ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ГРАМОТА

Филологические науки. Вопросы теории и практики
Philology. Theory & Practice

ISSN 2782-4543 (online)
ISSN 1997-2911 (print)

2025. Том 18. Выпуск 3 | 2025. Volume 18. Issue 3
Материалы журнала доступны на сайте (articles and issues available at): philology-journal.ru

RU

Английские и русские ведьмы в фольклорном нарративе: сопоставительное тезаурусное описание концептов

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Аннотация. Целью данного исследования является составление сопоставительного описания структуры английского концепта WITCH и русских концептов ВЕДЬМА и БАБА ЯГА на материале русских и английских фольклорных текстов жанра народной сказки и легенды на основе тезаурусного описания лексем и контент-анализа. Научная новизна работы заключается в представлении лексикографических тезаурусных моделей организации концептов ВЕДЬМА и БАБА ЯГА в русской и английской народной сказке, в осуществлении семантико-семиотического описания структуры данных моделей и сопоставлении концептов в двух фольклорных традициях. Результаты исследования показывают, что функциональное распределение лексем, эксплицирующих концепты ВЕДЬМА/WITCH в английских и русских текстах, схоже в своих базовых элементах, а различия между концептуальными структурами проявляются в многообразии лексических выражений, основанных на особенностях культурных интерпретаций. Имея много общего с представлениями о ведьмах в обеих традициях, концепт БАБА ЯГА выделяется более детально вербализованным набором семантических функций и предстает как уникальное воплощение языческого и христианского менталитета русского народа.

EN

English and Russian witches in folkloric narrative: a comparative thesaurus concept description

E. V. Ryazanova

Abstract. The aim of this study is to provide a linguistic comparative description of the WITCH and BABA YAGA concepts' structures in Russian and English folk tales based on thesaurus lexeme description and content analysis. The research novelty lies in presenting lexicographic thesaurus models of the WITCH and BABA YAGA concepts in the genre of folk and fairy tales, providing a description of the semantic and semiotic structure of the given models and comparing the concepts in the two folk traditions. Research results show that the thesaurus lexeme distribution of the WITCH concepts in English and Russian texts is similar in its basic elements, while the differences between the conceptual structures manifest themselves in a variety of lexical expressions based on peculiarities of cultural interpretations. Having a lot in common with the other WITCH concepts in both traditions, the BABA YAGA concept still stands out as a unique incarnation of pagan and Christian mentality of Russian people.

Introduction

The research relevance of this work is explained by a significant interest in the study of cultural concepts in modern cognitive linguistics and the need for reconstructing the concept structures that reveal themselves in the language of authentic discourses and form fragments or domains of the linguistic picture of the world. The folkloric genres are an integrated part of such discourse and the source for many archetypical concepts that continue to be used and transformed in present-day cultural contexts of modern nations. Systematic semantic and semiotic description of traditional folk concepts in a folk tale and comparison of their structures in different linguacultural environments add up to the understanding of modern conceptual and linguistic world pictures. The preliminary approbation of this study was accomplished by the author on the small sample of only one English and two Russian folk tales (Рязанова, 2021), which allowed us to expand the study and work on the other folk narratives from English and Russian collections of J. Riordan and A. N. Afanasjev to obtain more sufficient data for comparative analysis. This article presents the final results of the expanded research, more detailed commentary sections and subsequently improved findings to an international academic reader.

Научная статья (original research article) | https://doi.org/10.30853/phil20250162

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To achieve the aim of this study, we focused on the following research tasks:

- to provide thesaurus description of the cultural concepts WITCH and BABA YAGA in English and Russian folk tales based on lexeme relationships eliminated from the context;
- to analyse and explain similarities and differences in the linguistic expression of the concept structures of WITCH characters in the two cultures;
- to provide the analysis of the BABA YAGA concept and compare its structure with the WITCH concepts in English and Russian folk tale traditions.

