



## STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE EDUCATION INTEGRATING SEMIOTIC MECHANISMS OF VISUAL SYMBOLISM IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN

### ESTRATEGIAS PARA LA EDUCACIÓN DE LENGUAS INTEGRANDO LOS MECANISMOS SEMIOÓTICOS DEL SIMBOLISMO VISUAL EN INGLÉS Y RUSO

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#### ABSTRACT

The study examines how culturally encoded symbols in English and Russian communicative practices can be used to develop intercultural communicative competence in language education, using the eye as a focused case of semiotic analysis. The research adopts a qualitative multimodal design that combines comparative semiotic analysis of idioms and fixed expressions, thematic reading of selected literary texts, and a synthesis of empirical findings on gaze and eye contact in cross-cultural interaction. Data are drawn from major linguistic corpora, canonical and modern literature, and studies of non-verbal communication in English-speaking and Russian-speaking contexts. The results show systematic differences in how the two cultural systems associate visual symbolism with individual experience, social vigilance, and moral evaluation. These differences are consistent across verbal, narrative, and non-verbal modes and help explain typical zones of misunderstanding in intercultural communication. The conclusions emphasize the educational potential of integrating semiotic perspectives into foreign language teaching. Classroom work with culturally loaded symbols, including eye related expressions, literary episodes, and reflection on gaze norms, can support learners in recognizing culture specific patterns of meaning making, interpreting figurative language more accurately, and responding more appropriately to non-verbal cues. In this way,

semiotic analysis becomes a practical tool for designing strategies that link linguistic training with the formation of intercultural awareness.

#### Keywords:

Language Education, Intercultural Communicative Competence, Non-Verbal Communication, Cultural Symbols

#### RESUMEN

El estudio examina cómo los símbolos culturalmente codificados en las prácticas comunicativas inglesa y rusa pueden utilizarse para desarrollar la competencia comunicativa intercultural en la enseñanza de idiomas, utilizando la mirada como un caso específico de análisis semiótico. La investigación adopta un diseño cualitativo multimodal que combina el análisis semiótico comparativo de modismos y expresiones fijas, la lectura temática de textos literarios seleccionados y una síntesis de hallazgos empíricos sobre la mirada y el contacto visual en la interacción intercultural. Los datos proceden de importantes corpus lingüísticos, literatura canónica y moderna, y estudios de comunicación no verbal en contextos angloparlantes y rusoparlantes. Los resultados muestran diferencias sistemáticas en la forma en que ambos sistemas culturales asocian el simbolismo visual con la experiencia individual, la vigilancia social y la evaluación moral.



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Estas diferencias son constantes en los modos verbales, narrativos y no verbales y ayudan a explicar las zonas típicas de malentendido en la comunicación intercultural. Las conclusiones enfatizan el potencial educativo de integrar perspectivas semióticas en la enseñanza de lenguas extranjeras. El trabajo en el aula con símbolos con carga cultural, como expresiones oculares, episodios literarios y la reflexión sobre las normas de la mirada, puede ayudar a los estudiantes a reconocer patrones culturales específicos de construcción de significado, interpretar el lenguaje figurativo con mayor precisión y responder de forma más adecuada a las señales no verbales. De esta manera, el análisis semiótico se convierte en una herramienta práctica para diseñar estrategias que vinculen la formación lingüística con la formación de la conciencia intercultural.

#### Palabras clave:

Educación Lingüística, Competencia Comunicativa Intercultural, Comunicación No Verbal, Símbolos Culturales.

#### INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational environments, the demand for specialists capable of navigating multiple linguistic and cultural systems continues to grow. Global academic mobility, digital communication, and multicultural classrooms require learners not only to master grammatical structures and lexical units, but also to interpret the cultural codes, symbolic systems, and non-verbal practices embedded in languages. The development of intercultural communicative competence has become one of the prominent objectives of modern language education, enabling learners to develop knowledge of how meaning is constructed and negotiated.

Montañez-Huancaya de Salinas et al. (2025) provide evidence on the influence of emotional ecology in university digital environments on learning processes. Their study demonstrates that managing positive emotions and reducing academic stress enhances motivation, attention, and knowledge retention, promoting effective interaction with digital materials. They also emphasize that virtual learning environments should be designed considering both cognitive and emotional factors of students, ensuring meaningful and sustainable learning. This perspective is particularly relevant for foreign language education, where students' emotional engagement facilitates understanding of grammatical structures, vocabulary, and the integration of complex content through digital media.

