

## LINGUOCULTURAL FEATURES OF EPIGRAPHS IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE

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**Abstract:** The article examines epigraphs as a significant element of literary texts, endowed with linguocultural potential. Their role in structuring literary works, expressing the author's stance, and creating intertextual connections is analyzed. Special attention is given to the sources of epigraphs, their functional load, and their reflection of the cultural codes embedded in Russian literature.

**Keywords:** epigraph, linguoculturology, intertextuality, cultural code, Russian literature, author's perspective, pragmalinguistics, literary text, cultural memory, intertextual connections.

**Аннотация:** В статье рассматриваются эпитафьи как значимый элемент художественного текста, обладающий лингвокультурным потенциалом. Анализируется их роль в структурировании произведения, формировании авторской позиции и создании межтекстовых связей. Особое внимание уделяется источникам эпитафьев, их функциональной нагрузке и отражению культурных кодов русской литературы.

**Ключевые слова:** эпитафья, лингвокультурология, интертекстуальность, культурный код, русская литература, авторская позиция, прагмалингвистика, литературный текст, культурная память, межтекстовые связи.

### Introduction

An **epigraph** is a brief quotation placed before a text or its section that guides the reader toward a certain interpretation of the work. It may be borrowed or original, religious or philosophical, but it always contains cultural information essential for understanding the main text. The linguocultural approach allows the epigraph to be viewed as a medium for conveying cultural values and concepts specific to a certain era and national mentality. This approach focuses on how language reflects, preserves, and transmits cultural values, norms, mentalities, and the historical experience of a people.

### 1. Epigraph as a Linguocultural Phenomenon

In Russian literature, the epigraph serves not only as a compositional or stylistic element but also as a marker of cultural meaning. It is capable of:

- conveying key ideas of the work;
- expressing the author's position;
- establishing intertextual connections with cultural heritage.

From a linguocultural perspective, the epigraph is a "text within a text," functioning as a mediator between the author, reader, and culture.

## 2. Culturally Significant Sources of Epigraphs in Russian Literary Tradition

Russian literature typically draws epigraphs from the following culturally resonant sources:

The Bible: Christian tradition, spiritual values, sacrifice.

Classical Antiquity (Homer, Virgil): Allusions to eternal themes, heroism, fate.

Russian Classics (Pushkin, Lermontov, Gogol): Literary self-reflection, continuity of tradition.

Folklore and Proverbs: Folk wisdom, ethnic identity.

Foreign Classics: Indication of the universality of the problem, cultural polyphony.

In linguocultural terms, epigraphs fulfill important functions that deepen the meaning of a literary text. They create intertextual ties, activate the cultural memory of the reader, and establish a dialogue with other meaningful sources. An epigraph may contain a cultural concept—such as fate, truth, love, or sin—thus defining the semantic core of the text. Often, it also conveys the author's ideological or philosophical position by using a cultural code as a form of implicit authorial speech. Furthermore, epigraphs possess evocative power, eliciting associations, emotional responses, and immersion into the cultural-semantic space of the text.

### Methodology

This research is based on methods of linguocultural analysis, including interpretation of texts within the context of cultural codes, intertextual connections, and the pragmatic intent of epigraphs. The primary corpus comprises epigraphs from works of Russian classical literature of the 19th–20th centuries, focusing primarily on Pushkin, Dostoevsky, Bulgakov, and others. Comparative-historical and semantic analyses are also applied.

Elements of discourse analysis are employed to view the epigraph as part of the author's strategy for engaging the reader and guiding the interpretative process. Contextual analysis reveals the functions of epigraphs within the structure of a literary work and their role in shaping thematic and generic unity. Hermeneutic and narratological approaches are used to uncover the deep meanings encoded in epigraphs and their relationship to the plot and composition.

Additionally, intertextual analysis helps trace how epigraphs enter into dialogue with other texts—literary, philosophical, religious, or historical. This is especially relevant for authors such as Dostoevsky and Bulgakov, whose epigraphs often reference the Bible, classical literature, or global cultural heritage.