To achieve the aim of the study and perform the research tasks, the method of thesaurus description, quantitative and qualitative analysis, content analysis and comparative analysis have been implemented. We present the data in the form of word combinability in compliance with the semantic functions of interacting lexemes. To develop the strategy of thesaurus description for this study, we have chosen several semantic functions to be filled with the corresponding word relationships. In the focus of research analysis, there are the following semantic functions of the lexemes in question that help to identify the structure of the WITCH and BABA YAGA concepts at different semantic levels such as nomination (Name), appearance (Age and Appearance), the magic lifestyle (Attributes, Locus), interacting process with the other characters of the narrative (Actions, Types of Witchcraft, Helpers). Afterwards, qualitative approach and content analysis have been implemented to work on every piece of the obtained lexeme thesaurus, which is given in the commentary section, that aims to discuss and interpret the findings of lexeme functional analyses as well as identify connotations and semiotic implications that are revealed through different functional relations with other lexemes.

Research material comprises authentic collections of English and Russian folk and fairy tales as well as different reference sources:

- Афанасьев А. Н. Народные русские сказки. М.: Правда, 1982.
- Левкиевская Е. Мифы русского народа. Энциклопедия мифологии. М.: Астрель; АСТ, 2002.
- Мифология. Большой энциклопедический словарь (БЭС) / гл. ред. Е. М. Мелитинский. М.: Большая Российская энциклопедия, 1998.
- Энциклопедия суеверий. М.: Локид; Миф, 1997.
- Folk Tales of the British Isles / ed. by J. Riordan. J. Moscow: Raduga, 1987.
- Simpson J., Roud S. A Dictionary of English Folklore. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003.

Theoretical background for the research is presented in the works by V. Ya. Propp (Пропп, 2005), Yu. S. Stepanov (Степанов, 2001), N. A. Krinichnaya (Криничная, 2004), Yu. P. Nechai and A. G. Shishkina (Нечай, Шишкина, 2017), A. Johns (2004), A. S. Stemberg (Штемберг, 2011), R. Hutton (2018), N. S. Zelezinskaya (Зелезинская, 2021), J. Zipes (2002), N. Hakdodova (Хакдодова, 2022), who have examined the image of evil women characters from cultural, historical, etymological, literary and anthropological perspectives. The phenomenon of interconnection of mysticism and reality in folkloric worldview has been described in the work of L. Ch. Wimberly (1965, p. 17), who drew on L. Lévy-Bruhl's idea of primitive thinking and S. Wood's theory of people's traditional psychology and claimed that metaphors and symbolism in traditional folk texts were accepted as reflection of reality in authentic folkloric narratives. The transformation of a witch and Baba Yaga image in present day literature and media culture is analysed in the works by E. M. Sokolova (Соколова, 2024) and J. K. Ó. Haesler (2021).

From the linguistic perspective, the character of an evil woman sorcerer in a folk tale tradition can be approached with the term of lexeme-concept offered by Yu. S. Stepanov, who denotes a concept as the basic element of culture revealing itself through national mentality. The author defines a concept as a "bunch" of notions, pieces of knowledge, associations and feelings that the representatives of the one culture share (Степанов, 2001, p. 43). S. E. Nikitina points out the significance of providing folk concepts' linguistic thesaurus description drawn on different traditional narratives for the reconstruction of the folkloric picture of the world (Никитина, Петров, Разумова и др., 2020, p. 20).

The thesaurus descriptive method is based on the theory of semantic cases proposed by Ch. J. Fillmore (2006, p. 373-400), which later progressed into the ideas of case frames, and has been developed in the works of many scholars who suggested different approaches to syntax semantics (Гак, 1969; Апресян, 1974; Арутюнова, 1973). The theory of semantic cases and case frames has been adapted to thesaurus analysis in different types of discourse and first applied to Russian folkloric genres by S. E. Nikitina (Никитина, 1994).

Considering the historical roots of the concepts under study, a witch appears to be a universal folk character for many ethnic groups, hence, the lexeme itself in Indo-European languages shows similarities at the level of etymology. The first reference to witches goes back to the pre-Christian era, when people regarded witches as wise people sharing exceptional knowledge. With the spread of Christianity people began to beware of witches. Throughout Europe in the Middle Ages, witches were burned at the stakes of the Inquisition. The victims of such trials could be both ugly and sickly old women, who displeased their neighbours and "jinxed" their cows, and young beautiful representatives of the poorer classes, whose "magic" caused the amorous "madness" in powerful representatives of society (Мифология. БЭС, 1998, p. 118-119). The proof is in the documents on the cases of Lancashire witches (Mitchell, 1988), when several families living in the Lancashire County were tried by court and put to prisons. Not surprisingly, the 17th century Russia faced similar events, when innocent women were accused of witchcraft against the tsar family and put in the dungeons to be tortured severely in the process of investigating the case of Zamoskvoretsky witches (Низовский, 1998, p. 151-157).

