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Linguistic Representation of the ‘British Identity’ Concept Dynamics in the Discourse of Political Journalism

¹ Olga D. Vishnyakova, ¹ Vladimir I. Suslov ,
² Elizaveta A. Vishnyakova, ³ Elana V. Margania

¹ Lomonosov Moscow State University,

1 Leninskie Gory, Moscow 119991, Russia;

² Tula State Lev Tolstoy Pedagogical University,

125 Lenin Av., Tula 300026, Russia;

³ Abkhaz State University,

1 Universitetskaya St, Sukhum 384904, Republic of Abkhazia

ol-vish@mail.ru, v.i.suslov@mail.ru, vishnyalis@yandex.ru, elana1410@mail.ru

Abstract. The goals of this research are mainly two-fold: first, to convey an executive summary regarding the theoretical foundations of linguo-conceptual and linguo-cultural studies; and secondly, to identify and explore the dynamics of the conceptual framework of the 'British identity' concept at the level of language and the way it is represented in British political discourse. That is, the manner in which it evolves to meet the expectations from British government officials to serve the purpose of achieving particular objectives, while taking into account the specific functioning of the pertinent linguistic entities in articles published in the most acknowledged British newspaper, 'The Guardian,' with an emphasis on the actualization of evaluative features at the linguistic level. The study methodology encompasses intra-linguistic, conceptual, comparative, and functional-stylistic analyses, which provide the most comprehensive picture of the behaviour of the linguistic-conceptual object under consideration. The research findings reveal that the subject-specificity of the concept of "British identity," which acts as both a political and cultural concept in some circumstances, leads to inconsistent inferences and judgements in various ideological contexts, particularly in political journalism. As a consequence, the author concludes that the subject is relevant at this time in the evolution of the British media and requires more investigation, particularly in terms of language and British national linguistic legacy in general.

Keywords: linguo-culturology, linguo-conceptology, concept, the English language, the British Identity, mass media

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Языковая репрезентация динамики концепта 'British Identity' в дискурсе политической журналистики

¹ Вишнякова О.Д., ¹ Суслов В.И., ² Вишнякова Е.А., ³ Маргания Э.В.

¹ Московский государственный университет им. М.В. Ломоносова,
Россия, 119991, г. Москва, Ленинские горы, д. 1;

² Тульский государственный педагогический университет им. Л.Н. Толстого,
Россия, 300026, г. Тула, Проспект Ленина, д. 125;

³ Абхазский государственный университет,
Республика Абхазия, 384904, г. Сухум, ул. Университетская д. 1

ol-vish@mail.ru, v.i.suslov@mail.ru, vishnyalis@yandex.ru, elana1410@mail.ru

Аннотация. Целью исследования является изучение процедуры вербального описания концепта «британская идентичность» в современной британской лингвокультуре с акцентом на реализацию оценочных характеристик, данных на уровне языка. Методология исследования включает в себя внутриязыковую, концептуальную, сопоставительную и функционально-стилистическую анализы, которые дают наиболее полное представление о поведении рассматриваемого лингвоконцептуального объекта. Результаты исследования показали, что субъектная специфика концепта «британская идентичность», выступающего в некоторых обстоятельствах как политический и культурный концепт, приводит к противоречивым умозаключениям и суждениям в различных идеологических контекстах, в частности в политической журналистике.

Ключевые слова: лингвокультурология, лингвоконцептология, концепт, английский язык, британская идентичность, массмедиа

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Introduction

Concepts serve as organisational and substantive parts of a person's conceptualisation framework, guaranteeing the breakdown of information that represents the individual's personal perceptions as defined by specific societal groups and classes. The two fundamental kinds of classification activity are conceptualisation and categorisation, with the former involving the identification of the smallest significant units that comprise experience and patterns of knowledge, and the latter including the grouping of specific phenomena onto larger clusters or categories based on comparable qualities. Cultural conceptions, referred to as communal meaningful entities of thoughts that contain semantic features of cultural implications frequently conveyed in language via description or naming, capture specific traits of a given culture [Chekulai, Prokhorova, 2021].

