

LYRICS OF POPULAR FOREIGN SONGS AS A SOURCE OF LINGUOCULTURAL KNOWLEDGE FOR A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IMMERSION

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Abstract: The article views an alternative method of a foreign language immersion – by applying lyrics of popular foreign songs in the process of studying a foreign language in schools and universities. Analysed are linguoculturological bases of the foreign language learning method, periods in the development of the American song genre. The article proves the importance of musical genre while cognizing foreign culture, the function of the lyrics as a means of storing and transferring culture. It also reveals the basic moral values, cultural traditions, models of behavior and relations in the American society nowadays. On the example of the linguoculturological analysis of some popular American songs the linguocultural potential of the song genre is represented as a means of learning a foreign language and profound understanding foreign culture.

Keywords: linguoculture, concept, methods of linguoculture, linguistics, culture, lyrics, song

Introduction

Nowadays political, economic, cultural and communicative issues have become parts of international heritage. One of the results of the globalizing processes is a trend of learning foreign languages that requires new methods of quick and effective language acquisition. There might be an alternative way of foreign language immersion. Lyrics of popular foreign songs are an unusual material for research and analysis in this case. Availability of different nations' music, intercultural cooperation in musical art mean the necessity of usage of the lyrics of popular foreign songs as a cognitive material for foreigners and native speakers.

The topicality of the research is defined by the importance for modern linguodidactics of the systematic knowledge of effective studying foreign languages opportunities for implementing one of the fundamental functions

of a language – being a means of creation, development, storage and transmission of culture.

The objective and methodology

The aim of the research is proving the importance of usage of lyrics of popular foreign songs as a means of cultural and linguistic cognition. The object of the research are lyrics of modern popular American songs, their linguocultural characteristics.

Linguoculturological approach towards viewing linguistic units allows to reveal cultural facts represented in language, to describe specific character of a linguoculture. One of the main notions here is a concept that is a meaningful aspect of a verbal sign where a notion can be found, the latter referring to mental, spiritual or materialistic spheres of human being, fixed in

public experience of a nation, historically, socially and subjectively cognized [9].

Among different spheres of the USA national culture music plays a special role. American music is a kind of cultural alloy that includes some European genres (madrigal, ballade, aria, canzonetta) and purely American spirituals, blues and jazz.

Rich musical history of the American culture has created a fertile land for development of modern musical genres: rock, alternative rock, pop, dance-pop, jazz, rap and others. Music differs not only in a performance style but also in themes typical of a genre.

Music covers all the spheres of the American society. American performers are not afraid to throw light upon acute social issues, human vices, thus attracting attention of all the layers of the society to the existing challenges [4].

The material of the research are 10 modern American songs of the 2010s: Kety Perry – “Firework”, Lana Del Rey – “National Anthem”, “30 Seconds to Mars” – “City of Angels”, Eminem – “Not Afraid”, Lady Gaga – “Born this way”, “OneRepublic” – “Marchin on”, Rihanna – “Where have you been”, John Ledgend – “All of me”, “Imagine Dragons” – “Radioactive”, “Casting Crowns” – “Jesus, Friend of Sinners”.

The research findings

The research reveals concepts salient for the American society: “Patriotism”, “Money”, “American dream”, “Addiction”, “Self-realization”, “Optimism”, “Love”, “God”. Let's view the lyrics of some songs revealing their linguoculturological potential in the process of studying the English language.

Katy Perry is an American singer, a composer, an author of lyrics. The song “Firework” (2010) written in a dance-pop style contains a reminder of a national American holiday – the Independence Day celebrated on the 4th of July: “...like the 4th of July”. This song is about the necessity to change one's life, find a spark inside oneself and become a better, stronger and happier person. The clip based on this song tells us about people with cancer. Comparing the song and the video it is easy to define that the main idea is to live happily, cherish every moment of life and never give up despite all obstacles and difficulties. The Independence Day gives the same kind of mood to the Americans. All of them wait for this holiday

with anticipation because this day symbolizes their nation, freedom, victory of progressive ideas.

This single contains the concept “**Patriotism**” which is revealed with the help of poetic vocabulary used by the author: *shine, firework, ignite, light, spark*. The American patriotism represents an amazing phenomenon. The Independence Day is the core civil holiday in the USA. On the 4th of July in 1776 the Independence Declaration was adopted. This day became the birthday of the USA. The celebration of the Independence Day begins with vivid pompous civil and military parades which are always accompanied by fireworks (K.P.: “Cause baby you're a firework”).

This musical composition by Katy Perry is obviously not the only existing reflection of this event. Two films on the same topic are widely known: “Born on the Fourth of July” (1989) by Oliver Stone starring Tom Cruise and “Independence Day” (1996) by Roland Emmerich starring Will Smith. Nevertheless, Katy Perry's single is exactly a youth's response, a voice of the modern generation.

