

# Linguocultural Analysis of the Most Common Greetings in the Russian, Tatar and Chinese Languages

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**Abstract:** The article deals with greetings – as one of the speech genres, functioning in every language. Despite the universality of this speech genre, there are differences and peculiarities of its forms for various cultures. Of the great amount of greeting formulas functioning in the Russian, Tatar and Chinese languages the authors chose the most common three types. The formal-constructive, communicative-pragmatic and semantic characteristics are taken into consideration for a comparative analysis of the chosen units. The authors also attempted at providing a culturological interpretation of them. There are, on the one hand, greetings that are very similar in meanings among the linguocultures presented; on the other hand, there are nationally specific forms, which reflect the originality of the native speakers, their cultural traditions and axiological orientations. The study of greetings can give a key to understanding the nations' worldview structure, the traits of mentality, as well as be a basis for successful relationships in cross-culture communication.

**Keywords:** Greetings, speech genre, linguoculturological analysis, cross-culture communication.

## INTRODUCTION

At the present era of globalization, which is marked by the growing interest in issues of cross-culture communication, problems of differences and universal in various cultures of the world are of great importance.

The object of this research is the genre of greetings. The fact that these acts of politeness exist in all cultures is obvious, but in each ethnicity, there are peculiar traits of manifesting courtesy. When representatives of different cultures interact, there can be not only language difficulties, but also cultural misunderstandings. Russian philologist S. Ter-Minasova emphasizes in one of her books that in cross-culture communication the knowledge of the language only is not enough to be familiar with the characteristics of the culture and community from which the opponent interlocutor comes. Foreign language mistakes are usually reacted benignly, with no offence. But cultural mistakes, as a rule, can lead to most negative impression and consequences (Ter-Minasova S.G., 2000). Indeed, in case of choosing this or that greeting form one should know culture peculiarities of them. For example, foreigners can be puzzled when in China they are "greeted" by the phrase "你吃了吗?" (literally - *Have you eaten?*) which is a common form of greeting in informal settings but not an invitation for a meal. Or, when Europeans,

especially French people, greet Chinese guests with three kisses on the cheeks, which is a common etiquette action for the French, Chinese people can consequently feel embarrassed, as this is not a characteristic gesture for their culture. In the Tatar society, where Islamic and secular traditions coexist, it is important to greet elder people first, to shake both their hands, and the Muslim phrase "As-salamu alaykum" is common in this case.

Thus, in this research, the compared phenomena taken from the Russian, Tatar and Chinese languages may reveal new features, points of similarity and difference in the corresponding linguocultures. V.V. Krasnykh defines the term "linguoculture" as a system of ideas about reality inherent in a community speaking the same language (Krasnykh V.V., 2012).

T. Kostyuchenko, E. Yermolaeva, highlighting the close relations between language and culture, state: "Language, being a complex cognitive system of getting and delivering information, reflects human experience and perception of the surrounding world in culture that created it. That is why cultural investigations are significantly supported by linguistics" (Kostyuchenko and Ermolaeva, 2011).

To consider an example of how these culturally conditioned differences in greeting formulas are manifested, of the enormous variety of greetings that are functioning as traditional clichés or instantly created original ones, the authors turn to the most common forms in the three languages. In this regard, R.R.

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Zamaletdinov points out: "given the uniformity of the set of universal concepts, each nation has special relationships between these concepts, which creates the basis for a national worldview and assessment of the phenomena of the surrounding reality" (Zamaletdinov R.R., 2004).

## METHODS

The lexicographical methods, consisting of sampling and analyzing relevant lexemes in different dictionaries, thesauruses and phrasebooks, are used here for specifying the lexical units chosen for expressing greetings in the given languages.

For fulfilling linguocultural analysis, the methods dealing with different aspects of linguistic description of the phenomena under study are applied:

- synchronic method (considering characteristics of linguistic phenomena at a taken period of time);
- diachronic method (identifying the properties of greetings in terms of time projection);
- structural-functional method (analyzing the form and structure of greeting formulas);
- historical-genetic method (tracing the conditions and prerequisites of the origin of greetings);
- typological method (identificating phenomena according to classifications applicable to their numerous aspects).

To the culturological methods, focusing on the aspects of culture as the human and sociological phenomenon, belong the following ones:

- ethnographical methods (taking into consideration greetings as original products of different ethnic groups),
- psychological methods (concentrating on psychic and psychological implications of using this or that way of greeting people),
- semiotic methods, (for semiotics presupposes the study of culture and its phenomena as sign systems).

Thus, the above-mentioned methods, characteristic not only of linguistic studies but also of different areas of socio-humanitarian works, are used for this research

to reveal the peculiarities of greetings as vivid bearers of nations' culture, traditions, background history and traits of mentality.

## REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In linguistics, there are several ways of interpreting such a phenomenon as greetings.

