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Comparative Analysis of English and Russian Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity

Bachelor's thesis

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PREFACE

The present thesis discusses a certain field of linguistics focusing on a cross-cultural comparative approach which is applied to investigating and analyzing idiomatic expressions in Russian and English.

As a method of conducting the present research comparative linguistic analysis of idiomatic expressions involving nationality or ethnicity in English and Russian has been chosen.

The chief aim of the thesis is to compare the etymology and semantics of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian and English languages, and to make conclusions about the emotional colour of idiomatic expressions of different nationalities/ethnicities represented in these two languages.

The hypothesis of the present BA thesis either to be proved or refuted is English and Russian languages demonstrate the negative attitude towards different nationalities/ethnicities represented in idiomatic expressions.

The present paper consists of four parts: the introduction, two chapters and the conclusion.

The Introduction presents a brief overview of the Indo-European superfamily of languages both Russian and English belong to, East Slavic and West Germanic branches precisely. Also in order to determine the relations of Russian and English throughout the ages, the historical and social contexts of two languages are discussed in the introduction. Moreover, the introduction provides the key definitions, principal objectives and the hypothesis of the research.

Chapter 1 is focused on defining phraseological units and idioms as part of lexicology on the basis of world scholars' interpretations, the major criteria by which phraseological units/idioms can be distinguished, and main resources phraseological units and idioms originate from.

Chapter 2 of the research is dedicated to the comparative analysis of phraseological units and idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity and fulfilment of the aim of the present research. It also presents a brief analysis of equivalent idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English and Russian; the examples are given and the matter is explained.

The Conclusion sums up the results of the analysis and comments on the hypothesis.

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INTRODUCTION

It is language, more obviously than anything else, that distinguishes humankind from the rest of the animal world. More recently, humans have often been described as tool-making animals; however, language itself is the most remarkable tool that they have ever invented. Language, in fact, is the greatest machine-tool which makes human culture possible. Linguistics, the scientific study of language, can reach more deeply into the human past than the most ancient written record. The science developed from the study of the Indo-European superfamily of languages, by far the largest in number of languages and number of speakers. “Nearly half of the world’s population speaks an Indo-European language as a first language” (Gamkrelidze, Ivanov 1990:110).

The family tree of the Indo-European languages can be traced back to the protolanguage that was spoken by some relatively small group of people in a comparatively restricted geographical area, and flourished more than 6,000 years ago. In order to look for family relationships between languages it is essential to return to the earliest known forms of language, where you will definitely find a correspondence between either their sound-systems or the meanings certain words carry, which languages belong most closely together, etc. *The English Language: A historical Introduction* (Barber, 2000:70) offers one optional Indo-European family tree division as following:

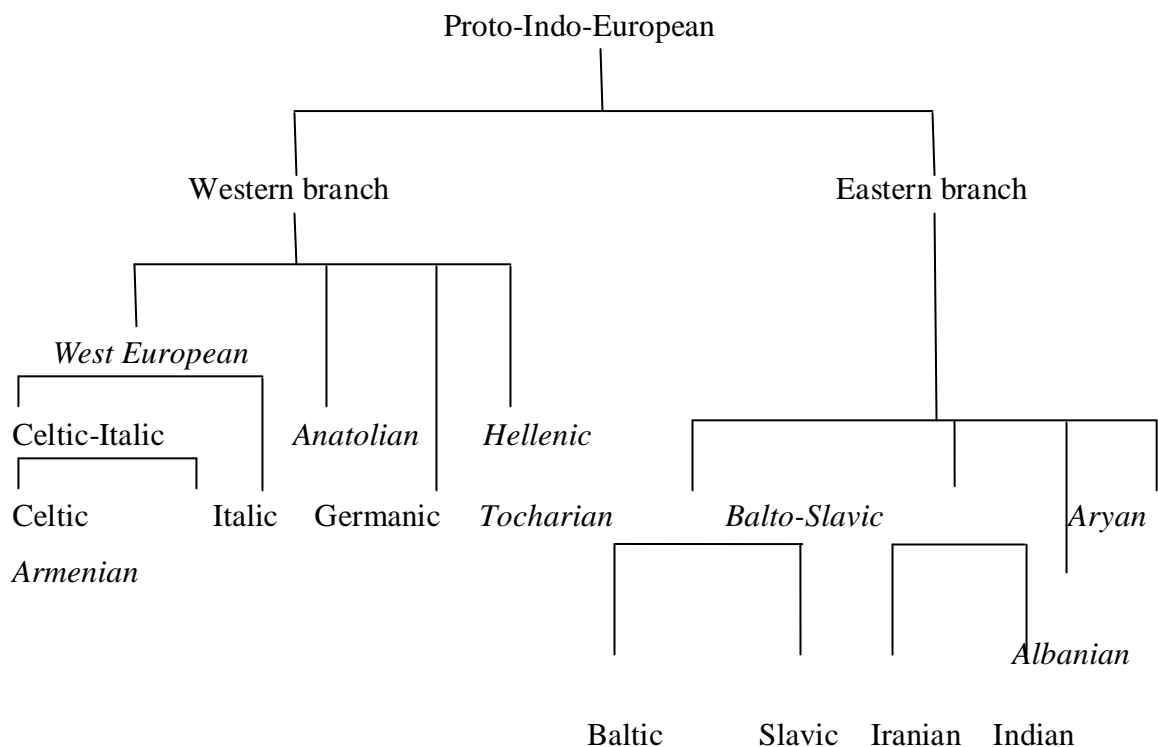


Figure 1. Proto-Indo-European language family classification

There are, undoubtedly, an enormous amount of subgroups of languages, excluding the mentioned above (see Appendix 1). However, we will not be more profound than our research requires, and take a closer look at two main Indo-European branches of languages, West Germanic, English and East Slavic, Russian; their movement through the world and following consequences of the displacements.

“Over three hundred million people speak a Germanic language, and about two hundred and seventy million speak a Slavic language”, - claims Charles Barber in *The English Language: A historical Introduction* (2000:67). There is a well-known piece of writing left describing Germanic-speaking people, or Germans by Tacitus, a Roman Empire historian, dated from AD 98. Around this time Germans had already started pressing on the borders of the Roman Empire. Germanic-speaking people obviously disliked peace; their tribes went through Scandinavia and Germany between the Elbe and the Oder. Rapidly growing population and natural resources degradation made Germans conquer new lands in all directions round about 300 BC (Barber, 2000:83). Eventually, Germanic tribes (Anglo-Saxons) settled in East Anglia (England), whilst the Romano-Celtic population of Britain was still fighting for their right to co-exist on the same island. As a result of this expansion of the Germanic-speaking people, differences in dialects of Germanic languages occurred; borrowings from conquered lands' languages were taken into English (Latin *requiem*, *endsay*, *complex*, French *bayonet*), or conversely complete loss of some words due to their irrelevance (outdated concept like *fee-penny*). Since Anglo-Saxon migration from the mainland was not just the arrival of ruling minorities, but the settlements of a whole people, their language remained the dominant; the number of Celtic words taken into English was small, names of towns (*London*) and rivers (*Thames*) mostly.

