

**RLMSEE-2020**  
**The Russian Language in Modern Scientific and Educational Environment**  
**STRUCTURE AND LINGUOCULTURAL ASPECT OF RUSSIAN**  
**STAND-UP DISCOURSE**

Kipriianova Mariia Vladimirovna (a)\*

\*Corresponding author

(a) Peoples' Friendship University of Russia, 1117198, Mikluho-Maklaya Street 6, Moscow, Russia,  
maria@interdialog.it

**Abstract**

Stand-up discourse has become an integral part of modern youth culture in developed and many developing countries. This phenomenon has its origins in American popular culture. The article highlights the changes in the modern media space, such as the emergence of a new humorous genre on Russian television (stand-up performances), a brief historical reference of its appearance is given. Stand-up discourse accentuates the problems in the life of society, consolidates, brings them to the point of absurdity and grotesque as the most effective way of dealing with the imperfection of the world. The transition from pure entertainment to information and the desire to find new forms of interaction with the viewer is noted. The article also provides an explanation of the concept of “linguoculture” formulated by Russian linguists. The universal features of stand-up discourse are described and a brief overview of the structure and features of creating jokes in Russian stand-up discourse is given. Based on the analysis of the decoded scripts of the “live” performances of Russian stand-up comedians, the linguocultural aspect of the Russian stand-up discourse is highlighted. It consists in the choice of topics for speeches, and also manifests itself in universal precedent and national precedent phenomena.

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*Keywords:* Linguocultural component, national precedent phenomenon, Russian language, stand-up discourse, universal precedent phenomenon



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## 1. Introduction

This article is devoted to the study and the analysis of the speech of Russian comedians performing in the stand-up genre. This new trend in humorous art, which arose under the influence of the Americanisation of Russian culture and mass media, is actively developing in modern Russia. Americanisation is the process through which American cultural values are established in other countries. The appearance of stand-up performances on Russian television screens is one of the manifestations of this phenomenon and therefore the unification of the mass media culture in Russia. At the same time, further analysis of the performances of Russian stand-up comedians shows that there is a linguocultural component of the Russian stand-up discourse which manifests itself in the themes of joke texts. Along with the universal typological features of the genre, the national culture of laughter has been identified in linguoculture. The humorous linguistic culture of a particular country is unique and diverse, largely determined by the traditions, values and norms adopted in that society. Therefore, it is possible to talk about the presence of a cultural component in the Russian stand-up discourse.

Stand-up in Russia is a fairly new phenomenon. This fact explains the scarcity of works on the study of this genre. In Russia, interest in the topic of stand-up comedy has become an object of study in the framework of linguopragmatics, cognitive linguistics, and sociolinguistics (works by Barasheva & Karnaukh, 2019; Ivanova & Vel'dina, 2020; Lobina & Nikolaeva, 2018; Manzhelevskaya, 2017, etc.). However, almost all studies are devoted to the English-language stand-up discourse. The Russian one, which has not become an object of study within the framework of linguistic culture yet remains outside the attention of academics. Foreign studies in this direction consider the nature of stand-up comedy from the point of view of cognitive linguistics and discourse analysis, highlighting linguistic, social, cultural, ethnic, national and other components. At different times stand-up comedy was shown by such foreign scientists as Filani (2015), Greenbaum (1999), Mackin (2001), Pinto et al. (2013) and others.

Stand-up comedy, as a formed genre, appeared in English music halls in the 18th-19th centuries. Mark Twain and Norman Wilkerson are considered the founders of the stand-up genre in the United States. In the second half of the twentieth century, the popularity of this genre increased, and by 1970 stand-up comedy had become the main form of humorous performance. For Russia, stand-up comedians' performances are a new trend in youth culture. More than half a century after the emergence of its American predecessor, this type of comedy appeared on Russian television screens. In Russia, stand-up comedy began to develop in the mid-2000s, and at the end of 2012 the first Russian stand-up show, called Central Microphone, was released. Even though this genre of comedy appeared in Russia relatively recently, the interest in stand-up performances is growing every year.

Today, stand-up discourse, although it belongs to the entertainment discourse, is called the mouthpiece of modernity, which speaks truthfully about the problems of society and is a powerful means of influencing a wide audience. American researcher Greenbaum describes stand-up discourse as “an inherently rhetorical discourse; it strives not only to entertain, but also to persuade”. In her opinion, “stand-up comics can be successful in their craft when they can convince an audience to look at the world through their comic vision” (Greenbaum, 1999, p. 33). According to the well-known historian and critic Uvarova the ease, accessibility, entertainment of comedy does not exclude its content. Like other forms of

art, the stage (comedy) is able to capture time. In some cases, there are only external signs, which are fleeting, in others — new tendencies which can persuade the audience to change their point of view or help to open their eyes to the truth (Uvarova, 1988, p. 49). This role of the comedian as social commentator is surely not a new one. Shakespeare made extensive use of the fool's traditional license to have the innocent but sharp, shrewd observer speak the "truth" which was universally recognized but politically taboo (Mintz, 1985, p. 76).

