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## PERIPHERAL ELEMENTS OF THE LEXICO-SEMANTIC FIELD "21<sup>st</sup> CENTURY CHINA"

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**Abstract.** Nowadays mass media including electronic resources play a significant role in creating popular opinion on various issues. It stands true for political questions such as proving information about countries. Analysis of lexical units and their choice to describe an image of a country can be done through the use of the conceptual scientific approach and the theory of lexico-semantic fields.

The author of the article analyzes how China was represented in American newspapers and magazines in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Relations between two largest economies in the world are of a great importance to all other countries. Besides, China is a special political and trade partner of Russia, and it makes everything connected with this country particularly significant.

This study is the second part of the research on this topic that focuses on the periphery elements of the lexico-semantic field "21<sup>st</sup> century China". The analysis showed that these are the following microfields: "China is a mechanism", "China is a problem", "Nature", "Health" and "China is a relative". The article highlights the lexemes comprising these microfields and discusses the possible meanings and ideas expressed by them.

**Keywords:** *modern China, American media, concept, lexico-semantic field, microfield.*

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## ПЕРИФЕРИЧЕСКИЕ ЭЛЕМЕНТЫ ЛЕКСИКО-СЕМАНТИЧЕСКОГО ПОЛЯ «КИТАЙ XXI ВЕКА»

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**Аннотация.** В настоящее время средства массовой информации, включая электронные ресурсы, играют значительную роль в формировании общественного мнения по различным вопросам. Это в равной степени можно отнести и к вопросам политики, например, к предоставлению информации о различных странах. Анализ лексических единиц и их подбора для описания образа того или иного государства может быть выполнен с использованием концептуального подхода и теории лексико-семантического поля.

Автор статьи анализирует, каким образом Китай представлен в американских газетах и журналах, изданных во втором десятилетии XXI века. Взаимоотношения между двумя крупнейшими экономиками мира представляют огромный интерес для всех остальных стран. Кроме того, Китай выступает в качестве особого политического и торгового партнера России, и это придает всему, что связано с этой страной, особую значимость.

Данное исследование является второй частью работы по данной теме; в нем представлен анализ периферических единиц лексико-семантического поля «Китай XXI века». Это такие микрополя, как «Китай – механизм», «Китай – проблема», «Природа», «Здоровье», «Китай – родственник». В статье освещаются лексемы, составляющие данные микрополя, а также приводится анализ возможных причин их употребления в том или ином контексте.

**Ключевые слова:** *современный Китай, американские СМИ, концепт, лексико-семантическое поле, микрополе.*

**Introduction.** The role of political communication is becoming more and more significant these days. Politics related issues are openly discussed in a democratic society. Whether or not political problems are solved adequately depends a lot on how they are represented verbally, mainly in mass media.

One of the most important branches of modern linguistics is the study of concepts. Concepts are mental images that stand behind linguistic signs. Linguistic analysis of lexical units within this approach is done by grouping words into lexico-semantic fields thus highlighting core and periphery elements and further examining what subgroups these fields fall into. Such a classification depends on associations this or that word has in a particular language.

Basics of conceptual research are outlined in the works by the Russian linguists: Z. N. Verdiyeva, G. G. Slyshkin, V. V. Krasnykh, V. V. Karasik, I. A. Sternin, Z. D. Popova [22], [18], [9], [8], [15], [16].

The goal of our work is to study the periphery of the lexico-semantic field “21<sup>st</sup> century China” as it is presented in the US media. It is a continuation of our previous study where the core elements of this lexico-semantic field were described [14]. To achieve our goal, it was necessary to study American media, to pick out lexical units describing China and to group them into microfields comprising the periphery of the lexico-semantic field “21<sup>st</sup> century China”.