Change of meaning or code-switching is a widely spread issue in English language as well. Some words – *pollen*, *salt*, *work* – have been adopted for a specific vocabulary by scientists. Other words have been changed throughout the time for a various historical reasons. In the sense of 'beautiful' the Old English adjective *fair* – originated from Gothic *fagrs*, 'fit' or 'suitable' – had been frequently used of women from Old English time onwards. However, considering the fact that upper-class never got sunburnt, unlike peasants, women remained blond. Consequently, a beautiful woman was also a blond one, and fair became to mean 'light in colour'. (Barber, 2000:229).

First, though blurred written record about Slavic-speaking people appeared in the 5th century BC amongst other ancient Greek historian's Herodotus pieces of art.

Describing ancient Greeks' life, Herodotus mentioned inhabitants of south-eastern coast of Baltic Sea defining them as unexplored lands' foreigners occupied with amber trade (Kondrashov, 1962:15). These people are thought to possibly have inhabited parts of Germany at one point, before migrating eastward, southward and northward in the 6th century. As the early Slavs were agriculturalists, their migration at this stage was not one of violent conquest by warriors, but of peaceful colonization by peasants moving about with tents in family groups. The situation had changed during the Great Slavic Migration around the year 500 AD. There was a rush of Slavic migration in all directions including to the south towards the Black Sea and the mouth of the river Danube. "Slavic warbands and groups broke through many defences with weapons in hand, throughout the lower Danube in the outer regions of the Byzantine Empire reaching the Balkans" (Borzyskowski, 2003). Most of foreign inhabitants were assimilated by Slavs' expansion; although, in spite of the great Slavic influence, some Romance-speaking settlements (present Romania) managed to maintain their Latin-based language. Consequently, Slavic languages have also been significantly changing throughout the history; nevertheless, Proto-Slavic heritage – lexicology of nature, outer world, physical aspects of life, familyhood – simultaneously with the enormous impact of the other members of Indo-European language family developed, enriched, and improved the Slavic languages.

As we can see, these two completely different languages united by one ancestor – Indo-European language family – demonstrate no other similarity, except today we come frequently across with the need to translate language units from English to Russian and vice versa. The present paper focuses on phraseological units, idiomatic expressions precisely. Kondrashov (1962:33) claimed that phraseology is inherently distinctive and national; idioms and other phraseological units are primary attributable to certain historical and cultural aspects of corresponding nationalities' lifestyle. These most peculiar figures of speech broaden our view on two absolutely different languages; following some patterns it is possible to recognize some historical events and their consequences.

A number of previous researches have been conducted on a marginally similar topic. Some scientific papers focus on idioms of different concepts, such as idioms of colour, time concept in idioms, etc. Moreover, there were authors who brought up the issue people face with while translating phraseological units, proverbs precisely, into different languages; often there are no equivalent proverbs, consequently, loss of meaning in translated version is almost inevitable. Idiomatic expressions in language as

a historical heritage which join different cultures, showing the connections, resentments and joy nationalities had experienced together is the main area of interest which I am going to investigate in the present thesis.

In order to proceed with the following thesis, it is significant to agree on the key definitions of the thesis:

Comparative analysis – method of analysis that utilizes the comparison of two or more comparable alternatives, processes, products, qualifications, sets of data, systems, or the like.

English language – West Germanic language of the British Isles of the Indo-European language family that is closely related to Frisian, German, and Dutch languages. Widespread and standard also in the U.S. and most of the British Commonwealth.

Russian language – belongs to the family of Indo-European languages and is one of three living members of the East Slavic languages. Written examples of Old East Slavonic are attested from the 10th century onwards.

Idioms – a group of words in a fixed order that has a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word separately, and which remains grammatically integral.

Nationality – in law, membership in a nation or sovereign state.

Ethnicity – the identification of a group based on a perceived cultural distinctiveness – language, music, values, art, styles, literature, family life, religion, ritual, food – that makes the group into a “people.”

The principal objectives of the thesis are the following:

- To research idioms of nationality or ethnicity in English and Russian;
- To analyze the etymology and semantics of such idioms in English and Russian;
- To compare such idioms in English and Russian and make conclusions about the emotional colour of different nationalities/ethnicities represented in idiomatic expressions in English and Russian.

The hypothesis of the thesis to be either confirmed or refuted is:

English and Russian demonstrate negative attitude towards different nationalities/ethnicities represented in idiomatic expressions.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Phraseology is a branch of lexicology studying phraseological units: set expressions, phraseologisms, or idioms. Phraseological units differ from free word-groups semantically and structurally: they convey a single concept and their meaning is idiomatic; they are characterized by structural invariability; they are not created in speech but used as ready-made units (Lecture VI: *Phraseology. Classification of Phraseological Units*, 2009). This chapter will depict the main issue of the terms “phraseological unit” and “idiom” precisely, come across with a number of linguists’ points of view on classifying phraseological units and their origins.

1.1 Idioms and phraseological units

A language is a dynamic system which social existence is being supported by its ability to develop. Phraseological units, or idioms (from Greek “peculiar”), represent what can probably be described as the most picturesque, colourful and expressive part of the languages’ vocabulary.

Phraseology is a kind of picture gallery in which are collected vivid and amusing sketches of the nation’s customs, traditions, and prejudices, recollections of its past history, scraps of folk songs and fairy-tales. (Antrushina 2001:225)

There is no coincidence that I mentioned both phraseological units and idioms. The terminology of units of phraseology varies depending on geographical location of scholars who use the terminology. The Russian term *фразеологическая единица*, lit. ‘phraseological unit’ is widely spread among Russian scholars, whereas western scholars use the term ‘idioms’ instead. Moreover, a number of scholars distinguish between these two terms – ‘idiom’ and ‘phraseological unit’, which could become an obstacle for those who start studying phraseology:

The term „idiom“, both in this country and abroad, is mostly applied to phraseological units with completely transferred meanings, that is, to the ones in which the meaning of the whole unit does not correspond to the current meanings of the components. (Antrushina 2001:232)

Therefore, some considerable confusion about the terminology associated with this word-group might appear. Let us compare a few definitions in both Russian and English correspondingly:

- Idiom is a sequence of words which operates as a single semantic unit, and like many multi-words verbs the meaning of the whole cannot be deduced from an understanding of the parts. They are often syntactically

restricted, someone can have a chip on their shoulder, but not a shoulder with a chip. (Gairns, Redman 1986:35)

- A phraseological unit is a stable word-group characterised by a completely or partially transferred meaning. (Koonin, 1970)
- A group of words established by usage as having a meaning not deducible from those of the individual words. (Oxford University Press, 2013)
- Units of fixed context, the new meaning of which is created by the whole, every element of the unit may have its original meaning weakened or completely lost. (Amosova, 2012)
- An idiom is a special kind of phrase. It is a group of words which have a different meaning when used together from the one it would have if the meaning of each word were taken individually. (HarperCollins Publishers, 1995:4)

To sum up, it is obvious that the terms „phraseological unit“ and „idiom“ are similarly defined in different sources; consequently, I would like to state a final definition of the term I have already mentioned in the Introduction, and I am going to refer to in the course of the present thesis:

Idiom is a group of words in a fixed order that has a particular meaning that is different from the meanings of each word separately, and which remains grammatically integral.

