

Identity as an Element of Human and Language Universes: Axiological Aspect

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ABSTRACT

Interest to axiosphere as the sphere of values and its correlation with the ever-progressive noosphere as sphere of knowledge of a person is due to comprehension of the modern period in the evolution of society. The aim of the article is to describe an axiological aspect of the research of identity as an element of human and language universes. The material of research is made by the term *identity* and the ways of its representation in Russian and French (nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives). For achievement of a goal of research, we use the cognitive, discursive and semantic approaches to the studying of the axiological aspect of the identity. The article deals with the modern linguistic axiological analysis and offers a detailed account of 'ethnosemimetry' as one of its possible implementations. The work specifies the principles and contexts of the method employment and features an axiological analysis of the lexeme "*identity*" in the French and Russian languages. The term *identity* is in the spotlight of the modern anthropocentric vector of research. It is recommended that interdisciplinary development of research of *identity* should include complex methods of analysis of the identity as an element of human and language universes.

KEYWORDS

Identity, human and language universes,
linguistic axiological analysis, ethnosemimetry

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Introduction

The categories and procedures related to axiology are present more and more often in the latest linguistics research, which provides clarifying the deepest aspects of homo lingualis – "human within language". In connection with the task set by the modern anthropological knowledge to develop a general theory of axiosphere, as well as in the relation to the emergence in linguistics of many new axiologically oriented disciplines like ethnolinguistics, critical discourse analysis, social discourse analysis, political discourse linguistics and others the issues of axiological kind necessarily deal with the definition of

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methods and a combination of adequate methods and techniques of analysis, that rely on paradigm changes in modern linguistics and on the experience in understanding of man and his language.

Modern state of the globalizing world in the era of "postmodernism" makes it particularly relevant to focus on the question of relationship between words and reality, of the clashes of original sustainable concepts within ethnoconsolidating spaces that are open to each other and of the senses of the thriving "interculture". In this regard, the importance of attempts to provide a thorough comprehension of the aspects and problems of axiological linguistic analysis in general and the development of adequate methodology and methods of such an analysis proves to be relevant.

Anthropocentricity of modern linguistics considers a person speaking – homo verbo agens – to be the initial point of consideration. From this angle, language is understood as existential essence of man. Such concepts as "the universe, the universe of man and the universe of language", "image of the world", "life-world" of man, as well as discourse/text, and subjectivity, due to the fundamental ontological paradigm of "People – Language – Culture – World (worlds)" are known as key ones within this paradigm. Since these integrated concepts of modern linguistics have a human origin and have a deep-seated evaluative dimension, they are defined according to their conceptual and linguistic parameters, as well as in the balance of statics and dynamics (Dictionary of foreign words, 1988).

Literature Review

Reflecting the concept of the interdependence of biological, psychological, social and cultural, transcendent and existential ways of human existence of a person (Barreto, 2004; Skrelina, 2009), the certain concepts initiate a question that concerns the categories in the axiological dimension of man and society: identity and personality that can be found in the work of D.A. Shevlyakova (2011), in particular, where while defining the concept of identity three structural components are specified: cognitive, affective (emotional value), behavioral. The cognitive component represents the substantive content (knowledge and understanding of some form of identity, criteria for differentiation and identification). The affective component summarizes the complex of feelings that arouse because of the fact of understanding of identity, and the behavioral component implements a set of behaviors, stereotypes, typical of a particular kind of identity, traditions and customs-related processes of identification (Zheltukhina, 2015).

Interest to axiosphere (the sphere of values) and its correlation with the ever progressive noosphere (sphere of knowledge) of a person is due to comprehension of the modern period in the evolution of society in which the processes of globalization are accompanied by the strengthening of communication, intercultural dialogue, on the one hand, and the intensification of the processes of ethno-cultural as well as and the level of defining its methodological base of research (Zheltukhina, 2014a). On the other hand, it becomes crucially important to define the theoretical background, the personal identity of man and society that is reflected more clearly in monographic studies, for instance (Linguistics and axiology: ethnosemimetry of evaluative meanings, 2011).

The social consequences of the era of high technology and globalization, that significantly increases cognitive and instrumental-material possibilities of man, are such phenomena as identity crisis in some countries, the problem of changing the existent values, the search for the "national idea" and other problems.