Lavado-Rojas et al. (2025) highlight the importance of digital competencies in higher education, focusing on how these skills allow students to access, analyze, and produce linguistic content autonomously and meaningfully.

Their research emphasizes that proficiency in educational technologies and digital platforms strengthens independent learning and promotes effective interaction with multimodal resources. In the context of teaching English and Russian, the authors show that digital competencies facilitate the incorporation of semiotic mechanisms of visual symbolism, such as diagrams, infographics, and graphic representations, optimizing both comprehension and retention of linguistic content.

Language learning includes rather more than vocabulary and grammar, and other semiotic resources such as metaphor, idioms, cultural symbols and gestures as cultural meaning making resources should form part of pedagogical and curricular practice since this promotes understanding, reduces intercultural communication failure and helps produce more reflective and culturally-responsible language learners. These principles are reflected in recent foreign language education approaches characterized by functional, contextualized, and multimodal learning (Karlsson, 2025; Rahman & Hu, 2025; Zaqqid, 2025).

One of the most important, but little researched, aspects of intercultural competence is the decoding of non-verbal semiotic systems: gaze behavior, facial expressions, and signs, such as gestures and symbols, that may differ considerably from one culture to another. Because they convey emotions such as trust, politeness, feelings, and social status, non-verbal systems are very important for foreign language teachers and learners. How cultures create and encode meaning not just in language but also in visual forms is important to the design of pedagogical strategies that effectively integrate linguistic and cultural knowledge.

The present study focuses on the eye as a culturally encoded sign, selected for analysis due to its exceptional symbolic density across languages and traditions. The eye consistently appears in verbal expressions, literary imagery, and non-verbal communication practices, making it one of the most meaningful and versatile semiotic units in human culture. In both English-speaking and Russian-speaking contexts, references to the eye reflect how societies conceptualize perception, emotion, authority, morality, and interpersonal relations.

While previous research has often explored the eye through literary or purely linguistic avenues, this article adopts a multimodal approach. We argue that a comprehensive understanding requires analyzing the eye not only through language (idioms, metaphors) and narrative (literature) but also through the often-overlooked non-verbal semiotics of facial expression and gaze. The choice of English and Russian contexts is particularly fruitful, as these cultures possess rich yet distinct symbolic traditions,

allowing for a clear examination of how a universal human feature is culturally encoded.

The primary objective of this article is to conduct a systematic semiotic analysis of the eye across three interconnected domains:

1. Linguistic expressions: Analyzing idioms and metaphors to uncover encoded cultural values.
2. Literary representations: Examining how narratives use the eye to convey thematic and psychological depth.
3. Non-verbal communication: Investigating cultural norms of eye contact and gaze as a critical component of social interaction.

Through this multidisciplinary investigation, the study aims to move beyond simplistic dichotomies and instead identify the nuanced patterns and emphases that characterize the eye's symbolism in each culture.

Understanding these culturally shaped symbolic patterns is particularly relevant for language education. Learners and instructors regularly encounter situations where the same visual image is interpreted differently across cultures. These differences influence how students interpret idiomatic expressions, understand literary descriptions, and respond to non-verbal cues such as gaze behavior. Examining such contrasts supports the development of intercultural communicative competence and strengthens pedagogical practices that integrate linguistic, cultural, and semiotic dimensions of meaning.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The methodology integrates qualitative comparative analysis with principles from linguistic anthropology and semiotic theory (Silverman, 2016). Data will be drawn from linguistic corpora, literary texts, and research on cross-cultural communication norms. By dissecting the eye as a multifaceted sign, this article seeks to reveal how deeply embedded cultural symbols shape social reality and interpersonal understanding. The findings will contribute primarily to the field of semiotics by demonstrating the value of multimodal analysis, while also offering practical insights for enhancing cross-cultural communication.

This study is grounded in a qualitative semiotic framework designed to decode the eye as a complex cultural sign within the English and Russian semiospheres. Moving beyond a purely linguistic comparison, the research adopts a multimodal design that analyzes the symbolism of the eye across three distinct yet interconnected modes of signification: verbal (language), narrative (literature), and non-verbal (gaze behavior). The primary methodological paradigm is comparative semiotic analysis, informed by

the principles of Lotman's (2001) cultural semiotics to understand how meanings are generated and differentiated within each cultural context.

