

## Linguistic Country Studies Dictionary as a Basis for International Communication

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### ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, the concept and understanding of a Linguistic country studies dictionary, which should serve as a country's cultural passport, varies across the world. However, the core idea behind such works remains consistent: if this idea were unified, theoretically systematized, and a linguistic country studies dictionary structure were developed in a way understandable to all peoples — and if all countries adhered to that model — it would greatly assist anyone in understanding the culture and general framework of a country they are interested in. This article briefly examines how the term linguistic country studies is interpreted globally, how linguistic country studies dictionaries have been created, and what characteristics such a dictionary should ideally possess. The research employs methods of material analysis, observation, comparison, and description. The article explores the origin and development of the term linguistic country studies, presents the opinions of international scholars on the subject, and identifies the lexical components, vocabulary, structure, and practical role of a linguistic country studies dictionary. If the structure of linguistic country studies dictionaries were standardized globally, scientifically grounded, and officially adopted — and if every country developed their dictionary based on this model — it would mark a significant achievement in intercultural and ethnocultural communication in human history.

**Keywords:** Linguistic Country Studies, Linguoculturology, Globalization, Language, Dictionary

### INTRODUCTION

Linguistic country studies is one of the important aspects of learning a foreign language, as it teaches language learners not only the language itself but also the culture, national structure, and overall identity of the target country. As a field of study, it began to be considered in the 1970s. Initially, it was viewed as a branch of linguodidactics within the process of foreign language teaching.

The term linguistic country studies was first introduced in scholarly literature by Russian scholars E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov [1]. They regarded linguistic country studies as a methodical and linguodidactic equivalent within the broader context of sociolinguistics [2, p.17].

L. G. Vedenina noted that linguistic country studies emerged as a science within the “language–person–society” triad. It synthesizes elements of geography, sociology, psychology, cultural studies, and linguistics, with the aim of helping learners understand national-cultural features in a foreign language [3, p.13].

Since the term linguistic country studies appeared, it has primarily been considered in the context of language teaching. Very few researchers have studied linguistic country studies from a lexicographic perspective, and in the context of Kazakh and Kyrgyz, there has been virtually no work in this area. In the current era of globalization, it is vital for every nation to introduce its language—and through that, its cultural identity and ethnographic values—to the world. Therefore, the relevance of linguistic country studies dictionaries becomes clear. This raises important questions about the structure of such dictionaries, how to group words semantically, and what types of linguistic country studies materials should be included.

According to Wilhelm von Humboldt, each nation has its own unique, inner spirit that develops from within, and the primary means of preserving and transmitting this spirit from generation to generation is language. This idea is the foundation of Humboldt’s philosophical-linguistic program. His linguistic philosophy closely ties language to human thought, consciousness, culture, and spiritual life. In his theories, he draws heavily on the ideas of J. G. Herder, particularly regarding the nature of language, its origin, and the connection between language and the “spirit of the people”. As Humboldt wrote: “*Man does not entirely fit within the boundaries of his language—he is more than what can be expressed in words. Yet he must enclose his inexpressible spirit within language to stabilize it and use words as a support to reach what lies beyond them*”. [4, p.349]

In Russian linguistics, the concept of linguistic country studies was later connected to the American methodology of “cultural literacy” or “world knowledge”, which greatly influenced the teaching of foreign languages by deepening awareness of universal human traditions and cultural-spiritual concepts. This methodological approach was developed by Professor E. D. Hirsch of the University of Virginia, who wrote: “*General knowledge is the oxygen of social communication, and its necessity became obvious when we began to suffocate from cultural illiteracy*”. [5, p.10] In his monograph, Hirsch emphasizes the vast role that background knowledge and cultural context play in language communication. He supports the idea that understanding cultural references and national concepts is essential for full comprehension. According to Hirsch, cultural literacy is: “*not just the ability to read, but the possession of shared knowledge—concepts from the national culture, traditional-national facts and evaluations, which serve as symbols known to all educated Americans*”. Based on this principle, he compiled his own dictionary. In 2002, the ‘New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy’ was re-published, co-authored by E. D. Hirsch, Joseph F. Kett, and James Trefil. It contains over 6,000 entries representing the cultural framework of the United States [6].

