

Olga N. Ivanishcheva  
(Murmansk Arctic State University)

## “It’s too late to drink *borjomi*,” or Russian cultural vocabulary in the modern language space

### Introduction

**Relevance.** The relevance of the problem of “language and culture” stems from a renewed interest, in recent years, in questions related to the dialogue of cultures, inter-cultural communication, speech perception, and cognitive paradigms of knowledge. Anthropocentric tendencies in the development of modern scientific thought and the cognitive approach towards language are based on the assumption that the individual is considered as a language-bearer. The bearer of a language, or native speaker, is the bearer of a certain culture. For this reason, with any language, it is necessary to study the cultural vocabulary in order to grasp its speakers’ character and form an idea of the linguistic individual.

### Research subject and approaches

**The purpose of this article** is to demonstrate how a connotative component is formed in the lexical meaning structure of a Russian cultural word through the incorporation of elements from the historically evol-

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ing background knowledge of the average native speaker. In our study, we proceed from the assumption that cultural connotations are generated by the various meanings that accumulate throughout the average native speaker's collective life experience. For this reason, in our research, we place particular emphasis on the phenomenon whereby the content of a Russian cultural word's lexical meaning expands by acquiring connotative components from the structure of the average Russian native speaker's background knowledge.

### **Overview: Theoretical premises**

We use the term "cultural word" in this article as a synonym of the term "realia item." Traditionally, in linguistics, a "realia item" refers to 'a word or phrase which corresponds to a similar word or phrase in another language' (Hartmann & Stork, 1972, p. 56). The term "realia" has primarily established itself in linguistics in the sense of material cultural things, historical facts, government institutions, names of national and folklore heroes, mythological creatures, etc. that are unique to certain nations or peoples. It is also in this sense that we use the terms "untranslatable (connotative, background) vocabulary," "cultural-connotative vocabulary," "loanwords," or words with a cultural component in their meaning. This group of words became actively used in Russia around the middle of the 20th century, with the development of cross-cultural linguistic trends in the theory and practice of teaching Russian as a non-native and foreign language. The aim was to study the cultural vocabulary in order to penetrate the culture of the people whose language was being taught. The result of this type of work was a gain in knowledge about the people's culture through language (words, phraseologisms), and the fact that Russian cultural vocabulary became viewed as a linguistic tool for objectivising Russian culture. In the last decade of the 20th century, there was another surge of interest in cross-cultural linguistic ideas. Linguists, methodologists and teachers began to study the subject of "language and culture" again. Researching the culture of a people through the prism of its language progressed to a new level: the problems of comprehension and mutual understanding – which are impossible to tackle without considering language as part of a people's culture – became increasingly relevant. What was important now was not so much to learn about another culture through learning its language, but rather to use one's knowledge about another cul-

ture in order to appropriately understand its (foreign) language. To correctly use a language, i.e., to be confident that one is being correctly understood, requires having an idea of what one's words imply to the native speaker. In modern linguistics, we are witnessing a shift towards a particular aspect of language description, namely the description of linguistic individuals (see, on this topic, Киклевич, 2014, p. 232); it has therefore become necessary to focus on the actual native speaker and his/her background knowledge. The idea that "it is impossible to learn a language just by itself, without looking beyond its limits and turning towards its creator, its bearer, its user: the human being, the actual linguistic individual" (Караулов, 2002, p. 7) is gaining particular significance in linguistics. It is important to note, additionally, that in this ever-evolving chain of paradigms, there has been a gradual shift from a methodology for teaching Russian as a foreign language towards a requirement to teach it as a native language. For this purpose, it is necessary to define what an average native speaker should know, and what they actually do know, about words denoting specific phenomena and objects of their own culture.

The term "Russian cultural word" is understood in this work as a word or phrase, the meaning of which reflects the Russian people's national-specific perception of some realities or fragments of reality.