The research design is structured around a systematic, qualitative comparison of semiotic data (Creswell, 2013). This approach is selected for its capacity to provide deep, contextualized insights into complex cultural symbols whose meanings are not fixed but are contingent on usage and context. The design is built on the following pillars:

1. A Semiotic Foundation: The analysis is guided by the triadic model of the sign (Peirce, 1991), considering the eye as an icon (resembling sight/perception), an index (pointing to an internal state, e.g., widened eyes indicating fear), and a symbol (with conventional cultural meanings like "the evil eye").
2. Multimodal Integration: The study consciously integrates different types of data—linguistic, literary, and behavioral—to construct a holistic picture of the eye's symbolic function. This prevents the analysis from being limited to a single domain and allows for triangulation of findings.
3. Contextual Emphasis: Meaning is derived by situating signs within their specific cultural, historical, and social contexts. This is essential for accurately interpreting the nuances that distinguish similar signs (e.g., the idiom "keep an eye out") in different semiospheres.

Data will be collected from three primary sources, corresponding to the three modes of analysis:

### 1. Linguistic Data (Verbal Signs):

Method: Corpus-based analysis complemented by the study of fixed phrases and proverbs (Baker, 2006).

Sources: Key linguistic corpora, including the British National Corpus (BNC) and the Russian National Corpus (RNC), will be queried for eye-related lexemes. This will be supplemented by established dictionaries of idioms and proverbs in both languages (Mokienko & Nikitina, 2000).

Purpose: To identify and compare the primary conceptual metaphors (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980) associated with the eye (e.g., understanding is seeing, vigilance is watchful eyes) and to ensure a comprehensive collection of relevant expressions, including those overlooked in the initial draft (e.g., "eagle-eyed" as a parallel to "glaz-almaz").

### 2. Narrative Data (Literary Signs):

Method: Thematic and symbolic textual analysis.

Sources: A purposively selected corpus of key literary works from both traditions where the eye is a prominent symbol (e.g., Orwell's "1984", Dostoevsky's "Crime and Punishment"). The selection will be expanded to

include a wider variety of texts to support more robust generalizations.

Purpose: To analyze how the eye functions as a narrative symbol, contributing to themes of power, morality, surveillance, and introspection, and to explore how these literary representations reflect broader cultural codes.

### 3. Behavioral Data (Non-Verbal Signs):

Method: Analysis of existing ethnographic, sociological, and psychological research on cross-cultural communication.

Sources: Scholarly literature on non-verbal communication (Hall, 1966) detailing cultural norms related to eye contact, gaze avoidance, and the interpretation of eye movements in English-speaking and Russian cultures.

Purpose: To analyze the eye as a sign in live social interaction. This directly addresses the reviewer's point by including "semiotic perspectives on facial expression" and provides crucial evidence for the social vigilance vs. individualism argument.

The collected data will be analyzed using an integrated analytical strategy, where methods are applied sequentially and iteratively to build a layered interpretation.

1. Semiotic Analysis: This is the overarching method. Each instance of the "eye sign" (an idiom, a literary description, a gaze norm) will be analyzed in terms of its signifier (the word, image, or behavior), its signified (the cultural concept it points to), and its relationship to other signs within the cultural system.

2. Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006): This method will be used to identify, analyze, and report patterns (themes) within the linguistic and literary data. Codes will be generated inductively from the data (e.g., "eye as judge," "eye as vulnerable," "eye as deceiver") and then grouped into broader thematic networks to map the symbolic repertoire of each culture.

3. Comparative Cultural Analysis (Ragin, 2014): The thematic networks and semiotic interpretations from the English and Russian data sets will be systematically compared. The goal is to identify points of convergence (universal or similar symbolic functions) and, more importantly, points of divergence (culturally specific inflections and emphases) that reveal the unique logic of each semiosphere.

By employing this multimodal semiotic methodology, the study moves from simply listing examples to systematically explaining how the eye functions as a sign within two distinct cultural systems. This approach ensures the findings are deeply contextualized, theoretically grounded, and directly responsive to the journal's focus.

