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## **The Lexico-Semantic Group “Light” in Accordance with the Cultural and Religious Beliefs of the Old Russian Period**

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### **Abstract**

A poem, story, or play, while expressing the inner states of the author, in many cases, reflect the state of culture and society where the poet or writer has lived in and been influenced by. The study of the lexical-semantic groups of vocabulary concerning the diachronic aspect is a promising direction in exploring the evolution of ideas about different areas of reality. The most important concepts with which human life has an inextricable link are representations of light and darkness. The paper will present the analysis of light in philosophical, worldview, lingual, and linguistic relations. The end of an era, the development of scientific thinking, and changes in the perception of the world image with respect to religious and secular aspects determine the formation of the system of meanings of the word “light”. It should be noted that the study has foremost used the method of conceptual analysis of one of the critical concepts of culture.

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## 1. Introduction

Literature from ancient times has reached a wider stratum of people and has been left in writing. It can be argued that after history books, no work as familiar as literature can acquaint us with the history of nations (Columba, Kebaya, & Siboe, 2019). In American literature, for example, most sermons are from the period of immigration (1750-1750), when the United States was a European colony (Barton, 2018). One of the most important beliefs in the literature and language of any country is the word “light”. Light and darkness are always opposed, and this belief is rooted in historical and religious traditions. Attention to the element of light is still observed over time in all early human cultures and in societies with different religious customs and beliefs, and in all of them, light or the sun as a source of light is considered a sacred element and is revered (Benadusi, Bernardini, & Bianco, 2017; Lopez-Fernandez, Williams, Griffiths, & Kuss, 2019).

The study was based on the material of the hagiographic literature monument of the old Russian period "*Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh*", written by Epiphanius the Wise. The monument reflected the religious and philosophical concept of *svet* (light), important for religious consciousness. The basic symbolism and the essential cognitive metaphors representing the LSG “свет” (light), the derivational potential of the words with the root *svet-* (light-), as well as the lexemes from this associative area, are considered. In the religious world image, light is one of the manifestations of sanctity and the essential attribute of God; therefore, when describing religious ascetics, the lexemes of LSG “свет” (light) are used very widely. The article shows the specifics of the manifestation of the second South Slavonic influence in the text, reflecting in-text formulas, including the studied lexemes. The findings can be applied in historical studies of the Russian literary language in linguoculturology, ethnolinguistics, and cognitive linguistics (Canagarajah, 2006; Kuhiwczak, 2014; Levy, 2017). A resort to hagiographic literature of the era of the Moscow state allows for the characterization of this stage in the development of the Russian literary language by the example of the

opposition of light and darkness that is significant in religious and everyday consciousness. The initiated study analyzes the specifics of understanding of these concepts by a medieval man, their attitude to the light, the sun, and also to those phenomena without which it is impossible to imagine the entire universe – the stars, the moon. Analyzing these concepts, it should be noted that already in antiquity, the light was associated with the knowledge of the foundations of human life. These concepts are made for the conceptualization and categorization of phenomena of extra-linguistic reality. The history of Russian literature is divided into several periods, which can be quite short or very long. There was no written language in Russia before the adoption of Christianity - first by Princess Olga in 957 and then by Prince Vladimir in 988. Greek, Latin, or Hebrew were used for written communication when necessary. Literary works such as legends, songs, and epics were preserved and passed down from generation to generation as a relic of oral history. Ancient Russian literature covers the period from the eleventh to the seventeenth century. Russian literature of this period appears with religious and secular historical texts created in Saturn Russia and then Russian Muscovy. Prominent examples of literary masterpieces include the lives of Boris and Golb, the story of the past years, the story of the Igor campaign, Zadonshchina, and many others (Sartori, 2017). During the second South Slavonic influence, the effect of the Old Slavonic tradition on literature and language is amplified, the language becomes archaized, manifested in various linguistic aspects, including the enrichment of philosophical terminology and stylistic means of the linguistic system. Hagiography changes significantly in the Middle Russian period (the 14th-16th centuries). One of the most famous monuments of this period is *Life of St. Sergius of Radonezh*. Sergius of Radonezh was the founder of the Holy Trinity Monastery and a known member of the clergy. One associates him with the development of Russian spiritual culture. His disciple Epiphanius the Wise described the life and work of his teacher Sergius of Radonezh in “Life”, which is considered the pinnacle of Russian hagiography and which contains rich information about the life of Muscovite Russia

