General Approaches to Gestalt's Definition: Linguistic, Sociologic and Psychologic Points of View

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Abstract: The study deals with the problems of the term gestalt and its interpretations in linguistics, psychology and sociology. The main idea of the study is to find the most relevant and systemic definition of the term which could be used as a tool for further analysis applied to the cognitive interdisciplinary research. Special attention is paid to the description of a gestalt and frames as its constituents, their correlation with other mental structures in synergetic development in the process of society evolution.

Key words: Sociology, linguistics, psychology, mental structure, gestalt, frame, concept, structure, model, categorization

INTRODUCTION

Thorough systemic analysis of the problem connected with the mental structure shows that being one of epistemic structures, gestalt is relevant as a tool for objective analysis of data (De-Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981; Chafe, 1994). Thus, this kind of structure emphasizes connection and correlation of linguistic and extralinguistic knowledge. Reflecting the structure of the organization of mental processes, conceptual components of gestalt can be represented as a system of perceptual (sensation, perception), intellectual (thinking, attention, imagination, speech) and affective (emotions, feelings, will) fields functioning in their unity and integrity. The result of operation of some spheres of gestalt is undifferentiated perception and reflection of reality in consciousness. Thus, gestalt combines conceptual combination of information and speech and mental activity: figurative, schematic, framing, scenario or different complexes of these levels. In addition, the set of elements of the dynamic characteristics of a gestalt promotes verbalization of the mental processes by means of modern language. According to Telija, people deploy (verbalize) a gestalt when they metaphorically use motivated nominations which are not only idioms but also single lexemes. In other words, gestalt as a mental structure is revealed in a context and can be described due to some linguistic data. But, the problem is that it has got a great variety of definitions depending on the scientific field which studies it.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study has a descriptive character as it shows different scientific approaches to the term gestalt and its interpretation. The main goal of this study is to define this term properly and find an adequate mental structure for the future interdisciplinary analysis. This requires systemic approach to the term interpretation, analysis of different points of view. The basic principle of the ongoing research is the interdisciplinary approach of modern science which allows us to search objective reasons of our choice.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Main part: The term gestalt initially comes from the German language. It was mentioned in K. Levin's doctrine and understood as form, structure or integral configuration. Subsequently, in the linguistic science, the term gestalt has become the structure of the organization of thought, perception, motor activity and language (Lakoff, 1972). The founders of the Gestalt theory were George Lakoff, L.O. Chernejko who defined it as a complete mental model capable of organizing the variety of phenomena in consciousness, representing something integral, dynamic or static. Nowadays it is believed that typical gestalts are Life, Love, Game, Enjoyment and so forth. At present, psychology and linguistics do not understand gestalt in a similar way. There is a certain difference between the two phenomena which is based on the number of identical items (or their sum). Also there is no direct correlation between identical elements which are in this case deduced from their functional characteristics. Psychology, linguistics emphasize the integrity of these structures, they do not simply represent a combination of elements and their properties, they are a unity at the same time. Gestalt is decomposable into such elements as a part and a whole which are connected by special correlation figure-ground. The principle of integrity and relatedness

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of the whole and its parts as it is seen from the systemic analysis of the works of scientists in the field of Gestalt psychology and cognitive science, can be extrapolated to the synonymous relationship, where the actualization of the meaning of words is equivalent to a relevant gestalt. As modern research shows one such cognitive structure does not exclude the presence of other and that, in its turn, the third fractional structure. The result of this structuring of consciousness is a rich and diverse background structure necessary for a full understanding of any given situation. However, modern scientists think that the most of this structure (if not the whole structure) is not realized and it is its undeniable advantage. Thus, the process of understanding, in their opinion, displays only the components of the situation which correlate with a gestalt and conceal the importance of those that do not correlate with it. In addition, another positive feature of gestalt is its correlation with other gestalt structures. Thus, the projection of the single part of a gestalt involves mapping of a part of the different gestalt and as a result, the second part of a gestalt which inherits some properties of the first gestalt structure. The corresponding dynamic features of a gestalt structure allow it to acquire new properties at the intersection with other gestalts, this determines its openness, energy potential and relationship with the external environment. This situation corresponds to the understanding of the phased deployment of a gestalt scheme, when the consciousness of the interpreter percepts the basic characteristics or categories at the level of generalization, this corresponds to the deployment of gestalt when they become the focus or they are perceived by the consciousness of the interpreter (i.e., an active gestalt in terms by Chafe (1994). The latter in accordance with the basic propositional content of the sentence transmit the meaning of discourse units. This comes to the question of the organization of meaning correlated with the gestalt structure. Consideration of this issue is based on the assumption of a prototype organization which is followed by the correlation of the unit with the prototype-core-periphery structure on the cognitive level where processing of concepts takes place. Due to such organization of the process of sense transmission contained in the meaning of lexemes, it can be compared with the process of nomination which is non-isolated from the general knowledge about the world. The study of lexical meaning from the standpoint of a prototypic approach suggests that the meaning itself is transparent is not limited but dynamic in its development (Geeraerts, 1983). These fuzzy edges of lexical meaning are well known in American philosophy (in the terminology by Quine (1960) and Foreign linguistics (Lakoff, 1972;

Weinreich, 1996). The idea of the prototypical invariant frame and non-prototypical characteristics suggests the idea of the ability of a gestalt to the permanent identification due to the invariant frame and changing elements which are in constant interaction with the outside world in order to get new information. This allows hypothetically relating a gestalt to an open system capable of modification while preserving the basic content that refers the situation to the synergetic approach.

