

# Russian Praise Words *molodec* and *umnica*: A Semantic and Cultural Analysis

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## ***Abstract***

This paper investigates the semantics of two most commonly used Russian language-specific praise words *molodec* and *umnica*. The meanings of these nouns comprise the evaluation of an action of another person with the evaluation of this person him- or herself. For this reason, they can be regarded as words with culture-specific meaning. The study applies the methodology of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage which uses simple universal concepts and the universal grammar of combinability to propose semantic explications of the words under consideration. The meanings of *molodec* and *umnica* are then related to several important cultural themes of Russian culture.

## ***Keywords***

Russian, Praise Words, Emotion Terms, Natural Semantic Metalanguage

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## 1. Introduction

Wierzbicka argued that “emotionality” is one of the fundamental themes of the Russian language (Wierzbicka 1992). This idea has been supported by numerous linguistic studies (e.g., Apresjan & al. 2004, Iordanskaja & Paperno 1995, Zalizniak & Levontina 1996), as well as by studies of anthropologists, cross-cultural psychologists and cultural historians (e.g., Figs 2002, Pavlenko 2002, Pesmen 2000, Ries 1997). As these and other studies show, Russian is rich in linguistic means of describing and expressing emotions. Moreover, modes of interaction specific to Russian culture are characterized by easiness and spontaneity of emotional expression.

Praise is a common phenomenon of Russian culture which can be related to the general theme of “emotionality”. Praise is a way of positive verbal evaluation of an action of another person. Russian has a variety of linguistic means to express praise. One way is to use adverbs *prekrasno* ‘excellent/splendid’, *zamečatel’no!* ‘splendid’, *zdorovo* ‘well done’, *otlično* ‘excellent’, *vosxitiťel’no* ‘beautiful’ to praise an action or an achievement of another person. These expressions provide an evaluation of an action without characterizing a person in general. Another way is by the means of nouns or noun phrases. Such expressions combine an evaluation of a person’s action with the evaluation of the person him- or herself. Among these means of praise in Russian two nouns, *molodec* and *umnica*, are most important and frequent. Like the English expressions *good boy* and *good girl*, they link the evaluation of an action with the evaluation of the person (cf. Wierzbicka 2004). Such words can be considered a valuable source of cultural information because their meanings embody modes of behavior that receive positive evaluation.

*Molodec* and *umnica* are language-specific words that have no exact semantic counterparts in English. The Oxford Russian-English Dictionary (ORED 1980) glosses *molodec* as “fine fellow.; as interj. (coll.) well done!” and *umnica* as “1. f. good girl; 2. (m. & f.) clever person”. However, this translation is very rough and even inaccurate because it presents these words as gender-specific. Although like any noun in Russian these words belong to a certain grammatical gender (masculine and feminine respectively), syntactically they both can be masculine or feminine. It is possible to say *on takoj umnica* ‘he is such.MASC *umnica*’ and *ona takaja molodec* ‘she is such.FEM *molodec*’. Therefore, glossing these terms as gender-specific is not accurate. Moreover, the use of English equivalents and glosses obscures the explanations of the meanings of these words.

Previously the meanings of *molodec* and *umnica* were described by Levontina (2004) within the famous project of the New Explanatory Dictionary of Russian Synonyms. She argued that as with any evaluative expressive words that are semantically close, the

meanings of *molodec* and *umnica* are difficult to articulate. In this work I want to show that it is possible to suggest semantic explications of these words using simple universal concepts on the basis of their detailed semantic analysis. Such explications make it possible to articulate clearly semantic differences between these words. My research differs from Levontina's by providing cultural interpretation of *molodec* and *umnica* and by proposing their semantic explications in simple universal concepts.

## 2. Data and methodology

The aim of identifying culturally valued modes of behavior that are encoded in *molodec* and *umnica* can be best achieved by studying the contexts and situations in which these words naturally occur. The use of modern language as recorded in corpora can be considered a good source of this kind. I will base my study on the analysis of natural occurrences of these words in *Nacional'nyj Korpus Russkogo Jazyka*, which is available online and contains over 120 million word usages of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

By studying the contexts in which these words naturally occur I aim to propose their explications in simple universal terms using the methodology of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM). NSM is the outcome of empirical and conceptual investigations that have been carried out for more than three decades (see NSM Homepage). According to the NSM semantic theory, every language has an irreducible core in terms of which other complex terms can be understood (Goddard & Wierzbicka 1994, 2002, Wierzbicka 1996). Furthermore, these irreducible cores of all languages match one another. Cross-linguistic empirical research undertaken within the NSM framework suggests a set of about 65 universal conceptual primes, each with its own set of universal syntactic frames. The semantic primes as identified in English and Russian are listed in Table 1 (next page).

