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**VALUE OF "MENTALITY"
AND "MENTAL" CONCEPTS IN RUSSIAN,
ENGLISH AND FRENCH¹**

Abstract

The article dwells on the cognitive-national sphere which is the subject of attention of researchers nowadays. One of the concepts that are difficult to detect, includes the concept of mentality, because it is not structured and is a kind of predisposition, the inner person's willingness to act in a certain way.

The origin and formation of the concepts "mentality" and "mental" in Russian and foreign humanities are considered in this article. With this purpose vocabulary definitions on the material of Russian, English and French dictionaries and the researchers' points of view in the given languages are analyzed, and an attempt is made to identify common and different features inherent in these concepts. The method used is a conceptual analysis. In addition, we aim to identify what the correlation of "mentality" and "world view", "mentality" and "national character" concepts are.

The volume of concepts "mentality" and "mental" considered in this article on the material of dictionary definitions and various Russian and foreign scientists' points of view, is different in Russian, English and French.

In the Russian language, in general, they talk about the mentality of a group

of people or whole nations, whereas the French can talk about the mentality of one person, and, to mean by mentality a moral behaviour of an individual. In English, the concept "mentality" has a volume greater than in the other two languages. In English mentality, in contrast to the Russian concept, can have a negative evaluation (e.g. *I can't understand the mentality of these people*). By mentality can be understood a degree of intelligence (low, medium, high) and characteristics of the mind (e.g., bourgeois mentality).

The Russian "mental" is basically identical with the French "mental" (belonging to the mental activity that uses intellectual ability). However, the French adjective has a different value than the Russian one, that is, "pertaining to mental activity in regard to the health and perhaps its pathological aspects". In English, the concept "mental" has the meanings: 1) relating to the total emotional and intellectual response to the human world around us; 2) referring to the intellectual rather than emotional activity; 3) related to mental disorders; 4) intended for the care or for the treatment of patients with mental disorders, which are absent in the corresponding Russian concept.

In modern humanities the concept "world view" gradually recedes into the background and is replaced by the con-

cept "mentality". National mentality implies stereotypes of consciousness, while the national character means psychological patterns of behaviour of people.

The data of this small study demonstrate the need for the further research of the concepts "mentality" and "mental" and their representation in languages in order to identify the features of the national consciousness of different peoples.

Key words: mentality; mental; national character; world view; concept.

At the present stage of development of the humanities the cognitive-national sphere is the subject of attention of many researchers. One of the concepts that are difficult to detect, includes the concept of mentality. "Mentality" is "deeper thinking, standards of conduct, a scope of the senses. It is not structured and is a kind of predisposition, the inner person's willingness to act in a certain way..." [9; p. 29]. (All the translations are made here by the author of this article).

It is supposed to consider in this article the origin and formation of the concepts "mentality" and "mental" in domestic (Russian) and foreign humanities, to analyse vocabulary definitions on the material of Russian, English and French dictionaries and researchers' points of view in the given languages, and to identify common and different features inherent in this concept. The method used is a conceptual analysis. In addition, we aim to identify what the correlation of "mentality" and "world view", "mentality" and "national character" concepts are.

The concept "mentality" appeared in a scientific linguistics language in Russia in the 80-90-ies of the 20th century. The word "mentality" is derived from

the Latin «mens - mind, thinking, inner properties of soul» [<http://iph.ras.ru>]. In the Russian language, it is a copy of the French word *mentalité*. In English-language dictionaries it is indicated that "mentality" term was first used in the 17th century (1691), and the term *mental* - earlier, in the 15th century [<http://www.merriam-webster.com>].