Foreign philosophers at the end of XX – the beginning of XXI century have been addressing the issue of identity in terms of axiological approach and in the light of such a social and political process happening in the world as progressive globalization (Drapeau Contim, 2010; Noiriel, 2007). Content analysis of studies on the problem of the dialogue of cultures of the recent decades shows that the representatives of different sciences consider the term identity as an ambiguous phenomenon (Zheltukhina et al., 2016b). If a few centuries ago an ethnic, national or a religious identity was an integral part of any culture, and the cultures themselves (Indian, Chinese, Islamic, etc.) were ethno-centric, now, there is a destruction of the "cultural centeredness". The above-mentioned cultures are not traditional in the classic sense, but they have not become modern (Shayegan, 2004). Along with this, it is noted that the excessive cultivation of cultural identity can develop into racism. The so-called "culture of exclusion" (la culture de l'exclusion) leads to the exclusion of the certain culture from the dialogue of cultures, therefore cultural identity should not exist in isolation, but be open in order to provide everyone with the free choice of identity (Portella, 2004).

Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to describe an axiological aspect of the research of identity as an element of human and language universes.

Research questions

The overarching research question of this study was as follows:

Is the identity an element of human and language universes?

Methods

The material of research is made by the term identity and the ways of its representation in Russian and French (nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives). For achievement of a goal of research, we use the cognitive, discursive and semantic approaches to the studying of the axiological aspect of the identity. Identity is transformed from an abstract philosophical category into one of the key concepts of modern humanitarian science. The essence of identity as a social construct, an integral part of the social world and of the axiosphere of the society can be studied, in our perspective, through the interpretation / measurement of a significant body of discourses / texts in the form of linguistic semimetry. It appears that measurement as one of the possible methods of semantic analysis, is to a large extent similar to axiological analysis, to the key terms of which belongs a scale evaluation, the system of values, a binary evaluation of the extreme points of the detected values and the variability within the possible range of values, the dependency of qualification assessment from the original measurements (Vikulova & Serebrennikova, 2014; Zheltukhina et al., 2016a). At the same time, the measurement provides a methodical correlation of the data analysis with ethno-cultural settings of the relationship establishment. Such



method of an axiological linguistic analysis can be called linguistic ethnosemimetry (Serebrennikova, 2008). This term being based on the concept of "measurement – metry" includes two other specific components: "semiotic" and "ethnic". The first refers to the identification of relevance and contents of the studied symbolic form, being close to a semantic analysis to some extent; the latter, based on the linguistic relativity hypothesis, puts all sorts of integral language symbolic form in the context of belonging to a definite cultural chronotope and cultural deixis.

Data, Analysis, and Results

While addressing the issue of gender identity S.V. Mikhailova (2012) carried out an ethnosemiotics analysis of the term *identity* and the ways of its representation in the language of research (Russian) and the language of the material being under studies (French) which proved the following (Mikhajlova, 2012; Vikulova & Kulagina, 2013; Zheltukhina, 2014b). According to the explanatory dictionaries of the Russian and French languages, the word *identity* is of the Latin origin. Still on the one hand, the French specialists insist on adjectival etymology, directly from the adjective *idem*, and its medieval scholastic derivative *identicus* (Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, 2006). On the other hand, according to the Russian tradition a middle-Latin verb *identificare* – *to equate* (from a class. lat. < *idem* + *facere*, to make smth the same, similar) (Dictionary of foreign words, 1988) is considered to be an etymon. Because the certain Latin adjective is still present in the Russian description of the etymology, the researcher makes a reasonable conclusion that an indicative nature appears basic in defining the concept of identity in the cognition of the two languages. The mentioned above nature indicates the presence of a certain quality, which can be typical of any object, a person, or a phenomenon of reality.