The pragmalinguistic approach allows the epigraph to be considered a speech act performing a specific communicative function: expressive, appellative, interpretative, or manipulative. This approach reveals not only the semantic but also the functional features of epigraphs, their influence on the reader, and their role in shaping the interpretation of the main text.

The study also addresses the cultural concepts and dominant values of the period in which the work was created, allowing for a more accurate understanding of the epigraphs in historical context. This is particularly important when analyzing 19th-century authors whose literary creation interacted closely with religious, philosophical, and sociopolitical thought.

Typological analysis is used to classify epigraphs by source (quotational, original, borrowed), function (semantic, compositional, pragmatic), and role in the structure of the work.

## Results

As a result of the analysis, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Epigraphs serve as markers of concepts that dominate the cultural consciousness of the corresponding era [5];
- In Russian literature, epigraphs are predominantly borrowed from religious (especially biblical) sources, as well as from Western European philosophical and artistic traditions;
- Epigraphs often have a distinctly moral and philosophical orientation and play a key role in the interpretation of the text [7].
- The epigraph functions as a semantic focus, setting the direction for the reader's interpretation even before the main narrative begins.
- Within the structure of a literary work, epigraphs often serve as prologues, preparing the reader for the key themes, motifs, values, and coordinates of the text.
- The use of epigraphs reflects the author's intertextual thinking and their aspiration to embed their own work within a broader cultural and philosophical context.
- Epigraphs can perform a polyphonic function, introducing an additional voice into the narrative - authoritative, ironic, or oppositional — which enhances the polyphony of the literary text.

There is a noticeable correlation between the choice of epigraph and the genre specificity of the work: in the novel, it often carries an existential load; in the novella, a thematic-problematic one; and in the short story, it tends to be aphoristic or symbolic.

A comparative analysis shows that 19th-century Russian authors (Pushkin, Lermontov, Dostoevsky) more frequently turn to religious and philosophical sources, whereas 20th-century writers (Bulgakov, Platonov, Pasternak) expand the range of cultural allusions, incorporating epigraphs rooted in modernist and post-classical aesthetics.

## Discussion



The linguocultural status of the epigraph in Russian literature is determined by its capacity to semantically enrich the text through references to cultural and religious contexts. The epigraph performs several key functions:

- Meaning-forming: it defines the thematic orientation of the text;
- Intertextual: it introduces quotations, allusions, and reminiscences;
- Ideological: it reflects the author's worldview;
- Pragmatic: it influences the reader's perception and interpretation of the text.

### Examples:

A.S. Pushkin – The Bronze Horseman

Epigraph: "Judge him, you heavenly judge!" (from Boris Godunov)

— Raises the theme of divine judgment and the moral evaluation of human actions.

F.M. Dostoevsky – The Brothers Karamazov

Epigraph: Gospel of John 12:24

— Establishes the Christian model of sacrifice and resurrection as the central motif of the novel.

M.A. Bulgakov – The Master and Margarita

Epigraph: Quotation from Goethe's Faust

— Reflects the idea of dualism and the author's philosophical engagement with the concept of truth.

M.Yu. Lermontov – A Hero of Our Time

Epigraphs to each part of the novel set the tone and conceptual framework of the narrative.

Example: "A true confession..." — serves as an introduction to the psychological depth of the work.

### Conclusion

Epigraphs in Russian literature represent a complex linguocultural phenomenon. Their functions go far beyond mere ornamentation: they shape the philosophical and cultural framework of a literary work, reinforce the author's position, and contribute to intertextual dialogue. A linguocultural analysis enables a deeper understanding of both the structure and content of a literary text, revealing the cultural layers embedded by the author through the epigraph.

Moreover, epigraphs serve a wide range of typological functions — from compositional and semantic to pragmatic and ideological. An author's choice of epigraph is often determined by genre-specific conventions, historical context, and personal worldview. It is through the epigraph that the author enters into a subtle dialogue with the reader, inviting reflection, engagement, and interpretation.

Thus, epigraphs can be viewed as markers of cultural memory and the ideological background of an era. Their study from a linguocultural perspective not only enhances our understanding of the author's intent but also reveals the cultural and intertextual connections that shape the unique, multilayered fabric of the Russian literary tradition.

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