As mentioned earlier, Soviet-era linguistic country studies began in the 1970s, pioneered by E. M. Vereshchagin and V. G. Kostomarov. According to R. K. Minyar-Beloruhev and O. G. Oberemko, the French term “*langue et civilisation*” (*language and civilization*) was translated into Russian as “*linguoculture*”. Since their early works, the term linguistic country studies began to be used widely. It is important to note that the term may differ across countries. While the relationship between language and culture is studied worldwide, the terminology and focus may vary, highlighting the depth of national distinctions in language. In Germany, the field is commonly referred to as *Kulturkunde* (*Cultural Studies*); in the United States, it is known as *Language and Area Studies*; in the United Kingdom, the term *Linguocultural Studies* is typically used. In other countries, the discipline may appear under different terminological variations, reflecting local academic traditions and priorities.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

Linguistic country studies dictionaries published in various regions were used as the primary research material. The methods employed in the study include content analysis, observation, comparison, and descriptive analysis.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

*Linguistic country studies lexicography.* The role of language as a tool of communication is closely tied to a nation’s norms and traditions. Since international communication is fundamentally conducted through language, its significance has greatly increased in our era. Several factors contribute to this relevance: the expansion of intercultural communication has created numerous situations that require mutual understanding; anthropocentric linguistics is developing rapidly; contrastive, comparative, and cross-cultural studies are on the rise. Increasing attention is being given to the national lifestyles of various ethnic groups, intercultural interaction, and the understanding of cultural diversity. Along with this, misunderstandings between ethnic groups have also grown, highlighting the urgency of exploring intercultural communication. Psycholinguistics, for its part, now offers new experimental methods based on communicative behavior. All of this underscores the need to approach communication with an awareness of national characteristics. A wide range of materials reflect national features:

from tourist media, articles on national identity, and academic publications that set new requirements in research, to dictionaries, encyclopedias, and religious guides that present national or cultural specificity. However, comprehensive and systematized resources that consolidate all of this information in one place remain rare. In our view, this gap can and should be filled by the linguistic country studies dictionary.

Currently, a complete and unified linguistic country studies dictionary does not yet exist. Many people confuse it with linguoculturological dictionaries or ethnolinguistic dictionaries. After analyzing several existing dictionaries produced under the banner of linguistic country studies [7-14], we examined their structures. In our view, the main goal of a linguistic country studies dictionary is not only to describe the ethnolinguistic and cultural aspects of a given people, but also to include socio-political and institutional information about the nation-state in which they live. Example from education: While school education in Central Asian countries covers 11 years, many European countries follow a 12-year model. Such structural cultural distinctions must be considered in a linguistic country studies dictionary.

In language learning, both technical and non-technical learning tools are essential. In Kazakh, such tools are grouped under the term “оқы құралдары” (*educational tools*) and are categorized into technical teaching aids and non-technical tools. If we include tools such as projectors, language laboratories, and other similar technologies, dictionaries may also be regarded as essential resources in language learning—both as technical aids (when presented in electronic form with visual or illustrative content) and as non-technical aids (when produced in traditional print format).

Regardless of form, dictionaries play a vital role for the language learner. They assist in the comprehension of unfamiliar words, phrases, sentences, and texts, which is crucial for acquiring a foreign language (Boulton & De Cock, 2017 ; Margalitadze & Meladze, 2023; Nied Curcio, 2022). Understanding words, collocations, and structures is foundational to language acquisition, and also facilitates passive learning of the target language. Moreover, bilingual dictionaries are not only used for comprehension but are also widely used for translation into the target language (Fuertes-Olivera, 2013; P. Márkus, 2023), thereby fostering active language use.

By using dictionaries correctly, language learners can significantly expand their vocabulary, internalize linguistic information, gain confidence, and ultimately engage in communication in a second language (Carduner, 2003; Gavriilidou, 2013; Kosem, Lew, Müller-Spitzer, Ribeiro Silveira, & Wolfer, 2019). Thus, a dictionary is not merely a bilingual list of words and phrases, but rather a purposeful, self-directed learning tool that supports second language acquisition (Leaney, 2007; P. Márkus, 2023).

In the age of globalization, there are countless instances in daily life when dictionaries become essential—whether at work, while traveling, or during interactions with people from different cultures. Dictionaries help users understand foreign languages and facilitate intercultural communication, thereby enriching their vocabulary. For example, when traveling abroad, individuals often rely on dictionaries to communicate with locals, using them to negotiate meaning and build mutual understanding. (cf. Todorova & Todorova, 2018). Moreover, with the continuous development of science and education, our everyday vocabulary is increasingly enriched with foreign terms and concepts. Upon arriving at work, many people begin their day by exploring international news and global developments—often with the help of dictionaries. When used effectively, dictionaries become invaluable tools for lifelong learning, self-development, and vocabulary expansion. (Linney, 2007; Lew, 2016). This reinforces the necessity for a new type of dictionary—namely, the linguistic country studies dictionary, which plays a crucial role in the modern world.