Let us trace the chronology of the appearance of the concept "mentality" in the humanities. An important milestone in the history of concepts of mentality is a steel work of the French historian Jean Lefevre, who introduced the term "collective mentality" [10]. J. Lefevre examined the phenomenon of mass panic that seized many French villages peasants about the impending danger from gangs of robbers in the summer 1789. The historian found it necessary to examine an in-depth approach to the analysis of mass psychology. J. Lefevre believed that such behaviour of a group of people, especially in the time of a crisis, can not be explained without taking into account the structure of the collective mentality. Investigating the behaviour of the "revolutionary crowds", Lefevre showed that beyond the usual ideological - political "event" story hides its deep source, which is intertwined with psychological and social aspects: a collective mentality dynamics which is subordinated to special laws. For Lefevre, collective and individual mentality are biologically caused constants.

As noted in the encyclopedia "Twentieth Century Culturology", the idea of collective mentality originated from Alexis de Tocqueville in his book "Democracy in America" (1835). Exploring the social consciousness of America, Tocqueville tried to find the

root causes of prejudices, habits and preferences prevalent in a given society, which make up a national character. Tocqueville argued that all residents of the United States have similar principles of thinking and manage their mental activity in accordance with the same rules.

The term "mentality" is found in R. Emerson (1856), however, as the researchers note, the concept of mentality got its productive and multifaceted development in francophone humanities. M. Proust, noting the novelty of the term "mentality", introduces him as a worthy of attention neologism to your vocabulary, penetrating to hitherto unknown space of a psycho-spiritual life.

We believe that one should especially focus on the concept of Lévy-Bruhl, who started from the ideas of the founder of the sociological trend in ethnological science Emile Durkheim. L. Levy-Bruhl used in his studies one of the basic concepts of Durkheim's "collective representation". According to L. Levy-Bruhl, collective representations are passed from generation to generation, and "impose themselves on personality, i.e. they are not the product for the reasoning but faith [4; 20]". In 1922, L. Levy-Bruhl in the study "Primitive thinking" ("La mentalite primitive") sought to identify differences between individual performances and collective representations of primitive peoples. The scholar distinguishes pralogical and logical types of mentality. In the first case mentality refers to the thinking of primitive peoples, in the second – to the rational mind of modern mankind.

Humanities of the 20-s developed the unique idea of mentality. Fixing a stable mood of the inner person`s world, uniting him/her in social groups and historical

communities, mentality serves as a means of analysis and explanation in humanities, especially in the extent in which dynamic historical dimension is inherent to its subject. Therefore, the representation of the mentality was mainly developed in historical anthropology and the "new science of history", the foundations of which were laid in the 1930s. French scientists grouped around the journal "Annals".

The works of a new generation of historic school of "Annals", such as J. Le Goff, R. Mandry, G. Duby and others, as well as researches of historians of culture, science and art (J. Huizinga, J.-P. Vernant, P. Frankastel, E. Panofsky, etc.) serve as samples of disclosure and recreation of mentality of different eras and social strata.

In the manifesto of the school of "New Annals" (1946) Fevr emphasizes that mental habits and perception attitudes and emotional life skills are inherited from the past generations of people without their clear understanding. Mentality is thought by Fevr not as a biologically rooted constant behaviour, but as a historically folding structure, defining the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of people, their values and "gestures". In historical reconstructions mentality was found primarily as a cause of "lag" or "resistance" changes in the socio-political and ideological spheres (inertia mentality). Thus, according to Fevr, mental structures simultaneously serve as a producing base and an obstacle to the movement of history, so it gets its own unique character, at the reconstruction of which history should primarily aim.

Structuralism, rejecting the concept of "pre-logical" primitive mentality of

Levy-Bruhl, contributed to the further development and deepening of these concepts and research, introducing the semiotic approach and extending to the entire culture of linguistic models. However, to the extent that structuralism goes into post-structuralism, the notion of the mentality changes. This is clearly seen, for example, in M. Foucault's works, who advanced the concept of "episteme", which can be interpreted as a projection of the structure of intellectual mentality of the corresponding era and its culture.

Let us consider some of the existing definitions of "mentality".

