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CONCEPTUALIZATION OF REALITY BY MEANS OF RUSSIAN AND ENGLISH SOMATIC IDIOMS

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Abstract

Each language reflects reality in accordance with its structural and conceptual peculiarities. Comparison of reality conceptualization across cultures helps to reveal allomorphic and isomorphic processes in different languages, which facilitates immersion in a new linguistic and conceptual reality and understanding of the degree of coincidence / discrepancy in mental complexes formed by different languages. The aim of this work is to establish the peculiarities of somatic phraseology conceptualization in Russian and English based on two samples of idioms. The research is based on a current approach to the study of linguistic units and phenomena from the point of view of cognitive linguistics – a scientific paradigm that takes into account not only the structure of the language, but also its connection with human cognition, which helps to reveal the differences and similarities in the mentality of individuals and communities belonging to different cultures. This study is based on a systematic approach with the employment of the methods of componential, conceptual, and comparative analysis alongside cognitive modelling of idiomatic somatic conceptual spheres in the Russian and English languages. The results of the study show that the conceptual spheres in two languages are extremely heterogeneous both in the number of idiomatic expressions and in the meanings of Russian and English idioms that coincide in their somatic components, which is connected with the historical and cultural development of the linguocultures under study. However, since somatisms are biological universals, the percentage of conceptual matches is also quite representative in the two linguocultures under study.

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Keywords: Concept, conceptual sphere, idiom, somatic component.



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1. Introduction

Conceptualization of reality has been studied by a large number of Russian and international scientists (Yu.D. Apresyan, A. Vezhbitskaya, E.S. Kubryakova, V.I. Karasik, D.S. Likhachev, V.V. Maslova, Z.D. Popova, S.G. Ter-Minasova, I.A. Sternin, Yu.S. Stepanov, G. Lakoff, G. Fauconnier, M. Turner, etc.) who interpret it as a way of perceiving and structuring the world, as a cognitive activity of a person, the result of which is the formation of concepts, conceptual structures, conceptual spheres and the entire conceptual system (Apresyan, 1995). Zykova (2017) calls the process of concept formation cultural genesis, i.e. the process of creating the conceptual sphere of culture, in which concepts generated by experience and by understanding of the world take on iconic forms. The result of conceptualization is a conceptual picture of the world, which can be partially understood through the language that forms the linguistic picture of the world. The linguistic picture of the world reflects the surrounding world refracted through the prism of national and cultural specificity and individual characteristics of a person. The conceptual picture of the world is closely connected with language and is determined by it, since cognition of the world is carried out not only on the basis of empirical perception, but also with the help of abstraction and generalization (Alefirenko, 2016; Džanić & Berberović, 2019; Maslova, 2018). The conceptual picture of the world is based on a certain set of universals also known as basic concepts. According to Hickmann (2009), universals are divided into functional and formal ones. Formal universals affect the grammatical sphere of the language, while functional universals belong to the areas of cognition and communication. Functional universals can be conditionally divided into the following subtypes:

- 1) cognitive universals: general ideas about the world that children master in the first place (for example, spatial and temporal relationships);
- 2) semantic universals: representations that relate to the organization of linguistic categories;
- 3) pragmatic universals: basic concepts related to the situation of communication (for example, interlocutors' social roles).

2. Problem Statement

Somatic vocabulary (from the Greek *soma*, "body") is one of the oldest layers of the vocabulary related to linguistic-cognitive universals. In antiquity, people associated the world with parts of their body, on the basis of which one of the first models of the Universe was designed. Using the names of somatisms in figurative meanings, people associated abstract concepts (for example, power, strength, weakness, sacred, profane) with body parts (Klevtsova, 2007; Samchik, 2019). Nowadays these associations are no longer valid for the majority of people speaking Russian or English, however, idiomatic expressions retain these elements of ancient mentality, and a thorough linguistic and conceptual analysis of idiomatic expressions may bring out valuable information concerning historical and cultural peculiarities that affected Russian and English mentalities (Dzakhova & Dzodikova, 2018; Gilmutdinova & Samarkina, 2016; Kovshova, 2016).