It can be observed that Christian beliefs and the misogyny of the Middle Ages contributed to the traditional image of a witch that we see in folk tales and other authentic sources. As a result, witches have been seen as those who conspired with the devil and used bad magic with evil intentions. The image of an evil ugly malevolent creature appears in many European and Russian folktales.

While witches in both cultures have "human" origin, Baba Yaga is a purely mythological character. The image of Baba Yaga is one of the folk personages of all Eastern Slavs, which indicates the connection of this character with ancient Slavic mythology (Степанов, 2001, p. 841). The analysis of the transition of this image from a mythological character into a fairy tale personage is carried out by K. M. Alexandrova (Александрова, 2021) who traces back the pagan mythological ritual elements in the texts of fairy tales.

The practical value of this study is that its results can contribute to the composition of the thesaurus dictionaries of folkloric concepts in different genres. The research results can also be used in the university curriculum to develop courses of folklore and cultural studies for students obtaining degrees in modern languages, literature and intercultural communication, as well as to train future specialists in translating.

Discussion and results

1.1. Thesaurus description of an English WITCH

Etymology: The English lexeme *witch* comes from Anglo-Saxon *wicca* meaning 'a wise man, wizard' (the word referred to men), originally neutral and could be applied to those using magic helpfully (Simpson, Roud, 2003, p. 389).

1. Name: *Mother Cuthbert, the matron, Mother Crady, the Witch of Penmure, Margery, Cicely, Witch Washerwife, the auld wife, the witch wife, Mother Shipton, an old witch, a hag.*
2. Age, Appearance: *old, young, canny (female).*
3. Locus: *a house like a stately palace, a little hovel at the Bottom of a hill, Wood and Mountain Hill, washerwife's habitation, glassy hill, Cave.*
4. Attributes/Objects: *a magic wand, a coal-stuff, an ointment, gridilon and tongs, washtub; kerchief.*
5. Actions: *carded and spun for living, (a great many women) dancing and revelling, sit at the table, strike the floor with a wand, play on gridilon and tongs, anoint her breast with the ointment, speak a charm, began to play many pranks, bring her daghters to witchcraft, mount on a coal-staff and fly; fetched the lady into his arms.*

Sitting by a great fire, welcomed all four by name, sent for cakes and entertained them in hospitable manner, plucked a kerchief from her head and threw it in the fire, calmly lifted it out of the flames and replaced it, unscorched, on her head.

Band owre a washtub, scrub bluidy sarks; washed till she wastired, gave to her doch, couldn't bring out a stain, ter set the strange lady to work; prepared a sleeping drink and given it to the knight; gied him another sleeping drink, took in a sleeping drink to the young knight's chamber, gaed away for some honey to sweeten it wi', She (an old witch) would tell him how to get rid of the fairies if he gave her one evening's milking.

6. Types of Witchcraft, Spells: *a tree rising out of the ground that multiplied into a very thick wood, play pranks, turn oneself into a hare to make him sport, impersonate the bride, by enchantment caused the lady to lose herself in the woods, cast someone into a deep sleep; prepared a sleeping drink; kerchief didn't burn, her prophesy came true.*
7. Helpers/Familiars: *a thing like a rabbit, changed into a hound, and then into a man; cats, bears, apes, imps, a mole; daughters.*

1.2. Commentary

As can be seen from the thesaurus description above, the concept of an English WITCH shown in folkloric tale discourse is quite traditional and coincides with the ideas about witches in European countries of the post-Christian period. English witches in a fairy tale have their own names and belong to different age groups (*old and young*), showing different types of appearance from being ordinary human-like creatures, sometimes young and attractive, and not necessarily ugly. Analysis shows that they often have a family, usually daughters who also are supposed to become witches. They may be accompanied by assistants in the form of various animals and devilish spirits such as *cats, bears, apes, imps, a mole*. The familiars of the English witches, as B. Sax puts it, once were shamanic animal helpers, mascot deities, mascots of saints and household spirits, which was the manifestation of one larger folkloric tradition of "grateful animals" (2009, p. 324). Being demonised during the period of witch-hunts and trials, familiars were believed to provide "a means by which the Devil allegedly communicated with witches through intermediaries" (Sax, 2009, p. 320).