I will use natural semantic metalanguage to formulate semantic explications of the words *molodec* and *umnica*. Such representations of meaning are useful for three main reasons. Firstly, an explication precisely represents the essence of the meaning of a word, so it will show clearly the difference between these words. Secondly, such representations of meaning make them a good ground for comparison with similarly used praise words of other languages and cultures because they are devoid of the fault of ethnocentrism which presents phenomena of one language or culture via means of another. And, thirdly, such explications can be represented in any language without losing or bringing in any additional meaning and, therefore, clearly explained to speakers of any language. In this paper semantic explications will be presented in English and Russian versions of NSM.

**Table 1. The list of the NSM semantic primes in English and Russian (after Goddard and Wierzbicka 2002)**

substantives	I, YOU, SOMEONE, PEOPLE, SOMETHING/THING, BODY, IT JA, TY, KTO-TO, LJUDI, ČTO-TO/VEŠČ', TELO, ĚTO
determiners	THIS, THE SAME, OTHER ĚTOT, TOT ŽE SAMYJ, DRUGOJ
quantifiers	ONE, TWO, SOME, ALL, MUCH/MANY ODIN, DVA, NEKOTORYE, VSE, MNOGO
evaluators	GOOD, BAD XOROŠIJ, PLOXOJ
descriptors:	BIG, SMALL BOL'ŠOJ, MALEN'KIJ
mental predicates	THINK, KNOW, WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR DUMAT', ZNAT', XOTET', ČUVSTVOVAT', VIDET', SLYŠAT'
speech	SAY, WORDS, TRUE GOVORIT', SLOVA, PRAVDA
actions, events, movement	DO, HAPPEN, MOVE DELAT', PROISXODIT' (SLUČAT'SJA), DVIGAT'SJA
existence, identity, possession	THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE/SOMETHING), HAVE SUŠČESTVOVAT', BYT'/JAVLJAT'SJA (KEM-TO/ČEM-TO), IMET' (PRINADLEŽAT')
life and death	LIVE, DIE ŽIT', UMERET'
time	WHEN/TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT KOGDA/VREMJA, TEPER'/SEJČAS, DO, POSLE, DOLGO, KOROTKO (KOROTKOE VREMJA), NEKOTOROE VREMJA, MOMENT/MOMENTAL'NO
space	WHERE/PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE, TOUCHING, BE (SOMEWHERE) GDE/MESTO, ZDES', NAD, POD, DALEKO, BLIZKO, STORONA, VNUTRI, KASAT'SJA, BYT'/NAXODIT'SJA (GDE-TO)
logical concepts	NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF NET/NE, MOŽET BYT', MOČ', POTOMU ČTO, ES LI
intensifiers, augmentor	VERY, MORE OČEN', EŠČE/BOL'ŠE
relational substantives	KIND OF, PART OF ROD (ČEGO-LIBO), ČAST' (ČEGO-LIBO)
similarity	LIKE KAK (TAK KAK)

### 3. *Molodec*

#### 3.1. Semantic derivation and polysemy

The noun *molodec* is derived from the adjective *molodoj*, which means 'young'. *Molodec* has an obsolete form with the stress on the first syllable. Its meaning was 'a young man of brave behavior' and it was commonly used in Russian folklore as a part of the collocation *dobry molodcy* 'good/kind *molodec*.PL'. Today three meanings of the

word *molodec* can be distinguished on the basis of its different syntactic functions.<sup>1</sup> *Molodec*<sub>1</sub> is used as a disparaging term to describe young people of unreasonably bold behavior that offends other people. Syntactically *molodec*<sub>1</sub> can be a subject or an object (as in 1, 2).

(1) ... *v noč' s 13 na 14 sentjabrja na territoriju probralas' šajka lixix molodcov i ustroila pogrom.*

... on the night from 13 to 14 of September, a gang of dashing *molodec*.PL got into the territory and organized a pogrom.

(2) *A dobryx molodcev tut že otpravili v policejskij učastok rajona "Praga-4".*

And the good *molodec*.PL were immediately sent to a police office of the district "Prague-4".

*Molodec*<sub>2</sub> designates a person who in spite of difficulties gives an impression of doing well. Syntactically it is used as a part of a complex Instrumental predicate. Most frequently it is used within the combination *deržat'sja molodcom* 'to behave like *molodec*', which ORED (1980) glosses as 'to put up a good show'. The following (3 and 4) are examples of use of *molodec*<sub>2</sub>:

(3) *Živet ona, sudja po inter'eru kvartiry trudno, no deržitsja molodcom.*

Judging by the interior of the flat, she lives with difficulty, but behaves like *molodec*.

(4) ... *emu bolee 75 let, no on deržitsja molodcom.*

... he is older than 75, but behaves like *molodec*.

The most commonly used meaning of *molodec* – *molodec*<sub>3</sub> – will be discussed in this paper. It is a praise word which is used in a predicative function within two syntactic variants: as a term of address (5) or a term of reference (6).

(5) – *Vse-taki ty molodec, ja by ne smog tak, - govorit on.*

- Nevertheless you are *molodec*, I wouldn't have been able to do so, - he said.

