Understanding Cultures through Their Key Words

English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese

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Lexicon as a Key to Ethno-Sociology and Cultural Psychology

Patterns of “Friendship” Across Cultures

1. “Friendship”—a human universal?

There is a widespread assumption that friendship is a universal human need and that the concept of ‘friend’ is a human universal. For example, Davis and Todd (1985) ask, “Why do friendships have the importance that they do?” and they comment: “The general answer provided in many theories is that not to have friends is to miss something vital for full-fledged human development. The personal relationship of friendship is thus seen as providing the context within which a number of basic human needs can be met” (21). Having characterized what they call “a paradigm case of friendship” in terms of nine basic characteristics (such as equality, enjoyment of each other’s company, mutual assistance, mutual respect, and intimacy), they affirm that these characteristics jointly “characterize a relationship taken to be central in normal personal development, and thus a relationship prototypical of people’s capacity to enjoy a meaningful life” (p.22).

Assumptions of this kind are ethnocentric. The concept of ‘friend’, and the relationship linked with it, are important in Anglo culture, but it is an illusion to think that they must have their counterparts in all other cultures and that they are somehow part of human nature.

It is possible to look at other cultures through the prism of the English words friend and friendship, of course, but if it is not recognized at the outset that these words don’t necessarily have exact equivalents in other languages, and that this fact is important and revealing, the inevitable result will be that the habitual Anglo perspective on human relations will be mistaken for the human norm. For example, Blieszner and Adams (1992) write:

From the days of the ancient Greek and Roman philosophers until now, throughout cultures, friends have been recognized as important sources of affection and enjoyment, understanding and support, companionship and counsel... With the advent of empirical methods in psychology, sociology, and other disciplines comes a desire to understand the attributes of friends and friendship. (28)

But it is not true that “throughout cultures” “friends” have been recognized as an important social or psychological category. Taxonomies of human relations are just as culture-specific, and language-specific, as are taxonomies of emotions, or of speech acts, and the concept encoded in the present-day English word friend has no privileged status in them. It certainly does not represent a constant, a human universal. In fact (as we shall see), even within English the meaning of the word friend has changed in the course of the centuries, thus reflecting a profound change in the conceptualization of human relations and in the patterns of those relations themselves. To quote a sociological classic (Znaniecki 1965):

Perhaps the best-known voluntary, long-lasting relations between individual men, as intimate as fraternal relations, but independent of hereditary bonds, are those of friendship. They have emerged in various complex collectivities, but reached their full development only in ancient Greece and Rome—judging from the evidence contained in the works of Plato, Xenophon, Aristotle, the Epicureans, and Cicero. Friendship was seldom mentioned in medieval literature, where the basic cooperative relations between men were supposed to be religious; but it was revived during the Renaissance, and is now widely spread in the Western world. (138)

Although in the Western world, concepts encapsulated in words such as amicus in Latin, friend (in its older meaning) in English, ami in French, amico in Italian, Freund in German, and przyjaciel in Polish are indeed remarkably similar and do reflect a common cultural tradition, in this world, too, there are differences as well as similarities. The very fact that, as mentioned earlier, the meaning of the English word friend has changed shows that the Western cultural tradition in the patterns of human relations is less unified than it may seem at first sight.

Here as elsewhere, the crucial question is that of language. What is missing in most of the English language literature on the subject—psychological, sociological, and philosophical—is a clear realization that friend and friendship are English words, embodying concepts which are cultural artifacts of the society which created them. When this is not recognized, the meanings of the words friend and friendship tend to be either absolutized and treated as clues to human nature in general, or ignored, and treated as less important than personal judgments about human relations coming from individual informants. For example, Winstead and Derlega (1986) write: “In order to have an adequate theory of friendship, we must have a definition of friendship. Curiously, in reviewing the chapters in this volume, we find that the issue of definition was not addressed... when authors refer to ‘friendship,’ they seem to rely on a consensual, but unspecified, idea of what friendship is” (2).

The very idea that there may be, and should be, “an adequate theory of friendship” is based on the assumption that “friendship” is something that exists independently of the English language and can be analyzed as a pre-existing, extralinguistic category.
The title of the section in which the authors put forward their proposal is: “A scientific approach to the study of friendship” (65).

This reliance on the word friendship, as if it were a label for a pre-existing fact, betrays an absolutization of this Anglo concept. At the same time, however, the authors fail to recognize the importance of this concept as a socio-cultural fact and want to base their “scientific approach to friendship” on some individuals’ personal definitions of this concept:

What is an appropriate starting place for a scientific study of friendship? Rather than continuing in the philosophical tradition that seeks the one definition of what constitutes the ideal friendship, we propose instead to focus on the individual: to examine individuals’ personal definitions of friendship and the influence of their conceptions of friendship on the networks of their actual friendships and the social worlds within which they live. (65)

The desire to go beyond the philosophical tradition that seeks a definition of “ideal friendship” and to engage in an empirically based study of human relations is understandable, but a valid empirical investigation requires a previous conceptual clarification—and this cannot be achieved without some attention being paid to the language in which the “empirical” questions are framed.

Bieszynski and Adams call, rightly, for an integration of “conceptual and empirical approaches to the analysis of friendship” and “of the friend relationship” (1992:123). It needs to be pointed out, however, that a fruitful conceptual approach must include an analysis of the words friend and friendship themselves, not as a focus for individual associations but as socio-cultural facts, and that a fruitful empirical approach must include an analysis of comparable socio-cultural facts embodied in languages other than English.

To give just one example of the kind of confusion which arises when language problems are ignored, consider the following statements from a psychology monograph (Duck 1977): “There is no Book of Common Sense, but magazines in dentists’ waiting rooms seem to have a reasonable claim to embody the everyday view of life. . . . People set out consciously to make friends. . . . People like to feel that there exists some control over the selections which they make” (2, 3, 7).

Who are those “people” that Duck is talking about? The expression to make friends is indeed significant, and it does imply some expectation of “control,” but it is a specifically English expression, without equivalents in many other European (let alone, non-European) languages; and moreover, it is an expression which emerged only in modern English, thus reflecting changes in the patterning of human relations and in their conceptualization in modern Anglo societies.

What this illustrates is that what people regard as “common sense” is bound up with a particular language, and that just as languages change and differ, so do “common-sensical” assumptions about human relations, as well as everything else. Reliance on one’s native language as a source of universally valid “common-sensical” assumptions about human nature and human relations is bound to lead to ethnocentric fallacies. At the same time, ignoring the different “common-sensical” assumptions reflected in different languages is bound to lead to the obliteration of very valuable empirical evidence concerning both similarities and differences in the patterning and conceptualization of human relations in different cultures and societies.

To illustrate. In Japanese culture, two (main) “friend-like” types of relationship are lexically distinguished: shin'yu and tomodachi. Loosely speaking, shin'yu can be glossed as ‘intimate friend’, whereas tomodachi is closer to ‘friend,’ tout court. For example, children of kindergarten age can be said to have their tomodachi, but not their shin’yu—presumably because small children are not seen as persons capable (yet) of genuine “intimacy” (Rie Hasada and Hiroko Quakenbush, personal communication).

But “intimacy” is not the only difference between the two categories. Normally, shin'yu refers (at least for older speakers) to a person of the same gender (a man’s shin'yu are normally men, and a woman’s shin'yu women), whereas tomodachi is not similarly restricted. This link between “intimacy” and “being a person of the same gender” is highly revealing of Japanese patterns of interpersonal relations. Yet in two (otherwise highly informative) studies of “Japanese patterns of friendship” (Atsumi 1980, 1989) the distinction between shin'yu and tomodachi is not mentioned at all, and although the word shin'yu is mentioned, tomodachi is not. Instead, most of the discussion relies, confusingly, on the English word friend and thereby loses sight of vital linguistic evidence bearing on Japanese patterns of interpersonal relations.

This is only one example. Other Japanese words referring to interpersonal relations are also very revealing. For example, there is the word doryo, which refers to people whom one works with, but only people of the same rank. There is also the word nakama (from naka ‘inside’), which refers to a group of ‘friends’ (one’s “crowd,” so to speak), and its derivatives, such as nominakama (roughly ‘one’s drinking friends/companions’), asobinakama (roughly ‘playmates’) and shigotomakama (‘people whom one works with’). There is also the word sujin, described sometimes as a more formal equivalent of tomodachi. Each such word reflects assumptions and values characteristic of Japanese culture and absent from the less differentiated English concept of ‘friend’.

In this chapter, I will explore the conceptualization and categorization of human relations in Russian, Polish, and Anglo-Australian culture, as reflected in the meaning of certain key words (such as druža and tovarišči in Russian, koledzy and przyjacièle in Polish, and mates in Australian English). I will also discuss the English word friend, showing how the meaning of this word has changed and how these changes reflect, and throw light on, changes in culture and society.

2. The changing meaning of the English word friend

2.1 How many friends does one have?

"Who was that?"

"Oh, just a friend. Someone I used to know"

(Brooke 1993:224)

The meaning of the English word friend has changed over the centuries in ways which are revealing of underlying changes in human relations. These changes could be
crudely described in various ways as "devaluation," "broadening of scope," "shift from vertical" ("in-depth") to "horizontal," from "exclusive" to "inclusive," and so on.

The general trend of these changes is aptly illustrated by the emergence of the expression close friend, which though difficult to date, is definitely modern. Among more than two hundred classical quotations including the word friend in Stevenson's (1949) Book of quotations, not a single one includes the expression close friend (and there are no examples of it in Spivack's 1968 concordance to Shakespeare's works), whereas in contemporary sources this expression appears to be the most common collocation.¹

Broadly, the meaning of the word friend has "weakened," so that to achieve anything like the same "force" it is now necessary to use the expression close friend. Something of the old value of the word friend has survived in the derived noun friendship: whereas in the older usage, friends were related to one another by friendship, in the current usage one can have many more friends than friendships, and only "close friends" can now be said to be linked by "friendship."

It is particularly striking that the number of "friends" that a person can be expected to have has increased over time in all major Anglo societies. A hundred years ago, Henry Adams wrote (in his Education of Henry Adams):

One friend in a lifetime is much; two are many; three are hardly possible.

And an older quote, with a characteristic injunction:

Choose thy friends like thy books, few but choice. (James Howell, 1659).

In the highly mobile present-day American society, people often count their "friends" by the dozen. To some extent, however, the same applies to other English-speaking countries, as the following sentence from an Australian book illustrates:

One of our long-term survivors, Peter, had lost over forty friends to Aids. (King 1992:300)

Clearly, for this writer there is nothing odd about the phrase "forty friends." In fact, in modern English, even a person's "best friends" can be quite numerous. The fact that in modern English the expression best friends is often used in the plural is highly significant in this respect. For example, Rees' (1990) Dictionary of popular phrases includes the following expressions: "even your best friends," "my best friends," and "some of my best friends."

The same holds for the expression close friends, which (at least in American English) can now be applied to dozens of more or less casual associates. As Packard reports in his book on American mobility:

A man who had moved sixteen times in twenty-two years of marriage contended he had at least acquired "a few close, lasting friends at every stop." (1974:174)

For this man at least, it would seem that the number of his "close, lasting friends" must have been at least fifty! This brings to mind the lines by the eighteenth-century English poet William Cowper:

She, that asks
Her dear five hundred friends, contains them all
And hates their coming . . .

For many other people interviewed by Packard, the numbers of "friends" were of a similar order. In most cases these "friends" were not seen as lasting but as transient and replaceable.

A man can become a pal for two hours with a stranger he meets on the golf course with full knowledge that he probably will never see the person again. The trick is the knack for affability. The new gregarious can be fairly indiscriminate in their selection of new friends, who become as interchangeable as cars. (188)

In fact, it might be suggested that the idea of "friendship" as a lasting, permanent relationship has given way in Anglo-American culture to the new ideal of "meeting new people." To quote one more of Packard's respondents, "the remarkable wife of a plant manager in predominantly stable Glens Falls, New York, who had moved twenty times in fifteen years of marriage, . . . explained":

I move to a new area with the feeling I will meet new people and will have many happy experiences—and I usually do. I join groups right away and get involved. (175)

Another woman, who had moved five times in eight years of marriage, made a similar comment:

One cannot stagnate. You have to adapt, learn to change. There are always new, interesting people, fascinating places. (174)

"New people" whom one meets in new places are very readily called "friends". For example:

The young wife of a new teacher in high-mobile Great Falls, Montanta, said that though she still did not know anyone on her block, "We have developed a number of friends through the bowling alley where we play. I bowl one afternoon a week with a lot of real nice girls and we have met several couples at the alley. The alley develops leagues which any girls can join and you are periodically put on a different team with people you don't know".²(147).

Packard speaks in this connection of different methods of "instant plug-in" used by American people "when they move to a new community" (149).

Both the instant "plug-in" and the equally instant "plug-out" of contemporary "friends" are features quite incompatible with the classical conception of "friendship," including that reflected in the earlier English usage. This view of "friendship" as something that grows slowly and lasts "forever," is expressed in numerous traditional sayings and proverbs and in well-known works of literature. For example:

Friendship is the wine of life; but friendship new
Is neither strong nor pure.
(Edward Young, Night thoughts)
Above our life we love a steadfast friend.

(Christopher Marlowe, *Hero and Leander*)

Ah, how good it feels

The hand of an old friend!

(Henry W. Longfellow, “John Endecott”)

There are certain signs to show

Faithful friend from faltering foe.

(Richard Barnfield, “Passionate pilgrim”)

As old wood is best to burn, old horse to ride, old books to read, and old wine to drink, so are old friends always most trusty to use.

(Leonard Wright, “Display of dutie,” 1588)

Clearly, the changes in the use of the word *friend* discussed here reflect historical processes and social transformations which are not unique to Anglo societies. America in particular has gone further along a road that many other modern societies are still traveling. There is, accordingly, nothing uniquely Anglo about the general direction of the semantic changes discussed here either (although the precise shape of the modern Anglo concept of ‘friend’ is no doubt due also to some specific features of Anglo culture). Given the key role that the English word *friend* plays in the modern literature on interpersonal relationships, it is particularly important to understand what this word really means. If we see clearly the changes which the meaning of this word has undergone, we will be less likely to absolutize the contemporary Anglo concept of ‘friend’ and to treat it as some kind of natural yardstick for assessing and comparing human relations in general.

2.2 A friend in need

The idea of permanence was linked in the traditional conception of “friendship” to the expectation of help in adversity. This, too, is reflected, in countless traditional sayings, as well as in a number of common collocations. For example:

A friend in need is a friend indeed.

(Richard Graves, 1772)

He that is thy friend indeed

He will help thee in thy need.

(Richard Barnfield, “Passionate pilgrim”)

A friend is never known till a man hath need.

(John Keywood, “Proverbs,” 1541)
Among the collocations which attest (in reverse) to the same idea, particularly noteworthy are *fair weather friend*, *summer friend*, and *false friend*. For example:

*Like summer friends, Flies of estate and sunshine. (George Herbert, "The answer")*

*O summer-friendship, Whose flattering leaves, that shadow’d us In our prosperity, with the least gust drop off, In the autumn of adversity! (Philip Massinger, The maid of honour)*

Evidence of this kind suggests that the older concept of ‘friend’ had a component of wanting to do something good for this person. The examples adduced above may seem to suggest that this willingness to help (to do good things for) the other person was restricted to times of adversity. In fact, however, it appears that adversity was seen as a time when ‘friendship’ was put to the test, rather than the only time when active benevolence was expected. The desire to do good things for another person is undoubtedly part of the concept of ‘love’ (as in “person X loves person Y”) though not ‘friendship’. But a “friend” in the older sense of the word was seen as a “beloved” person. Common collocations such as *sweet friends, loving friends, dearest friends*, now obsolete, certainly point in this direction, as do numerous references to “loving one’s friends” (a point to which I will return later). Consequently, a desire to do good things for one’s friends was (it seems) expected to be a permanent feature of the relationship and not something restricted to times of adversity. But this is not the case with the modern concept of ‘friend’. For example, the numerous “friends” developed “through the bowling alley” are hardly expected to want to do good things for the speaker. Rather, friends are now expected to do things with us [or rather we are expected to do things with our friends]—and not so much “good things” as “fun things,” things that make those involved “feel something good”. These differences can be represented as follows:

A. I want to do GOOD THINGS FOR this person when I think about this person, I feel something very good
B. I want to do THINGS WITH this person when I am with this person, I feel something good

In nonformulaic English, one could say (roughly) that “friends” in the older sense of the word were expected to be loved, whereas “friends” in the modern sense are expected to be liked, and it is love, not liking, which may need to be put to the test especially if the permanence of the relationship is not ensured by marriage or family bonds.

2.3 “Bosom friends” vs. “congenial fellowship friends”

Another important aspect of the older concept of ‘friend’ which has gone is that of special trust and a willingness to confide in the other person. This feature of the old friend is reflected in the old expression *bosom friend*, whose ironic echo resounds in the modern *bosom buddy*. Compare also the following nineteenth-century definitions of a “friend”:

*A friend is a person with whom I may be sincere. (Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Friendship")*

*What is a friend? I will tell you. It is a person with whom you dare to be yourself. (Frank Crane, "A definition of friendship")*

Compare also the definition of a “true friend” offered by William Penn, a Quaker and founder of Pennsylvania:

*A true friend unbozons freely, advises justly, assists readily, adventures boldly, takes all patiently, defends courageously, and continues a friend unchangeably. ("Fruits of solitude")*

And George Herbert’s injunction:

*Thy friend put in thy bosom: wear his eyes Still in thy heart, that he may see what’s there. ("The church-porch")*

The willingness to confide in a “friend” is of course related to the number of people whom one is willing to regard as “friends.” As we have seen, one may now have even fifty “friends” (in the current sense of the word), but one can hardly “confide” in fifty people. A friend who is seen as someone with whom I may dare to be sincere and to whom I can truly open my heart implies a rather exclusive relationship. The willingness to confide and the exclusive relationship can be represented as follows:

I think about this person like this:
I want this person to know what I think
I want this person to know what I feel
I don’t want many other people to know these things
I know this person thinks the same about me

2.4 A “circle of friends” vs. an exclusive relationship

The shift in perspective on human relations discussed throughout this chapter is reflected in a particularly revealing way, in the syntactic construction “a friend of mine,” in which, as it would seem, the word *friend* has started to appear more and more often in modern usage.

While some examples of this construction can be found in sixteenth-century English (e.g., in Shakespeare: “Dar’st thou resolve to kill a friend of mine”), it appears
that the use of this construction increased considerably in modern times and that at the same time the use of friend with a definite possessive (e.g. "my friend") has decreased. Although I can't offer at this stage any serious statistical evidence for this contention, it is worth noting that according to Spevak's (1968) concordance of the complete works of Shakespeare, the construction "a friend of mine (his, N's etc.)" occurs 11 times for 452 occurrences of friend, whereas, for example, in Piper's (1970) concordance of F. Scott Fitzgerald's Great Gatsby it occurs 5 times for 17 occurrences of friend. In proportion to the corpora as a whole, this would be 2.5% for Shakespeare and 30% for Fitzgerald (or, roughly, one in forty for Shakespeare, and one in three for Fitzgerald). Although the two corpora are of course vastly different in size, a difference of this magnitude is nonetheless suggestive.

Furthermore, in the SEU (Survey of English Usage) Corpus of English (based on 1 million running words), all the occurrences of friend (excluding the parliamentary title "my honourable friend") amount to 80, of which 21, that is 24%, are instances of the "a friend of mine" construction. (If the 28 cases of "honourable friend" are included, the proportion of this construction is still very high: 18%.)

What is more, we can note some qualitative changes in the use of the "my friend" construction which support the hypothesis that the use of the alternative construction "a friend of mine" has extended over time. To illustrate these changes, I will quote a few sentences from Shakespeare's works where the use of "my friend" (or "mine friend") rather than "a friend of mine" sounds now archaic.

1 The knave is mine honest friend, sir.
(Second Part of King Henry IV, 5. 1.50)

2 For I shall never hold that man my friend whose tongue shall ask me for a penny cost.
(Frist Part of King Henry IV, 1.3.50)

3 There is not a man I met but doth salute me
As if I were their well-acquainted friend.
(Comedy of errors, 3.2)

4 Ye're welcome, my fair guests: that noble lady
Or gentleman that is not freely merry
Is not my friend: this, to confirm my welcome [Drinks].
And to you all, good health.
(King Henry VIII, 1.4.37)

In present-day English, one would normally say "he is a friend of mine" rather than "he is my friend" (unless under heavy emphasis, e.g. "I can't do it to him, he is MY FRIEND"), at the same time, sentences such as "he is my son" or "he is my brother" are perfectly natural. In fact, in current usage the phrase "my friend"—in contrast to "a friend of mine"—has started to be used as a euphemism for "boyfriend" or "girlfriend," as in the following example:

Dolly had a man friend. Quite possibly, although this seemed grotesque to me, Dolly was in love. All became clear when she said, in response to my mother's question as to how she had managed the journey to our flat—always a hazardous undertaking, as they both confessed to believe—"My friend drove me over. Actually he owns the firm. You could say he was combining business with pleasure. Harry," she added, with deep satisfaction. "Harry Dean. A dear friend."
(Brookner 1994:120)

If not used euphemistically, the phrase my friend tends to be, in current usage, accompanied at first by a specifier, as in the following example:

After tea my friend Marigold Chance might receive a visit. ... She had been my friend since we had started school together at the age of four. ... (Brookner 1994: 78)

But in older usage, phrases such as my friend, thy friend, or your friend, definite but without a specifier and non-anaphoric, were used commonly, as the phrases my brother or my son are still used in present-day English.

In current usage, it seems that a "friend" is usually introduced into conversation in one of four ways, all of which suggest a possible multiplicity of "friends": (1) with a possessive and a specifier ("my friend Marigold"); (2) in the partitive construction ("one of my friends"); (3) with an indefinite article ("a friend"); (4) in the highly characteristic "a friend of mine" construction, whose semantics deserves special attention.

To appreciate the full implication of this construction, consider the following phrases:

A. A friend (relative, servant) of mine was married in this church/is buried in this cemetery.
B. ?A brother of mine was married in this church/is buried in this cemetery.
C. ?A son of mine was married in this church/is buried in this cemetery.
D. ?A husband of mine was married in this church/is buried in this cemetery.