On the one hand, this song can be considered as a yet another meaningless hit for teenagers which can actually insult the great holiday. But the popularity of the single speaks for itself, proving that even the modern youth does not forget its history and feels proud about it. The achievements of this musical composition can serve as the evidence of this tendency. The single “Firework” was ranked first in “Billboard Hot 100” (a hit parade of 100 most popular songs in the USA weekly published by the American magazine “Billboard”). The song was also at the top of such wide-spread club charts as “Hot Dance Club Songs” (hit parade of dance music “Billboard”), and “Adult Pop Songs” (one of hit parades of “Billboard” which includes 40 most popular pop songs based the rotation of songs on the radio).

Let us move onto the realization of the concept “**Money**” in the song by the American singer Lana Del Rey “National Anthem” (2012). Her musical style was described as “the self-proclaimed gangland version of Nancy Sinatra” (the American pop singer popular in the 1960s) and marked by cinema-like sound and references to different aspects of pop culture of the 1950s and 1960s.

It should be noted that the concept “Money” is extremely popular in the American culture. The value judgments about money made by some

American ethic representatives testify that the attitude towards money is very controversial. Everybody needs money despite the fact that some people equate it to evil. Money is always the centre of attention, people's life is regulated with it. It is hard not to agree with the following statement: "Some worship ranks, some worship heroes, some worship power, others worship God and they all argue about these things; but everybody worships money with a single heart".

In this song money is a key to success and happiness: (Lana D. R.: "*Money is the anthem of success. So before we go out, what's your address?*"). The worship of money and the rich are taken for granted (Lana D. R.: "*Money is the reason we exist. Everybody knows it, it's a fact*").

The concept "Money" is characterized with a complicated associative structure which includes such ideas as livelihood and an indicator of luxury. A lot of representatives of the old American generation who in their youth had much less money and property than now think that the society has become too materialistic. Young men do not take into account the negative influence of money supporting the lyrics of the popular song by Liza Minnelli: "Money makes the world go round". The Americans call money all-powerful but dangerous at the same time. They believe that both phrases "money talks" and "the love to money is the root of all evil" are correct.

The linguocultural peculiarities of the song "30 seconds to Mars" – "City of Angels" are also worth attention. "30 seconds to Mars" is an American rock band from Los-Angeles. The song "City of Angels" (2013) written by Jared Leto is devoted to the band's hometown Los-Angeles as known as City of Angels. The song got the 8th position in the chart "US Alternative Songs (Billboard)". The musical composition became really popular thanks to the video based on it. A lot of luminaries such as Kanye West, Juliette Lewis, Lindsay Lohan, Olivia Wilde, Steve Nash, Ashley Olsen, Lily Collins, James Franco, Selena Gomez, Alan Cumming, Shaun White and Corey Feldman starred in this clip.

This single is connected with the concept "**American dream**" (30 Seconds to Mars: "*Found myself in the fire burnt hills, in the land of a billion lights. A boulevard of hope and dreams, streets made of desire*"). Annually thousands of people come to the USA, particularly to Los-Angeles in search of

success. The city is the focal point of the larger Los Angeles–Long Beach–Santa Ana metropolitan statistical area and Greater Los Angeles Area region, which contain 13 million and over 18 million people in Combined statistical area, making it one of the most populous metropolitan areas in the world in terms of entertainment, computer games, cinema, music and TV industries and the second-largest in the United States. Hollywood, one of the areas of Los-Angeles, also attracts people from all over the world. In most cases people's hopes and dreams get broken against a rock of competition, corruption and emotional stress. A lot of people achieve nothing. Disappointment and depression based on this are destructive for people, especially for the youth (30 Seconds to Mars: "*I'm 17, and looking for a fight*").

The concept "American dream" found in this single reveals the phenomena that happen in the deepest formations of the American's consciousness. "American dream" is a dream of a better life; it is directed to an individual and the realization of his abilities. The individual in this meaning is a centre of the society and he is self-contained. This concept as every nationwide myth contains not only the picture of the country, its people and existing principles but also some certain life stances, behavioral and moral standards.

The main aspects of the inner structure of "American dream" are an "individual and individualistic way of action" which does not accept dissolution of oneself in other people; "focus on success closely connected with the entrepreneurial initiative"; focus on personal self-creation which in the end lead to "self-made man" [6].

