

РАЗДЕЛ I. ТЕОРИЯ ЯЗЫКА

УДК 811.111(73)

DOI: 10.18384/2310-712X-2019-4-7-12

THE CONCEPT OF THE FRONTIER: ITS LINGUISTIC AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE IN AMERICAN ENGLISH

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Abstract. The article deals with the linguistic and cultural aspects of the concept in question. Special emphasis is made on the importance of diachronic and synchronic approach to the issue under consideration. Otherwise stated, the article is concerned with some features of the formation and evolution of the concept of the Frontier in American English, the modern state of affairs in so far as the Frontier is concerned, as well as the significance of its awareness in understanding the conceptual and linguistic worldview of the Americans. Turning to authoritative dictionaries and reference books, the author gives a concrete definition of the word “Frontier” in American English, as well as the interpretation of the term “concept” used in the article. Numerous examples illustrate the influence of the above-mentioned concept on the vocabulary of the American variant of English. Several lexical strata which have appeared as a result of the westward movement of the settlers are adduced, namely: words denoting various representatives of flora and fauna; borrowings from American Indian languages; words and word-combinations which have become phraseological units, but which had a concrete material meaning in the 19th century. Besides, a new comprehension of the analyzed concept in the second half of the 20th – the beginning of the 21st century is given.

Keywords: concept, Frontier, American studies, worldview, American character.

ЯЗЫКОВОЕ И КУЛЬТУРНОЕ ЗНАЧЕНИЕ КОНЦЕПТА «ФРОНТИР» В АМЕРИКАНСКОМ ВАРИАНТЕ АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА

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Аннотация. Статья посвящена языковым и культурным аспектам концепта «Фронтир». Особое внимание уделено важности диахронического и синхронического подходов к изучению данного вопроса: в статье освещаются некоторые черты формирования и эволю-

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ции рассматриваемого концепта в американском варианте английского языка, а также его значимость при изучении понятийной и языковой картины мира американцев. Обращаясь к авторитетным словарям и справочным изданиям, автор определяет точное значение слова "frontier" в американском английском, а также то понимание термина «концепт», которое используется в статье. Приводятся многочисленные примеры влияния концепта «Фронтир» на словарный состав американского варианта английского языка. Выделяется несколько пластов лексики, появившихся в результате освоения Дикого Запада, а именно: названия из мира флоры и фауны; слова, пришедшие из языков американских индейцев; слова и словосочетания, ставшие фразеологизмами, но имевшие конкретное вещественное значение в XIX в., во время передвижения переселенцев на запад. Кроме того, в статье приводится информация о новом осмыслении данного концепта во второй половине XX – начале XXI вв.

Ключевые слова: концепт, Фронтир, страноведение США, картина мира, американский характер

First and foremost, it is essential to clarify what is meant by the term "concept" in the present paper. Following the definition of the term in The Concise Dictionary of Cognitive Terms, we believe that it is a mental unit of our mind and of the informational structure, reflecting the knowledge and experience of a person. Thus, concepts are directly connected with thinking processes and with our perception of the world, or worldview¹.

Next, it is necessary to understand the meaning of the word "frontier". For example, in Collins COBUILD Dictionary it is defined as follows²:

1. The border between two countries.
2. When you are talking about the western part of America before the twentieth century, you use frontier to refer to the area beyond the part settled by Europeans.
3. The frontiers of something, especially knowledge, are the limits to which it extends.

¹ Концепт // Краткий словарь когнитивных терминов / Е. С. Кубрякова, В. З. Демьянков, Ю. Г. Панкрац, Л. Г. Лузина. М.: МГУ им. М. В. Ломоносова, 1996. С. 90.

² Frontier // Collins COBUILD Dictionary. London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006. P. 585.

...pushing back the frontiers of science.

...the frontiers of medicine

Interestingly, the word "frontier" is one of the 10000 most commonly used words in the dictionary in question. However, it is the second meaning of the word that is relevant for the present paper. Turning to The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture, we can find a related definition of the word³:

Frontier – the area where people have never lived before, that not much is known about, especially in the western US before the 20th century.

It follows from the definitions adduced above that the concept of the Frontier is inextricably linked with the early history of the USA. When the country was first settled by Puritans, people lived mainly on the Atlantic coast of North America. But they wanted more space and tried to cross the limits of settled territories and go west. However, there were a number of barriers on their way, both geographical and political. Basically, what these people found when they went west was wilder-

³ Frontier // The Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture. Pearson Education Limited, 2005. P. 556.

ness, so they had to clear their own land, and build their own homes, and hunt or grow their own food.

A family of settlers might be a day's journey from another family. This pattern created frontier communities that had to rely completely on their own resources. Besides making everything they used themselves, they also developed their own music, folklore, and forms of religious worship.

Such a way of life fostered independent philosophy: "I'll do things for myself", "I don't want anyone dictating what I can do". In this setting the so-called "frontier spirit" developed. It was marked by toughness, independence, and self-reliance. It is worth mentioning that the frontier spirit has always had an enormous influence on the entire nation. It goes without saying that Frontier is a concept reflecting the national identity of American people, as it has been stated in the works by Professor T. A. Komova and her disciples [1; 3].

One of the outstanding American historians of the late 19th century, F. J. Turner, claimed that the frontier experience had shaped the American character for all time. In his opinion, the geography and environment of America – particularly the westward expansion and the availability of free land – formed American attitudes and institutions. These peculiarities of the American character are as follows:

1. A spirit of adventurous enterprise: a willingness

to go through any hardship or danger to accomplish an object.