Phrases such as a brother of mine, a son of mine, and a husband of mine sound off-hand, ironic, and patronizing. The reason is, presumably, that the construction itself implies a whole class of persons, all equivalent to one another because all are related in the same way to a central figure. The phrase a friend of mine suggests that at the moment of speech the speaker is not interested in that particular friend's individuality, but views him exclusively as a member of a category, a category defined in terms of its relation to the speaker. It implies that I have, or could have, many friends (a "circle of friends"), and that I view myself as a figure at the center of that circle of friends, unilaterally related to them all.

The construction "an X of mine (yours, his etc.)" is particularly suited to collective categories, where all members can be viewed as equidistanted with respect to the person who provides the point of reference:

- a colleague of mine
- a student of mine
- a fan of his
The related construction "this X of mine" (or "that X of mine") is different, in one respect, from "an X of mine," of course, but it, too, carries the semantic component which can be stated, very roughly, as 'it doesn't matter how many Xs I have'. This component explains why the phrase this friend of mine sounds neither odd nor playful, whereas the phrases this husband of mine and this son of mine do. (If one has several sons, the phrase this son doesn't sound at all playful [e.g. Was it this son who married an actress?] but this son of mine does.)

I am suggesting, then, that in the older usage friend tended to be seen as an individual related to us in a special way (rather like a brother, or a child), whereas in the current usage friends tend to be seen as a multiplicity of people related in an analogous way to a central figure (as reflected in the common expression circle of friends).

This suggestion is further supported by the fact that the range of adjectives with which the word friend, and, in particular, friends (in the plural), can co-occur has apparently changed. Thus, among 445 quoted occurrences of friends in Shakespeare (cf. Spevack 1969), we find numerous examples of sweet friends, good friends, gentle friends, loving friends, faithful friends, dearest friends, true-hearted friends, worthy friends, noble friends, precious friends, loyal friends, and so on (as well as a few false friends, hollow-hearted friends, and even monstrous friends)—that is, evaluative terms, focusing on the personal qualities of the "friends" and the value of the relationship. What seems to be missing entirely are descriptive phrases specifying one particular category of people, such as, in contemporary literature, "my American friends" (Brookner 1994: 215), "my feminist friends" (Brookner 1994:217), or the following phrases listed in a concordance to the works of Bernard Shaw (Bevan 1971): "his English capitalist friends," "my clerical friends," "the American's American friends," "our Christian friends," and "English friends" (in the context "an Irishman may have . . ."). In these phrases, the adjective describes a kind of "people," not a kind of "person," and does not refer to the nature of the relationship.

What such phrases, apparently quite common in twentieth-century English, suggest is, first of all, a large number of possible "friends," who can even be classified into various collective categories on the basis of some (non-evaluative) characteristic. They also imply that the relation in question is not personal and exclusive but rather ranges over a whole class of people, defined by a single nonpersonal characteristic.

2.5 Making friends

The new "plural" orientation of friends is reflected, among other things, in the modern expression to make friends, with the object in the plural and without a further complement (e.g. "to make lots of friends," "to make new friends," "an opportunity to meet people and make friends.")

In modern usage, the set phrase to make friends (with the object in the plural, and with no further complements) seems to have largely supplanted the earlier expression to find a friend (not a set phrase). One obvious difference between the two phrases has to do with the voluntary character of the more recent, and the involuntary character of the older one. "Making friends" appears to be seen as an art and a skill which requires an active attitude to one's life and one's relationship with other people. (It is
similar in this respect to the less idiomatic “winning friends,” as in the title of a modern super-bestseller: How to win friends and influence people (Carnegie 1982 [1936]). But the expression to make friends implies also, significantly, a desire to have a multiplicity of friends, since while one can “make friends” one can hardly “make a friend.” For example:

I have made eight new friends (Bernard Shaw, Good King Charles’s golden days)

… in the teens it takes longer to make friends (a friend) than in the grammar school years. (Packard 1974:237)

In the older usage (with the verb to find), both the singular (a friend) and the plural (friends) were perfectly natural. For example:

Faithful friends are hard to find. (Richard Barnfield, “Passionate pilgrim”)

A friend may be often found and lost . . . . (Samuel Johnson)

But in the characteristic modern usage (with the verb to make), the object is normally the plural.

The combination of the verb make with the noun friends has been possible for a long time (for example, it occurs in Shakespeare) but apparently not in the construction discussed here (“to make friends,” with no further complement). For example, in Shakespeare’s works one can find examples with a double object or with a prepositional complement, such as the following ones:

... for those you make friends
And give your hearts to, when they once perceive
The least rub in your fortunes, fall away . . .

(Henry VIII)

the poor advance’d makes friends of enemies

(“Hamlet”)

Get posts and letters, and make friends with speed

(Henry IV, Part Two)

However, among the 490 examples of the use of the word friends (in the plural) recorded in Spence’s (1969) concordance of Shakespeare’s works, there is not one example of the construction “to make friends” (without a second complement) scussed here. This confirms the intuitive impression that this construction has ovably appeared, and in any case spread, in modern times.

The common present-day expression to make friends, normally with a plural object (and without an explicit or implicit with-phrase), clearly reflects the modern idiom, which stresses an active forging of a whole multiplicity of associations with her people.

It should be added that in the older usage there was also another common collocation, next to finding a friend, namely, choosing a friend (or choosing one’s friends). For example:

Be slow in choosing a friend, slower in changing. (Benjamin Franklin)

True happiness
Consists not in the multitude of friends.
But in the worth and choice.
(Ben Jonson, “Cynthia’s revels”)

Choose for your friend him who is wise and good, secret and just, ingenious and
honest . . . (Jeremy Taylor, Discourse of friendship)

The idea of deliberately “choosing a friend” may seem almost diametrically opposed to that of “finding a friend,” and indeed closer to that of (voluntarily) “making friends.” In fact, however, “finding” and “choosing” may represent two different aspects of the same process (one is lucky if one can “find” someone whom one can “choose” as a friend). On the other hand, “choosing” and “making” friends, while both voluntary processes, differ significantly in the attitudes implied. “Choosing friends” implies that one expects a small number and requires special qualities; “making friends” implies a desire for a large number (as in any “production process”), and a somewhat indiscriminate approach (the more the better), no special, individual qualities being necessarily required, and no exclusive relationship being envisaged. The expression to make friends is similar in this respect to the words popular and popularity, which point to a related cultural ideal of, roughly speaking, being liked by many people (cf. Stewart 1972:58).

2.6 “True friends” vs. “close friends”

One could object that since in the older usage “true friends” were sometimes distinguished from “friends,” this distinction was in fact analogous to the modern distinction between “friends” and “close friends,” so that the difference between the older and more recent approach to “friendship” is not as sharp as I have been suggesting. I would argue, however, that the similarity between the notions of ‘true friends’ and ‘close friends’ is more apparent than real.

First, a few quotes illustrating the use of the expressions true friends and true friendship:

To have the greatest blessing, a true friend
(Philip Massinger, “Parliament of love”)

They are rich who have true friends.
(Thomas Fuller, “Gnomologia”)

A true friend is forever a friend.
(George Macdonald, “Marquis of Lorne”)

Patterns of “Friendship” Across Cultures
The expressions *true friend* and *true friendship* implied an observed “corruption” and “misuse” of *friend* and *friendship* as such and were meant to defend them against that corruption, or, as Ralph Waldo Emerson put it, “prostitution”:

I hate the prostitution of the name of friendship to signify modish and worldly alliances. (“Friendship”)

Indeed, there is plenty of evidence showing that in its earlier use the words *friend* and *friendship* without any modifiers were loaded with meaning going far beyond that associated with the modern Anglo *friends*. The expression *true friend* was clearly intended to defend that meaning rather than to draw a distinction between *friend* and some other category of human relations. The very high expectations linked with a *friend* as such can be illustrated with the following quotations:

Life without a friend is death without a witness.
(George Herbert, “Jacula Prudentum”)

The best elixir is a friend.
(William Sommerville, “The hip”)

Love is only chatter,
Friends are all that matter.
(Gelett Burgess, “Willy and the lady”)

O friend, my bosom said,
Through thee alone the sky is arched,
Through thee the rose is red.
(Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Friendship”)

A friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of nature.
(Emerson, “Friendship”)

A Father’s a Treasure; a Brother a Comfort; a Friend is both.
(Benjamin Franklin)

Similarly, *friendship* (without modifiers) was linked with expectations which could hardly have been greater with respect to *true friendship*. For example:

Friendship is a union of spirit, a marriage of hearts, and the bond thereof virtue.
(William Penn, “Fruits of solitude”)

And on the value of “friendship”:

Friendship is the gift of the gods, and the most precious boon to man. (Benjamin Disraeli, speech, 1855)

Thus, a *true friend* was not seen as a special kind of *friend* (particularly close and valued), but simply as a *friend* in the most literal (rather than a “corrupted”) sense of the word.

By contrast, the modern expression *close friend* is not meant to have the same range of referents as the word *friend*; it is indeed intended to stand for a different category of people, linked to the target person by a different kind of relationship. The notion that not all “friends” can be regarded as “close friends” does not represent (from the speaker’s point of view) an attack on the current use of the word *friend*; rather, it establishes a new category including a special subset of the broader category. “Close friends” are “friends” with an additional feature of being “closely” related to the target person—the implication being that “friends” as such are not expected to be necessarily closely related to that person. Nonliteral, “corrupted” use is still seen as possible, but now it is the use of the expression *close friend* which may be scrutinized from this point of view rather than the use of *friend* itself (since one does not necessarily expect “friends” as such to amount to very much in the present usage).

For example, Packard (1974) repeatedly uses the phrase “really close friends,” as if *close friends* was not sufficient to exclude weak and superficial relationships. For both Packard and his informants, the number of expected “close friends” clearly exceeds what was to be regarded as the “normal” number of “friends.” For example, one of the questions in Packard’s questionnaire was formulated as follows: “How many of the people that you regard as close friends (as distinguished from casual acquaintances and friends) live within five miles of your home?”

To this, the median answer in the high stability town Glens Falls was 6, whereas in the high mobility town of Azusa it was 3. (In both Glens Falls and Azusa the respondents wished that the numbers in question should be higher.) But if most people in Glens Falls have about six “close friends” living within five miles of their home, one wonders how many “close friends” they have altogether. It would seem that even if the man mentioned earlier who had moved sixteen times in twenty two years of marriage and had acquired “a few close, lasting friends at every stop” could be regarded as somewhat exceptional, neither Packard nor his respondents would regard a number of ten, fifteen, or twenty “close friends” as incongruous.

### 2.7 Friends and enemies

In the older usage of the word *friend*, this word was very frequently paired with the word *enemy* (or *foe*), and the two were clearly treated as opposites. For example:

- Friends are as dangerous as enemies.
  (Thomas De Quincey, “Essays”)

- You and I were long friends; you are now my enemy and I am yours, Benjamin Franklin. (Letter to William Strahan)

- Do good to thy friend to keep him, to thy enemy to gain him.
  (Benjamin Franklin, “Poor Richard’s almanac”)

- He will never have true friends who is afraid of making enemies.
  (William Hazlitt, “Characteristics”)

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Pattern of “Friendship” Across Cultures
2.8 “Dear friends” vs. “enjoyable friends”

In the older usage, one of the most common collocations involving friend was dear friend or dearest friend. For example:

Farewell, dear friend, that smile, that harmless wit.
No more shall gladden our domestic hearth.
(H. F. Cary, "Epitaph on Charles Lamb")

But Fate ordains the dearest friends must part.
(Edward Young, "Love of fame")

In present-day English, however, the collocation dear friend or dearest friend is marginal or even archaic. It is true that it is still possible to address a group of people as "dear friends," but normally only older people would now describe a person as a "dear friend," let alone "dearest friend." Two other common collocations, good friend and best friend, have survived, but dear friend has largely gone out of use (as have also sweet friend, and many others, cited earlier from Shakespeare).

To account for this fact, I would posit a weakening (as well as reshaping) of the emotional component of the word friend, which can be represented as a shift from ‘very good’ to ‘good’:

friends when I think about this person, I feel something very good
friends when I am with this person, I feel something good

In the older usage, friends were mutually bound by something much closer to love than friends in the present-day sense of the word. To illustrate:

So, if I live or die to serve my friend,
'Tis for my love—'tis for my friend alone,
And not for any rate that friendship bears.
In heaven or on earth.
(George Eliot, "Spanish gypsy").

Having some friends whom he loves dearly,
And no lack of foes, whom he laughs at sincerely.
('Robert Southey, "Robert the rhymers account of himself")

Thus, in the old usage of the word friend, people were usually expected to “love” their friends, but this is certainly not the case now. The distinction between ‘feeling something very good’ and ‘feeling something good’ is meant to account partly for this difference.

In addition to the difference of degree, however (‘something very good’ vs. ‘something good’) there is an additional qualitative difference, which, roughly speaking, can be linked with the contrast between “affection” and “enjoyment.” As mentioned earlier, in the older English literature, people often “loved” their friends, or felt and thought of them as “dear” and “dearest.” By contrast, in contemporary English
In the explication of *friend*, component (b) refers to personal knowledge which goes beyond a mere acquaintance or familiarity, component (c) refers to some valued personal qualities, components (d) and (e) define a dimension of something like "confidence" and "intimacy," (f) alludes to a "special" and rather "exclusive" relationship, (g) to "good will" and "willingness to help," (h) and (j) refer to "reciprocity," and (i) to something like "affection."

In the explication of *friends*, component (b) refers to a more superficial knowledge, components (c) and (d) substitute something like "gregariousness" for "confidence" and "intimacy" of *friend*, whereas (e) refers to the "fun-to-be-with" aspects of the modern "friends," replacing the earlier loving attitude (roughly speaking, a shift from "loving" to "liking").

Samuel Johnson in his *Dictionary of the English language* (1755) offered the following definition of the English word *friend* (as used at the time): "friend—one joined to another in mutual benevolence and intimacy." The striking differences between this definition and those offered by modern American dictionaries highlight the changes in the meaning of *friend* discussed in this chapter.

For example, *The American Heritage dictionary of the English language* distinguishes two meanings of *friend* (presumably, an earlier one and a more recent one) and offers the following two definitions: (1) a person whom one knows, likes, and trusts; (2) a person whom one knows; an acquaintance. The first of these two definitions is "thinner" in its implications than Johnson's (with no "benevolence" or "intimacy" being mentioned, and with an emphasis on mere "liking"), whereas the second one is so "thin" that hardly anything of the earlier meaning of *friend* is left in it at all.

*Webster's third* requires a bit more than just "knowing a person," but it offers the following characteristic comment, which explicitly denies "intimacy" and emphasizes "liking" and "pleasure": "friend applies to a person one has regarded with liking and a degree of respect and has known for a time in a pleasurable relationship neither notably intimate nor dependent wholly on business or professional ties."

The *New shorter Oxford English dictionary* (1993), too, reflects the change in the meaning of *friend* in the way it glosses phrases such as *be or keep friends (with)* ("be on good or intimate terms [with]"), and *make friends (with)* ("get on good or intimate terms with"). There is a big difference between being on "good" and on "intimate" terms with someone. Clearly, in older English more than "good terms" was required, but in present-day English being on "good terms" may be enough.

Certainly, the older sense of the word *friend* lingers on, to some extent, in the collective memory of native speakers of English, who are familiar with it through English literature and other cultural echoes from the past. If the modern expression *close friend* reflects the change in the meaning of *friend* (because in the past, all "friends" were "close friends," so no such distinction was necessary), the modern expression *real friend* expresses a sense of continuity in this word's meaning (because it seems to acknowledge, and even celebrate, the older sense of *friend* as a valid meaning of this word, and perhaps even as its "real" meaning, in contrast to the "loose" and "watered down" modern usage). For example, Allan (1979) writes:

(1) **friend**
(2) **friends**

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2.9 Summary and conclusion

The two meanings of the word *friend*, the earlier one (*friend*) and the present-day one (*friends*), can be portrayed as follows:

**friend**

(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:

(b) I know this person very well

c) I think good things about this person

(d) I want this person to know what I think

e) I want this person to know what I feel

(f) I don't want many other people to know these things

g) I want to do good things for this person

(h) I know this person thinks the same about me

(i) when I think about this person, I feel something very good

(j) I think like this about this person

**friends**

(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:

(b) I know this person well

c) I want to be with this person often

(d) I want to do things with this person often

(e) when I am with this person, I feel something good

(f) I think this person thinks the same about me

(g) I think like this about this person

---

(As mentioned earlier), people are more likely to talk about "friends" in terms of "enjoyment," "pleasure," and "fun."

This difference between "dear" friends and "enjoyable" friends can be represented as a shift from (habitual) affectionate thoughts to (occasional) pleasurable company:

friend

when I THINK ABOUT this person, I feel something very good

friends

when I AM WITH this person, I feel something good

For example, the sociologist Allan (1979), who bases his analysis of the category "friend" on accounts given by a large number of respondents, writes: "An assumption entailed in the idea that friendship is voluntary is that it is a relationship based on enjoyment. A friend is someone with whom one enjoys spending time and sharing activities" (41).

This is, of course, quite different from the classical (Roman) conception of *amicitia*, which (as presented by Cicero in "De Amicitia") was held to be based on mutual good will and affection, and which was seen as implying the duty of correcting a friend (*amicus*) when necessary. The older English concept of *friend* was clearly closer to that Roman conception than the concept encoded in the modern English *friend*. 
To claim that some friends are allowed to discover the ‘real self’ more than others is to say that some are trusted more than others. This is the major difference between those people labelled ‘real’ or ‘true’ friends and the remainder. ‘Real’ friends appear to be trusted totally and can be relied on to protect their friend’s interests. . . . Other friends not labelled real or true ones are likely to be treated more cautiously. . . . They are people who are found interesting and with whom one is sociable, but they are not people to whom one reveals innermost fears or worries.

As Suttles (1970) develops at length, an important way in which people become friends, and ‘everyday’ friends ‘real’ friends, is by breaking the normal ‘rules of public propriety’. This serves to reveal the ‘real self’ and for the friends symbolises the strength of their friendship bond. (70)

Allan talks about the expressions true friend and real friend as if they were interchangeable, but in fact they are not. A true friend is an older expression, which, as we have seen, tried to protect the seriousness of the word friend. A real friend seems to be a predominantly modern expression (for example, there are no instances of it in Spiveck’s concordances of Shakespeare’s works), which is closer in meaning to a close friend than to the older true friend, but which, nonetheless, recalls and acknowledges the older usage. In particular, Suttles’ (1970) distinction between “everyday friends” and “real friends” highlights the fact that “real friends” tend now to be seen as a special category of “friends,” distinct from the category of “everyday friends.” This is not quite the same as “true friends” in the older usage.

Thus, semantic history of the word friend confirms the validity of Donqueville’s observation that “democracy does not create strong attachments between man and man, but it does put their ordinary relations on an easier footing” (quoted in Bellah et al. 1985:117). As Bellah et al. comment, with special reference to America, “in the mobile and egalitarian society of the United States, people could meet more easily and their intercourse was more open, but the ties between them were more likely to be casual and transient” (117). The change was visible by the 1830s, when Tocqueville wrote his classic work, and the trend has continued throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century. “Friendliness became almost compulsory as a means of arguing the difficulties of these interactions, while friendship in the classical sense became more and more difficult.” (Bellah et al. 1985:118). In a similar vein, Stewart (1972) comments:

Personal relationships among Americans are numerous and are marked by friendliness and informality; however, Americans rarely form deep and lasting friendships. Friends and membership groups change easily as the American shifts status or locale; consequently, his social life lacks both permanence and depth. (49)

The generalized “friend” of Americans, standing for anyone from a passing acquaintance to a life-time intimate, is maintained according to activities. . . . But these patterns of friendship among Americans . . . do not imply a distrust of people. They signify more often the American reluctance to becoming deeply involved with other persons. In circumstances where a foreigner might turn to a friend for help, support or solace, the American will tend to search for the professional, preferring not to inconvenience his friends. (54)

What Bellah et al. mean by “friendship in the classical sense” involves not only a “deep involvement” with another person, and a “deep commitment” to him or her, but also the concept of a common good served by the relationship. I am not convinced that this latter idea was part of the older meaning of the word friend as such, although it was indeed part of the conception of “friendship” developed by the philosophers of antiquity and shared by many thinkers and writers in modern times. In more recent times, the ideal of a deep and lasting “friendship” involving strong attachments and an exclusive intimacy has given way to the ideal of “friendliness” and of “making friends” in the sense of extensive but limited and transient relationships is certainly corroborated by linguistic evidence. This applies not only to America but, to some extent, to the English-speaking world as a whole, although the fact that, for example, in Australia, another crucially important way of talking about human relations has developed, in addition to the idiom of “friends” (see below, section on “Mate”), shows that in this area, as in others, “Anglo culture” is far from monolithic.

As mentioned earlier, changes in the patterning and conceptualization of human relations, similar to those whose reflection in one fragment of the English language has been discussed here, have also occurred in other Western societies, during their gradual entry into “modern civilization.” To what precise extent these changes have found their expression in other European languages is a matter for further investigation.

3. Patterns of “friendship” in Russian culture

Western, especially American, students of Russia are often struck by Russian patterns of “friendship” (I put the word “friendship” in quotation marks because this word itself embodies a certain categorization and interpretation of human relations, which, as we shall see, is different from that reflected in the Russian language).

For example, Hedrick Smith (1976), in his justly acclaimed The Russians, wrote:

Their [the Russians’] social circles are usually narrower than those of Westerners, especially Americans, who put such great stock in popularity, but relations between Russians are usually more intense, more demanding, more enduring and often more rewarding.

I knew of a couple sent off to Cuba for a two-year assignment, and another family put their teenage son in an already crowded two-room apartment. When Bella Akhmadulina, the poet, married for the third time, she and her husband were broke, and their friends bought them an entire apartment full of furniture. Let a dissident intellectual get in trouble and real friends will loyally take the terrible political risk of going to his rescue...

