

INTERPRETATION PATTERNS OF THE “PATRIOT” CONCEPT BY AMERICAN STUDENTS (AS EXEMPLIFIED BY THE ASSOCIATION EXPERIMENT)

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Patriotism generally represents a significant value. In every language and culture entity it is marked in accordance with the peculiarities of national discourse. The present-day analysis of the “patriot” and “patriotism” concepts allows determining the following: their traditionalism in the minds of native speakers, the significance of patriotism in the hierarchy of American values, the formation of the younger generation’s patriotic discourse influenced by extra linguistic context.

In the course of 2001-2002 academic year the association experiment was conducted in North Brookfield and Lester High Schools, Massachusetts, USA. The 141 respondents (91 females and 50 males) were teenage students of 13-18 years old. The time frame under analysis covers the post-11 September period when Americans felt shock and horror that were at the height of their emotions. This justifies strong emotions expressed by the respondents, which is reasonably explained by the fact that the USA was not ready for a sudden attack. As a consequence, its status of a secure and enduring country was shattered. The nine-eleven tragedy mobilized patriotic feelings of Americans. They needed to express such feelings by means of verbal and non-verbal communicative actions and become conscious of the significance of the “patriot”, “patriotism”, “country” concepts in ethnic self-awareness.

In this paper we shall not go beyond but the interpretation patterns analysis of the “patriot” concept that was targeted by the following survey questions: ***In your opinion who is a patriot?, Why or why not do you consider yourself a patriot?, Are there patriots in other countries?***

The question ***In your opinion who is a patriot?*** aimed at the respondents’ understanding of the notion of “patriot”. An attempt was made to determine the native speakers’ perception of the analyzed concept in the context of a traditional definition of the word “patriot” (*someone who loves their country, supports its interests and is willing to defend it*). Association reactions observation made it possible to classify the responses according to the following parameters:

- The concept interpretation pattern on a personal, local, national and universal levels;
- Concretization of the Patriot (precedent names, names of professions);
- Characteristics of the Patriot (abstract notions denoting emotions, feelings, attributes and concrete notions standing for patriots’ actions towards his country);
- markedness of the “patriot” concept in American national discourse.

All in all, the following groups of respondents were singled out: 62,6% perceive the concept on a global scale, 34,2% make it exclusive of all the nations but the Americans, 3,2% find it difficult to come up with any answer.

The “country” concept is given consideration by the majority of the respondents. In this respect “a patriot” denotes a person who loves their country, supports its interests, is proud of it, willing to defend and die for it. The respondents view love for one’s country as deedful activity of contributing to its wellbeing. All the words and phrases used to describe the concept of “country” refer to the feelings of love, care and protection: *admire, believe in, be with, care, do good things for, fight for, help out, live for, love, make it a better place, respect, save, serve and protect, show appreciation, stand up for, value the rights*. In other words, a patriot is *a person who will do anything for their country and stand up for it regardless of what it does*.

The “patriot” interpretation analysis allows forming the “personality – society – country – mankind” implemented by the respondents. On a personal level, a patriot *believes in themselves and the importance of their nationality* (questionnaire #121, female student, 16); *a patriot is any person who stands up for his country and what they believe in* (questionnaire #102, female student, 16). As a member of society, a patriot *helps someone no matter how small it is* (questionnaire #24, female student, 13). The respondents believe that it is patriotic not only to love, defend and admire one’s country or simply “live for it” but criticize its government as well.

Among the most prevalent patriot’s actions are *to fight for one’s country* (10%), or rather *fight for its freedom* (questionnaire #38, male student, 14). For 7% of respondents it is equally important to give life as a sacrifice for their country and support it. One of the main characteristic features of a patriot are pride (10%) and love (7%) for their country. These words are commonly used with the adjectives *strong* and even *extreme*.