The notion of "average native speaker" is not defined anywhere in the linguistic literature; the scope of his/her knowledge is not described comprehensively for any language. In Russian studies, the average native speaker may be understood as: a contemporary individual with secondary-level education (having graduated from primary school at least ten years ago), regardless of age, sex, type of occupation, or area of activity (Верещагин, 1969, p. 120); the author of the research study his/herself (Вучкова, 1984, p. 3); or a generally understood average linguistic individual, i.e., a single, abstract native speaker/language bearer substituting the sum-total of all individuals in a comprehensive linguistic study (you, me, them, an old man, Napoleon, the Prophet Muhammad... all rolled into one person) (Караулов, 1996, p. 69). Since the perception of a word, and of a text, depends on the scope of knowledge acquired by the native speaker/language bearer throughout the process of his/her socialisation, including school education, it seems logical, from our point of view, to consider as an average speaker any person having received secondary-level school education.

## Resources and techniques

In our study, we used component and definitional analysis methods to examine the lexical meaning structures of cultural words in Russian. Study materials include samples of cultural word usage in Russian artistic and journalistic literature, notably from the Russian National Corpus and from the author's own archives. To analyse this linguistic material, we also used modern Russian and Swedish dictionaries. The reason for including foreign-language dictionaries when analysing Russian cultural vocabulary is that the lexical meanings of Russian cultural words contain nationally-specific connotative components, and this national specificity can, and must, be assessed against the background of another language and another culture.

## Results

### Culture and language: Why study cultural words?

The notion of culture belongs to a category of fundamental concepts, which are of utmost importance, yet are terminologically undefined, broad, and polysemic, and onto which every person projects their own interpretation:

Что такое «культура»? Существовало ли нечто как «советская культура»? Что осталось от нее после крушения коммунизма в России? [...] Была советская культура. Это была не только идеологическая, навязанная модель, но и ансамбль символов, сумма фактов и артефактов. Даже диссиденты в некоторой степени жили той советской культурой: не *Кратким курсом*, а бытовой культурой, не книгой *Как закалялась сталь*, а мифом и анекдотами о Чапаеве, не *Седьмой симфонией* Шостаковича, а советской опереткой, романсом, *Двенадцатью стульями* и *Золотым теленком* Ильфа и Петрова (Нива, 2001).

[What is "culture"? Was there ever such a thing as "Soviet culture"? What is left of it after the collapse of Communism in Russia? [...] There indeed was a Soviet culture. It was not simply an imposed ideological model, it was also a whole set of symbols, a sum of facts and artefacts. Even the dissidents, to a certain extent, lived by this Soviet culture: not according to the *Short course [of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks) – O. I.]*, but according to their everyday culture, not by the novel *How the steel was tempered*, but by the myth of Vasily Chapayev and the jokes about him, not by Shostakovich's *Seventh symphony*, but

by the Soviet operettas and romances, by Ilf and Petrov's *The twelve chairs* and *The little golden calf*.]

Belonging to a given nation implies knowing its culture:

Человеку должно быть неловко, если он не знает, кто такой Ломоносов, и не читал *Евгения Онегина*. По подобным признакам человек не может быть отнесен к русской культуре. Его считают либо иностранцем, либо невеждой (Рождественский, 2000, р. 83).

[A person should feel awkward if they do not know who Lomonosov was and if they have never read *Eugene Onegin*. Judging by such things, a person cannot be considered as belonging to Russian culture. They will be considered either a foreigner or an ignorant.]

It would be impossible to list all the components of a culture. It seems that the notion of culture implies a very broad scope of phenomena, events, signs, and objects. The following Russian words, for instance, would come under the heading of "culture": *Волга* ['the River Volga'], *тайга* ['taiga'], *соболь* ['zibeline'], *Урал* ['the Ural Mountains'], *Транссибирская магистраль* ['the Trans-Siberian Railway'], *леший* ["leshy," the forest spirit'], *русалка* ["rusalka," the mermaid or water-witch'], *ковер-самолет* ['the flying carpet'], *пятибалльная система* ['the five-point grading system'], *рубль* ['the ruble'], *копейка* ['the kopeck'], *Правительство Российской Федерации* ['the Government of the Russian Federation'], *восстание декабристов* ['the Decembrist Revolt'], *Отечественная война* ['the Patriotic War of 1812'], *свекровь* ['mother-in-law'], *щи* ["shchi," Russian cabbage soup'], *осел* ['donkey, ass'], *лиса* ['fox'], *аэропорт Внуково* ['Vnukovo Airport'], *Чехов* ['Chekhov'], *картина Левитана Март* ['Levitan's painting March'], *Мамаево побоище* ['the Battle of Kulikovo, 8 September 1380'], *работать спустя рукава* [lit. "to work with one's sleeves rolled down," i.e., 'to be slack, or careless, about one's work'], and many more.

