

# PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ISSUES IN YAKUT LANGUAGE

## ПСИХОЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКИЕ ИССЛЕДОВАНИЯ НА МАТЕРИАЛЕ ЯКУТСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

### YAKUT DİLİ MALZEMELERİNE GÖRE PSİKOLİNGÜİSTİK ARAŞTIRMALAR

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#### ABSTRACT

The paper is aimed at investigating the ethnocultural specificity of traditional world view of Yakut speakers on the basis of associative verbal nets. The research is aimed at study of traditional world view through the free association experiment's database realized in indigenous communities. The associative verbal nets reveal the peculiarities of spiritual and material culture, ethnic stereotypes of linguistic behavior, traditional beliefs and specificity of ethnic world view.

**Keywords:** psycholinguistics, free association experiment, associative-verbal nets, language consciousness, language identity, associative dictionary.

#### АННОТАЦИЯ

В статье исследуется этнокультурная специфика традиционного образа мира якутов на материале ассоциативно-вербальных сетей. Исследование посвящено анализу традиционного образа мира посредством свободного ассоциативного эксперимента. Ассоциативно-вербальные сети раскрывают особенности духовной и материальной культуры, этнические стереотипы речевого поведения, традиционных верований и этнического мировоззрения.

**Ключевые слова:** психолингвистика, свободный ассоциативный эксперимент, ассоциативно-вербальная сеть, языковое сознание, языковая идентичность, ассоциативный словарь.

#### ÖZET

Makalede çağrışım-sözel şebeke malzemelerine dayalı Yakutlarda dünya görüşünün geleneksel etnokültürel özellikleri incelenmiştir. Serbest çağrışım denemeleri esas alarak geleneksel dünya bakışı tahlil edilmiştir. Çağrışım – sözel şebekeler maddi ve manevi kültürü, konuşma tarzlarının etnik stereotipleri, geleneksel inanca ile etnik dünya görüşünü açıklamaktadırlar.

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**Anahtar kelimeler:** Psikolinguistik, serbest çağrışım denemeler, çağrışım-sözel şebeke, dilsel şuur, dilsel benlik, çağrışım sözlüğü.

## **Introduction**

Language consciousness and world view, along with cross-cultural communication and speech ontogenesis constitute some of the main areas of contemporary psycholinguistic research. In particular, it is concerned with describing and explaining how cultural ideals and values are formed and reflected in language, what role linguistic units play in determining the ethnic cultures, and especially how they contribute to the formation of ethnic and cultural features of linguistic identity.

Ethnoculturally oriented psycholinguistic research is premised on the assumption that language not only communicates, but that it also defines a peoples' culture, nature, history, humanity and ancestry (UNESCO 2009). The main object of study of ethnopsycholinguistics is the world view which exists in the minds of individuals who identify themselves with a particular culture. This cognitive construct is hypothesized to be a universal mechanism for cultural adaptation. That is, it functions as a kind of coordinate map, and individuals in a particular ethnic culture act within its system of coordinates, for the most part unconsciously, in order to match their behaviour with the culturally established norms. In the course of development of a cultural group, an individual world view may change, while the ethno-cultural constants of the group itself — elements of the group's collective unconscious as a whole — do not (Lurye 1997). In so far as linguistic identity reflects the character of interaction between a specific cultural group and the surrounding world, an analysis of concrete forms of verbal expressions, sampled from the representatives of the group, may be used to study their world view at a particular point in their history. On the basis of this information, inferences can be made with respect to the delineating features of the cultural group as a whole.

## **Theoretical issues**

From the early 90s the Moscow Psycholinguistic School has been actively developing a new methodological program for ethnopsycholinguistic research. The central problem upon which research is centered is the investigation of the ethnoculturally specific form of linguistic cognition mediated by the environmental conditions of some particular culture.

According to Evgeniy Tarasov (1996), the main underlying causal factors of misunderstanding between communicators of different cultures are not linguistic, but rather they stem from the communicators' differences in their national consciousnesses. In the course of cross-cultural communication various aspects of culture are exchanged by means of specific linguistic markers, such as words, phraseological expressions and texts. Therefore, a theory of cross-cultural communication calls for identification and measurement of national, culture-specific characteristics of linguistic identity. In addition to their theatrical value, such efforts will also contribute to the development of methods that could be used to prevent communicative conflicts in cross-cultural education.