That is why this genre of humorous art is an integral part of modern youth culture. There are many popular television and YouTube channels that specialise in stand-up discourse.

## **2. Problem Statement**

The article is aimed at:

- providing the wider picture of the Russian stand-up discourse;
- highlighting the linguocultural aspect of the Russian stand-up discourse.

## **3. Research Questions**

Specifically, the following research questions are pursued:

- What is stand-up discourse?
- Is there a linguocultural component in the Russian stand-up discourse?
- What does the linguocultural component in Russian stand-up discourse consist of?

The object of the research is the joke of the Russian stand-up discourse as a product of the intentionally linguo-creative activity of the stand-up comedian. The choice of the text of a joke as an object of research is dictated by the fact that it provides a unique material for decoding and interpretation of comic information by the addressee based on his/her background knowledge.

The subject of analysis is the linguocultural characteristics of jokes in Russian stand-up comedy, as well as the basic mechanisms and techniques for creating a comic effect in a joke.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

The Purpose of Study is a comprehensive analysis of the specifics of the joke in Russian stand-up discourse in the context of cultural linguistics.

## **5. Research Methods**

To achieve this goal, the following methods were used: analysis of literature and generalisation of the results of research, academic observation and colligation of linguistic experience devoted to the research topic. The material for the analysis was "live" scripts of Russian stand-up comedians' performances, whose videos are freely available on YouTube. The choice of personalities is based on the popularity of the artists, as well as the number of views (over two million), which indicates their popularity among Internet users.

## 6. Findings

The research results show the presence of a linguocultural component in the Russian stand-up discourse. While conducting the research, the texts of the speeches of Russian stand-up comedians were collected, described and analysed. The rich linguistic material collected in the course of the research, as well as the great popularity of the named humorous genre, serve as additional evidence of the relevance and importance of further studying the language of the Russian stand-up discourse, its speech characteristics and potential.

One of the most researched fields in linguistics is cultural linguistics. In recent years, this term has become firmly entrenched in the conceptual apparatus of the scientific description of the relationship between language (linguistics) and culture (works by Kostomarov & Vereshchagin, Vorobiev, Shaklein, Burvikova, Karasik, Sternin and others). So far there is no unique definition of linguoculture, although there is a general understanding that we are talking about a discipline in which the idea of the syncretic unity of language and culture has been approved (Shaklein & Mikova, 2015, p. 4).

“Cultural linguistics is perhaps the youngest branch of ethnolinguistics today ... The tasks of this academic discipline include the study and description of the relationship between language and culture, language and ethnicity, language and folk mentality ... It presents linguoculture as a lens through which a researcher can see the material and spiritual identity of the ethnic group” (Vorkachev, 2001, p. 64).

A deep understanding of the term “linguoculture” can be found in the works of Krasnykh. Here it is defined as “culture embodied and fixed in the signs of the language”, revealed to us in the language and through the language (Krasnykh, 2013, p. 7).

The assertion: “language is closely connected with culture: it grows into it, develops in it and expresses it” has become a postulate of modern linguistics (Maslova, 2018, pp. 172—190).

As a comic phenomenon, stand-up discourse, on the one hand, is a universal human phenomenon, and on the other, it is deeply national. This means that, despite its universality, it is a reflection of the national linguistic culture. Stand-up comedy is a humorous genre borrowed from American and English entertainment clubs. Over the years of its formation, it has acquired structural and compositional features: the construction of the text, jokes of speeches, techniques for creating a comical funny situation, manner of presenting material, etc. Therefore, it can be argued that in many ways the Russian stand-up discourse is similar to its predecessor — the American stand-up discourse, while it has the Russian national culture of laughter. A common technique for creating a joke in stand-up discourse is to break the usual template. For example, when the stand-up artist talks about a situation which is familiar to everyone and the beginning of a monologue is immediately recognised by the audience, but the end turns out to be completely different from what was expected. “The effect of disappointment” is one of the most common ways of constructing a joke; the first part builds the expectation, and the second one destroys it. This effect is created using various stylistic tropes and techniques. The main condition for the realisation of the effect of disappointed expectations is the prevailing psychophysiological and linguistic experience of a person. Each person has a habitual way of thinking, reactions to an already familiar situation, an algorithm for constructing speech, and any dissonance creates the effect of disappointed expectations

(Arnold, 2016, pp. 108-112). The concept of a joke in stand-up discourse is built on a collision, a conflict of already established ideas in the mind of the listener.

