

Verbal and Nonverbal Characteristics in the Students' Oral Narrative about Happiness

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Abstract

The article presents the results of a study of Russian and American students' narrative of happiness. Verbal and nonverbal representations of the phenomenon of happiness were analyzed on a sample of Russian and American students. The general and specific features were determined. It was found, that happiness is connected with involving in activities for both samples of students. At the same time, Russian students are more result-oriented, and American students are more focused on the process, associated with the experience of a state of happiness. The overall trends in gestures' description were found: for signification of happiness both groups of students put the palms backside up, the character of the movement is circular or convex, the peak of gesture movement is located in the center in regard to a speaker.

Keywords: Russia, Russian education, regional university, happiness, narrative of happiness

1. Introduction

Currently a special importance, in the context of the study of issues of social and geographical space, is attached to the subjective determinants, as which the concept of quality of life is regarded, along with the objective characteristics and elements of the space, among which the inherent land area, its natural and economic indicators are considered. Acting as an important component of social and geographical space, a quality of life can be discovered by analyzing the phenomenon of happiness. Studies show, that the state of happiness is not related to the level of economic development, however, it depends on a person's residence. Happiness appears as a measure of a quality of life, being a cultural characteristic of a country (a region), including moral and psychological values. Florida (2014) believes, that most of the authors in the studies of the phenomenon of happiness try to answer the question "Who?", "What?" makes a person happy, but no less important and urgent question is "Where?", because important components of a happy life are determined and depend on the place, where a person lives. In this regard, this study is of interest, because it examines the characteristics of Russian and American students' experience of a state of happiness.

The study of questions, related to a research of the phenomenon of happiness, obtains special actuality in the context of the problems of positive psychology (Benet-Martinez & John, 1998; Ciarrochi et al., 2015; Donaldson et al., 2015; Easterlin, 2001). An active interest for the problems of the psychology of happiness is manifested by the following facts: new magazines are appeared, books are published in the field of positive psychology, international conferences are held, for example, the Gallup Institute in 2002 became the site of the annual international conferences on positive psychology; there is the European Association of Positive Psychology in Europe; Russia has established a scientific and educational group of positive psychology and quality of life.

2. Conceptualization of Happiness

An interest for the problems of psychology of happiness and for the direction of positive psychology in general, can be explained partly by the fact, that despite the increase in well-being, some residents of wealthy countries still feel themselves unhappy (Chikesentmihayi, 2011; Pavot & Diener, 2008). More and more people fall under depression. For example, in Europe, the percent of depressed people in some countries is more than 50%. Depression becomes younger; young people, including teenagers, suffer from depression more and more. The average age of people, suffering from depression, was 29.5 thirty years ago, and now the average age of depressed people is 14.5 (Sheldon & Lyubomirsky, 2007).

Analyzing the reasons of interest for the problems of positive psychology and the psychology of happiness in Western society, Bonivell (2009) names the following. The author believes, that the developing countries has not yet reached the level of well-being at a present time, in which a survival is not the main problem. On the other hand, the quality of life is becoming today a more important indicator of the society's development than indicators of economic prosperity (Pavot & Diener, 2008). An emphasis of attention to personal happiness becomes significant because of the tendency to individualism (Bonivell, 2009).

In addition, the interest for this problem can be explained by an increase of tension in the society, a necessity to explore the opportunities of optimal and successful human functioning, also in high stressor conditions (Linley et al., 2006).

Studying the issues of psychology of happiness in the context of the problems of positive psychology, it should be noted, that today the following questions are in the center of attention: the positive potential of a personality, the questions of optimal functioning of a person, the study of factors, that determine the state of happiness, that promote the happy existence of a person (Anrews & Withey, 1976; Argyle, 2003; Bonivell, 2009; Chikesentmihayi, 2011; Diener, 1985; Dzhidaryan, 2013; Gurieva, 2012; Linley et al., 2006; Seligman, 2009).

In the context of the phenomenon of happiness, a creation of ontology of the subject area 'Psychology of Happiness' is of a particular interest.

