joy, does not yet prove the uniqueness of this emotional experience. Each specific manifestation of *toska* can be translated adequately by such English words as “depression,” “anguish,” “yearning.”(4) Moreover, the rest of the “sadness” field is structured very similarly in the two languages: there are stronger and more painful emotions such as *gore* and “grief,” which are stimulated by heavy losses and tragic events, and “lighter,” “bittersweet” emotions such as “*pechal*” and “sorrow” which occur in more “sentimental” circumstances such as parting;

b) “fear” and “disgust” clusters, based on basic and biologically rooted emotions, are very similar in Russian and English. There is, however, a difference between them which reveals the sources of cross-linguistic discrepancies. Namely, in Russian, these two emotion clusters are quite distinct, as they are in the brain (the fear area is localized in the amygdala, whereas the site for disgust is in the insula part of the brain). However, in English, there is a “synthetic” term “horror,” which refers to a feeling caused by a stimulus both frightening and repulsive. There is no equivalent for “horror” in Russian, and this word is translated either as *uzhas* (terror) or as *otvrashchenie* (disgust), depending on the context. Again, as in the case of *toska* (which embraces English “depression,” “anguish,” and “yearning”), we observe two different mappings of linguistic terms onto the same conceptual field rather than a different range of emotional experience;

c) the greatest differences in the emotional terminology are found in the “shame” and “offence” clusters. While both these clusters are well represented in the Russian language, they are comparatively under-represented in English both lexically and in terms of relative frequency. The Russian language has an abundance of “shame” expressions, some of which have no correlates in English and the Russian words which have English correlates are used more frequently and with greater ease than in English. Examples include: *stydit’sia* (to be ashamed), *syd* (shame), *pozor* (disgrace), *stydno* (ashamed), *sovestno* (untranslatable) ≈ “having qualms,” *nelovko* (ethically compromised), *neudobno* (ethically or psychologically uncomfortable). In many contexts where Russian language chooses a shame-associated expression, English favors a more general emotion term; consider *Mne stydno, chto ia vas pobespokoila* (I

feel bad to have disturbed you), rather than “I feel ashamed to have disturbed you” or *Mne stydno smotret’ emu v glaza* (I can’t look him in the eyes), rather than “I feel ashamed to look him in the eyes.”

This applies to the “offence” cluster to an even greater extent. *Mne obidno* (I feel hurt), *Ty ne obidelsia?* (Are you offended?) *Ne obizhaisia* (Don’t be offended) are among the most frequent conversational emotion expressions in Russian and are used to refer to feelings that arise with a minimum stimulus. The corresponding English expressions: “to be offended,” “to feel hurt/wounded” seem to be prompted by much graver stimuli and occur with much lesser frequency. As with “shame” English favors less specific terms to describe these feelings: “Is everything OK?,” “Have I upset you?,” “Take it easy,” “It’s sad that...,” etc.

5) I suggest the following explanation for the observed discrepancies between Russian and English emotion terms: rather than stemming from emotional worlds of a different sort or from different “souls,” the differences are linguistically generated. The first source of English/Russian distinctions is different mapping of linguistic terms onto the same conceptual field. This is a phenomenon found in all domains of language, not only in the sphere of emotion terms. It typically occurs when a specific configuration of meanings is expressed by a single word in language X and by two or more words in language Y (e.g., the word “horror” embraces the meanings of the words *uzhas* and *otrashchenie*, and the word *toska* contains some parts of the meanings of the words yearning, depression, and anguish).

The second source of distinction is different display rules: American English tends to avoid sending direct negative messages of the kind “I did something bad,” “You made me feel bad,” “You feel bad,” “You are in a bad situation” and replaces them with milder ones, whereas there is no such constraint in Russian. This explains the relative higher frequency of Russian terms for “pity,” “shame,” and “offence.” Overall, the Russian cultural situation allows expression of **negative** feelings in a slightly exaggerated way whereas American English welcomes exaggerated expression of **positive** feelings (consider the desemanticized use of “happy” as compared to *schastlivyi*).

