

The “happiness” concept in the Russian and German advertising texts

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Abstract. The prerequisite for this research was the frequent use of the “happiness” word in modern advertising texts. The authors of the article have tried to answer the following question: Do copywriters take into account a national mindset when creating an illusion of easy-to-get happiness in advertising slogans? How effective is such advertising? The article aims at studying the national specifics of the “happiness” concept in the German- and Russian-speaking environment, analyzing advertising texts and assessing the correspondence of the “happiness” image created in them to consumers’ ideas about it. The authors used the method of linguistic observation and description, contextual analysis, conceptual analysis, comparative analysis, associative field method and survey method. Based on the study results, they have drawn the following conclusions: 1. The concept of “happiness” in the German- and Russian-speaking linguistic cultures is mostly the same and its representatives can be combined into the following semantic groups: “state”, “its external manifestations” and “external sources of happiness”. 2. In contrast to the German-speaking society, which measures the degree of its happiness by the individual feeling of satisfaction in life, the Russians prefer to wait for happiness and do not talk about it once this emotion is obtained. 3. The use of the “happiness” lexeme in advertising products and consumer goods is ineffective since they are not included in the concept of “happiness” in the Russian and German cultural codes. 4. Pandemic-caused changes in modern society requires the reappraisal of values: happiness is now associated with such concepts as health, freedom of movement, travel and home. The comparative analysis of the “happiness” concept in German and Russian advertising was conducted for the first time. The results obtained can be used in further linguistic and marketing research.

Keywords: ethnolinguistics, information and communication, advertising.

1 Introduction

For many centuries, humanity has been seeking its own happiness. The idea of happiness is individual for everyone. It is formed under the influence of personal circumstances and life

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requests. At the same time, it is affected by general clichés typical of the society in which a person is brought up and lives.

The prerequisite for our research was the use of the “happiness” word in numerous advertising texts in Russia and Germany. Every day people are offered to buy happiness in different forms. However, the following questions arise: how successful and appropriate is the appeal to this basic value of humanity in advertising discourse; how cultural codes are taken into account when creating advertising slogans with the “happiness” word; how successful such advertising of a product will be.

Any advertisement has two components: informative and manipulative components. If the basis of an advertising text, which includes basic information about a product, is universal (supranational), the manipulative component that affects the emotional aspects of human consciousness will be different for each target group. Advertising becomes the most effective in case it takes into account the cultural code, which is a combination of individual experience and national cultural heritage, passed down from generation to generation and forming a unique perception of the world. All the things and phenomena are perceived by a person at the subconscious level through the culture in which they were brought up [1: 13]. It is worth mentioning that the main cultural codes, which include basic cultural concepts and determine the general worldview of society, can change under the influence of specific social situations and produce new, secondary codes in the process of cultural and everyday human activity. At the same time, “secondary codes are symbolically associated with the structure of society and the expected behavior of individuals living in it. In this regard, an advertising text is a medium that stands between the main cultural code and the secondary code” [2: 57–58].

The success of an advertising product depends on the extent to which the basic national cultural code and private social needs (the composition and status of the audience, its interests and desires) are taken into account. The main tool for translating the cultural code is language. When creating an advertising text, it is necessary to regard a potential consumer as a complex linguistic person who owns a certain vocabulary and grammar, perceives the surrounding reality through both individual and collective experience that forms the linguistic worldview. Each linguistic personality has behavioral characteristics, an individual system of values, interests and motives [3: 61]. While knowing the target group and the potential of particular language material, a copywriter can create a unique advertising product. Manipulating the addressee’s consciousness, they not only form a given image of the product but also create linguistic clichés and stereotypes, pushing the addressee to a pre-programmed response [4: 199]. By creating an illusion that happiness is near (the consumer can afford it, touch it or buy it), advertisers distort the basic concept of happiness. However, the COVID-19 pandemic suggests to rethink universal human values and revise the existing components of cultural codes.

The novelty of the research lies in the fact that the scientific literature has not made any attempts to study the concept of “happiness” in advertising texts based on the material of the German and Russian languages.

The article aims at conducting a comparative analysis of the German and Russian advertising texts appealing to the concept of “happiness”. Such comparative studies reveal the national and cultural specifics of images arising in the consciousness of representatives of Russian and German linguistic cultures, and complement the existing knowledge about the linguistic worldviews of both nations.

To achieve the goal, the following **tasks** were set:

- To analyze the available linguistic studies concerned with the concept of “happiness” in the national worldviews of Russia and Germany;
- To determine common components and different national characteristics of the “happiness” concept;
- To select advertising texts in Russian and German that use the “happiness” word;

- To understand what image of happiness advertisers try to create for consumers and compare it with the national specifics of these images based on the data obtained;
- To study the effectiveness of advertising texts with the “happiness” lexeme to conduct an express survey among the respondents (young people aged between 18 and 22 years) to make up a slogan with the “happiness” word and a product advertised with this slogan;
- To consider the obtained data to confirm the hypothesis that during the pandemic the system of universal values was rethought, which might lead to changes in the correlation “happiness – the advertised product”.

2 Methods

The study of the “Happiness” topic is interdisciplinary and conducted by numerous scholars, which leads to a large number of options for the interpretation of this concept. Among many definitions, we would like to dwell on the following one: happiness is a personal but socially determined emotion, a feeling of fullness and richness of life, which arises due to the subjective interpretation of reality by a person or a group of people. Happiness is defined as “a positive balance of life”, whose highest manifestation is “the greatest inner satisfaction with the conditions of one’s being, the fullness and meaningfulness of life, the fulfillment of one’s purpose, the sensual and emotional form of the ideal” [5: 55].