There are some other terms denoting more or less the same linguistic phenomenon: set-expressions, phrases, set-phrases, fixed word-groups, collocations. However, it should be pointed out at once that there are two major criteria by which phraseological units can be distinguished from ”free“ word-groups: semantic and structural. The structural criterion refers to a number of restrictions in terms of substitution components, introducing any additional components and grammatical invariability. As a rule, no word can be either substituted or additionally added, or grammatically changed in phraseological units without destroying the sense. On the other hand, the semantic criterion mentioned above, which characterises a phraseological unit, appears in the fact that the meanings of the constituents merge to produce an entirely new meaning. Nowadays the last is likely to be used distinguishing phraseological units, or idioms from free word-groups.

1.2 Classifications of phraseological units

There are several classifications of phraseological units suggested by different linguists; however, the most widely recognised is considered the classification by V.V. Vinogradov based on the level of semantic unity of the phraseological units' components. Semantically phraseological units can be divided into (Novikov, 2003:285):

- Phraseological combinations – phraseological units with a partially transferred meaning, which can be clearly deduced from the components (e.g. *to have a bite, to take something for granted, номунуть взор, зеленая тоска, etc.*) The mobility of this type is much greater; the substitutions are possible and not necessarily synonymical, e.g. *щекотливый вопрос, щекотливое положение, щекотливое обстоятельство.*
- Phraseological fusions – phraseological units with a completely transferred meaning, which cannot be clearly deduced from the components (e.g. *at sixes and sevens, white elephant, бить баклуши, собаку съестъ, etc.*) Phraseological fusions are specific for every language and do not lend themselves to literal translation into other languages.
- Phraseological unities or “idioms” – phraseological units with a completely transferred meaning, which can be clearly deduced from the components of the phraseological units (e.g. *to look a gift horse in the mouth, a fish out of water, последняя спица в колесе, держать камень за пазухой etc.*) Some of these are easily translated and even international, e. g. *to know the way the wind is blowing.*

It has been pointed out by N.N. Amosova and A.V. Koonin that this classification, being developed for the Russian phraseology, does not fit the specifically English features. N.N. Amosova's approach is contextological. She defines phraseological units as units of fixed context, where fixed context is “a context characterized by a specific and unchanging sequence of definite lexical components, and a peculiar semantic relationship between them” (Arnold, 1986:170). In the following concept idioms is one of the sub-divisions of fixed context units. Soviet linguist Amosova claims: “In idioms the new meaning is created by the whole, though every element has its original meaning weakened or even completely lost, e.g. *in the nick of time* ‘at the exact moment’.” (Arnold, 1986:170)

Professor A.V. Koonin in turn states that phraseology should not be viewed as a part of lexicology, but it must develop as an independent linguistic science. His classification of phraseological units is based on the functions the units fulfill in speech. They may be nominating (*a bull in a china shop*), interjectional (*a pretty kettle of fish*), communicative (*familiarity breeds contempt*), ornominating-communicative (*pull somebody's leg*). (Arnold, 1986:170)

The structural principle of classifying phraseological units is based on their ability to perform the same syntactical functions as words. Both in Russian and English lexico-grammatical classification of idioms is divided according to Professor V.V. Vinogradov into (Antrushina, 2001:248):

- Verbal: *put one's best foot forward, строить глазки*
- Nominal or substantive: *red tape, the arm of the law, камень преткновения*
- Adjectival: *as good as gold, safe and sound, лёгок на помине*
- Adverbial: *from head to foot, in cold blood, как рыба в воде*
- Interjectional: *good Heavens! увы и ах!*

Nevertheless, the traditional and oldest principal of classifying phraseological units is based on their original content. As a rule, this principle is alluded to as “thematic”, when idioms are classified according to their sources of origin referring to a particular area of human activity, nature phenomena, etc. Mentioned in *The English Lexicology* linguist L.P. Smith names a few groups of idioms used by sailors (e.g. *in deep water* ‘in trouble or danger’, *to weather the storm* ‘to overcome difficulties’), soldiers, hunters; domestic and wild animals, agriculture and cooking related idioms are also included into Smith’s classification, equally with numerous idioms drawn from arts, sports. (Antrushina, 2001:242) Modern dictionaries use this principle to organise the guidance of working with idioms. For instance, *Cambridge International Dictionary of Idioms* (Cambridge University Press, 1998) contains theme panels showing idioms grouped according to their meaning or function, e.g. *Anger, Happiness and Sadness, Health, Business, Money, Intelligence and Stupidity, Power and Authority, Success and Failure*, etc. Some online resources sort idioms by topics: *Colours, Animals, Law, Nature, Technology and Science*. Amongst these idioms one can easily find idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity which are of genuine interest of the present paper. This principle of classification of phraseological units is likely to be confused with “etymological”.

1.3 Etymology of idioms

Both English and Russian have a thousand-year-old background of developing and changing under the influence of other cultures, historical facts, changes in human daily activities, etc. This time appeared to be enough to collect an enormous number of neat and peculiar expressions, which is how phraseology as the most picturesque branch of lexicology has developed.

On the one hand, three main categories of idioms might be distinguished: active/passive idioms, special idioms or terminology, phraseological units – neologisms. Amongst active idioms one can find common, well-known within different spheres of human life (e.g. *raining cats and dogs*, *an ugly duckling*, etc.), whereas it is almost impossible to hear any passive phraseological units due to their archaic characteristics (e.g. *Вавилонское столпотворение*, *тьма Египетская*, etc.). Special terminological idioms are rooted to human daily routine, their occupation: sports, technology, science, etc. (e.g. *to push the panic button*, *привести к одному знаменателю*, etc.). Authors of a textbook *Современный русский язык: Теория. Анализ языковых единиц* (1995:137) claim that it is worth to mention so called phraseological units-neologisms developed between active/passive and special/terminological idioms. At the present moment language is developing very swiftly and phraseological units-neologisms gather steam with the help of rapidly changing lifestyle (e.g. *черный рынок*).

