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Agatha Christie's Poirot: Linguocultural Image of a Foreigner in British Literature

Nowadays, the study of linguocultural images or archetypes is a relevant research issue for linguists and culturologists.

The theory prevails that the detective character, appeared in the English linguoculture, reflects both the universal features of professional occupation and the specificity of the national character.

The functioning of the linguocultural detective character includes a description of the physical characteristics, professional activity, personality traits and marital status.

The character of Hercule Poirot, created by the British writer Agatha Christie in 1920 and portrayed on television by various actors, is undoubtedly one of the most recognizable detectives throughout the entire world.

Being a Belgian, partially assimilated into British reality, Poirot, on the one hand, objectifies the stereotypical beliefs about the detective with all the set of characteristics proper to the English national character; on the other hand, he holds "alien" views generalizing hetero-stereotyped ideas about the English linguoculture like prejudiced attitude of the British towards foreigners, restraint and conformism.

Most protagonists of detective fiction possess unique and recognizable individual physical characteristics. The appearance of Poirot is also quite eccentric, but very "unbritish": «He was hardly more than five feet four inches but carried himself with great dignity. His head was exactly the shape of an egg, and he always perched it a little on one side» [1] His mustache as the main feature of his appearance is mentioned in all novels. The elegance of the detective is his sartorial statement, he embodies luxury and incomparable sense of style. The general description of the appearance can be characterized by epithets: well dressed, very neat, very spotless, spruce, dandified, etc.

Analyzing the novels of A. Christie, it is possible to detect a considerable number of lexical items related to the detective lexical field: mind, police, investigate, deduction, routine work, probabilities, false, passport, suspicion [2]. It means that inductive reasoning is the leading method of investigation. Intuitive reasoning and probability are contrary to Hercule's main postulate: "It is the brain, the little gray cells on which one must rely" [3]. The value characteristics of linguocultural image don't provide exceptions ("I never make exceptions") and do not allow personal qualities to influence the conclusion of the investigation.

Another significant characteristic of the detective's character is the marital status. Hercule Poirot is a bachelor sneering at lovebirds who come undone. Poirot does not trust women's beauty. He believes that innocence can be proved by brutal facts. The appearance of a woman, according to Poirot, is deceptive, since pathological propensities can easily be combined with the face of a Madonna: «A malformation of the grey cells may coincide quite easily with the face of a Madonna» [4]

There are undoubtedly "natural" barriers, such as language and national peculiarities, which cannot be easily overcome. Even though the Belgian detective carries the very same British mentality, his persona is perceived as "not one of us", in some degree, because of his French accent: «- You foul French upstart! - Madame, I am not a French upstart, I am a Belgian upstart» [5]

British mentality is characterized by two concepts: the capability to keep feelings under control and the capability to respond to circumstances properly. These features are very typical of English detectives and comply with the "principles of gentlemanly behavior". Hercule Poirot passes such behavior pattern through the prism of his own (Belgian) worldview, being an observer and an experimenter in some ways. He takes the liberty to judge the reality judge with a critical mind, subconsciously comparing and mixing two different cultures.

To sum up, it may be said, Agatha Christie managed to create a remarkably unique linguocultural image of the detective, combining both the aspects of the British cultural code, and the mentality of an immigrant existing within frameworks of different environment.

Литература

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4. Agatha Christie «The Murder on the Links», 1922.
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