A word can imply to a native speaker many "concealed" things: associations, both social and individual, from their childhood and adulthood, from everyday life or literary works (for an example, see Kiklewicz, 2015, p. 181, on the symbolism of the telephone). Daniil Granin described the gap between the perceptions of different generations of Russians as follows:

Спросите, например, про гамашы. Мало кто знает и объяснит, что это такое, их давно не носят. А носили на ботинках и туфлях, прикрывая ими шнуровку. Зачем нужны были гамашы, этого в точности мы сами не помним,

поскольку мы были тогда детьми и гамаши видели на ногах у взрослых (Гранин, 2003, р. 9).

[Try asking people, for instance, about gaiters. Few will know and be able to explain what gaiters are; they are no longer worn nowadays. They used to be worn on top of boots and shoes, to cover the laces. Why did people need gaiters? Nobody remembers that, not even us, because we were children then, and we only saw gaiters on grown-up people’s feet.]

There are many illustrations of the fact that knowing cultural words is necessary in order to understand linguistic facts. Otherwise it becomes difficult to understand a text and, therefore, to communicate:

Сентябрь–октябрь в техникуме не учились, работая на уборочной (колхозников там в это время видели редко). Отцу и матери, выезжавшим со своими студентами, выписывали трудовни и как работникам, и как бригадирам (плюс один трудовень) (Чудаков, 2000).

[In September and October, nobody studied in training college; instead, we all went to work on the harvest (the collective farm workers could hardly ever be seen around that time of year). Father and mother, who went out to harvest together with their students, earned extra *trudodni* [labor days – O. I.] both as workers and as foremen (plus one *trudoden*).]

Of course, a translator might use the equivalent information found, for example, in a Russian-Swedish dictionary for the word *трудодень*: ‘*dagsverke (enhet för löneberäkning vid kolchoser)*’ [‘work done in one day (a countable work unit on a collective farm)’] (Sharapova, 2006, p. 718). But this equivalent information, even with the explanation ‘*единица труда в колхозе*’ [‘a countable work unit on a collective farm’], fails to provide the exact idea of ‘*единица учета труда в колхозах, определяющая долю колхозника в доходах, которая применялась в нашей стране до 1966 г.*’ [‘countable work unit on collective farms, used to determine the revenue share to which a collective farm worker was entitled, applied in our country until 1966’] (Мокиенко & Никитина, 2005, p. 434), ‘*которая служила основой распределения доходов*’ [‘which served as a basis for distributing earnings’] (Кузнецов, 2000, p. 1348; Прохоров, 2000, p. 1229). Not to mention the other part of the information which is left beyond the scope of the dictionary entry (“*работать на трудовни*” [“to work for *trudodni*”] meant ‘*получать оплату частью урожая, не деньгами, в конце сезона и в зависимости от полученного урожая*’ [‘to be paid part of the harvest,

not cash, at the end of the season, and depending on the overall volume of the harvest’]).

An inaccurate interpretation or “translation” of a cultural word can lead to significant distortions of the entire content of the work at hand. In her monograph, Yuliia Obolenskaia cites multiple examples from the translations of 19th-century Russian writers in Spain and Latin America. For instance, the Barcelona edition of *War and peace* (1905), which was translated from a French edition, interprets the term *балалайка* [‘balalayka’] as ‘музыкальный инструмент, очень распространенный на Кавказе’ [‘a musical instrument very widespread in the Caucasus’], and *горилка* [‘“gorilka,” vodka made in Ukraine, often home-made, low-grade, and illegal’] as ‘русское уменьшительное от водки’ [‘a Russian diminutive for vodka’]. In the complete works of Leo Tolstoy published in 1955 by Aguilar, one of the best printing houses in Spain, it is stated that *квас* [‘kvass’] is an ‘алкогольный напиток, при изготовлении которого используется ячмень’ [‘alcoholic drink whose brewing process involves barley’]. A French translator once found an incorrect analogy for *сухари* [‘hard croutons’]: ‘пирожное, бисквит’ [‘cake, sponge cake’], which later re-emerged as “*pastel*” [‘sponge cake’] in an Argentinian translation of Ivan Turgenev’s *Torrents of spring* in 1901 (Оболенская, 2006, p. 71).