On the other hand, the consideration of the origin of phraseological units contributes to a better understanding of phraseological meaning. According to their origin all phraseological units may be divided into two big groups: native and borrowed. Native phraseological units are connected with the realia, traditions, and history of a certain country, e.g. according to Cocker ‘following all rules’, E. Cocker is British author of a well-known book on arithmetics; *Люблю грозу в начале мая* ‘the symbol of nature refreshment in spring’, Fyodor Tyutchev “A Spring Storm”. Borrowed phraseological units come from several sources: different languages (Dutch *forlorn hope*), the Bible (*the root of all evil*), ancient mythology (*Achilles’ heel*) (see Appendix 2).

The great part of these idioms has changed into international; different languages claim to their origin. It is worth to mention that most of the idioms came into Russian and English from Latin through French, which means they are the representations of French phraseological units; however, in Russian idiomatic expressions are used as the exact representations of French idioms, in English in turn it is not the representation functioning, but an expression which exposes original idiom’s

meaning (e.g. French *Cherches la femme*, Russian *Ищите женщину*, English *There is a woman in it*).

In a word, in order to determine the exact origin of idioms, linguists study historical data, ethnography, mutual relations between languages within Indo-European family of languages. It is essential to know traditions, customs, beliefs and superstitions of people in order to define the origin of a particular idiom, and remember that all of them have the same ancestor.

2. IDIOMS OF NATIONALITY AND ETHNICITY

Idioms come from people and represent their specific national culture. The following chapter will introduce a number of idiomatic expressions of Nationality and Ethnicity both in English and in Russian. If one needs to insert any phraseological units in his/her speech, it is unnecessary to build it up from the beginning, but to take fixed expressions out of the memory reserves.

The etymological and semantic aspects of idioms will help us to note a uniqueness of both cultures, to take a look at relations they used to have with other representatives of Indo-European family of languages. As studied languages are rooted to the same language ancestor there should obviously be some correlation between idioms in Russian and English, which will be vividly illustrated in the last sub-chapter dedicated to idiomatic equivalents in both languages.

The list of idioms for the empirical part of the research was compiled on the basis of a number of scientific and online sources, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, journals etc. and there was also compiled a list with the idiomatic definitions of the phraseological units (see Appendix 3).

2.1 Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English

2.1.1 Etymology

The origin of English idioms goes back to ancient times. It has a strong expressiveness and vivid national character, and a close connection with the long history, religion, and unique culture of Britain – the country known by its prosperity and pride of the nation. Additionally, according to the list of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity introduced in Appendix 3, it becomes obvious that these people are not handling well the inevitability to share wealth and glory with other nations; mostly they hide behind their jokes, which sometimes might be not only indelicate, but offensive.

Introduced idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English (see Appendix 3) may be divided by their sources of origin into four main groups:

1. Idioms based on historical background
2. Idioms based on traditions/way of life
3. Idioms – international stereotypes
4. Idioms based on literature/politics

The most massive group of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English are idioms where historical factor became fundamental in order for idiom to appear. The

first large division of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English is the one which includes the word “Dutch” inside of the expressions. “French” and “Spanish” or “Spain” also form a substantial class of idioms based on common historical background of these countries.

1. I’m a Dutchman
2. That beats the Dutch
3. Double Dutch
4. Dutch treat
5. Dutch uncle
6. Dutch auction
7. Dutch courage
8. To go Dutch
9. Dutch headache
10. Dutch leave
11. Flying Dutchman
12. Dutchman’s log

Figure 2. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English with the word “Dutch”

1. Take a French leave
2. Pardon/excuse someone’s French
3. The French disease
4. French letter

5. Old Spanish customs
6. Castles in Spain
7. Spanish practices

Figure 3. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English with “French”, “Spanish”/ “Spain”

These countries have been going hand in hand for ages. They fought against each other, e.g. England failure in 17th century while taking a leadership of shipping and trading from the Dutch; they conquered common enemy, but ended up wresting for the control of the territories, e.g. foreign preoccupation towards Normandy by Kingdom of France and Kingdom of England in 11th century. The history of Anglo-Spanish relations is complicated not only by historical events connecting these two countries, but also by their political heritage, e.g. the United Kingdom and Spain were both imperial powers, after the same land, an occurrence which is being played out to this day with the disputed ownership and status of Gibraltar.

Idiomatic expressions the essence of which are stereotypical facts mostly contain “China” or “Chinese” and “Greek” words as a part of the expression.

1. At the Greek calends
2. Beware of the Greeks bearing gift
3. Greek to me
4. Chinese whisper (US)
5. Chinese walls
6. Like Chinese arithmetic
7. Slow boat to China

Figure 4. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English with “Greek”, “Chinese”/ “China”

Most of nationalities mentioned in *Figure 4* promote a number of stereotypes in western people’s minds. For instance, in Europe the Chinese language used to be considered as incomprehensible, along with Greek. As a result, a game for children *Chinese Whispers* where one person whispers a message to another appeared – a message is passed through a line until the last player announces the message to the entire group; errors typically accumulate in the retellings. Moreover, many of the idioms above became international due to their historical background, e.g. *Beware of the Greeks bearing gift* derives from ancient Greek story of Trojan horse which teaches people not to trust the opponent. The initial essence of The Great Wall of China known worldwide has transferred to idiomatic, ‘regulatory information barriers that aim to stop the flow of information that could be misused, especially in financial corporations’ (*Chinese Walls, Cat. Nationality and Ethnicity, 2002-2013*).

The other large division of idioms is based on traditions, way of life people used to follow or have been following till modern times. It might be either a practice of American Indians, or *Indian givers* of taking back gifts from white settlers, or being a crafty, naturally warrior-gifted natives walking *Indian file*, the way nobody knows how many warriors there are in the group. The same as England is known by its pride and passionate desire to have everything under control in the kingdom, e.g. *An Englishmen’s home is his castle*.

1. Indian giver (US)	1. An Englishmen’s home is his castle (UK)
2. Indian file (US)	2. For England (UK)
3. Indian summer (US)	
4. Too many chiefs and not enough Indians (US)	

Figure 5. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English

There could also be found idiomatic expressions based on literature amongst idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English. The Bible is the main source for a number of idioms, e.g. *Corn in Egypt* meaning ‘wealth, a plentiful supply of goods’. One of politically coloured idiom in English introduced is *The Young Turks*; an expression derives from the name of Turkish nationalist reform party in early 20th century, which now means ‘a young person, full of new ideas and impatient for change, but also rebellious and difficult to control in a company, team or organisation’.

As has already been mentioned, western people might have a weakness for stereotypes judging nationalities they do not know a thing about. The vivid example could be an expression *More holes than Swiss cheese* to illustrate ‘incompleteness, the lack of something’; some sorts of cheese in Switzerland indeed have enormous number of holes; however, not all of them how it is believed outside the Switzerland.

Sharing the same island there has always been a close connection between England and Scotland. Expressions *Scotch Mist* and *Scotch cousin* demonstrate sarcastic attitude of English people towards Scots; although, parallels might be built up between both English and Scottish.