Thus, in the Russian cultural situation, it is acceptable to tell a person X that the experiencer feels sorry for X, or to admit that (s)he feels offended by X. It is even polite to exaggerate one’s feeling of shame before X for insignificant inconveniences caused by the speaker. The English language prefers to spare the feelings of both the experiencer and the object of emotion in situations potentially

embarrassing for either of the communicants by using generalized terms like “to feel bad.” This tendency in the expression of emotions is a manifestation of a more general tendency to avoid direct negative messages. Thus, as compared to Russian, English favors sentence negation over constituent negation “I don’t [think he will come]” as opposed to *Ia dumaiu, chto on ne [pridet]*. English also favors implicit negation over explicit negation “It is hardly surprising” as opposed to *Neudivitel’no, chto...*

Appendix. “pity” cluster in Russian and English

As mentioned above, Russian *zhalost’* (pity) is, according to some researchers, a uniquely Russian emotion; consider recent work by [Levontina and Zalizniak 2001: 317-320]. The origin of this view can be traced back to the portrayal of this emotion in Russian philosophy and literature, especially religious philosophy. Also important is the usage of this term in Russian dialects and in XIX century Russian language. Its contemporary usage, however, suggests a different semantic image of *zhalost’*, one which is closer to English “pity,” especially if viewed in the context of the entire “pity” cluster. Although Russian *zhalost’* and English “pity” are by no means interchangeable and each possesses its own semantic and phraseological peculiarities, their differences have been exaggerated. The conceptual maps of Russian and English “pity” are no more distinct from each other than those of “fear” or “anger” and, in the majority of cases, it is possible to convey the general meaning of “pity” words across these two languages, often giving direct word-for-word translation.

On the whole, the English and Russian conceptual maps of “pity” have similar structures. Both languages distinguish between what might be called “objective” and “subjective” “pity.” The former occurs when the object of the feeling experiences real hardship of which (s)he is aware and which (s)he experiences as such. “Subjective” “pity” occurs when the experiencer thinks that the object of emotion is in a bad situation, but the object of emotion does not share this feeling. The former kind of “pity” forms the semantic core of such expressions as English “compassion,” “sympathy,” “empathy,” “concern,” “to feel for somebody” and the Russian *sochuvstvie* (sympathy), *sostradanie* (compassion), *uchastie* (compassionate concern). The latter is found in English “pity” and “sorry” and in Russian *zhalost’* (pity), *zhalko,* ‘*zhal’* (sorry). Consider “I pity him – he is such a fool;” *Mne ego zhalko – on*

takoi durak, but not “*I have compassion <sympathy> for him – he’s such a fool,” **Ia emu sochuvstvuiu – on takoi durak*. This does not mean *zhalost’* cannot be felt when the object of emotion does indeed suffer; but suffering is not a prerequisite for such a feeling.

In both Russian and English, the most neutral and the most frequent term for ‘pity’ is “sorry” or *zhalko, zhal’*. The words express the idea of regret concerning some person being in a bad situation, semantically explicated as follows:

“X feels sorry for Y,” *X-u zhalko <zhal’> Y-a* = ‘X thinks Y is in a bad situation; X feels bad because of that’.

A stronger kind of “subjective” “pity” is expressed by the English “pity” and the Russian *zhalost’*. Unlike “sorry” and *zhalko (zhal’)*, “pity” and *zhalost’* imply not only a bad feeling concerning someone’s misfortune, but also some good feeling towards the person in distress, potentially implying a desire to do something to amend the situation; consider *nezhnaia zhalost’* (tender pity), *sdelat’ chto-libo iz zhalosti* (to do something out of pity).

“Pity” and *zhalost’* describe, perhaps, the widest range of feelings. These include a tender and somewhat painful emotion, occasionally termed “benevolent pity” in psychology (consider “to melt with pity,” *rastaiat’ ot zhalosti*; “to cry with pity,” *plakat’ ot zhalosti*, “painful pity,” *zhguchaia zhalost’* (lit. stinging pity), “heart-piercing pity,” *pronizitel’naia zhalost’*). They range to a cold and contemptuous feeling, unpleasant and denigrating for its object (“contemptuous pity,” “humiliating pity,” “cold pity,” *prezritel’naia zhalost’*, *unizitel’naia zhalost’*, *kholodnaia zhalost’*). While the former kind of “pity” implies a good attitude towards the object prompted by the unfortunate situation in which the object finds him/herself, the latter implies a bad attitude, which the situation may aggravate. In the latter case, the experiencer sees the object as guilty of creating the bad situation through his/her own ineptitude or improper behavior.