From the point of view of the Theory of Speech Acts, developed by J. Austin, verbs, denoting greetings, reveal their purpose while being pronounced. This purpose is to greet the addressee (Austin J.L., 1975). However, it is obvious that greetings include not only verbal phrases, but also cliché-formulas, or even micro dialogues and gestures, that are tied to typical situations of interpersonal communication and the Theory of Speech Acts can be applied not to all of them.

Another area that has been actively developing in Linguistics over the past decades is a look at greetings in the framework of the Theory of Speech Genres, formulated by the Russian philosopher M.M. Bakhtin. He defines a speech genre as a relatively stable type of an utterance developed by a certain area of language use. In his opinion speech genres (hereinafter referred to as SG) appear and function due to the use of certain speech means in typical situations, taking ready-made forms, given to us almost in the same way as our native language (Bakhtin M.M., 1996).

R. Bauman defines speech genres "as a set of conventional guidelines for dealing with recurrent communicative exigencies, greetings, for example as a means of establishing interactional access" (Bauman R., 2001).

H. Knoblauch points out a great degree of social engagement of the communicative genre of greetings which are "forms of social action and interaction sequences produced by and oriented toward actors" (Knoblauch H., 2013).

The same point of view is of J. Swales, he emphasizes that SG having discursive characteristics are realized for performing different communicative aims. Consequently, such SG as greetings are used to maintain a comfort interaction between interlocutors (Swales J. M., 2201).

This research is actually based on the recent approach to greetings as a SG.

Many different manuals on intercultural communication, thematic dictionaries and phrasebooks often offer three basic types of greetings that a learner can use to master a foreign language:

- 1) greetings, pronounced everywhere, regardless of the time in official settings,
- 2) time-bound greetings;
- 3) greetings, chosen for communication in the circle of close friends, relatives, acquaintances.

As for the choice of relevant criteria for a comparative analysis of greetings, the attention is taken to formal-constructive, communicative-pragmatic characteristics, semantic content, including the disclosure of the concept semantics in the unity of all its structural components.

## DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

### Three Types of Greetings, Most Common in the Russian Linguoculture

The most neutral Russian greeting “Здравствуй(те)” (*zdravstvuy(te)* - *hello*, which can be used regardless of the time in a wide range of situations of formal and informal communication. Construction analysis shows that this form, like most greetings, is an interjection. The choice of interjections derived from the verbs in the grammatical form of the singular or plural in the imperative mood “Здравствуй” or “Здравствуйте” allows the speaker to mark not only an appeal to one or several participants of the dialogue. It can also reveal socio-hierarchical relations between communicants when used towards an older person or those who occupy a senior position on the social ladder. The same principle of choosing verb forms with endings marking singularity or plurality of the second person is also characteristic of languages from Slavic, Turkic, Romano-Germanic groups, etc.). As N.N. Matveeva, V.G. Fatkhutdinova note, “comparing the derivative vocabulary and word-forming systems of different languages, we can trace the ways of worldview development concerning a particular ethnic group with its universal and culture-specific characteristics” (Matveeva and Fatkhutdinova, 2016).

The seme “здоровье” (*zdorovye*) – *health* in the etiquette interjection “Здравствуй(те)” shows that people who use it at the meeting are positive towards the interlocutors and wish them health. However, “Здравствуй(те)” can be subjected to the process of

re-accentuation of SG, when it can be an expression of the simple SG of discontented exclamation in a situation of surprise and negative attitude of communicants to what is happening. In cases of transition of the SG from one to another in accordance with the situation and the speaker’s intention the so-called “re-accentuation of SG” takes place. This term was introduced by Bakhtin, who claimed: “the genre form of greetings from the official sphere can be transferred to the sphere of familiar communication, when used with a parody-ironic re-accentuation” (Bakhtin M.M., 1996).

The greeting “Добрый день” (*dobryy den'*) - *good afternoon* and its variants that are functioning in everyday speech depending on the time of day “Доброе утро” (*dobroye utro*) - *good morning*, “Добрый вечер” (*dobryy vecher*) - *good evening* are even more neutral equivalents of the greeting “Здравствуй(те)” from the point of view of an attitude to the interlocutor. Behind the greeting “Добрый день” one can “hide” an uncertain attitude towards the addressee in case of doubt as to how to address him using the familiar “ты” - *you* (singular) or formal “вы” – *you* (plural, also respectful form of address to one person). The semantics of a benevolent attitude towards the interlocutor is indicated by the adjective “добрый” – *good, kind*. In the expressions “Доброе утро”, “Добрый день”, “Добрый вечер” the noun for the time of day usually appears in the nominative singular.