The necessity of studying the implementation procedure for semantic speech frameworks, embodying evaluative interpretations in the English-speaking culture on a scale of linguistic meanings in many different kinds of discourse, determines the topicality of this research issue. The proposed topical issue is how to tackle media discourse analysis in terms of conceptual structure representation at the textual level, that have illustrative specificity is heavily influenced by the ability to express evaluative properties according to the techniques and nature of the interpretation.

Therefore, the goal of this research is to investigate the procedure of verbal portrayal of the “British Identity” concept within contemporary British linguistic culture, with a focus on the realisation of the evaluative features given at the level of language.

Materials and methods

The practical, as well as the theoretical goal of the research, aims, and the particular attributes of the analysed material all influence analysis techniques and approaches. Complex methodology, which involves analyses such as:

1) *conceptual analysis* (assessing the typical qualities of the relevant language units, analysing and arranging the elements of semantic contents of the concepts for their reconstruction);

2) *intra-linguistic semantic analysis* (discovering shared and national-specific characteristics in linguistic unit semantics);

3) *contextual analysis* (investigating details of the context which determine the technique of semantic development of connotations, that indicate the meaning of linguistic units);

4) *comparative analysis* (investigating the functional elements of verbal representations of these concepts in their diverse linguo-cultural domains and in various interpretational aspects);

5) *functional and stylistic analysis* (development of methods for representing expressive-emotional and evaluative meanings of linguistic units in the media texts under examination to generate a unique stylistic effect).

The research material comprises a variety of examples from texts relevant to the sphere of mass media discourse, including articles written in the most well-known and respected newspaper 'The Guardian,' as well as widely circulated declarations by notable public figures. Online sources constitute a substantial portion of the content.

A short introduction to the development of the 'concept'

First glance

The primary efforts are going to be made in this article to study the conceptual structure of 'The British Identity' including its particulars of linguistic expression in modern English. Without a doubt, our research would not have been feasible without the participation of linguo-cultural studies, particularly linguo-culturology - a field of study that analyses manifestations of people's culture, primarily spiritual one, as represented and fixed in their language and speech. The linguo-cultural concept, that when taken in its most generic form boils down to a concept as an ensemble of key qualities of a subject "immersed" in culture and language, is the fundamental research unit in linguo-culturology [Dekhnich et al., 2016].

Given that our study focuses on the analysis of British media, it is appropriate to approach political discourse through the lens of conceptual structure representation at the scale of the written materials that formalise it. Their representational characteristics are mostly dictated by the possibilities for communicating evaluative properties based on the nature and modes of comprehending the readers in today's fast-changing world [Khramchenko, 2019, pp. 1287–1291].

The importance of this article is determined by consideration of its content allowing to expose diverse functional and semantic properties of the notion "The British Identity," which in the current the English-speaking reality constitutes one of (perhaps even one of) the most essential political and cultural concepts.

Furthermore, we are eager to investigate how modern media manipulation strategies influence the construction and modification of a thought (concept) in the brains of the populace.

Making the concept culturally relevant

Without a doubt, this subject falls under the purview of distinct cultural phenomena. Because, as previously said, the fundamental component of linguo-cultural studies is an idea, it is basically an articulated cultural meaning. It is a linguo-cultural idea (linguo-concept) by default - a semantic unit of culture's "language", the plan of its manifestation being the bilateral linguistic sign, the linear spectrum of which, in theory, cannot be restricted by anything [Teliya, 2002, p. 92].

The conceptualization of culture being a "symbolic universe" whose specific manifestations must be ethnospecific in a given "interval of detachment" (in relation to a foreign culture) is critical



for comprehending this linguistic concept [Kassirer, 2000, pp. 40–41]. As a result, the ethno-cultural nature of a linguistic idea is its primary distinguishing trait. At the same time, language is not simply a tool for studying culture in linguocultural studies, but it is an important aspect of it, "probably one of its fundamental parts" [Tolstoi, 1997].

Indeed, paying close attention to what is known as the linguistic, sign 'body' of a concept sets it apart from all other things: a linguistic concept can be found in the semantic system of a given natural language via its 'name,' which typically aligns with the prevalence of the equivalent synonymic series, and its position in the latter defines the shape of its 'meaningful component' [Vishnyakova, 2022, pp. 3–19]. A concept is a linguistic construct that is methodologically similar to representation (picture), concept, and meaning but combines them in a simplified form - a type of "hyperonym" of each of them [Kolesov, 2002, p. 122]. Linguistic identity and concept are the fundamental categories of linguoculturology, expressing the awareness and mind of the average natural language speaker.