The importance of discerning and describing the cultural component in lexical meanings is evident in the preface to the linguo-culturological dictionary *Русское культурное пространство* [The Russian cultural space] (Брилева, Вольская, Гудков, Захаренко, & Красных, 2004). The authors refer to their dictionary as one of a “recording” type, in which an attempt is made to describe not what *should* be known, but what is actually known by practically any socialised member of the Russian national-linguo-cultural community (Брилева et al., 2004, p. 9). For instance, every Russian knows that *дядя Степа* [Uncle Stiopa] is tall, and that *Шапокляк* [Old Lady Shapokliak] has a favorite pet rat; the stereotypical character of the bear is one of physical and/or moral awkwardness and rudeness, added to the mythical and ethical representation of the bear among Russians (the symbol of the Moscow Olympics, the helper of Russian folk tale heroes, etc.) (Брилева et al., 2004, pp. 26–27). The phenomena described in this dictionary are representative items of the Russian cultural space, the latter being understood by the authors as culture reflected in consciousness. At the “core” of the cultural space lies a shared cognitive foundation. Mastering the Russian cognitive foundation will determine, in many ways, how appropriately its speakers communicate in Russian. In order to become a member of

society, one must go through the process of socialization. At the heart of this process is a transition into culture, or between cultures, and the main channel for making that transition is language (Брилева et al., 2004, pp. 10–12).

In sum, even a brief overview of a few aspects of the interrelations between culture and language shows that the cultural vocabulary appears to be extraordinarily important for learning the culture of a people. It is beyond doubt that its study is absolutely indispensable.

## **Background knowledge of the average native Russian speaker: Scope and content**

In order to gain full knowledge of the phenomena and objects of a native culture, one needs to have access to a “collection,” or description, of that knowledge. For the non-native speaker, there are educational manuals, linguistic and cross-cultural dictionaries. For the native speaker, this “collection” of knowledge is provided by schoolbooks, the school reading list, folk tale children’s books, proverbs, sayings, riddles, etc. However, a part of that knowledge is also transmitted through the environment in which the person grows up and learns. For example, the tradition, and hence its verbal expression, of *присядем на дорожку/дорогу* [‘sitting down for a short moment before going on a trip’] does not belong to the type of knowledge that is “learnt in school.” A child will, therefore, learn about this in an “ad hoc” or “situational” setting. Russian monolingual dictionaries of definitions record the expression *присесть перед дальней дорогой, перед отъездом* [‘sitting down for a short while before a long trip or before a departure’] either with no explanation at all (Евгеньева, 1983, p. 439), or with minimal explanation: ‘*по старому обычаю, старый русский обычай*’ [‘according to an old custom; old Russian custom’] (Кузнецов, 2000, p. 989; Ожегов & Шведова, 1993, p. 617). Its popularity is evident in the fact that it is considered as an idiomatic expression: the phrase *присядем, друзья, перед дальней дорогой* [‘Let us sit down, friends, before this long trip’] appears in the *Большой словарь крылатых слов русского языка* [The great dictionary of Russian aurea dicta], along with the following definition: *напутствие перед трудной и дальней дорогой, перед принятием серьезного решения* [‘farewell message given before a long and difficult trip, or words of advice before making a serious decision’] (Берков, Мокиенко, & Шулежкова, 2000, p. 403). However, the tradition of sitting down before a trip is widespread among Russians not only *перед*



*трудной и дальней дорогой* [‘long and difficult trip’] or *перед принятием серьезного решения* [‘before making a serious decision’], but indeed before any kind of departure. In a cross-cultural manual for students of Russian as a foreign language, one can read:

Перед тем, как отправиться в дальний путь, все – как уезжающие, так и провожающие, – должны дома сесть на несколько секунд и помолчать (Берков, Беркова, & Беркова, 2002, p. 85).

[Before leaving on a long trip, everyone, including those who are leaving and those who are seeing them off, must sit down for a few seconds while they are still at home, and remain silent.]