However, linguistic country studies lexicography remains an underdeveloped field, particularly in the countries of the former Soviet Union. Here, we focus on the cases of Kazakh and Kyrgyz philology, where no substantial work on linguistic country studies lexicography has yet been conducted. Some elements of this type of lexicography can be traced in the works of Russian scholars during the colonial era, but systematic, dedicated research in this area is still lacking. Even today, only a few small-scale, pedagogically oriented dictionaries can be found, and comprehensive resources in this domain remain rare. Such dictionaries are scarce not only in Turkic studies but also in global lexicography.

The topic remains underexplored in both Kazakh and Kyrgyz lexicography. The term linguistic country studies was first introduced in the philological tradition of Russian linguistics within the former Soviet Union. One of the earliest educational dictionaries related to the Kazakh language is the 1778 handwritten Russian-Kazakh dictionary, often referred to as the “*Skalon’s Dictionary*” [28, p. 6-7]. As stated in the preface and evident from the structure of the work, this dictionary was intended both for Russians in need of Kazakh and for Kazakh speakers learning to communicate in Russian. It can be considered the starting point of linguistic country studies dictionary tradition on the Kazakh steppe.

As noted earlier, the term linguistic country studies is used differently across the world, which has also led to the publication of linguistic country studies dictionaries under various names. However, despite the terminological variety, the underlying purpose of such dictionaries remains consistent. This raises a pressing question for us: What structure and what kind of lexical content should a linguistic country studies dictionary produced in our countries

contain? To date, there is no unified standard observed in the linguistic country studies dictionaries that have been published. These dictionaries vary significantly in size (ranging from 1,500 to 20,000 lexical units), in structure (macrostructure, microstructure, mediostructure), in target audience, and organization of dictionary entries. In lexicographic practice, it is generally accepted that large dictionaries contain up to 100,000 lexical items; medium-sized dictionaries include over 40,000 entries, and small dictionaries feature over 10,000 units [29, p. 49].

In countries where such dictionaries have not yet been published, we believe it is essential to define the core lexicon and structure appropriate to a linguistic country studies dictionary. In Western academic circles, the term linguistic country studies is often used interchangeably with *linguoculturology*. However, in our context, the two terms are understood as distinct concepts. For this reason, it is important to clarify the differences between linguistic country studies dictionaries and linguoculturological dictionaries, including distinctions in the types of entries they include.

To understand a nation's cultural identity through language, it is crucial to have insight into its cultural worldview and traditions. However, linguistic country studies extends beyond that: it encompasses a nation's political and economic systems, state structure, political outlook, modern realities, governmental institutions, international relations, and even scientific and academic practices. This broader scope, in our view, distinguishes linguistic country studies from linguoculturology, giving the former a more comprehensive and multifaceted character.

Linguistic country studies dictionaries should include several types of culturally significant lexical items: non-equivalent words (terms that do not exist in other cultures or languages), background knowledge vocabulary (words that exist in multiple cultures but have unique cultural connotations or usages), connotative vocabulary (words that may share a basic meaning across languages but differ in historical or cultural associations). In addition, such dictionaries may also include non-verbal and gestural communication systems. While some scholars do not consider these forms of expression as "language" due to their lack of cumulative function, an increasing number of researchers now recognize them as a part of language. We support this perspective and believe that non-verbal communication should be treated as a legitimate component of linguistic country studies dictionaries. Non-verbal cues often reflect deep cultural differences. For instance: in Kazakh culture, nodding one's head downward signals agreement, while in Indian culture, agreement may be expressed by tilting the head from shoulder to shoulder. Greetings vary widely: handshakes, back-patting, smiling, and placing a hand over the chest are all examples of culturally embedded gestures. A Kazakh individual might unknowingly bring white chrysanthemums to a friend's wedding in France, unaware that in French culture, such flowers are traditionally associated with funerals. Therefore, we argue that non-verbal communication and gesture systems should also be considered valid entries in linguistic country studies dictionaries.