**Relevance.** In the modern world it has become quite popular to study what image this or that country has. It refers to various countries, but nowadays China more and more often gets to the center of attention. Recently this nation has significantly strengthened its positions globally and is likely to become the greatest economy in the world already this decade. That is why it is so important to learn what people in different countries think about China. Their point of view is to a great extent influenced by the media. In the media sphere information is gathered, processed, analyzed and only then presented to the public. That is why turning to media as a source of this research is relevant.

A number of works were devoted to how China is represented in the Russian mass media. These are PhD theses and scientific articles by Chen Yuysyao who described the linguocognitive aspect of China’s image in Russian media [1]; Van Syuy who wrote how China is represented in Russian printed media [21]; Zhan Hueyting studied the image of the country by analyzing internet comments to the news about China [23], while Shi Sya examined language means used for demonizing China in the Russian media [17].

Image of China in American media was described in detail by Sorokinaback in 2007 [19]. As it was published more than ten years ago, it seems to be necessary to analyze how the US propaganda has been representing China in the recent years. Taking into consideration all the current disputes between the USA and China and emerging of COVID-19 such research is of special importance.

**Materials and Methods.** Material for studying was taken from US newspapers and magazines published in the second decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The total number of analyzed lexical units is 300. Descriptive, linguoconceptual and linguocognitive methods, analysis and synthesis were used in this paper.

**Results and Discussion.** The micro fields “China is a mechanism”, “China is a problem”, “Nature”, “Health” and “China is a relative” are the least represented in the lexico-semantic field “21<sup>st</sup> century China” and comprise its periphery. Yet the lexemes from these slots are crucial for understanding what image of China is created by American media. The contents of these slots is both interesting and unusual.

The micro field “China is a mechanism” comprises only 5 % of the lexico-semantic field. Here American journalists represent China as a moving force of the world economy. The most common lexemes in this slot are “a driver”, “an engine”, “a locomotive”, “a powerhouse” and “a catalyst”.

The following example “Investors are concerned an escalation of the trade war could slow global growth, as China is a key driver of the world economy” [20] represents tense relations between China and the USA which result from the trade wars. The word “driver” is defined as “something that has an important influence on other things” [12], so the phrase “a key driver” is used here to stress China’s leading position in the world. (From this point on all the vocabulary definitions are taken from Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English Online)

We can see the same phrase in the following context: “China is the key driver of zinc demand at present” [5]. Here it stands for the growing demand on zinc in China. This fact highlights revolutionary changes in the production of more high quality zinc with the emphasis on the obviously positive influence it has on the environment.

The lexeme “an engine” can be represented with the following example. It is connected with the practice of capital punishment in China as one can assume from the article, “Mostly though, latter-day Sinophobes don’t like the fact that China is the engine driving the world economy” [6]. In this context the idea of China’s leadership is presented as something frowned upon yet inevitable. This negative connotation becomes evident with the help of the lexeme “Sinophobes” which can be defined as “those who hate China”. An engine is “something powerful that causes great changes in society” [12]; choosing this word the journalist also wanted to pay the readers’ attention to how China can alter the whole world.

China is also compared to a powerhouse in the example “China is a powerhouse in the world of table tennis and has dominated on the world stage” [13]. A powerhouse can be defined as “someone who is very strong or has a lot of energy” [12]. The metaphor we see in the article points at the leading position of China in table tennis, so strong that it can’t be shaken by any other nation. It also refers us to the micro field “Sport”, a core part of this lexico-semantic field.

The micro field “China is a mechanism” gives a clear notion that China has become a driving force of the global economy and contributes a lot to its long lasting and stable development. A mechanism is “a system that is intended to achieve something or deal with a problem” [12]. The metaphors employed in this micro field create the image of a lever country that brings to motion all the world economic mechanisms.

The next micro field is “China is a problem”. In this micro field China is portrayed as a state that stands in the light of some other countries thus causing lots of problems and hardships. The most representative lexemes of this micro field are “a problem”, “a challenge”, “a concern” and “a bugbear”. They comprise 5% of all the lexemes of the lexico-semantic field.