There are also literary examples which show the persistence of this tradition still today, as well as its expression in language:

В Берлине я подружился с одним историком. Как всех немцев, его звали Шиллер. Автор мириад книг, он знал о России несравненно больше меня, и поразить его мне удалось лишь напоследок, когда мы уже выходили с чемоданами из украшенного иконами дома. Прежде чем переступить порог, я машинально сказал:

– Присядем!

– Вам нехорошо? – с тревогой спросил Шиллер.

– Нет, с чего вы взяли?

– А зачем же мы сядились?

– На дорогу.

– Чтобы – что? Зачем садиться, если надо ехать?

– Но так принято.

– Я понимаю, что принято, – закричал хозяин. – Я немец, а не идиот, я не понимаю – почему?

– Я не знаю! Деды сидели, прадеды – вплоть до Рюрика, – наврал я для убедительности.

Услышав знакомое, Шиллер затих, но до вокзала шевелил губами (Генис, 2001).

[In Berlin, I became friends with an historian. His name, like all Germans’, was Schiller. He had written a plethora of books and knew incomparably more about Russia than me, and I was only able to surprise him at the last moment, when we were already preparing, suitcases in hand, to leave his icon-decorated house. Before stepping out of the front door, I said, mechanically:

“Let’s sit down for a second!”

“Are you feeling unwell?” Schiller asked, worried.

“Not at all, why should you think so?”

“Well, why did we have to sit down?”

“Before leaving.”

“What for? Why do we have to sit down when it’s time to leave?”

“But that’s the custom.”

“I understand it’s the custom,” cried the host. “I’m German, not an idiot. What I don’t understand is: Why?”

“I don’t know why! My grandfathers sat down, my great-grandfathers sat down, and so did everyone else, all the way back to Rurik,” I lied, to add persuasion to my words.

Upon hearing something familiar, Schiller fell silent, but he kept moving his lips all the way to the railway station.]

A native speaker’s background knowledge is typically inconstant. This continuous evolution of the background knowledge implies its ability to reflect the changing social landmarks, changes in our relationships to the realities of life and in our stereotyped perceptions thereof.

There is no doubt about the historical nature of background knowledge:

После революции Шаляпин пел в Мариинском театре. Он ходил по изменившемуся до неузнаваемости городу в меховой боярской шапке, белоснежной вязаной фуфайке и обшитых кожей белых бурках (Полянская, 1999).

[After the revolution, Shaliapin sang at the Mariinsky Theater. He would walk through the city, which had changed beyond recognition, in his boyar fur hat, his snow-white, warm knit shirt and leather-lined felt boots.]

The meaning of the word *фуфайка* [“fufayka,” body-warmer’], for a modern Russian native speaker nowadays, is usually connected with the idea of a *‘стеганая ватная куртка’* or *‘ватник’* [‘cotton-padded jacket,’ ‘body-warmer’] (Кузнецов, 2000, p. 989; Ожегов & Шведова, 1993, p. 890), i.e., with the word’s second dictionary meaning (*фуфайка* – *‘куртка’* [‘jacket’] (Караулов, Сорокин, Тарасов, Уфимцева, & Черкасова, 1996, p. 298)). Much less common is the first dictionary meaning: *‘теплая рубашка, вязаная или из плотной ткани’* [‘warm shirt, knit or made of thick material’] (Бабенко, 2005, p. 393), which connects the term *фуфайка* [“fufayka”] to the category of *рубашки, кофты, блузы, жилеты* [‘shirts, camisoles, blouses, vests’], together with *ватник* [‘body-warmer’], *безрукавка* [‘sleeveless jacket’], *блуза* [‘blouse’], *жилет* [‘vest’], *кацавейка* [‘wadded vest’], *ковбойка* [‘cowboy shirt’], *косоворотка* [‘skewed-collared shirt’], *рубаша* [‘formal shirt’], *рубашка* [‘shirt’], *сорочка* [‘undershirt’], *тенниска* [‘tee-shirt’], and *толстовка* [‘fleece shirt’]. Additionally, the more widespread

