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**“Unity in Diversity: Russia and the English-Speaking World.**

**Time for Equal Opportunities”**

Исследовательская работа (эссе)

**«Пословицы и поговорки разных стран как отражение национально-культурных сходств и различий»**

**« Proverbs and sayings of different countries, and how they reflect national and cultural similarities and differences»**

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## **Theses**

Proverbs and sayings focus attention on the common and most typical features of their creators. They give us an idea of the authentic features, customs and traditions of the people.

The core and integral part of human life is work, Russians, Britons as well as many others are unanimous in the statement that work is the main value of life, therefore, in both cultures there is a clear respect for labor and condemnation of idleness.

English folklore shows us the priority of personal goals and interests. In the Russian mentality, only joint efforts made it possible to see the positive outcome of work.

Collectivism of the Russians generated openness, friendliness and hospitality. The English worldview was more connected with industrial production and entrepreneurship than agriculture. Of particular importance here was individualism closely related to the promotion of competitiveness and rivalry.

In Russia, where survival was highly dependent on natural conditions, the peasants were used to living in harmony with the environment. Meanwhile, in England, population growth, urbanization, the development of science and technology led to a confrontation between man and nature, to his desire to subdue it and rise above it.

The achievements of science and technology guarantee the improvement of life for Westerners. Faith in the future allows them not to be afraid of novelty and boldly set their sights forward. Russian proverbs and sayings show us respect for the past and the desire to avoid innovations.

Examining the proverbs and sayings of different countries as a reflection of national and cultural similarities and differences, we come to the conclusion that we have common core values.

“A good expression is always to the point” (English proverb)

“Без пословицы не проживешь”/ “You will not survive without a proverb”

The greatest riches of the people, according to the Nobel Prize winner in Literature Mikhail Sholokhov, is its language. For thousands of years, proverbs and sayings have been passed from generation to generation by word of mouth. This treasure of collective wisdom reflects extensive historical experience, typifying certain actions and phenomena related to household management, culture and customs of people, covering almost all aspects of people's lives and choosing the most essential features in them. They give us the opportunity to more fully and deeply get acquainted with the worldview of a particular people, its spirit and national character.

Each folk is a complex world, with mentality determined by the peculiarities of the structure of its society, historical and cultural development, religious beliefs and, of course, language. Proverbs and sayings focus attention on the common and most typical features of their creators. They give us an idea of the authentic features, customs and traditions of the people.

Men differ, however, comparing Russian and English proverbs and sayings we see how much the representatives of these two nations have in common, especially when it comes to universal values. The core and integral part of human life is work. Russians, Britons as well as many others are unanimous in the statement that work is the main value of life, therefore, in both cultures there is a clear respect for labor and condemnation of idleness, “*Never put off till tomorrow what you can do today*”, “*Nothing seek, nothing find*”, “*Не покидай в запас дела, а покидай в запас хлеба*”. “*Где работно, там и густо, а в ленивом доме пусто*” (Pic. 1). Achieving success demands efforts, “*The early bird catches the worm.*” / “*Кто рано встает, тому Бог подает.*”, but as a reward, a person receives material and moral satisfaction, «*Где труд, там и счастье*» / “*A busy bee has no time for sorrow.*”

But if we focus our attention on the attitude to the quality of work, we will be able to notice certain differences. Russian peasants working together on arable land in a very short time needed to sow, grow and harvest; the quality of work was no longer the issue. What mattered was to manage in time. An Englishman, working in his workshop, had to rely only on himself. He was personally responsible for the marketability of the product that purchasing power depended on the quality of the finished piece. The result obtained by a master, and, consequently, profit, were directly connected with his personal experience, skills and knowledge, *“Each person is his craft.”* English folklore shows us the priority of personal goals and interests, *“God helps those who help themselves.”*

In the Russian mentality, only joint efforts made it possible to see the positive outcome of work. This is due to the fact that on poor soils and in the zone of risky farming exclusively the endeavors of the entire community gave a chance of survival, *“Что одному не под силу, то легко коллективу”* (Pic. 2), *“Один в поле не воин”*, etc.