Following E. Tarasov, language consciousness is understood as a culture-specific world view mediated by language — i.e. it is conceptualized as a combination of perceptual, conceptual and procedural forms of knowledge linked to objects in the real world. In the Moscow School of Psycholinguistics, the notion of language consciousness is

compared with the notion of world view. In Russian psychology, world view is conceptualized as a set of mental representations of the material world mediated by objective, externally-fixed meanings, which are correlated with internal, cognitive mechanisms amenable to conscious manipulation. Following A.A.Leontiev, language is defined as a system of orientation, necessary for an individual to function in the world of his/her own culture — i.e. in his/her immediate social and material milieu - and consciousness as a system which presents the individual the image of the world into which he/she is included — i.e. his/her behaviours and emotional states (Leontiev 1997: 272).

Linguistic cognition is conceptualized as an aggregate of mental structures, the development of which is based on social knowledge of verbal signs (Tarasov 1988), or as mental representations which can be externalized by linguistic means, such as individual lexemes, phraseological expressions, texts and associative thesauri. Linguistic cognition integrates the intellectual knowledge generated by the subject mainly in the act of communicative interaction, and sensory knowledge that arises in the mind as a result of perceptual information processing which occurs when an individual receives and processes sensory input in the course of purposeful activity (Tarasov 2000: 3).

The world view (or the ethnic picture of the world) is a major component of culture and contains all the essential elements of cultural knowledge which an individual, belonging to a particular culture, needs in order to adapt to both natural and social components of his/her surrounding environment. This is the lens, so to say, through which people see the world in which to act.

The structure of the world view is shaped in the early stages of ethnogenesis, and remains largely immutable throughout the life of an ethnic group. It defines ethnic identity and uniqueness of a particular culture and, hence, its carriers – the members of an ethnic group comprising a social community characterized by a specific cultural model which mediates the nature of their activity in the world. It, therefore, operates in accordance with special laws aimed at maintaining for extended periods of time, even at times of major social change, internal patterns of relationships of such cultural models which are unique to a given socio-cultural community. All representatives of a particular ethnic group possess similar mentalities, by which we, after Svetlana V.Lurye, mean "a set of conscious and unconscious attitudes associated with one's ethnic traditions" (Lurye 1997). The central object of the study is the image of the world, existing in the minds of the holders of a particular culture, and which will vary from one culture to another. It is the image of the world is the universal mechanism of adaptation of the ethnic group to the outside world, because they set the coordinate system in which the representative acts the same ethnic culture: in the process of development of ethnos image of the world may change, but remain unchanged belonging to the collective unconscious elements of ethnic unconscious - ethnic constants.

Through the language consciousness displays the specificity of interaction with the world of a particular ethnic group; analysis of the specific forms of expression of the language consciousness allows you to explore the perfect shape of the culture of a particular ethnic group in a certain historical time.

One way to externalize linguistic consciousness is by means of the free-association experiment. From the data obtained through such an experiment it is possible to describe the nature of a particular ethnic group's world view – i.e. the knowledge which the members of the group of a given culture rely on in their verbal and nonverbal behavior. According to N.V. Ufimtseva, the study of linguistic consciousness with the help of the free

association experiment makes it possible to derive the systematic organization of the content of some culture's collective consciousness, which is reflected in its language. Also, it enables the researcher to ascertain the systematic organization of the linguistic cognition of the members of the culture as a whole and at the same time it shows the uniqueness and non-repetitiveness of the world view associated with any culture (Ufimtseva 1996).

The associative verbal nets reveal the peculiarities of spiritual and material culture, ethnic stereotypes of behavior, traditional beliefs and the specificity of an ethnic world view. The links of verbal associations translate into assemblages of ideas, identities and behaviours which find their owner experientially located in self-contained worlds of people, events, values, norms and constraints (Rapport, Overing 2002).