“Pity” and *zhalost’* can be caused by observing intense suffering (this is more typical of benevolent pity) or it can occur without stimulus when the experiencer considers the object of emotion to be in a bad situation (this is more typical of contemptuous pity): *ispytyvat’ zhalost’ k golodnym detiam* (to feel pity for the hungry children); *Ia ispytyvaju zhalost’ k etomu idiotu* (I feel pity for this idiot). “Pity” and *zhalost’* can also be felt towards the self: “self-pity,” *zhalost’ k sebe*.

Overall, this type of feeling can be explicated as follows: ‘X thinks that Y is in a bad situation; X doesn’t want Y to be in a bad situation; X

feels bad because of that; X can feel something good toward Y; X can want to do something good for Y.’ *Zhalost’* (pity) towards others is conceptualized as a fundamental human ability whose lack is viewed as a serious character flaw. A person who does not feel and show “pity” in appropriate circumstances is considered cruel; consider “pitiless” and *bezzhalostnyi*. Excess of “pity” can also be viewed negatively, though it is not as strongly censured: consider the slightly ironic coloring of “bleeding heart” or *serdobol’nyi* (soft-hearted; lit. heart-paining), usually in reference to women – *serdobol’naia starushka* (a soft-hearted old woman).

The verbs “to pity” and *zhalet’* demonstrate more discrepancy than the corresponding nouns. While both “pity” and *zhalost’* can be used in a wide range of contexts, “to pity” and *zhalet’* are more specialized, with the former being more frequent in “contemptuous” contexts, and the latter gravitating towards “benevolent” contexts: consider “He pities her” vs. *On ee zhaleet*. The English phrase describes only a feeling, and not a very kind feeling, whereas the Russian phrase refers not only to a kind attitude, but also its behavioral manifestations. Russian *zhalet’* can mean “to spare,” especially in the perfective aspect: *On ee pozhalel i otpustil* (He had pity on her and let her go; lit. He pitied her and let her go). However, this difference does not mean that English has no concept of benevolent pity; rather, it is expressed by different means. In Russian, both the verb and the noun carry this meaning; in English, it is only the noun.

“Compassion” and its derivatives, as well as the Russian *sostradanie* and its derivatives, express the idea of co-suffering, feeling good towards the object and doing something in order to help the object. Russian *sostradanie* implies a greater degree of objective suffering on the part of the object than its English correlate. “Compassion,” especially in the expression “to have compassion” is used in many contexts where Russian *sostradanie* would have been too strong and a speaker of Russian would use *zhalost’* or *zhalet’* instead: “Turn the TV down a bit, have some compassion for me;” *Sdelai televizor potishe, pozhalei menia*, but not *Sdelai televizor potishe, proiavi ko mne sostradanie* (Turn the TV down a bit, show me some compassion). Thus, English “pity” and “compassion” together roughly equal Russian *zhalost’*, *zhalet’* and *sostradanie*. Overall, this type of feeling can be explicated as follows: ‘Y is suffering; X feels how Y is feeling; X feels bad; X feels something good toward Y; X wants to do something good for Y.’

Both languages have the concept of co-feeling, understanding another person’s predicament combined with a good attitude towards that person but not necessarily an active involvement or a desire to help. “Sympathy” and *sochuvstvie* can be felt for someone who is in a difficult situation, but are usually manifested only verbally rather than through action aimed at relieving the situation: consider the common expression *vyrazit’ sochuvstvie* (to express one’s sympathy) and the much rarer expression *sdelat’ chto-libo iz sochuvstviia* (do something out of sympathy). *Pity*, *compassion*, and *sostradanie* and *zhalost’*, on the other hand, prompt action: it is perfectly normal to do things *out of compassion* or *out of pity*, *iz sostradaniia* or *iz zhalosti*. Overall, this type of feeling can be explicated as follows: ‘Y is in a bad situation; X understands how Y is feeling; X feels bad; X feels something good toward Y’.

An even more perfunctory kind of ‘PITY’ is expressed by “condolence” and *sobolezovanie*, a ritual verbal expression of one’s sympathy, usually for someone whose relative has died: *Prinite moi sobolezovaniia* (Accept my condolences).