As noted by Y.S. Stepanov, within the field of cultural studies, the concept serves as the fundamental unit of culture in a person's mental environment¹. The linguistic concept, as the 'rightful heir' of each of these semiotic types, is distinguished by the diversity and multitude of attributes; drawing from the concept the evocative portrayal of meaning, via its image of metaphorical origin along with emotive nature of such representation, as well as from its meaning that is part of its name in the lexical framework of language.

According to V.A. Maslova, every native speaker is also a bearer of culture, and so linguistic signs gain the power to operate as cultural signs, serving as a channel for the presentation of culture's essential attitudes [Maslova, 2001, pp. 63–72]. A. Wierzbicka also mentions national conditionality of language. At the same time, the scholar believes that cultural differences cannot be examined if all word meanings are culturally specific - exclusively established universals of language can serve as a solid foundation for assessing conceptual gaps secured in lexical systems of various languages [Vezhbitskaya, 1999, p. 291].

The relationship between culture and politics

We cannot discuss a "conceptual image of the world" without mentioning it in the bigger picture of our investigation into the conceptual framework behind 'The British Identity' concept within political discourse [Kharkovskaya et al., 2020]. Researchers define a conceptual representation of the world to be the 'grid of measurements' by means of which one experiences reality and organises its different incarnations in one's mind. It is the foundation of the perspective of an individual and "depends to a great extent on the premise of value perspective, that serves in the same way as the primary tenet of object hierarchization" [Гуревич, 1972; Дьяконов, 1977].

It is pertinent to keep in mind that emphasising the variety of national concepts which comprise the national ethnic world allows us to confidently distinguish "ours" compared to "alien," that can help prevent bias in social and political evaluations or oversights in our personal declarations and conduct, which undoubtedly comes to the fore when discussing the present condition of the mainstream media.

Understanding the concept of 'the british identity' in modern political journalism

Analysing material published in 'The Guardian'

Before proceeding with the material, it ought to be mentioned that the portrayal of such a complex topic as 'British identity' within media texts is influenced by a variety of linguistic and extra-linguistic variables. The latter encompass a wide range of elements and methods of describing incidents, especially the ones that do not always fully correspond with the authors' true

¹ Stepanov Yu.S. 2001. Konstanty: slovar' russkoi kul'tury [Constants: dictionary of Russian culture]. Moscow, Publ. Akademicheskii proekt. P. 43.

impressions (both collective and individual) [Vishnyakova, 2019, pp. 21–31]. Thus, what is meant by "the British Identity"?

In terms of political discourse, there is no simple and unambiguous response to this question. A sense of belonging to a society that may consider itself a nation gives rise to national identity. National identity additionally refers to a type of group identity in which people feel united despite their absence of physical touch because they are bound together by language and a variety of traditions [Prokhorova et. al., 2021] More than that, the recollection of past events should be emphasised right now, which is constantly felt in today's society (as pride in the nation's victories and achievements or, conversely, remorse for defeats and failings). This should not come as unsurprising that one should be honoured to be a citizen of a great country. In today's environment, however, this premise is gradually losing its categorical nature. In our situation, the issues around national identity (in the United Kingdom) are only growing.

We believe that Britain appears to be a lot more open-minded multicultural community than most other ones, and it is far more comfortable with itself than nearly every other European countries country. It is an honour to be a British citizen. Many individuals are delighted to be British, but our point was that there are many other individuals who do not consider themselves 'British' in a proper sense of the word. The first article to be analysed was written by Tom Bentley (Deputy Chief of Staff and senior policy adviser to Julia Gillard from 2007 to 2013); namely '*Building a new Briton*' written in 2004, which is nothing more than a prediction from 2004 to 2020, by which time, the author believes, the very notion of British national identity will have been redefined and the concept of Britishness will have taken on a completely different meaning.