English witches are fond of transformations into animals and people. In the narrative of *Lancashire Witches*, the young witch turns herself into a bride. Meanwhile, the frequent animal transfiguration *turning into a hare* goes in line with data collected on British beliefs of previous times (Энциклопедия суеверий, 1997, p. 55).

Those who newly join the ranks of witches usually go through a rite of initiation, smearing their breasts with *a magic ointment* and taking off on *a broomstick*. This ritual is the reminiscence of the connection of European witches with the league of the devil, little *imps* that accompany a witch is another attribute of this link. The devil's impact on the concept and lexeme structure is important as it explains the malevolent nature of a witch making it impossible for a witch character to develop good intentions that can be attributed to Baba Yaga. Witches may be seen near the *fire*, the locus of which is symbolic as it shows the connection with the world of the dead and the other world. As a rule, all the activities of English witches and the purpose of witchcraft have evil consequences leading people into insanity and delusion. Witches can *play tricks, impersonate a living person, cause someone to lose their way in the forest, cast them into a deep sleep*. Sometimes they mislead the main characters by giving them bad advice asking something in turn (*an evening's milking*), which ends up with poor consequences for the heroes.

Among the attributes of an English witch, a specific object of *a magic wand* can be observed in some of the narratives, which distinguishes her from the Russian witch, who never uses it. At the same time, the presence of a magic wand relates this concept to other sorcerers of folklore such as warlocks and fairies, kings and queens of bad fairies in particular.

2.1. Thesaurus description of a Russian WITCH *(translated from Russian by the author)*

Etymology: The Russian lexeme *ведьма* (*witch*) has the same root as the Slavic word "ведать", which means "to know" (Левкиевская, 2002, p. 357).

1. Name: *sister, witch, terrible witch, snake witch, Chuviliha, a malevolent witch, a hag.*
2. Locus: *palace, seashore, mountain*, *house, window.*
3. Age, Appearance: *unknown, young (female), all in white, a queen lady.*
4. Attributes/Objects: *stone, teeth, claws.*
5. Actions: *grabbed Alyonushka, tied a stone around her neck, threw her into the sea, beat the little goat, pounded and pounded and threatened him, so and molested the tsar, will eat both father and mother, ran out, met, loved her brother, left to sharpen her teeth, sharpened her teeth, rushed into the upper room, got angry, and gritted her teeth, and started to chase, swam across the lake, ran even faster, began to clear the way, gnawed, gnawed, gnawed, by force she got through, climbed and climbed, climbed over the mountains, chased after her brother again, saw him, began to ask for her brother to be given away, climbed up, stepped a foot, stayed on the ground, went in search for, called in a terrible voice, got the mother's voice, kept watch over smb., sang in a learnt voice, snapped smb. and rushed away, hurried into the hut, jumped into the hut, ate and drank full, went out, rides and rolls, keeps talking, heard smb., raised her head, looked around, got frightened, glanced, looked up, saw smb., jumped on her feet, rushed to the smith, beat and cut, couldn't do anything, flung at the tree, dug her teeth into the tree, gnawed the oak tree, smacked her lips and went on.*

Loathed her step-daughter, raged at smb, went uneasy from jealousy, took her time, kicked her stepdaughter out of the house into the dense wood, dressed her daughter into step-daughter's dress and swapped her for the real wife.

Appeared in the window, took the sprinkler, pushed her hand into the hut (to kill people), groaned, squealed, whoofed and ran away.

Sits near the window, takes off her head, washes it with soap and water, combed the hair and fixed her head back; died, got up from her coffin, ran and screamed, rushed and collapsed into the coffin.