On considering the formal representation of the paradigm of *identity* in French, it became clear that the latter comprises the following elements (Mikhailova, 2012):

– nouns

- *identité* – an abstract noun, denoting simultaneously **identity**, i.e. similarity with others (synonyms *communauté*, *accord*, *ressemblance*), and **uniqueness**, i.e. distinctiveness that allows to determine the subject / person more accurately (synonym *unité*),

- procedure verbal noun *identification* – **identification** or **recognition**,

- terminological nouns, adjectival by the way of their formation, *identificateur*, *identifieur* – unique sign/s allowing to define the data, to identify them and then to distinguish from others (e.g., IT sphere);

– adjective *identique* (describing a person/object on the grounds of their **identity**, **similarity** with other members of the class, or on the basis of **integrity**, **uniqueness**), *identifiable*, *identitaire* (verbal adjectives) – amenable to **identification**, personally **identifiable**;

– the verb *identifier* and its reflexive form *s'identifier* – **to establish the identity**, **the affiliation** by the set of characteristics;

– the adverb *identiquement* to denote the way of functioning of the entity.

It is noted that the phenomenology of identity in the French language is both of **indicative** and **functional** character: along with a common noun, adjectival nouns and adjectives, the signs of activity and action – the verb, the adverb, the verbal noun and adjectives, represent the certain construct. Moreover, the adjectival nature of nouns *identificateur*, *identifieur* is secondary according to the way of derivation. Thus, it is right to emphasize the dominant functional development of the phenomenon in the French consciousness, "which corresponds to the semiosis signification of the situation of the trait carrier's life involvement into some kind of activity" (Serebrennikova, 2008).

The paradigm of *identity* in the Russian language is represented similarly:

- a descriptive definition of the phenomenon is expressed in the adjective *identical* and the abstract noun *identity*,
- an action definition – the verb *identify*, nouns of action *identification*, *identifier*, the adverb *identically*.

All the elements of the paradigm possess the seme "identity, equivalence, similarity". However, the seme "integrity, unity" is not observed in the explanatory dictionary of the Russian language (Dictionary of foreign words, 1988).

Let us focus on the diachronic analysis of the semimetric nature of the paradigm of the word *identity* in the French language. Undoubtedly, the core of the paradigm is represented by the verb *identifier*, the noun *identité* and the adjective *identique*. The adjective *identique* does not belong to the originally Latin lexical corpus of the French language and goes according to the "Historical dictionary of the French language" (Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, 2006) back to the medieval scholastic borrowing *identicus* (*similar*), formed on the basis of the classically Latin adjective *idem*. The appearance of the adjective *identique* was officially recorded in 1610, but the authors of the "Historical dictionary" suppose it to be in use earlier, which is indirectly confirmed by the derivative *identité*, having been presented in the dictionaries from the XIV century and being interpreted as "the quality of something that is similar" (*qualité de ce qui est le même*). Early substantivation (the noun had been fixed in the dictionaries before the adjective was) suggests that the need for conceptual contents was higher in the French language consciousness than for the contents in the form of an attribute.

Having referred the etymology of the certain adjective to the period of the Medieval Latin, the authors of the dictionary provide the primary etymon *idem* of the classical Latin and explain its meaning by the Latin proverb *idem nec unum* (*similar but not the same*). Indeed, *identique* is defined in the dictionary as a characteristic of real objects that are "fully similar to each other, but remain different" (*parfaitement semblables en tout restant distincts*). Since 1825 the adjective has proved to possess a new meaning – "same at different moments of its existence" (*le même à différents moments de son existence*). Similar is the way of development of the semantics of the noun *identité* defining the nature of "something that is permanent, whole" (*ce qui est permanent, ce qui est un*) (Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, 2006).

It is important that at every stage of their existence the notion *identité* and the attribute *identique* had an anthropological as well as a non-anthropological meaning, describing both a human and an object. From the middle of XVIII



century there occurred a significant expansion of a non-anthropological, subject use, mainly in the field of abstract sciences (mathematics, logic, philosophy) which indicates the development of abstract knowledge and the emergence of the associated conceptual unity (Drapeau Contim, 2010).

The French verb *identifier* has been fixed in the dictionaries since 1764 with the meaning of "being seen as similar to another" (*considérer comme identique à autre chose*); in 1784 the following definition appeared: "to know smb., to recognize smth." (*reconnaître qqn, qqch*); in 1836 the original meaning of "making similar" was marked as rare. In XIX–XX centuries as a result of a broader interpretation of the word new definitions were added: in 1864 – "to recognize the nature of smb., smth." (*reconnaître la nature de qqn, qqch*); at the end of the XIX century – "to define in the terms of a social status" (*reconnaître du point de vue de l'état civil*), and finally, in 1935, "to acknowledge as belonging to some class, kind" (*reconnaître comme appartenant à une classe, une espèce*) (Dictionnaire historique de la langue française, 2006). Thus, the original semantic dominant of "similarity" has been present throughout the history of this lexical item; however, from the point of view of the content characteristics there appears a narrower meaning due to the additional correlation – "the similarity with a certain group of objects or people.