of the 14th century. The content of this monument determines the relevance of his language to the church-literary style. But this "Life" is different from similar works written in the era of the Kievan state. As Vinogradov notes, not only the structure but also the content of the works of this genre change: daily sketches, a description of the saint's life take second place, in addition, not a passive martyr but a real ascetic, a fighter for Faith is praised (Vinogradov, 1969), to which Sergius of Radonezh pertained. In the language of monuments of the church-literary style, the construction of *weaving of words* is used, which involves long syntactic periods, including participial phrases, extended attributes, and numerous subordinate clauses. This style is distinguished by an abundance of quotes from the Scriptures, many exclamations, tautological combinations, antitheses, complex words, and derivatives with suffixes of abstract semantics. These devices are used to describe the saint as emotionally, emphatically, and expressively as possible in order to convey his essence, greatness, and exclusiveness by means of words. Psychological descriptions that are connected, according to Likhachev, with a reflection of "abstract psychologism" are characteristic of the monuments of that period, as well as of the studied life (Likhachev, 1970; Maitra, 2017).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The subject of this article is research and studies from different dimensions. Ziolkowski (2014, p. 225) mentioned that "the legacy of medieval painting, the varied and voluminous literature dedicated to the saints, was far more important in nineteenth-century Russia than it is usually recognized".

Although researchers have examined examples of the impact of hagiographic writing on several prominent Russian writers, Margaret Ziolkowski is the first to describe the extent of its impact. Professor Ziolkowski identifies and analyzes the most common uses of surgical materials by Russian authors, as well as the various purposes that have led to the exploitation of their cultural past. Tolstoy, for example, used jewelry resources to attack the organized church and monastic institution. Separate chapters address the impact of treatise writing on Decembrists poetry, reconstructing specific surgical myths or tales,

and the application of contracts and hygiographic features to contemporary characters and situations.

Isidorova (2008, p. 380) stated that "the investigation of Russian hagiography, which in the Soviet years had almost ceased under anti-religious propaganda and censorship, has clearly revived over the past nineteen or twenty years". This can be easily seen in the publications of the Department of Ancient Russian Literature at the Institute of Literature and Art of Russia (Pushkinsky Dam) of the Russian Academy of Sciences and St. Petersburg State University, which are the most prestigious institutions in the country. Because they publish research papers made by scientists from different regions of Russia and other countries, their publications can provide a broad view of what is happening in this field.

## 3. Methodology

The linguistic-cultural approach to foreign language teaching was formed in the 1990s. What does cultural linguistics study? It is a science that examines the objects and phenomena of a particular culture. The subject of the study of cultural linguistics is a cultural background - a worldview specific to a particular nation, which is reflected in myths, legends, proverbs, sayings, and other forms of folklore in previous texts. According to researcher Maslova, it is the study of cultural language, standards, stereotypes, symbols, images, speech behavior, and etiquette (Maslova, 2004). Because the cultural language approach includes culture as the goal of foreign language teaching, the presentation should be based on the principle of "from a cultural unit" (language culture), not from a language unit. In this approach, the emphasis is on the point record of some cultural information extracted from a particular language unit and the reflection on the language of a particular representative block of national culture in relation to the expressed units of language (speech).

The mainly context-based approach to the study of objects in the context of culture stems from the general nature of the context as a unit of synthesis. Thanks to this phenomenon of the outside world, the gaps in the conceptual system are very subtle. For the purposes of teaching a foreign language and culture, the

contextual system should include at least sufficient but essential linguistic culture, which distinguishes between the two cultures (Jabbarova, 2020; Soboleva, 2016). This phenomenon was analyzed by applying the linguocultural approach widely used in modern linguistics, focused on the consideration of the phenomena of the language in close connection with a person, their thinking, spiritual, and practical activity. When studying the linguistic representations of the LSG “свет” (light), the conceptual analysis method which suggested considering this concept as one of the keys in Russian culture was applied. The content of the material assumed the use of the historical approach to the consideration of the concept of light to analyze the semantics of the word in diachrony and the religious and philosophical views of a person of the medieval period. The method for describing lexical definitions in combination with the techniques of composition and contextual analysis was used in order to study the semantic structure of verbal representatives of the concept. The use of the textological method made it possible to establish historical patterns of change of the text in general and individual lexical units in particular.