One of the universal features of stand-up discourse is the comedian's performance style. These include: tough and pure stand-up comedy, absurdism, anti-humour, self-deprecation, black humour and a comedy of observations. The comedian does not always stick to the same style in his performance (Shiroglazova, 2020, pp. 189-195). Also, the internal structure of a joke is universal and has three different components: 1) stress building; 2) the semantic centre; 3) climax (Hockett, 1982, pp. 686-690). Building tension is the basis of a joke, and a semantic centre containing a word or phrase creates ambiguity. The climax is an unexpected effect on the audience that has the function of entertaining and satisfying the audience. From Nurlan Saburov's monologue: *"Is there anyone on a diet? ... My wife keeps track of calories, carbohydrates, proteins, and doesn't keep track of money at all. She also monitors what I eat at work. I lie to her all the time. She told me: "What did you eat at work?" I told her: "I love you"* (Nurlan Saburov, StandUp on TNT, 2020). The speech means of actualisation of the comic are alogism, contrast, homonyms and paronyms. Humour can be created not only with the help of lexical and stylistic means, but also with a number of thematic blocks that can be interspersed, confusing the viewer and adding intrigue to the joke.

Stand-up discourse as one of the types of humorous discourse has a "national humorous attitude". It is a set of mental (cognitive) stereotypes that reflect national characteristics of humour. The humorous effect arises within the framework of the cultural paradigm (socio-linguocultural situation), illustrates and reinforces it. Background knowledge is necessary, although not always sufficient for understanding national humour (Kulinich, 2000, pp. 53-58). The themes of stand-up jokes are diverse: from discussion of a close circle of people, travel, contemporary social problems to acutely provocative topics (foreign policy, vices, death, illness). All these topics are universal for any stand-up discourse. However, it has been revealed that there are some themes which are typical of the Russian stand-up discourse. These include the problems of domestic violence, feminism, homophobia, etc. These topics are discussed in Russia more often than in other countries. Since cultural linguistics is considered in the light of the methodology for studying stereotypes of a national character, the topic of the research is especially relevant for those speeches whose topics are the opposition of ethnic groups and national stereotypes. When analysing the texts of stand-up jokes, an image of the Russian national character is formed, which consists of incredible stamina, compassion, courage, ingenuity, and a strong character of a Russian person who does not give up when faced with difficulties. From the monologue of Pavel Volya: *"We are unkillable ... The dollar jumped, the euro too. Ruble since March is on AVL apparatus. But we don't care about anything"* (Pavel Volya, We are unkillable, 2020). For an adequate understanding of the comic situation, the background knowledge of the recipient should include the fact that during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, an artificial lung ventilation machine (ALV) was adopted to help the patients breathe and save them. (This is a piece of current information that the recipients can get from the medias). During the entire speech, the author deliberately uses the generalising pronoun "we", as well as the phrase "our people", thus placing himself together with those present in the hall. From the monologue of Sergei Bessmertny: *"The Russian superman can watch football on the turned off TV. A Russian superman can always get two identical ones from a pile of washed socks ... The Russian superman drank the coastal sap"*

*and sucked a birch tree*” (Bessmertny, The Russian superman, 2016). The described everyday reality of modern Russian life is presented in an ironic form, praising the incredible strength of the Russian man. On the other hand, the monologues of famous comedians often contain bitter self-irony, self-deprecation, comparing “us” and “them” (the West). Often, “they” win, while the author emphasises the mediocrity of the values of Western culture and underestimates the achievements of others. To a large extent, humour is realised in the fields of standard and familiar humorous topics, and a number of sociocultural and speech situations underlie the division of humour into linguocultural strata. In the Russian stand-up discourse, comedians often sneer about the laziness, and negligence of Russians, their desire to go to extremes, leading to contradictions or extreme positions.

Since it reflects the system of values of a specific cultural group and it responds to changes in it, stand-up discourse can’t help but pay close attention to precedent texts, which provide a significant value source. When studying the material of Russian stand-up discourse in the texts of speeches, the presence of precedent phenomena was discovered: a universal precedent and a national precedent phenomenon.

The first ones are fixed in the universal cognitive space and are known to any Homo Sapiens. When, as the second, national precedent, they are inseparably associated in the human mind with a certain linguistic culture and are included in the national cognitive base”. (Krasnykh, 2013, p. 18).

The following examples belong to the national precedent phenomena: *“We, men, came up with 3 things for ourselves, which are freebies. What do we have? In my life I have to plant a tree, grow my son and build a house. The tree grows by itself, another person gives birth to a son, the guest-workers build a house* (Pavel Volya, 2012).