The song by Eminem "Not Afraid" is next to be considered. "Not Afraid" (2010) is the first single in Eminem's 7th album "Recovery". By the 5th of October 2010 it had become no1 in iTunes chart (a media player, media library used to play, download, and organize digital audio and video developed by Apple Inc) and in "Billboard Hot 100". In this song Eminem tells us about overcoming his problems in life during last years, particularly his drug addiction and rehabilitation (Eminem: "*We'll walk this road together, through the storm... I'm breaking out of this cage, I'm standing up, Imma face my demons*"). Drug addiction in the USA is of current interest. 56% of drug addicts in the world are from the USA, it is 12% (17,5 million

people) of the whole population of the USA according to the information in 2009.

The cultural and political movement of conservatism in the West appeared partially as a reaction to the wide addiction of the youth influenced by new outside drugs. This was equated to the degradation of traditional cultural foundations. That is why drug addiction isn't only a medical or social problem, it is also a cultural phenomenon – concept “**Addiction**”. The topic concerning drug addiction is unbelievably popular in the American musical industry. Drugs caused death of people in the song by Metallica – “Master of Puppets” (1986), the love to drugs and madness of a female drug addict is presented in the single by Big D and The Kids Table – “My Girlfriend's on drugs” (2004), the musical composition by Strata – “Cocaine” (2007) is about the story of an underage drug addict. In contrast to these songs, Eminem who has defeated his drug addiction appeals to his fans to fight against drugs. Taking into consideration the fact that the musical industry creates ideals and behavior patterns, it is worth hoping that this pattern can also become highly popular and help people eliminate their addiction. The change of attitude to drugs since the realize of the previously mentioned songs and the appearance of “Not Afraid” indicates a positive tendency. The worship of drugs was replaced by fear, hatred to them and the desire to get rid of the dreadful addiction. Probably in the near future singers will support this idea by that implementing a new behavior standard in the American society and the whole world community.

Now it is time to analyse the songs by Lady Gaga “Born this way”, Rihanna – “Where have you been” and John Legend – “All of me”.

Lady Gaga is an American singer, an author of lyrics, a producer, a philanthropist. Her electro-pop and dance-pop single “Born this way” (2011) reached the first position in the musical charts of 19 countries, it also became the third Gaga's song in the USA that headed “Billboard Hot 100”. The song is about a real person (the concept “Self-determination”) (L.G.: “*Don't hide yourself in regret, just love yourself and you're set*”). The singer appeals to the rich and the poor, to all races, nationalities and sexual minorities. Rob Sheffield from “Rolling Stones” (an American musical magazine) writes: “the more excessive Gaga gets, the more honest she sounds... [Gaga] whoops her manifesto to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, the

disabled and monsters of all races and nationalities”. In the British edition of “Guardian” (an American weekly newspaper) was written that the topic of this musical composition can be replaced by the phrase: “love yourself just the way you are” – L.G.: “don't be a drag, just be a queen”.

The peculiarities of the American national character are also revealed in such an intimate area as love. The Americans and the Europeans treat love differently. It is common knowledge that love is a complex social feeling which is brought up and cultivated within centuries. In Europe the attitude to love has been formed according to the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle, compositions by medieval theologians, troubadours' poetry, gallant and courtly literature, and love mysticism by French and German romanticists. All this old and deep European tradition is a secret to the Americans. Nevertheless, it is a mistake to believe that the Americans are not interested in love problems. On the contrary, the concept “**Love**” is paid a lot of attention in magazines, songs, TV programs and polls.

The French journalist Rossi de Stal in his article “Love in America” (1938) wrote: “America is the only country in the world where love represents a nationwide problem” [8].

The Americans' attitude towards love is pragmatic and rational, it often lacks that romantic halo which love has in the European culture. For the Americans love is all about sex. Yet the absence of the romantic flair among the Americans has benefits. The people are not ashamed of publicly discussing (including songs) problems connected with love and marriage.

The example of this approach is the song by Rihanna – “Where have you been”. Rihanna is an American R&B and pop-singer and actress. Her song “Where have you been” (2012) is related to dance-pop, R&B and hip-hop styles. It became no 5 in “Billboard Hot 100”, no 1 in the charts “US Hot Dance Club Songs” (a weekly published national review on the most popular songs in the USA dancing clubs) and “UK Dance Chart” (the chart made by the British musical organization “The Official Charts Company” and based on sales in music shops and downloads).

The main character in the song is a woman searching for a partner who is going to make her happy (Rihanna: “...*looking for someone, someone who can please me, love me all night*”).

long"). The song contains monotonous, downgraded vocabulary, slang: babe, man, yeah, repetitions are also used (*"I've been everywhere, man, looking for someone. I've been everywhere, man, looking for you babe"*). However the approach to love in American songs can be different like in the single by John Legend – "All of me". John Legend is an American singer, an author of lyrics, an owner of nine "Grammy Awards" (an accolade by the National Academy of Recording Arts and Sciences of the United States to recognize outstanding achievement in the music industry), one of the representatives of neo-soul style – a retrospective direction in modern rhythm-n-blues. "All of me" (2013) is a song dedicated to the singer's wife Chrissy Teigen. This musical composition became the 4th in the musical chart "Billboard Hot 100" and the 1st in the chart iTunes. The love ballad reached great success and it was performed at the 56th Grammy ceremony.