They commit themselves to only a few, but cherish those. Within the trusted circle, there is an intensity in Russian relationships that Westerners find both exhilarating and exhausting. When they finally open up, Russians are looking for a soul-brother, not a mere conversational partner. They want someone to whom they can pour out their hearts, share their miseries, tell about family problems or difficulties with a lover or mistress, to ease the pain of life or to indulge in endless philosophical windmill tilting. As a journalist I sometimes found it ticklish because Russians want a total commitment from a friend. (108–110)
Like many other foreign commentators, Smith linked Russians’ need for intense and enduring friendships with the conditions of life under the Soviet regime.

Precisely because their public lives are so supervised and because they cannot afford to be open and candid with most people, Russians invest their friendships with enormous importance. Many of them, in cities at least, are only children whose closest friends come to take the place of missing brothers and sisters. They will visit with each other almost daily, like members of the family.

Friendships are not only compensation for the cold impersonality of public life but a vital source of personal identity.

"Friends are the one thing we have which are all our own," a mathematician confided. "They are the one part of our life where we can make our own choice completely for ourselves. We cannot do that in politics, religion, literature, work, Always, someone above influences our choice. But not with friends. We make that choice for ourselves."

The choice, among intellectuals at least, is made with special care, for one essential ingredient of Russian friendships is the political test of trust. This gives them special depth and commitment. Americans, spared the violence of Soviet political purges, repressions and constant pressures for ideological conformity, do not have to make the vital, acute judgment of sorting out true friend from devious informer.

Soviets must make that judgment often, and always unremitting.

... For safety’s sake, Russians hold each other at bay. "We don’t want personal relations with that many other people," one man said bluntly.

But while the conditions of life in Soviet Russia have no doubt contributed to the exceptional importance of deep friendship, especially in milder times after Stalin’s death, in other ways the dangers involved in trusting anybody at all outside the immediate family have had the opposite effect. In the chapter entitled "Russian character and the Soviet system" of their well-known study, How the Soviet system works, Bauer, Inkeles and Kluckhohn (1956) have commented on this reverse side of the coin:

Virtually all aspects of the Soviet regime’s pattern of operation seem calculated to interfere with the satisfaction of the Russians’ need for affiliation. The breakup of the old village community and its replacement by the more formal bureaucratic and impersonal collective farm is perhaps the most outstanding example, but it is only one of many. The disruption and subordination of the traditional family group, the church, the independent professional associations, and the trade unions are other cases in point. Additional effects of a marked kind are created by the strains which the regime has created on friendship relations between two or more individuals, by its persistent programs of political surveillance, its encouragement and elaboration of the process of denunciation, and its assumptions about mutual responsibility for the failings of particular individuals. (139)

The authors concluded, nonetheless, that Russians (and this applies to Soviet times as well) “value warm interpersonal relations to an unusually high degree”:

The need for free, uninhibited social intercourse is both frustrated and accentuated under Soviet conditions. The desire to express pent-up feelings impels the individual to seek out confidants. The fear of talking makes him less likely to talk. The result is not a cessation of confidences, but rather the development of techniques of screening and assessing people in order to decide how much they can be trusted. (110)

The importance of deep friendship in the Russian hierarchy of values, reflected in the Russian literature and, as we will see, in the Russian language, is also confirmed by sociological surveys. For example, as noted by the Soviet sociologist Kon (1987:133–134), a survey conducted in America in the early 1970s showed that Americans ranked friendship tenth on a list of values, whereas in a comparable survey in Russia friendship was ranked sixth. Other studies conducted in the late 1970s and early 1980s found that in Russia young people responding to questions about their goals in life put friendship in the first place (cf. Shlapentokh 1989:174–176).

Intensive interpersonal bonds of the kind described by Smith and others no doubt continue patterns which were part and parcel of Russian culture in pre-Soviet times as well, and it has even been suggested that the political climate in tsarist Russia may have been a contributing factor, too; but generally speaking, all observers appear to agree that these patterns were intensified by the conditions of life under the Soviet regime. Shlapentokh (1984) comments on this as follows:

The virtual cult of friendship in tsarist Russia strongly supports the notion that a lack of political freedom can greatly contribute to the development and preservation of close human relationships. The glorification of friendship in the poetry of Pushkin is linked directly to political opposition against tsarist despotism and the yearning for freedom... The Soviet system, which has increased the political pressures on its citizens, has only enhanced the significance of friendship in Russia. (219)

But political pressures under the tsarist regime were incomparably less pervasive and oppressive than under the Soviet; it was in Soviet times that Russia became the true Gulag archipelago for everyone. It seems hardly surprising, therefore, that in the twentieth-century Russian conception of “friendship,” mutual trust came to be seen as one of the most important features of this kind of relationship (Kon 1987:166, Sokolov 1981:207). Whether or not this has led to any changes in the meaning of words such as družba (roughly ‘close friends’) is a point which requires further investigation.

3.1 Russian counterparts of the English friend—an overview

In Russian, the categorization of human relations is particularly richly developed, in comparison not only with Western European languages but also with other Slavic languages. If the wealth of Hanunóo words for ‘rice’ (Conklin 1957) reflects the special interest that the Hanunóo people (understandably) have in this area of reality, the wealth of Russian words for different categories of human relations (in addition to kin) provides evidence of Russian culture’s special interest in the realm of human relations (a special interest also reflected in the extremely rich system of expressive derivation of Russian names, cf. Wiertzicka 1992b, chapter 7).

The main nominal categories are drug, podruga, tovarish (in the sense tovarish, to be discussed below), prijatel’ (Fem. prijatel’ica), and znakomyj (Fem. znakomaja).

Roughly speaking, the order in which these words are mentioned above could be said
to correspond to the degree of “closeness” or “strength” of the relationship. Drug is someone extremely close to us (much more so than the English friend); podruga refers to a bond less powerful than drug but still stronger than friend; prijatel’ (or prijatel’ica) is rather more distant; and znakomyj (or znakomaja) still more distant, although closer than the supposed English equivalent acquaintance, normally offered by Russian-English dictionaries. (Tovarišč, in the relevant sense, may seem either “stronger” or “weaker” than prijatel’; depending on context.)

In fact, as we will see shortly, the semantic differences among the words of this group are qualitative, not quantitative, with the impression of some differences in “degree” of strength or closeness following from the presence of distinct semantic components in their meaning.

None of the Russian words matches exactly any of the English ones. To give the reader some idea of the value of the Russian words, we could say that drug can be compared, roughly, to a close friend (male or female), podruga—to a (girl’s or woman’s) girlfriend, prijatel’ to a (male) friend (without a modifier), and znakomyj (fem. znakomaja) to a close acquaintance, whereas tovarishts is (in the relevant sense) can only be compared to the bound morpheme-mate (as in classmates or workmates), or to the nominal modifier fellow (as in fellow-prisoners). But these are only very rough approximations.

Thus, in a situation where a speaker of English may describe someone as “a friend of mine” a Russian speaker is forced to analyze the relationship much more deeply and to decide whether the person in question should be described as drug, podruga, prijatel’ica, or znakomaja (in the case of a female), or as drug, prijatel’, tovarishts, or znakomjyj (in the case of a male). In English, one can differentiate between various kinds of “friends” if one wants to, but one doesn’t have to do so: adjectival modifiers are only optional extras; but different nouns (as in Russian) provide a different grid and force speakers to make more specific choices. For example, explaining how the question of a person’s nationality was decided in the Soviet Union, the Russian writer Sergei Dovlatov (1983) writes about his different “friends” as follows:

Ja, dopustim, byl armjaninom—po materi. Moj drug, Aršt Xajmovič Lerner—v russkie probijalja... Moj prijatel’ xudožnik Ser govorili:
—Ja napolovinu russkij, napolovinu—ukrainec, napolovinu—poljak i napolovinu—evrej.
... Zatem načala emigracija. I povolal narod obratno, v evrei.... Moj znakomyj Ponomarev special’no v Gomel’ ezhil, tektu nominat. (11)

‘I was, for example, an Armenian, after my mother. My friend [drug] Aršt Xajmovič Lerner managed to get himself in among the Russians. My friend [prijatel] Ser, an artist, used to say:

‘I’m half Russian, half-Ukrainian, half-Polish, and half-Jewish.’
... Later the [Jewish] emigration [of the Brezhnev era] began. And everyone rushed back to being Jewish. Another friend [znakomyj] of mine, Ponomarev, made trips specially to Gomel’ to hire himself an auntie.’

Dovlatov’s careful distinctions between a drug, a prijatel’, and a znakomyj would normally be replaced in an English version with the all-inclusive term friend.

In what follows, I will discuss the Russian words one by one. (I have omitted from this survey znakomyj, which is similar in meaning to the Polish znajomy, to be discussed in section 4.)

3.2 Drug

Drug (Pl. druz’ja) is one of the most important words in the Russian lexicon. Its very frequency in Russian speech is prodigious. In Zasorina’s (1977) corpus of 1 million running words, the frequency of drug is 817, whereas that of friend in a comparable corpus of American English (Kucera & Francis 1967) is 298 (in Carroll et al. 1971, the corresponding figure is 346). Relatively speaking, friend is also a high frequency word in English; for example, it is much more frequent than brother (125 and 169). Nonetheless, drug is still much more common than friend; and the frequency of the abstract noun družba (155) is many times higher than that of friendship (27 and 8). The irregular plural of drug (druz’ja, like bratia from brat ‘brother’) provides another interesting clue to this word’s meaning: družba, like bratja, is an old collective form, and it suggests a group of people. Indeed, from an individual’s point of view, one’s družja form an important social category: they are the people on whom one can rely for help and support. Neither the word podruga nor prijatel’ has that implication, but for drug it is very important.

Although no data on the relative frequencies of the singular drug and plural družja are available, I would judge that the plural is even more common and more salient in Russian speech than drug. The opposite is probably true for prijatel’ (Sg.) and prijateli (Pl.): a person’s družja form this person’s vital support group, but prijateli don’t form a collective category of any kind (one can more readily say vse moi druz’ja ‘all my družja’ and even vse moi znakomye ‘all my acquaintances’ than vse moi prijateli). As a form of address, too, družja (‘friends’) is perfectly normal, but prijateli (‘friends’) is not acceptable.

Common phrases such as rodyne i družja ‘family and družja’ and pomoci družja ‘the help of družja’ support the impression that the plural družja constitutes a salient conceptual category, as does the fact that the word družja is usually used without a possessive pronoun, whereas prijateli sounds better with a possessive pronoun:

Emu pomogla mat’žena.

-to him helped mother/wife

‘He was helped by his mother/wife.’

Emu pomogli družja/sosed/ego prijateli/prijateli.

-to him helped-Pl družja/neighbors/ego prijateli-Pri/prijateli-Pri

‘He was helped by his družja/neighbors/prijateli.’

(This is not to say that the form prijateli, without a possessive pronoun, would be rejected by all native speakers, but ego prijateli is usually preferred. This is not the case with družja.) Similarly, in the following sentence from a novel by Sergei Dovlatov (1986:93) the word druz’ja (Pl. Acc.) occurs without a possessive modi-
fier, as the word for 'mother' would, but if the word prijatelej (Pl. Acc.) were to be used instead, the sentence would sound much more natural with a possessive modifier:

Ty, Musen'ka, družej ne zabyvaj.
‘You, Musen'ka, don't forget [your] friends.’

Ty, Musen'ka, materi (mother) ne zabyvaj.

Ty, Musen'ka, svoix prijatelej ne zabyvaj.

Ty, Musen'ka, prijatelj ne zabyvaj.

The importance of the concept of druža in Russian life is nicely illustrated by the following six sentences, all drawn from one page of a memoir about two famous Russian dissidents, Anatolij Marčenko and Larissa Bogoraz (Litvinova 1994c:10–11):

Druža pomogli Laras s Tejej tože kupit’ v Taruske kusok doma.
‘Friends [druža] also helped Lara and Tolja to buy part of a house in Tarusa.’

V 73-m godu i poše ja tuda [v Tarusu] priežžala navestit’ družej, guljat’, kupal’ja i rabotat’.
‘In 1973, and later, I used to travel there [to Tarusa] to visit friends [druža], to go on walks, to swim, and to work.’

Gostili Sanja i Katja, priežžali i roditelji, navečalili druža . . .
‘Frequently Sanja and Katja came to stay with them, their parents would also come, and so would friends [druža] . . .’

Letom pohiboziti selis’ Lariny roditelji i druža—Lavutas, Kulaevy.
‘In summer, Lara’s parents and friends [druža], the Lavuts and Kulaevs, would come to live nearby.’

Priežžaše na den’-dva druža tože staralisi’ pomogat’ [stroi’ dom].
‘Friends [druža] who would come for a day or two also tried to help [to build the house for the Marčenkos].’

Pokažoni, vreem ili včetverom, i mnogočislennye rodnye i druža, osvobodivšiesja iz zaključenija, i preslećemye, kotreje priežžali k nim—vse jutlis’ v malen’koy izbuike, razdelenoj na tri časti doščatymi peregorokami.
‘In the meantime, the Marčenko family, together with their numerous relatives and visiting friends [druža], who had been released from prison and were still being harassed, would all huddle together in a tiny hut divided into three by wooden partitions.’

These six sentences, two of which refer to giving substantial help and four to prolonged visiting, are highly typical, and they illustrate well what druža are for: seeing one’s druža, talking to them, spending a lot of time with them, is one of the most important parts of a Russian’s life; and so is helping one’s druža when they need it. To quote Shlapentokh (1989) again:

The notion of friend in the Soviet Union is different than in the United States. Americans use the term “friends” even for persons with whom they entertain only the most superficial relations (see, for instance, Pogrebin, 1986, who treats neighbors . . . as friends). But a friend, to Soviet people, is an individual with whom you have deep emotional, intimate relations. Friends in Soviet society characteristically maintain very intense contact. As Semen Lipkin, a Soviet author, became friends with Vasilii Grossman, the famous writer, they began to “meet each day” . . . and no Soviet reader would be amazed by this statement. (170).

On the importance of mutual help and support among friends, with special reference to the Soviet era:

Soviet people provide each other with considerable assistance in “beating the system.” Friends play an extremely vital role in procuring necessary goods, for they constantly buy each other food, clothing, shoes, or other items should the chance arise, i.e., should these items appear in stores . . . (174)

The mutual financial support between friends . . . is also one of the most significant aspects of Soviet private life. According to some data, up to three-quarters of Soviet people regularly borrow money from each other. (174)

Being a Russian, Shlapentokh assumes that the obligation to help a “friend,” though particularly pronounced in Russian culture, is a human universal:

In all societies, the role of friend tends to carry the expectation that, in a state of emergency—with one’s life, freedom, or survival is in jeopardy—a friend will offer assistance and comfort in full measure. In Soviet society, the expectation of friends’ active assistance, even when they may be put at risk, is particularly high. Again, the arbitrariness of political power in this society is largely responsible for the extraordinary demands placed upon friends. (230)

But it is highly questionable whether in all societies “friends” will be expected to “offer assistance and comfort in full measure.” Certainly, no such expectation is built into the very meaning of the closest counterparts of the Russian drug in other languages, including the English word friend. It does appear, however, that such an expectation is indeed part of the very meaning of the Russian word drug.

Interestingly, both these key elements of the Russian concept of ‘drug’ (intense and intimate face-to-face communication and readiness to help) are included in Tolstoy’s literary definition (given in Pierre’s words to Nataša in War and Peace):

. . . no ob otnom prošu vas—sčitajte menja svoim drugom, i ježeli vam nužna pomoci, sovet, prosto nužno budet izit’ svoju dušu konu-nibud’—ne teper’, a kogda v vas jasno budet v dušu—vspomnite obo mne. (Tolstoy 1964:643)

. . . one thing I beg of you: look on me as your friend [drug], and if you need help, advice, or simply need to open your heart to someone [literally to pour out your soul to someone]—not now, but when your mind [soul] is clearer—think of me. (Tolstoy 1950–1951:710)
The bond implied by the word *drug* is far stronger than that of *prijatel*, not to mention *znakomy*, as the following contrasts in acceptability show:

*natošaičij drug, istinnyj drug*

*natošaičij prijatel’, *istinnyj prijatel’*

*natošaičij znakomyi, *istinnyj znakomyi*

where *natošaičij (-aja) means 'real' or 'genuine' and *istinnyj (-aja) means 'true'. Only *drug* can be described as ‘real’ or ‘true’ because, of the three, only *drug* implies a powerful hidden bond which could be put to the test.

The Academy of Sciences’ *Dictionary of synonyms* (SSRJ) defines *drug* as "čelovek blizkij po duhu, po ubezdenijam, na kotornog no možno vo vsem polozij’sha, ‘a person close in spirit, in their convictions, on whom one can rely for everything’; and SSRJ (the *Dictionary of the Russian literary language*), as ‘a person closely linked to someone by mutual trust, devotion, love.’ According to these definitions, too, the defining elements of *drug* appear to be, roughly speaking, readiness to disclose to the other person one’s thoughts and feelings, complete trust, readiness to help, and intense ‘good feelings’:

S prijateljami v kino sjedat, futbol gonnajat, s drugom vse napopolam idet—i radost i gore. (Mis’alkov, SSRJ)

‘With prijatel’s (Pl.) one goes to the movies, or kicks a football around, but with a *drug* one shares everything, fifty-fifty, both joy and sorrow.’

Cerez dva-tri dniya my stali uču druž’jami, xodili vsja dneve, povjerjali drug drugu svoi namerenija i željanja, delili porovnu vse, čo perepadao odhodne iz nas. (Gor’kij, SSRJ)

‘Within a few days we had already become friends ['drug']a, went about everywhere together, confided to each other all our hopes and desires, and shared everything that came our way.’

A *drug* is someone on whom one can rely for help. The expression *bud’ drugom*, used ‘dliga vyraženija usilenoj pros’by’ (SSRJ) (that is, ‘to intensify a request’) provides evidence for this:

Na svjatki L’jov stal ugovarivat Platona:—Ty—xrabryj, *bud’* drugom, pomogi mne. (Gor’kij, SSRJ)

‘At Christmas, L’jov tried to persuade Platon: ‘You are brave, be a *drug*, help me.’ ‘

The expression *ne v službu a v družbu* ['please do it] not out of duty but out of friendship ['družba'] points in the same direction.

Interestingly, the Russian *drug* is frequently used as a form of address, especially in letters, which often begin with phrases such as ‘Nataša, moj drug’ (‘Natasha, my *drug*’) and end with similar expressions of *družba* ‘friendship’, such as ‘voj drug Andrej’ (‘your *drug*, Andrej’).

The use of the word *drug* as a form of address may seem to have a parallel in the English phrase *my friend* used sometimes in conversation, but this is an illusion: in English, when the phrase *my friend* is used as a form of address, its use is ironic, sarcastic, or patronizing. One doesn’t address a real friend in this way. On the other hand, in Russian, phrases such as *drug, moj drug* and *dorogoj drug* ‘dear drug’ can be used affectionately to real friends (and even family members).

The fact that *drug* can be used in this way (rather like *darling* or *sweetheart* in English) suggests that it has an emotive semantic component such as ‘when I think of you I feel something very good’. Neither the English *friend* nor the Russian *podruža* or *prijatel’* (or *prijatel’nica*) would justify positing such a component.

The most common collocations with *drug* include adjectives referring to the “closeness” and “specialness” of the bond, for example, *blizkij drug* ‘close friend’, *zaduševnyj drug* ‘soul friend’, *lučšíj drug* ‘best friend’, *edinstvennyj drug* ‘only friend’, and *nerazčuščtí druža* ‘inseparable friends’, and reliability, e.g. *vernyj drug* ‘faithful friend’, *nadeļnyj drug* ‘reliable friend’, *predanryj drug* ‘devoted friend’, and *istinnyj drug* ‘true friend’ (cf. Mel’čuk & Žolkowski 1984:293, USSSRJ 1978:147).

On the basis of all these considerations, I would propose the following explication of the concept *drug*:

*(my) drug*

(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:

(b) I know this person very well

(c) I think very good things about this person

(d) I want to often be with this person

(e) I want to often talk [say things] to this person

(f) I know: I can say anything to this person

(g) nothing bad will happen because of this

(h) I want this person to know what I think

(i) I want this person to know why I think this

(j) I want this person to know what I feel

(k) I want to do good things for this person

(l) when something bad happens to this person, I can’t not do something good for this person

(m) I know: this person thinks the same about me

(n) when people think like this about other people, they feel something very good

(o) I think like this about this person

As in the several subsequent explications, the first component (a) shows that *drug* refers to a common pattern of human relations, and the last that this pattern is thought of as shaping this particular relationship. Components (b) and (c) reflect the assumption that the relationship is based on knowing the other person very well (not just well, but very well), and (c) the related assumption that one holds this person in high regard. The components (f) and (g) jointly spell out something like complete trust, components (d) and (e) represent the need for frequent face-to-face interaction, components (f)–(i) correspond to the desire to “pour out one’s soul” to the other person, components (k) and (l) spell out the willingness and indeed obligation to help, (m) refers to the assumption that the relationship is symmetrical, and component (n) stands for the intensive emotion.
The *Explanatory combinatorial dictionary of modern Russian* (ECD, Mel’čuk & Zhulkovskij 1984) offers the following carefully phrased and very detailed definition of *drug*:

X—drug Y—a—čelovek X takoj, čto ljudi X i Y, xorosho znaja drug druga, emocion- nai no raspoloženi drug k drugu, ponimajut drug druga, duxovno blizki, predany drug drugu i gotovy pomogat’ drug drugu, i e to kauzirot les, čto X i Y xotijat imet’ kontakty (obyčno očnije) v sfere ličnix interesov, pričem vse to—ne v silu kakix-libo inx otnošenij [nапример, rodstvennych] meždu X-i om i Y-om. (292)

‘X is Y’s *drug*—X is a person such that persons X and Y, who know each other well, are emotionally well disposed towards each other, understand each other, are spiritually close, are devoted to each other and are ready to help each other; and this causes the fact that X and Y want to be in contact (usually, face-to-face), in the domain of personal interests; and all this not by virtue of some other relationship (for example, kin) between X and Y.’