(6) *Mama molodec, ona ničego ne skazala bratu i sestre...*

Mother is *molodec*, she didn't say anything to either brother or sister...

### 3.2. The semantics of *molodec*<sub>3</sub>

*Molodec*<sub>3</sub> is used in a wide range of situations to praise someone who did something good that surpasses the norm or normal expectations. For this reason, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is a

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<sup>1</sup> Levontina (2004) distinguishes only two meanings of *molodec* – those that I gloss as *molodec*<sub>2</sub> and *molodec*<sub>3</sub>.

common way to praise someone whose achievement is publicly recognized, as is in a competition or a public performance (7 and 8).

(7) *U ženščin naši segodnja srebro i bronzu vyigrali. – Molodcy. A skol'ko plyli? – 25 kilometrov. – O-go!*

Our participants today won silver and bronze among women. – *Molodec.PL*. And how long did they swim? – 25 kilometers. – Wow!

In this example two sportsmen discuss the achievements of their fellow women who won silver and bronze medals in a marathon swimming. One of them after learning about the outstanding results praises the women using the word *molodec*<sub>3</sub> in plural. In this situation the achievements of the women are publicly acknowledged because they received medals for them. In example (8) a director praises young actors for their good performance during a premier in Leningrad. He bases his judgment on the reaction of the audience; therefore this success can be regarded as an objective achievement.

(8) *Vošel Venecianov i spokojno, budto i ne volnovalsja za prem'eru, skazal: Nu čto že, pozdravljaju, molodcy! ... Prekrasno vas prinimajut. Dlja Leningrada èto xorošo.*

Venecianov came in and calmly, as if he had not worried about the premiere, said: - Well, congratulations, *molodec.PL*! ... You are being wonderfully accepted. It is good for Leningrad.

In example (9) *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is used in an article in which editorial board congratulates one of the employees of the newspaper with a baby girl. Giving birth can also be considered as an outstanding achievement.

(9) *Pozdravljaem tebja, Dina, s roždeniem ešče odnoj kaliningradki. Molodec! ... Redakcija "NK".*

We are congratulating you, Dina, with the birth of another Kaliningrad female citizen. *Molodec!* ... Editorial board of "NK".

Achieving a better social or financial status – also a noticeable achievement – can be a reason to praise someone *molodec*<sub>3</sub>, as in (10) and (11). In example (10) a young man is praised in this way for his being the only person in the family to achieve a high social status. Example (11) illustrates a similar situation with reference to a young woman.

(10) *Molodec, Fedor, xot' odin iz rodni v bol'sie ljudi vybilsja.*

*Molodec*, Fedor, at least one person from the family became an important man.

(11) *... molodec, molodec, devočka! Iz nikudyšnyx obstojatel'stv, sovsem iz ničego, postrojila ved' očen' neploxu: obrazovanie, svoja kvartira, daže vnešnost' svoju nevygodnuju oblagorodila, imeet stil', v konce koncov.*

... *molodec*, *molodec*, girl! From good-for-nothing conditions, almost from nothing, she built up her life not badly at all: education, her own apartment, she even made her unpleasant appearance nobler, created her own style after all.

*Molodec*<sub>3</sub> is a common word to praise someone for a good performance due to an outstanding physical ability. As Levontina (2004: 543) writes, “only *molodec*, not *umnica*, is possible if a person is praised for brave behavior in a combat, sports achievements, etc.”<sup>2</sup> Numerous examples from the Corpus support this argument (12-14).

(12) “*Molodec! Silač*”; - *kriknuli v odin golos i staryj, i malyj*.  
*Molodec!* Strong man! – shouted unanimously the old and the young.

In example (12) the audience praises and encourages a man who demonstrated his strength. In example (13) a woman is praised for performing outstanding skating after a lengthy period of unsuccessful performance.

(13) *Ona molodec, posle zatjažnoj polosy neudač pokazyvaet sejčas fantastičeskoe katanie*.  
She is *molodec*, after a long period of failures she now shows fantastic skating.

Example (14) is taken from a children’s story where small bears want to teach small hedgehogs to climb trees. In their understanding, the one who climbs the tree first, that is displays an outstanding physical ability, can be called *molodec*.

(14) *My naučim vas igrat’. Vidite sosnu? Lezem naperegonki! Kto na veršine budet pervyj, tot molodec*.  
We’ll teach you to play. Do you see the pine tree? Let’s compete in climbing it!  
The one who will be at the top first will be *molodec*.

Similarly, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> can be used to praise people for their mental achievements. In the majority of such examples from the Corpus, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is addressed to children who are praised for good and persistent studies, as in (15-19). In example (15) a girl is praised *molodec* for completing her first ABC book; in examples (16) and (17) young people are praised for studying well.

(15) *Davajte vse vmeste pozdravim Marinu. Ona zakončila svoju pervuju knižku-bukvar’. Molodec, Kroxa. Pozdravljaem tebja! Teper’ ty čelovek gramotnyj*.  
Let’s congratulate Marina. She finished her first ABC book. *Molodec*, Little One. Congratulations! Now you are a literate person.