"Mentality — a particular way of thinking— usually singular". [<http://www.learnersdictionary.com>]

"Mentality – 1: mental power or capacity: INTELLIGENCE 2: mode or way of thought: OUTLOOK (the imperialist *mentality* of the nineteenth century — John Davies). Examples of M. *Most teenagers do not have the mentality to foresee the consequences of such risky behavior*". [<http://www.merriam-webster.com>]

"Mentality – 1. mental capacity or endowment 2. the set of one's mind, view, outlook". [<http://dictionary.reference.com>]

"Mentality – noun (plural *mentalties*) 1. often *derogatory* the characteristic way of thinking of a person or group: *I had inherited not only my father's blood but his bourgeois mentality as well.* 2. [mass noun] dated the capacity for intelligent thought: *machines can possess mentality*" [<http://oxforddictionaries.com>].

"Mentality – (Latin "mens", mind) – the thinking person's ability» [<http://www.onlinededics.ru>].

"Mentality - thinking, general spiritual mood of a person, group» [<http://www.onlinededics.ru>].

"Mentality - stable disposition of the inner world of people rallying in their social and historical community; totality of conscious and unconscious attitudes and predispositions of individuals, social groups to a particular type of values, thinking and action » [<http://www.onlinededics.ru>].

"Mentality – (from Lat. mens –consciousness, mind) - a way of thinking, the overall mood of a spiritual man group. M. is broader yet less clear concept than a style of thinking that characterizes only intellectual predisposition to certain mental actions" [<http://www.onlinededics.ru>].

"Mentality (from Lat. Mens, mentis, "mind, intellect") – a concept (e.g. English mind), not having an accurate counterpart in the Russian language. Mentality is opposed to "matter" or, in a more modern contexts, "brain", the ratio between the "brain" and "mentality" is figuratively compared with the relationship between hardware and software, that is brain is understood as a neurophysiological (material) substrate of mentality, whereas "mentality" - is understood as functionality characteristic of this substrate» [<http://ru.wikipedia.org>].

It is noted that mentality is formed in the process of education and gaining experience. Individuals, who have received training in different cultural environments, are distinguished by their mentality.

In the historical and philosophical contexts in the Russian discourse "matter" is opposed to "spirit." In actual psychological contexts "brain" is opposed to "consciousness." This, however, leads to a conflict of values, because consciousness is a part of mentality along with the unconscious.

In the traditional sense "mentality" is synonymous with "mentalitet" (a Russian word transliterated into English – from German *Mentalität*) and means (usually in sociological contexts) this or that mindset, that is stable, intellectual and emotional features inherent in a particular individual, usually as a representative of some social group. Mentality is such a way of seeing the world in which a thought is not separated from emotions.

Now we are turning to some definitions of "mentality" and "mental" in Russian, French and English dictionaries.

«**Mentalité** (French) –

A. - Ensemble des manières habituelles de penser et de croire et des dispositions psychiques et morales caractéristiques d'une collectivité et communes à chacun de ses membres. *Mentalité d'un milieu, d'une époque; mentalité archaïque*

("Mentality – Set of habitual ways of thinking and believing and mental and moral dispositions of community characteristics common to each of its members. *Mentality of a middle of an era; archaic mentality*).

B. – État d'esprit permanent inhérent à un individu. Synon. *psychologie. Mentalité de spectateur, de commerçant*. (A permanent state of spirit inherent in an individual. Synon. *psychology. Mentality of a viewer, a merchant*.)

C. – *Fam.* Comportement moral. Synon. *moralité. Une mentalité détestable; quelle mentalité! Arg.* Loyauté, conformité aux règles du milieu. (Moral behaviour. Synon. *morality. A hateful mentality. What mentality! Argo. Loyalty, compliance with the rules of the environment*) [<http://www.onlinededics.ru>].

"Mentality - attitude, mindset. M. of Russian people" [<http://slovarozhegova.ru>].