Consider the word *botqa* (Kazakh) and *kasha* (Russian), both typically translated as "porridge". According to a Russian explanatory dictionary, "kasha" is defined as "a dish made from cooked grains" [30, p. 233]. In the Kazakh explanatory dictionary, "botqa" is described as "a thick dish prepared by boiling rice, millet, or other grains" [31, p. 388].

In Russian culture, there are many types of kasha: rice, oats, wheat, barley, buckwheat, etc. Sweet kasha cooked with milk is a common breakfast dish to which butter and sugar are often added. Savory kasha made with water is typically served as a side dish with meat. Kasha holds a special status in Russian cuisine – it is a beloved and respected dish. In contrast, Kazakh culture views *botqa* differently. It is usually associated with: the elderly (who have no teeth), infants (who have not yet developed teeth), the sick (who require soft food). Regular consumption of *botqa* may be interpreted as a sign of poverty or hardship. This is reflected in proverbs and literary examples: "A spoonful of millet won't make a botqa, and even if it does, people won't like it." (proverb) "Was I meant to live to eighty, just to eat bylamyq?" (proverb) "It stuck in his mind like hot botqa – he couldn't let it go." (I. Älimqulov) "In our village, they cooked rice as botqa." (S. Mukanov) Also worth noting is that *botqa* and *bylamyq* are closely related concepts in Kazakh. While *bylamyq* tends to be more liquid in consistency, their preparation methods are similar. These examples indicate that *botqa* is not highly regarded in Kazakh cuisine and is not considered a delicacy. Meanwhile, for the Russian people, the saying "*Shchi and kasha* – are our food reflects its central role in traditional meals, commonly eaten for breakfast or dinner. In fact, it is customary to serve kasha to newlyweds the day after their wedding, rooted in the belief: "You can't feed a Russian man without kasha." In Russian culture, bread symbolizes abundance and hospitality. This idea is captured by Russian painter V. F. Stozharov, who titled his still-life "*Bread, Salt, and Bratina*" (a traditional cup), aiming to express the wealth and pride of Russian cultural traditions. V. G. Kostomarov refers to such understanding and sensitivity as intercultural competence. According to him: "Intercultural competence implies the ability to perceive foreign cultural facts with tolerance and with the desire to understand another culture – to see the behavior of its speakers through their own eyes. It is through this path that global culture is comprehended, built from national identities. This process also significantly enriches one's own culture – and, likely, one's native language." [32]

Words with specific national and cultural connotations in a language are often proper names. The meaning and cultural weight of a proper name are frequently shaped by the identity and reputation of the person who bears

it. In the Kazakh language, as in many others, personal names can go beyond simply referring to an individual – they may also embody values or symbolic meaning associated with the name’s bearer. For example, the names Abai and Abylai carry such significance in Kazakh. The name Abylai is now widely known not only in Kazakhstan but also in many other countries, as it belonged to the great khan who united the Kazakh people. However, if one were to mention his original name, Abilmansur, few would recognize it (just as Ibrahim is not immediately associated with the renowned poet and thinker Abai). Thus, the name Abylai evokes cultural reverence only for those familiar with Kazakh history and culture. To those without such background, it may simply appear as an ordinary given name. This cultural layering is also evident in Kazakh proverbs and sayings, where many expressions are rooted in historical and cultural contexts that trace the journey of the people who speak the language. These linguistic “traces” serve as a map of the nation’s past.

Similarly, in American culture, figures such as Paul Bunyan and his trusty companion Blue Ox, or legendary lawmen like Bat Masterson, or historical signatories like John Hancock (famous for signing the Declaration of Independence), carry significant cultural meaning. However, outside the United States, these names do not evoke the same depth of national association or historical resonance.

## CONCLUSIONS

In the modern era, the same concept may be conveyed through diverse terminologies and frameworks, which can complicate the task of learners, researchers, and readers. A person studying a foreign language, an individual aiming to present their homeland abroad, a tourist, a student, or a migrant – all increasingly recognize the necessity of linguistic country studies dictionaries. It is essential to develop a linguistic country studies dictionary that is user-friendly, grounded in a robust theoretical framework, built upon a clear and systematic structure, and designed for unified international application. If such dictionaries were developed in electronic format, enriched with illustrative content, and capable of continuous real-time updates, their effectiveness would be significantly enhanced. The integration of artificial intelligence technologies would further augment their functionality, making them a powerful tool for promoting cross-cultural understanding, facilitating knowledge acquisition, enhancing communication, and fostering interethnic and intercultural dialogue.

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