

Bad or good and why?

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The data obtained in 2 sets of perceptual experiments conducted with the use of the semantic differential methodology point to both universal and language specific factors governing emotive interpretation of foreign words. The subjects were exposed to the audio form of a foreign slang word and asked to evaluate its meaning on the scale *pejorative* - *meliorative*. In the experimental series with the English material the subjects are speakers of Finnish, German, Russian and French. In that with the Russian material the subjects are speakers of English and Swedish. The analysis of the data shows that perception of a foreign lexical unit as a pejorative is universally aligned with the presence in its sound form of peripheral consonants and back rounded vowels, while recognition of a foreign word as a meliorative is usually triggered by its high sonority, as well as the presence of fore-lingual consonants and front vowels. An important contributing factor is the length of the word. The findings are evidence of direct iconic correspondence between the form of an emotive language sign and its meaning. In most cases the respondents were able to guess the emotional connotation of the foreign slang words correctly. This is not surprising as, cognitively speaking, the process of cognition of a phenomenon involves ascribing it a name which may reflect at least some of its content aspects. This leads to an iconic sign of a specific natural language being able to imply by its sound form some features of the signified. Linguistic sound symbolism may be argued to have to be (at least partly) universal because of the neurophysiological basis of speech common for all humans, as well as their common cognitive structures. The data also demonstrate language specific strategies speakers of different languages use in evaluating the emotive meaning of foreign lexis. These mostly refer to the sound form of foreign words assumed to be pejoratives, rather than melioratives, and include the occurrence of fricatives in it, individual choice of phonemes within the sound classes regularly associated with the pejorative semantics and their distribution in the word. It has to be emphasized, though, that the preferences speakers of different languages have for certain sounds to occur in certain types of words still fall within the universal phonosemantic theory, while specific features in the sound organization of a word (including an iconic one) are only to be expected, as any natural language enjoys its own phonological system, phonotactics, forms of suprasegmental events, etc. and these find their reflection in perception, too.