3. Research Questions

The understanding of the verbal representation of the physical body of a person through the prism of culture from the point of view of the cognitive-cultural approach seems relevant, as it allows understanding how cognitive structures are reflected in the structure and semantics of phraseological units (idioms) and how the understanding of the world representing a particular culture is manifested. Idiomatic expressions, or idioms as culturally marked combinations of words characteristic of a certain language is a valuable source of information about the conceptualization of the world through the prism of a particular culture. Cross-cultural comparison of idioms may help to identify how universal somatic elements form cultural associations in different languages, i.e. how similar or different these associations are in the languages and cultures under study.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the specificity of reality conceptualization through idioms with somatic components in Russian and English. The following dictionaries served as sources of English idiomatic units: Oxford Learner's Dictionaries and the Great English-Russian Phraseological Dictionary by A. V. Koonin. Sources of Russian phraseological units were phraseological dictionaries of the Russian language by E. A. Bystrova, A. I. Molotkov, V. N. Telia, I. V. Fedosov. For analysis and comparison, 124 English and 129 Russian idioms with a somatic component were selected.

5. Research Methods

The selection of phraseological units was carried out according to the somatic keyword, which is included in an idiomatic expression, or an expression that implicitly refers to somatisms. By the method of continuous sampling, Russian and English idioms with the following somatisms were selected: *голова/head* (мозг/brain, волосы/hair, уши/ears), *лицо/face* (лоб/brow, брови/eyebrows, глаза/eyes, нос/nose, щеки/cheeks, рот/mouth, губы/lips, язык/tongue, зубы/teeth), *шея/neck* (глотка/throat), *спина/back* (плечи/shoulders), *верхние конечности/upper limbs* (локти/elbows, пальцы/fingers, arms, wrists, hands), *нижние конечности/lower limbs* (колени/knees, пятки/heels, toes, legs, feet), *ногти/nails*, *живот/stomach*, *грудь* (сердце/heart). The number of somatic keywords in the Russian language comprised 25 units, the number of somatic keywords in the English language amounted to 31 units. This asymmetry is explained by a more detailed division of somatisms of the upper and lower limbs in the English language, i.e. in English exist idioms with such somatisms as *toes, legs, feet, arms, hands*, which do not have non-term somatic equivalents in the Russian language.

All the units of the sample were divided into groups according to somatic components, and Russian and English units containing similar somatisms were compared according to conceptual phraseological meanings (hereinafter referred to as concepts) identified by means of the componential analysis of dictionary definitions of idiomatic expressions. The conceptual phraseological meaning is understood as the content plane of the phraseological sign, in which two interrelated levels are distinguished: semantic and conceptual. The semantic level can be described as a collection of semes. The source of the formation

of the semantic level is the conceptual level, understood as a structured set of various conceptual components, on the basis of which a holistic phraseological image is synthesized (Zykova, 2016a, 2016b).

All the concepts associated with a somatism included in an idiom were combined into conceptual spheres forming a hierarchical structure (see Figure 01). Figure 01 presents a general set of concepts obtained through the analysis of phraseological units in Russian and English.