Clearly, this definition does not endeavor to use semantic primitives or simple syntactic patterns, but in content it is fairly close to the one proposed here. It contains, in a different form, all the components proposed in my explication and adds two more: the exclusion of kinship as a basis of the relationship in question, and the inclusion of spiritual closeness.

In principle, I agree with the spirit of these two additional components, but I don’t think they have to be mentioned explicitly: a family member can well be described in Russian as a *drug*, and since the family ties are simply not relevant to this relationship they don’t have to be mentioned in the definition at all.

The question of “spiritual closeness” is more problematic, largely because it is not quite clear what is meant by this phrase. I presume, however, that it is intended to refer to the domain of moral judgments and is probably meant to imply that in Russian culture *drug* is expected to often agree, in important matters, on what is “good” and what is “bad.” If we accepted that this expectation was indeed a necessary ingredient of the Russian concept of *drug* (*drug*), we could spell it out in the explication along the following lines:

when I think that it is good if someone does something
often this person thinks the same
when I think that it is bad if someone does something
often this person thinks the same

Given other evidence for the importance of absolute moral judgments in Russian culture (cf. e.g. Bauer, Inkeles & Kluckhohn 1956:142; Walicki 1980:100–110; Wierzbicka 1992b:435–440) the idea that this kind of moral unity is seen as a necessary ingredient of Russian “drug” (close friendship) is appealing; whether or not it is a necessary semantic component of the word *drug*, however, is a question which I would like to leave open.

I would add that “spiritual closeness” as an ingredient of the relationship between “friends” (*drug*), is also mentioned by Shlapentokh (1984:229), in whose view the relationship between *drug* (especially men) is often closer and more open than that between family members and even that between husbands and wives:

... lying to family members is only a part of a general pattern of lying in Soviet life.
... Thus, it is to friends that the Soviet people are more likely to turn to fulfill the expressive need in their lives. (225)
... quite often the spiritual closeness between friends is greater than that between husbands and wives, the role of friends in such interpersonal communication is probably greater. This is especially true among men. (229)

It seems to me, however, that the components ‘I know: I can say anything to this person’ and ‘nothing bad will happen because of this’ (in combination with the other components of the proposed explication) sufficiently account for all those aspects of the concept ‘*drug*’ which are implied by the word as such.

3.3 *Podruga*

Russian-English dictionaries (e.g. Smirnitskij 1961, Wheeler 1972), gloss the word *podruga* (etymologically related to *drug*) as “(female) friend,” and since *drug* is glossed as “friend,” this seems to imply that *podruga* is simply a female counterpart of *drug*. But this impression is deceptive, first, because a woman or a girl, too, can be called a *drug*; second, because calling a woman a *drug* does not mean the same as calling her a *podruga*, and third, because a man’s or a boy’s female friends are normally not called his *podrugi* (Pl.).

Before discussing the different implications of these two words (*podruga* and *drug*) as applied to relations between women or girls, we must note that in addition to its main use, *podruga* also has three other uses, which offer helpful clues to the main meaning of this word: first, when applied to nonpermanent heterosexual relationships, *podruga* has a meaning similar (though not identical) to that of the English word *girlfriend* (as in “his girlfriend”); second, in the expression *podruga izin*, ‘life *podruga*’, it refers to a man’s wife, seen as someone who shares his life (Wheeler 1972 glosses this meaning as “helpmate”); and third, *podruga* is often used in a metaphorical sense, as “loving companion,” especially in poetry—often with reference to a woman but in poetry also to a concrete object or an abstract idea (when the Russian word for it has the feminine gender). For example (from Pushkin):

*Podruga* dua nois suryovyx,
golubka drjatij moja.

‘*Podruga* of my sombre days,
My poor old darling.’ [so his old nanny]

Gorsi li ty, lampada naša,
*Podruga* bdeni i pirov.

‘Are you burning, our lamp,
The *podruga* of wakefulness and all-night feasts.’

Zadumčivost’, ee *podruga*
Ot samix kolybel’nyx dnej,

when I think that it is good if someone does something
often this person thinks the same
when I think that it is bad if someone does something
often this person thinks the same
The phrase podruga dnev mojih sutora (‘podruga of my sombre days’), implies that at the time the addressee, Pushkin’s old nanny, was his constant (and only) companion and that her presence softened the loneliness and the bleakness of his days. Similarly, the phrase zadumčivoj, ee podruga (‘pensiveness, her podruga’) implies that pensiveness “was always with” Tat’jana, and the verb ukrašala (beautified, colored) implies that Tat’jana felt something good because of that constant companion. Finally, the phrase lampada naša, podruga bledij i pirov (‘our lamp, a podruga of wakefulness and [long-night] feasts’), implies that the lamp “was always there” and that it made the atmosphere pleasant and enjoyable. The phrase podruga živni ‘one’s life’s podruga’ (referring to a man’s wife) has similar implications (the wife is always with her husband, and her presence is a source of “good feelings”). These additional uses of podruga highlight the elements of companionship and ‘sharing of life’ present in its meaning but absent from the meaning of drug. In fact, some dictionaries hint at this aspect of podruga without spelling it out in definitions.

For example, Rozanova (1978) glosses podruga in English as friend, but in French as amie, compagne (‘friend, companion’); and Smirnitskij (1961) glosses the expression podruga detsta, literally ‘a childhood podruga’, as playmate (thus highlighting the aspect of shared activities).

Similarly, the Dictionary of the Russian language (SRI) defines podruga as follows: devočka, devuška ili ženičina sostojačaja v družeskij, tovarajčeskij otnošenja s kemi-nibud’ (‘a girl or a woman who has a družeskje, tovarajčeskje relationship with someone’), thus describing the relationship in question as not simply družeskje (adjective derived from drug) but also tovarajčeskje (adjective derived from tovarajčje). Since, as we will see later, tovarajčje refers crucially to sharing (of life experiences), this definition, too, highlights an important difference between podruga and drug. In the case of podruga, this sharing has to be long-term, as reflected in the following definition: devočka, devuška ili ženičina, s detdjëmi ili s davnij let blizko sduživjašaja s kemi-nibud’ (‘a girl or a woman who has been for a long time, often from childhood on, someone’s close friend’) (TSRJ 1940).

All these definitions offer helpful hints, but they all fail to mention the specifically “inter-female” character of the relationship implied by the word podruga and, more generally, to sort out the distinct meaning of this word from others in the group. To see that the word is indeed polysemous, and that the implications of specifically “inter-female” kind of friendship are not due to context, it is sufficient to consider common expressions such as podruga deštva ‘childhood friend (podruga)’ and školjke podrugi (Pl.) ‘school friends (podrugi)’. If podruga really meant something like ‘female friend’, there would be no reason why such expressions could not refer to boys’ childhood friends, or school friends, but in fact they normally refer only to inter-female relationships, and a sentence such as

> Oa pošel guljat s podrugami.

> ‘He went for a walk with his podrugi’

sounds very strange.

To see the main meaning of podruga more clearly, therefore, it is better to consider first the meaning of the plural form podrugi, which cannot apply to the other meaning of this word. Roughly speaking, this form refers to female friends who have shared some long time shared life experiences and whose existential situation is similar—with the implication that these shared life experiences have something to do with the nature of women’s lives and that women’s existential situation is linked with their gender. In a more formulaic form, these “specifically female” implications of the form podrugi can be spelled out along the following lines (to be refined later):

> many women think about other women like this:

> this person is someone like me

> often, when I do something, this person does similar things

> often, when something happens to me, similar things happen to this person

> often this person feels similar things to me

A podruga is someone who can provide a woman or a girl with much needed and highly valued company of “someone like herself.” The following nineteenth-century example illustrates these implications very nicely:

> Oda žaljela o tom, što ee vospitannica ne budet imet’ podrugi v derevne.

> (Cemjüevskij, SRI)

> ‘She was sorry that in the village her adopted daughter [ward] would not have any podrugu’ (Pl.).’

> It is also interesting to note that Dal’s 1955[1882] dictionary of Russian includes the following comment about the use of podrugi and its diminutive podružki in folk speech: “O devicax oboletka, vyroščix vnestje... about girls of the same age who have grown up together”. Dal illustrates this use with the words of a folk song and with two proverbs:

> Kak pošu naši podružki v les po jagody guljat’.

> ‘When our podružki (Pl. Dim.) went for a walk in the forest to gather berries.’

> Podružka—poduska (drugoy net).

> ‘A podruga is [one’s best] pillow (there is no other).’

> U xorošej neveste po sem podrug.

> ‘A good prospective fiancée has seven podrugi.’
The fact that one can talk about *družja po perepiške* 'družja by correspondence, pen-friends', but not *podruži po perepiške, 'podruži by correspondence', points in the same direction: *podruži* have to be together and to share life experiences.

Mutual help (though very common) is not a necessary ingredient of this relationship: for this concept being together (with a like-minded person) in a shared mood is more important than doing things for one another. The contrast between *podruži* and *drug* used in close succession in the following passage provides a good illustration of this (Litvinova 1994:12):

> I čo on, lodo, sej čas preučuvač, kak ob vas duša u nego boli. 

> Prišela k Laro okoli 7 večere—na pametom pojedinc. Zdra, Nina Petrovna—

> 'Who is with you, Larissa? A girlfriend [podruža]? That's good, it's hard to be alone.
> It's painful. And what is he, poor soul, thinking about now, how his heart must ache
> for you. . . .

> I came to Lar's about 7 in the evening—by express train. Nina Petrovna is
> here—a good, quiet, helpful friend [drug]. Everything is in good order in the
> house—everything has been washed, N.P. is doing the ironing.'

The woman referred to in this passage, Larissa, is tormented by anxiety about her husband, Anatoliy Marčenko, who has been arrested by the KGB. A sympathetic woman neighbor, worried about Larissa, is pleased to see that she has the company of a *podruža*. Two sentences further, another woman friend of Larissa's is mentioned, who comes in and simply starts doing Larissa's household chores for her (washing, ironing). In the first case, (focusing on company), the word *podruža* naturally comes to mind, in the second (focusing on help), *drug* (and the phrase *dejstel'ny drug* 'an actively helping *drug*').

Consider also the following example (again from Pushkin's *Eugene Onegin*, with Nabokov's translation):

> Kogda že nanja sobirala
> Dija Ol'gi na širokij lug
> Vsgh malen'kix ee podrug,
> Ona [Tat'jana] v gorelik ne igrata,
> Ej skucen byl i zvokij smex
> I sum ix verenxy utxk.

> 'Whenever nurse assembled
> for Ol'ga, on the spacious lawn,
> all her small girl companions,
> she did not play at barleys, and
> dull were to her both ringing laughter
> and noise of their giddy diversions.' (138)

Ol'ga's little *podruži* gathered for her by her nanny, are other little girls with whom Ol'ga likes to share her activities and her fun. These other little girls would probably not qualify as *družja*, but they are like-minded companions, of a similar position in life, with whom little Ol'ga likes to be together, feeling that each of them is someone like herself (partly because they are all girls).

Yet, despite all this existential closeness, *podruža* does not have the emotional warmth of *drug*. This absence of "warmth" is reflected in the fact that, except in metaphoric usage, *podruža* cannot be used as a form of address; for example, one cannot start a letter with the phrase *Anna, moja* ('my') *podruža*, or *Anna, dorogaja* ('dear') *podruža*. In metaphorical usage, on the other hand, *podruža* is often so used (as in one of the examples from Pushkin quoted earlier).

Given the specifically "inter-female" character of friendship implied by *podruža*, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another, one might expect that this word will also imply a willingness to confide in one another.

The case of the bond between *podruži* (Pl.) is seen as largely existential may explain, to some extent, why *podruža* does not imply a "high opinion" of, or high regard for, the other person in the way *drug* does. Some good opinion is implied, but not necessarily "very good" opinion, as in the case of *drug*.

To sum up all these considerations, I would propose the following explication of *podruža* (in the sense under discussion):

*(my) podruža*

(a) everyone knows: many women think about some other women like this:

(b) I know this person very well

(c) I have known this person for a long time

(d) I think something good about this person

(e) this person is someone like me

(f) I have often been with this person

(g) often, when I did some things, this person did similar things

(h) often, when some things happened to me, similar things happened to this person

(i) often, when I felt some things, this person felt similar things

(j) when I am with this person, I feel something good

(k) I know: this person thinks the same about me

(l) I think about this person

3.4 *Prijatel’*

Alexander Pushkin's masterpiece *Eugene Onegin* introduces the hero with the following lines:
Onegin, dobrij moj prijatel’
Rodilja na bregax Nevy.
‘Onegin, a good pal [prijatel’] of mine
Was born upon the Neva’s banks’ (Pushkin 1975:96)

These lines define the narrator’s attitude to the hero—friendly, but rather distant. The set of modifiers that the word prijatel’ takes underscores this distance: while both a prijatel’ and a drug can be described as dobrij or xorošij, only drug would be normally described as lučij ‘best’, edinstvennyj ‘only’, boščoj ‘great’, zadušený ‘soul friend’, or zakadyčýný ‘bosom friend’ (cf. e.g. *boščoj prijatel’), and only druža, not prijatel’ (Pl.), would be normally described as nerazlučený ‘inseparable’.

Similar contrasts can be observed in the collocations rodný i druža ‘family and druža’ vs. *rodný i prijatel’ ‘family and prijatel’; the second of which could be compared to the bizarre combination family and distant friends, in contrast to family and close friends.

The Academy of Sciences’ Dictionary of synonyms (SSRJ) describes the meaning of prijatel’ as follows:

prijatel’—čelovek, s kotorym složil’s xorošie, prostye, ne nečest’ blizkie otnošenija
prijatel’—a person with whom one has good, simple, but not very close relations

Many examples of the use of the word prijatel’ gathered in dictionaries support the gist of this definition and highlight the difference between drug (very close) and prijatel’ (not very close). For instance:

S prijateľami v kine xodiat, futbol gonzajut, a s drugom vse napolom idet—i radost’ i gore. Prijatel’—čet’ im mnogo byvajet. A drug—odn. (Mixaļov, SSRJ)
‘With one’s prijatel’ (Pl.) one goes to the movies, or chases a football, but with a drug one shares everything, fifty-fifty, both joy and sorrow.’

Prijateļei u Gavrīka bylo mnogo, a sostojasčih družej vsego odn. Petja. (Kataev, SSRJ).
‘Gavrīk had many prijateļi, but only one real drug: Petja.’

V ego druže ko mne bylo čto-neudobnoe, tjażnostnoe, i ja xočo predpoečel eij obyknovenyj prijateļ’eskije otnošenija. (Čexov, SSRJ).
‘In his friendship [druže] for me there was something uncomfortable, awkward, and I would have preferred to have an ordinary prijateļ’-like relationship with him.’

As these examples (the first of which we have already seen) suggest, prijateļ’, in contrast to drug, does not imply a willingness to confide in the other person, to open one’s heart to them, and to “share with them one’s joys and sorrows.” Nor does it imply that one can always count on the other person’s help and support. Instead, it implies that one knows the other person well (but not necessarily very well) and that one enjoys their company. There is no implication that one thinks very good things about this person. More precisely, the meaning of prijateļ’ can be represented as follows:

(my) prijateļ’
(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:
(b) I know this person well
(c) when I am with this person, I feel something good
(d) when I do something with this person, I feel something good
(e) I think this person thinks the same about me
(f) I think like this about this person

The examples from Russian quoted earlier, which explicitly contrast the two words prijateļ’ and drug, highlight the importance of this distinction in Russian and, more generally, the importance that Russian culture attaches to the classification of human relations. Furthermore, judging by the frequencies of the two words (as reported in frequency dictionaries), the category of drug (very close “friend”) is far more important in Russian culture than that of prijateļ’ (a more casual kind of “friend”).

The explanation of prijateļ’ sketched here is in fact quite similar to that assigned to the English friend (friends). The main difference is that friend expresses a more active attitude: one seeks, as well as enjoys, the company of “friends” and shared activities with them. In this respect, friend resembles drug rather than prijateļ’; but otherwise, friend is more like prijateļ’t than drug.

3.5 Tovarišč

The word tovarиšč was of central importance in the Soviet era in its political meaning, usually rendered in English as “comrade”. Although the use of the word tovarиšč in this sense was politically driven and imposed from above, its status in the Russian language of the Soviet era cannot simply be compared to that of the English comrade. Being addressed as tovarиšč was a sign of belonging; losing this title and losing the right to apply it to others was a sign of exclusion and could have easily been a prelude to arrest, incarceration, and death.

If only one word were to be nominated as the key word of the Soviet Russian, it would probably have to be this one. Although after the collapse of communism in Russia this politically driven use of the word tovarиšč quickly started to recede, it will always keep its place in Russian history as a symbol of a long and terrible era, and as such it certainly deserves analytical attention. It should be noted that throughout the Soviet era tovarиšč also retained its earlier, nonpolitical meaning, and that that nonpolitical meaning has never lost ground. To avoid confusion, I will distinguish the two meanings as tovarиšč (political) and tovarиšč (nonpolitical).

Although we do not have any statistical data on the relative frequencies of these two meanings in Russian speech, we do have some data on the frequency of the word tovarиšč as such, and these data suggest that in the Soviet era tovarиšč was one of the most frequently used nouns in the Russian language (in Zasorina’s frequency dictionary it is the sixth most frequent noun, following only such basic nouns as god ‘year’, delo ‘matter’, čelovek ‘man’, žizn’ ‘life’, and den’ ‘day’, and its frequency in a corpus of 1 million running words is a phenomenally high 1,162; in a comparable corpus of American English [Kučera & Francis 1967], comrade doesn’t appear at all, and
It is important to point out, therefore, that the dictionary’s reference to a shared “kind of activity” (as well as shared “conditions of life”) is not part of the word’s semantic invariant. For example, the common phrase tovarišč po nesčastju ‘fellow-sufferers’ does not refer to any activity at all; and the frequent use of the word tovarišči in the prison and camp literature (as illustrated below) also highlights the central relevance of “conditions of life” over and above any shared activities.

Of course, some common “conditions of life” imply also some kinds of activities, and, for example, the existence of schoolboys, or soldiers, can be viewed either from the point of view of what they do or from the point of view of what happens to them. But as the phrase tovarišči po nesčastju ‘fellow-sufferers’ shows, the word tovarišči as such highlights an undergoer’s, not an agent’s, perspective.

Some examples:

Soldati beznolvno smotreli na četo strašne zrelješču [kazni’. Nikto iz nič ne rinišla na začetku svoj tovarišči. (Novikov-Priboj, SRLJ.)

‘The soldiers were silently watching the terrible sight [execution]. None of them made a move to try to defend his tovarišči (Pl.)’

A četo, vol drug ema?—drug ne drug, a tovarišči. (Semenov, SRRJ.)

‘What, are you his drug?—Perhaps not a drug, but a tovarišči.’

U nego zavjuzačas družba s tovariščam po robote. (Gorbatov, SRLJ.)

‘He developed a friendship [družba] with his workmates [work tovarišči].’

And some more recent examples:


‘For three years, I lay awake at night telling the story of it all in my thoughts. About everything. Not just about myself. About my companions in misfortune with whom fate [sudba] had brought me in contact, about their grievous sufferings, the tragic circumstances of their lives.’

A est’ takie zavelikale’ nye tijurny, gde dajut obvykni kničnov počasti—i četo četo za členin’ ugalda’ okuda . . . pomenujat’ja s tovariščami. (Solzhinitsyn 1973:211)

‘And there are prisons which have the engaging practice of providing fragments ripped out of books—what a great read that is—to try and guess where it comes from . . . swap bits with your comrades [tovarisch].’ (On prison latines)

Edut [na poronny Marčenko] krome Pavlika i Sani [Danielja], Katja s Mišej, Kolja Mjuge, Genja Lubenecji—tovarisch Sani. (Litivnova, 1994a:10)

‘Those traveling [to Marčenko’s funeral] include Pavlik and Sanja [Daniel], Katja and Miša, Kolja Mjuge, and Genja Lubenec—s tovarisch of Sanja’s.’

If one considers the time, the effort, and the political risk involved in traveling to the funeral of a leading dissident in a remote island of the Gulag archipelago, the participation of someone described as “a tovarisch of Sanja’s” (a son of Larissa’s,
Marčenko’s wife, by an earlier marriage) illustrates well the human weight of the concept encapsulated in the word tovarišči. Clearly, the relationship between the two men is not considered to be close enough for the word drug to be used here, and yet few “friends” would be expected to do as much.

The assumption of similarity in one’s existential position links tovarišči, in one respect, with podruga (in the plural, podrugi), but there are also important differences between these two concepts. My podruga is someone whose existential position, so to speak, is similar to mine (as, for example, in the phrase škol’naia podruga ‘a school-Adj. podruga’), but it cannot be someone who is simply “in the same boat” because the same misfortune has befallen us both. Hence the unacceptability of a phrase such as *podruga po neščast’ju (‘podruga in misfortune’) or *podruga po tovarišču (‘podruga by prison cell’). Unlike in tovarišči, in podruga there is also an element of personal attraction and personal choice.

This asymmetry between podruga and tovarišči throws an interesting light on the different expectations with regard to males’ and females’ lives in Russia. Let us compare, for example, the position of schoolgirls and schoolboys in an Anglo society (say, in America), in Poland, and in Russia. In an Anglo society, both a girl and a boy would usually refer to some of their classmates as “friends.” In Poland, the basic word used for classmates is koledzy (referred to boys) and koleżanki (referring to girls). The Polish dictionary equivalents of friend, namely przyjaciel (male) and przyjacielka (female) are normally not used for the classmates that one associates with. Usually, they are reserved only for one person, roughly the equivalent of the English best friend. This means that while the basic social grid applied in Anglo schools and Polish schools is different, nonetheless in both systems girls and boys are treated essentially in the same way.

This is not the case in a Russian school. Here, there are no colloquial words applying to all classmates (as in the case of the Polish words koledzy and koleżanki), and there is no colloquial word for those boys and girls who one usually associates with (as in the case of the English friend). Instead, girls are expected to have podrugi (a specifically female form of friendship), whereas boys’ classmates can be seen as tovarišči (unless they are especially close friends, that is, druža). A girl’s close friends (male, or a mixed group) can also be seen as druža, but for girls, there is no colloquial equivalent of tovarišči and for boys, there is no equivalent of podrugi.