Mentality - a mindset (from French *mentalité*) or socio-psychological attitudes, ways of perceiving, feeling and thinking styles. As stated by M.I. Rozhansky, the notion of *mentalité* was confirmed in the intellectual life of the West as an amendment to 20 century Enlightenment to the identification of consciousness with the mind. *Mentalité* means something in common, underlying the conscious and the unconscious, logical and emotional, that very deep and so hardly lockable source of thinking, ideology and beliefs, feelings and emotions. Mentality is associated with the very foundations of social life and at the same time has its own peculiar history.

"Mental (psychic) - pertaining to the mind in its functional aspect (perception, imagination, memory, feeling, desire, etc.) or in its substantive aspects (sensory data, images and other content present in the mind" [<http://ru.wikipedia.org>].

"Mental (bookish). Referring to the mind, mental activity. *Mental abilities*" [<http://slovarozhegova.ru>].

"Mental,-ale,-aux (French) - mental.

A. - Qui appartient au mécanisme de l'esprit; qui fait appel aux facultés intellectuelles. Calcul, effort, niveau, test, travail mental; activité, construction, organisation, structure, synthèse mentale; facultés, fonctions mentales. (Belonging to mental activity, using intelligence. *Thoughtful calculation, stress, mental level, test, activities, design, organization, structure, synthesis, mental abilities, functions*).

PSYCHOL. Âge mental. Degré de développement intellectuel attribué à un individu, généralement à un enfant, en fonction des résultats de tests auxquels il est soumis:

♦ *Par dérision. Vous avez 10 ans d'âge mental! Vous avez un comportement d'enfant.* (Psihol. mental age. Level of intellectual development, attributed to an individual, usually a child, depending on the tests carried out by him/her. *Ridicule. You mental development is at 10 years old. You are behaving like a child*).

♦ *Restriction mentale.* En casuistique, subterfuge qui permet de tromper sans mentir en ne dévoilant pas expressément sa pensée: (Mental reservation - In casuistry it is a trick allowing not to deceive, not by lying but by covering one's thoughts). Ensemble des facultés psychiques. (Totality of psychic abilities).

B. - Qui a rapport à l'esprit en ce qui concerne sa santé et éventuellement son aspect pathologique. Aliénation, arriération, confusion, cruauté, débilité, déchéance, désordre, hygiène, maladie, pathologie, trouble mental (e). (Pertaining to the mental activity that concerns health and possibly its pathological aspects. *Mental - deviation, lag, confusion, cruelty, debility, mental decline, disorder, hygiene, disease, pathology, disorder*) [<http://www.onlinededics.ru>].

Referring to the issue of relations between concepts "mentality" and "national character" the following should be said.

As noted by G.G. Stefanenko, the concept of "national character" was used in the literature of travel for the purpose of expressing people's lifestyle. The whole history of the study of national character indicates that the exclusive selection of specific cultural traits is not the best, because "unique are not the features and not their sum, but the structure of the mental world of representatives of a people in a complex way determined by the culture and the experience of their his-

torical development" [7; p. 136]. For this reason, replacing the notion of "national character" comes the concept of "mentality". A sufficiently clear definition of mentality was proposed by J. Duby: "a system of images, ideas that in different groups or strata, constituting a social formation, are combined in different ways, but it always underlies human conceptions of the world and their place in this world, and hence, defines the actions and behaviour of the people" [3; p. 35]. G.G. Stefanenko believes that for the study of social and cultural peculiarities of the peoples mentality rather than a national character is the most appropriate category.

I.A. Sternin considers, that the concept of "mentality" has now become commonplace, but it still can not be considered well-defined [6; p. 24-26]. The concept of "mentality" as used in the description of this sphere, is crossed and mixed primarily with concepts such as national psychology and national character. The scientist separates the concepts "mentality" and "national character".