From the point of view of sociology, gestalts represent the whole system of people's achievements or specific imprints of reality having real associations including a family, education, etc. In other words they associate a gestalt with a functional social unity which is formed and perceived separately. That is why they are seen as unique due to an individual's experience. But this point of view is more or less clear when it is seen in comparison with those approaches suggested in linguistics and psychology. But at the same time, they can be seen as similar when they show the role of any gestalt in creating a certain ideology and ideological movement of society. In this case gestalts are seen as a society uniting force which attracts people and helps authorities to rule the social mass by creating in people's minds a certain picture of the perspective life, etc.

Despite, the dominant linguistic or extralinguistic doctrine, a gestalt is a highly organized cognitive model which performs an instrumental role and contributes to the objective study of verbalization of linguistic data in the modern discourse. In addition, a gestalt is understood as the conceptual repository of meanings transmitted through the lexical units, capable of permanent modifications and sustainability through prototypical base. In addition to the ability of gestalt to interact with other gestalt structures, interfere with them and learn new information through such interaction. There is also its ability to have basic prototypical gestalt properties and contain non-prototypic properties. In the ongoing study, we take into consideration the following positive properties of gestalt: syncretism and discontinuity that is figure and ground, correlation of elements.

Another important gestalt feature relevant for the present study is its ability to contain frames as structural units. A frame is a mental structure. This term appeared in linguistics by Minsky (1980)'s researches who defined it as a data structure for representing a stereotyped situation. From these positions the frame was seen as a set of slots that contain typical information associated with a particular stereotypical situation. Deviation from the target frame is explained by the by the presence of empty slots that can contain differentiating information adequate for each case. Subsequently, of course, the term

frame has become more complex and has been defined as a common framework, the stereotype that is filled with specific content every time. Its formation is based on the correlation of the received text information and practical knowledge about the world which is directly related to the message received by the addressee. This construction includes a basic type of knowledge representation the model of the situation, constructs (describing knowledge that is a part of the conceptual system cognitive map of words (it can be viewed as a permanent of all directions of semantics transformation, the concept serving to designate the process of human representations stored in memory, an alternative way of seeing things. Frames create a mediation which is a projection of ways of expressing a content specific to the language. As a result, the frame acts as knowledge units, structured around a particular concept and contain information associated with it (De-Beaugrande and Dressler, 1981; Van Dijk, 1981, 1989), the model presentation of information about the stereotypical situations (Minsky, 1980), one of the mental structures to represent specific repetitive situations (Ungerer and Schmid, 1996).

Despite the similarity and polarity of views, scientists think that frame is heterogeneous in its structure. It is a structure of hierarchically organized plurality of slots/cells/nodes/terminals of obligatory and optional order (Minsky, 1980; Stevenson, 1993). Taking into consideration Belyaevskaya's point of view, we define the frame as a structure represented by the upper and lower levels. The invariant information in the form of the mental framework of obligatory elements is organized on the upper level and the extra, optional information transmitted by frame optional elements organized at the bottom. Thus, frames represent the elements included in a gestalt structure but the latter is not exclusively limited to their sum. Moreover, gestalt is a functional structure, ordering the variety of individual events and providing a complex interaction of verbal and non-verbal language signs and frames as they are embodied in language forms. In addition, as has been repeatedly stated, gestalt as a mental structure is characterized by semantic density of variety of its verbalizers. It provides Gestalt formation and modification of their semantics in certain discursive conditions taking into account the intentions of the communicants. This conclusion is possible if we take into account the psychological opinion which postulates energetism and release of energy when exposed to external factors. Finding an answer to the question, how energy is emitted, it is enriched, as well as associated with these aspects, the process of formation and modification of semantics of lexical units, motivates application of synergetic approach which despite its relative novelty,