The author points out from the very beginning, that some symbols of identity can be easily defined as a certain 'cultural points' in a changing landscape of progressive expansion of multiculturalism, which was only emerging at those times. That is, cultural identity can easily change imperceptibly. The author argues that in the past, the concept of 'Britishness' rested on such images as '**expansionalism**' and '**ingenuity**', which can hardly be questioned at all. However, historical events which swept through the UK '**slightly altered** the whole image of national identity' (*the abdication crisis of 1936; the blitz; Suez; the intervention of the International Monetary Fund in 1976; the 1984 miners' strike*, etc.). What is more, political processes speed up this process even more, for example, '**Thatcherism**' and the 'poll tax' that followed¹.

What we find extremely interesting in this article is that Tom Bentley gave the potential reader a list of '*shared national and cultural characteristics*' of British identity, which are as follows:

1. Psychological dependence on a successful past (Once again ideas of colonialism and 'glorious days' are meant here, from which Britain is still suffering to this very day);
2. Confidence in one's tolerance and sense of fair play (this may appear too *naive* and obvious, (maybe even ironic), if we look at the way modern politicians in the UK, are performing their duties. Evidently, political competition and jockeying for power are not areas where we are likely to find fair play and tolerance);
3. The maintenance of a particular family and religious tradition;
4. A belief in one's own formative beliefs and values (which sounds rather radical even for the author of the article).

However, the author warns us that 'all these types of self-image will be tested by the way our society changes over the next generation. The question is whether we can respond in ways which **strengthen** or **diminish** them'. More than that, Tom Bentley also points out a crucial fact: the second half of the 20th century, beginning with 1950 (till nowadays probably), can be described

¹ The Community Charge, generally known as the poll tax, was a scheme of taxation implemented by Margaret Thatcher's government to replace domestic rates in Scotland from 1989, before being introduced in England and Wales from 1990. It was a single, flat-rate per capita tax levied on every adult at a rate set by the local authority. It was superseded by the Council Tax in 1993, two years after it was announced that it would be abolished.



using two words - these are 'decay' and 'decline'. So, how can this happen, if the wealth is rising, social freedoms are expanding, and various political projects dedicated to national renewal are emerging? The answer is quite simple: church, trade unions and even monarchy are 'in retreat'. The author uses a very clever phrase to show his direct attitude to this process - **Healthy majority** creates **creaking minority**.

The only reasonable conclusion which can be deduced from this thesis is that such 'erosion' of traditional social organisations is naturally happening step-by-step, which can be considered as a starting point of the emergence of individualism ('either by choice or fate', the author adds), That is the main power source which will shape British society. As a result, discussions about '**human nature**' and '**identity**' will only become more and more popular in the future (from the point of view of 2004). That is what can we see nowadays - the prediction was correct, because these days people are striving for self-expression and self-perception, both in politics and everyday life.

Another peculiar idea concerning the state of national identity in the UK which was shown by Tom Bentley is that the collapse of traditional institutions will not necessarily destroy British national identity, simply because of crucial characteristic of Britons - namely '*not the way they cling to past verities but the way we change with the cultural tides*'. What is implied here is that various 'hybrid cultures' might appear in the nearest future. As culture develops new crossbreeds, so will the political arena. Politicians are increasingly preoccupied these days with trying to manage the conflicts created by cultural clashes. Undoubtedly, race is not supposed to be the defining issue of national political debate, but it will continue to be, as it is now, a catalyst for broader arguments about a shared culture.

The author believes that new, more adaptable governance frameworks will serve as a foundation for '**hybrid identities**'. It is not a coincidence that this is happening at the sub-national level. The governing systems in Northern Ireland, for example, are essentially intended for enabling two rival nationalist cultures to coexist. Naturally, the consequences of London being a city centre and its proclivity to absorb skills and riches from surrounding areas obscures the resurgence of city-regions in England. However, the cultural character and impact of Britain's largest cities are shifting, in part due to the economic reasons.