Diachronic ethnosemiotics of the lexical unit *identity* in the French language allows drawing the following conclusions:

- 1) linguistic representatives of the concept of *identity*, being a borrowing of the Medieval scholastic Latin, represent abstract concepts;
- 2) core meanings of ethnosemiotics of the lexical unit *identity* should be "similarity, identity" and "diversity in one's likeness";
- 3) dual semantics of this concept is constituted of both an anthropological and non-anthropological meaning based on the seme "similarity, but not a complete coincidence".

While the non-anthropological meaning is developing into a specific terminological meaning in the sphere of mathematics and logic, the anthropological meaning gets a new round of abstracts development in terms of philosophy, social and humanitarian sciences.

In the work of a Russian philosopher, D.G. Trunov (2011) there is a description of the process of identity formation (*self-cognition*, in the terminology of the scientist) from the standpoint of modern phenomenology. At the *primary stage of self-cognition* there takes place "an acquaintance of a man with himself through the Other," a primary, passive, identity is formed. Eventually, said the philosopher, the *crisis is the primary realization* takes place because of the emerging cognitive dissonance between the natural desire to preserve the integrity and stability of "self-concept" and the emergence of the internal changes that do not fit in the usual self-image. Changes may occur, for example, in the connection with a variety of new circumstances in which it is difficult for a person to preserve the usual identity. In such an "extreme situation", an identity crisis is experienced because of which the person refuses either from a new experience as alien, imposed by circumstances or from their former self for the sake of their future self. The third stage of self-cognition is of a renovative character, it initiates the secondary (*active*) identity. D.G. Trunov (2011) insists on the open self-determination, on "the *cycles* of self-cognition, including the

accumulation of knowledge about the self and their *transformation*: progress and leap, continuity and transition, continuation and overcoming, peace and conflict, daily routine and drama" (Trunov, 2011).

Formulating the definition of *personal identity*, a French philosopher and sociologist P. Ricoeur (2008) separates the two poles of the manifestation of this social and cultural phenomenon, insisting on their inseparable connection: identity as *sameness* (*identité*, from lat. *idem*) and identity as *selfhood* (*ipséité*, from lat. *ipse*). The pole of "sameness" is stable and immutable in its nature, even over time, and the pole of selfhood is open to change. Thus, according to P. Ricoeur (2008), identity involves duality, while remaining at the same time immutable and changing.

We find the above mentioned position developed in the work of a French historian and sociologist J. Noiriél (2007) who analyses the evolution of French national identity and states that national identity (*identité*) is determined by two criteria: selfhood (*ipséité*) and sameness (*mêmeté*, from French *le même*, "same"). In addition, thus, he assumes hypo-hypernym relations in the system of terms describing the concept of identity. J. Noiriél (2007) believes that the criterion of *mêmeté* is realized through the understanding that all Frenchmen are identical to each other in contrast to, for example, the Germans (*tous les Français sont identiques par opposition aux Allemands*). Whereas the criterion of *ipséité* shows that all of them have the same feeling of belonging to a nation, as the history is common for all the representatives of the French society (*les Français partagent le même sentiment d'appartenance parce qu'ils ont la même histoire*). This is the case of development of H. Tajfel's ideas concerning social groups and social self-esteem, when each person believing their identity to be unique (*ipséité*), however, recognizes that there is a similar identity in the Other (*mêmeté*) due to the presence of a unified system of social and cognitive categories (values, behaviors, ideas, etc.).

The concept of *identity* is naturally dichotomic, it is based on understanding of one's self as an individual ("distinction in the oneness") and on the correlation with the Other ("otherness" or "authenticity"), and its correlation with the different aspects of the notion of *Other* can assume the following (Augé, 1992):

- so-called "exotic *Other*" (l'autre exotique), which is actualized through a certain "we" intended as identical;
- ethnic or cultural *Other* (l'autre ethnique ou culturel), represented by the pronoun "they" and the name of the ethnic group;
- social *Other* (l'autre social), involving gender, professional or political distinction.