The last introduced idiom in Appendix 3 correlates with the division of idiomatic expressions according to traditions of a particular country. *To play Russian roulette*, famous by its ghoulish essence; the game played in the old Russian military was for a group of soldiers to put one bullet in the chamber of a revolver. Each would spin it randomly, point it at their head and pull the trigger. You had a one-in-six chance of killing yourself.

2.2 Semantics

Semantics is a branch of linguistics which studies the relations between words and their meanings; it is also believed to be the foundation of lexicography, the compilation of a dictionary. In order to be able to discuss emotional colour of phraseological idioms in cross-cultural context, it is obligatory to define thematic fields of idioms commonly used in a language. According to the analysis of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English (see Appendix 3) the following categories may be distinguished:

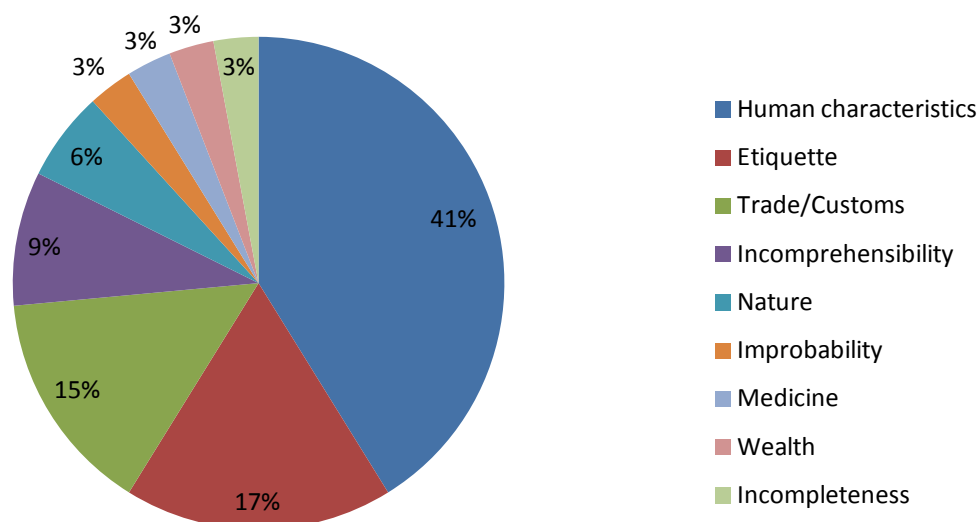


Figure 6. Thematic field of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English

The diagram above illustrates the thematic fields of idioms in English. The characteristics and personality of human beings seem to be valued the most (*The Young Turk*, *Indian giver*, *Dutch Uncle*) which might be explained by the fact that mankind and culture exist in social context. Etiquette, and trade, and customs semantic themes are also considered to be of a great prevalence, e.g. *Dutch treat*, *take a French leave*, *to go Dutch*, etc. People come across, communicate, and create a picture of each other and different cultures according to the information they gain contacting with one another. Each culture is unique, and sometimes human are not able either to understand or accept some aspects of people with another cultural heritage. That is when incomprehensibility takes over, e.g. *Double Dutch*, *like Chinese arithmetic*, *Greek to me*. One of the most fruitful semantic fields for idiomatic expressions lies in the aspect of nature, which might possibly be rooted to customs again, e.g. *Indian summer*. The improbability (*At the Greek calends*), and the incompleteness (*More holes than Swiss cheese*) along with the medical sphere (*The French disease*) and wealth are acknowledged (*Corn in Egypt*).

According to data provided in Appendix 3, the majority, 24 idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity out of 38, carries the negative emotional colour and not infrequently offend representatives of other cultures English got acquainted with. For instance, one might find extremely offensive to refer to his/her mother tongue in the meaning of abusive language, as English people do in their attitude to French (*Pardon/excuse someone's French*). Dutch have also become a target for English to express their unfriendly mocking mindset, e.g. *Dutch headache*, *Double Dutch*, *Dutch*

courage, etc. Nowadays an innocent game *Chinese Whispers* might be taken as a serious abuse based on its etymology which claims to originate from common European belief that Chinese language is unintelligible.

2.2. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian

2.2.1 Etymology

Phraseological world in Russian is enormously huge and multifarious. Getting acquainted with the Russian language one reaches the insight of a new national culture. After analyzing idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity (Appendix 3), it becomes possible to single out three chief source domains of Russian idioms:

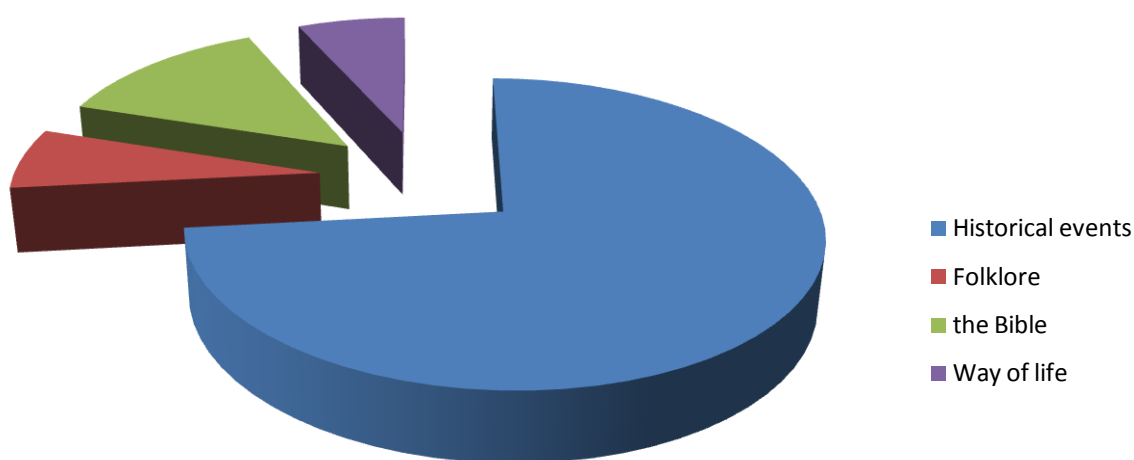


Figure 7. Chief source domains of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian

History has always been one of the essential sources of inspiration, and language development is not an exception. Amongst idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian formed on the basis of historical events often occur ones with words “Американский/ “Америка” and “Китай/Китайский”. Last two have been of a great interest since olden times. An unbounded “recently discovered” America (ironically *открывать Америку*) full of hopes and great expectations of Europeans (*Американский дядюшка*) travelling across the ocean seeking after a better life (*Американская мечта*). Mysterious China with its extremely incomprehensible language (*китайская грамота*), and extraordinary customs which are hard to understand and accept for many western people (*китайские церемонии*). The Chinese have always protected their territories vigorously, and kept life private behind the Chinese wall (*китайской стеной*); however the Chinese have never been taken seriously, as the origin of idiom *Последнее китайское предупреждение* illustrates to

us. *Энциклопедический словарь крылатых фраз и выражений* (2005) claims the last derives from political affair between China and USA in 1958 over Taiwan. By the year 1960 there were more than 400 warnings from China protesting against collaboration between USA and Taiwan.