To put in a nutshell, Britain has a fantastic opportunity to navigate this new multicultural reality. Instead of frustration at the collapse of their power or the abuses of past British control, UK's **colonial legacy** can encourage collaboration and connection among various cultures and nations. The 2004 prediction that by 2020, the people of Britain would have re-engaged with their former empire as 'partners' rather than 'conquerors' and used their past to our advantage, hasn't come to pass. However, to do so, Britons must overcome their equally strong drive towards **insularity**, engage with greater confidence with the **unfamiliar**, and better understand **cultural difference**. Too frequently, the British (and especially the English) approach to the world has been built on the assertive assertion of '*common sense*' - a method that Britons of all kinds continue to employ up until now.

Let us consider an article published in The Guardian in 2014, which reads as follows "*I'm Indian, English and live in Scotland. Will my son's identity be as borderless after the referendum?*", which, as the title suggests, deals with concerns at the time about Scotland's impending referendum on leaving the UK. Straight from the beginning, a very peculiar dilemma arises: in the week before the independence referendum, the author of the Chitra Ramaswamy, who is of Indian descent, finds herself in the unusual position of having resided exactly half her life in Britain and half in Scotland. To make a long story short, she is being torn apart by several identities and cultures, so to speak: "*my life is conveniently splitting down the middle - a personal border **between my childhood down south and my adulthood up north***".

The contradiction of belonging (national identity) is that you must **leave** a country in order to truly belong to it. Scotland altered the author's sense of belonging the moment she arrived at Central Station and, perhaps for the first time in her life, she "*became English*". Does this mean to say, that one could switch his/her identity simply by crossing the countries' borders? That would

be very questionable. Chitra Ramaswamy used to consider herself British, including countless “*second-generation immigrants born in England in the 1970s and 1980s*”.

Her parents emigrated to the United Kingdom from Canada: “*“British Asian” was the box she checked on paper and mentally*”. She had been the Britisher who could not even pronounce her own name when she visited her family in India. But what if we talk about the English language? “*Never, particularly not among English people*”. It was Scotland that made her feel English, rather “*odd and unexpected sense*”, according to the author.

Finally, the main reason why Chitra Ramaswamy is so concerned about the upcoming Scottish referendum is her child. According to her, raising a child in an “*adopted nation*” has reconnected Chitra with Scotland. To put it in the nutshell, her kid is Scottish, English, Indian, and British - “*a rich and sometimes overwhelming brew of an identity which no box has been able to contain so far*”. This child will continue to be an ambassador of all of these characteristics in a ‘**post-indyref**’¹ world, but the author of the article has no idea in what sequence or to what extent it will occur. All that we could deduce from her words is that whatever happens in Scotland, Chitra Ramaswamy, her child, and all our other concepts of self-identity will continue to evolve because that's what national identities do when they are at their most - magnificent, mysterious, and borderless.

However, we would make the world worse for both the powerful and the disadvantaged if we stress identification *above* universalism. It is as obvious as day that we must speak about “identity synthesis” in this context. We imply the “role that identity classifications like ethnicity, sexual orientation, and gender play in the world” by this idea. It is a phrase rendered necessary by the reality that currently, anyone who discusses identity politics or portrays an activist as woke risks being mistaken for an elderly guy wailing at the clouds. To be more precise, the rejection of solid identification categories (or identities) such as for example ‘Briton’ or ‘proletarian’ as the rot setting in, while in fact it is a vital waypoint in the awareness that neither all Englishmen nor the working class think the same way.

According to Yascha Mounk’s book “The Identity Trap”, academics' popularisation of race-critical and the post-colonial discourses appears to have occurred in the shape of a ‘*bell-jar, with rising race-based inequality being secondary*’. He mentions free speech as an essential liberal value that we've mysteriously lost sight of; it is as if Elon Musk, Twitter, Donald Trump, and the Capitol insurgency didn't exist; as if Peter Thiel along with Andrew Tate were not around; as if no one had ever wondered about the delicate balance between safeguarding free speech and putting an end to incitement to violence.

Therefore, numerous members of British ethnic minority, namely those of a different race than the majority, are not considered important members of British society while we should all work to change this, which we should. Everyone should be willing to accept, value, and respect their diverse cultural and religious practices, as long as they are consistent with the regulations of the land and our own deeply held notions of morality and compassion. The ‘British identity’ crisis, so to speak, has nothing to do with immigrants and little to do with the nation's name, but it has everything to do with the breakdown of ancient common values amongst the white majority. If the immigrant community can assist repair and maintain these, they will have rendered an invaluable service to Britain.