According to I.A. Sternin and his school, mentality is a concept that characterizes not only the nation as a whole, but also different social groups of people. In connection with this, mentality is defined by them as "a particular way of perceiving and understanding the reality, defined by a set of cognitive stereotypes of consciousness characteristic of a particular group of people" [6; p. 24-26]. Group mentality is a particular perception of reality by certain social, age, professional, gender groups of people. Mentality is associated with installing individual mechanisms of apperception.

I.A. Sternin gives various examples of group mentality:

- losing team players tend to attribute the defeat to the influence of objective factors (poor field, biased refereeing, etc.);
- observers of the game tend to explain the defeat by subjective factors (the players did not show their will or did not try hard, did not have enough speed, etc.);
- winners` success is usually credited to one`s own efforts and defeat – to the influence of circumstances. "Victory has a lot of fathers, defeat is always an orphan";
- there is a children's, men's and women's "logic", etc.;
- there is a mentality of certain psychological types of people - for example , the mentality of optimists and pessimists: the first says "there is still half a bottle left," a pessimist says " there is no half a bottle already".

We can say that mentality is "automatic" in nature, it operates with little or no control of consciousness, and so in many cases is "biased". It is noted that if a person wants to be objective, s/he must consciously overcome the "guidance" of their mentality, their attitudes, their apperception.

There is a national mentality - the national way of perceiving and understanding reality defined by a set of cognitive stereotypes of a nation. For example, an American seeing a rich man thinks, "rich means smart," a Russian, in this case usually thinks "rich means a thief". The term "new" is perceived by an American as the "best ", a Russian considers "new" to be "unchecked".

Thus, a national mentality is a national way of perceiving and understanding reality based on those present in the national consciousness stereotypes, ready thoughts, schemes, explanations of phenomena and events, mechanisms of

causal attribution. These are stereotypes of *consciousness*. As I.A. Sternin understands it, a national character means psychological patterns of *behaviour* of the people. Social, physical and communicative behaviour are defined by the mentality and national character, but mentality undoubtedly plays a key role [Sternin 2003; 23-25].

Let us now try to identify whether there is any relationship between the concepts of "mentality" and "world view". As for the opinions of V.S. Jidkov and K.B. Sokolov, mentality is not philosophical, scientific and aesthetic systems, it is not the same as ideology, as mentality remains mostly rationally undetected. It is on that level of consciousness where thoughts are not separated from emotions, subconscious stereotypes and patterns. Mentality has such properties as greater stability and relative volatility. However, the mentality is changing very slowly, imperceptibly from its carriers. A.Y. Gurevich revealed, that historians understand mentality as "all that set of basic beliefs about the world, by means of which a human mind in any given era processes in an orderly "world picture" any chaotic and diverse flow of perceptions and experiences". Thus, A.Y. Gurevich identified the concepts "world view" and "mentality". Indeed, the attitude and perception of the world by the people of any society, their beliefs, thinking skills, social and ethical values, attitudes toward nature, the experience of time and space perception, the idea of death and the afterlife in every age are interconnected and form a kind of integrity.

The following conclusions can be drawn in the result of the conducted research.

1. In modern Russian concepts of "mentality" and "mentalitet" are interchangeable. "Mentality" means:

a) a thinking ability of a person or functionality inherent in a brain;

b) way of thinking, overall spiritual mood of a person, group;

c) attitude, mindset;

g) "mind " or socio-psychological attitudes, ways of perceiving, feeling and thinking style;

d) something in common, underlying conscious and unconscious, logical and emotional;

e) a specific way of perceiving and understanding reality, defined by a set of cognitive stereotypes of consciousness characteristic of a certain group of people.

It is noted that mentality is formed in the process of education and gaining life experience in a particular socio-cultural environment. It is not structured and is a kind of predisposition, the inner person's willingness to act in a certain way.