A composition of ontology is the leading paradigm of modern scientific knowledge; it is of interest and has important methodological significance, because it allows optimizing the presentation of the subject area and structuring the research material (Zhdanova et al., 2014a; Zhdanova et al., 2015; Zhdanova et al., 2014b). The concept of ontology can be revealed as a hierarchical conceptual framework, which is forming by a researcher, based on the studying and structuring the knowledge and documentation. As a conceptual model of the subject area, the ontology includes a hierarchy of concepts of the subject area, relations between them and laws, that operate in the framework of this model (Zhdanova et al., 2014a).

During the creation of ontology, all concepts of the subject area are divided into classes, subclasses. The development of ontologies involves systematization, categorization, structuring of knowledge, formation of concepts, identifying relations, determining values, representation of knowledge in the form of semantic networks, thesaurus, etc.

In our study, an ontological design was implemented by the example of the subject area 'Happiness'. The combined strategies - descending strategy ('top-down') and ascending strategy ('bottom-up') - were used during the formation of ontology. The conceptual core of the concept of 'Happiness' was defined, based on the work with literature on a material of dictionary definitions.

It was found, that there are different approaches of understanding the phenomenon of happiness at a present time (Argyle, 2003; Bonivell, 2009; Chikesentmihayi, 2011; Dzhidaryan, 2013; Gurieva, 2012; Seligman, 2009; Vinichuk, 2008; Vorkachev, 2001). It was revealed, that the category of happiness might be considered from the point of view of objectivistic and subjectivistic approaches.

According to the objectivistic approach, the happiness is seen in the context of the problems of the personality and is connected with the level of psychological and social well-being, the degree of personal fulfillment (Ryff, 2009).

In accordance with the subjectivistic approach, the happiness is seen as a subjective sensation, as a particular psychological experience (Argyle, 2003; Ispolatova & Nikolaeva, 1999).

Thus, Chikesentmihayi (2013) reveals the concept of happiness as a 'flow', as a special, bright, exciting experience that accompanies activity (Argyle, 2003). Diener (1985), considering the happiness as a characteristic and a condition simultaneously, finds that there is a definitely stated personal disposition to experience some level of emotions, which can be measured independently of the appraisal of the current state.

The phenomenon of happiness can be viewed from three main positions: as a life satisfaction, as a value (an object or a result of activity) and as a positive affective state (Vinichuk, 2008). The happiness, as a person's satisfaction of 'life in general' is related to the concept of a quality of life, psychological well-being (Argyle, 2003). The happiness as a

value can be revealed through the analysis of the system of human values, objectives, expectations, basic needs, results of activity (Argyle, 2003; Chiksentmihayi, 2011; Diener, 1985; Giovanni, 2004; John et al., 1991; John et al., 2008). The happiness as a positive affective state is regarded as a special subjective feeling, the experience of a person.

In general, the concept of the happiness, following Vinichuk (2008), can be defined as a psychological phenomenon, characterized by contentment and understanding of human life, the dominance of positive emotional state, a positive attitude to themselves and the outside world (Vinichuk, 2008; Zhdanova et al., 2014a; Zhdanova et al., 2015; Zhdanova et al., 2014b).

The analysis of the categories of happiness, existing in the literature, allows to determine three components in the structure of the phenomenon: cognitive, affective and behavioral. Cognitive component is represented at the expense of understanding by the subject the reasons, sources of happiness, and includes a reflective appraisal. Affective component involves a process of experience by the subject a condition of happiness, behavioral component is linked with external outpouring, which can be transmitted through non-verbal characteristics, human behavior. The phenomenon of happiness can be learned in the space-temporal perspective - in the cohesion of the past, present and future, and from the point of view of the analysis of procedural and productive aspects. The happiness as a process is associated with the experience, a special emotional state (Bonivell, 2009). The happiness as a result - with the level of psychological and social well-being, the degree of personal fulfillment.

In the context of the psychology of happiness, a question about the factors, causing it, becomes more urgent. Argyle (2003), analyzing the sources of happiness, highlights the factors, important for satisfaction with life in general, for a state of happiness and less significant. As the most significant factors, determinant to a state of happiness, Argyle (2003) names: the presence of close social relationship, job satisfaction, health, free time for leisure, personality traits (self-esteem, extraversion, meaningfulness of life), and positive emotions (good mood).