This is not to say that the word tovarišči— unlike druža— can never be used with reference to women. It can, especially in contexts where the focus is on solidarity (often, the solidarity of prison or camp inmates, as in the example from Stishov quoted earlier or in the example from Solzhenitsyn which follows); but prototypically, it refers to men (or at least did in pre-Soviet times).

Anna Skripnikova . . . požalovalas’ sledovatel’ju, čto ee odnakomernoe načal’nik
Lubjanka tskaet za volosy. Sledovatel’ rasmejalaja sprosil: “A vas tože tsaet?” —
“Net, do moich tovariščej!” (Solzhenitsyn 1974:301)

Anna Skripnikova complained to her interrogator that the head of the Lubyanka prison had been pulling her cellmates around by their hair. Her interrogator laughed

and asked, “And does he pull you by the hair as well?” “No, but he does my comrades [tovarisch]!”

Nonetheless, women companions with whom one is on friendly terms are more likely to be referred to as podrugi, and if they are very close, as druža, as in the following example:

Proev neskol’ko rublej, sobrannyx lagernymi druž’jami, Stoljarova vornulas’ k zone, sobrala otrnne . . . — v svoj barak! . . . Podrugi okružili, prinesli s kusmi baldany.
(Solzhenitsyn 1975:467)

‘Having eaten her way through the few rubles her camp friends [druža] had collected for her, Stoljarova returned to the zone, tricked the guards into letting her back in—and went straight to her hut. . . . Her friends [podrugi] clustered round her and brought her some gruels from the kitchen.’ (A prisoner released from a camp decides the only way she can survive is by getting back into the camp.)

Another way of describing the situation in Russian is to say that Russian singles out, lexically, a special category of human relations (namely tovarišči), which refers to prototypically male solidarity based on shared experiences of groups of males thrown together by “fate”— as in the case of soldiers or prisoners. There is no element of personal choice in that solidarity, but there is an expectation of mutual good feelings and good will based on the fact of having been thrown together into the same circumstances, as equals (like brothers in misfortune). The following examples illustrate this bond particularly clearly.

Za den’ ili za dva dnia pered etim oni xoroš’no pogovorili s Aleksejem i oba kak-to
vnutrenne daže poradowali, čto oni tovarišči po neščast’ju i u nih oboj odinakovo
složone sostojanie ličnyx del. (Polevoj, SSRL)

‘One or two days before that, he had had a good talk with Aleksej, and they both felt
very pleased that they were fellows in misfortune [tovarisch in disaster] and that they
were both in a similarly difficult personal situation.’

Vot Vas’ka, on u nas molodčina! . . . Ni nad čem dija tovarišča ne zadumaetsja.
(Vereasev, SSRJ)

‘That Vas’ka, he is a great chap! He would do anything for a tovarisch.’

. . . a takoe čuvstvo, bucket serdce otovrala ot samogo dorogogo i ljubimogo, ot
tovarischči po neščast’ju. (Solzhenitsyn 1975:476)

‘And a feeling as if one’s heart had been torn away from that which is dearest to
it—one’s comrades [tovarisch] in suffering.’ (a camp prisoner’s feelings just after her
release)

In particular, one normally doesn’t want “bad things” to happen to one’s tovarisch, as one doesn’t want “bad things” to happen to oneself, as the following example illustrates:
literature is certainly striking, as the last example from Adamova-Složberg and the following one illustrate:

> Ja toji ko gorjačo zahla svojo tovarščico po nesčastju in nenadidla naših palač; (Adamova-Složberg 1993:220)

> 'I just pitied with all my heart my companions in misfortune and loveth our murderous tormentors.'

One may wonder whether the components (f) and (g) are compatible with examples such as the one quoted earlier about the soldiers, none of whom tried to defend their tovarščico (Acc. Pl.) from execution, but I think it is. The whole point of the quoted sentence was the contradiction between the soldiers’ observed behavior and their presumed or expected feelings. The same applies to the following sentence about a student forced by her interrogator in prison to make false accusations against other students:

> On fabrikovali in zastavljal ee podpisuyat’ čadovisčnyye protokoly, obvinjal’ desjati ee tovarščic. (Adamova-Složberg 1993:189)

> 'He fabricated, then forced her to sign grotesque protocols implicating dozens of her fellow-students (tovaršči).

### 3.6 Tovaršči (‘comrade’)

Tovaršči has no doubt developed out of the earlier meaning tovaršči. One can almost see this transition in examples such as the following one, where the word tovaršči is still accompanied by a possessive pronoun but where it clearly refers to political and ideological ‘comrades’:

> V rasprostranenii že učenij nazvannyx pisatelej [Marka i Engelsa] imeno i zaklučqatja cel’ mox tovarščičej. (Plexanov; SSRJ)

> ‘The goal of my tovaršči is precisely to spread the teachings of these writers [Marx and Engels].’

Subsequently, however, the possessive pronoun was dropped and an absolute use of tovaršči developed in which the very absence of a possessive pronoun signaled that both the speaker and the audience were presumed to belong to the same speech and thought community and to be permanently united in a common ideology, a common struggle, and a common pursuit. As Majakovskij put it:

> Nado obvjažat’ i žin’ nužičin i ženičin

> Slovom nas ob’edinjavajučim: “Tovaršči”

> “We should bind together the lives of men and women with this word which unites us: ‘Comrade.’”

Who would be seen as tovaršči in that new sense of the word the word was spelled out in Lenin’s words, designed to ignite the October revolution:
As a force uniting the Soviet people (and implicitly excluding others) the word továřiščë came to be valued and cherished almost above all other Russian words:

Naše slovo gordoe "továřiščë"
Nam dorož vsekrasivý slovo.
(Lebedev-Kumač, SSRIL)
"Our proud word "comrade"
is dearer to us than the most beautiful words."

Used in this new sense, the word továřiščë implied a kind of collective identification: if X called Y a továřiščë, X assumed that Y was someone like him (X); and at the same time, X was referring to many other people with whom they both (Y and X) could identify ('there are many people like this; Y is one of them, I am one of them').

This collective identification presupposed common ideals and common goals ('these people want the same things to happen', 'these people want to do many things because of this'). Presumably, the common ideals and goals hinted at in the concept of továřiščë were, in an embryonic form, the basic ideals and goals of the communist ideology: the future good of the masses of the "working people," class struggle, struggle against all the forces of "counter-revolution." This can be represented as follows: 'these people (i.e. all the "comrades") want good things to happen to very many people', 'these people want bad things to happen to some other people (because of this'). The common struggle of all the továřiščë (Pl.) implied shared experiences and similar risks ("the same things can happen to these people because of this"). Finally, the word továřiščë implied appreciation and high regard for those on whom it was bestowed. I will represent this as follows: 'I think something very good about these people'.

Before proposing my own explication of továřiščë, I will first adduce Nikita Khrushchev's definition, which in fact tallies quite well with all the points mentioned above:

Slovo "továřiščë" vyražáet edinomyslie, i ravenstvo, i bratstvo, i uvažezenie, i sotrudničestvo. (SSRL)
"The word "comrade" expresses unanimity, and equality, and brotherhood, and respect, and cooperation."

I propose, then, the following explication:

továřiščë
(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this
(b) these people are people like me
(c) there are many people like this
(d) these people want the same things to happen

As this explication suggests, in továřiščë the emphasis has shifted from things that happen to people to things that people want to happen and to things that people want to do. One might say that the "solidarity of undergoers" (not to say "victims") has been replaced by the "solidarity of agents"; and while the positive affective attitude remained ('when I think about these people I feel something good'), the attitude of "solidarity of undergoers" ('I don't want bad things to happen to these people, as I don't want bad things to happen to me'), natural in people who see themselves as potential victims of life, disappeared, being replaced by an attitude of mutual regard ('I think something very good about these people'), natural in self-confident agents, aware of their numbers and their power.

The component 'these people are people like me' remained, but it was expanded and broadened (and diluted) by the reference to many people ('there are many people like this'), united not by the vicissitudes of fate but by a common ideology and purpose.

Interestingly, the group identification implied by továřiščë was no longer focused on men: there is no reference to men, only to people, in the explication of továřiščë.

It is hardly necessary to point out that, from the first to the last component, the whole explication sounds phony, as the word továřišč itself (in its political sense) has always done.

3.7 Rodnye ('one's own people, close relatives')

The concept of rodnye is another important Russian category of thought. Russian-English dictionaries usually translate this word with the English word relatives, but the two words are far from equivalent. In fact, Russian does have a lexical equivalent of relatives, namely, rodstvenniki, but this is not the same as rodnye.

First of all, the word rodnye refers normally to close relatives, not to distant ones; and the phrase dal'nie rodnye, unlike dal'nie rodstvenniki 'distant relatives', sounds ludicrous.

But the phrase bliz'kie rodnye, unlike bliz'kie rodstvenniki 'close relatives', is also very odd, at least as odd as the phrase close immediate family would sound in English; rodnye, like immediate family, are, by definition, very close to us, and this closeness cannot be qualified in any way because it is seen as an absolute, an existential given.

In principle, rodstvenniki—like relatives in English—refers to people who are not members of the immediate family, whereas rodnye refers primarily to the immediate family. In certain special contexts, the words rodstvenniki and relatives can be used more broadly, in a way which would include family, and rodnye can be extended to people outside the family, but prototypically, rodstvenniki (like relatives) focuses
on those outside the family, whereas the opposite is true for rodnice. Furthermore, rodnice implies closeness, emotional attachment, belonging, whereas rodstvennik has no such implications.

Although it is cognate with the verb roditi ‘give birth’, and although it is roughly coextensive with semja ‘family’ (in its broader sense, including not only parents and children but also brothers, sisters, and grandparents, as well as various in laws), the concept of rodnice is defined, primarily, in existential and emotional terms rather than in biological or legal ones. From this point of view, being a member of the same household may be more important than being related by blood. For example, for Nataša Roslova (in Tolstoy’s War and Peace), her cousin Sonja, who is being raised by Nataša’s parents together with their own children, belongs undoubtedly to her rodnice—probably more so than her own married older sister Vera, who is no longer a member of the same household.

It is perceptive, therefore, of Taube’s (1978) Russian-English dictionary to offer the Russian word domašnie (from dom ‘house’, ‘members of the same household’) as a synonym of rodnice. The two words (rodnice and domašnie) do not mean exactly the same, but in a sense they are closer than rodnice and rodstvennik (‘relatives’). It is also perceptive of another Russian-English dictionary (Wheeler 1972) to illustrate the meaning of rodnice with the phrase v kraju rodnome, literally ‘in the circle of rodnice’, glossed as ‘in the family circle, with one’s people’: the phrase v kraju ‘in the circle’ suggests a group of people who are often together, who sit around the same table, and who share their life, as well as their meals. For this image, being a member of the same household (though not necessary either) may be more important than being a close blood relative.

Bolesar Nataša bila je tak scrzena, čo, k ščast’ju cei k ščast’ju ce rodnym, nysl o vsem tom, čo je pridajočej ce boleznem, ce postopok i razrivy v ženixum, perseli v vtoroj plan. ... Čo že je delali Sonja, graf, i grafinja, kaks by oni smotrali na slabujo, točnje Nataša, ničego ne predprimajama, esli by ne bylo etik pijil’ po časem, pit’ja teplen’kogo, kurnoj kolotk i vsez podrobnostij żzni predpisannyx doktorom, sobjudat’ kotorye sostajalija zanjarati i ujetenie dlja okružažujúx (Tolstoy 1964:60–62)

‘Nataša’s illness was so serious that, fortunately for her and for her parents [rodnice] all thought of what had caused it, of her conduct and the breaking off of the engagement, receded into the background. ... What would have become of Sonja and the count and countess if they had had nothing to do but look at Nataša, weak and fading away—if there had not been those pills to give by the clock, the warm drinks to prepare, the chicken cutlets, and all the other details ordered by the doctors, which supplied occupation and consolation to all of them. The stricter and more complicated the doctor’s orders, the more comfort did those around her find in carrying them out.’ (Tolstoy 1930–1931:776–778)

Another image which may be helpful here is that of a nest: one’s rodnice are like people who form one’s existential “nest”. This nest provides one with existential and emotional support, warmth, and a frame of orientation and belonging—not just in childhood but throughout one’s life.

Given the double, existential and emotional, bond implied by the word rodnice, the English expression nearest and dearest gives a better idea of what this concept really involves than the cold descriptive term relatives, although the strength of the bond implied by the Russian word is much greater. In English, people often make disparaging comments about their relatives, as reflected, for instance, in the celebrated linguistic example of a sentence with two possible syntactic interpretations:

Visiting relatives can be a nuisance.

In Russian, a sentence of this kind could only be translated with the word rodstvennik, not with the word rodnice. From a Russian perspective, rodnice are, by definition, beloved and indispensable, not a nuisance, and they are beloved not because of any personal attraction or preference but simply because they are an inalienable part of one’s own life. I am not saying that from a Russian perspective relatives are necessarily “beloved,” but only that rodnice are. One CAN speak about relatives in Russian in a cold or hostile manner, but the word which would be used for this would be rodstvennik, not rodnice.

Jeterpet’ ne mogu moix rodstvennikov? rodnym.

‘I can’t stand my relatives.’

Even the ironic definition of the concept rodnice, offered by the cynical narrator of Pushkin’s Eugene Onegin, confirms this:

Pozvol’tte; možet byt’, ugodno
Teper’ uznaž’ vam ot menja
Čto znachit imeino rodnice.
Rodnicu ljudi vot kakiz;
My ix objaznjen laskat’;
Ljubit’, duševno uvažaž;
I, po obiyaju naroda;
O rozdelezix i nevažaž;
Ili po počere pozdvazat’;
Čeb ostal’ noc vremya goda
Ne dumaj o nas oni...
Itak, daj bog im dolgi dni!

‘Perhaps you would like to
learn from me now
what “kinsfolk” [rodnice] means exactly?
Well, here’s what kinsfolk are:
we are required to cosset them,
love them, esteem them cordially,
and, following popular custom,
at Christmas time, visit them,
or send them postal greetings,
so that for the rest of the year
they will not think about us.
So grant them, God, long life!’
(Pushkin 1975:184)
The warm, emotive character of the word *rodnye* is also reflected in the fact that—unlike *relatives* or *rodstvenniki*—it can be used as an endearment, that is, as a form of address, as in the loving graffiti scratched out on prison walls in the following example:

*Vernuviš*’ v kameru, ja stal čitat’ nadpis, nacarpanyy na narax, na stenax i na podokonniki. Po bol’šej časti četo byli obračeni k materi, žene ili detjam; obyčejno oni končašl’ slovam: prošeštja, rodnye, na tri goda ili na pjet’ let, itp. (Amal’rik 1970:51).

‘When I came back to the cell, I started to read the graffiti scratched on the bunks, on the walls, and on the window sill. For the most part, these were addressed to mothers, wives, or children; and usually they ended with the words: goodbye, rodnye, I won’t see you for three years, or for five years, etc.’

Although it is impossible to be quite sure whether *rodnye* is meant here as a noun or as an adjective, its use as an endearment standing on its own is none the less quite telling.

The word *rodstvenniki* (in contrast to *rodnye*) is also used in contexts where for some reason the speaker wishes to speak about relatives in a fully detached, objective manner.

Consider, for example, the following dialogue (Litvinova 1994b:11), in which the words *rodnye* and *rodstvenniki* are used in close succession (the speakers are a KGB officer and the dissident Larissa Bogoraz, whose husband, a human rights campaigner, Anatoliy Marčenko, is on the verge of death in a Soviet prison):

ON: My predlagaem vam drugoy vyxod—nemedlenno podat’ zajavlenie ob emigracii v Izrail’ vojesh sem’i—muža, syna, i vas.
L: ... ja dolžna obsudit’ vaše predloženie s rodnymi i družjami.
ON: S synom Pašči?
L: I s nim, i so staršim synom.
ON: No ved’ on tože možet vyezat’ v Izrail’. U ego ženy tam rodstvenniki.
L: Rodstvennikov net. ...

HE: We would suggest a different solution: that you apply immediately for emigration to Israel for your family—your husband, your son, and yourself.
L: I would need to discuss your suggestion with my *rodnye* and *druža* (family and friends).
HE: With your son Pašči?
L: With him too, and with my older son.
HE: But you know, he, too, can go to Israel. His wife has relatives [*rodstvenniki*] there.
L: No, she doesn’t.

Thus, Larissa’s sons are for her *rodnye* with whom she wants to consult before taking any important decision concerning herself and her family; clearly, they are not in the same category as some presumed relatives of her daughter-in-law.

The phrase *rodnye i druža* used in this passage is also very characteristic and very common in Russian: given the strength and the warmth of the word *druža*, and the marked coolness and detachment of the word *rodstvenniki*, a phrase conjoining the two (‘*rodstvenniki i druža*’) would sound odd. Interestingly, even the phrase *semya i druža* ‘family and friends’ sounds less felicitous than *rodnye i druža*, presumably because *semya* doesn’t have the connotations of an emotional bond that both *rodnye* and *druža* share. But the fact that Russian—unlike English or even Polish—has a separate word for one’s close relatives seen in that “nearest-and-dearest,” “inseparable-and-inalienable” perspective, is culturally revealing. One is reminded in this context of the Russian proverb cited in Dal’’s 1955[1882] dictionary of Russian, ‘Russkiy čelovek bez rodi ne živet,’ roughly ‘Russians can’t live without their kinfolk,’ and also of various social commentaries emphasizing the importance of family ties in Russia.

But while the word *rodnye* reflects and documents the perceived value of close family ties in Russian culture, it also shows that the boundary between kin and non-kin can be blurred: what is really essential is the existence of enduring and unconditional emotional ties, which are perceived as an important aspect of one’s identity, rather than “blood relations” as such. This is why the gloss “one’s people,” offered for *rodnye* by some Russian-English dictionaries in preference to the less imaginative “relatives” captures the meaning of this word better. In addition, this gloss provides also some insight into the semantic link between the noun *rodnye* and the adjective *rodnoj* (in the plural *rodnye*), although the phrase “one’s own people” would be even better, as a parallel to the phrase “one’s own” often used by dictionaries to describe one of the meanings of the adjective *rodnoj*.

Usually, dictionaries ascribe three different meanings to the adjective *rodnoj* (fem. *rodnaja*): for example, Wheeler (1972) offers the following glosses:

1. own (by blood relationship in direct line), *rodnoj brat* ‘one’s brother’ (as opposed to cousin, etc.)
2. native, e.g. *rodnaja strana* ‘native land’, *rodnoj jazyk* ‘mother tongue’
3. (as a form of address) (my) dear.

Descriptions of this kind, though useful as a first approximation, do not really explain what is conveyed by this adjective in any one of the following sentences (Dal’ 1955[1882]):

*Ja prišel k nysl, čto ne po krovi ljudi ljubljata druga druga, ne po rodstvu oni rodnys i bližkie, a po duše, po serdečnoj svjazi* (Glądkov).

‘I have come to think that people don’t love one another because of blood ties, that they are not *rodnye* and close because of kinship, but because of the heart [soul], because of ties of affection.’

*Eši svoju dal’nejsiu žizn’ Doronin ne predstavljal bez služby v armii, to i svoju voennuju službu on ne predstavljal vne rajdov rodnoj divizii* (Čakovskij).

‘If Doronin couldn’t imagine his future life outside the army, nor could he imagine his military service outside his *rodnaja* division.’
4. Patterns of “friendship” in Polish culture

The area of human relations which is covered in English by the term friend is divided in Polish into three different categories, corresponding to three nouns (all of them very common in everyday speech). These nouns are przyjaciel (glossed by Polish-English dictionaries as “friend”), kolega (cognate to, and in some uses corresponding to, the English word colleague), and znajomy (derived from znac ‘to know’, and glossed by Polish-English dictionaries as “acquaintance”). It could be objected that—leaving aside more or less “slangy” words such as pal, chum, and buddy (which will be discussed later)—English has two nouns, not one, for classifying the semantic area under discussion: friend and acquaintance. But in fact, acquaintance is only a marginal word in colloquial English. Its frequency is very low and the range of syntactic frames in which it can appear is also quite limited. For example, while one can say

She is an old acquaintance of mine.

one can hardly use this word referentially:

? I talked about it with an acquaintance of mine.
? I had lunch with two acquaintances.

There are no similar limitations on the use of the Polish word znajomy.

Since each of the three Polish nouns listed above has its counterpart of the feminine gender—przyjaciółka, koleżanka, and znajomą—it could be argued that Polish provides a basic grid with six rather than three categories in the area of friend. Unlike the Russian pair drug and podruga, however, Polish pairs such as przyjaciel and przyjaciółka do not exhibit any semantic differences in addition to gender and can be regarded as purely grammatical variants of the same lexical unit.

In examining these three Polish “folk categories,” the social anthropologist Janine Wedel (1986) writes: “Apart from family, in general Poles maintain contact with przyjaciół (close friends), koleżanki (colleagues from school, work or other common experiences) and znajomą (acquaintances)” (103). And, “Family, very close friends, colleagues and ‘good acquaintances’ are the four types of individuals Poles invite into their homes for dinner or ‘parties’” (112).

Assuming, then, that in Polish the basic lexical grid for interpersonal relations (apart from family) has three categories, not six (przyjaciół, kolega, and znajomą), I will note that this is still three times as many as English (with its cover-all category of friend), though not quite as many as Russian (with its five basic lexical categories of drug, podruga, prijatel’, tovaršč, and znakomyj). This suggests that Polish culture places a greater emphasis on different types of interpersonal relations than Anglo culture but doesn’t go quite as far in this direction as Russian culture. This is consistent with the implications of the different systems of expressive derivation of names, with both Polish and Russian systems being much more highly developed than the English one, but with Russian having an even more elaborate system than Polish.

To give the reader some idea of how common the three Polish words under discussion are, I will adduce some data from frequency dictionaries. In Carroll et al.’s
The idea of shared activities is one of the dimensions which distinguish the Polish concept of 'koleżda' from the Russian concept of 'towarišči'. Although at school, a Polish boy has a set of koleżdy (classmates), and a Russian boy, a set of towarischi, and although both these words refer to equal status and to shared life experiences, for the Russian concept, the most important thing is that the same things happen to the whole group, whereas for the Polish concept, the most important thing is that the whole group does the same things.