6. Witchcraft/Spells: *put a spoil on the tsar and the tsarina, turned herself into a tsarina, everything was eaten, only the walls remained; turned her step-daughter into the beast, died and got up at nights.*
7. Helpers: *a mouse, a daughter.*

2.2. Commentary

As can be seen from the thesaurus, the conceptual structure of a Russian WITCH lacks such a variety of personal names as the English witch possesses. Nevertheless, the Russian witch often acts as *a close relative*, *a sister* or *a wife*, her incarnation is evil and she has bad intentions, misleads, deceives, threatens and tries to kill. In the analysed fairy tales, she *either has no helpers* and carries out her intentions herself, or her helpers *take the hero's side* (*the mouse* after the rite of bidding helps Ivan Tsarevich to mislead the witch). Appearance in fairy tales is conventional, attributes are not many, but one of the important signs is the presence of *teeth*, with which she can *gnaw* and *devour* everything around her. There is a certain focus on her capability to devour, the feature not found in the concept of the English witch. A big part of verb lexeme collocations describes the process of chasing after a potential victim of a witch. All taken into account, the thesaurus description shows the nasty and wicked nature of this concept in Russian tradition. On the one hand, it shows certain links to the real world being a relative of a personage, on the other hand, it can easily transform into a terrifying monster *gnawing and devouring* everything on its way.

3.1. Thesaurus description of BABA YAGA *(translated from Russian by the author)*

Etymology: cf. Polish *jezda*, Czech *jezinka* "forest baba", cf. Old Serbian jeza "disease", "nightmare", etc. Yu. S. Stepanov sees some connection in the etymology of Baba Yaga with the ancient Indian Yama-king of the kingdom of the dead, with the ancient Roman Janus, from whom she may have inherited her dual nature, and with the Greek Empusa, a vile creature of the female sex, which could take the image of a dog as well as of a beautiful girl (Степанов, 2001, p. 841).

1. Name: *aunt, sister, Baba Yaga, a bone leg, golden leg.*
2. Locus: *hut, bathhouse, river, the river of Fire, dense forest, dark forest, glade, Yaga's hut (turns on its hen legs): a fence around the hut made of human bones, human skulls with eyes stick out on the fence, instead of doors – human legs, instead of locks – hands, instead of a lock – a mouth with sharp teeth; around the hut twelve sticks, eleven with human head on them, one not engaged.*
3. Age, Appearance: *very old, old woman (female), an ugly stout, a bone leg, a golden leg.*
4. Attributes/Objects: *bone leg, clay leg / earthen leg, teeth, needle and thread, stupa (flying mortar), pusher, pestle, broom, oven, wheat, poppy, the fence of eleven sticks with sculls, skull with burning eyes*; *daughters, horses, golden apples.*
5. Actions: *weaved, went to the window, asked, rushed into the hut, saw, started to beat the cat and scold, pounced on the dogs, began to pound everyone; got into a stupa, drove a pusher, covered the trail with a broom and started to chase, chased, came to the river, gritted her teeth with anger, returned home, took the bulls, drove them to the river, chased again, started to gnaw the forest, could not gnaw it and returned back.*

Fed and watered, ordered to approach the tasks, screamed and shouted at her horses, sends Ivan-tsarevich to shepherd horses, went to sleep, woke up, rushed to chase, rode (in a stupa) to the river of Fire, rode over the bridge, tumbled into the river; *escaped, rushed away, came to a deep gulf, opened an iron plank, disappeared beneath the ground, went into deep sleep for twelve nights.*

Lived in a hut, did not let anyone in and ate people like chickens; she drove in from the forest, rode in a stupa, drove with a pestle, covered the trail with a broom, drove to the gate, stopped, sniffed around herself, shouted; drove in, whistling, stretched out, ate everything, drank everything, went to bed, snored.

The trees rattled, the leaves crunched, Baba Yaga came, examined everything, complained, ate enough, went to bed and gave orders, left again, returned, looked around, sat down to dinner, dragged Vasilisa out of the upper room and pushed her out of the gate, took the skull off the fence and gave it to her.

6. Spells: *the gates wanted to slam shut, the dogs wanted to tear, the birch wanted to gouge her eyes, everything locked up again, (Baba Yaga) whistled and a stupa with a pestle and a broom appeared in front of her*; *send powerful warrior-host.*

7. Helpers: *birch, gate, dogs, cat, worker, bulls; white rider (the day), black rider (the dark / the night), red rider (the sun), faithful servants (three pairs of hands)*, *geese-swans, giant horse, a beautiful daughter, tailors, shoemakers.*

3.2. Commentary

Thesaurus data show that the BABA YAGA concept retains the basic characteristics of a witch, such as being a female antagonist to the good characters, being evil, belonging to the outside world, being able to cast spells and move on air. Nevertheless, the concept has its own peculiarities and a more complicated structure. As far as her appearance, Baba Yaga looks like an ugly old woman, possessing an attribute in the form of *a bone leg / earthen leg / golden leg*, which definitely illustrates her connection to the world of the dead. However, despite that link with the other world, in the fairy tale narrative she can be a relative of the main characters (*aunt, sister*). Being a real person's relative makes her more human than other evil spirits. Another surprising fact is that Baba Yaga has her own daughters, their number is conventional and may vary in different folk tales.