Among the less significant factors for life satisfaction in general, for a state of happiness, author includes material support; among factors, which have a little effect on life satisfaction, are religious satisfaction; the factors, which do not affect the state of happiness, are the age and sex.

Andrews and Uaytni (1976) mark three components, which make up the happiness: life satisfaction, positive and negative emotions. Subjective well-being, as the authors say, depends on the level of positive emotions and satisfaction index of their own lives. At the same time, satisfaction of their own life is not only an emotional assessment, because it includes cognitive estimation.

According to Diener (1985) and Seligman (2009), happy people are clearly different from the unhappy by only one parameter: happier people have more close interpersonal contacts. This can be romantic love, stable relationship, marriage, good relations with friends. Happy people spend less time alone (Seligman, 2009).

Research results are consistent with the data, obtained by the All-Russian Public Opinion Research Center on April 30, 2014, according to which for the majority of the respondents the welfare of the family is on the first place, on the second - the joy of children, grandchildren, on third place respondents put a good, interesting work / study and profession. At the last place turns out to be a statement "I'm young, beautiful, and healthy". 19 % of happy Russians do not realize the reason of their happiness.

Sources of happiness can be analyzed in terms of levels of individuality, which are involved in the process of experiencing a state of happiness (Zhdanova et al., 2014a). In our approach, the system of factors, which act as sources of happiness, is considered on basis of the theory of integral individuality of Merlin (1986) and revealed as a unity and interaction of biological, psychological, social.

The general model or the ontology of subject area "Psychology of Happiness" can be represented in a hierarchical structure, where there is a relation between the elements. There is a structural unit "Happiness" on the top of this model, the second level is formed by units 'Object', 'Subject'. The objective component includes 'Reasons', 'Sources of happiness', 'Objectives', 'Manifestations of activity: verbal, nonverbal'. These units, in turn, are divided into smaller structural components. The subjective component includes direct experience (affective component), and is manifested in the form of reflexive evaluation (cognitive component). Different levels of person individuality turn out to be involved in the process of experiencing a state of happiness. The experience of happiness is performed at the level of individual, personal, social and psychological levels of individuality.

3. The Methodology of Study

In order to study the features of verbal and nonverbal representation of experience of a state of happiness in different cultures, we have organized and conducted a special empirical study. It took place in 2013-2014 on a sample of students from Perm State National Research University (60 people) and students from Lyndon State College (Vermont, USA) in

amount of 38 people. The total number of surveyed people was 98. Groups were balanced by gender and age.

The hypothesis of the study is the following: there are significant differences in the description of a state of happiness by Russian and American students. Empirical prerequisites of the study is a contention of R. Harrison, according to which communication elements are assigned with different roles by different nations. So, R. Harrison believes, that linguistic means and speech, not verbal means, are uppermost in Western countries. For the Eastern people, paralanguage is an integral part of communication, often nonverbal means transfer more information than words (see Lebedko, 1999). Zaychikova and Tretyakova (2008) also believe, that different cultures are very different in the degree of emotions' expression in communication, the intensity of their behavior. The authors believe, that "verbal and nonverbal behavior presents a unified whole. Verbal and nonverbal means complement each other", and it has the necessary impact on the listener (Zhdanova et al., 2015, p. 3).

The method of narrative was used in the study. This method is one of the qualitative research methods of personality, it is quite informative, because it is focused on the description of the life history, events, experienced by a person and endowed with individual and collective sense. The advantage of the narrative approach in the study of the phenomenology of mental states is the ability to effectively analyze and interpret events, which take place in the person's life and determine their psychological content (Zhdanova et al., 2014b).

Narrative analysis is a way of summarizing past experience, a reflexive process of personal and sociocultural identification, a design of memories and understanding of events. According to the narrative, the meaning of human behavior is expressed in the story-telling. "Man achieves self-understanding through narrative, highlighting in the flow of life certain moments, that have estimated value and meaning for him, designing and maintaining through stories (narratives) his identity" (Kadyrova, 2012, p.126).