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<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout the paper the quotes from Levontina (2004) and Šmelev (2005) are translated by me.

(16) *Molodec, čto učiš'sja xorošo.*  
*Molodec* that you study well.

(17) *Čem zanimaešsja v nastojaščee vremja? A? Uroki! Molodec! Papa tvoj učilsja, čelovekom stal...*  
 What are you doing now? Well? Homework! *Molodec!* Your father studied and became a real man.

In example (18) a student praises his fellow student for solving a difficult mathematical problem.

(18) – *Molodec, Alik, - skazal ja tixo Komarovu, - takuju trudnuju zadaču rešil.*  
 – *Molodec, Alik, - I said quietly to Komarov, - you solved such a difficult problem.*

In example (19) a teacher comments on essays of students and praises one girl for her diligent and neat work, which he evaluated as excellent.

(19) *Čerez pjat' dnej učitel' prines tetradki. – Galine Grebenkinoj – “pjat”.*  
*Molodec! Akkuratno i čisto, bez edinoj ošibki.*  
 In five days the teacher brought notebooks. – Galina Grebenkina gets “five”.  
*Molodec!* Done cleanly and neatly, without a single mistake.

In example (20) *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is used to praise a witty answer of a person:

(20) – *Postoj, govorit Stalin, - otec u tebja kto? – Evrej. – Mat' kto? – Evrejka. – A ty kto? – A ja communist! – gordo skazal Kaganovič. – Aj molodec, - skazal Stalin, - nastojaščij internacionalist.*  
 – Hold on, said Stalin, – who is your father? – A Jew. – Who is your mother? – A Jew. – And who are you? – I am a communist! – proudly said Kaganovich. – Well, *molodec*, – said Stalin, – you are a real internationalist.

Example (21) describes a situation when a boy praises his friend for reciting his own poems in front of the whole school. In this case the boy admires his friend's creativity and courage.

(21) *I Miška poklonilsja i polez so sceny. I vse emu zdorovo xlopali, potomu čto, vo-pervyx, stixi byli očen' xorošie, a vo-vtoryx, podumat' tol'ko: Miška ix sam sočinil! Prosto molodec!*  
 And Mishka bowed and climbed down the stage. And everyone applauded him enthusiastically because, firstly, the poems were very good, and secondly, it's impossible to believe it, Mishka wrote them himself. Simply *molodec!*

Example (22) shows that *molodec*<sub>3</sub> can extend to praising people for their moral qualities. In this case a speaker praises another person for a caring attitude to people.



(22) *A éto ty xorošo delaeš', čto o ljudjax zaboliš'sja tak. Molodec.*  
It's good that you care about people. *Molodec*.

As these examples from the Corpus suggest, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> can be used to praise a person for showing outstanding physical, mental, or moral abilities. Therefore, the range of situations when *molodec*<sub>3</sub> can be used as a praise word is very wide. The characteristic that unites these situations is the realization that the person performed something outstanding that surpasses the norm, that is that not many people can do. There is a hint for this in the stem of the word – not all people are “young”, or “young men”.

I will now discuss the attitude towards the referent that is reflected in the meaning of *molodec*<sub>3</sub>. The person who uses the word *molodec*<sub>3</sub> admires the action of another person. This action reveals something positive about this person and raises the opinion of the speaker of him or her. The following example well shows that *molodec*<sub>3</sub> expresses a pleasant surprise of the speaker about the person whom he or she praises. In this example a boy expresses surprise and admiration for his father's skill in helping another boy who had stuck a coin into his nose. The boy says the following about his father:

(23) *Nu, tovarišči, ja i ne znal, čto moj papa takoj molodec.*  
Well, comrades, I didn't know that my Dad is such *molodec*.

In example (24) a school principal praises as *molodec*<sub>3</sub> one student from her school who used to have a negative record. She says that recently introduced extra-class activities allowed this boy to reveal his good moral qualities. She presents this information in such a way that due to these new activities she discovered that this student is actually a good person.

(24) *Vzjat', k primeru, togo že Sašu Plotnova. Ešče nedavno ne znali, čto s nim delat'. A on, von kakoj molodec! Klassnyj rukovoditel' Saši – Tat'jana Sergeevna Burkova – srazu zametila v nem peremenu.*  
Take, for example, Sasha Plotnov. Recently we did not know what to do with him. And there he is – such *molodec*! Sasha's class master Tatiana Sergeevna Burkova immediately recognized a change in him.

Therefore, the behavior of someone who is praised as *molodec*<sub>3</sub> can often be a pleasant revelation about the abilities of that person. Following are more examples to support this point.

(25) – *Molodcom, paren'! Ja s toboj teper' v ljubuju razvedku pojdu.*<sup>3</sup>  
*Molodcom, bloke!* I will now go to any reconnaissance with you.

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<sup>3</sup> *Molodcom* (*molodec*INST) is an archaic form of *molodec*.