To enjoy the fruits of his labor in the autumn, the Russian peasant should have been preparing for a fleeting summer period of field works all through the long snowy winter, *“Долго запрягает, быстро едет”*. A fast-flowing agricultural season required from the collective, albeit short-term, but an emergency exertion of all forces, *“Летний день год кормит.”* The Russians are hardworking and hardy, but they are characterized by some impulsiveness in work (ability to make a dash in case of necessity), hence, there is a rapid fatigue from continuous and systematic labor, to which they are not accustomed, *“Ретивая лошадка долго не живет”*.

Collectivism generated openness, friendliness and hospitality. Loneliness in Russia was considered as God's punishment. It was believed that any grief or misfortune can be dealt with in the circle of friends, *“На миру и смерть красна”*, *“В раю жить тошно одному”*. The guests were supposed to be

welcomed wholeheartedly, i.e. “с распростертыми объятиями” (“with open arms”). Even those who were not rich greeted guests with a traditional invitation to the table, “Просим к нашему хлебу и соли”. Bread, revered as a gift of God, has been the source of life and a guarantee of happiness for the people-cultivators since ancient times. Russian folklore proves that a meal, a wash and a restful night’s sleep awaited the traveler in any home. While the English house is associated with a fortification construction, “*An Englishman’s house is his castle.*”

The results of labor in Russian proverbs are often represented by food, “На полатях лежать — ломтя не видать”, “Хочешь есть калачи, так не лежи на печи” (Pic. 3), «Что потрудимся, то и поедим», not money, which can be explained by the conduct of subsistence farming.

The English worldview was more connected with industrial production and entrepreneurship than agriculture. England was deservedly considered to be the Workshop of the World. Of particular importance here was individualism closely related to the promotion of competitiveness and rivalry. Consequently, the proverbs reflect it, “*A horse never runs so fast as when he has other horses to catch up and outpace*” (Pic. 4) and “*Better be envied than pitied*”.

The principle of competition is directly related to the concept of success, when the reward is monetary. Since Russian peasants could not earn much money under the traditional type of agriculture, “От трудов праведных не нажить палат каменных”, they had to be content with natural products. In well-developed industrial England, on the contrary, there was a real opportunity to make a fortune that gave citizens both a secure position in society and power, “*A thief passes for a gentleman when stealing has made him reach*”, “*Money makes the man*” and “*An ass loaded with gold climbs to the top of the castle.*” (Pic. 5)

It is worth mentioning, though, that dependence on money was not encouraged, “*Money is a good servant but a bad master.*” The illiterate use of

finance was also frowned upon, “*Riches serve a wise man but command a fool*”, “*Of saving, comes having.*” In the Russian language this attitude is expressed by the proverb, “*Копейка рубль бережет*”; simultaneously, people in Russia still say, “*Не в деньгах счастье*”, while the residents of Foggy Albion are convinced that “*If money goes before, all ways lie open.*”

The utilitarian attitude of the English can be traced in their sayings about nature. The rapid development of industry has changed the way of interaction between men and their habitat. In Russia, where survival was highly dependent on natural conditions, the peasants were used to living in harmony with the environment. “*Не беречь поросли – не видать и дерева*”, “*Кто не сажал дерева, тому не лежать в тени*” (Pic. 6). Meanwhile, in England, population growth, urbanization, the development of science and technology led to a confrontation between man and nature, to his desire to subdue it and rise above it, “*Human is the soul of the universe.*” At the same time, in the proverb “*Nature is conquered by obeying her*” there is a willingness to preserve it, which will later lead to the creation of “green energy” (Pic. 7).

Independence from nature, associated with scientific and technological progress and self-confidence, gives a Westerner the possibility to make plans for the future, to predict the profit in advance. People with an entrepreneurial streak are not satisfied with what they have here and now, they tend to strive for the future and note, “*Newer is truer*”, “*Change brings life*” and “*Variety is the spice of life.*” The achievements of science and technology guarantee the improvement of life for Westerners. Faith in the future allows them not to be afraid of novelty “*be a demon for work*” or “*put some ginger into something*” and boldly set their sights forward.