The word “challenge” is the most common lexeme in this micro field. People generally face challenges “when someone refuses to accept that someone or something is right and legal” [12]. In different articles it is used to create a negative image of China during US-China trade wars. Violation of intellectual property rights by China made US journalists call this country a challenge. Another case of using the word “challenge” refers to military and economic problems that China poses to the USA, its biggest and the mightiest rival.

The lexeme “problem”, “a situation that causes difficulties” [12], was used in the following sentence: “So just because China is a problem means we should do absolutely nothing?” [2]. In this case China was treated negatively by the American journalists for the huge amount of greenhouse gases it emits being one of the greatest industrial superpowers in the world.

The lexeme with the strongest negative connotation in this micro field is in our opinion the word “a bugbear”. The following example “This time China is seen as the chief bugbear” [4] exemplifies the image of China in connection with the slowdown of GDP growth in this country that caused massive capital outflow and bankruptcies. Bugbears “make people feel annoyed or worried” [12], and when used to describe China this lexeme renders a negative connotation, not something horrible, but still rather unpleasant.

All the examples quoted indicate that they were used by the American press to promote the negative image of China, the country that is a problem, an obstacle and a challenge in the political and economic spheres for other countries.

Lexemes from the next micro field, "Nature", were found in 4% of the analyzed articles. American media use names of various animals, birds, insects and natural phenomena to provide their readers with the information about the role of China on the global scale. China is mostly compared with a shark, a wolf, a dragon, an elephant, a goose, a cockroach, and a storm. The metaphor "a predator" is also used to portray this country. The image created by such lexemes is both negative and positive.

It is quite obvious that such lexemes as "a shark", "a predator", "a cockroach" are used by the American media to evoke negative emotions about China. For example, we see the word "a shark" for the description of China as the biggest producer of consumer goods in the world which makes most of the countries dependent on this country. It is not a surprise the author of the article resorts to such a word. A shark is not only a dangerous sea creature, but also "someone who cheats other people out of money" [12]. The lexeme "a wolf" was used to describe a similar situation to highlight the growing economic dominance of China.

The word "a predator" was used in the following context: "China is a strategic predator committed to globally displacing the United States economically, politically and militarily" [11]. A predator is metaphorically defined as "someone who tries to use another person's weakness to get advantages" [12]. Here China is displayed as a true monster that can threaten the USA taking over their position in economics and politics.

The most negative animalistic comparison we came across was the one with a cockroach, when a parallel was drawn between China and this nasty yet livelong insect. In our opinion such a disgusting parallel was made to blame China in producing low quality toys for children the very fact of which was, in the opinion of the media, carefully concealed by the country's officials. The word with the connotations as negative as the word "a cockroach" was almost perfect for such alleged accusations.

The most positive lexeme denoting an animal which was used to talk about China was the word "a goose". It appeared in connection with tourism, in particular with its boom during the so called Golden Weeks, three weeks of national holidays during the year. China was compared with the goose that laid the golden eggs for tourism during Golden Week as the government of the country supports tourist boom during these holiday sessions.

The word from the micro field "nature" that deserves special attention is in our opinion the word "a dragon". It is "a large imaginary animal that has wings and a long tail and can breathe out fire" [12]. In China a dragon is a symbol of nobility, power and authority, a national symbol of this country. Yet American media mainly stress the negative aspects of this word. For example, the magazine "Forbes" wrote that "China is the sleeping dragon when she awakes she will shake and destroy the world" [10]. This example alludes us to a similar quotation by Napoleon and also clearly indicates that China is a potential danger everybody should be afraid of. The same notion of hidden threat is rendered with two other words from the same slot, "a storm" and "a typhoon". China is displayed as a potential tropical storm that can become a typhoon at any time thus convincing the readers that China is unpredictable should always be treated with caution and fear.

The words from the slot "Nature" represent China as a powerful country, a leader in economics and politics. Comparisons with a shark and a wolf make hints that this state is a predator that will tend to lead others. When China is called a storm one feels its unpredictability and menace while the word "a cockroach" was used to show China as a maneuverable country that is quite problematic to destroy.