Among introduced idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian (see Appendix 3) the majority of phraseological units appeared to be borrowings from other languages, e.g. *Уйти по-английски*, 'to leave without saying goodbye, or with no permission' taken from French. Previously given examples (Chapter 2.1.1) make it possible to define relations between France and England strained throughout the history. *Сиамские близнецы* is also one of borrowed idiom which brings us back to 19th century to the country called Siam (Thailand nowadays) where twins were born congenitally united near the waist and had to spend all life together. Nevertheless, there is an idiomatic expression in the list which occurs to be rooted deeply in Russian history. *Фразеологический словарь русского языка* (2003) includes a typical expression *Казанский сирота* 'person who pretends to be unhappy in order to provoke sympathy of compassionate people to get what they want', which demonstrates people's flexibility, capacity to adjust to rapidly changing environment. In 1552 when Moscow gained the power over Tatar khanate; in order to keep the new territory under control Russians engaged Tatar aristocracy in the first place. They appeared to be very pliant and faithful provoking sympathy of compassionate Russian authority to gain wealth.

Another set of loan idioms originally comes from the Bible. It is worth to mention that Holy Writ is the richest source of phraseological units. *Тьма Египетская* and *Египетские казни* idioms derive from one biblical story about vain Egyptian pharaoh who fetched misfortunate and agony to the whole land and was punished by God for his obstinacy.

The other legend with morality is *Летучий голландец* (Dutch *De Vliegende Hollander*, English *The Flying Dutchman*). In the 17th a captain of a Dutch ship swore to round the Cape of Good Hope though it should take until the Day of Judgment, he never made it to the destination; moreover, he was punished by Gods for his impudence and excessive self-confidence. Folklore is another essential source of idiomatic expressions' origins; this aspect is peculiar for every nation, people created it endowing with morality they stand for.

2.2.2 Semantics

The analysis of thematic fields of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian illustrates some similarity with the ones in English in terms of chief categories:

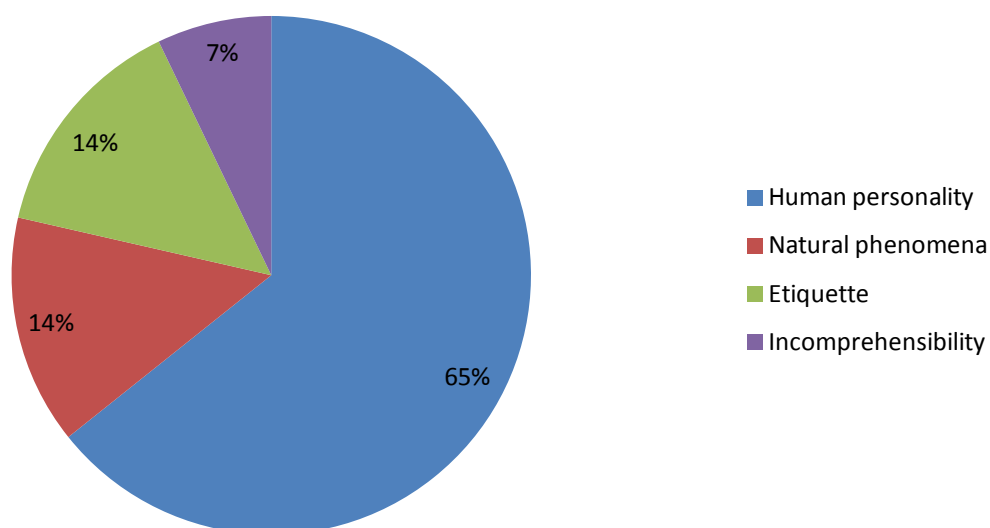


Figure 8. Categories of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian

The idiomatic expressions of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian is found describing human personality more frequently than any others – 9 idioms out of 14, e.g. *Сиамские близнецы*, *Американский дядюшка*, *Казанская сирота*, etc. Natural phenomena (*Тьма Египетская*) along with etiquette (*Уйти по-английски*) are two categories which have always played significant role gaining a cultural heritage of different nationalities and ethnicities. Incomprehensible expressions like *Китайская грамота* also occur amongst the categories of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian from the semantic perspective.

Getting acquainted with idiomatic representations of nationalities and ethnicities in Russian, it becomes possible to discuss a topic of emotional attitude of Russians towards other nationalities and ethnicities. I repeat that the majority of Russian idioms in the list (see Appendix 3) are coloured rather roughly. It might be considered a demonstration of disrespect when one uses the phrase “*Давайте обойдемся без этих китайских церемоний*” for the idiomatic expression originates in a strange mysterious land of China with rituals western people might not understand. Who would tolerate mocking one of the greatest geographical breakthroughs of the 15th century which has an important impact on every using sarcastic *Открыть Америку* right and left?

It also might be seen that nationalities Russian idioms include mostly words “Американский” and “Китайский”, possibly due to stereotypes and rumours spreading

amongst common people, for instance, who heard that America is “a heaven”, a place where all dreams come true, but have never experienced it themselves.

Most of the Russian idioms are borrowed, thus there are not many originally Russian idioms of nationalities that would show others in a negative light. However, the mentioned above idiomatic expression *Казанская сирота* does carry an unpleasant colour.

2.3 The equivalence of phraseological units of Nationality and Ethnicity in English and Russian

The meaning of the word equivalent can be described as “equal in value, measure, force, effect, or significance” (Equivalent, 2012). Based on the word's etymology, however, its first half can also be taken to mean “like”.

Idioms in English/Russian	Equivalent idioms in Russian/English	Alternative equivalent of idioms, if any
1. <i>Siamese twins</i>	<i>Сиамские близнецы</i>	<i>Одним миром мазаны</i> <i>Одного поля ягоды</i>
2. <i>Beware of Greeks bearing gift</i>	<i>Бойся Данайцев дары приносящих</i>	
3. <i>Indian summer</i>	<i>Бабье лето</i>	
4. <i>At the Greek calends</i>	<i>До греческих календ</i>	<i>Когда рак на горе свиснет</i> 19th cent. <i>Until a blue moon</i> Nowadays <i>Once in a blue moon</i>
5. <i>Уйти по-английски</i>	<i>To take a French leave</i>	<i>Dutch leave</i>
6. <i>Pardon/excuse someone's French</i>	<i>Прошу простить мой французский</i>	
7. <i>Китайская грамота</i>	<i>Like Chinese arithmetics</i>	<i>Double Dutch</i> <i>All Greek to me</i> <i>Netherlands Dat is Chinees/Russisch voor mij</i> <i>German Dat kommt mir Spanisch vor</i> <i>Spanish That's Arabic for</i>

		<i>me</i>
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Figure 9. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity with their equivalents

These phraseological units both in Russian and English are considered to have assimilated; the majority has lost connection with the source language a long time ago. However, a number of widely known idiomatic expressions managed to maintain kin relations; they might have been translated into different languages, but sense has never changed, mainly because of their solid status and essential influence on world history (*Beware of Greeks bearing gift vs. Бойся Данаицев дары приносящих*).