#### 4. Results

The word “literature” did not appear until the 14th century, but the word composition, of course, had a rich history before this. We call Homer's epics “literature”, but there was no equivalent term at the time of its construction between the 8th and 10th centuries BC. His epics were oral, unwritten, and even said to have been fabricated by Homer - they were the result of generations of verbal activity, as far as possible, recording important Greek culture rather than creating a memorable date with no written history. The motive was probably historical and utilitarian, rather than what we now call “literary”. However, Homer's Iliad and Odyssey followed an extraordinary combination of predetermined rules for their composition, and because of their ability and constant change, they depended on the technical agility of their speakers (or most likely readers). In fact, the term used by the Greeks in Homer's time to refer to those epics is *tekne*, meaning production through appearance. The relationship between light and literature is more than the use of light as an

image in some literary texts. The light of the natural world is what literature does - it shows something that would otherwise be hidden from us or not noticed in our lives. Literature does not need to reveal only the most fascinating facts, such as Dante's spiritual journey or Milton's explanation to the man of God's ways. It can also reveal things that are very familiar to us so that we can ignore them. This can be normal and make us want to see it again as if it were our first time. It helps to motivate a simple poem such as William Carlos Williams' poem “Too Much Dependent on the Red Wheel”, the opening lines of his famous 1923 poem, “The Red Wheel”. We expect literature to be complex and difficult - otherwise, it is not some kind of literature. This reflection, on our part, has a lot to do with what literature we are taught and how we are taught. Shakespeare is complex and difficult, and so is Milton, and their work seems to be unquestionably literary. Williams' poetry, on the other hand, seems simplistic to some and does not deserve to be categorized. In fact, the so-called “new critique” that began in the United States in the 1920s and influenced poetry reading for most of this century defined “literature” as complex, ambiguous, and coherent. If a text does not contain all of these features, then as a new critical assumption goes, it should not be literature (Demastes, 2005).

The LSG “свет” (“light”) is the contensive lexical category of multifarious interpretation, the components of which characterize different sides of the cultural reality. The religious content of this concept for the medieval worldview becomes the most significant. In “*Life of Sergius of Radonezh*” (<http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru>), the lexical-semantic group “свет” (“light”) is represented by multitudinous language units. The high frequency of using the very word *свѣтъ* (*light*) (11 times), as well as various derivatives of this stem and the etymologically related verb *сияти* (*to shine*), is an indication of the significance of this concept in religious and philosophical consciousness: *свѣтитися* (5 times), *свѣтлыи* (5 times), *пресвѣтлыи* (5 times), *свѣтильникъ* (3 times), *свѣтлость* (3 times), *свѣтло* (2 times), *просвѣтити* (1 time), *сияти* (3 times), *възсияти* (3 times), *сияющии* (2 times). The word-forming potential of the units of language confirms

their important place in the world image (Fatkhutdinova, 2015; Volskaya, Chupryakova, Safonova, & Karipzhanova, 2018). In connection with the specifics of the hagiographic genre, the religious component relevant for theological theories is actualized in the semantics of these lexemes. In philosophical concepts, light is often associated with truth; that is, symbolism has been inherent in this concept since ancient times. Everybody was aware of the impossibility of being without light. The mysticism of light is much deeper than any of its philosophical interpretations. The words *God is light* mean not only the perfection of God but also the transparency for God of everything created by Him and everything that happens in the world (<https://gufo.me>). God and light are without end (“eternal”) and without beginning (“increase”), and are therefore synonymous (“Coeternal”). Milton questions his ability to speak for light (“Can I speak for you without reproach?”) Because he then speaks for God (“because God is light”). However, like Dante, Milton sees his role as a poet, the microcosm of the radiance of God's light: “explaining God's ways to men” to reveal the truth (Demastes, 2005; Hoepfer, 2000).

From ancient times, even in pre-Christian folk ideas, the concepts of light and holiness were closely interconnected. In the new Christian worldview, the connection of these concepts acquired a more in-depth content and became inextricable. Already in the oldest original monuments of Russian writing, the word *свет* / *light* appears primarily as a designation of spiritual light and becomes one of the key concepts of religious consciousness.

In “*Life*”, the lexeme *свѣтъ* is frequently represented within traditional formulas borrowed from illuminated texts. So, the word *свѣтъ* in the very beginning of the monument is used in correlative construction *свѣтъ and живот* (“life”), which is traditional for understanding the godhead of supreme force, “*Слава Богу вышнему, иже въ Троици славимому, еже есть упование наше, свѣтъ и живот нашъ, въ негоже вѣруемъ, вън же крестихомся, о немже живемъ, и движемся, и есмь!*” (<http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru>). Such intonations are typical of the monuments of church-literary genre.

Since Sergius of Radonezh was consecrated a saint, *Life* describes those signs that had emerged before his birth and prophesied his future holiness. He is compared with famous saints and prophets, including Илья Fezvityanin, whose holy life is likened by the bishops to the light. A fixed comparison of light and life is sacred, “*Будет бо дѣтице сего житие свѣтъ и слово суд, и тѣи судит Израилью оружием и огнем*” (<http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru>).