So far, we have seen that English and Russian conceptual maps of “pity” overlap, if not in exact wording, then in the gradations of the feeling. However, there are some areas where they differ. English has the concept of “empathy,” which is quite important and involves any kind of co-feeling, not necessarily co-suffering [consider Jabbi, Swart and Keyzers 2007 on the neuropsychology of empathy, which involves the mapping of the negative or positive bodily states of others onto the experiencer’s own]. This is also expressed by the phrase “fellow feeling.” Russian lacks this concept: it has been borrowed as a psychological term – *empatiia*, but has not yet entered conversational Russian. Although neither “empathy” nor “fellow feeling” technically mean that the object of emotion is in a bad situation, in reality, many contexts in which they are used are identical to those of “sympathy,” co-feeling with someone in distress. A closely related meaning is expressed by the English “to feel for somebody.” Again, technically, it does not necessarily point to any suffering on the part of the object, it is mostly likely to be used to express one’s pain over somebody’s misfortune: “I’ve a fellow feeling for their woes;” “I feel for him – he’s had some real troubles;” “I have great empathy for his pain.”

While these words can also be used to express co-joy as well as co-suffering, they are the preferred means of expression for “pity”-like emotions, because, unlike other “pity” words, they do not contain an indication that the object of emotion is in a bad situation, thus avoiding

the potentially humiliating and unpleasant components of “pity”. English, with its avoidance of direct negative messages, prefers such neutral terms for the expression of “pity”-like feelings.

Russian lacks one-word terms for the expression of co-feeling, although it can be expressed through phrases: consider *la perezhivaiu za nego* (I am concerned about him; lit.: I experience for him). However, Russian has another kind of “pity” which is not developed in English, namely, compassion or sympathy-associated behavior. This behavior is manifested in action aimed at relieving the predicament of the object of emotion. It is denoted by the word *uchastie* (concerned help, doing good things for somebody who is in a bad situation because of compassion for this person; lit. “participation”): consider *On proiavil bol'shoe uchastie k okazavshimsia v bede sem'iam* (He did a lot for the families in distress; lit. ‘He showed great participation for the families in distress).

As we can see from this comparison, English and Russian do indeed differ. They differ, however, in ways unlike those ascribed to these languages by previous research.

NOTES

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2 Without any attempt to create a comprehensive list of sources for these components of the “Russian soul” stereotype, let us merely mention some of the philosophical and scholarly sources which refer to them. These include works by Berdiaev 1918, Fedotov 1938-1939/1992 and scholarly works by Boym 1995, McDaniel 1996, Rancour-Laferrriere 1995.

3 Interestingly, contemporary anthropological research on Russian behavioral patterns, table conversations, reactions, etc. highlights the same concepts as central to the “Russian *dusha*”; consider [Dale 2000: 150-156]. They emphasize the importance of *dushevnost'* (soulfulness), communality, hospitality, giving. In this context, *perestroika*, which switched Russia from the communality of socialism to the individuality

of capitalism is perceived as killing the Russian soul: “life and soul were disappearing”. Moreover, *dusha* (soul) is viewed as a predominantly Russian attribute. In typical everyday Russian discourse, one comes across the collocation “Russian soul,” but *dusha* does usually not appear with the names of other ethnicities [Dale 2000: 140].

4 In “Evgeny Onegin”, Pushkin famously juxtaposed another pair of ‘inexplicable sadness’ words: English spleen and Russian *khandra*; consider the lines

Недуг, которого причину	But there's no need that I dissemble
Давно бы отыскать пора,	His illness - name it how you choose
Подобный английскому <i>сплину</i> ,	The English spleen it may resemble,
Короче: русская <i>хандра</i>	'Twas in a word the Russian blues
Им овладела понемногу...	He spared us, true, one piece of folly...

However, in this paper, these two words are not considered among the currently active means of expressing this concept because in both contemporary Russian and English they have become obsolete; Merriam-Webster’s online dictionary marks *spleen* in the meaning of “melancholy” as archaic, whereas McMillan’s English dictionary for Advanced Learners does not mention this meaning at all. Though the *Малый академический словарь русского языка* does not provide a stylistic label for *khandra*, the two examples given there are both from the XIX century. The Russian National Corpus returns 360 occurrences for *khandra* (with a meaning somewhat like ‘bad mood’), whereas *toska* shows 10,619 occurrences. In both English and Russian, “depression” and *depressiia*, respectively, have replaced “spleen” and *khandra* as indications of persistent, and, often inexplicable, low mood.

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