Identity is a product of social interaction. It arises as the result of the individual projection of the expectations on the certain self and norms on others. A member of an ethnic group – and thus a carrier of a certain "ethnic identity" (according to A.P. Sadokhin is formed):

- not by the origin (biological or cultural and historical), but the role the individuals play in social interaction.

The term "sense of belonging" (*sentiment d'appartenance*) acts in many foreign publications on the problem of identity as a synonymous substitute to *collective identity* and is defined as "individual awareness of belonging to one or more referential groups and taking their basic identifying traits (values,



behavior patterns and understanding, symbols, the collective imaginary, basic skills)" (Dictionnaire de l'altérité et des relations culturelles, 2010). Such interpretation of the problem leads to the need for consideration of the analyzed phenomenon of ethnic and cultural identity (Kulagina, 2012), or female identity (Mikhailova, 2012) in the framework of a particular social group, united by common ideas, values and dominant strategies of behavior.

One of the newest French dictionaries devoted to the problem of otherness within the framework of intercultural communication (Dictionnaire de l'altérité et des relations culturelles, 2010) features an article *Identité* in which F. Blanchet and M. Franker emphasize the procedural character of identity, believing it to be necessary to analyze this social and cultural phenomenon from constructivist positions (Dictionnaire de l'altérité et des relations culturelles, 2010). The authors correlate the concepts of *identity* and *otherness* (*identité/altérité*), believing that without the recognition of the existence of the Other and without "its right to differ" (*reconnu légitimement différent*) self-identification of a person is impossible.

The French school of discourse linguistics was one of the first to address the identification processes in the speech. French linguists use the concepts of the subject (*I, the speaker, sujet parlant*), and the Other (*Observer, Autre*) to determine the identity. While communicating I, the speaker is collated with the Other and thus the distinctive features of the subject of speech are determined. The identity of the speaker is dualistic in nature as it is constructed in the process of speaking in both directions, independent from each other, but complementary: the formation of *personal identity* (*identité personnelle*) and *identity positioning* (*identité de positionnement*).

Relevant is the opinion of the French discourse linguist P. Charaudeau (2002), who suggests dividing *personal identity* into:

- external, possessing a psychosocial nature: it is a combination of traits that characterize the individual according to their age, gender, social status, level of affectation, etc.;
- internal, or discursive, described in terms of a pragmatic interpretation of the utterance with the help of locationy categories (*modes de prise de parole, ôles énonciatifs, modes d'intervention*) (Charaudeau, 2002).

The discursive strategy of a speaker is thus the result of various combinations of external and internal components of the personal identity of the individual. We find it essential to pay attention to the considering the positioning identity both from a formal point of view (choice of vocabulary, language register, discourse genre, etc.) and a conceptual one (in particular, in defending some ideological precepts, in the conscious or unconscious protection of a certain system of values) (Zheltukhina, 2016c). An example of the analysis of positioning identity is found in the work of O.A. Kulagina (2012), who showed that ethnic identity, otherness, and ethnic stereotypes belong to the axiological coordinates of the language world image of the French society in a diachronic perspective, diagnosing the social evolution in communication with the Other. Basic lexemes *étranger* (strange), *autre* (other) and *même* (same) prove to be typically French representatives of otherness and identity, their communicative and social relevance is determined within the mediated literary communication by the values, reflecting the knowledge of the speaker in the situation of an

ethnic and cultural dissonance caused by behavioral setting of the communicants and their social status.

Social and humanitarian scientific paradigm, which studies the identity as a complex multilevel phenomenon integrates the works of philosophers, sociologists, anthropologists, psychologists, political scientists, culturologists, linguists, discourse linguists. Thus, we can conclude that the term *identity* is in the spotlight of the modern anthropocentric vector of research and that today an interdisciplinary approach dominates the certain vector.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications and recommendations for future studies are as follows. Based on findings of this study we can compare the concept “identity” in different linguistic cultures. It is recommended that interdisciplinary development of research should include complex methods of analysis of the identity as an element of human and language universes. Axiological analysis is integrated into research process of the identity in Russian and French and should be discussed by experts in their fields.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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