One of the parts of *Life -About the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin* – narrates the appearance of the Blessed Virgin – an event that only devoutly spiritual people who serve God are honored with. At the same time, only saints see her as a rule. She always appears in the form of a light luminous silhouette; her image is filled with light and radiance. Therefore, when describing the appearance of the Blessed Virgin to Radonezh, the lexemes of the LSG “*свет*” (light) are so widely used: *свѣтъ* (*light*), *свѣтлость* (*lightness*), *сияющий* (*radiant*), *солнце* (*sun*), *заря* (*dawn*). The divine light emanating from the appearance of the Virgin is compared with the light of the sun and dawn, which in the physical world are the sources of light and heat. In this passage, the brightness of light at the boding of heaven is even stronger than sunlight. In the religious sense, holiness, light, and mystery are paired with a divine principle. The tradition of this narration is also manifested in the use of set epithets to the words of the LSG “*свет*” (light): *неизреченнѣи* (in the meaning of “inexpressible, incomprehensible, inmost, mysterious” (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019) *свѣтлости; нестрѣпимую* (this attribute characterizes the degree of physical exposure to light from the revealed Virgin) *ону зарю*, “*И се свѣтъ велий осѣни святого зѣло, паче солнца сияюща; и абие зреть Пречистую съ двема апостолама, Петром же и Иоанном, в неизреченнѣи свѣтлости облистаящася. И яко видѣ святыи, паде ниць, не могый трѣпѣти нестрѣпимую ону зарю*” (<http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru>).

The lexeme *свѣтъ* is used in all parts of the monument, forming one of the conceptual centers of the whole narration. The light that foreshadowed the birth of the saint had been accompanying him throughout his life – was present at his death. Thus, thanks to this

concept, a kind of ring composition is created - the saint comes with the light and leaves with the light and continues to shine after his departure to another world, “...и въ желаемое блаженство вводяще, в покой праведных, въ **свѣте** аггелъ; и яже присно желаше, зряй и всесвятая Троици **озарение** приемля, якоже подобаше постнику, иноком украшение” (<http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru>). In this context, the use of the lexeme *свѣтъ* in combination with the noun *аггелъ* in the Genitive case makes up a set terminological combination “ангельский свет” (“angelic light”). The verb formation *озарение* (*illumination*) acts as a religious term in the meaning of “ясное понимание” (“clear understanding”), due to the semantics of the generating verb *озарить* (*to illuminate*), which undergoes a typical way of semantic evolution for the components of this LSG: from the specific meaning of “ярко осветить” (to brighten up) to the meaning of mental activity прояснить что-либо (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019).

Epiphanius was a monk from Rostov, a surgeon, and disciple of St. Sergius Radunge. The historian Serge A. Zenkovsky wrote that Epiphanius, together with Stephen of Perm, St. Sergius of Radonezh, and Andrei Rublev, the painter, show “the spiritual and cultural revival of Russia in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries” (Brisbane, 2020; Martin, 1995; Schaeken, 2018). Epiphanius was born in Rostov in the first half of the fourteenth century. As a young man, he joined the monastery of Gregory the Theologian in Rostov. There, he learned to copy manuscripts and draw icons. He also had to learn Greek and the traditions of Greek orthography. He later moved to the Trinity Monastery, a house founded by Sergius Radonge in 1337. Epiphanius made many trips and is known to have visited Moscow, Constantinople, and Mount Athos (Zenkovsky, 1974, p. 259).

When praising his teacher and mentor, the author of *Life*, Epiphanius the Wise, uses the style of “weaving of words” characteristic of the Middle Russian period. Simultaneously, the traditions of the hagiographic genre which prevailed in the Old Russian period are preserved, which manifested themselves, among other things, in the use of set constructions with the lexemes with the

meaning of light. These expressions contain an associative field with the lexemes with symbols of light by means of which the saint is described, “Съи убо преподобный отецъ нашъ **провосиаль** есть въ странѣ Русстѣй, и яко **свѣтило пресвѣтлое възсия** посреди тмы и мрака, и яко **цвѣтъ** прекрасный посреди трънниа и вльчець, и яко **звѣзда** незаходимаа, и яко **луча**, тайно **сияющи** блистающе, и яко кринъ въ юдолии мирьскихъ, и яко кадило благоуханно, яко яблоко добровонное, яко шипок благоуханный, яко злато посреди брънниа, яко сребро раждежено, и искушено, и очещенно седморицею, яко камень честный, и яко бисеръ многоцвѣтный, и яко измарагдъ и самфиръ **пресвѣтлыи**...” (<http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru>). To characterize the saint, the tautological combination *свѣтило пресвѣтлое* is traditionally used, as well as a number of the verbs of the LSG “свет” (“light”), including with the prefix *въз-* of Old-Slavonic origin *възсияти* (shine, be glorified); *провозсияти* (shine, be glorified). In prefixal formations, as well as in the derivational verb *сияти* (*to shine*), on the basis of the primary meaning “to radiate light, shine”, the figurative meaning is “to be notable, be famed, be famous” (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019). When elevating the saint, a detailed series of comparisons is used, the objects of which are sources of light – a ray and a star, the concept of color; in addition, the saint is compared with a lily, a censer, an apple, a rosehip, gold, silver, pearls, sapphire, a date palm, a garden, a vineyard, and the rest.