When answering the question *In your opinion who is a patriot?*, it is but natural that the respondents regard “country” as two separate concepts – “any country” and “the United States”, which is made obvious by the frequent use of the phrase *our country* and the proper name *America*. Therefore, *a patriot is a person who will do anything for America* (questionnaire #31, male student, 13), *anyone with pride in our country* (questionnaire #81, female student, 15) and *someone who believes in Americans* (анкета #17, female student, 13). The interpretation of the concept as *a citizen of the US who tries their best to help and loves this country* (questionnaire #56, female student, 14) summarizes previous answers to some extent. Consequently, the following definition might become conventional for native speakers: “a patriot is a citizen of the United States”. The all-American character of the “patriot” concept is exposed in the statement *everyone is a patriot because we all respect our flag and*

our country (questionnaire #35, female student, 14). The statement [*A patriot is*] *someone who is from not necessarily America and shows love for their country every day* (questionnaire #22, female student, 13) raises hopes that patriotic Americans are not the only nation showing love for their country.

The following words indicate how culturally specific the interpretation of the universal “patriot” concept is: *our, America, Americans, Constitution, ideals* (meaning the Principles listed in the Constitution of the USA), *red, white, blue* (American flag colors), *Revolutionary War*.

Interpretation of “a patriot” as a specified individual or individuals is also culturally marked. All of the respondents define a patriot as a person, an individual or a citizen supporting the interests of their country. At the same time the native speakers’ associations of a patriot with a particular person or a group of people proves to be of greater importance for the research.

In their attempt to instantiate a patriot, the respondents resort to the components of national discourse, in particular those belonging to military, government, political, sports, and everyday-life spheres. The first person regarded as a patriot is the President of the US, George Bush Jr. *for trying to keep the country under control after September 11* (questionnaire #61, male student, 14). In American patriotic discourse the “patriot” and the “president” concepts have become identical. Army soldiers and those who sacrifice their lives fighting for America and its wellbeing are true patriots: [*A patriot is*] *someone who has fought and done something that has changed America for the better* (questionnaire #92, female student, 15). Just as significant is a part played by the war veterans’ who fought for their country’s independence and by the Founding Fathers notable for creating the US Constitution. After 11 September the respondents have distinguished not only soldiers fighting in the Middle East, but also local policemen and firefighters helping out with the terrorist attack aftermath. On a personal level, a patriot is a relative who gave his life in the Vietnam War (questionnaire #129, male student, 17).

The students’ local patriotism is vividly displayed when they identify *New England Patriots*, the American football team from their state, and all New England natives as patriots. It should be noted that gender differences do not apply to the combination of patriotic and recreational discourse. Both male and female students favor this football team.

Notwithstanding their young age, some students strongly criticize their compatriots. It is believed that a patriot is someone who truly loves their country, takes pride in and fights for it, but *not someone with a flag bumper sticker that only has it on their car because it is the right thing to do* (questionnaire #13, female student, 13). At the same time the respondents admit that *today’s world in the United States lacks actual patriots. Instead we have only left a shell of what a patriot should be, a memory* (questionnaire #29, female student, 13).

The aim of the question *Why or why not do you consider yourself a patriot?* was to determine the respondents' standpoint in patriotic discourse. Experiment data show that 70% consider themselves America's patriots, 18% feel they do not deserve to be called so, 4,5% are only somewhat patriotic, 4,5% find it difficult to come up with an answer, 3% gave no response.

The majority of students interpret their patriotic actions and attitudes based on the traditional meaning of "patriot": *[I consider myself a patriot because I] love my country, support my country, am willing to fight/to die for my country, show pride in my country, believe in my country, respect my country.*

It is possible to distinguish the following reasons why the American students consider themselves patriots: 1) affection for their locality, willingness to live in the US only; 2) pride in their national identity; 3) respect for the national flag, the country and its people; 4) commitment to their country; 5) commitment to the society; 6) readiness to fight and die for their country; 7) belief in nationwide values and personal rights.