In this example a person calls another person *molodec*<sub>3</sub> and expresses his new degree of confidence in this person by saying that he can go to any reconnaissance with him. A similar kind of attitude is expressed in example (26) when the speaker says that one will not get into trouble when being with such a person:

(26) *Vot tak Van'ka, molodec! S takim čelovekom ne propadeš', on vseгда znaet, čto nado delat'.*

Vanka is such *molodec*! One will not get into trouble with such a man; he always knows what to do.

*Molodec*<sub>3</sub> is a way of praise for someone whom the speaker regards as an equal. As numerous examples have shown, it is a common way to praise someone younger or of the same age. As the quoted examples illustrate, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is used to someone whom the speaker addresses using the 'intimate' and 'informal' pronoun *ty*, not the 'distant', 'respectful' and 'formal' *vy*. However, a person can call someone older *molodec*<sub>3</sub> if he or she uses the *ty* form to this person (as in 27). In such cases older people are usually praised for their youthful behavior and spirit, that is in a way they are considered similar to young people. In the following two examples *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is used to older people:

(27) *Ne vyderžal, podošel k odnomu 106-letnemu tancoru Ruslanu Džogija, govorju, ty molodec, slušaj.*

I couldn't help it, came over to a 106-year old dancer Ruslan Dzhogija and said to him: Look, you are *molodec*.

(28) *Vse-taki naši babuški molodcy.*

Nevertheless our grandmas are *molodcy*(PL).

In example (27) the person calls a 106-year old dancer *molodec*<sub>3</sub> and admires his skill and youthful spirit. Example (28) is taken from the context in which the author praises the generation of her grandmothers for their endurance and optimism. In this example *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is used as a reference, not as an address form.

Having all these characteristics in mind, the following explication can be proposed for *molodec*<sub>3</sub>:

[A] *Ty - molodec*<sub>3</sub> [you are *molodec*<sub>3</sub>]

(a) I think like this now:

(b) you did something very good

(c) not many people can do something like this

(d) because I know that you did this, I know something very good about you

(e) when I think like this about you, I feel something very good

(f) I want to say something good about you because of this

In this explication component (a) shows that as a praise word *molodec*<sub>3</sub> has a cognitive basis. Components (b-d) capture the reasons for praise: (b) – performance of a very good action, (c) – the outstanding character of such performance, which is

explained by the comparison of the action of this person with the majority of people who are not capable of performing such an action. Component (d) reflects the new understanding of another person as a good person. Component (e) captures a very good feeling which is caused by such way of thinking. The desire to express this attitude verbally to the other person is captured in component (f).

This explication is written for the syntactic variant of *molodec*<sub>3</sub> as a form of address (as used in examples 5, 8, 9-12, 15-20, 22, 25, 27). The explication for *molodec*<sub>3</sub> as a term of reference (as in examples 6, 7, 13, 14, 21, 23, 24, 26, 28) would differ from this one in the component (a) – I think like this about this person. Also in other lines of the explication ‘you’ would be replaced with ‘this person’.

This explication can be represented in Russian NSM as follows:

- [A1] *Ty - molodec*<sub>3</sub>  
 (a) ja dumaju tak teper’:  
 (b) ty sdelal čto-to očen’ xorošee  
 (c) ne vse ljudi mogut sdelat’ čto-to takoe  
 (d) potomu čto ja znaju, čto ty èto sdelal, ja znaju čto-to očen’ xorošee o tebe  
 (e) kogda ja tak o tebe dumaju, ja čuvstvuju čto-to očen’ xorošee  
 (f) ja xoču skazat’ o tebe čto-to očen’ xorošee poètomu

## 4. *Umnica*

### 4.1. Semantic derivation and polysemy

The word *umnica* is polysemous. I agree with Levontina (2004) that *umnica* has two meanings. *Umnica*<sub>1</sub> means, roughly speaking, “a clever person who is liked by the speaker” and is used to characterize a person in general, as in (29):

- (29) *On ved’ byl umnica, talantlivyj čelovek, oficer...*  
 He, after all, was *umnica*, a talented person, an officer...

In its second meaning – *umnica*<sub>2</sub> – it used to praise a person for a certain deed, but not as a person’s characteristic in general. This meaning will be discussed further in the paper.

The word *umnica* derives from the adjective *umnyj* – a culture- and language-specific word which meaning overlaps with the meanings of ‘clever’, ‘wise’, ‘intelligent’, and ‘sensible’ in English. The semantics of the word *umnyj* is important in order to understand the meaning of *umnica*<sub>2</sub>. *Umnyj* is someone who can think well about many things and because of this behave and do things well. Boguslavskaja (2004) also writes that a person can be called *umnyj* on the basis of his or her everyday behavior. The meaning of *umnyj* can be represented as follows:

- [B] *X – umnyj čelovek* (*X – umnyj* person)  
 (a) person X can think well about many things  
 (b) because of this, X can do many things well  
 (c) people think: it is good if a person can be like this

The semantic part that is shared by the words *umnyj* and *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is that a person gets praised for good thinking which results in performing good actions.