In “*Honorable Word to Sergius of Radonezh*”, Epiphanius uses many lexemes of the studied LSG, «Это все еще светло, сладко и просветлено для нас о наших благородных, о памяти нашего отца, святой зарей и просветляющей славой, и мы злимся» (<http://lib.pushkinskiydom.ru>). The meaning of the adjective *свѣтлыи* comprehends a large number of components, one of which is “благой, добрый” (“good, kind”); therefore, it is used as a characteristic of an abstract concept – memory (about the church fathers). In a series of homogeneous attributes *свѣтла*, и *сладка*, и *просвѣщенна*, the adjective *сладкыи* is also used in the abstract meaning “pleasant, joyful”, and the adjective with the root *свѣт-* *просвѣщенныи*, etymologically denoting “pouring light”, comes out with

religious semantics “relating to spiritual enlightenment” (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019).

## 5. Discussion

In the passage *On the Beginning of the Abbess of the Saint*, the hero of life is placed on a par with other spiritual enlighteners and religious ascetics. To name them, an axiological metaphor *свѣтила* is used, which denotes preachers, transmitters of spiritual light, whom Sergius of Radonezh was guided by in his sincere life and service of God. This formation is a verb with the suffix *-л(о)* and realizes the meaning of “transmitter of inward light” (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019), as a result of the actualization of the semantics of the forming verb *свѣтиту* in the meaning of “spread spiritual light, enlighten” (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019), “И сия рек, думая в жизни великих светил, которые жили во плоти, живя на землях Ангель, живя, река Антоний Великий и Великая Евфимия, Сава Освященный, Пахомия аггеловиднаго, Феодосия общежитие и другие” (<http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru>).

When describing the beginning of the monastery, when the monks were still isolated from the whole world, and they did not have the most necessary things, including food, incense, wax, etc., which is depicted in “*On the Abundance of the Most Needed*”, the representatives of the LSG “свет” (light) – *свѣча, свѣтиту* (candle, to light) - have their direct meaning, «... иногда мне не хватало еды, имже подсвечников, и я пояху в утрене ночью, у них жертвы нет, а только с березовым факелом или с ростком себе» (<http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru>).

Another formation of specific semantics with the root *свѣт-* the lexeme *свѣтильникъ* is represented both in the direct concretized meaning “luminous source, candle, lamp”, and in the abstract, religious-philosophical “transmitter of spiritual light” (Kovalenko & Kolosova, 2019), “Как может такой святой человек появиться в этих странах, тем более в последние дни этого времени?” (<http://lib.pushkinskijdom.ru>).

In the works of the hagiographic genre, the symbolism of light pervades the narrative. In the time of the second South Slavonic influence, the contexts of the use of the words

of LSG “light” deepen and extend. The text “*Life of Sergius of Radonezh*” presents a typical stylistic device of the “weaving of words” that is typical for this era and that are individually changed by Epiphanius: long syntactic periods, multicomponent comparisons, tautological combinations, and antitheses. Within the set traditional formulae, the representatives of the LSG “свет” (“light”) realize primarily religious and spiritual semantics relating them to the field of holiness. Several significant ideas, such as purity, righteousness, and morality, are expressed in the religious world image with their help.

Overall, the study has utilized a conceptual analysis of one of the significant cultural concepts, exhibiting the national-specific world image. The historical procedure concerns the investigation of vocabulary definitions and the component analysis and contextual analysis of the considered concept's language representations. The results of the study can be applied in the practice of linguocultural and ethnolinguistic analysis of the basic concepts of Russian culture; they refine upon the data on the evolution of a person's views on the idea of light in Russian culture. The diachronic analysis of the lexico-semantic group “light” shows the development of ideas about one of the critical concepts of Russian culture in the religious and philosophical world image. The materials of the article can be used in lexicographic practice, as well as in studying the systemic nature of vocabulary, teaching the history of the Russian literary language, lexicology, word formation, and stylistics.

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