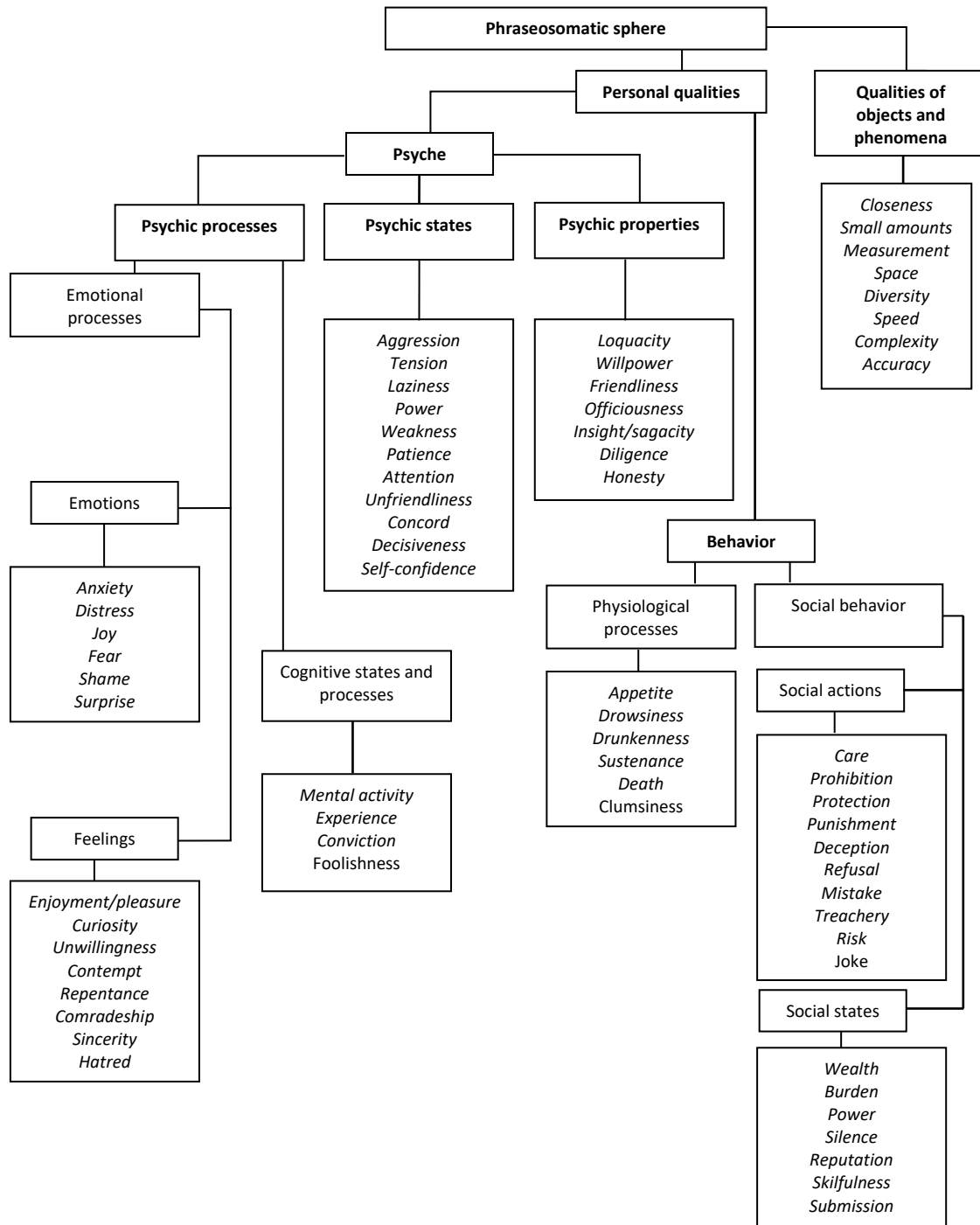


Figure 01. Classification of somatic idioms according to conceptual meanings

All concepts expressed by the somatic idioms (see Fig. 01) were divided into two conceptual spheres: *personal qualities* and *the qualities of objects and phenomena*. The conceptual sphere of personal qualities was divided into two spheres of a lower order: the sphere of *psyche* and the sphere of *behavior*. These areas are opposed to each other on the basis of accessibility / inaccessibility criteria for direct observation. This classification is based on the behaviorist approach (Cardwell, 2014), which allows distinguishing between internal and external phenomena. In the conceptual sphere entitled “psyche”, such sub-areas as *psychic processes*, *psychic states*, and *psychic properties* were distinguished. The subsection entitled *mental processes* was divided into two sub-areas: *emotional processes* and *cognitive processes*. The concepts belonging to the sphere of *emotional processes* were divided into the subclasses of *emotions* and *feelings*, in accordance with the classification by Leontyev (1971). In the *personal qualities* section, in the sub-sphere of *behavior* two major subsections were identified: *physiological processes* and *social behavior*. The conceptual sphere of *social behavior* includes cultural and socioeconomic realia, which were grouped into the sub-areas of *social actions* and *social states*.