### **Psycholinguistic issues in Yakut language**

The Yakut language is of special interest for the study due to several factors: first, it belongs to the Turkic group of languages, and has retained most archaic features, secondly, Yakuts as an ethnos for four centuries, are in close cultural and linguistic contact with the Russian ethnos, and on small peoples of the North (Evens, Evenki, Chukchi and Yukagir) - in more prolonged contact.

Study the language consciousness of the peoples living in the Northern territories, in particular, in the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia), is of interest not only from the point of view of studying the problems of intercultural communication, but also for studying the ethnic consciousnesses of people in long-term cultural and linguistic contact. The study of speech activity in a multilingual and multicultural environment are for the Republic of Sakha (Yakutia) of particular relevance, since the Republic is implementing an active language policy aimed at the preservation and development of the linguistic and cultural diversity. In republic are functioning two state languages - Russian and Yakut, and five languages of numerically small peoples of the North. Besides, the system of education of the Republic pays much attention to the teaching of foreign languages. In this regard, study the problems of bilingualism and associated features of intercultural dialogue and learning, is especially important.

The North-Eastern Federal University of Yakutsk has been conducting psycholinguistic research on linguistic identities and world views of the peoples of the North. On the basis of this research a dictionary of free verbal associations (<http://adictsakha.nsu.ru>) was made.

Between 2006 and 2009 a large number of free-association experiments were conducted in our laboratory. Verbal stimuli were chosen from a list of 112 words originally drawn from the Slavic Dictionary (Russian, Belorussian, Bulgarian and Ukrainian Languages). This word list was discovered to constitute the core of the linguistic cognition of native Russian speakers, based on the material from the Russian Frequency Dictionary and several multi-step association experiments, which included both the direct experiment (from stimulus to reaction) and the reverse experiment (in which respondents' reactions are used as a stimuli) were carried out using these words as verbal stimuli.

To this word list were added words which reflected important for the northern cultural groups meanings (e.g. deer, mountain, sea, horse...etc and their antonyms). In total each experimental questionnaire contained 140 verbal stimuli. In the experiments participated 1000 students of the Yakut ethnic background, from a variety of higher education institutions of Yakutia, aged 18-23 years, for whom Yakut was the native language. The

experimental groups contained approximately equal numbers of male and female participants. With regards to the representatives of the minor indigenous peoples of the North (Evens, Evenki, Yukagirs), due to their already small number, all native speakers of these ethnic groups were included in the experiments irrespective of age and gender.

During the experiment a respondent was given a stimulus questionnaire and was asked to write down the very first verbal association that came to mind in reaction to each stimulus. All the explanations of the experimental procedures were done in the native language of the respondent, carefully avoiding the insertion of Russian which has become a frequent practice in the modern speech of many native Yakut speakers. The respondent had to complete the experimental questionnaire in 12-15 minutes.

We believe, in accordance with the theory, that the data from these free-association experiments reflect associative-verbal networks at the level of linguistic cognition.

Associative dictionary fixes and measures of cultural peculiarities of the language consciousnesses by matching associative fields of the same words in languages.

Today in world practice there are only two cases enough to fully secure the national consciousnesses in the form of associative dictionaries norms is known Thesaurus of the English language J. Kish (The Associative Thesaurus of English//G.Kiss, C. Armstrong, R.Milroy, J.Piper 1972) and Russian Associative Dictionary (edited by Y.N.Karaulov, N.V.Ufimtseva, E.F.Tarasov, Y.A.Sorokin, G.A.Cherkasova), which is treated as a tool of analysis of linguistic ability," reflecting the manifestations of language consciousness, metaphorical interpretation of reality, frames typical ethno-cultural situations.

The associative data of Yakut language reveals the ethnocultural specificity of the world view of Yakut speakers. Our research shows the vitality of ethnic stereotypes and traditional beliefs in linguistic behavior of modern Yakut speakers.