Let us now pass on to another article, namely “*It was never about Europe. Brexit is Britain’s reckoning with itself*”, published in 2019, where Fintan O’Toole's claims that Brexit had never been about Europe. Fintan O’Toole's excellent piece (“*It was never about Europe. Brexit is a uniquely British neurosis*”, 18 January) wonderfully describes the national state of affairs with the words “**the meaning is in the leaving, not what is left or how**”. Colin Montgomery concurs with Fintan O’Toole's assessment that **Britain** and **British democracy** are no longer *fit for purpose*.

¹ Second referendum.



As a consequence, it is normal for Fintan O'Toole's argument to appear completely incorrect to some of his audience. In a 2018 survey, voters were asked about the primary reasons behind their decision. Control over immigration, control over laws, an urge to send less money to the EU, and "to teach British politicians a lesson" were the top four reasons given by Leave voters. Surprisingly, 88% of those who voted to leave ranked the fourth choice as the least significant. Mr. O'Toole, however, ignored the data and built a straw man. By framing Brexit as a product of domestic issues, he absolves the EU of blame. This may be considered as a most hazardous form of denial. Only by admitting that the EU has fundamental and enduring difficulties at its foundation will the European project be able to begin a productive discourse about how it can advance forward successfully. Mr. O'Toole seems like he does not want to participate in that discussion.

We are optimistic that his perspective on *Britishness*, along with his concept of Britain being a cohesive nation, is feasible. On the contrary, we believe that British political parties' priority should do everything possible to strengthen their cohesiveness, which is struggling to survive both decentralisation in Scotland and Wales and a widespread denial of the country's past and heritage throughout the British Isles.

Conclusion

In a nutshell, it should be noted that the topical sensitivity for the idea of 'The British Identity' alone is susceptible to a variety of modifications and permutations attributed primarily to the influence of multiple cultural and social and extra-linguistic elements, which is undoubtedly conveyed during the execution of its corresponding units of language in the works of the British media, which is attempting to please two parties.

Furthermore, at the verbal level, the conceptualised area "British identity" has is highly represented in spoken language of evaluative nature, so it corresponds with the specificity of the concept content, acting in certain circumstances as a cultural and political concept, encouraging mixed deductions and judgements in different ideological contexts. This feature is most strongly revealed in articles of the mainstream media, which reflect both modern tendencies in the growth of British society and broad polemics on issues of multiculturalism.

Thus, concepts represent the substance of civilization, including its major meanings and values. It is because of these that the phenomenon of cultural identity exists. Furthermore, understanding of all of the abovementioned leads to an intercultural conversation, which we believe can only be beneficial. As a result, we believe that further research in this area holds a considerable promise for exploring the 'development' and 'adaptation' of conceptual domains (not just those of 'British identity') within contemporary, shifting society.

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ИНФОРМАЦИЯ ОБ АВТОРАХ

INFORMATION ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Вишнякова Ольга Дмитриевна, доктор филологических наук, профессор, профессор кафедры английского языкознания филологического факультета, Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова, г. Москва, Россия.

Olga D. Vishnyakova, Doctor of Philological Sciences, Professor, Professor of the Department of English Linguistics, Philological Faculty, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.

Суслов Владимир Игоревич, аспирант, преподаватель английского языка кафедры иностранных языков экономического факультета, Московский государственный университет имени М.В. Ломоносова, г. Москва, Россия.

Vladimir I. Suslov, postgraduate student, teacher of English at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Economics, Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow, Russia.

Вишнякова Елизавета Александровна, кандидат филологических наук, доцент, заведующая кафедрой английского языка, Тульский государственный педагогический университет им. Л.Н. Толстого, г. Тула, Россия.

Elizaveta A. Vishnyakova, Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Head of the English Language Department, Tolstoy Tula State Pedagogical University, Tula, Russia.

Маргания Элана Владимировна, кандидат филологических наук, доцент, доцент кафедры истории и теории международных отношений, Абхазский государственный университет, г. Сухум, Республика Абхазия.

Elana V. Margania, Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor, Associate Professor of the Department of History and Theory of International Relations, Abkhaz State University, Sukhum, Republic of Abkhazia.