meaning of the word *фужайка* ["fufayka"] (*ватник* ['body-warmer']) carries another semantic component, not recorded in the dictionaries: *вид рабочей одежды* ['type of working garment']. Therefore, by analogy with this widespread meaning of *вид рабочей одежды* ['type of working garment'], the term *фужайка* ["fufayka"] in the above-cited example can be misunderstood: how can a *фужайка* ['cotton-wadded jacket'] be knit, and moreover, snow-white? It is obvious that only the presence of other signals in the surrounding lexemes – *боярская шапка* ['boyar fur hat'] and *бурки* ['felt boots'], denoting old-fashioned realia items which are clearly not any type of working garments, provides the correct pointers for understanding the term *фужайка* ['warm knit shirt']. But because the word *фужайка* is undoubtedly used more often in the sense of *ватник* ['body-warmer, cotton-wadded jacket'] than as *теплая рубашка* ['warm shirt'], a cognitive effort is required in order to correctly understand this text.

It is equally important to take into consideration the dynamics of change in a people's background knowledge in order to understand a word. For instance, the outer appearance of the Russian *баня* ["banya," Russian-style steam bath'], and also, partly, the steam bath process itself, have evolved (not to mention, of course, the differences between the steam bath process among Russians living in the city compared to those living in rural areas). *Бубенцы* ['sleigh bells'] have become a symbol of Russian culture (as for example, *тройка с бубенцами* ['a "troika" (traditional Russian sleigh using three horses abreast) with sleigh bells']). *Баранки* ["baranki," Russian baked dough rings'], once a popular sweet delicacy taken at teatime, have nowadays become an ordinary type of pastry. To quote Valentin Kataev's tale of *Цветик-семицветик* ["Tsvetik Semitsvetik," The Flower With Seven Colours'], which every Russian child knows:

Жила девочка Женя. Однажды послала ее мама в магазин за баранками. Купила Женя семь баранок: две баранки с тмином для папы, две баранки с маком для мамы, две баранки с сахаром для себя и одну маленькую розовую баранку для братика Павлика. Взяла Женя связку баранок и отправилась домой (Катаев, 1968, p. 573).

[There once was a little girl called Zhenia. One day, her mother sent her to the shop to buy some *baranki*. Zhenya bought seven *baranki*: two *baranki* with caraway for Papa, two *baranki* with poppy seed for Mama, two *baranki* with sugar for herself, and one small pink *baranka* for her little brother Pavlik. Zhenia took her bundle of *baranki* and set out on her way home.]

## The cultural word in modern Russian: What makes it specific?

The fundamental idea of our study is that the connotative component of a cultural word plays a leading role in the structure of the word's lexical meaning. Linguistic materials have shown that cultural words tend, more than others, to accumulate, "overgrow" with, associations which are part of people's background knowledge.

For example, the Russian cultural word *боржом* (*боржом*) ["borjomi (borzhomi), borjom (borzhom)"] is defined in most Russian monolingual dictionaries as *целебная / лечебная минеральная вода* ['medicinal/therapeutic mineral water'] (see, for instance, Кузнецов, 2000, p. 91; Ушаков, 2000, p. 174). *Толковый словарь русского языка* [Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language] explains that this water is used for drinking and for bathing (Ожегов & Шведова, 1993, p. 54). In Russia, there have always been several kinds of popular mineral water: *боржом* ["borjomi"], *эссентуки* ["essentuki (iessentuki)"] and *нарзан* ["narzan"]. Not all of these appear in bilingual Russian dictionaries, and even when they do, they are defined by an "impersonal" semantic commentary such as *'ett slags mineralvatten'* ['type of mineral water'] (Давидссон, 1992, p. 58). The Russian monolingual dictionaries either do not provide any distinguishing characteristics for these realia items (*нарзан – напиток, представляющий собой воду, насыщенную газами и минералами, добываемую из определенных естественных источников, употребляемый для утоления жажды и в лечебных целях* ["narzan" – 'a drink constituted by water saturated with gas and minerals, extracted from certain natural sources, used for satisfying thirst and for medicinal purposes'] (Бабенко, 2005, p. 385)); or they describe them according to their composition and origins (*боржом – целебная минеральная вода. [По названию города и курорта в Грузии, где находится источник этой воды]* ["borjomi" – 'medicinal mineral water (named after the city and resort in Georgia where the source of this water is located)'] (Ушаков, 2000, p. 174)). However, mineral water is not such an indispensable accessory of the ideal Soviet table (as indicated by the well-known *Книга о вкусной и здоровой пище* [Book of tasty and healthy food]). Russian dining culture is somewhat different from that of other nations (for instance, we are not in the habit of drinking water, juice or beer with our food, as is customary in Scandinavian countries). Our relationship to mineral water is also different: it is not simply water for the dining table (*столовая*, or "table water,"