We have used these data to explain three related psycholinguistic phenomena:

- ethnocultural specificity of language consciousness of the peoples of the North living in Yakutia, in particular, of Yakut speakers,
- common and distinct features of language consciousness of the peoples of the North living in Yakutia,
- attributes of bilingualism and multilingualism peculiar to Yakutia/

Below I present the results of these free association experiments. It allows show the ethnocultural specificity of language consciousness of Yakut speakers.

**Example.** In Yakut language there are two words to express the concepts of spirit and soul: *duuha* and *kut*. The first word *duuha* originates from the Russian word *dusha* corresponding to *soul* in English. The other word *kut* is of Turkic origin and it also corresponds in meaning to Russian *dusha*.

Two free association experiments\* were conducted, one for each of the aforementioned words. The word-stimulus *duuha* (soul) produced the following set of most frequent responses: *yraas* / *clean* (101) <sup>1</sup>; *kut* / *soul* (96); *kihi* / *man* (71); *abaasy* / *devil*, *sanaa* / *thought* (60); *kut-sur/soul-spirit* (43); *ichchi* / *ghost* (37); *surekh* / *heart* (27); *sanaa* / *internal thought* (26); *elbut kihi* / *deceased person* (25); *elyy* / *death* (20); *salgyn* / *air*, *syrdyk* / *light* (14); *aura* / *aura*, *khallaan* / *heaven* (13); *kestubet* / *invisible* (11); *baar* / *existing*, *kihi duuhata* / *human soul*, *keter* / *flying*, *ytyyr* / *crying* (10); *tangara* / *god*; and *gray* / *paradise* (9).

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• Author's note: The number of Yakut respondents participated in free association experiment is 1220 persons.

For the stimulus *kut-sur* (*spirit*) the most frequent reaction was the word *duuha* / *soul* (257). It suggests that these two words (*duuha* and the pair word *kut-sur*) in the modern Yakut language are synonymous. The other frequently produced reactions were *itegel* / *belief* (82), *kihi* / *man* (48), *ayii* / *deity ayii* (31), *abaasy*, *ichchi* / *devil, ghost* (14), *eye* / *mother* (13), *eye kut* / *mother kut* (11), *buor* / *soil* (9).

According to the traditional Yakut world view, all in the world has *kut*. The human soul consists of three elements: *eye kut* (*mother kut*), *buor kut* (*soil kut*), *salgyn kut* (*air kut*). The Yakut people believed (and believe) that the emergence of a new life was not only due to a physiological act between a man and a woman, but also to the intervention of the heavenly deities - *aiyy*. The goddess of fertility *Aiyyhyt*, which acts on the orders of the supreme deity *Urung Aiyy Toyon*, implants an embryo of the future life – *eye kut* (*mother kut*) – into a man. A man, who received this *mother-kut*, becomes active, and "creates" the beginning of life by transferring *mother-kut* into the bosom of a woman. Yakuts say: "*Aybyt agata, terepput iyete*" (*the father-creator, the mother-giving birth*) (Bravina 2005: 39).

R. Bravina notes that at the time of the birth the child's *kut* is supplemented by two elements. At the time of contact of the newborn to the ground (Yakut women in former times gave birth on the dirt floor), it inculcated *buor kut* (*soil kut*), and with his first cry entered its body *salgyn kut* (*air kut*). The set of three elements formed the basis of the *kut* of human life - the ability of its existence to a full and, therefore, no one of them meant to disability, in particular human disease.

According to traditional notions of Yakuts *kut* is characteristic of all natural objects, including animals, but *kut-sur* is peculiar only to man (human being) A. Kulakovsky wrote: "The words "sur" and "kut" were almost always used together, so take them as synonyms, or simply within the meaning of the word "kut" (Kulakovsky 1979: 59). A. Kulakovsky wrote that if a person was ill, the Yakuts explained it because the evil spirits *abaasy* steal and torture his *eye kut*. "*If a child is very frightened, his mother-soul "bounces"*. (The Yakut expression "*kut ystanar*», literally *the soul jumps* means the Russian expression "*soul left in the heel*", that is to say to be very scared).