When comparing the concepts of “schastie” and “Glück”, we used different approaches. Thus, the lexicographic analysis of dictionaries has demonstrated that the common lexical and semantic variants of the “happiness” lexeme in the German and Russian languages are “success, luck, fortune” and “the state of the highest/complete satisfaction with life” [6: 38–39]. However, the Russian “schastie” word is an important component in the lexical-semantic field of fate. Etymologically, its synonyms are such words as “dolya, chast” (share, part), namely, “a quantity obtained by dividing” [7: 11]. In contrast to the Russian equivalent, the German lexeme “Glück” contains such semes as *Ersehntes* (the desired, something one strives for) and *Erlangung* (achievement), which are included in the definition of happiness as a state when a desired ideal or material benefits are achieved [8: 80].

The associative field method [9, 10, 11, 12] used to study the actual semantics of a word allows to collect and group the associates of the word-stimuli “happiness” in Russian and German into the following semantic blocks: 1) state (*radost – Freude, Liebe, Harmonie, Zufriedenheit* (joy); 2) external features of such a state (*vesele, smekh – Lachen* (laughter); 3) a source of happiness (*semya, druzya, puteshestvie – reisen, Sorge, Freunde, Geld* (family, friends, travel); 4) chance (*udacha, vezenie – Spiel, gewinnen* (luck). It is worth mentioning that the associative field of “happiness” in the Russian language also includes the concepts of “serenity and peace”.

3 Results and discussion

The comparative analysis of lexicographic and associative studies has shown that the basic concepts of “schastie” and “Glück” coincide in the Russian and German linguistic cultures. However, a more passive life position is typical of the Russian mindset. Due to some dreaminess and striving for peace, Russians are convinced that happiness is something difficult to achieve and it is preferable to expect it than to really achieve. At the same time, the German worldview is characterized by a clear setting: a person creates their own happiness (*Jeder ist seines Glückes Schmied*) [13: 85].

After receiving the desired, the Russian person hardly recognizes happiness in this achievement. In Russia, people speak about their success with restraint and do not mention their happiness because there is a belief that “happiness can be jinxed”. This explains the

relatively low position of Russia in the ranking of happy countries [14: 2–3]. In German-speaking countries, happiness correlates with an emotional state and the degree of satisfaction in life. Without high expectations, people in Germany are much more likely to feel happy, and happiness seems to them quite affordable. To feel happy, one needs health (87%), good family relationships (74%), joy in the little things (69%), a workplace (56%), joy of success and achievements (42%), time for hobbies (39%), no financial problems (31%) [15].

Despite higher requirements for achieving a happy state in Russia, local copywriters use the “happiness” word more often than their German-speaking colleagues, as shown by the Internet sources. At the same time, completely different categories of goods fall into the range of advertised products: shawarma – *Ty ne mozhesh kupit schastie, no ty mozhesh kupit shaurmu/You cannot buy happiness, but you can buy a shawarma! (Which is basically the same thing)*; drinks – *Otkroisya schastyu! Schastie vidno srazu! Otkroisya schastyu/Open up to happiness! Happiness is visible immediately! Open up to happiness!*; dumplings – *Domashnee schastie/Home-made happiness!*; chocolate spread – *Schastie na zavtrak/Happiness for breakfast!*; baby food – *Malenkoe schastie – bolshaya lyubov, Rastim schastie vmeste/Little happiness is big love, Growing happiness together!*; elite housing – *V SCHASTIE mozno zhit! Schastie za uglom/You can live in HAPPINESS! Happiness is around the corner*. In the German advertising content, “happiness” is primarily included in the name of the product itself – *Hanf im Glück* (energy drink); *Glückstüte: Mit Freude Glück teilen!* (a set of promotional items for pharmacies); *Glück* (the jelly brand); *Eine Portion Glück* (bath salt). The reason for this is the abundance of various products. The buyer can no longer memorize information from an advertisement. To keep people updated on different products, advertisers offer them easily accessible pleasures, from which the feeling of happiness is formed.

The Russian and German advertising discourse is characterized by the devaluation of happiness: a new way of thinking is imposed, where happiness is replaced by food and consumer goods. However, they are not perceived as a source of true happiness, therefore advertising does not “anchor” a potential consumer, is not effective and does not fulfill its manipulative function.

A quick survey of the respondents has proved that “happiness” would look more appropriate in slogans advertising travel agencies (*Happiness is the whole world!*); health and wellness products (*Happiness is to be healthy!*); products to create a comfortable home (*Happiness is in the little things!*); animal shelter (*You cannot find happiness!*); psychological/social center (*Happiness is when you are understood!*). We have combined the respondents’ answers by thematic groups since they were often repeated and had similar wording, which is explained by the clichéd idea of advertising texts. The results obtained allow us to conclude that the younger generation in Russia associates their idea of happiness with health, the ability to travel, a comfortable home and successful communication. This shift in the values-based system and a more conscious approach to assessing the surrounding reality are conditioned by the feelings and emotions experienced during the pandemic and lockdown [16: 12]. An ever-changing world requires new ideas. The further study of creating effective advertising texts with due regard to the national mindset and new experience of humankind seems promising and requires an integrated approach, including the work of marketers, sociologists, psychologists and linguists.

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