should not be taken literally). Russians have always considered mineral water as something therapeutical or curative, and have always known which kind of water cured which ailments. Thus, *borjomi* is a popular mineral water for curing stomach ailments. There is even a Russian expression that says: *поздно пить боржоми* [‘it’s too late to drink borjomi’], i.e., “your health has gone down the drain, there is no cure,” which later took on the metaphorical meaning of ‘*потерянного не воротить*’ [‘what is lost is lost’]. Here is an example, taken from the Russian National Corpus:

До какого момента можно было сохранить СССР, с какого момента уже поздно было пить боржоми, где была пропущена решающая историческая развилка, до сей поры точно не знает никто и, похоже, в наименьшей степени (уже точно – не в наибольшей) знает сам М. С. Горбачев (Максим Соколов. *Президент СССР перед судом // Известия*, 2014.04.11).

[Until what moment could the USSR have been saved? From what moment on was it too late to drink borjomi? Where did we miss that crucial historical turn? So far, no-one knows for sure, and least of all (certainly not most of all), M. S. Gorbachev himself.]

The term *боржоми* [“borjomi”] in Russian culture used to be opposed to strong alcoholic drinks. Here is another example from the Russian National Corpus:

А в спектакле *Высоцкий* Театр на Таганке был готов во фразах «Чемодан мой от водки ломится» и «с кем водку пью» заменить «злодейку с наклейкой», как говорили в еще более ранние времена, на боржоми (Юлия Рахаева. *Как Любимов водку на боржоми заменил. Советская цензура в борьбе за нравственность // Известия*, 2002.05.26).

[In the show *Vysotsky*, the Taganka Theatre was prepared to replace the “villain with a label” (as it was referred to in even older times) with “borjomi” in phrases such as “My suitcase is bursting with vodka” and “with whom I drink vodka.”]

This cultural content (*боржоми* – ‘*популярная минеральная вода при желудочных заболеваниях*’ [“borjomi”: ‘a popular mineral water used for treating stomach ailments’]) should, in our opinion, be included in the connotative component of the lexical meaning structure of the cultural word *боржоми*. This particular component is precisely what will define this realia item, the *боржоми* drink, as a nationally specific word, and, therefore, make it a member of the category of cultural words.

This example of the cultural word *боржоми* is also revealing in that its connotative component, defined by the background knowledge of the average native speaker, is historically inconstant. In the mind of today's average native speaker of Russian, it has become a symbol of the Soviet way of life. From the Russian National Corpus:

Как и «Боржоми» – не то чтобы такая уж хорошая вода, сильно минерализированная и с отдушкой, но ведь традиционная, можно сказать, вещь неотъемлемая, часть великой советской триады Боржоми–Нарзан–Ессентуки (Константин Крылов. *Поздно пить "Боржоми" // Русская жизнь*, 2012).

[The same goes for "Borjomi": It's not so much that it was a great water, strongly carbonated, with a nice fragrance, etc.; it was, in fact, a whole tradition, an inseparable, integral part of the supreme Soviet triad of Borjomi–Narzan–Essentuki.]

## Conclusion

Our analysis of Russian cultural words has shown that cultural content accumulates through the gradual collection of the information contained in people's background knowledge. The connotative component which appears in the lexical meaning structure of a Russian word emerges out of that part of a person's knowledge which is nationally specific, i.e., which "can only be understood by Russians." This, in turn, leads to a metaphorisation of the meaning, where the realia item becomes a symbol and the word acquires a symbolic meaning. At the same time, the classifying function of the cultural word, i.e., its capacity to distinguish a particular object from other similar ones, is supplemented by the cumulative function, i.e., the capacity to reflect, record, and preserve in language units the information learned by the linguistic individual about reality. Thus, in the lexical meaning of the word *боржоми* ["borjomi"], alongside the component given by modern Russian dictionary definitions (*лечебно-столовая минеральная вода* ['a medicinal table water']), a connotative component can be discerned: *популярная минеральная вода при желудочных заболеваниях* ['a popular mineral water used for treating stomach ailments']; later on, as a result of evolving social landmarks and changes in the stereotypes of people's perception of this realia item, the connotative component of the word has also acquired a new element: *символ советского образа жизни* ['a symbol of the Soviet way of life'].

