

## II. REVIEWS

DOI: 10.17951/et.2018.30.303

Julia Antonenko

ORCID: 0000-0002-1374-5197

THE SLAVS: ANTHROPOCENTRISM  
IN CULTURE AND LANGUAGE\*

Review of *Antropocentryzm w języku i kulturze*, ed. Svetlana M. Tolstaya, 2017, Moscow: Indrik, pp. 264. Biblioteka Instytutu Slavyanovedeniya RAN.

The impressive list of works produced by the Moscow school of ethnolinguistics has been enriched by a new publication. The book continues the tradition of a series devoted to the key semantic categories of language and culture. It offers a coherent set of articles dealing with the issues of anthropocentrism and the language and culture of Slavs in particular.

The collection opens with an article by Svetlana M. Tolstaya, “Humanisation of reality: remarks on anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism in language and culture”, devoted to the basic aspects of anthropocentrism. Thanks to the duality of anthropocentric perception, we can exist simultaneously as an object of interpretation through external cultural codes and as a subject that acquires knowledge of the world through him- or herself. The author notes that, because our perception of the world is subjective, the subjectivity of worldview is one of the central aspects of anthropocentrism. This was shown by researchers from Lublin (Bartmiński and Anna Pajdzińska 2008; Bartmiński, Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, and Nycz 2004). Tolstaya scrutinises the ways and mechanisms that relate to the “humanisation” of worldview in folk language and culture, relying on the methodology proposed by Yuriy Apresyan, together with his concept of naïve (everyday) worldview. Teleological and genealogical elements are discussed in detail. The rich, well-structured material of Slavic mythological-poetic traditions presents anthropocentrism not only as a natural and convenient model for perceiving and categorising the world, but also, as was suggested by Vladimir Toporov (2015), as a testimony to the human stance towards the external world.

Next, Aleksandr Gura touches upon a seemingly well-researched topic of attributing human features to animals, yet in his analysis of anthropomorphism in

---

\* The review appeared in Polish as “Antropocentryzm w języku i kulturze Słowian” in *Etnolingwistyka* 30. The present English translation has been financed by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, project titled “English edition of the journal *Etnolingwistyka. Problemy języka i kultury* in electronic form” (no. 3bH 15 0204 83).

folk zoology he manages to offer a new perspective, paying special attention to various ways, types, and degrees of animal anthropomorphisation. The author also looks at the issue holistically, through the prism of genres and forms of traditional culture. He examines various ways of explicating anthropomorphism: linguistic (and folk-poetic), morphological, relating to the physical appearance of characters, and functional. The analysis is enriched by examples taken from the literary tradition, offering insight into these types of anthropomorphism. The novel value of the article is an analysis of those cases of attributing animals with names derived from anthroponyms and human names that relate to the archaic mythological ideas of similarity between animals and humans.

The idea of post-mortal change of human life force into a tree form is discussed by Tatyana Agapkina in her article "To recognise a human in a tree (in the Slavic ballads)". She focuses on the three plots: "Poplar"/"Rowanberry" (the plot: "A fiancée changed into a tree standing alone in the field"), "Death of the persecuted couple in love"/"Mother poisoner", and "Enchanted children". The plot in which a tree begins to behave like a human being is understood not as a folk metaphor but as a myth of transformation into another material form. The author contemplates what it means for "one life to replace another, one soul inhabit two bodies (the human body and the tree), for one body to enter another one?" (p. 43). Looking for an answer, Agapkina thoroughly analyses spiritual, behavioural, and emotional aspects of transformation of human personality and the similarity between humans and trees. A comparative-typological analysis of mythological-poetic relation between a human being and a tree in the ballads of Eastern and Western Slavs reveals both the similarities and the differences in how the motif of a person changing into a tree is realised.

Ludmila Vinogradova addresses the issue of anthropocentrism in the folk calendar of Eastern Slavs, with an attempt to describe little-known figures in Eastern Slavic mythology that act as personifications of holidays and weekdays, regulating the cycle of the weaving process. Scholarly reflections are based on materials from the Archive of the Polish Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences, and relate to the works on folk terminology and mythology of Ukrainian and Byelorussian weaving, as evidenced in East Slavic and partly Western Slavic data. Mythological figures of the weaving tradition of Polesia are not only saints, the patrons of spinning and weaving, but also numerous mythological creatures, spirits of the ancestors, demons, and animals.

Marina Valentsova, studying the anthropological code of Slavic mythology, points out that the Slavic demonological system is pregnant with universal intentions of an anthropocentric worldview. However, regional myths also offer specific rather than universal concepts, which may be of particular interest to scholars. The author analyses the much understudied Slovak demonological system. The analysis depicts a great number of anthropomorphic characters, offers a high level of their specificity and underscores a substantial role of memory in the creation of the image of demonic creatures.