2. Independence of thought and action.

3. An apparent roughness, which some would consider to be rudeness of manners.

4. An American is always whispering to himself:

"I ought to do better" [5].

It should be added that many values and attitudes – good or bad – of present-day America can be traced back to the frontier experience. The frontier stressed values of ruggedness, resourcefulness, and self-reliance.

Thus, the frontier spirit is also closely connected with the concept of individualism, one of the underlying concepts of the American worldview. It is what Ralph Waldo Emerson, the leader of American Transcendentalists, referred to as "rugged individualism" [4, p. 60]. Developing this idea, the authors of the book "Impressions. America Through Academic Readings" state that the Americans are individualistic by nature, and this trait is traced back to the frontier experience [2, p. 13]:

"Americans almost always express a strong preference for individual rather than group values... The emphasis on individualism means that Americans do not like to depend on others. They prefer to solve problems or make decisions themselves.

Another trait of American individualism is distrust of the government. Some political observers believe this distrust came from the frontier experience. The Americans who moved west to the wild frontier were cut off from the political system. Organized government was far away. As a result, people had to survive on their own. In such an environment, self-reliance and individualism became important".

Besides, the linguistic significance of the westward movement cannot be overestimated. For example, the famous American explorers, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, introduced over 2000

words in American English while travelling through the Wild West. Among these words one can mention “buffalo” (the word was known in England, but used in a different meaning – “буйвол”), “rattle-snake” (named so because of the sound it produced with the end of its tail), “rapids” (used as a noun “пороги реки, участки реки с быстрым течением”, formerly used as an adjective), “elk” (which in England meant “лось”, but in America was used to refer to a different animal – “олень вапити”), “mocking-bird” (this name was derived from the bird’s habit to imitate other birds’ songs).

Quite a number of words were borrowed from American Indian languages: “moccasin”, “maize”, “opossum”, “toboggan”, “pemmican” (a mixture of meat, fat and berries). But this was just the beginning. The country was on the move and on the make. As gambling was one of the favourite pastimes of frontiersmen, a few typically American idioms sprang from this activity: “to pass the buck” (from a buckhorn knife, showing who was dealing the cards), “deal” (square deal, fair deal, New Deal, no big deal), “to have an ace up your sleeve”, “to keep a poker face”, “to scoop the jackpot”. Gambling and drinking spread across the West, together with the new words: “saloon”, “bartender”, “bootlegging” (comes from a habit of hiding a flat bottle of whiskey in a leg of a boot to be sold illegally to the natives).

Certainly, frontiersmen encountered American Indians on their way west, and tensions between the two grew, adding a number of words and expressions to American English: “sculp” (a well-known English noun became a rather frightening American English verb), “tomahawk”, “war dance”, “war path”, “long knives” (a name for white men), “fire water” (a name

for alcohol). Some colloquial expressions in American English are, in fact, literal translations from American Indian languages, for example, “no can do”, “long time no see”. It is interesting to mention that a slang word for dollar “buck” is derived from buckskin – a standard unit of trade between American Indians and Europeans.

One more aspect of the concept of Frontier is connected with the fact that the westward expansion was an epic journey full of hardships imposed by the distance and the weather. Frontiersmen distilled their experience through their stories, often mixing fact and fiction. This is manifested in such idioms as “tall talk” (хвастовство, бахвальство, небылицы), “to kick the bucket”, “to face the music”, “to bark up the wrong tree”, “to be in cahoots with someone”, “to stake one’s claim”, “to strike it lucky/rich”.

Even in the 20th and 21st centuries Frontier continues to play an important role in the USA. Politicians have praised the frontier life. Songs and stories have described it in glowing terms. Frontier heroes, such as Daniel Boone, Meriwether Lewis and William Clark, David Crockett, have been admired by generations of the Americans. The Frontier has been described as “wild”, “final”, “new”.

For example, the term “New Frontier” was used by John F. Kennedy in his acceptance speech in 1960. It was the time when the Americans were somewhat piqued by the fact that the Soviet Union outdid them in its space exploration programme. The future president of the USA promised his citizens to catch up with America’s rival:

“We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier – the frontier of the 1960s, the frontier of unknown opportunities and perils, the frontier of unfilled hopes and

unfilled threats... Beyond that frontier are uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of peace and war, unconquered problems of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions of poverty and surplus”¹.

Later the term “New Frontier” developed further to refer to the Kennedy administration’s domestic and foreign programmes.

To conclude: The Frontier is one of the underlying concepts of the American conceptual and linguistic worldview. At pre-

sent it can refer not only to the westward movement of the settlers, but also to quite a few other notions, as well as artifacts – knives, guns, airlines, cars, articles of clothing, TV series. Thus, on the one hand it seems that the grand conquest of the West deteriorated into being exploited by popular culture. However, looking at it from a different perspective, it may be said that it has left an indelible mark on the American character, having shaped it for all time.

Статья поступила в редакцию 11.06.2019

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ПРАВИЛЬНАЯ ССЫЛКА НА СТАТЬЮ

Баранова Л. Л. Языковое и культурное значение концепта «фронтир» в американском варианте английского языка // Вестник Московского государственного областного университета. Серия: Лингвистика. 2019. № 4. С. 7–12.
DOI: 10.18384/2310-712X-2019-4-7-12

FOR CITATION

Baranova L. L. The concept of the frontier: its linguistic and cultural significance in American English. In: *Bulletin of Moscow Region State University. Series: Linguistics*, 2019, no. 4, pp. 7–12.
DOI: 10.18384/2310-712X-2019-4-7-12