6. Findings

A comparison of Russian and English idiomatic expressions with equivalent or similar parts of the body revealed a low percentage of similar concepts (27% in Russian and 28% in English of the total number of the samples) and a high percentage (73% in Russian and 72% in English) of conceptual inconsistencies. 72-73% of idiomatic expressions that coincided in somatic components included into idiomatic expressions have a mismatch at the lexical-structural and semantic levels. Nevertheless, basic conceptual coincidences (27-28%) can be traced in almost all somatic components presented in the samples. For example, phraseological units containing the following somatic components coincide in their general conceptual features: **head** tends to express the concept of mental activity (*to have a head for something*, *to lose one's head*, *let your heart rule your head* – *потерять голову*, *умная голова*), or the concept of a container for ideas (*put ideas into somebody's head* – *вбить себе в голову*); **head and feet** express the concept of measurement (*from head to toe* – *с ног до головы*); **brain** expresses the concept of mental activity (*to rack your brain* – *шевелить мозгами*); **mouth and ears** – the concept of joy (*from ear to ear* – *рот до ушей*); **face** – the concept of honesty and reputation (*to lose face* – *потерять лицо*, *to be written all over the face* – *написано на лице*); **eyes** – the concept of attention (*to catch somebody's eye* – *бросаться в глаза*), the concept of pleasure (*to feast your eyes on something* – *глаз не отвести*), and the concept of deception (*to pull the wool over somebody's eyes* – *пускать пыль в глаза*); **nose** – the concept of curiosity (*to poke your nose at smth* – *совать нос в чужие дела*), the concept of contempt (*to turn your nose up at something* – *воротить нос*); **cheeks** – the concept of patience (*to turn the other cheek* – *подставить щеку*); **tongue** – the concept of loquacity (*to have a loose tongue* – *язык без костей*), silence (*to bite your tongue* – *проглотить язык*); **neck** – the concept of punishment (*to get it in the neck* – *получить по шее*), the concept of burden (*a millstone around your neck* – *сидеть на шее*); **back** – the concept of treachery (*to stab in the back* – *получить нож в спину*); **shoulders** – the concept of experience (*an old head on young shoulders* – *иметь опыт за плечами*); **hands** – the concept of power (*to tie somebody hand and foot* – *связать по рукам и ногам*); **fingers** – the concept of foolishness (*finger in the air* – *попасть пальцем в небо*), the concept of laziness (*not to lift/raise a finger* – *палец о палец не ударить*), the concept of

contempt (*to let something slip through your fingers – смотреть сквозь пальцы*), the concept of deception (*to have sticky fingers – обвести вокруг пальца*), the concept of experience (*a rule of thumb – знать как свои пять пальцев*); legs – the concept of death (*to be on one's last legs – протянуть ноги*), the concept of fear (*cold feet – поджилки трясутся*); knees – the concept of submission (*to bring somebody or something to their/its knees – поставить на колени*), breast – the concept of repentance (*to beat your breast – бить себя в грудь*); heart – the concept of sincerity (*to give somebody (fresh) heart – от всего сердца*), the concept of unwillingness (*your heart is not in something – скрепя сердце*), the concept of friendliness (*to give somebody (fresh) heart – от всего сердца*), the concept of joy (*somebody's heart leaps – с лёгким сердцем*), the concept of bitterness/chagrin (*to take something to heart – сердце разрывается*).