Unlike a witch, who is malevolent and unmerciful in most of the cases in both cultures, Baba Yaga has a unique quality of being helpful. Such ambivalent nature is vividly revealed through the actions that she performs in the traditional narrative. She often has bad intentions, for example, chasing other characters, at the same time she helps the main characters to fight evil by giving the heroes attributes of help, such as an *enchanted skull with burning eyes*. Surprisingly enough, according to the data in some research, the good incarnation of Baba Yaga is found in 79% of Russian fairy tales, while the evil one takes only 21% (Криничная, 2004, с. 72), which strongly distinguishes her from *a witch*, both Russian and English, that predominantly takes the evil side.

The functional variety of lexemes describing the activities of this personage contributes to its dynamic nature, the predicate paradigm involves verbs of movement like *went, rushed, chased, rode, tumbled, escaped*, etc. Baba Yaga can move in the air, but unlike a witch, uses *a stupa* for this purpose, she also has helpers from the world of animals and plants, which sometimes stop obeying her after the rite of bidding and take the side of a good character, thus revealing their archaic roots as "grateful animals", the folkloric tradition described by B. Sax (2009, p. 324).

Another unique attribute of Baba Yaga is her locus in the wood in the shape of the hut on three chicken legs surrounded by *a fence made of human bones, human skulls with eyes* that *stick out on the fence, instead of doors – human legs, instead of locks – hands, instead of a lock – a mouth with sharp teeth*. The function of this lexeme is thoroughly symbolic as, according to V. Ya. Propp, it is the focal point of the initiation ritual (Пропп, 2005, p. 36-39). Having passed through the riddle ceremony in the hut of Baba Yaga, the hero of a fairy tale usually gets the opportunity to enter the kingdom of Koschei the Immortal, that is, the otherworld. Thus, Baba Yaga's house serves as a passage from the world of the living to the world of the dead. This connection, according to Yu. S. Stepanov, is also evidenced by her indispensable attribute, which is a *bone leg / earthen leg* (Степанов, 2001, p. 842). The symbolic appearance of a *golden leg* in some of the narratives might be a rudiment of Baba Yaga's ancient totemic roots going back to pagan tradition. The spectrum of Baba Yaga's familiars is wider and more hierarchical than that of a witch. In traditional texts Baba Yaga's helpers are embodied into the symbols of nature, they could be plants (*birch*), animals (*dogs, bulls, cat*, etc.) or natural phenomena (*day, night, sun* in the shape of *white, black and red riders*). These metamorphoses illustrate the link of the image to the ancient Slavic ideas of the feminine beginning, the maternal essence of all living things, which goes in line with the idea of V. Ya. Propp that the remnants of those beliefs are reflected in the power of Mother Yaga over the natural world (Пропп, 2005, p. 57).

A *broomstick* is the attribute that all witches including Baba Yaga possess. However, its function is different in the conceptual structure of this personage. While witches use broomsticks for flying or riding in the air, Baba Yaga uses it as an appliance to her stupa with the help of which she *covers the trail*. The attribute of a *stupa* is unique by itself. Not being found in European mythology, a "stupa" is Baba Yaga's inherent moving tool that together with the "hut on hen's legs" forms the integrated image specific for the Russian culture, thus putting this concept into the rank of cultural lacunas.