This is why in Russian one can also speak of towarischi po neschastju ('fellow-sufferers' or 'comrades in misfortune') or towarischi po kamere 'fellow prisoners', whereas the Polish word koleżda cannot be used in such contexts. For example, to refer to one's "fellow-sufferers" one would have to say in Polish towarzysze w nieszczęściu, not koleżdy w nieszczęściu. The Polish word towarzysze, cognate with the Russian towarischi, can be used in such contexts, but it is a much more marginal word in modern Polish and is not used for describing "normal" human relations such as those prevailing in schools, universities, army, or the workplace. In Polish, one speaks of koleżdy z pracy 'koleżdy from work', koleżdy z wojska 'koleżdy from the army', koleżdy z koni 'koleżdy from the school', and so on, not towarzysze z pracy, z wojska, or ze szkoły (from work, the army, or school).

The shared institutional framework mentioned earlier is also important, which is why English words such as buddy or chum mentioned by the Kościuszko dictionary can be misleading as glosses for koleżda (although there is also in Polish an expressive word koleś, derived from koleżda, which jocularly extends the use of koleżda outside institutional frameworks, and which can indeed be loosely compared with buddy).

Of course, the main difference between chum or buddy on the one hand and koleżda on the other is sociolinguistic rather than semantic: the former two are (more or less) slang words, whereas the latter has no links with slang whatsoever. In addition, however, there are also important semantic differences, which illuminate certain aspects of the meaning of koleżda.

First, buddy implies an exclusive relationship based on personal preferences and restricted to a very small number of participants (typically, two), whereas koleżda applies to an entire set of equals within a certain institutional framework, regardless of any personal preferences. Chum doesn't necessarily imply an exclusive relationship, but it, too, implies a degree of personal attraction and personal preference. Consequently, one's relations with one's buddies or one's chums are, by definition, good: if they spoil, the buddies cease to be buddies, and the chums cease to be chums. By contrast, one's relations with one's koleżdy, while expected to be good, can also be bad, because this relationship is defined by the institutional framework, not by personal choice.

Importantly, in institutional frameworks there are many people in the same position. In this sense, being a koleżda is not a private, interpersonal relationship but a social relationship, defined with reference to a whole social group. Even when a waiter in a café (in "People's Poland") tried to fob off an exasperated customer, after a long wait, with the customary phrase koleżda załatw 'a koleżda will take your order', there was an implicit reference to the establishment as a whole, with a set of employees with equal status and the same duties.\textsuperscript{11}
This is not to say, however, that **kolega** has no affective component. Although one’s **koleżanki** are not personally chosen but are given to one within a certain institutional framework, the word carries an implication of solidarity and mutual good feelings: even if my relations with my **koleżanka** happen to be poor, or temporarily soured, nonetheless the word still carries an implication that when I think of them ‘I feel something good’ (although these “good feelings” may be mixed with temporary “bad feelings”).

The solidarity with one’s **koleżanki** is based on the perception that within a certain framework we are all equals, that we do the same things, and that I know these people well (though not necessarily very well), and with a kind of concomitant group identification: ‘these people are people like me’.

All these considerations lead us to the following explication:

**(my) koleżanka**
(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:
(b) these people are people like me
(c) I know these people well
(d) I do things in the same place
(e) these people are people in the same place
(f) these people do the same things as I
(g) I think these people think the same about me
(h) when people think like this about other people, they feel something good
(i) I think like this about these people

In this explication I have not used a format starting with the component ‘I think about this person/these people like this’ in order to account for the fact that **koleżanki** can be neither people with whom “I do the same things, in the same place” or people with whom “I did (have done) the same things, in the same place.” Since the relationship is conceptualized as unitary, whether it has its basis in the present or in the past, I don’t want to use a disjunction in the explication (“I do or I did”). The phrasing suggested here overcomes this difficulty: the prototypical **koleżanka** relationship refers to the present situation (components [a], [c], [f]); at the same time component (i) indicates that I see my own relationship with some people (my **koleżanka** in the same light, without actually implying that I do now the same things as those people do.

The explication proposed here, therefore, is consistent with the fact that phrases such as **koleżanka z wojska koleżanki from the army** or **koleżanka ze studiów koleżanki from the university** may refer to relationships rooted in the past.

This analysis of the concept of **koleżanka**, corresponds, on the whole, quite closely to that proposed, from a different perspective, by Wedel (1986):

**Koleżanki** are colleagues brought together by formal organizations or common experience. **Koleżanki** are close friends—often those with whom one forms lasting bonds. But **koleżanki** and **koleżanki** (the female form of **koleżnik**) are also everyone with whom one works, even if one started work one week ago. **Koleżanki** are relationships formed through an institutional base or common experience. Hence, schoolgirls have **koleżanki or koleżankę** from school; university students have **koleżanki or koleżankę** from the university; most adults have **koleżanki or koleżanki** from work; many people over 50 have **koleżanki or koleżanki** from the war or the resistance; and almost all males 18 years of age and older have **koleżanki** from the army. (105)

The only aspect of Wedel’s analysis that I would disagree with is that concerning the permanence of the **koleżanka** relationship:

People are **koleżanki and koleżanki** for life, years after the formal organization or common experience that first made them so no longer brings them together. Poles who lived through the war together, comrades in the underground or the Warsaw uprising developed special **koleżanki** relationships. **Koleżanki** and **koleżanki** from school or work from days past often operate as “old boy networks,” relying on each other to solve problems. Though **koleżanki and przyjaciele** are people through whom one can **zatrzymać sprawy** [get things arranged], these relationships are often of a moral quality, as in family relationships. **Koleżanki** may now be engaged in vastly different pursuits, yet they continue to meet getting together for drinking parties, reunions and nameday celebrations. In some cases their ties may be even stronger than kin ties.

A 50-year-old professor of mathematics still meets frequently with her **koleżanki** from secondary school for coffee klatch and nameday celebrations. She has a higher position than her **koleżanki**, but they all belong to one **środowisko**. Likewise, a 62-year-old working class man meets often with his **koleżanki** from a World War II underground resistance organization. (105–106)

It is quite true that people are often **koleżanki and koleżanki** for life. But the concept as such implies, roughly speaking, equality within an institutional framework, without necessarily implying permanence: whether or not the bond will be regarded as permanent depends on the importance of a given institutional framework in people’s lives. In this respect, therefore, the bond of **koleżanictwo** (abstract noun derived from kolega) is not like the family bond.

Nonetheless the salient role of this kind of relationship in Polish culture, reflected in the prominent place of the words **koleżanka and koleżanki** in the Polish lexicon (alongside **rodzina, przyjaciele, and znajomi**), calls for an explanation. I believe that such an explanation can be found in Poland’s history and, in particular, in the concept of the “noble ethos,” expounded particularly well by the British historian Norman Davies (1984):

Of all the products of Polish life before the Partitions, the Polish nobility—the **Szlechta** and all their works—might seem to have been the most discredited. . . . In fact, though the legal status of **szlachta** was annulled in 1795 by the partitioning powers, its ideals lived on. The **kultura szlachecka** (the noble ethos) has become one of the central features of the modern Polish outlook.

As it happened, the annulment of **szlachta’s** legal status rendered a signal service to their reputation . . . The mass of the **déclassé** nobility shared the misfortunes of the common people, and, as the main educated element, could act as their tribune. What is more, in mourning the fate of their own defunct estate, they could interpret the attacks on their own battered ideals as an assault on the beliefs of the entire population. In this way, the **wszyscy szlachcic** became the pioneers of the new intelligentsia; the former ‘noble nation’ was transformed and expanded to include all social classes of the new, universal Polish nation, and the **kultura szlachecka**—with its ideas of exclusivity,
equality, unanimity, resistance, and individualism—continued to provide the guidelines for Polish social and political thought. In the old days, only the Szczechta could address each other as pan (Lord) or pani (Lady). Nowadays, it is the normal form of address for everyone. Two hundred years after the formal abolition of the Szczechta most people in Poland are content to think of themselves as honorary nobles. (331–333)

Most important in the present context is the Szczechta’s old ideal of equality (within their own class). Having described the Szczechta’s deplorable attitudes labeled sometimes as “Noble Racism” and “Vanity of Birth,” Davies goes on:

More attractively perhaps, the Szczechta were devoted to the principle of treating each other as equals. All noblemen called each other ‘Brother’. Except for the princes of Lithuania, whose titles had to be confirmed to gain their acceptance to the Union of Lublin, all titulature in the old Republic was legally banned. All noble citizens, irrespective of wealth or office, enjoyed the same civil liberties, and full equality before the Law. Phrases implying that some nobles were more equal than others—such as ‘magnate’ or ‘lesser nobility’—were struck from the record of the Diet. No one could seriously contend that all members of the Szczechta were equal in all respects, since the gain of wealth and power was enormous. But the final fiction of equality was an important social lubricant, which added greatly to the sense of solidarity within the broad mass of the nobility as a whole. After the partitions, the ex-nobles shared the ‘democracy’ of the oppressed and the deprived—where the old ideal could be preserved in new forms. (333)

I would suggest that the old ideal of the “solidarity of equals” (within the confines of one social group) has found its expression in the key Polish concept of koledzy (and koleżanki).

Speaking of the ideal of the “solidarity of equals,” it is impossible not to think of the name of the Polish Solidarity union and the Solidarity movement of 1980–1981, which is widely believed to have initiated the process of the collapse of communism in Eastern Europe. It would be difficult to doubt that the rush of nationwide popular support for Solidarity had something to do with the fact that the ideal referred to in this name struck a vital chord in the Polish national psyche. As Norman Davies (1981) wrote, perceptively and sympathetically, at the time: “The Polish working class can be seen to be reviving the political traditions of the Noble Democracy—traditions which appear to have survived almost two hundred years of suppression” (724). The fact that in Polish the concept of koledzy, with its emphasis on equality and solidarity of existentially linked free individuals, has become a key concept in the national folk-philosophy is also a reflection of the strength of those traditions.

The word kolega is, of course, a loan word in Polish, as colleague is in English. But the fact that on Polish soil this loan word has greatly expanded its range of use (and its meaning) and has turned into one of the language’s key words for categorizing human relations suggests that there was something in its meaning which tallied well with the Polish ethos.

In English, the word colleague (which, as we have seen, has a very low frequency anyway) is restricted to professional elites, and it doesn’t have the implications of “shared existence” characteristic of the Polish kolega. Its meaning can be explicated as follows:

(my) colleagues
(a) I think about these people like this:
(b) these people are people like me
(c) these people do things of the same kind as I do
(d) not many other people do things of this kind
(e) I think something good about these people
(f) I think these people know a lot about some things
(g) because of this, these people can do things of this kind
(h) I think these people think the same about me

The first two components of this explication, as well as the last one, are essentially the same as in the explication of the Polish word koledz, but the other ones are different. In particular, component (d) points to the somewhat elitist connotations of the word colleague, (e) to the respect implied by it, and (f) and (g) to its professional implications. On the other hand, this explication does not include the components of familiarity (“I know these people well”), of affection (“when I think about these people, I feel something good”), or of an existential bond, based on doing things together in the same place that is characteristic of the Polish concept of koledz (cf. components [d]–[f] in the explication of this word). Furthermore, the word colleagues does not embrace the past in the way koledz does: whereas in Polish, people with a shared past may well be referred to as koledz, in English, people from one’s past are usually referred to as “former colleagues” rather than simply “colleagues.” This is why the explication of colleagues can start with the component ‘I think about these people like this’, whereas that of koledz needs to be done via a prototype.

Since the original meaning of the French word collègue (and the Latin collega) was similarly restricted to privileged elites and didn’t have the existential implications of kolega, one could say that within Polish this word has both increased in “existential weight” and undergone far-reaching democratization.

Nonetheless, the salience of the concept ‘kolega’, with its emphasis on equality, in Polish language and Polish culture should not be taken to mean that the Polish ethos is superegalitarian (in the way, for example, the Australian ethos is). As Wedel (1986) rightly emphasizes, the concept of koledz celebrates the equality of people who share the same status, and so, in a way, it emphasizes, rather than de-emphasizes, differences between different social statuses:

For example, a professor at the university is on very friendly terms with her secretary. While on vacation in Romania and Bulgaria, they have met several times, the professor taking the secretary out to dinner. The secretary did not elect to take sick leave from work (to the amazement of her physician) even when she was quite ill. She felt obligated to finish a typing job, even working overtime without extra pay, to meet her boss’s deadline. Despite their affection and respect for one another . . . they will not become koleżanki (colleagues) or refer to each other as ty. The two women appreciate the difference in their status, which will remain clearly defined. Though it is often in the best interest of both parties to establish a personal relationship, this by no means blurs the distinct social hierarchical structure. (111)
Expectations of real help and in terms of offering such help to their friends. Having a circle of _przyjaciela_ increases the feeling of safety, both in psychological as well as in very "practical" aspects of life. (104)

But while both Hoffman’s and Nowak’s remarks are apt and valid as sociological comments, the meaning of _przyjacielem_ and _przyjaciółka_ is, I think, even more clearly illuminated by the following examples of use from Polish literature quoted in the Dictionary of the Polish language (SIP):

Mialem serdecznego przyjaciela, który, jak sądzę, otworzył przeze mnie swoją duszę na okicie. (Świętoszowski)

‘I had a close _przyjaciel_, who, I believe, used to fully open his heart (soul) to me.’

_Przyjaźń_ prawdziwa tylko tam istnieć może, gdzie pomiędzy _przyjaciółmi_ [przyjaciółmi] istnieje ustawiczne i nieprzerwane porozumienie. (Kaczkowski)

‘True _przyjaźń_ (friendship) can exist only where there is constant communication and understanding between the _przyjaciele_.’

Nie lubiła zwierzeń i nie miał przyjaciół pomiedzy koleżankami, z którymi żyła na stopie pewnej wyniosłości. (Reymont)

‘She didn’t like confidances and she had no _przyjaciółka_ among her _koleżanki_, from whom she maintained a somewhat haughty distance.’

Zrób ze mnie swoją powiernicę, _przyjaciółkę_; miej do mnie zaufanie, jak do własnej matki. (Sewer)

‘Make me your confidante, your _przyjaciółka_; trust me, like your own mother.’

What these examples highlight is the assumption of a "special relationship" based on "intimate communication." Compare also the comment made by the poet Czesław Miłosz (1972: 147) about another Polish writer, Ksawery Pruszyński:

Stosunki nasze były kordialne, ale nie zasługiwały na miano przyjaźni. Prowadziliśmy czasem zupełnie szczere rozmowy, ograniczone jednak do polityki; inny wymiar, który mnie interesował, był Ksawerem obcy.

‘Our relations were cordial, but they did not deserve the name of friendship [przyjaźni]. We sometimes had long talks which were completely open, but they were restricted to politics; another dimension, which interested me, was alien to Ksawery.’

This assumption of a "special relationship based on an intimate communication" can be represented along the following lines (as in the explication of the earlier meaning of _friend_):

(my) _przyjacielem/przyjaciółką_

(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:

(b) I know this person very well

(c) I think good things about this person

(d) often when I think something, I can’t say it to other people

(e) I can say it to this person
4.3 Znajomi (‘close acquaintances’)

Unktońsiłb znajomym z daleka, bez zbytnej uprzejmości. (1953, SIP)

‘He bowed to his znajomi from afar, without excessive politeness.’

Wyszli razem, bormialią odprowadzić do parku, gdzie czekały na nią znajomi. (1949, SIP)

‘They left together, because he was to see her off to the park, where her znajomi were waiting for her.’

Po paru godzinach spędzonych w tym miłym saloniku, gwarzyli już z sobą jak starzy znajomi. (1901, SIP)

‘After a few hours spent in this pleasant drawing-room, they were chatting with one another like old znajomi.’

Wszystkich przyjaciół i znajomych swoich, bez względu na wiek i płeć, zaprosił do siebie na bankiet, chcąc się z nimi pożegnać. (1779, SIP)

‘He invited all his friends [przyjaciele] and znajomi, regardless of their age and sex, to his house for a banquet, because he wanted to say good-bye to them.’

Znajomi (glossed by Polish-English dictionaries as “acquaintances” and derived from znac ‘to know’) are, literally, “known ones,” that is, people whom one knows. But in fact, ‘being known’ is only one component of the meaning of this important word. As many “participant observers” of both cultures (Polish and Anglo) have noted, the relationship between “znajomi” would often be described in English by means of the word friends, and only a small proportion of Polish znajomi could be described in English as acquaintances. If the English word friend means, so to speak, less than the Polish przyjaciel, acquaintance means less than znajomi. To put it differently, the English friend covers most of the territory shared in Polish between przyjaciel and znajomi, and—from a Polish point of view—it seems to obscure an important conceptual distinction. Consequently, for many Polish immigrants to English-speaking countries, accustomed and attached to their own universe of social relations, the need to preserve the distinction between przyjaciele and znajomi leads to identifying przyjaciele with friends and znajomi with acquaintances. For example, Hoffman notes that while she herself, after a while, gave up trying to preserve the distinction between “friends” and “acquaintances” scrupulously, her parents “never divested themselves of the habit, and with an admirable resistance to linguistic looseness, continue to call most people they know my acquaintance—or, as they put it early on, mine acquaintance.” But in fact, what Hoffman’s parents show is not really “admirable resistance to linguistic looseness” but rather unconscious transfer of Polish conceptual categories into English: they say “acquaintances” when they mean znajomi.

One wonders in this connection whether Joseph Conrad’s insistence on distinguishing a “friend” from a mere “acquaintance” (as in the quote below) is not similarly due to the influence of Polish: “You understand that I am not their friend. I am only a holiday acquaintance” (quoted in Webster’s third).

Janine Wedel (1986), too, tends to identify znajomi with “acquaintances” when she writes:
The most distant relationships are those of znajomi (acquaintances). Znajomi has a broad meaning; it can refer to people that one sees frequently, or to those one has just met. Neighbours often become close acquaintances, aided by their proximity and the long time period, often years, in which they have to build relationships and engage in exchange. Hence there are “close” and “distant” acquaintances, as well as long-term and short-term acquaintances. (107).

But this is not quite accurate. Rodzina can indeed be described as bliska or najbliższa (‘close’ or ‘closest’) and daleka or dalsza (‘distant’ or ‘more distant’), but znajomi cannot be described as dalecy or dalsi (plural). They can, on the other hand, be described as bliscy or dobrzy (‘close’ or ‘good’). The same applies to przyjaciele, who can be either przyjaciele tout court, or bliscy przyjaciele ‘close przyjaciele’, but not dalecy przyjaciele (‘distant przyjaciele’). What these colloquial suggestions is that znajomi, unlike acquaintances, are seen as people whom one knows fairly well and with whom one has a bond which is far from negligible: not only bliscy znajomi and dobrzy znajomi, but any kind of znajomi. From this point of view, znajomi are more like English friends than like English acquaintances.

The very fact that one often speaks in Polish of dobrzy znajomi ‘good znajomi’, and bliscy znajomi ‘close znajomi’, highlights the difference between znajomi and acquaintances and the similarity between znajomi i przyjaciele: in English, one can speak of “good friends” and “close friends” but not of “good acquaintances” or “close acquaintances.”

Eva Hoffman’s friend who doesn’t quite qualify as a przyjaciółka could not be described as Eva’s znajoma either. In Polish, Penny would be described as a koleżanka, and although one of one’s koleżanki can become one’s przyjaciółka, a koleżanka can never be described as a znajoma. Loosely speaking, the reason seems to be that the category of znajomi implies a certain reserve and voluntary distance, which are incompatible with the solidarity of koleżanki. It is also interesting to note that children can’t have znajomi at all, although the categories of przyjaciele/przyjacielki and koleżanki/koleżanki are perfectly applicable to them. The word znajomi is parallel in this respect to the polite titles Pan and Pani, which also cannot be used for children. Normally, przyjaciele and koleżdy would address each other with the “familiar” form ty, whereas znajomi would use the “unfamiliar” forms Pan and Pani. The correspondence between the forms of address and the lexical categorization of human relations is certainly striking. One could say that both forms of address and lexical categories of human relations suggest that Polish culture values gradation in and barriers to intimacy and closeness, as well as intimacy and closeness as such.

Consider, for example, the possibilities available for addressing a Professor Tadeusz Kowalski. When I address this person, my basic options include: Tadziu, Tadek, Tadecz, Panie Tadzia, Panie Tadka, Panie Tadeusz, Panie Profesorze. Each of these options implies a different kind of relationship and, roughly speaking, a different degree of “closeness,” “intimacy,” and “familiarity.” For example, the combination of the diminutive form Tadziu with the polite title Panie in Panie Tadzia implies that I wish to convey something like affection for the addressee while also setting a certain barrier between us.

Given the value placed in Polish culture on “degrees” of familiarity, closeness, and intimacy, one can well understand why the Polish emigre poet and professor of Slavic literatures at Harvard University, Stanisław Barańczak, includes the following item on his “list of things American which E.E. [East European] will never be able to come to terms with”: “being addressed on a first-name basis by strangers” (1990:11).

What I am suggesting, then, is that by defining many of their personal relationships in terms of znajomi, Poles are also setting and acknowledging certain barriers in these relationships. Relationships without social barriers (those with przyjaciele and rodzina) are also valued, of course, but so are those with deliberately set barriers (i.e. those with znajomi). This can be represented as follows:

(ny) znajomi
(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:
(b) I know these people well
(c) I don’t want to say: very well
(d) I can say things of some kinds to these people
(e) I don’t want to say things of some other kinds to these people
(f) when I say things to these people, I often feel something good
(g) I think these people think the same about me
(h) I think like this about these people

In this formula, the “barriers” are represented in the components (c) and (e), whereas the closeness of the relationship is represented in (b) and (f). Component (b) reflects the fact that znajomi are people of one’s own social circle, people with whom one maintains social relations, whereas (f) reflects the voluntary and the pleasurable character of these contacts.