has already established itself in explaining highly complex linguistic facts. Considered linguistic, psycholinguistics data indicate that gestalt as a holistic conceptual information system is updated on the level of discourse thanks to the perception of the interpreter of basic lexemes which make it possible to deduce the fundamental stages of decoding information within a given discursive space to build a working model of deployment of mental structures online. The initial perception of semantic information is the perception of a coherent semantic gestalt system, that is, thematic identification (including obligatory conceptual features) within topic discourse chain. Further unconscious structural and morphological analysis of the system leads to a certain gestalt deployment or understanding its accently selected elements (in our case, gestalt areas, gestalt spheres and structured gestalt fields) as well as of the functioning of the data elements within the meaning of subordination of hierarchy in general. Identification of the so-called optional components of a structured gestalt field take place at the last stage of perception, their actualization is determined by the accent on this or that phenomenon described in order to focus on the author's intention. At the last step of the information decoding the recipient unconsciously involves his or her own associative experience, categorizes information in accordance with his or her own processual determinants. Thus, the reference word taken from the discourse by the recipient, from the point of view of its interpretation may be seen as a complex semantic information. Discourse itself carries invariant and associated linguistic and non-linguistic information. The reference word does not only expand the mental structures in search of hidden meaning but also leads to the direction of further trajectory of generating meanings. As Kibrik observes, from the narrative point of view, even a separate word is not an elementary atom but the whole cosmos, requiring its piecemeal analysis. And if we consider the discourse from the perspective of the discursive formation, it can be interpreted as the text before the mind's eye of the interpreter. So, verbal expression of discourse is lexemes verbalizing different gestalts and the semantic characteristic of discursive space is a certain set of thematic chains. In other words, as Demyankov notes that elementary particles of meaning lie in elementary propositions which the interpreter derives from the sentences or their parts in the discourse. Later obtained information is grouped in consciousness into the general meaning, ready to perceive new information obtained during the subsequent processing of information. Thus, the scheme of discourse perception works as follows: discourse gestalts and their deployment proposition and analysis of the actualization of frame

structures merging and combining their meanings into topical chains. Thus, through the establishment of semantic (synonymous/antonymous relations) and referential (in the correlation of the real world with the categorization entities) connections, establishment of a functional perspective of statements (i.e., what is possible in the projection of topic deployment) the interpreter establishes the unity of discourse in his or her consciousness that allows him or her to further add new associative information to the discourse. Recent data coming from the consciousness of interpreter being subjective do not coincide with the concept of discourse constructor. However, without it, there is no experience and personal assessment, it is impossible to complete the recipient's associations. Describing the features of perception of the information by the recipient as a mechanism of the appropriate gestalt deploying in the discourse we should say that it is associated with the parameter of chronotopos or parameter here and instantly. This parameter allows gestalt to combine present, past and future at any point in its actualization show its appropriate temporal plan and unfold online in the virtual space of human consciousness. In other words, chronotopos provides discreteness and syncretism of perception of lexical meaning, realizing the correlation of figure (the meaning at the actual point in time) and background (linguistic and non-linguistic information on the respective situation of an actualized gestalt). Chonotopos is one of the key concepts of modern psychology, Gestalt psychology, literary criticism. Initially, the term was introduced in Ukhtomsky's writings to refer to the relevant concepts in physiology. Subsequently, due to the teachings of Bakhtin, it was defined in humanitarian studies. Thus, discursive chronotopos is a basic factor that determines the semantic content of the word (its meaning) in the narrow sense and the system and the strategy of deploying of the appropriate gestalt in accordance to the present time perception in the broadest sense.

Describing the difficulty of conveying meaning in the context, O.D. Vishnyakova notes that the meaning of a lexical unit depends on the context that is on a particular speech situation. The latter is a blend of language and extralinguistic information. Hence, according to O.D. Vishnyakova, there exists a need to take into consideration internal systemic functional parameters of the general background of the specifics of real communication. Taking into account the process of perception of discourse it is interesting to note that invariative nuclear part of it practically doesn't undergo any cognitive transformations. Moreover, while maintaining the required classifiers meaningful specificity

of the linguistic sign is revealed through the actualization of the additional optional elements of mental structures which are able as mentioned earlier, to adapt to the specific conditions of the communication act. Thus, being verbalized at the level of discourse, the mental structure-gestalt-retains its invariant prototypical structure and is subjected to synergic changes under the influence of processual factors at the level of discourse constructor. Specific recipient deploying a packet of information in his/her consciousness understands it due to his background knowledge and fills it with his own associations, trying to understand the implied information hidden in the meaning. Similar processes occur regularly and can be treated as occasional (when the unit is used in its non typical meaning) puts forward the connotative part of meaning and regular (which occur with some degree of regularity, fixed by the system and then recorded in the lexicographical sources).

CONCLUSION

To sum it up, taking into consideration that the term mental structure serves as a general one for nomination of gestalts, frames, concepts, prototypes, etc. and functional variability of the relevant constructs we assume that a gestalt is the most appropriate term for further interdisciplinary analysis. A gestalt is verbalized in a context and its combination with other gestalts into a system helps to maintain the continuity of topics within the discursive space. This conclusion will help us in future to reveal certain features of meaning on the micro and macro level of analysis.

The term gestalt is chosen as the most relevant for the interdisciplinary analysis as it is more or less structured and contains variant and invariant features, can be deployed in context and contain mental structures of lower level (like frames) is transparent, intersects with other structures and is capable of synergetic modifications.

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