#### 4.2. The semantics of *umnica*<sub>2</sub>

Semantically, *umnica*<sub>2</sub> and *molodec*<sub>3</sub> differ in the reasons for praise and in the speaker's attitude. *Molodec*<sub>2</sub>, as it was shown in the previous section, can be used to praise someone for physical as well as mental achievements, whereas *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is used to praise a person for good results achieved due to good thinking. Levontina (2004) notes rightly that fans when praising their favorite team for scoring a goal can scan *Molodcy!* (plural of *molodec*). It is impossible to use *umnicy* (*umnica*.PL) in this situation because *umnica*<sub>2</sub> cannot be used to praise positive results achieved due to physical ability only. However, *umnica*<sub>2</sub> can be used to praise not intellectual abilities only. The good thinking of *umnica*<sub>2</sub> cannot be abstract, but it should be applied to some performance. Examples (30) and (31) illustrate how *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is used to praise someone for giving a witty reply or suggestion which has a practical application.

- (30) - *A čto vy delaete, esli obožžetes'?* *Kakoe est' narodnoe sredstvo?* – *Sljuna?*  
 – *predpoložil ja.* – *Umnica! Vot imenno, sljuna! ... moja dogadlivost' nasčet*  
*sljuna očen' ponravilas' staruxe, i ona rasxvalivala menja ...*  
 - And what do you do if you burn yourself? What folk remedy is there? –  
 Saliva? – I suggested. – *Umnica!* Right, saliva! ... the old woman liked my  
 shrewdness about the saliva very much, and she was praising me ...

In example (30) an old woman praises a boy for suggesting the right answer to her question. In example (31) a senior military person praises a young man who suggested a place to hide in a situation of danger:

- (31) - *Sprjatat'sja tut legko. Tam vsego metrax v pjatidesjati bylo to li ozero, to*  
*li boloto. V takuju žaru ono vysoxlo, no ostalis' kamyši, očen' vysokie.* –  
*Umnica, - v pervye poxvalil Zudina Devjatkin.*  
 - It is easy to hide here. There used to be a lake or a swamp fifty meters away  
 from here. It dried out in such hot weather, but there are very high canes left. –  
*Umnica,* - Deviatkin praised Zudin for the first time.

*Umnica*<sub>2</sub> can be used to characterize actions of a person that were clever and somewhat expected from the point of view of a more experienced person. As Levontina (2004: 543) writes, “*umnica* is used to nominate a person who behaves well or in the right way... *umnica*, most likely, implies that a person is praised for meeting expectations of normal behavior.” Such case can be illustrated with the following

example (32) from a children's story in which mother-hedgehog praises her babies for a clever behavior in a situation of danger. Their behavior was good, but obviously safe from the point of view of their more experienced mother.

(32) *Zaletela k ežam osa. Ežata slepen'kie: nedelja ot rodu, no uslyšali nedobryj gud – v komočki svernulis'. – Ax, umnicy moi! – obradovalas' ežixa-mama. – Koljučki mjagon'kie, a za sebja ežiki uže gotovy postojat'.*

A wasp flew into a hedgehogs' place. The small hedgehogs are blind, just one week old. But having heard a hostile buzz, they rolled themselves into balls. Wow, my *umnica*.PL! – happily exclaimed Mother-Hedgehog. – The spikes are still soft, but the small hedgehogs are ready to stand for themselves.

Other examples can be quoted to show that *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is used sometimes to praise a person who behaves in a way that another person wants him or her to behave. In the following examples *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is used between adults: in example (33) a woman praises her friend for not getting angry; in example (34) husband praises his wife for cooking dinner for unexpected guests; in example (35) a woman praises her lover in her thoughts for expressing his love in the way she anticipates and hopes for; in example (36) a man praises his sister for coming to visit him.

(33) *Krepko uxvativ Strigunkova za lokot', Maja skazala...: - Ne rasserdilsja? Vot i umnica.*

Having grasped Strigunkov firmly around his elbow, Maja said: - You didn't get angry, did you? – So (you are) *umnica*.

(34) - *Ty nam v gostinoj nakryla? – sprosil Maksim, celuja ženu v ščeku. – Umnica.*

Did you lay the table in the drawing room for us? – asked Maksim kissing his wife on the cheek. – *Umnica*.

(35)... *Vse bylo uže ustroeno v ee žizni, vse cvelo, byl porjadok, obrazovalos' glavnoe: vsegda vmeste s Samsonom. Čerez mnogo časov on priexal pod okno i prosvistal: "Ax, net sil snesti razluku", umnica.*

... Everything was already decided in her life, everything was blossoming, was in order, and the main thing emerged: always to be together with Samson. In many hours he came under her window and whistled: "I can't bear the separation", *umnica*.