Marfa Tolstaya, in her article "People and snakes in Middle Zakarpattia", considers data from the fieldwork at the turn of the 21st century, presenting the

materials collected by the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences in Middle Zakarpattia in the 1980s and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The decoding of the sound samples was done by the author herself and enriched by the data from the Archive of the Carpathian Institute of Slavic Studies. Recordings of folk beliefs connected with snakes are accompanied with detailed comments and divided thematically: snakes and the Christian calendar, snakes and the people who “know” (*bosorkuny/bosorkani*); charms used to ward off snakes and related magic spells; stories of snakes that bit people or cattle; snakes that suck milk from cows; revenge taken by snakes; snake charming; snakes as protectors of houses; snakes as house hosts; stories about nests of snakes; mythological stories of the king of snakes and magical objects: the snake crown, ring, and stone; the legend and fairy tale about a multi-headed serpent, *šarkanti*. A thorough analysis of the texts shows that snakes in the culture of Middle Zakarpattia belong to everyday life but are also mythological creatures that belong to the folk demonological world.

The article by Oksana Chokha, “Earthly life of celestial bodies”, focuses on the spread of legends that portray the sun and the moon in human form in Greece and the Balkan region. Referring to the works by Evel Gasparini, who studied the concept of the sun in the Balkan culture, where it is presented as a man, and the moon as a woman, the author demonstrates that such a perspective is only partially true since the Greek tradition, apart from treating the sun and the moon as a married couple, also portrays them as siblings, while in the Bulgarian and Macedonian tradition the image of the two as a married couple is relatively rare. The Greek, Macedonian, and Bulgarian traditions highlight the dominating role of the Sun whereas in the Serb, Croatian, and Slovenian cultures, the moon (Luna) is the dominant one.

Olga Byelova scrutinises Eastern Slavic etiological legends, with a focus on anthropocentric motifs they contain. A detailed analysis of folk texts dealing with the dawn of times shows that they accentuate those human aspects that belong to the system of values: their function is to help people adjust to reality. The article presents the cosmogonic code, focusing on those parts that deal with the creation of the human being in the context of nature and culture.

Vladimir Pietrukhin, in his article “The problem of the Zbruch Idol: anthropocentrism of Slavic paganism or a park sculpture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?”, presents arguments for and against viewing the sculpture fished out of the Zbruch river in 1848 near Lykhkivitsi<sup>1</sup> as a one-time idol of pagan Slavs. Commenting on arguments of the supporters and opponents of the deconstructive approach in historiography, the researcher takes a neutral stance, stressing that contemporary scholarship cannot provide enough facts to verify one or the other hypothesis, leaving much room for interpretation.

Anna Plotnikova (“Anthropocentrism in the language and folk tradition of Burgenland Croatsians”) deals with archaic beliefs in the Slavic tradition in the context of contacts with another ethnic group and another language. The article

<sup>1</sup> Also known as Sviatovid from Zbruch or Sviatovid from Lykhkivitsi, today’s Ternopil region in Ukraine (cf. Gieysztor 1982) is now on display in the archives of the Archeological Museum of Cracow in Poland.

presents an in-depth analysis of the field data collected by the author from 2007 to 2015. Ethnic-dialectal texts contain traces of archaic mythological conceptions of flora and fauna, natural phenomena, time of the day, or weather, and embrace various aspects of everyday life, such as familial customs or folk calendar.

The shaping of linguistic and cultural worldview is shown in Yelena Uzyenyova's contribution "Anthropocentrism in Bulgarian clothing terminology". The author relies on a large body of data excerpted from dialectal dictionaries of Bulgarian folk culture, monographs, archives, field materials, and personal databank of Bulgarian wedding terminology. She concludes that "we can observe anthropocentrism in Bulgarian clothing terminology (84 terms), yet it does not play a dominant role" (p. 223).

The authors of the final chapter, Yelena Byeryezovich and Galina Kabakova, carry out an analysis of derivatives that come from Russian somatic lexemes and look for instances of the naïve worldview of people. They focus on semantic derivatives and phrases such as *bryukho*, *zheludok*, *zhelch*´, *zhivot*, *kishka*, *nutro*, *pechen*´, *potrokha*, *puzo*, *pup*, *trebukha*, *selezenka*, *utroba*, *ch(e)revo*, supplemented in some cases by dialectal stems: *butor*, *lantukh*, *sen*´, *yatreba*. Empirical data are presented and commented on within two semantic spheres of language, dealing with the psychological person and the social person.

To conclude, the collective work offered by the Institute of Slavic Studies at the Russian Academy of Sciences broadens the ethnolinguistic area of anthropocentric studies, with a focus on both common and culture-specific elements of particular ethnic groups. The work contributes to ethnolinguistic studies by analysing a rich body of data, from archives and the field, as well as by providing insightful theoretical solutions. It will be of interest especially to experts in the ethnolinguistic field but also to everyone interested in folk culture.

*Translated by Konrad Żyśko*

## References

- Bartmiński, Jerzy and Anna Pajdzińska (eds.). 2008. *Podmiot w języku i kulturze*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Bartmiński, Jerzy, Stanisława Niebrzegowska-Bartmińska, and Ryszard Nycz (eds.). 2004. *Punkt widzenia w języku i kulturze*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo UMCS.
- Gieysztor, Aleksander. 1982. *Mitologia Słowian*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwa Artystyczne i Filmowe.
- Toporov, Vladimir N. 2015. Znak i tekst w prostranstve i vremeni. *Slavica Revalensia* II: 139–167.