The remaining sample cases (70%), which are identical in somatic elements (or partially coincident, in the case of the somatisms *рука* and *arm, hand, and wrist*), differ in the general idiomatic meanings containing these somatic elements. For example, in Russian, the somatic element *голова* (*head*) expresses the concepts of foolishness and recklessness (*без царя в голове* (lit. *without a tsar in one's head*), *в омут с головой* (lit. *into the pool headlong*), *дурная голова ногам покоя не даёт* (lit. *a foolish head doesn't give rest to one's legs*)). In English, the somatic element *head* is associated with the concepts of accuracy (*to hit the nail on the head*) and freedom (*to give someone their head*). In Russian, the somatic element *локоть* (*elbow*) expresses the concept of support (*чувство локтя* (lit. *the feeling of someone's elbow*)), in English - the concept of refusal (*to give someone the elbow*). In English, the somatic element *hair* expresses the concept of disregard (*not to turn a hair*) and molestation (*to get in one hair*), in Russian, the same somatic element *волосы* (*hair*) expresses the concepts of resentment (*рвать на себе волосы* (lit. *to tear one's hair*)) and arbitrariness (*протягивать на волосы* (lit. *to pull by the hair*)).

The hierarchical conceptual structure shown in Fig. 01 reveals which parts of the body in Russian and English are associated with various conceptual spheres, as well as helps to identify similarities and differences in these associations.

As an example, let us introduce the subsphere *psychic states* of the conceptual sphere *personal qualities* (see Table 01).

Table 01. Classification of the somatic idioms within the sphere of psychic states

CONCEPTUAL SPHERE		
PERSONAL QUALITIES	RUSSIAN IDIOMS	ENGLISH IDIOMS
PSYCHE		
Psychic states		
1. Aggression /lack of aggression		not to touch a hair of somebody's head
	пальцем не тронуть	not to lay a finger on somebody
	поднять руку на кого-то	to raise one's hand against someone
		to bare your teeth
2. Laziness	палец о палец не ударить	not to lift/raise a finger
3. Power	утереть нос (lit. to wipe someone's nose)	to have teeth

	быть по плечу (lit. to be for one's shoulder)	to find your tongue
4. Weakness		on bended knees
	не по зубам (lit. not up to one's teeth)	weak at the knees
	ахиллесова пята	Achilles heel
5. Patience/endurance	подставлять другую щеку	to turn the other cheek
		to grit teeth
6. Attention	бросаться в глаза	to catch somebody's eye
7. Tension		to keep somebody on their toes
8. Unfriendliness	встать не с той ноги (lit. to get off on the wrong foot)	to give somebody the cold shoulder
	надуть губы (to pout)	
9. Concord	ударить по рукам (lit. to strike one's hands)	to see eye to eye with somebody
10. Decisiveness	давать голову на отсечение (lit. to give one's head to be cut off)	to dig your heels
		to fight tooth and nail
11. Self-confidence	пуп земли (lit. navel of the world)	the brass neck
	море по колено (lit. the sea is knee-length)	

The conceptual sphere *psychic states* (see Table 01) includes 11 concepts, 5 of which are presented almost symmetrically in both languages (Russian and English). Table 01 shows coincidence in the parts of the body that are part of idioms expressing identical concepts.

The state of aggression / lack of aggression is presented in both languages by the somatic components *finger* and *limb* (*to lay a finger on someone - пальцем не тронуть; to raise one's hand against someone - поднять на кого-то руку*) within the "tool – action" metonymic model.

The state of laziness in both languages is associated with the inability of the individual to move one's finger (*not to raise a finger; палец о палец не ударить*), which represents the *tool - action* metonymic model.

The state of attention is also expressed in a similar way with the help of the somatic element *eyes* (*to catch someone's eye; бросаться в глаза*), which is part of the *tool-action* metonymic model.

Another concept expressed in a similar manner both in English and in Russian is the concept of patience, where in both cases the cheek is related to the saying of the biblical origin (*to turn the other cheek - подставить другую щеку*). The cheek-patience model is a variant of the *action-recipient* metonymic model.