(36) *Medeja ... ne uspela ešče vstat', kogda on sgreb ee v oxapku, podnjaj, prižal k sebe, kak rebenka: - Sestrušen'ka, umnica, priexala!*

Medeja ... didn't yet have time to get up, when he threw his arms around her, raised, cuddled her like a child: Dear sister, *umnica*, came!

The use of *umnica*<sub>2</sub> as praise in situations when a person expects a certain behavior from the addressee explains why *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is often used by a person of an older age or of

a higher status. For this reason, *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is usually not used to someone older. In this aspect *umnica*<sub>2</sub> differs from *molodec*<sub>3</sub>, which, as discussed earlier, implies equality between the speaker and the addressee.

The presence of the component of ‘acting according with the wish of the speaker’ in the semantic structure of *umnica*<sub>2</sub> explains the possibility of its use in an imperative construction *bud’ umnicej* ‘be *umnica*’, as in the following examples:

(37) *Bud’te umnicej i ne pejte ničego sliškom na svad’be.*  
Be *umnica* and don’t drink too much at the wedding.

(38) *A teper’, - skazal on, podxodja k dočeri i gladja ee po golove, - perestan’ plakat’, uspokajsja i bud’ umnica.*  
And now, - he said approaching his daughter and stroking her head, - stop crying, calm down, and be *umnica*.

*Bud’ umnicej* sounds like a request: the speaker asks the addressee to behave in a way he or she wants. <sup>2</sup>*Bud’ molodcom* ‘be *molodec*’ is anomalous because in *molodec*<sub>3</sub> there are no semantic components which can be considered to be a reason for a request.

At the same time *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is a very affectionate way to praise another person. As the previously quoted examples suggest, the use of *umnica*<sub>2</sub> signifies a very affectionate attitude between the two people who are either close friends, spouses, lovers, a brother and a sister, or a parent and a child. *Umnica*<sub>2</sub> is commonly used with the possessive pronoun *moj/moja* ‘my.MASC/my.FEM’. By the use of this pronoun the speaker shows that the addressee belongs to his or her private sphere. It emphasizes the positive emotional attitude of the speaker and shows a close relationship between them. Examples (39-44) illustrate how *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is used with possessive pronouns.

(39) - *Mam, smotri, ja pervoe mesto zanjal! – voskliknet Aleša. – Smotri, kakaja krasivaja gramota! – Umnica moj, - skážet mama, poceluet Alešu v lob.*  
- Mom, look, I got the first prize! – Alesha would exclaim. – Look, what a beautiful certificate! – *Umnica* my, - mother would say and kiss Alesha on the forehead.

(40) *Devočka iz igrušečnoj lejki polivala cvety. – Umnica ty moja! – govorila babuška.*  
A girl was watering flowers from a tiny watering-pot. – You are my *umnica*! – said grandmother.

(41) - *Raj u tebjja, moja umnica, - govorila ... njanja.*  
- Your place is heaven, my *umnica*, - said ... nanny.

(42) *Dočen’ka premiju polučila, takuju rubašečku podarila, umnica moja.*  
Dear daughter received a premium, bought this shirt, *umnica* my.

(43) *Muročka, umnica moja ... Ona malen'kix žaleet. ... Ona ego ne obidit.*  
*Murochka, umnica my... She pities small ones ... She will not hurt him.*

(44) *Ty moja umnica, - skazal Ivan Dmitrievič. – Ty lučše vsej.*  
 You are my *umnica*, - said Ivan Dmitrievich. – You are better than anyone.

Unlike *umnica*<sub>2</sub>, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> is not commonly used with a possessive pronoun, which suggests that it is a more 'distant' and 'detached' way of praise.

Using simple universal concepts, we can propose the following explication of *umnica*<sub>2</sub>:

- [C] *Ty - umnica*<sub>2</sub> [you are *umnica*<sub>2</sub>]
- (a) I think like this now:
  - (b) you did something good
  - (c) a person can't do something like this  
if this person doesn't think very well
  - (d) when you do something, I want you to do it in this way
  - (e) because you did this, people can now know that you can think very well
  - (f) when I think about you like this, I feel something very good
  - (g) I feel something good towards you
  - (h) I want to say something good about you because of this

In this explication component (a) stands for the cognitive basis of the praise word and presents the scenario from the point of view of the speaker. Component (b) shows that another person did something good, and component (c) explains that it was done due to good thinking. The 'parental' attitude of the speaker is reflected in the component (d) which shows that the speaker wants another person to behave in such a way. Such phrasing of this component explains why *umnica*<sub>2</sub> cannot be applied to someone older or of a higher status. Component (e) shows that this action of the person reveals to other people his or her ability to think well and explains the social acceptance of such behavior. The realization of the success of the action of another person leads to the state of emotional satisfaction (component f) and a positive affectionate attitude towards another person (component g). Because of this realization and experience of these feelings the speaker wants to say something good about it to that person (component g).