"The narrative is coherent, time-ordered story-telling, which contributes the organization of personal experience of the subject. Narrative analysis allows to display the psychological reality, hidden in the text, and separate this reality from the formal content of the text" (Kadyrova, 2012, p.126).

In order to obtain a narrative of happiness, the method of early memories of a person (retrospective self-report method) was used. This method is one of the projective methods of personality's study and has a number of advantages. They lie in the fact, that people are willing to tell or describe their earliest memories. Through memories, people admit in their life goals, in their relations to others, their view of the world. Herewith there is no need to establish 'reliability' of early memories, because what has been altered or invented by a person, also reflects the goals, values and meanings (Isolatova & Nikolaeva, 1999).

The choice of this method was caused by the speculation, that phenomenology of perception will be manifested quite clearly in a free description of person's own emotions and emotional experiences of happiness, which has a retrospective character, and this will provide the more complete picture of the person's state of happiness from the context of the full situation, once perceived by a person. A prerequisite for this speculation was the statement, that the nature of person's emotional response, emotional experiences, both past and present, reflects in the early memories as a symbolic model of interpersonal relations. Referring to the events and situations, that were experienced earlier, the subject 'moves back' in the past situation, then he goes through the event again, as the real participant, and experiences feelings, similar to those, that, according to his memories, he had instead (Isolatova & Nikolaeva, 1999; Shilenkova, 2003).

In order to obtain a narrative of happiness, students were asked to recall a situation, where they felt themselves happy, and tell about it. All the stories were recorded with the permission of the study participants on the video for their further analysis.

On the basis of video recordings, scripts interviews, that reflected verbal and nonverbal characteristics of students' oral narrative about happiness, were made, a multimodal main body of oral and nonverbal narratives about happiness was created. Further, in order to process obtained data, method of content analysis was used. The legitimacy of the use of selected categories for analysis was tested by the procedure of expert evaluation. The experts are specialists in the fields of psychology and cognitive psycholinguistics, with experience in the analysis and interpretation of texts, among them are two Doctors of sciences (psychology and philology), two Master's degree students, who attend a course "Psychology", one Master's degree student, who attends a course "Philology". The tasks for the experts were the following: to identify readings - indicators of happiness, presented in students' oral narrative about happiness; analyze the validity of indicators' inclusion for a particular category; estimate a measure of concordance of the main categories of content-analysis to their content; assess the correctness of the categories' formulation.

The study examined characteristics of nonverbal representation of Russian and American students' state of happiness. As a method of research, we used the method of identifying gestural units – it describes gestures by parameters: a shape, a position, a movement, a character of movement by Cornelia Müller (Cienki, 2010; Cienki & Müller,

2008). Gestural representation was investigated by video sequence. Gestural units, subject to a further analysis, were selected depending on the type of the studied gestures; a content analysis of nonverbal characteristics in the oral narrative of happiness was carried out (Zhdanova et al., 2015). A coefficient ϕ - angular conversion of Fisher was used as a method of mathematical statistics for processing received data.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings suggest, that a leading category in the description of the state of happiness for Russian students is a "significant event" (72% of all respondents). The most significant event for Russian students appears "a birth of a child".

Russian students pay much attention in the description of the state of happiness to a category "Travel". This statement can be explained by the fact, that a state of happiness for Russian students is related to a family well-being, family values. Russian students, unlike the American, have earlier experience of fatherhood and motherhood. On the other hand, they travel and visit other countries more. The least significant for the Russian sample of respondents were such subcategories, that characterize a significant event as "Graduation", "Introduction".

Verbal representations of American students regarding an experience of a state of happiness show, that achievements in activities, such as sports, achievements in overcoming difficulties are significant for American students. It was found, that the leading categories in the description of happiness for Americans are "Academic achievement", "Advances in activity", "Favorite pastime".