2. French "mentalité":

a) mental habits and attitudes, perception and emotional life skills, that are inherited from the past generations of people without their clear understanding;

b) a system of images, ideas that always underlie human conceptions of the world and their place in this world, and, hence, define the actions and behaviour of the people;

c) a historically folding structure, defining the thoughts, feelings and behaviour of people, their values and "gestures";

d) a set of the usual way of thinking, beliefs, and mental and moral propensities characteristic of a community and specific to each of its members;

e) a permanent state of mind inherent in an individual;

e) moral behaviour.

If we compare the value of concepts in Russian and French, we shall see that they are basically the same, except for the fact, that in the Russian language, in general, they talk about the mentality of a group of people or whole nations, whereas the French can talk about the mentality of one person, and, moreover, to mean by mentality a moral behaviour of an individual.

3. English "mentality" means:

a) special (specific) way of thinking;

b) a thinking ability of a person;

c) world view, perception;

d) (in a group), similar principles of thinking and management of their mental activity in accordance with the same rules;

e) specific way of thinking that is not approved;

f) degree of intelligence;

g) characteristics of the mind.

As you can see, the scope of "mentality" term in the Russian language and "mentality" in English differ. In English mentality, in contrast to the Russian term, can have a negative evaluation (e.g. *I can't understand the mentality of these people*). By mentality can be understood a degree of intelligence (low, medium, high) and characteristics of the mind (e.g., bourgeois mentality).

4. The concept "mental" in the Russian language has a general meaning of "belonging to the mind, to the mental activity" or "pertaining to the mind in its functional aspect (perception, imagination, memory, feeling, desire, etc.) or in its substantive aspects (sensory data, images and other content existing in the mind)".

In this sense the Russian "mental" is basically identical with the French «men-

tal» (belonging to the mental activity that uses intellectual ability). However, the French adjective has a different value than the Russian one, that is, "pertaining to mental activity in regard to the health and perhaps its pathological aspects.

In English, the concept of «mental» has a volume greater than in the two languages:

- a) existing in the mind;
- b) related to the mind;
- c) related to the mind, its activities, or product of the mind as an object of study (ideological);
- d) relating to the spirit or idea as opposed to matter;
- e) relating to the total emotional and intellectual response to the human world around us;
- f) referring to the intellectual rather than emotional activity;
- g) related to mental disorders;
- h) intended for the care or for the treatment of patients with mental disorders.

Thus, in English, the concept «mental» has the meanings e), f), g), h), which are absent in the corresponding Russian concept.

5. In modern humanities the concept "world view" gradually recedes into the background and is replaced by the term "mentality".

6. Regarding relations between the concepts "mentality" and "national character", the following has been revealed.

Ethnopsychologist G.G. Stefanenko believes that the study of social and cultural peculiarities of the peoples is the mentality rather than a national character and is most suitable category, as the structure of the mental world of representatives of a people in a complicated way determined by the culture and experience

of the historical development of this people is unique. Therefore, according to G.G. Stefanenko, whose opinion is based on a number of ethno-psychological researches, at this stage it is necessary to examine not a national character but a national mentality.

According to the opinion of I.A. Sternin and his school, the concepts of "national mentality" and "national character" are not identical. A national mentality is a national way of perceiving and understanding the reality on the basis of present national consciousness stereotypes, ready thoughts, schemes, explanations of phenomena and events, mechanisms of causal attribution. These are stereotypes of *consciousness (mind)*. In the understanding of I.A. Sternin, a national character means psychological patterns of *behaviour* of the people.

Thus, the volume of concepts "mentality" and "mental" considered in this article on the material of dictionary definitions and various Russian and foreign scientists' points of view, is different in Russian, English and French. However, in Russian and French linguistic consciousness mentality is understood almost in the same way more than in the English conceptosphere. In English, the concepts "mentality" and "mental" have a volume greater than in the other two languages. The data of our small study demonstrate the need for the further research of the concepts "mentality" and "mental" and their representation in the language in order to identify the features of national consciousness of different peoples.

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