This explication can be rendered in Russian as well:

- [C1] *Ty – umnica*<sub>2</sub>
- (a) ja dumaju tak teper':
  - (b) ty sdelał čto-to očen' xorošee
  - (c) čelovek ne možeť sdelať čto-to takoe,  
elsi etot čelovek ne dumaet očen' xorošo
  - (d) potomu čto ty eto sdelał, ljudi teper' moguť znat',  
čto ty možeš' očen' xorošo dumat'

- (e) *kogda ty čto-to delaeš', ja xoču čtoby ty èto delal takim obrazom*
- (f) *kogda ja tak o tebe dumaju, ja čuvstvuju čto-to očen' xorošee*
- (g) *ja čuvstvuju čto-to xorošee k tebe*
- (h) *ja xoču skazat' čto-to xorošee o tebe poètomu*

## 5. *Molodec*<sub>3</sub> and *umnica*<sub>2</sub> compared

Now that we have explicated *molodec*<sub>3</sub> and *umnica*<sub>2</sub> using the same set of universal concepts, it is easy to identify the semantic similarities and differences between them. The explications of both terms start with the component 'I think like this now' which explains the cognitive basis of praise words. They also share the component of acknowledging a good action of the referent – 'you did something good'. In the case of *molodec*<sub>3</sub>, this component is intensified by the element 'very' and is presented as 'you did something very good'. Such wording of the component shows that from the point of view of the speaker *molodec*<sub>3</sub> praises someone for an outstanding actions, and this line in the explication is supported by component (c), which explains the outstanding character of this action – 'not many people can do something like this'.

The explication of *umnica*<sub>2</sub> contains component (c) – 'a person can't do something like this if this person doesn't think very well' – which explains that this word is used to praise people whose achievements result from a certain way of thinking. This line excludes achievements of physical character only. There is no such or similar component in *molodec*<sub>3</sub> because this word can be used as praise for achievements of various types. Also unlike *molodec*<sub>3</sub>, *umnica*<sub>2</sub> has component (d) 'when you do something, I want you to do it in this way', which reflects the idea that this word is commonly used by someone who is more knowledgeable and experienced than the addressee.

Both explications reflect the idea that the performed action of another person can make other people think good things about this person. For *molodec*<sub>3</sub> this idea is reflected in component (d) 'because I know that you did this, I know something very good about you', which states that the speaker thinks well about this person. Therefore, it presents this word as an 'objective' way of praise. In *umnica*<sub>2</sub> component (e) - 'because you did this, people can now know that you can think well' - provides reference to a possible positive evaluation of the performed action by other people, although limiting it only to the awareness of mental abilities of the person. Therefore, *umnica*<sub>2</sub> contains reference to more socially valued modes of behavior than *molodec*<sub>3</sub>.

Both words have the component that reflects the speaker's positive feeling, which is caused by the realization of the good behavior of the referent - 'when I think like this about you, I feel something very good', as well as the component of the desire of verbal expression of the praise - 'I want to say something good to you about you because of this'. However, they differ in the emotional attitude of the speaker. While both words signify a positive emotional state of the praising person, *umnica*<sub>2</sub> has an additional component, which reflects a positive attitude of this person, that is component (g) – 'I



feel something good towards you'. The presence of this component shows that *umnica*<sub>2</sub> is a more affectionate way of praise than *molodec*<sub>3</sub>.

## 6. Cultural features of meaning in *molodec*<sub>3</sub> and *umnica*<sub>2</sub>

The justification of the relation of these words to other Russian cultural words can be found in their common collocations (albeit in a different meaning). The word *molodec* can be used in such collocations as *udal' molodeckaja* 'youthful daring' and *molodec-udalec* '*molodec* who performs *udal'*'. Both these collocations relate the word *molodec* (or the adjective *molodeckij* which derives from it) to the word *udal'* 'daring/boldness'. This word is regarded by some scholars to be a cultural key word of Russian (cf. Šmelev 2005). Šmelev writes the following about *udal'* (p. 57):

This word is not used to talk about doing one's duty. It is suitable to characterize someone who acts against reason and by doing so performs actions that are impossible for other people to perform... At the same time the word *udal'* in Russian has a distinct positive evaluation.

Like *udal'*, *molodec*<sub>3</sub> positively evaluates actions that not every person can perform and that require some outstanding ability. In these words the Russian language expresses a positive attitude towards ingenuity, courage, and doing good.

*Umnica*<sub>2</sub> evaluates positively a somewhat different scenario of behavior. *Umnica*<sub>2</sub> is someone who behaves in a clever way and within socially accepted norms. It is linked with the idea of harmony among people which is achieved by thought. *Umnica* is related to the concepts *um* and *razum* 'reason/mind/intellect' and is used in compounds *umnica-razumnica* 'clever and reasonable girl' and *umnica-krasavica* 'clever and beautiful girl', which are used to females only.

Thus, the use of simple universal concepts allowed me to propose comprehensive semantic explications of the Russian praise words *molodec*<sub>3</sub> and *umnica*<sub>2</sub>. The implementation of a refined methodology also enabled me to show cultural features of the meanings of these words by relating them to some Russian cultural themes.

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