A meaningful category for American students also serves the category of "inner harmony", which is linked with achievements in activity, which is consistent with the contention of Chikesentmihayi (2011), that a person feels a state of Flow (happiness), due to the successful implementation of activity's challenges. Thus, the American student wrote: "I felt the strength, warmth, energy. I often go through alike emotions about my musical experience. The most significant event, that made me happy, was when my team and I have won an important music competition among drummers". A focus on achievements in activities and overcoming difficult situations is more characteristically, as shown by the results of the study in the American sample, for males. Also the category "Relations", including relations with the opposite sex, is an important category for American students. Girls pay more attention to this category.

Among the interesting facts is the fact, that Russian students more likely mark the results of any activity as reasons for happiness, while American students are more focused on the state of experiencing happiness.

During the study of nonverbal representation of Russian and American students' state of happiness, a stable set of elements, that are relatively constant and manifested in the narrative of happiness, regardless of cultural background, was found. It was found, that both groups of students in the gestures' description put the palms backside up, place their hands on the chest, in the diagonal plane, use a circular or convex character of the movement, the peak of gesture movement is located in the center in regard to a speaker. This finding suggests that a person in a state of happiness demonstrates the confidence to others, because his hands are open; hands' relaxation can be interpreted as an indicator of inner harmony, absence of anxiety. In other words, "a gesture of happiness" combines a set of gestural units, that reflect the experience of conditions such as satisfaction, confidence, peace of mind.

The differences in nonverbal characteristics of narrative of happiness were revealed. It was shown, that the American students often use gestures, which are directed away from the body. This fact is consistent with the data, which has been received by us earlier, that American students are more likely to describe happiness as a long, streaming experience, so this gesture makes it easier to transmit a streaming state of experiencing happiness. Because Americans are more likely than Russians use gesture, in which the palms are facing down, it can be assumed, that an element of infusion is distinctive for the representatives of American culture in the description of the emotional state.

As for Russian students, in nonverbal representation an emphasis on the description of the causes of happiness is made. A hand is more intense, a gesture is directed to body, and it may indicate, that a desire to retain the experience of the emotional state, the concentration of it for himself is more typical of Russian students.

5. Concluding Remarks

In general, the obtained results allow to make the following conclusions. An ontology of the subject area "Psychology of Happiness" is formed. It is shown, that the hierarchical structure of the concept of "happiness" is formed with the basic units, structural elements, there is a relationship between them. It includes the object, the subject; causes, sources, factors of happiness, manifestations of activity (verbal, nonverbal). The subjective component includes direct experience and is manifested in the form of reflexive evaluation. In the process of experiencing a state of happiness, different levels of human personality (individual, personal, social and psychological) are involved.

The verbal representations of the phenomenon of happiness are analyzed on a sample of Russian and American students. It was found, that the state of happiness for Russian students is due to the characteristics of personal and socio-psychological level of the individuality (with family welfare, family values). American students associate happiness with manifestations of individual level of identity (a metaphorical description of the state of happiness is typical for US students; they say, that happiness is warmth. The psychological and socio-psychological characteristics of individuality, as a source of happiness, for American students are self-realization, overcoming difficulties, relationship with the opposite sex.

The comparative analysis of the data showed, that for students of both samples happiness is connected with involvement in activity: overcoming difficulties, achieving goals. At the same time, Russian students are more focused on the productive side of the phenomenon of happiness. As the reasons of happiness, they mention the result of any activity, including the ability to travel. American students are more focused on the process, associated with the experience of a state of happiness.

During the study of nonverbal representation of Russian and American students' state of happiness, overall trends for both samples were found: both groups of students in the gestures' description put the palms backside up, placing them in the diagonal plane, the character of the movement is circular or convex, the peak of gesture movement is located in the center in regard to a speaker. "The gesture of happiness" combines a set of gestural units that reflect the experience of conditions such as satisfaction, confidence and peace of mind.

The differences in nonverbal characteristics indicate, that American students are more likely to use gestures directed away from the body, a gesture in which the palm is facing down. Russian students have a more intense hand, a gesture is directed to the body, which indicates a desire to retain the experience of the emotional state, the concentration of it for himself.

The attained study's results contribute to the development of psychological knowledge, socio-economic geography on the understanding of the role of a person's residence and its impact on specific differences in verbal and nonverbal characteristics that reflect the American and Russian students' experience of happiness.

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