The states of strength and weakness in Russian and English are expressed through different somatic elements (*to have teeth - быть по плечу; weak at the knees - не по зубам*). An exception is the borrowed idiom "Achilles heel" ("ахиллесова пята"), which functions as an allusion to Greek mythology in many languages.

Other concepts, such as *hatred, unfriendliness, consent, decisiveness, and self-confidence* are expressed with the help of idioms containing various non-corresponding somatic elements (see Table 01).

The analysis of the frequency of occurrence of idioms belonging to the sphere of psychic states revealed the following features (see Figures 02-03).

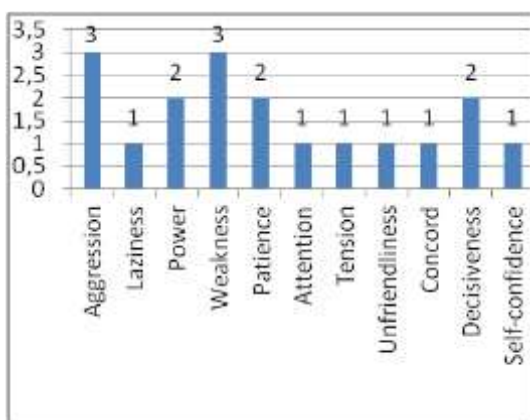


Figure 02. Distribution of concepts within the sphere of psychic states in the English sample

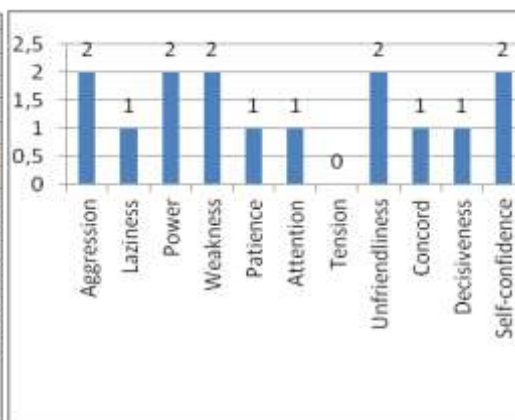


Figure 03. Distribution of concepts within the sphere of psychic states in the Russian sample

On the basis of these diagrams, we can conclude that the English sphere representing psychic states contains more idiomatic expressions with somatic elements than the Russian sphere. In the English sphere, 11 psychic states are represented by somatic idioms, whereas in the Russian sphere 10 of the 11 states are represented. The concepts of *aggression*, *weakness*, *decisiveness* have a higher nominal density in the English sample. In the Russian sample, the concepts of *self-confidence* and *unfriendliness* has a higher nominal density, the other concepts are represented either equally or with fewer examples compared to the English sample.

Similarly, a comparative analysis of all the subspheres of the phraseosomatic conceptual sphere was performed (see Fig. 01). Figures 04 and 05 reflect the percentages of all the selected subspheres of the conceptual spheres *Personal qualities* and *Qualities of objects and phenomena* in the English and Russian samples of idiomatic expressions.

Comparative analysis of the diagrams showed that despite the similar set of subspheres related to the conceptual spheres of personal qualities and qualities of objects and phenomena in the Russian and English samples their ratio differs. The English sample is dominated by concepts such as *psychic and social states* (see Figure 04). In the Russian sample, concepts such as *emotions, feelings, cognitive processes, psychic properties, physiological processes, qualities of objects and phenomena* predominate constituting higher nominal density of the phraseosomatic conceptual sphere (see Figure 05).