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## “It’s too late to drink *borjomi*,” or Russian cultural vocabulary in the modern language space

### Summary

This article uses the example of the Russian cultural word *боржому* [“borjomi”] to demonstrate how a connotative component is formed within the lexical semantic structure of a Russian cultural word through the incorporation of parts of the historically variable background knowledge of the average native speaker. It is noted that this connotative component emerges from that part of a person’s knowledge which is specific to their nation, leading, in turn,

to a metaphorisation of the word's meaning – the item of realia which it denotes becomes a symbol, and the term acquires a symbolical meaning. In addition, the cultural word's classifying function, i.e., its capacity to distinguish that particular object out of a series of similar objects, is supplemented by a storage function, i.e., the capacity to reflect, record, and preserve in linguistic units the information acquired by the linguistic individual about the realities of life. The article shows how, in the lexical meaning of the term *боржоми* ["borjomi"], alongside the definitional component described by modern Russian language dictionaries (*лечебно-столовая минеральная вода* ['a medicinal table mineral water']), an additional, connotative component can be discerned by analysing the background knowledge of the average Russian native speaker: *популярная минеральная вода при желудочных заболеваниях* ['a popular type of mineral water used for treating stomach ailments'], and how, as a result of a reconfiguration of social landmarks and changing stereotypes in people's perception of this realia item, the connotative component of the term *боржоми* has now acquired a new element: *символ советского образа жизни* ['a symbol of the Soviet way of life'].

## **„Za późno pić borżomi”, czyli rosyjskie słownictwo kulturowe we współczesnej przestrzeni językowej**

### **Streszczenie**

W artykule pokazano na przykładzie rosyjskiego słowa kulturowego *боржоми* [„borżomi”], jak za sprawą włączenia części (zmiennej historycznie) ogólnej wiedzy przeciętnego rodzimego użytkownika formuje się w leksykalnej strukturze semantycznej takiego słowa komponent konotacyjny. Ów komponent konotacyjny powstaje przy tym z tej części wiedzy użytkownika, którą dzieli on z innymi Rosjanami, co z kolei prowadzi do metaforyzacji znaczenia słowa – element rzeczywistości przez nie określany staje się symbolem, a sam wyraz nabiera znaczenia symbolicznego. Funkcja klasyfikacyjna słowa kulturowego, która pozwala mu wyróżniać pewien konkretny przedmiot spośród innych podobnych, zostaje także uzupełniona o funkcję magazynującą, która

umożliwia mu odzwierciedlanie, rejestrowanie i przechowywanie w jednostce językowej informacji, jakie użytkownik języka uzyskał na temat realiów życia. Artykuł demonstruje, jak analiza ogólnej wiedzy przeciętnego rodzimego użytkownika języka rosyjskiego pozwala w znaczeniu wyrazu *боржоми* [„borżomi”] wyróżnić, oprócz komponentu definicyjnego opisywanego przez współczesne słowniki (*лечебно-столовая минеральная вода* [‘lecniczo-stołowa woda mineralna’]), także komponent konotacyjny (*популярная минеральная вода при желудочных заболеваниях* [‘popularna woda mineralna stosowana przez schorzeniach żołądka’]) – a także jak w wyniku rekonfiguracji społecznych punktów orientacyjnych i zmian stereotypów składających się na postrzeganie tego elementu rzeczywistości komponent konotacyjny wyrazu *боржоми* wzbogacił się o znaczenie *символ советского образа жизни* [‘symbol radzieckiego stylu życia’].

**Keywords:** Russian cultural vocabulary; average native speaker; connotative component

**Słowa kluczowe:** rosyjskie słownictwo kulturowe; przeciętny rodzimy użytkownik języka; komponent konotacyjny

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Olga N. Ivanishcheva, Department of the Russian Language and Mass Communication, Institute of Social Science and the Humanities, Murmansk Arctic State University

Correspondence: oivanishcheva@gmail.com

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