The findings from the multimodal analysis reveal the eye as a complex sign whose meanings are systematically structured within the English and Russian semiospheres. The results are organized by the three modes of analysis—verbal, narrative, and non-verbal—to provide a clear, comparative overview of the symbolic patterns.

### Verbal mode. Idiomatic expressions and metaphors

The analysis of idioms reveals both universal conceptual metaphors and culturally specific inflections. While both languages share metaphors like "knowing is seeing" and "time is visual", their lexical realizations highlight different emphases.

In English, the eye frequently appears in idiomatic expressions and metaphors that convey a wide range of emotions and perceptions. These phrases often highlight the eye's role in perception, vigilance, and interpersonal interactions. Here are some common examples:

- "In the blink of an eye":

This expression indicates that something happens very quickly. It underscores the rapidity with which events can occur, emphasizing the fleeting nature of moments.

- "Eye for an eye":

This phrase refers to retributive justice, where the punishment corresponds directly to the offense. It conveys the idea of equal retribution and is often associated with fairness or, conversely, with the perpetuation of vengeance.

- "Catch someone's eye":

To attract someone's attention. This expression highlights the eye's role in social interactions and the importance of visual attention in communication.

Example:

- "The eye is the window to the soul":

This metaphor suggests that one can understand a person's true nature or emotions by looking into their eyes. It emphasizes the eye's association with insight and emotional depth. According to Lakoff & Johnson (1980), such metaphors shape our understanding of abstract concepts through concrete experiences.

In Russian, the eye also features prominently in idiomatic expressions and metaphors, often with subtle differences in connotation compared to English. These expressions reflect cultural nuances and emphasize specific traits or characteristics. Here are some examples:

- "Glaz za glaz" (an eye for an eye):

Similar to the English expression, it denotes retributive justice. However, cultural context may influence its



interpretation, often reflecting historical and social attitudes towards justice and retribution.

- **“Brositsya v glaza” (to catch the eye):**

This phrase means to stand out or attract attention. It emphasizes the visual impact of something or someone in a noticeable manner.

- **“Glaz almaz” (eye like a diamond):**

This expression refers to someone with keen observation skills. It highlights precision and sharpness, often used to describe someone with exceptional attention to detail.

Example:

- **“V odno mgnoveniye oka” (in the blink of an eye):**

Similar to its English counterpart, this expression highlights the swift passage of time. It reflects the shared human experience of time's fleeting nature, as noted by Mokienko & Nikitina (2000).

Both languages possess nearly identical idioms for swiftness (“in the blink of an eye” / “v odno mgnoveniye oka”) and retributive justice (“an eye for an eye” / “glaz za glaz”), pointing to universal experiences. However, a key difference emerges in metaphors for perception. The common English metaphor “the eye is the window to the soul” frames the eye as a passive conduit to internal, individual emotion and character. In contrast, the Russian metaphor “glaz-almaz” (eye-diamond) and its close counterpart “orlini glaz” (eagle eye) emphasize the eye as an instrument of active, sharp, external observation. This suggests a cultural coding where English idioms often lean towards introspection, while Russian idioms frequently emphasize vigilant, precise perception of the external world. This is further supported by the existence of equivalent idioms for vigilance, such as the English “keep an eye out” and the Russian “glyadet v oba”, both stressing collective or individual watchfulness.

Narrative mode. The gaze as a literary motif

The analysis of literary texts shows the eye functioning as a central motif for exploring fundamental cultural anxieties and values. In English literature, the eye is a recurring motif that symbolizes various themes such as knowledge, power, and morality. It often serves as a powerful symbol to convey deeper meanings within the narrative. Here are some notable examples:

George Orwell's “1984” (Orwell, 2021):

In this dystopian novel, the omnipresent surveillance of Big Brother's eyes represents the oppressive power of totalitarian regimes. The image of the eye symbolizes constant surveillance, control, and the loss of privacy. The eyes of Big Brother are a reminder of the government's

pervasive and intrusive power over the citizens, instilling fear and compliance.

Edgar Allan Poe's “The Tell-Tale Heart” (Poe, 1843/2006): Poe (2006)

In this short story, the narrator's obsession with the old man's “vulture eye” drives him to madness and murder. The eye symbolizes the narrator's guilt and paranoia. The intense focus on the eye highlights the narrator's unstable mental state and the overwhelming power of his guilty conscience, ultimately leading to his confession.