Another Russian greeting-interjection “Привет” (*privet*) – *hi, hello*, according to the etymological dictionary, means “an address of a feeling of personal affection, good wishes, solidarity” and goes back to the Proto-Slavic verb “privětiati” - *broadcast, speak* (Shaposhnikov A.K., 2010). The prefix *при* (*pri*) in “Привет” reveals the act of approximation, reducing the distance between interlocutors; consequently, the choice of this greeting indicates friendly or close relationships between the participants in the dialogue.

### Three Types of Greetings, Most Common in the Tatar Linguoculture

The Tatar greeting “Исәнме(сез)” (*Isənme(sez)*) - most often acts as the equivalent of the Russian greeting “Здравствуй(те)”. Its structure is a combination of three morphemes: *исән+ме+сез*. The form *исән* means “alive, whole, healthy”, the morpheme *ме* has the grammatical meaning of the question. The ending of the verbs *сез* indicates the

plural number of interlocutors or respectful attitude towards officials, strangers, older people. If the communicants are well familiar with each other, the form “Исәнме” is used. In the semantic plan, the question-concern about well-being, the health of the interlocutor is expressed. The use of the interjection “Исәнме(сез)” can also be subjected to the process of re-accentuation of the SG. In this case, there is a transition from the SG of greeting to the SG of dissatisfied exclamation or surprise.

In the Tatar language, time-bound greetings are widely used in official or friendly and family settings: “Хәерле иртә” (khæerle irtə) - *good morning*, “Хәерле көн” (khæerle kön) - *good afternoon*, “Хәерле кич” (khæerle kich) - *good evening*. Their semantics can be effortlessly deduced from the adjective “хәерле”, meaning “good, prosperous” and nouns denoting the time of day. These greetings can also act as SG of parting words and good wishes to the interlocutors.

In informal situations, the message “Сәлам” (səlam) - *hello, hi* is used. Etymologically, it goes back to the Arabic form “sälām” and is also found in other Turkic languages (Chuvash, Uzbek, Turkmen, Uyghur, etc.). There is an etymological connection of this interjection with the Muslim greeting “As-salamu alaykum” – *Peace be upon you* (Akhmetyanov R.G., 2015). Thus, when using the greeting “Сәлам”, a warm, favorable attitude of the addressee to relatives and friends is manifested. “As-salamu alaykum” also functions in the Tatar society as a greeting and is preferable when addressing to elderly people.

### Three Types of Greetings, Most Common in the Chinese Linguoculture

The Chinese greeting phrase “你好” (nǐ hǎo) is very close in meaning to the Russian interjection “Здравствуй(те)” and the Tatar form “Исәнме(сез)”. It can be used in official situations, among strangers, colleagues at work, people of different ages and social status. Its semantic component – the question about the state of health, well-being of the addressee is literally translated as *Are you well?* A deeper look at this phrase presupposing a hieroglyphic analysis reveals the semantics of this greeting. The hieroglyph “你” (nǐ) corresponds to the form of the personal pronoun of the second person “you”, “好” (hǎo) is translated *good, kind*. This token consists of two elements: the grapheme 女 (nǚ), meaning “woman, daughter, girl” and 子 (zǐ), meaning “son, child, man”. From ancient times, it was considered a good luck to

have a son and a daughter in the Chinese family. According to the Chinese philosophy about the fundamentals of all things, 女 corresponds to the female essence of Yin, and 子 corresponds to the male essence of Yang. Together they form a harmonious whole, i.e. this combination is identical to the concept of “good”. In case of greeting several people the plural form of the pronoun of the second person is used - “你们好” (nǐmen hao). “您好” (nǐn hǎo) is a more respectful form of greeting, as the pronoun “您” (nǐn) is used in relation to an older person, a superior and a deeply respected one. Traditionally, older people, guests, officials in China are addressed with reverence, while diminishing one’s own significance.

In the Chinese language, there are also forms of greetings, which include tokens that indicate the time. Such phrases are: “早上好” (zǎoshang hǎo) - *good morning* and its truncated form used in colloquial speech “早”; “早安” (zǎo ān) - *good morning*, “中午好” (zhōngwǔ hǎo) *good afternoon*; “下午好” (xiàwǔ hǎo) *good afternoon*, “午安” (wǔ ān) *good afternoon*, “晚上好” (wǎnshàng hǎo) *good evening*. Of these, the most common are “早上好”, “晚上好”. They have a form of an adjective with a noun marking the time of day. They are used both in situations of formal communication, and in informal settings. The token “好” in them reflects a favorable attitude towards each other, wishes and hopes for a successful day (morning, evening).

The correspondent variant for the etiquette formula “Hi”, “Hello” in various dictionaries and phrasebooks is the Chinese greeting “你好”. However, at present, such greetings as: “你吃了吗?” (Nǐ chīle ma) - *Have you eaten?* or “你吃饭了吗?” (Nǐ chīfànle ma) - *Have you eaten (rice)?*, “你去哪儿?” (Nǐ qù nǎ’er) - *Where are you going?*, “你在做什么?” (Nǐ zài zuò shénme) - *What are you doing?* are very common. Foreigners, having witnessed the use of such greetings, may regard them as a manifestation of tactlessness, but for the Chinese this speech behavior is normal.