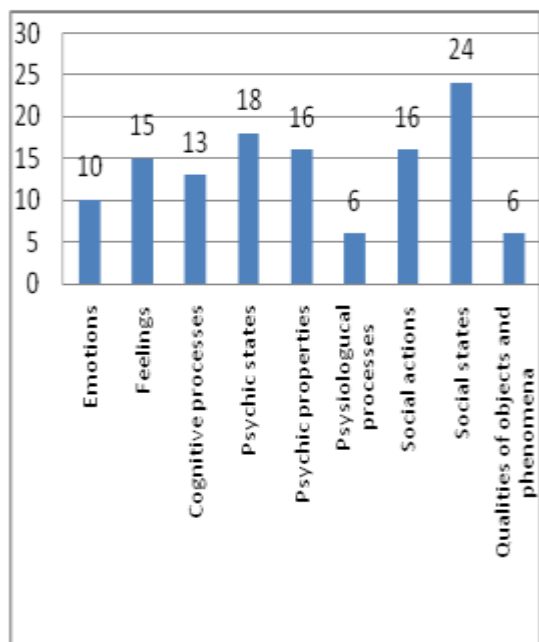


Figure 04. Distribution of the conceptual spheres in the English sample of somatic idioms

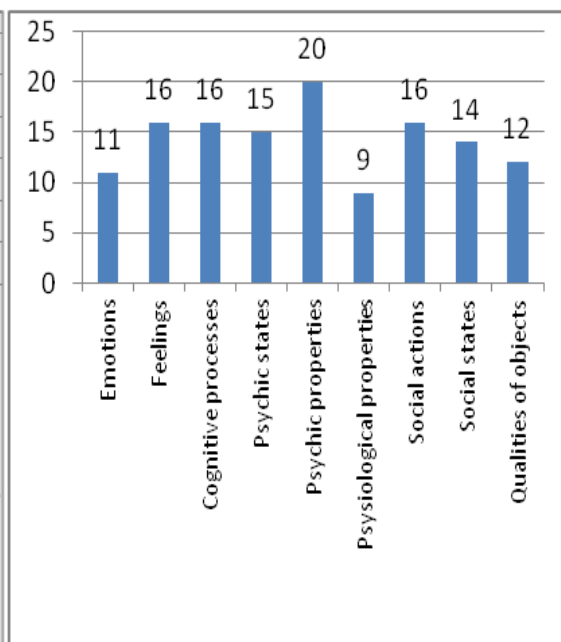


Figure 05. Distribution of the conceptual spheres in the Russian sample of somatic idioms

From the point of view of the frequency of usage of somatic elements in the Russian and English samples, it can be concluded that idioms with such somatic elements as *head, face, eyes, neck, toes*, predominate in the English sample; whereas in the Russian sample, idioms with such somatic elements as *лоб (forehead), брови (eyebrows), нос (nose), спина (back), плечи (shoulders), нижние конечности (lower limbs), живот (stomach)* tend to be more abundant.

7. Conclusion

Thus, on the one hand, somatisms belong to universals, which explains the percentage of coincidences in the conceptualization of reality. Nevertheless, in the universal somatic picture of the world there are features associated with different approaches to dividing the human body into segments. In English linguistic culture, a more fractional differentiation of the upper and lower limbs is observed (different lexemes for fingers and toes (*fingers, thumbs, toes, feet, legs*). In Russian linguistic culture, the human body is presented as a more holistic unity where the upper and lower limbs are not divided into more fractional components (*пальцы, ноги*).

On the other hand, similar conceptual spheres in Russian and English are extremely heterogeneous in terms of phraseological units in each conceptual sphere and in terms of the wording of phraseological units that coincide in conceptual and somatic components in Russian and English, which indicates the historical and cultural peculiarities of Russian and English cultures.

The isomorphism of English and Russian pictures of the world is also manifested in the dominance of the global conceptual sphere of “personal qualities”, which indicates an anthropocentric approach to understanding the surrounding reality in English and Russian linguistic cultures. Allomorphy manifests itself in the differences in such areas as *psychic properties, social states, cognitive and physiological*

processes, qualities of objects and phenomena, where somatic universals become the basis for national-cultural development and the divergence of the conceptual spheres of different linguocultures.

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