Russian proverbs and sayings such as “*Чем старей, тем правей*”, “*О будущем говорить – чертей смешить*” show us respect for the past and the desire to avoid innovations. This is due to the fact that the changes threaten the age-old foundations and endanger the very existence of the peasants who are

convinced that *“Недолго той земле стоять, где начнут уставы ломать”*. With an unpredictable harvest result, taking risks can be too costly. Nikita Khrushchev’s unsuccessful experiment with corn in the 20th century turned into a food disaster for Russians. Our country was forced to switch to grain purchases from abroad. That is why for us *“лучше синица в руках, чем журавль в небе.”*

And yet, examining the proverbs and sayings of different countries as a reflection of national and cultural similarities and differences, we come to the conclusion that we have common core values. Difficult fates have taught the British and Russians to be hardworking and thrifty, overcome all the hardships and vicissitudes of fate with faith in God, and a great sense of humor. Proverbs and sayings teach people *“не вешать нос”*, to face disasters *“with a stiff upper lip”*, *“не падать духом”*, *“to keep their head”*. In addition, the constant struggle for survival forced our peoples to be inventive and resourceful, *“Голь на выдумки хитра.”* / *“Necessity is the mother of invention.”*

Knowledge of sayings and proverbs beautifies a person’s speech, making it imaginative and vivid. It also facilitates better mutual understanding and rapprochement with other peoples. A foreign adage spoken to the place, always finds an emotional response from the audience.

In the statements reflecting the core values of the host nation, we can see the specifics of various historical paths of development. We understand not only the “similarities” of our mentalities. Differences also arouse interest and respect. Thus, Russian hospitality, their ability to share the last piece of bread with a guest surprises and delights foreigners. We, in turn, would really like to adopt such “English traits” as business acumen and punctuality, which is confirmed by popularity of English sayings in the Russian language, *“Точность – вежливость королей”*. / *“Punctuality is the politeness of princes.”* or *“Хочешь сделать хорошо – сделай сам”* / *“If you want a thing done well, do it yourself.”*

## Illustrations (made by the authors of this essay)

Picture 1.



Picture 2.

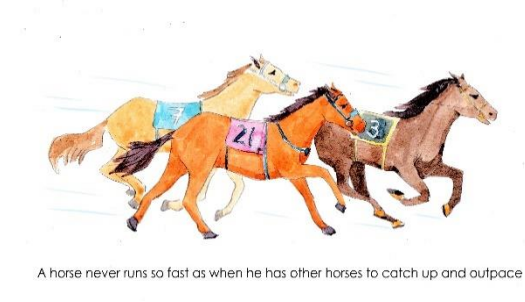


Picture 3.



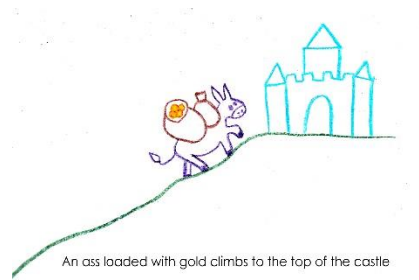


Picture 4.



A horse never runs so fast as when he has other horses to catch up and outpace

Picture 5.



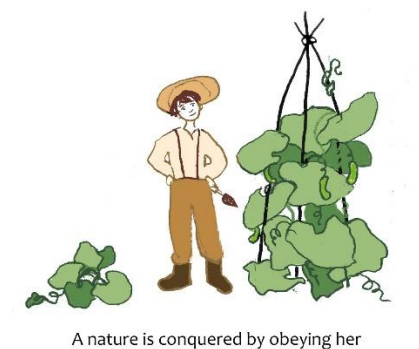
An ass loaded with gold climbs to the top of the castle

Picture 6.



Кто не сажал дерева, тому не лежать в тени

Picture 7.



A nature is conquered by obeying her

## Resources

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