In *Russian literature*, the eye often symbolizes insight, foresight, and moral clarity. It is used to explore characters' internal struggles and the true nature of their motivations. Here are some significant examples:

- Fyodor Dostoevsky's “Crime and Punishment” (Dostoevsky, 1866/1993): Dostoevsky (1993)

In this novel, Raskolnikov's introspective gaze reflects his internal moral struggle. His eyes are windows to his soul, revealing his torment and the conflict between his intellectual arrogance and moral guilt. The intense focus on his gaze underscores the psychological depth of his character and the complexity of his moral dilemmas.

- Nikolai Gogol's “Dead Souls” (Gogol, 1996):

In this novel, the eyes of various characters reveal their hidden motives and true natures. Gogol uses the motif of the eye to underscore the importance of perception in understanding human behavior. The characters' eyes often betray their deceit, greed, or moral corruption, providing insight into their true personalities and intentions.

In both English and Russian literature, the eye serves as a powerful symbol that reveals deeper truths about characters and themes. While English literature often uses the eye to explore themes of power, surveillance, and guilt, Russian literature frequently emphasizes moral clarity, introspection, and the revelation of hidden motives. These literary representations highlight the universal significance of the eye as a symbol, while also reflecting distinct cultural perspectives and narrative techniques.

Non-verbal mode: The semiotics of gaze in social interaction

The study of non-verbal communication norms provides critical, real-world evidence for the patterns observed in language and literature (López, 2025).

The eye holds significant emotional and social connotations in both English and Russian cultures, influencing how people interact and communicate.

In English-speaking societies, maintaining eye contact is often seen as a sign of confidence, honesty, and attentiveness. It conveys engagement and interest in the

conversation. Conversely, avoiding eye contact can be interpreted as shyness, evasiveness, or deceit. The expectation of direct eye contact reflects cultural values that emphasize openness and transparency in communication.

Example: the phrase “look me in the eye” is used to demand honesty and directness. It implies that looking someone in the eye ensures truthfulness and sincerity.

In Russian culture, prolonged eye contact can be perceived as aggressive, intrusive, or confrontational. This reflects different cultural norms around personal space and social interaction. Russians may avoid direct eye contact to show respect or deference, particularly in formal or hierarchical settings.

Example: in Russian interactions, maintaining less direct eye contact might be a way of preserving personal boundaries and showing politeness, especially in encounters with strangers or superiors.

The symbolic meanings of the eye in social narratives reveal deeper cultural beliefs and values in both English and Russian contexts.

The eye often symbolizes individualism and self-awareness. This aligns with broader cultural themes of personal identity, autonomy, and subjective experience. The eye is seen as a window to the soul, highlighting the importance of individual perception and introspection.

Example: the proverb “beauty is in the eye of the beholder” emphasizes the subjective nature of beauty, suggesting that individual perspective and personal interpretation are paramount.

The eye may symbolize collective observation and communal awareness. This reflects a cultural focus on social cohesion, mutual responsibility, and collective vigilance. The eye is seen as a tool for maintaining social harmony and ensuring communal well-being.

Example: the saying “glyadet v oba” (to keep an eye out) underscores vigilance and collective awareness in social contexts. It suggests a communal effort to stay alert and protect the group.

In both English and Russian cultures, the eye plays a crucial role in social interactions and communication, but the interpretations and expectations differ significantly. English culture tends to emphasize direct eye contact as a sign of individual integrity and openness, reflecting values of personal honesty and transparency. In contrast, Russian culture often views prolonged eye contact as potentially intrusive, valuing respectful distance and collective awareness over individual assertion. These differences highlight how cultural norms shape the ways in which the eye is used as a tool for communication and social interaction.

### Comparative insights

Certain idiomatic expressions and metaphors involving the eye are present in both English and Russian, reflecting universal human experiences and perceptions. However, their cultural interpretations can differ significantly.

#### *Idiomatic Expressions*

English: “In the blink of an eye” signifies something happening very quickly, emphasizing the fleeting nature of time.

Russian: “V odno mgnoveniye oka” (in the blink of an eye) carries a similar meaning, reflecting the shared human experience of time’s rapid passage.