Phrases “你吃了吗?” (Nǐ chīle ma) and “你吃饭了吗?” (Nǐ chīfànle ma) consist of the personal pronoun of the second person singular 你 (nǐ), the verb 吃 (chī) or 吃饭 (chīfàn) translated as “eat, eat food, (rice)”, the verb particle 了 (le), indicating completion of the action and interrogative particles 吗 (ma), used at the end of the sentence. The verb 吃 in these phrases indicates that food has always been of paramount importance for the Chinese. I.A. Sternin emphasizes the national-specific nature of such greetings and cites

**Table 1: Most Common Types of Greetings in Three Linguocultures**

Type of situation, settings	Linguoculture		
	Russian	Tatar	Chinese
Formal situation, neutral variant	“Здравствуй(те)” (zdravstvuy(te))	“Исәнме(сез)” (Isenme(sez))	“你好” (nǐ hǎo)
Time-bound greetings	“Доброе утро” (dobroye utro) “Добрый день” (dobryy den') “Добрый вечер” (dobryy vecher)	“Хәерле иртә” (khæerle irtə) “Хәерле көн” (khæerle kən) “Хәерле кич” (khæerle kich)	“早上好” (zǎoshang hǎo) “中午好” (zhōngwǔ hǎo) “下午好” (xiàwǔ hǎo) “晚上好” (wǎnshàng hǎo)
Informal situations, communication among friends, relatives, etc.	“Привет” (privet)	“Сәлам” (səlam)	“你吃了嗎?” (Nǐ chīle ma) “你去哪兒?” (Nǐ qù nǎ'er) “你在做什麼?” (Nǐ zài zuò shénme)

the old Chinese proverb: “民以食为天” (Mín yǐ shí wéi tiān) translated as *People consider food to be their heaven*. The original Chinese question “你吃饭了吗?” (Nǐ chīfàn le ma) *have you eaten rice*” is used as a greeting among relatives and friends on the basis of feelings of care, a friendly attitude to the interlocutors. People using these greeting phrases do not literally want to find out if their interlocutor ate or not. The right answer to such greeting phrases may be “我吃了，谢谢” (Wǒ chīle, xièxiè) - *I have, thanks* (Sternin I.A., 2002).

The presence of the lexeme “饭” (fàn) - *rice, food*, in the greetings represents a reverent attitude towards this important agricultural crop for the Chinese. Rice for them has the same meaning as bread in Russian linguistic culture. Greeting question phrases “你去哪儿?” (Nǐ qù nǎ'er) - *Where are you going?* and “你在做什么?” (Nǐ zài zuò shénme) - *What are you doing?* are used in an informal situation, when the interlocutor shows interest in the affairs of the addressee. This kind of attitude towards the interlocutors reflects a specific feature of the Chinese mentality - collectivism, emotional cohesion. As noted by V.V. Sukhomlinova, referring to the research of the Chinese sociologist Professor Fei Xiaotong, “Chinese collectivism took shape not as a result of the forcible restriction of individuals' personal freedom in the name of achieving a common goal, but as an expression of the goodwill of each of them, their need for emotional cohesion” (Sukhomlinova V.V., 2018).

## CONCLUSIONS

To sum up, it should be noted that despite the universality of the speech genre of greeting, which serves to initiate communication among all peoples, one can trace the difference in linguistic forms and connotative meanings of the most frequent greeting forms. This can be explained by the variety of types of world perception, customs, and traditions of the linguocultures implemented not only in linguistic units, but also in speech-behavioral tactics. Thus, the most frequent greeting cliché “Здравствуй(те)” in Russian, “Исәнме(сез)” in Tatar and “你好” in Chinese traditions originally meant an interest in the recipients' state of health, a wish for good to them. In all linguistic cultures considered in the study, there are time-bound forms of greetings used in a wide range of situations. In the languages presented, there are also specific forms of greeting, which reflect the originality of the native speaker, its cultural traditions and axiological (value) orientations. For example, for representatives of the Russian, Tatar, Chinese linguocultures, honor and respect for the interlocutors are important a priori. In Chinese linguoculture, the main worldview principle is collective cohesion. That is why in the familiar setting such greetings as personal questions “你吃了嗎?” - *Have you eaten?* or “你去哪儿- *Where are you going?* are used, though a direct answer is not required in response.

Taking into account the foregoing, we can conclude that knowing the peculiarities of speech etiquette allows to build the right relationships between

representatives of different linguocultures, based on respect for communication partners, the desire to preserve the cultural heritage and national identity of peoples, hope for beneficial relationships.

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