Synonymy is common for idiomatic expressions; they might be either literally translated into the other language (*Pardon/excuse someone's French to Прощу простить мой французский*) or changed completely (*Китайская грамота – Like Chinese arithmetics – Double Dutch – All Greek to me – Dat kommt mir Spanisch vor*). As it is seen, changed idiomatic expressions consist of different national representatives. Mostly it depends on either close or distant relations between different countries throughout history. The English language seems to take a rather unfavorable view of both the Dutch and the French due to tense historical relations between them. It should be noted, however, that the French language pays in kind and calls syphilis (in England *the French disease*) *la maladie anglaise*, literally, 'English disease'. Italians also called it the 'Spanish disease', Russians called it the 'Polish disease', and the Arabs called it the 'Disease of the Christians'; the last refers to the difficulties based on religious beliefs. Simultaneously, Arabic and Russian languages mentioned in the context of Spanish and Dutch languages derives from the fact that these nations knew little of each other and might have been considered mysterious and complicated left overseas, metaphorically speaking.

In addition, a few equivalents for well-known national idioms specific for each language could be found. The idiomatic expression *At the Greek calends* or *До греческих календ* of Latin origin translated into several languages, including Russian and English, has an alternative equivalent phraseological units derived from Russian folklore (*Когда рак на горе свистнет*) and rooted to natural phenomenon in English language (*Untill a blue moon, Once in a blue moon*).

Thus, if borrowings in languages share the same primary source, it is possible to claim similarity in figurativeness and stylistic aspects of phraseological units, which became habitual both in Russian and in English that we do not have any second thoughts about their origin. However, it is necessary to take into account issues might

appear while translating idiomatic expressions; often figurative shifts take place, e.g. *Indian summer* changed into *Бабу́е лето́*.

The process of translation, assimilation of idioms in different languages is one of the ways the research of the idiomatic expressions might develop to; however, the present paper is strictly focused on idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian and English languages; their etymology and semantics.

CONCLUSION

The study of phraseological units and idioms is a corner stone of gaining valuable knowledge about different cultures while learning a new language. Once one knows phraseological units, it is impossible to look at the language from the same angle.

The present thesis aimed at distinguishing the emotional colour of idiomatic expressions of Nationality and Ethnicity in a cross-cultural perspective, the attitude of Russians and Englishmen towards different representatives of nationalities/ethnicities in idiomatic expressions precisely.

The theoretical part of the research allowed the author collecting necessary information to construct a solid and reliable basement for the following conducted research on the chosen topic.

The comparative analysis of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity is offered to a reader in empirical part of the thesis. According to the results of the conducted research, certain similarities in English and Russian idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity might be distinguished.

Analyzed etymologically the list of idioms in both languages displays the most frequently used nationalities and ethnicities as ones with constituents “French”, “Dutch”, “Chinese”, “Американский”, which reason rooted in a rich long-term relations correlating one language with another throughout the history.

From semantic point of view resembling thematic fields is revealed: human personality/character and etiquette along with incomprehensibility and natural phenomena are the common categories of semantic division of idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity.

Moreover, while analyzing data of the present research, the author has arrived at a conclusion that nationalities and ethnicities represented in idioms are mostly shown in the negative perception, and might be considered offensive, depending on the source of origin. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in Russian express the attitude smoother with the help of ironic, sometimes sarcastic remarks; meanwhile the majority of idiomatic expressions in English carry rough abuses against representatives of different nationalities and ethnicities.

Thus, the aims of the present thesis have been fulfilled and the hypothesis stated at the beginning of the research has been proved.

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RESÜMEE

Käesoleva töö pealkirjaks on „Rahvuseid ning etnilist kuuluvust sisaldavate vene- ja ingliskeelsete idioomide võrdlusanalüüs”.

Töö eesmärgiks on võrrelda rahvuseid ning etnilist kuuluvust sisaldavate idioomide etimoloogiat ning semantikat ning teha järeldused vene ja inglise keeles kujutatavate erinevate rahvuste emotsionaalsest varjundist.

Hüpotees – vene ja inglise keel demonstreerivad negatiivset positsiooni erinevate rahvuste ning etniliste gruppide vastu, mis väljenduvad idiomaatilistes üksustes.

Töö koosneb 4 osast: sissejuhatuses, 3 peatükist ning kokkuvõttest.

Sissejuhatuses on esitatud üldinfo Indo-Euroopa keeleperekonnast, kuhu kuuluvad vene ja inglise keel. Samuti on ära toodud nende keelte vahelised suhted, vastastikune seos ajaloolises ja sotsiaalses kontekstis.

1. peatükis on kirjeldatud fraseoloogilise üksuse mõistet, mida klassifitseeritakse struktuuri, teemaväljade ja allikate põhjal
2. peatükk sisaldab mõlema keele rahvuseid ning etnilist kuuluvust sisaldavate fraseoloogiliste üksuste ja idioomide võrdlusanalüüsi.
3. peatükk kajastab analüüsiks valitud idioomide ekvivalente, idioomide sünonüümilisust, ning ekvivalentide päritolu.

Analüüsiks oli välja valitud 38 idioomi inglise keeles ja 14 idioomi vene keeles.

Idioomide analüüs näitas, et inglise ja vene keeles on kõige sagedamini kasutatavad rahvuste ning etnilise kuuluvusega idioomid negatiivse varjundiga – pilklikest väljenditest kuni sarkastiliste, isegi jämedate väljaütlemisteni.

Seega sai hüpotees edukalt tõestatud.