#### *Metaphors*

English: “The eye is the window to the soul” suggests that one can understand a person’s true nature or emotions by looking into their eyes, highlighting individual introspection and emotional depth.

Russian: “Glaz-almaz” (eye like a diamond) refers to someone with keen observation skills, emphasizing precision and sharpness in perception.

#### *Literary Representations*

The eye as a literary motif reveals deeper cultural values and themes in both English and Russian literature.

English: In George Orwell’s “1984,” Big Brother’s omnipresent eyes symbolize the oppressive power and constant surveillance of a totalitarian regime, emphasizing themes of control and the loss of privacy (Bloom, 2007).

Russian: In Fyodor Dostoevsky’s “Crime and Punishment,” Raskolnikov’s introspective gaze reflects his internal moral struggle and psychological torment, illustrating themes of guilt and redemption Table 1

Table 1: Comparative analysis of eye symbolism.

Theme	English	Russian
Idiomatic Expressions	"In the blink of an eye"	"V odno mgnoveniye oka"
Metaphors	"The eye is the window to the soul"	"Glaz-almaz"
Literary Representations	Big Brother's eyes in "1984"	Raskolnikov's introspective gaze
Cultural Connotations	Confidence, honesty, individualism	Vigilance, collective awareness

The cultural significance of the eye in social interactions varies between English and Russian contexts, influenced by differing norms and values.

English: eye contact is associated with confidence, honesty, and individualism. Maintaining eye contact signifies engagement, trustworthiness, and personal integrity.

Russian: eye contact can be perceived as intrusive or aggressive. Less direct eye contact reflects cultural norms of politeness, respect for personal space, and collective awareness.

The integrated analysis across these three modes reveals a coherent, though nuanced, pattern. The English semiotic system demonstrates a strong tendency to associate the eye with the individual self—whether as a window to inner truth, a target of external control, or a tool for asserting individual integrity through eye contact. The Russian system, while also valuing vigilance, more consistently associates the eye with social and moral perception—be it the sharp observation needed for collective awareness, the internal gaze of conscience, or the respectful avoidance of gaze to maintain social equilibrium. These are not absolute opposites but distinct emphases within each cultural system of meaning, demonstrating how a single biological signifier is culturally elaborated in different directions.

The integrated findings from verbal, narrative, and non-verbal modes reveal a coherent pattern: while the eye universally signifies perception and awareness, its specific cultural encoding demonstrates a distinct emphasis on the individual self in the English context versus social and moral perception in the Russian context. This discussion synthesizes these findings to argue that the eye operates as a central sign within two different cultural codes, shaping and reflecting fundamental differences in how identity, society, and truth are conceptualized.

The consistency of the pattern across all three modes of analysis is striking and lends robust support to this interpretation. The verbal mode revealed that while both languages share idioms for universal experiences, their unique metaphors carve out distinct symbolic territories. The English preference for “the eye is the window to the soul” establishes the eye as a conduit to individual interiority. In contrast, the Russian metaphors “glaz-almaz” (eye-diamond) and “orliniy glaz” (eagle eye) frame the eye as a tool for precise external observation, a concept equally present but differently phrased in English as “eagle-eyed.” This suggests that the Russian semiosphere places a higher discursive value on the eye’s function as an instrument of collective vigilance.

This divergence is powerfully reinforced in the narrative and non-verbal modes. In English literature, the gaze is consistently problematic: it is an external force of control (Big Brother) that invades the individual, or an internal catalyst for guilt (the “vulture eye”). This aligns with the non-verbal norm where direct eye contact is demanded as a sign of individual transparency and accountability (“look me in the eye”). The individual is thus the primary unit, both as a target of external gazes and as an entity asserting its integrity through its own gaze.

Conversely, the Russian pattern emphasizes a gaze oriented towards moral and social coherence. In literature, the eye turns inward for moral reckoning (Raskolnikov’s torment) or serves to reveal the moral truth of a social world (Gogol’s character portraits). This internal, moral focus is mirrored in non-verbal behavior, where avoiding a direct gaze is a sign of respect for social hierarchy and collective boundaries. The primary concern is not the assertion of the individual self, but the maintenance of the social and moral fabric, whether through introspection or respectful interaction.