It could be argued that the English concept of ‘acquaintance’, too, sets barriers in social relations. But first, as mentioned earlier, this concept is quite marginal in English, whereas in Polish the concept of znajomi has considerable significance in people’s lives; and second, the concept of ‘acquaintance’ does not apply to fairly close relationships at all, whereas that of znajomi does. Znajomi, in contrast to acquaintances, are seen as people whom one knows well and contact with whom is perceived as pleasurable or satisfying.

Unlike przyjaciel, the concept of znajomy does not imply any willingness to confide, to share one’s thoughts and feelings with the other person; it does, however, imply a willingness to talk—though not without some barriers on what one is willing to say. Unlike przyjaciel, znajomy doesn’t necessarily imply affection (‘when I think about this person, I feel something good’); it does imply, however, “good feelings” related to social (mainly conversational) contact (‘when I say things to these people, I often feel something good’). The fact that one could never use the word znajomi as a form of address, and hardly as a form of introduction, supports the absence of a ‘when I think of these people I feel something good’ component in its meaning:

*Znajomy! *Znajomi!
*Przyjaciel, znajomy!
*Friends and acquaintances!
4.4 Rodzina (‘family’)

The word rodzina is outside the scope of this chapter, strictly speaking, but since it is, as Wedel (1986:103) says, one of the four basic categories used in Polish for categorizing human relations, it does merit a few brief comments.

Looking at the concept of ‘rodzina’ from an Anglo point of view, one is struck, first of all, by how much territory it covers, in comparison with the English family:

In Poland “the family” may include extended family members such as aunts, uncles and cousins, or the term may refer to immediate family members—children, parents, sometimes grandparents, or people who share a household. People speak of “the closest family,” which is defined as either of the above. They speak of “more distant family” those wider kin relations with whom they may or may not have frequent contact. Wedel (1986:99)

Wedel’s point referring to the common collocations najbliższa rodzina ‘the closest family’ and dalsza rodzina ‘more distant family’ is very important because it highlights the difference between the concepts ‘rodzina’ and ‘family’. Without a modifier, rodzina covers a territory extending far beyond the so-called nuclear family. A distinction between “the closest rodzina” and “the more distant rodzina” can be made, but “the more distant rodzina” is not seen as an “extension” of the same basic core; rather, the whole “extended family” is seen as simply rodzina. The expression najbliższa rodzina (the closest rodzina) cuts off, so to speak, some real members of the rodzina, not some “extensions” to the rodzina. This could be compared with the English distinction between close friends and friends: close friends constitute only a subset of friends, and similarly, najbliższa rodzina constitutes only a subset of rodzina.

In English, on the other hand, immediate family is not seen as a subset of family; rather, this phrase seems to emphasize that what is meant is “family” in the strict sense and not “extended family.”

I would add that in English, the phrases extended family and nuclear family belong to the technical language of sociology, not to everyday speech, and that even the phrase immediate family sounds like a sociological comment rather than like a “normal” everyday way of speaking (for example, it does not belong to the same register as close friends). Normally, one says simply family, and while this may include brothers and sisters, or grandparents, it would normally not include uncles, aunts, or cousins.

In Polish, too, one normally says rodzina, without modifiers, but this would normally include aunts, uncles, and cousins. The expression najbliższa rodzina does not sound like a sociological comment but has a stylistic status comparable to that of close friends in English; and the adjective najbliższa, like close in English, serves here to narrow down the basic category to a subset of this category. To illustrate the meaning of rodzina (which she glosses as “family”) in Polish, Wedel (1986) cites the following dialogue between herself and one of her Polish friends, Barbara:

Barbara explained how she plans to go about obtaining a refrigerator when she eventually moves into her brother’s apartment.

“But on whom can you most depend to help you get the refrigerator?” I inquired.

“Well, on my family. Always.”

“Family, meaning your parents and brother?”

“No, no,” she adamantly replied. “Family means the closest family. Brothers and sisters of my mother, their husbands, their families, the family on my father’s side. We can really count on each other.” (99)

Wedel comments: “Barbara depends not only on her parents and brother and his in-laws but also on her entire extended family unit.” What is worth adding is that Barbara calls this “entire extended family unit” rodzina and, when queried, najbliższa rodzina.

Thus, what would count for Barbara as dalsza rodzina ‘more distant rodzina’ would in English correspond not to extended family but to relatives. This shows that in Polish, rodzina not only covers “immediate family” and “extended family” but extends even further than that, into the territory covered in English by relatives (although the word relatives as such has a counterpart in the Polish word krewni).

But what matters is not only a term’s range of use but also its focus (cf. Berlin & Kay 1969), and for rodzina and family these are different, too. Family without a modifier is normally taken to refer to the nuclear family, although it can be extended...
further than that, whereas rodzina without a modifier is normally taken to refer to a group extending far beyond that.

The point is nicely illustrated by Wanda Chotomska’s (1967) children’s story about a lonely hedgehog who wants to have a rodzina and who dreams therefore of finding not only a żona (wife) but also a stryjek (uncle), a few ciotki (aunts), and a dziadek (grandfather). The story ends happily with the hero finding some cousins, getting married, and leading a happy life with his rodzina, playing Monopoly with his father-in-law and his uncle.

An additional difference between rodzina and family is that the former emphasizes one’s roots (parents, grandparents, past generations), whereas the latter places a special emphasis on one’s offspring. Thus, family can be used to refer specifically to a couple’s children (e.g. “we want to have a family”), but rodzina can never be used like that. On the other hand, rodzina is often used in combination with the preposition z from to describe a person’s background. The phrase z dobrej rodziny ‘from a good rodzina’ is particularly common:

One mother asked a series of questions as she tried to assess whether the boyfriend of her engineer daughter would make a suitable husband: “Is he educated? Is he from a good family? ...” The mother’s questions were illustrative of the categories often used to gauge social position.

... Part of a person’s moral status is coming from a good family. In every social milieu or stable community in which families have known each other for many generations, certain families are considered good and certain ones bad. It was said about a prominent Polish journalist, “How can it be that he came from such a ‘good family’ and became an alcoholic?”

A good family may have a history of high moral standards, abilities and discipline for generations. As part of a cultural elite with a particular ethos, members of the traditional intelligentsia have a heritage of education, cultural competence and social service. (Wedel 1986:152–153)

The concept of rodzina can be compared in this respect with that of cjeczyzna (‘homeland’); they both link a person’s personal identity with “where he or she comes from.”

Schematically (and without trying to use only primitives), the difference between a comprehensive and “backward-looking” concept of rodzina and the much trimmer and “forward-looking” concept of family can be represented as follows:

\[(X')\] rodzina
- many people
- these people are like one thing
- because every one of these people is a mother, father, wife, husband, or child of another one of them
- X is part of this thing
- X’s mother and father are part of this thing
- other people are part of this thing

\[X’s\] family
- some people, not many people
- these people are like one thing
- because every one of these people is a mother, father, wife, husband, or child of another one of them
- X is part of this thing
- X’s mother and father are part of this thing

4.5 Summary and conclusion

Apart from rodzina (‘family’ and ‘extended family’), the Polish taxonomy of human relations includes three basic categories (przyjaciel, kolega, and znajomy). None of these categories has an equivalent in English, although przyjaciel is relatively close to the older English concept ‘friend’ (different from the present-day concept ‘friends’). Znajomy, which can be compared with the Russian znajomyj (and the German Bekanntes), implies a certain distance and a lack of intimacy, and it extends over a whole range of relationships covered in English by the words friends and acquaintances, excluding, however, “close friends.” Kolega, which has a very broad range of use (applying to schoolchildren and soldiers as well as to professional elites) is a uniquely Polish concept which emphasizes both equality and status and which appears to embody the traditional values of the so-called Polish “noble ethos.”

5. Mate—a key to Australian culture

If one word had to be nominated as a key word in traditional Australian culture, few would hesitate to nominate the word mate. From the first half of the nineteenth century to the present time, it has been widely felt that the word mate provides a key to the Australian spirit, Australian national character, Australian ethos; and even those who do not wish to subscribe to this view have to recognize that the word mate holds an exceptionally important place in the Australian national mystique. It is not a key to the Australian culture, then it is a key to the Australian self-image. But there is a great deal of evidence that it is in fact a key to both (cf. e.g. Bell 1973, Kapferer 1988, Ernst 1990).

To start with some recent examples (from a volume of interviews with two young Australian rugby league players, Daley & Clyde 1995):

And I liked hanging out with my mates. We were the cool cats at school and at lunch-time we'd be left alone by the other kids to meet on the back oval to do our own thing, which was to play sport.

I wasn’t a big television viewer. I’d prefer to be outdoors with my mates doing whatever came naturally, such as swimming at the creek, playing footy and listening to my music at night, than imitate a couch potato.

It has certainly been a huge roller-coaster ride, but I reckon I’ve been fortunate to come through it all with a bloke who is a true mate, solid and strong. ... Apart from being considered one of the game’s top players, Laurie Daley is also one of the most popular blokes to have laced on a pair of boots. The fans love him simply because, despite his success, he has never once put himself above them. ... he’s the people’s person and gives a lot of himself.

Lozza, you’re a champion and I take my hat off to you.
In fact, as Kapferer rightly points out, "many women in Australia are now stressing a kind of mateship among themselves" (1988:158).

The continued appeal to this concept by politicians points in the same direction. For example, "In his summit launching speech, he [Mr. Hawke, then Australia's prime minister] said: 'Our problems call for the application of those qualities of innovation, initiative, independence, tolerance—and, need I say, mateship—the qualities which we like to think are distinctly Australian' (1983, quoted in Wilkes 1985:1978:268). Similarly, in a 1988 speech, John Howard, leader of the Federal Opposition (and now prime minister), referred to "certain timeless traditional qualities about Australian life that . . . ought to be preserved and complemented in a contemporary fashion," citing "mateship and the equal treatment of people" as "the best of these qualities" (cf. Ernst 1990:110).

In any case, by "Australian culture" I do not mean the trends prevailing in the last decade of the twentieth century but those which have emerged and prevailed—to a varying degree—over the last two centuries. Seen in this perspective, the importance of the concept of 'mate', and of the idea of "mateship" based on it, can hardly be doubted, and it takes a good deal of determination and ideological parti pris to try nevertheless to deny it, as Donald Horne (1989:183) does in his ironic comments on the subject (to which I will return in section 5.5).

The idea that "mateship" may be a unique cultural form in the whole history of human sociability seems to strike Horne as laughable, but careful semantic analysis shows that this is precisely what it is. The characterization of "mateship" as "bonded (male) comradeship" is vague and superficial; and on this level of superficiality many parallels can indeed be pointed to (beginning with 'comrade', or with the Russian concept of 'tovarišč').

At a deeper level of analysis, however, it can be shown that the concept of 'mate' is different not only from 'comrade' or 'tovarišč', but also from the French concept of 'camarade', or the Russian concept of 'drug', or the Polish concept of 'kolega', and probably from any other concept embodied in a noun in any other language. What Horne fails to appreciate is that concepts of this kind are very complex and that each of them reflects one particular perspective on human relations due to special historical and cultural sets of circumstances.

"Mateship" is not just a "bonded male camaraderie" (whatever that might mean), but a unique cultural ideal, based on a uniquely Australian perspective on human relations. Even though mateship itself is not a common everyday word in Australia, mate is such a word; and the meaning encoded in it reveals a unique combination of assumptions, expectations, attitudes, and values.16

Before trying to analyze the meaning of mate which underlies the concept of 'mateship', let me first adduce some quotes from The Australian national dictionary, illustrating the importance of this concept in Australian culture.

River banks were grassy—grassy in the bends,
Running through the land where mateship never ends.
(1913, H. Lawson)

But moreover shall I forget, not though I live for ever,
The days when we in mateship met along the Moonee River.
(1915, T. Skeyhill, Soldier-Songs from Anzac)
So mateship became the lonely poet’s watchword, and he made it the watchword of Australia. (1931, Lawson & Brereton, H. Lawson.)

The one compensating aspect of life as then lived was the element of mateship. (1935, J. P. McKinney).

And some more recent quotes:

Historians have come to accept fairly calmly the notion that the Australian national philosophy of ‘mateship’ emerged from what was perhaps the world’s only homosexual social ordering of things. (1973, Max Harris; quoted in Wilkes 1978).

Mateship is an important aspect both of the conceptions Australian males have of themselves, and of conceptions Australians generally have of their ‘culture’ [and of an ‘Australian way of life’. It is part of the legendary history of the nation, common parlance in the press and most other popular media and, not infrequently, an object of sociological inquiry. (Ernst 1990: 110).

If anything, it’s the lack of mateship in the House that will get to him. (About a footballer, Paul Osborne, turned MP, The Canberra Times March 11, 1995).

5.1 Different senses of mate

The Australian national dictionary (TAND) distinguishes four different though interrelated senses of the (Australian) word mate. Of these four, the crucial one is sense number three, but to understand it fully, it is necessary also to consider the others.

TAND defines sense 1 as follows: “an equal partner in an enterprise. Also working mate.” This sense of mate was associated with a special grammatical frame: “to go mates” (that is, as TAND puts it, “to work as an equal partner”). For example, TAND quotes an advertisement in the Sydney Morning Herald: “Wanted mate to go rabbiting.” Other crucial quotes illustrating and commenting on this sense of mate include the following:

These men when they contract to do heavy work, as clearing, fencing, etc., almost always do it in parties of two, or more, being prompted to this in the first place by the hardness of the work, which a man cannot face alone, requiring always the assistance of ‘neighbours’, or ‘mates’, or ‘partners’, as they are severally called, even in the minute details. (1838)

Two generally travel together, who are called mates; they are partners, and divide all their earnings. (1845)

Two working mates occupy the same tent if working together. (1859)

A ‘mate’ was a ‘mate’—share and share alike, no matter how bad might be the times. (1887)

I have alluded several times to ‘partners’, or ‘mates’, which was the more popular term. These partnerships were quite common amongst carriers and diggers in bygone days. It was simply chums, owning and sharing everything in common, and without any agreement, written or otherwise. (1921)

As these quotes suggest, the essence of the original mate relationship (i.e. mate1) can be represented as follows:

(my mate)

(a) everyone knows: many men think about some other men like this:
(b) this person is someone like me
(c) I have to do some things
(d) I couldn’t do them if another person didn’t do them with me
(e) I want to do them with this person
(f) this person is often in the same place as I
(g) this person does the same things as I
(h) this person does these things with me
(i) the same things happen to this person as to me
(j) I think like this about this person
(k) I know: this person thinks the same about me

Component (b) refers to the equality of the “mates1,” (f) to their spending a great deal of time together, (g) and (h) to their shared activities, and (i) to their shared experiences; (c) shows that the shared activities constituted work (and not, for example, a game); (d) refers to the heaviness of the work, which a man “couldn’t face alone;” (e) indicates that the relationship was entered into freely, as a free partnership; (k) shows the symmetrical and reciprocal nature of this relationship; and (a) shows that this type of relationship was seen as common among men.

It should be added that although at the outset “mate-partner” referred typically to one person, at the times of gold rush it spread to teams of half a dozen or more. In keeping with the earlier traditions, the miners working in such cooperative groups were reluctant to work for wages and preferred to share their earnings, with one digger acting as a cook and tentkeeper, as was earlier done at out-stations (cf. Ward 1966[1958]:109). This use of the word mate in the context of group endeavors has no doubt facilitated the transition from the “mate-partner” sense of the word to the sense of mate focusing on a group and embracing companions in contexts other than those of partnership.

5.2 Mate2: a transitional stage between mate1 and mate3?

According to TAND, the second sense of mate was that of “an acquaintance; a person engaged in the same activity.” This definition suggests that my mate2 is simply someone whom I know and who does the same thing or things as I do. But the examples deduced by TAND show that in fact much more was involved in that. Significantly, all these examples are in the plural. The relationship between “mates” in this second sense of the word is in some ways analogous to that in the first sense, but in the second sense there is no question of a partnership entered into freely; rather, the reference is to activities that groups of men have to do (for example, as soldiers, or as miners).

We told him our mates were gone, and that we had heard two shots fired. (1841)

Boasting, among his mates in the bush. (1849)
Kipper Tommy was . . . acknowledged by his mates to be the crack driver of the
district. (1879)

Covered with large green ants . . . how they stung! and how dusky mates laughed!
(1911)

The boy had joined his mates in one of the little cemeteries on the Western front.
(1919)

Seventeen of our mates were killed in the mining industry last year. (1934)

The old soldiers watch him, look around at their mates and don't listen. (1971)

The "mates" mentioned in the above sentences are not only people doing the same
things (as suggested by TAND), but also people doing these things together (with one
another, in the same place). Furthermore, there is clearly an assumption of equality or
similar status ("these people are people like me"); and clearly, here, too, there is an
expectation that the same things are likely to happen to all the "mates."

It is by no means clear that the second sense posited by TAND is indeed a separate
meaning of the word mate and that one can distinguish it in a principled way from
sense 3, from which the abstract word mateship is derived. For the time being,
however, I will go along with the classification of meanings proposed by TAND and
will discuss mates as if it were indeed a meaning separate from mates. Given the central
position of this meaning (mates) in Australian English, I will call it simply mate,
without a subscript (in contrast to the early nineteenth century mate, i.e. "mate-partner"),
and I will return later to the question of whether this crucial meaning (TAND's
mates) can be distinguished from that described by TAND as mates.

The intention behind TAND's hypothetical meaning mate is clear. What this
category was intended to capture was sentences referring to one's "co-workers"
without attitudinal components characteristic of references to people's "special
mates," "good mates," "mates-friends." The intended category can be seen as inter-
mediate between mate, in the sense explicated in the preceding section (roughly,
voluntarily chosen partners), and mate (to be discussed in the next section (roughly,
companions seen as special "friends").

5.3 Mates and mateship

Moving now to the crucial sense of mate widely used in Australia for defining human
relations and constituting the basis of "mateship" (TAND's mates), I will note that
TAND defines this sense as "one with whom the bonds of close friendship are
acknowledged, a 'sworn friend.'" This definition implies that a mate (in the relevant
sense) is simply something like "close friend." In fact, the whole point about "mates-
ship" is that it is not the same as "friendship," or even "close friendship," and that
these two categories ("friendship" and "mateship") differ in culturally significant
ways. As Kapferer says, "To reduce the idea of mateship to friendship or comraderie
is not to comprehend its meaning fully" (1988:158–159).

To begin with some examples:

Where his mate was his sworn friend through good and evil report, in sickness and
health, in poverty and plenty, where his horse was his comrade, and his dog his
companion, the bushman lived the life he loved. (1891)

No matter what you do, your Australian mate will defend you—'A mate can do no
wrong.' (1965)

'He's my mate. I gotta help 'im.' he stated simply and incontrovertibly. . . . There was
no answer to that, Gunner knew: the outcome of this incident had been predetermined
by the peculiar chemistry of compatibility, by social mores and by the almost tribal
ties of marriage, all pledged with countless beers. It was personal, traditional, and
deeply masculine. (1977)

My "mate" in the crucial Australian sense of the word is someone whom I perceive
to be "someone like me" (as in mate) but whom I also see, more specifically, through
the prism of the collectivist concept 'people like me'. It is also—as in the original
sense—someone who is often with me, who does the same things as I do, and who
does these things with me.

But in the "mate-partner" sense of the word, being together was simply a
consequence of doing something together—something that one needed to do (work)
and that one couldn’t do alone (heavy work). By contrast, in the "mate-friend" sense
of the word, being together could be, and can be, mainly "hanging around together"—
precisely because one wants to be together with that person.

Given the traditional (male) Australian ethos—anti-intellectual, anti-verbal, anti-
overly emotional—being together, for men, could not mean a great deal of "talking
together," exchanging ideas, swapping confidences, articulating and revealing one's
feelings. In this culture, being together for pleasure had to mean, primarily, "doing
things together" and enjoying shared activities and shared experiences (that is, doing
the same things together and feeling the same because of this).

There was mateship, sharing a billy of bitter-black tea, a smoke and a yarn. (1985,
Dorothy Hewett; quoted in Wilkes 1985).

Even the verbal activity of "having a yarn" (in the Australian sense of the word
yarn, see chapter 5) was more an instance of "doing something together" (and "feeling
something because of this") than of verbal self-disclosure.

The emphasis on spending time together and doing things together rather than on
talking, and in particular the abhorrence of any verbal intimacies is also well
illustrated by the following statement from Hawke's book: "We don't say it in so many words.
When I see those Hollywood movies where they bleed their hearts, it actually makes
me sick. It's just knowing that each other's around" (1990:60)

It is interesting to note in this respect that one can talk of good mates, best mates,
and old mates, but not of close mates (as one can talk of "close friends"). This shows
again that what really matters in "mateship" is not something like "closeness" or
"intimacy" (in the sense of intimate knowledge of the other person's inner life) but
how much time one has spent with another person (sharing the same activities and the
same conditions), and to what extent one can rely on them (a point to which I will
return shortly). To quote an example from an Australian play:
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As a first approximation, therefore, I would propose the following explication for the crucial Australian sense of mate (mates):

1. **X is my mate**
   - everyone knows; many men think about some other men like this:
     - these people are people like me
     - these people are often in the same place as I
     - these people do the same things as I
     - these people do these things with me
     - the same things happen to these people as to me
     - I know: these people think the same about me
     - I think like this about this person (X)

   (This is not a complete explication; further components will be suggested shortly.)

   Thus, the main shift in the semantics of mate (from the original mate to the main mate) involved a transition from an emphasis on sharing work, out of necessity (usually, with one person), resulting in sharing company and sharing experiences, to an emphasis on sharing company, sharing activities, and sharing experiences—not necessarily because of sharing work and usually with a group of men.

   The emphasis on equality (‘someone/people like me’) and on a specifically inter-male character of the relationship remained unchanged. Although in the past, the word mate (in the quasi-friend sense) was occasionally applied to women (TAND has included two such examples dated 1928 and 1930), there can be no doubt that throughout its history the idea of a ‘mate’ included a reference to a specifically inter-male style of relationship (continuing the cultural tradition of mates-partners going rabbiting or timber-sawing together).

   Emphatic statements such as the following one may overstate this obligatory maleness of a “mate,” but they capture correctly the necessarily “inter-male” prototype, and style of “mateship”:

   “My mate” is always a man. A female may be my sheila, my bird, my charley, my good sort, my hot-drop, my Judy or my wife, but she is never “my mate.” (1960. Donald McLean, quoted in Wilkes 1985.)