Appendix 1. Indo-European language family



Appendix 2. Chief resources of phraseological units in English and Russian

Resources of phraseological units	English	Russian
1. Terminological vocabulary, jargon	<i>The stars were against it</i> – astrology	<i>Без сучка и задоринки</i> – carpenter occupation <i>Попасть в тон</i> – music <i>Брать высоту</i> – sports
2. Literature, folklore	<i>A fool's paradise</i> – W. Shakespeare <i>To be or not to be</i> – W. Shakespeare <i>Vanity Fair</i> – W. Thackeray	<i>Рыльце в пуху</i> – I. Krylov <i>Человек в футляре</i> – A. Chekhov
3. Historical facts, traditions	<i>Carry coals to Newcastle</i> – to bring something to a place where it exists already; Newcastle has always been the center of a coal industry.	<i>Положить в долгий ящик</i> – The tsar of the Kolomenskoe village, Aleksei Mikhailovitch, had a long drawer in his bureau where all complaints been collected and due to red tape left unexamined. <i>Бросить перчатку</i> – in the Middle Ages knights used to throw a glove to the ground challenging the opponents.
4. Antique mythology, legends	<i>Achilles' heel</i> – Greek mythology <i>The Trojan House</i> – Greek mythology	<i>Вавилонское столпотворение</i> – extreme disorder, chaos. According to a biblical myth, Babylon inhabitants had been punished by God who mixed their languages

		not to be able to understand each other due to their impertinent attempt to build up a tower (a pillar) to the sky.
5. Religion myths, the Bible	<i>The apple of discord</i> – the Bible <i>A wolf in sheep's clothing</i> – the Bible	<i>Аредовы веки</i> – exceptional longevity. Derives from biblical legend about Jared the Patriarch, who had been living for 962 years.
6. Idioms created by people	<i>In for a penny, in for a pound</i> – once one has started something, it should be finished.	<i>Бабье лето</i> – summer used to be the hardest season of the year for woman; they had been working both on a field and at home. At the beginning of the fall, after the hard work at harvest-time, they could have some rest for a while.
7. Borrowings	<i>Blue blood</i> – Spanish ‘of a royal origin’ <i>The Sick Man of Europe</i> – Russian ‘hard economical situation’ <i>To lose face</i> – Chinese ‘to be humbled’	<i>Гадкий утёнок</i> – Danish ‘one that is considered ugly or unpromising at first but has the potential of becoming beautiful or admirable in maturity’ <i>Железом и кровью</i> – German ‘ruthless use of force’

Appendix 3. Idioms of Nationality and Ethnicity in English and Russian

Idioms in English	Idioms in Russian
1. <i>Take a French leave</i> (UK) 'make an unannounced or unauthorised departue'.	1. <i>Открыть Америку</i> – to say something well-known and obvious.
2. <i>Pardon/excuse someone's French</i> (UK) 'apology for swearing'.	2. <i>Американская мечта</i> (US) – ideal life, rich and full, where everybody gets what they deserve.
3. <i>The French disease</i> (UK) - literally, "English disease." An old-fashioned term in both languages to refer to syphilis.	3. <i>Американский дядюшка</i> – mysterious luck came from nowhere.
4. <i>French letter</i> – a slang expression for used by soldiers in the European Theater during World War II for a condom	4. <i>Последнее китайское предупреждение</i> – threats, which will never be implemented.
5. <i>I'm a Dutchman</i> (UK) – expression of disbelief or strong refusal.	5. <i>Китайская грамота</i> – something extremely difficult, incomprehensible.
6. <i>That beats the Dutch</i> (US) - to do or say something remarkable, extraordinary.	6. <i>Китайская стена</i> - impenetrable barrier, urge towards privacy, desire to live avoiding communication with outer world.
7. <i>Double Dutch</i> (UK) – a nonsense; gibberish – a language one cannot understand. The name of a children's skipping game, in which two ropes are used.	7. <i>Китайские церемонии</i> – tiring unnecessary conventionalities.
8. <i>Dutch treat</i> (UK) - a situation where	8. <i>Уйти по-английски</i> (FR) – to

each person pays his or her own share of the expenses.	leave without saying goodbye, or with no permission.
9. <i>Dutch Uncle</i> (US) – a kindly, but authoritative figure.	9. <i>Казни Египетские</i> – a disaster, a torment.
10. <i>Dutch auction</i> (UK) - the seller offers property at successively lower prices until one of his offers is accepted.	10. <i>Тьма Египетская</i> – pitch-dark
11. <i>Dutch courage</i> (UK) – bravery induced by drinking alcohol.	11. <i>Сиамские близнецы</i> – unseparable people, ones who live common thoughts and behaviour.
12. <i>To go Dutch</i> (UK) – share the cost of something equally	12. <i>Казанская сирота</i> (RUS) – person who pretends to be unhappy in order to provoke sympathy of compassionate people to get what they want.
13. <i>Dutch headache</i> (UK) – hangover	13. <i>Итальянская забастовка</i> – slow careless work.
14. <i>Dutch leave</i> (UK) – to leave without permission. What a soldier took when he left his base without permission.	14. <i>Летучий голландец</i> (NL) – a constant wanderer. Legendary ghost ship which cannot be moored at the dock due to its' punishment to wander forever.
15. <i>Flying Dutchman</i> – a ghost ship. A sailor who sees a Flying Dutchman will die before reaching home. A captain of this ship, a legendary Dutch mariner condemned to sail the seas against the wind until Judgment Day, forever.	
16. <i>Dutchman's log</i> – rough method for finding a ship's speed by throwing a piece of wood.	
17. <i>Chinese whisper</i> (UK) – umulative	

error, especially the inaccuracies as rumours or gossip spread.	
18. <i>Chinese walls</i> – regulatory information barriers that aim to stop the flow of information that could be misused, especially in financial corporations.	
19. <i>Like Chinese arithmetic</i> – something complicated and hard to understand.	
20. <i>Slow boat to China</i> – to describe something that is very slow and takes a long time.	
21. <i>Old Spanish customs</i> (UK) – see <i>Spanish practices</i>	
22. <i>Castles in Spain</i> (FR) – to make impossible, imaginary plans, dreams about future success that are unlikely.	
23. <i>Spanish practices</i> (UK) – unauthorized working methods that benefit those who follow them.	
24. <i>An Englishmen's home is his castle</i> (UK) – what happens in a person's home or private life is their business and should not be subject to outside interference.	
25. <i>For England</i> (UK) – a lot or to the limit.	
26. <i>At the Greek calends</i> – never, a point or time that does not or will not exist.	
27. <i>Beware the Greeks bearing gift</i> – do not trust your enemies.	
28. <i>Greek to me</i> – something not understandable.	
29. <i>Indian giver</i> (US) – one who gives a gift but later takes it back.	

30. <i>Indian file</i> (US) – to march in line one by one.	
31. <i>Indian summer</i> (US) – a period of warmer weather in late autumn.	
32. <i>Too many chiefs and not enough Indians</i> (US) – a skewed ratio of leaders over followers.	
33. <i>More holes than Swiss cheese</i> (US) – incompleteness, the lack of something.	
34. <i>Scotch mist</i> (UK) – humorously referring to something that is hard to find or doesn't exist - something imagined. A small, but wetting rain.	
35. <i>Scotch cousin</i> (UK) – humorously a distant relative.	
36. <i>To play Russian roulette</i> – to take a dangerous and unnecessary risk.	
37. <i>The Young Turks</i> – a young person who is rebellious and difficult to control in a company, team or organisation.	
38. <i>Corn in Egypt</i> – wealth, a plentiful supply of goods.	

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