The next micro field in the lexico-semantic field China is “Health”. It is represented by the following lexemes: “a donor”, “a sick man of Asia”, “sick to death of virtue”, “a panacea”, “the heart of Asia”, “a body” and “a backbone”. These lexemes comprise 3% of all the lexical units under analysis.

For a long time, China has been offering aid to the developing countries. This fact is sometimes, though seldom, mentioned by the media. China’s assistance promoted development of trade and economic cooperation between many third world countries.

The lexeme “a panacea” brings us back memories of the US-China trade wars. It was used to describe signing of the temporary trade deal between the USA and China. Though panacea is “something that people think will make everything better and solve all their problems” [12], it doesn’t come true in all the instances. Nevertheless, that event was of an utmost importance not only for these two countries but for the whole world for the US-China trade wars involved financial markets and multibillion dollar trade contracts.

In the American magazine “Breaking Energy” we can see the lexeme “donor” in the following context: “China is the second largest donor to the UN” [7]. China is the second largest country of the world as to the number to peacekeepers provided to the UN. Also China provided a considerable humanitarian aid to some African countries during the COVID-19 pandemic.

No wonder COVID-19 contributed one more phrase to the micro field “Health”, and that is the collocation “a real sick man of Asia”. This phrase appeared in “The Wall Street Journal” on March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020, when China was mostly hit by the coronavirus pandemic [3]. The article also implied the Chinese authorities might have concealed the true scale of the problem.

Before the pandemic China was mostly characterized as a nation where people want to maintain healthy lifestyle and eat only healthy food: “China is a healthy body now and wants better living standards”.

Two anatomical lexemes, “a heart” and “a backbone” are used to stress China’s central and extremely important position on the continent in purchasing consumer goods and a leader in electronic commerce. In our opinion the use of the word “backbone” gives the reader the image of China as something strong and unified both in its inner and foreign policy.

In general, the lexemes from the micro field “Health” depict China as a companionate country always ready to provide assistance to the third world nations especially when the world faces global challenges. Words with negative connotations in this micro field are connected with various problems that China faces including economical ones and threats of the pandemic in the year 2020.

The smallest micro field in the lexico-semantic field “China” can be called “China is a relative”. It comprises only 1% of the lexico-semantic field and consists of only two words, “a mother” and “a father”.

For every person these words are associated with something warm and kind. Our study showed that China is called both a father and a mother. The word “father” shows that China is a strongest member of the world family who doesn’t need to prove its power and confidence. The word “mother” in its turn creates the image of something kind and caring. China takes care of a number of countries which markets are potentially strong though can’t develop without external help. American journalists also imply that China often protects other countries from the aggressive behavior of their neighbors.

**Conclusions.** The lexemes from such micro fields as “China is a mechanism”, “China is a problem”, “Nature”, “Health” and “China is a relative” are used by the American media less than the lexemes from the other micro fields, “War”, “Sports”, “Business” and “Crime”. The periphery micro fields comprise about 33 % of the whole lexico-semantic field “21<sup>st</sup> century China”. As our study did not include many articles published in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic is not represented in it to a great extent. We believe that it could become a basis for further research of

how China is brought forward in foreign media. The lexemes we studied mostly give readers the idea about economic relation of China with other countries. These lexical units represent the country both negatively and positively. On the one hand we see China as a moving force of the world economy, a leader among other nations, the heart of Asia and a basis for the development of other countries. One can find lexemes that disclose positive features of China mostly in the periphery micro fields. Nevertheless, these micro fields also contain negative images characterizing China as an enemy, a victim, a problem, a manipulator, a sick man and even a typhoon. That makes readers feel afraid of China, consider it to be a danger, something that always poses threat to other regions. The image of China as provided in American media also depends on the events in the world, but usually is presented to readers from the subjective point of view of the media themselves.

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