The thesaurus descriptions of the English WITCH, Russian WITCH, and BABA YAGA reveal both shared archetypal features and culturally specific distinctions, highlighting the rich complexity of these folkloric concepts. The English WITCH, rooted in European post-Christian traditions, is characterized by humanlike appearance, transformative abilities and explicit ties to the devil, often using familiars and magic tools like wands to carry out malevolent deeds. In contrast, the Russian WITCH, while sharing the malevolent nature of her English counterpart, exhibits a more monstrous and ambiguous appearance, with implicit connections to the world of the dead and a focus on violent actions such as devouring humans. BABA YAGA, however, stands apart as a uniquely Russian figure, combining the traits of a witch with a more complex and ambivalent nature. Her distinctive attributes, such as the hut on chicken legs, a bone leg and a flying mortar, reflect deep ties to Slavic pagan and Christian traditions, as well as a dual role as both a helper and a hindrance to fairy tale protagonists. The functional diversity of the witch's actions, her hierarchical familiars, and her symbolic locus as a gateway between the worlds of the living and the dead further underscore her exceptional place in Russian folklore. These findings not only illuminate the semantic and semiotic structures of the concepts in question but also demonstrate how cultural narratives shape and differentiate folkloric characters across traditions, offering valuable insights into the interplay between language, culture and folklore.

Conclusion

Summing up the results of the study, we have come to the following conclusions that correspond to research aim and tasks.

This study has provided a comprehensive thesaurus description of the cultural concepts WITCH and BABA YAGA in English and Russian folk tales, based on lexeme relationships extracted from textual contexts. The analysis revealed that all the three concepts are deeply embedded in their respective cultural narratives, with lexemes reflecting their semantic and symbolic structures. For the WITCH concepts in the two cultures, the thesaurus models highlighted key characteristics such as malevolence, transformative abilities, and connections to the otherworld, while also capturing culture-specific features, such as the English witch's association with the devil and the Russian witch's implicit ties to the world of the dead. Similarly, the thesaurus description of BABA YAGA showcased unique features, including ambivalent nature, multifunctional objects (e.g., her hut on chicken legs and flying mortar) and distinct narrative roles. These thesaurus models not only provide a systematic representation of the concepts in folkloric pictures of the world but also serve as a foundation for further comparative analysis.

The comparative analysis of the WITCH concepts in English and Russian folk tales revealed both shared archetypal features and culture-specific distinctions. Common elements include the witches' malevolent intentions, their ability to transform and their symbolic connection to the otherworld through attributes like familiars or magical tools. Both English and Russian witches are portrayed as antagonists who cause trouble for the protagonists, often using magic to achieve their goals. However, significant differences emerged in their lexical expression and cultural interpretation. The English WITCH is often depicted as humanlike, with explicit ties to the devil, while the Russian WITCH exhibits a more monstrous and ambiguous appearance, with implicit connections to the world of the dead. Additionally, the actions of Russian witches tend to be more overtly violent and sinister, such as devouring humans, whereas English witches are more inclined to deceive and mislead. These differences reflect the distinct cultural and historical contexts that shape the portrayal of witches in each tradition.

The analysis of the BABA YAGA concept highlighted its exceptional nature within Russian folklore, distinguishing it from both English and Russian witch figures. While BABA YAGA shares some characteristics with witches, such as connection to the otherworld and use of magic, the concept structure is far more complex and multifaceted. BABA YAGA's ambivalent nature, combining both evil and good intentions, sets her apart from the uniformly malevolent witches. Furthermore, her unique attributes, such as her hut on chicken legs, flying mortar and broomstick, as well as her active participation in diverse narrative plotlines, underscore her distinct role in Russian fairy tales. Unlike English witches, who are often tied to the devil, BABA YAGA's semiotic connections are rooted in the world of the dead, reflecting the pagan and Christian influences in Russian culture. This comparison not only emphasizes the richness of the BABA YAGA concept but also illustrates how cultural narratives shape and differentiate folkloric characters across traditions.

This study has undertaken a comprehensive linguistic comparative analysis of the WITCH and BABA YAGA concepts in Russian and English folk tales, employing lexicographic thesaurus models and content analysis to elucidate their semantic and semiotic structures. Further research perspectives can be seen in developing thesaurus lexeme descriptions and comparative analyses of other folk concepts related to the genre of folk and fairy tales in English and Russian traditions that would contribute to the cognitive studies exploring the way how cultural narratives shape and reflect conceptual frameworks across linguistic and cultural boundaries.

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Информация о статье | About this article

Дата поступления рукописи (received): 05.01.2025; опубликовано online (published online): 28.03.2025.

Ключевые слова (keywords): концепт БАБА ЯГА; концепт ВЕДЬМА/WITCH; лексическое тезаурусное описание; народные сказки; фольклорный концепт; BABA YAGA concept; WITCH concept; lexical thesaurus description; folk and fairy tale; folk concept.