   When one recalls that, as Baker pointed out, “For more than half a century Australia was almost entirely a masculine country” and that “as late as 1840 the proportion of males to females was two to one” (1970:121), it becomes clear that the masculine bias of the traditional Australian ethos, reflected in the concepts of ‘mate’ and ‘mateship’, had its roots in historical conditions and was related to the absence of women and to the fact that many men were dependent on other men for companionship and human contact. In fact, common references to Australian men “needing” mates suggest another dimension of continuity in the use of the word mate; just as it was once assumed that a man needed a “mate” (partner) to go rabbiting or timber-sawing, it was also assumed that a man needed a “mate” or “mates” to spend time with:

   A mate in Australia is simply that which a bloke must have around him. Mates do not necessarily want to know you. (1972, K. Dunstan, Knockers 52, quoted in TAND)
The male who hasn’t a male mate is a lonely man indeed, or a strange man, though he have a wife and family. (1913, H. Lawson, quoted in TAND)

And a recent quote:

It is necessary to have good mates. (Hawkes 1990:52)

The supreme value of a man’s mate was clearly linked with this notion, rooted in Australia’s history, that men were dependent on men.

Stevie is more to me than a man is to a girl—yes, I know you’ll grin at that, but you don’t rightly know what men are to each other out here. He’s my mate—we’re mates, and good mates. (1917, B. Cable)

You’ve been a good mate and a man can’t say more than that. (1948, F. Clune).

What exactly being a “good mate” means is a point which will be addressed in the next section.

5.4 The attitudinal components of mate

As mentioned earlier, throughout its history (after mate, i.e. “mate-partner”), the word mate has implied the same interpersonal attitudes—attitudes which in the literature on mateship are usually referred to with words and phrases such as “loyalty,” “solidarity,” and “mutual support.” These attitudes, often contrasted with the American ideal of “self-reliance,” are generally linked with the harshness of the conditions confronting the first European settlers in Australia and the economic conditions, which made individual success unlikely. To quote first an American observer, George Renwick:

“Emerging from their particular heritage are the Australians’ fundamental beliefs that one has a responsibility for his or her neighbor and that loyalty to one’s friends is not only appropriate, it is essential” (1980:16).

Contrasting these Australian cultural attitudes with the American ones, Renwick writes:

Consistent with their interest in limiting the depths of friendships while increasing the number of friends, Americans are careful to minimize their commitments to others.

... Australians have traditionally expressed the priority they give to personal relationship in terms of “mateship.” Through the loneliness, vast distances, and the difficulties of existence experienced by the first Australians, men and women learned to help and trust each other. Australians still respect and share a genuine spirit of mateship, a sense that “we’re in this thing together.” ... Australians therefore believe strongly that “a man’s got to stick to his mate and see him through.” An American is more conscious of sticking to his job and seeing his work through to completion. (17–18)

What Renwick doesn’t address is the difference in the original conditions for Australian and American settlers, which must have contributed to these differing cultural attitudes. These differences between the conditions in America and in Australia were discussed, with particular clarity, by Ward (1966[1958]):

Ward’s comments are echoed by Bell (1973), among many others, who wrote (with reference to Turner 1968): “The Australian dream, according to Ian Turner, had no element of the American dream of rising from the log cabin to the White House. In Australia the individual could rise only with the collective” (5).

As Ward (among many others) pointed out, in Australian “mateship” the idea of solidarity with one’s equals had not only an egalitarian but also an anti-authoritarian ring and combined “the strongly social sense of solidarity with the nomad tribe, and the equally strong, antisocial hostility to any control, or even patronage, from above” (Ward 1966[1958]:227). This somewhat “aggressive” dimension of “mateship” is well illustrated by Henry Lawson’s often quoted quatrains from his poem “The Shearers”:

They tramp in mateship side by side —
The Protestant and Roman —
They call no bishop lord or sire,
And touch their hat to no man!

The “collectivist” ring of the word mate can be accounted for if we formulate the first component of its meaning in the plural:

these people are people like me

Of course the word mate can also be used in the singular, but—like the Polish kólega or the Russian tovarisch—it refers to a prototype that is plural and collective, as well as clearly defined in gender: to a group of men. The very common use of phrases such as “Barry and his mates” or “me and a few old mates of mine” in Australian English points in the same direction. In the formula proposed earlier I have represented this as follows:

everyone knows: many men think about some other men like this:
these people are people like me

This formulation suggests that mate is exclusive as well as inclusive. By emphasizing the notion that “these people are people like me,” the speaker is implicitly referring to some other people who are not like me. It has often been pointed out that this group identification excluded “Abos” and “sheilas” (i.e. Aborigines and women,
But while the attitudinal components proposed so far account for one crucial aspect of mate and mateship, they do not seem to fully capture the "loyalty" dimension, which is also widely felt to be as essential to the concept of 'mate'. After all, people could believe in the necessity of helping one another in general, and when misfortune strikes in particular, without feeling the need to "stick to one another" when one of them does something wrong, or when one of them thinks that the others are doing something wrong. Yet, as Frank Hardy put it, "a mate can do no wrong" (quoted in TAND), and the idea of "dobbing a mate in" (cf. chapter 5) or of "betraying" one's fellow workers by acting as a "scab" (i.e. strike breaker) is completely unreconcilable with the notion of 'mateship'.

The assumption of equality, existential bonding, and mutual dependence in the face of hardship and danger lead to attitudes which are loosely referred to by means of words and expressions such as solidarity, mutual support, loyalty, and sticking to one another through thick and thin; but without more fine-grained analysis it is impossible to see what exactly these labels are meant to stand for and how the attitudes in question differ from those encoded in other ethno-sociological categories, such as kaledzy, tovarisch, and druz'ja.

Linking the basic features of the Australian outback ethos with Australia's convict past, Ward noted also: "Take, for example, the strongly egalitarian sentiment of group solidarity and loyalty, which was perhaps the most marked of all convict traits. This was recognized as the prime distinguishing mark of outback workers fifty years before Lawson and others wrote so much about mateship" (1958:77).

Consider also the following conclusion reached by Ward on the basis of his analysis of Australian folk ballads: "The greatest good is to stand by one's mates in all circumstances, and the greatest evil is to desert them" (188). Clearly, this is not quite the same as the belief that one must help one's companions in misfortune—or, rather, it is more than that. Yet the idea of "standing by" and "sticking with" is generally felt to be essential to the traditional Australian folk philosophy of "mateship." To account for this "loyalty" dimension of "mateship," I would propose for it the following additional components:

I don't want to say bad things about one of these people to other people
I don't want other people to say bad things about one of these people
I don't want other people to do anything bad to one of these people

Needless to say, these components are not meant to define the whole meaning of the word loyalty, or to fully explicate the assumptions behind condemnatory terms such as scab or dob in, but only that aspect of the concept 'mate' which was related to them.

According to the mateship ethos, a man is supposed to "stick up" for his mates. While it is an accepted part of mateship to "rubbish" one's mates (i.e. to say bad things about them) to their faces, for fun, it would be felt to be disloyal to say bad things about them to outsiders (in particular, to "dob them in") or to listen willingly to outsiders saying bad things about them.

The assumption that one doesn't say bad things about one's mates to outsiders is closely related to the assumption that one doesn't want "other people" to do something bad to one's mates. In a way, both these assumptions are reflected in the traditional
Australian abhorrence of “dobbing a mate in,” that is, saying something bad about one’s mate to someone in authority (a boss, a policeman, even the mate’s wife) and thus possibly causing trouble for the mate.

Stressing how deeply the concept of ‘mateship’ is embedded in the “Australian psyche,” Hornadge (1980) quotes, with approval, the following definition offered by Thomas Dodd and quoted in the Australian Worker (1926):

What is a mate nowadays? Somebody you can rely on—through thick, thin and middling; past hell and high-water. Like the mariner’s compass he always points north to you. In any trouble, you know what he will do, without argument; because, since he is your mate, it is exactly what you would do yourself. Your mate is indeed yourself in another fellow’s skin. (129)

This psychological identification and solidarity with one’s “mates,” implied by the very word mate, is reminiscent of those implied by the Russian word továrišči. In the case of továrišči, I have represented this psychological identification and solidarity in the form of the component “I don’t want bad things to happen to these people, as I don’t want bad things to happen to me,” and in a sense, this could be said to apply to mates, too. But in the case of mates, this “solidarity” has the added “loyalty” and “anti-authority” dimension, and this requires a different phrasing of the explication. I think that the additional components proposed here account adequately for this aspect of “mateship.”

The attitudinal components of mate discussed here are reflected with particular clarity in the meaning of the expression good mate, used in an absolute sense, that is, not only as “Jack is a good mate of Bill” but also as “Jack is a good mate.” For example:

Old Sam, born and reared in the bush, a good mate and bushman. (1968, OEDS)

As this example illustrates, being a “good mate” could be seen, in traditional Australian culture, as a standard of human value in general. This is also illustrated by the following nineteenth-century example, with a different syntactic frame:

At this time I was mates with a young fellow called Jim Smith, a good enough lad as a mate. (1880, OEDS)

Clearly, being a “good mate” in that general, absolute sense is a matter of attitude to one’s equals, whose existence one shares, and this attitude must involve more than readiness to help in misfortune. All the examples available are consistent with the idea that it involves also “solidarity and loyalty” in the sense of not wanting bad things to be done by anyone to one’s “mate” as one doesn’t want them to be done to oneself.18 The expression great mates has similar implications. For example:

An obelisk in the Jewish section of the Melbourne General Cemetery records the names of those who fought for Australia in the 1914 War. Many of them trained in the Faraday Street School cadets. They assimilated the lessons of patriotism and were great mates. (1974, Sydney Morning Herald, OEDS)

Praising a person as a “mate” (and, therefore, a fine human being) can also be done by means of other, more ad hoc chosen adjectives, as in the following example:
and _mates_. To this end, let us consider again the following two sentences, adduced by the TAND under the hypothetical meaning _mate_:

- The boy had joined his mates in one of the little cemeteries on the Western front.
- Seventeen of our mates were killed in the mining industry last year.

Is there any reason to regard such uses of _mates_ as different in meaning from those illustrating the hypothetical meaning _mate_, as in the following sentence:

- He’s me mate. I gotta help ‘im. (1977, Beilby)

The intention behind the TAND decision to separate the supposed meanings _mate_ and _mate_ is clear: _mate_ is intended to apply to something like "personal friends," whereas _mate_ (with all the examples in the plural) can refer to fellow-workers, fellow-sportsmen, or fellow-soldiers with whom one has been "thrown together" by life.

In the light of the foregoing discussion, however, I would argue that Australian culture makes no such distinction between "personal friends" and "impersonal mates" (in the sense of, for example, fellow-workers or fellow-soldiers). To draw such a distinction with respect to the word _mate_ would mean to impose an alien perspective on Australian culture and Australian English. From the Australian cultural perspective, it is important that one’s fellow-workers, or fellow-players, or fellow-soldiers are treated with the same commitment, solidarity, and loyalty with which good personal "mates" are treated.

Consider, for example, the following quote from an interview with the noted Australian footballer Paul Vautin, known as "Patty":

- Old mates—blokes who’ve known each other for 10, 20, 30 years, who’ve played together, got drunk together, been best man at each other’s weddings—have thrown down the gloves and they’re going for each other’s throats. It’s shocking. (Jamrozik 1995:36)

The "mates" whom Patty is talking about are his fellow players from the Australian Rugby League—that is, people who have been "thrown together" by the circumstances but who are also drinking companions, people who enjoy each other’s company and who are at the same time expected to be deeply committed to one another on a personal level.

Of course, one can always draw a distinction between one’s "mates" in general and one’s special "mates," or one’s "best mates," as one can draw a distinction between one’s "friends" in general and one’s "best friends." But the word _mate_ as such is no more polysemous in this respect than the word _friend_ is. The nominal category _mate_ is inclusive, and this very inclusiveness is culturally revealing. The same sentence can refer to special personal "mates" and to "mates" or "mateship" in a broader sense, without any distinction being made between the two, as in the following example:

- Shearing to me is the mates I’ve made. . . . There’s no greater mateship in any industry in Australia. (1984, People Magazine [Sydney], quoted in TAND)

In traditional Australian culture, "mateship" was expected to bind people not only with their "best mates" or their "great mates" but also with their fellow-miners, fellow-shearsers, fellow-"diggers," fellow-soldiers, or fellow-footballers, and this expectation is one of this culture’s most enduring and characteristic features.¹⁹

5.5 "Debunking" mateship?

Since the concept of ‘mateship’ has always been regarded as one of the main keys to Australian culture, it is not surprising that in their efforts to abolish the very notion of "Australian culture" many recent writers attack this concept first of all. I will illustrate this trend with two quotes, one from Donald Horne’s _Ideas for a nation_ (1989) and one from Elaine Thompson’s _Fair enough_ (1994). Horne’s approach (mentioned earlier) is to dismiss the idea of mateship as something characteristically Australian:

... by the end of the [nineteenth] century it [the word mate] had developed a special cultural form, in the noun "mateship," which was seen by many as Australia’s decisive contribution to civilisation. The creation of this meaning was folkish, but it was also given intellectual popularisation by some of the professional bush cultists. It was nothing more than the idea of bonded (male) comradeship, but it was seen as having special Australian characteristics, given to it by the smell of gum-leaves. In the 1890s the word was also appropriated by the growing trades union movement, thereby giving nineteenth-century working-class consciousness a certain local flavour, and in the Great War it was appropriated by the Diggers, giving the camaraderie of soldiers a special Australian warmth that led its devotees to believe that their mateship was unique in the whole history of human sociability. (183)

In contrast to Horne, Thompson does see the idea of mateship as peculiar to Australia, but as "racist, sexist, ethnocentric, conformist and oppressive." "Mateship" thus becomes a whip with which Thompson belabors Australia’s history and culture as a whole (with Donald Horne, on the cover, applauding):

While the positive role of mateship in helping to create a powerful union movement should not be underestimated, neither should its shortcomings be overlooked. Because mateship was exclusive, it was not egalitarian but racist, sexist, ethnocentric, conformist and oppressive. These criticisms are hardly new, but the unattractive aspects of mateship were deeply embedded and part of mateship’s defining characteristics. And they have ramifications for the way Australians have been portrayed by social commentators. (35)

Australia was egalitarian because it was xenophobic and sexist. (252)

Having done its best to destroy the indigenous cultures, Australian society has struggled to develop a distinct cultural identity out of an environment dominated by conservative, conformist, Anglo-oriented values. (215)

I hope this chapter shows that both Horne and Thompson are substantially wrong in what they say about mateship—Horne in dismissing it as a commonplace idea, and Thompson in presenting racism and sexism as its defining characteristics.
To begin with Thompson’s charges, there are some words in English, as in many
other languages, which do indeed unequivocally express racism and sexism. The
well-known Russian word čerňozove ('the black arsed ones'), used with reference
to Central Asians (cf. Wimbush & Alekseev 1982), offers a clear example of the
former, as do English words such as rice-eyes, slit-eyes, slant-eyes (cf. Dean 1985);
and obviously ethnic prejudice is reflected in English (Australasian) words such as
wog, dago, and greaso. As for sexism, the highly elaborated segment of Russian called mar
(literally ‘motherese’) provides a particularly striking illustration, as do—a much
smaller scale—English words such as bitch, doll, and others. But there is nothing
inherently racist or sexist about the words mate and mateship.

To say this is not to dispute the existence of either sexism or racism in the
Australasian past, or to deny any links between the ethos of mateship on the one hand
and sexist and racist attitudes on the other. But it is simply incorrect to call sexism
and racism “defining characteristics” of mateship.

As we have seen, the concept of mateship does include (among others) the
components ‘these people are people like me’ and ‘men often think about other men
like this’. But the component ‘these people are people like me’ can be interpreted
more inclusively or more exclusively. It is not inherently racist or sexist, and this is
why with changing social attitudes the use of mate could be increasingly extended to
embrace migrants from Southern and Eastern Europe and from Asia. (It is also worth
noting in this context the remarkable success of the Australian Freedom from Hunger’s
“A plate for a mate” project, which was run in Australian schools in 1991.)

As we have seen, the inherent semantics of mate does not preclude the possibility
of extending the use of this word to women either, despite the male prototype inscribed
into its meaning and perfectly understandable given the gender imbalance throughout
much of Australia’s history. (Thompson, incidentally, denies the existence of such an
imbalance, on the grounds that there were many black women in the country—an
argument which defies both logic and arithmetic.)

Horne asserts that there is nothing uniquely Australian in the idea of mateship.
This misunderstanding may owe something to a tendency to assume that rough
equivalents are exact synonyms. As we have seen, however, concepts such as ‘mate’,
‘friend’ and ‘comrade’ are very complex, and each such concept constitutes a unique
configuration of several semantic components. Some of these components may occur
in different languages, but the configuration as a whole is often unique. (For further
discussion of Australian culture, see chapter 5.)

6. Conclusion

For a number of disciplines, such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, philosophy,
it is important to understand how people categorize and conceptualize their relations
with other people. In the abundant literature on the subject, however, human relations
are often interpreted through the lens of one particular ethno-taxonomy, especially
that embodied in the (modern) English language. This applies both to the more
traditional works on “friendship” and to those within the new discipline of “interper-
sonal relations” (as, for example, in the “Sage series on close relationships”). The
problem lies largely in the reification of English words such as friend and friendship
and their unreflective use as descriptive tools and theoretical constructs in talking
about people and human relations in general.

For example, in discussing what he calls “human friendships,” which he compares
with social relationships among non-human primates, Serpell insists that “mutual
liking” is an essential feature of “friendship” (1989:116). But why should “mutual
liking” be more important to human relations than, for example, mutual support,
solidarity, loyalty, or shared experiences? Isn’t the emphasis on “mutual liking” not
derived, unconsciously, from the modern English concept of ‘friend’?

Consider also the following statements by another author, Allan (1979):

...friendship is a personal relationship in that it is seen as involving individuals and
not as members of groups or collectivities. (38)

A second characteristic of friend relationships is that they are defined as voluntary.
They are seen as consequent on the free choice and selection of each friend by the
other. (40)

An assumption entailed in the idea that friendship is voluntary in that it is a relationship
based on enjoyment. A friend is someone with whom you enjoy spending time and
sharing activities. (41)

It is ... a relationship ... that exists simply because it is found to be enjoyable. (43)

All these statements reflect a perspective suggested to the author by the English word
friend, in its modern usage. For example, as we have seen, the Polish word koleszy,
the Russian word tovarischi, and the Australian English word mates do not imply a
“personal relationship, involving individuals as individuals, and not as members of
groups”; yet the bond between koleszy, tovarischi, or mates can be as strong, or stronger,
than that between “friends.”

The same applies to the voluntary, free choice of one’s “associates.” Even though
“friends” can be chosen voluntarily, koleszy, tovarischi, and mates are not “chosen,”
but this doesn’t make these relationships any less important.

Finally, the idea that the most important human relationships outside the family
are those based on “enjoyment” does not even apply to the traditional Anglo culture.
For example, when Emerson wrote that “a friend is a person with whom I may be
sincere” or that “better be a nettle in the side of your friend than his echo,” he clearly
didn’t mean by “friend” an enjoyable companion. Nor does the key Russian term drug
or the Polish term przyjaciel refer specifically to the idea of “enjoyable company.”
Clearly, the dimensions focused upon by Allan (1979) (and apparently supported by
the comments of his respondents) are in fact those suggested by the modern English
usage. They reflect the assumptions, expectations, and values of modern Anglo
culture.

But the literature on human relations is also full of works which are not influenced
by the meaning of English words such as friend and friendship and which are instead
making distinctions unrelated to the normal usage—in English or in any other
language. This is hardly preferable to analyses guided (if only unconsciously) by the
English language.
Consider, for example, statements such as the following: "Deep friends love one another," and "the idea of deep friends not confiding in one another seems almost unthinkable" (Thomas 1987:217). What exactly are these statements about? The use of the English word friend? Presumably not, since friend implies neither love nor mutual confidences. The use of the expression deep friends? Presumably not that either, since in fact there is no such expression in English. (English speakers talk about "close friends," "old friends," "good friends," "great friends," or "best friends," but not "deep friends"). What are they about, then? If they are about human relations regardless of language and culture, then they seem to mean little more than that some people love one another and confide in one another—hardly an original observation.

Having made those initial statements about what he calls "deep friends," the author proceeds to make some terminological distinctions, singling out "friendships of pleasure," "friendship of convenience," and "companionship friendship," and talks about these "kinds of friendship" created by his own arbitrary terminological decisions as if they were objective realities. For example, he states that "companionship friendships are a manifestation of a choice on the part of the parties involved" (215).

But what is the point of making generalizations about categories that we have invented ourselves? The English language and Anglo culture do not distinguish between "friendships of pleasure," "friendship of convenience," and "companionship friendship." On the other hand, the English language does embody the socio-cultural category of "friend," a category which deserves to be studied as a reflection of, and a key to, objectively existing Anglo culture.

Similarly, the fact that the Australian variety of English includes, additionally, a socio-cultural category of "mate" is an important empirical fact, providing evidence for specifically Australian patterns of social relations and specifically Australian cultural values. This evidence guides us toward some objective socio-cultural realities and allows us better to understand them. Such realities cannot be fully comprehended if sufficient attention is not being paid to language and, in particular, to key words such as friend, mate, kolega, drug, and tovarišt. To fully understand such words, however, we need to avoid reifying concepts supplied by our native language and to try to explore the relevant terms—including our own—from a universal, culture-independent perspective.

Appendix

SUMMARY OF THE FORMULAE

friends
(a) everyone knows: many people think about some other people like this:
(b) I know this person very well
(c) I think good things about this person
(d) I want this person to know what I think
(e) I want this person to know what I feel
(f) I don’t want many other people to know these things
(g) I want to do good things for this person
(h) I know this person thinks the same about me

(my) prijatelj
(a) everyone knows: many people think like this about some other people:
(b) I know this person well
(c) when I am with this person, I feel something good