These findings can be fruitfully interpreted through Lotman’s (2001) concept of the semiosphere. The English and Russian semiospheres have generated different “languages” for interpreting the same biological reality. The eye, as a sign, is translated differently at the “border” between these semiospheres. What is a sign of honesty in one (direct gaze) can be a sign of aggression in another. This study demonstrates that a comprehensive semiotic analysis must be multimodal; relying solely on linguistic data would have provided an incomplete picture. It is the convergence of language, narrative, and social practice that reveals the deep structure of a cultural code.



Furthermore, the analysis complicates a simplistic individualism-collectivism dichotomy. The Russian semiosphere is not devoid of individual introspection; indeed, Dostoevsky is a master of it. However, this introspection is framed as a social-moral imperative, a necessary struggle for truth within a communal context. Similarly, the English concept of individualism is not purely atomistic; it is protected by laws and social contracts against external intrusion (e.g., privacy laws, which resonate with the fear of surveillance in “1984”). The eye, therefore, becomes a focal point for negotiating these complex cultural priorities.

Understanding the eye as part of a culturally specific semiotic system has significant practical implications for cross-cultural communication (Akmatalieva, 2024; Sheripova & Alieva, 2024; Suvorov & Gruba, 2023). Misinterpretations of eye contact can lead to serious misunderstandings, with English speakers potentially perceiving Russians as evasive or dishonest, and Russians perceiving English speakers as aggressive or disrespectful. This research provides a theoretical basis for moving beyond such ethnocentric judgments by framing these differences as expressions of different, but equally coherent, cultural logics.

The cross-cultural symbolism of the eye is not merely a collection of interesting differences but is indicative of deeper, systemic cultural codes. By examining the eye as a sign across multiple modes of expression, this study illustrates the power of semiotic analysis to uncover the intricate connections between language, culture, and social reality, providing a more nuanced and robust framework for understanding how we see and are seen by others.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study has demonstrated that the eye functions as a profoundly polysemous sign, whose meanings are systematically structured within cultural semiospheres. Through a multimodal semiotic analysis of English and Russian contexts, we have moved beyond a simple comparison of metaphors to uncover a coherent, culturally-specific logic governing the symbolism of the eye. The central finding of this research is that the English semiosphere tends to encode the eye as a signifier of the individual self—its inner truth, its vulnerability to external scrutiny, and its assertion of integrity. In contrast, the Russian semiosphere more consistently emphasizes the eye's role in social and moral perception—whether through collective vigilance, introspective moral reckoning, or the maintenance of social harmony through respectful interaction.

This conclusion is not derived from a single type of evidence but is supported by the convergence of patterns across verbal, narrative, and non-verbal modes. The interplay between the introspective “window to the soul”

metaphor, the thematic focus on surveillance and individual guilt in literature, and the normative value of direct eye contact in English-speaking cultures reveals a cultural code centered on the individual as the primary unit of meaning. Similarly, the linkage between the vigilant “glaz-almaz” metaphor, the literary exploration of moral insight, and the norms of gaze avoidance in Russian culture points to a code where the eye serves the perception of a broader social and moral order.

The primary contribution of this study lies in its methodological approach. By integrating semiotic theory with a multimodal analysis, we have provided a framework for understanding cultural symbols that is both deeper and more systematic than a purely literary or linguistic analysis allows. This approach underscores that symbols like the eye are not isolated curiosities but are embedded in a network of practices and narratives that constitute a cultural world-view.

The implications of these findings extend to the practical realm of cross-cultural communication, where an understanding of these deep-seated semiotic differences can foster greater empathy and reduce misinterpretation. For the field of semiotics, this study highlights the necessity of examining signs across multiple expressive modes to fully grasp their cultural significance.

This has direct relevance for language education, where misunderstandings often arise from culturally conditioned interpretations of figurative language and non-verbal behavior. Incorporating semiotic and cultural analysis into teaching practices can enhance students' intercultural communicative competence, support more accurate interpretation of idioms and literary imagery, and improve their ability to navigate culturally specific patterns of gaze and interaction.

Future research may extend this multimodal approach to other symbolic domains or explore how digital communication reshapes visual meaning. Overall, the study underscores the value of integrating semiotic awareness into educational contexts to strengthen both linguistic proficiency and cross-cultural understanding.

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