These two singles connected with love are clearly different from one another in a stylistic and emotional way. In John Legend's song a man in love plays the main role, consequently beautiful epithets and metaphors are given priority (*"beautiful mind"*, *"you're my end and my beginning"*).

The realization of the concept "Love" is not the same in the two analysed musical compositions. Probably, this is due to different genres of the songs, the public they are aimed at and the stories of their creation left behind. Thus the American society can invest absolutely diverse ideas in this concept: passion – tenderness, frivolity – loyalty.

Finally it is worth paying attention to the lyrics of the musical composition by "Casting Crowns" – "Jesus, Friend of Sinners". "Casting Crowns" is a modern Christian rock band founded in 1999 by a youth pastor Mark Hall, a central vocalist in the band and a member of the First Baptist Church in Daytona Beach, Florida. "Jesus, Friend of Sinners" (2012) written by Mark Hall and Matthew West was declared in the nomination of "Grammy" as "The best modern Christian music" and described as a "pop hymn" and lyrically "admonishes the church to show compassion". Mark Hall addresses the idea that the world knows those who follow the Christian faith more for what they oppose than what they support; he stated that the song is a "reminder that we need to do something about that". He also commented that,

despite the use of "strong words" in the song to grab attention, the true focus of the song is the chorus, which calls the church to be more aware of the world and to let their hearts be "led by mercy". While Hall noted the song was "one of the more direct songs [Casting Crowns] has written", he said that "it also speaks truth. And I think believers should speak truth to each other as long as we do it in love". The musical composition received positive reviews from critics. Lindsay Davis of GMC.com stated that the song, along with several others on the album, "are directed to the church, doing what [Casting Crowns] does best – bluntly calling out the way the world views Christianity based on the way Christians live their lives".

The USA is a country where polls and research on the influence of religious beliefs on people and their life stances are often held. The service "Gallup Organization" (an authoritative social institute in the USA) has been measuring the level of the Americans' religiosity. The latest research of this kind was held in 2011. At that time 92% of respondents declared their belief in God. For comparison, in 1994 there were 96% of them and in 1967 – 98%. According to the statistics, usually the retired, women and low-educated people with a small income are biased towards religiosity.

The majority of the Americans strongly believe that God cares about their private life and that he is directly involved in their daily routine; this creates the concept "God" (Casting Crowns: *"Oh Jesus friend of sinners, open our eyes to world..."*). So, 82% of the Americans rely on God's help in the process of making decisions; 61% of the respondents are sure that their life sticks to a special God's plan, 32% of them agree with the statement "It does not make sense to plan your life because it is in God's hands". On the whole better educated people with higher incomes less often support such principles.

One's belief in God decreases a potential to try to achieve some goals in life and it helps to avoid temptation. Nevertheless, the level of one's religiosity does not influence their behavior. This conclusion was made after several psychological experiments from Waterloo University the results of which were published in the magazine "Journal of Personality and Social Psychology".

Freedom of religion strengthened the American outlook making it more buoyant and independent [5].

Conclusion

The linguoculturological research of the songs of the 2010s reveals the important concepts of the American culture of nowadays: “Patriotism” (Kety Perry), “Money” (Lana Del Rey), “American dream” (“30 Seconds to Mars”), “Addiction” (Eminem), “Self-realization” (Lady Gaga), “Optimism” (“OneRepublic”), “Love” (Rihanna, John Legend), “God” (“Casting Crowns”). They reflect the American specific cultural traditions. Lyrics of the American songs contain knowledge of models of behavior and interrelations in the USA. They are included into the model of value view of the world of the nation.

The viewed songs promote the USA culture very effectively. Popular songs of the 2010s are extremely important from the cultural point of view.

Songs are parts of a language as a system of signs and parts of culture as a system of values

accumulated and created by a human being. This is a unique sample of symbiosis of different types of culture: linguistic, musical, social and others. They reflect changes that occur in them, quickly react to nation's moods. Revealing concepts in the American musical compositions analysis is very important for linguodidactic purposes and promotes interest to the issue of interrelation of language and consciousness, language and culture.

Lyrics of the songs can be perceived as a lively and constantly enlarged source of language and culture studying. In lyrics of the songs in an artistic form reflected are the main moral values of a nation, stereotypes of its consciousness at a certain historical stage of development. Thus listening, learning, singing foreign songs, interpreting and discussing them helps learners to understand foreigners not only linguistically but also culturally.

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