An ironic interpretation of popular Russian wisdom has a comic effect. This intertextual inclusion contains appellative, expressive and metatextual functions.

*“Tell me who your friend is, and I will tell you how unlucky he is”* (Pavel Volya, 2010).

The illusion of quasi-quotation of phraseological units “Tell me who your friend is and I will tell you who you are” will be familiar to every representative of the Russian linguistic culture.

The listener's perception of humour is directly related to his cultural and linguistic competence against the background of anticipating a different outcome of the situation: *“We are the family where the wife developed, developed and divorced, and now she does not drag the whole family on her, but drags the suitcase to her mother”* (Andrey Atlas, StandUp: new season premiere, 2020).

In this example, the effect of surprise in the micro-theme of a joke is based on presence of two homophones in Russian language “razvilàs” and “razvilas” of the lexeme “divorced” and “developed”. Alogism and pragmatic ambiguity cause a comic effect on the basis of the incompatibility of two situations: the wife was engaged in self-development and developed “razvilas” — the logical conclusion of the phrase, the husband is dissatisfied with the way his wife manages her time and decides to divorce “razvilàs”.

Precedentness is one of the studied phenomena in cultural linguistics nowadays. “Humorous compositions have a tendency to be allegorical and allusive. The addressee him or herself extracts the

hidden meaning, getting satisfaction from it and using widely the elements of cultural literacy” (Slyshkin, 2000, p. 51). When it comes to stand-up discourse, precedent phenomena create intellectual humour. To understand the comic, the addressee uses his background knowledge, since the effectiveness of the interpretation of a joke depends on the volume of his encyclopedic knowledge. Precedent phenomena give an additional intellectual load to the addressee and enrich his cognitive base. The dissonance between stereotypical situations and their presentation by a stand-up comedian leads to a comic effect (Lobova, 2013, p. 12). From the monologue of Pavel Volya: *“All words that express something «in between» carry a negative meaning. Let's say you ask a person: Hello! How are you? - Fine. This means that he is doing badly, because after that he adds why: okay, only had a fight with my wife; ok, just fired from work; ok, now instead of me is Mishustin”*. (Pavel Volya, We are the country of extremes, 2020).

This joke refers to the current changes in the Russian government. For its adequate decoding, the following facts must be included in the background knowledge of the listener:

- 1) Mishustin became the Prime Minister (current information known from the mass media);
- 2) Previously, the government was headed by Medvedev (an element of political literacy, known to any citizen of the Russian Federation).

These examples (the presence of stereotypes of the Russian national character reflecting the national peculiarities of humour; the division of humour into linguocultural strata; the fact of a precedent phenomenon; the statement that the perception of humour by the listener is directly related to her/his cultural and linguistic competence) in the texts of jokes of Russian comedians prove that the Russian stand-up discourse has a “national humorous attitude”.

## 7. Conclusion

As a result of studying the theoretical basis of stand-up discourse, as well as analysing the performances of Russian stand-up comedians, the following conclusions were obtained:

- In the situation of globalisation, the local begins to give way to the international. Speaking about the humorous genre of stand-up comedy borrowed from American culture, it can be argued that the Russian stand-up discourse, based on the features of its predecessor, has its own linguistic culture.
- Each stand-up performance reflects current social events. The topic of performances is not limited.
- Although a stand-up comedian's speech is prepared in advance, entails many features of spoken discourse. It contains frequent neologisms, jargon, slang expressions, colloquial words, colloquial particles, and interjections. It is characterised by the features of colloquial syntax: colloquial etiquette formulas, a fast speech rate, corresponding syntactic constructions, including ellipsis, a violation of the syntactic structure of speech, the lack of grammatical agreement of the sentence members, as well as non-union sentences.
- The need to keep the audience's attention for a long time forces the stand-up comedian to use accent signals in his speech: repetitions, exaggerations, metaphors, etc.
- The individual personality traits of a stand-up artist affect the style of the presentation, its content, and accent signals.

- Russian stand-up discourse is a new form of presentation of the comic, which includes not only a monologue presentation, but also verbal means of communication.
- The comic effect in stand-up discourse, in particular in Russian stand-up discourse, is achieved through the use of contrast, the contradiction of two semantic plans, as well as the use of various linguistic means to achieve the effect of disappointed expectations.
- It is shown that the text of jokes of the Russian stand-up discourse reflects the properties of the national character, mentality, temperament, traditional means of expressing emotions. The “humorous universal” — ethnic (local) humour, the main prerequisite of which is the cultural differences of peoples, is noted.
- The tasks of Russian stand-up discourse are not only to entertain the viewer, but also to inform and convince.

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