The responses stating the students' difficulty in identifying themselves as patriots and their yes/no answers are of the greatest interest for the research. The negative responses were caused by the following factors: 1) inability to stand up and risk their life for the country; 2) inability to do something important for the country; 3) lack of feeling of pride for their country; 4) disagreement with some of the country's policies and belief that many people display their patriotism too much; 5) tokenism in showing respect to national symbols; 6) age limit; 7) showing restraint; 8) peculiarities of world outlook and conduct.

The reasons the native speakers interpret the "patriot" concept ambiguously are a lot similar to those enumerated above. The percentage of those who are only somewhat patriotic and those who find it difficult to come up with an answer is the same. On one hand, the respondents state that they are proud of their country and the freedoms they get to enjoy. On the other hand, they admit that lack of patriotic activity does not earn them the right to be called patriots: *I do and I don't. I love my country and take pride in being an American, but haven't really done anything to be considered a «patriot»* (questionnaire #92, female student, 15). Some teenagers do not fully comprehend what "patriot" means: *I am not sure, there are many definitions of a [word] patriot* (questionnaire #76, female student, 15) or view it in its broad or narrow sense. The respondents are highly uncertain about their ability to stand up for their country: *I don't know if I would be the first person to jump up and go to war. I'd be scared* (questionnaire #132, male student, 18). Some students admit that they are not fully aware of the United States' role in the world, and therefore find it difficult to express an opinion.

Analysis of the question *Are there patriots in other countries?* helps to determine how the respondents perceive the “patriot” concept: whether it pertains to the American language and culture entity or is regarded in its global, universal sense.

First of all, the students from 13 to 16 are incapable of recognizing if there are patriots in other countries; they either reject or are not sure of this. All of the students above 17 years of age respond in the affirmative and try to comment on their responses. Table 1 shows the percentage ratio of the respondents’ reactions:

Table 1

Are there patriots in other countries?

Yes	No	Maybe	I don’t know	No answer
84%	6%	6,4%	2,6%	1%

Many of the affirmative responses are quite striking. This can be explained by the fact that 34% of the respondents identify the “patriot” concept within the framework of American patriotic discourse. The question “Are there patriots in other countries?” was interpreted wrongfully as “Are there American patriots in other countries?”, which resulted in the following: *Yes, because some people could have moved from the U.S. to another country* (questionnaire #25, female student, 13); *Yes, but they are soldiers from the U.S. or people that are loyal to their country* (questionnaire #42, male student, 14). National egocentrism and excessive mobility – the dominant features of American mentality – are one of the main reasons of such conceptual dualism. G. Gachev’s observations on Russian and American mentalities justify the reasons above. In the scholar’s opinion, an American takes their roots anywhere, while a Russian’s roots tie them with their native land in the same way a newborn is tied with an umbilical cord to their mother. The American’s native land is where they feel good (*ubi bene ibi patria*). The Russian feels good where their native land is (*ubi patria ibi bene*) [Гачев 1997: 97].

The following statement demonstrates the narrow-minded outlook of some of the respondents: *Patriot is an American term, but if someone is on a trip elsewhere, then it is so* (questionnaire #61, male student, 14). Approximately 5% of the students believe that other nations attribute different semantic and phonetic characteristics to the concept: *Yes, except they are not called patriots* (questionnaire #28, female student, 13).

On the whole, most of the native speakers interpret the “patriot” concept in its traditional way. Conceptualization of “patriot” in terms of an American phenomenon can be justified by certain dominant features of American mentality and values: focus on none but America’s interests and

problems, showing respect to the key symbols of the national discourse, and viewing the 11 September tragedy on a global scale. “Patriot” is associated with a specified individual or a group of individuals. Thus, the respondents operate on personal, local, national and universal levels to interpret the role of a particular individual in patriotic discourse. Characteristic features of American mentality contribute greatly to making the “patriot” and “American” concepts identical. Such linking is justly explained by ethnocentrism and certain intellectual bareness of the respondents along with globalization influence and a tendency to regard the world community from the perspective of American ideals and principles.

References:

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