For ancient Yakuts a child until seven years was not considered a man. The child becomes fully human only when he acquired personality traits: the ability to think independently, to express their thoughts, to separate "good" from "evil", to orientate correctly in the world and to act in accordance with accepted rules of behavior, depending on the particular situation. These qualities, apparently, are not attached to *kut*, and they are likely acquired with *sur* (Bravina 2005: 45). So, the notion *kut-sur* in Yakut culture reflects the whole complex of traditional representations based on ethnic ideas about the universe, world and life's creation.

Individual responses also reflect the full range of meanings that are included in this concept: traditional belief *aiyy*, fate and destiny of man, the guardians of human *kut*, its various manifestations (*ran, stopped, broke, appeared, disappeared, rose, etc.*), its tripartite nature (*mother, air, soil*).

The reactions obtained on this word-stimulus argue that the traditional "mother" basis of Yakut culture not only continues to exist in the historical memory of the people, but also of the potential energy of its ethnic cultural development.

Thus, we can notice a living link between the historical past experience and the language of the contemporary Yakuts. The associative network reflects the information

containing the ethno-cultural specificity of the world-view of a particular ethnic group, the past and present existing in their language consciousness.

In response to the stimulus *kihi /man, human being* the Yakut speaker's association field *kihi /man, human being* consists of the following associations in order of decreasing frequency — *d'on/people* (89), *aymah/relative* (65), *suohu/livestock* (56), *er kihi/man* (40), *min / I* (23) (19%), *tyynnaak / living* (20), *kiil/animal, eydeeh /intelligent* (18), *uol /boy* (17), *hara /black* (16) *ikki anahtaah/two-legged* (14), *aailga ogoto/for nature* (7%), *tiinartiinnaah/living* (7%), *uchugei/good* (7%), *jol/body* (6%), *ayilga /nature* (5).

According to Yakut beliefs a human being is closely connected to nature and is considered a part of it. This is reflected in the characteristic word-pairings such as *kihi-suohu* which literally means *human-livestock* and signifies the unity of the living world in a sense of a connection between a human being and a domestic animal, which in ancient times lived side-by-side indoors in order to keep each other warm. The association *human-child of nature* reflects the primary concept of Yakut system of beliefs, in accordance with which, nature is considered a single living organism whose other components, including the human being, exist harmoniously and in agreement. The human being in this world view does not have a dominant place; he/she is simply a part of nature, no more or less important than any other element.

In the 18th century, the great French enlightener of North-HP Montesquieu main factor shaping and culture, and national character of the considered climate. «Geography determines history, and together they create the culture», says doctor of Philology C.Г.Тер-Минасова in his book «War and peace languages and cultures» (Ter-Minasova 2007: 100) .

Nature is not just a landscape, territory; it has always been a fundamental principle of life. Genesis nation inseparably with the natural environment, for any man and ethnos is a part of the biosphere. So, mentality, traditions, norms of conduct of peoples of the North largely determined by the terms of the geographical environment. Inherent properties of their nature steel careful attitude to natural objects, its plant and animal life, animation, impersonation of natural phenomena, originating from the traditional beliefs. (Maksimov 1992: 102).

Similar geographical and cultural contexts influence on the formation of the similarities in the language consciousness of the people. North, as a cultural and historical type of civilization, is defined as socio-cultural community of people with known and marked stable traits and characteristics: presence of language, original traditional culture, and environment, of the common economic and spiritual spheres of life.

Concerning the Yakut people, we can note that the content of their language consciousness is marked ethno culturally and therefore it contains a substantial layer of traditional knowledge and representation. Obviously, the linguistic policy and the approaches of language teaching, implemented early in 1990, proved fruitful

Finally, it is possible to conclude that the data of free association experiment (associative-verbal networks) in so far as they reflect conscious and unconscious layers of the mind, especially within the context of inter-cultural contact in a multicultural and multilingual environment, present interest not only for the investigation of a variety of scientific problems, but also of many issues of everyday life. The investigation of language consciousness with the help of associative dictionaries allows the researcher to derive the content of cultural world views, its ethnocultural specificity and uniqueness and enables

him/her to fixate and thereby preserve these indicators of ethnic mentality for their transmission to future generations.

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